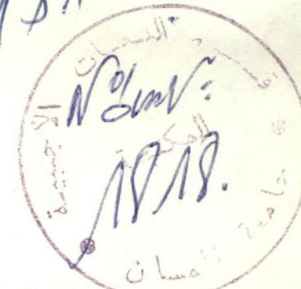


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VIOLENCE AND COUNTER-VIOLENCE  
IN ALEX LA GUMA'S NOVELS

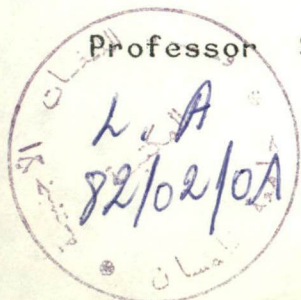


a Thesis Submitted by: YAMINA BEDRICI

In fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Magister.

Under the Supervision of:

Professor Si-Abderrahmane ARAB.



1991

Q.T.

I Dedicate this thesis  
to my father and  
my mother.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude to my parents who have shown great understanding through my difficult moments, and to the best of brothers, Mohamed, for his unflinching support. This work could not have been completed without the advice and assistance of Professor Arab who never hesitated to give help whenever needed. I also take this opportunity to thank my friend and colleague Abderrahmane, who read the manuscript and made some valuable comments.

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## P R E F A C E

Between the writing-up of the final copy of the dissertation and the time of its defence, far-reaching political changes have taken place in South Africa. This is evidenced in such measures as the liberation of political leaders among whom Nelson Mandela, in February 1990 and the legalisation of Trade-Unions and other political organisations, including the ANC. There are signs of a marked flexibility shown by an increasing black integration in the socio-economic sphere. Public places are being de-segregated, African wages are improving and African Trade Unionism is gaining new ground. The suppression of 'Petty-Apartheid' as well as some fundamental laws of Apartheid's juridical edifice such as The Group Areas Act, The Immorality Act and The Land Act, together with the measures mentioned above would tend to make my argument sound rather superseded today. Yet the violent opposition recently manifested by members of the white population to the liberalisation announced by Prime Minister F. W. de Klerk, still gives credence to my approach. Apartheid will not disappear overnight.

The reader will come across some terms such as Naturalism, Critical Realism and Socialist Realism which we think to be relevant to our purpose. We shall define these terms in due course, i.e., when the modes of writing they illustrate are discussed.

We should like also to clarify a semantic point in connection with the use of the words black and white, The two

main antagonistic groups are referred to as Black and White. Black designates all the non-white South Africans (Negro, Coloured and Indian) and white designates English and Afrikaner alike. We shall conform to this rule at all times except when circumstances impose the need to name the more specific racial group which a protagonist belongs to.

- I N T R O D U C T I O N -  
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My study focuses on the theme of violence and counter-violence in Alex Laguma's novels. More specifically, I shall look closely at violence as experienced by the black and the counter-violence issued therefrom. This theoretical framework is mainly Fanonian. A reasonable understanding of counter-violence in particular - the core of the Fanonian thesis - requires a thorough inquiry into colonial violence in the first place.

Violence could briefly be defined as the impairment of Man's dignity. Be it physical or psychological violence affects him qua human being. P.R.Gottier explains:

There is violence whenever man is treated as a thing instead of being treated as a person ... It seems to me that it is erroneous to confine the field of violence to that of physical violence only. We live in a world where a good deal of violence is of a psychological nature; and it is generally the outcome of an arbitrary political system.<sup>1</sup>

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1- P.R. Gottier, Dialogue ou violence (Neuchatel: Editions de la Saconnière, 1963) pp. 279-80. My translation.

But this definition calls for clarification and elaboration.

We know that one of the characteristics of man is his aspiration to freedom. Though the idea of freedom has an essentially moral connotation, it nevertheless expands to other provinces of Man's needs and aspirations. Economic freedom, political freedom, freedom of expression are some of the most obvious of such provinces. But all these are predicable on the moral sense of the term. Therefore any man deprived of any of those freedoms, which express his nature, is reduced to a state of alienation; and this is ethically unjustifiable.

Indeed alienation has been inseparable from the history of Man, or at least, the history of what were regarded as the lower reaches of humanity. Ancient Greece and Rome, Medieval Europe and the Age of Industrialism have all been notorious for their victimisation of slaves, serfs and the working class. With colonial expansion, this violence went unrestrained and reached paroxysmic heights especially as it was waged against people of a different and therefore inferior race - in the white man's eyes, that is. History has also shown that the down-trodden have never accepted their fate.



From Spartacus,<sup>2</sup> to the Levellers,<sup>3</sup> from Peterloo<sup>4</sup> to the Haymarket Square<sup>5</sup> Massacre. The course of the liberation of the damned of the earth has been punctuated with revolts, with manifestations of counter-violence.

Fanon expounds a complete theory of violence. In the Wretched of the Earth<sup>6</sup>, he summed up the process of social and political revolution in the history of the oppressed people. This consists of three stages. In the first phase, violence is 'monopolised' by the coloniser: the colonised can do

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- 2- Spartacus was that famous slave who led quite a successful revolt against the Roman Establishment round 71.B.C.
  - 3- It is a movement in seventeenth century England which wanted all men to be on the same social and economic level. They proposed fundamental reforms such as a new parliament.
  - 4- The Peterloo Massacre occurred on August, 16, 1819. Soldiers fired at a crowd of workers at St Peter's Fields, Manchester. It was named Peterloo, a derisive reminder of Waterloo (1815).
  - 5- The American workers' famous rising in Chicago on May, 1<sup>st</sup>, 1886 claimed an eight - hour day work. The celebration of Labour Day dates back to that massacre.
  - 6- Originally published by F. Maspero in 1961, and translated by Constance Farrington as The Wretched of the Earth, (New York: Ballantine Books INC, 1973)

nothing but absorb it as best as he can. The second stage witnesses the interiorisation of this violence; this is when the colonised fight each other. In the third and last phase, violence is appropriated by the oppressed. It is no longer directed against weaker unfortunates, but against the source of evil and disorder: The coloniser. It thus becomes revolutionary counter-violence.

Revolutionary counter-violence is then justifiable on moral grounds. As the coloniser's policy is a violent one - political, economic, cultural, social and military - the colonised feels justified in resorting to violence to put an end to his alienation. The legitimacy of this course of action comes from the fact that such violence is not arbitrary, but is a response to that initiated by the coloniser; Furthermore by thus fighting for his own liberation, the colonised contributes to liberating the human kind. Hence the close link between revolutionary violence and humanism. If the legitimacy of revolutionary violence is asserted it is because it safeguards peace in the world by eradicating

evil.<sup>7</sup>

Antipodal to the Fanonian theory, there stand Gandhi's theses which first championed non-violence in the land of Apartheid. Gandhi first set foot in South Africa in 1893 where he had first-hand experience of racial violence and discrimination. Naturally enough, he was very active, working against the laws imposed upon Indian immigrants in the country. In 1894 he formed the Natal Indian Congress. In 1908 he headed the struggle of Indians for social equality and rejected the famous pass-books which restricted the liberty of movement of all Indians. He was on various occasions imprisoned for organising campaigns of civil disobedience. These were to lead to the removal of some of the legal

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7- The revolutionary import of this thesis is summed up thus by C. Lockwood: Fanon provides a great service to revolutionaries by explaining and analysing the consciousness of a colonised people, and showing how they move from an awareness of being oppressed to the point where they are willing to fight for their freedom. He strips away the feelings of guilt that one might have had over; for instance, wanting to kill his slave master. 'C. Lockwood conversation with Eldridge Cleaver, Algeria, (New York: Dell Publishing Co 1970), p. 90.

The impact and effect of this thesis on the black Panthers is considerable. One of their leaders, George Jackson, states: 'Men who read Lenin, Fanon, Che Guevara don't surrender, they mass, they rage, they dig graves'. See Selected Brother, The Prison Letters of George Jackson (New York: Bantam Books 1970) p. 30.

abuses inflicted upon Indians. The effectiveness of this passive resistance induced the African National Congress leaders of the fifties ( such as Dr James Moroka, Walter Sisulu and Albert Luthuli) to adopt it for their own struggle. Witness this statement by Luthuli:

I have embraced the non-violent Passive Resistance technique in fighting for freedom because I am convinced it is the only non-revolutionary, legitimate and human way that could be used by people denied<sup>8</sup>.

Hence in April 1952 Passive Resistance was launched to defy unjust laws and restore human dignity. But non-violence proved ineffective and allowed the power-holders to resort to increasing punitive measures. The Sharpeville massacre put an end to the Blacks' non-violent aspirations. They, from then on, resorted to revolutionary action as the only means which could end the country's injustice.

It needs hardly be said that violence, the backbone of colonial order, pervades the South African scene. Bloke Modisane, a south African writer, painfully remarks:

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<sup>8</sup>-Mary Benson, Chief Albert Luthuli of South Africa (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 21.

I learned early in my life to play games with death, to realise its physical presence in my life, to establish a rapport with it.<sup>9</sup>

It is no surprise therefore if violence is a dominant theme and an insistent element in the South African literary expression. The fictional recreation of 'strife and turmoil' dominates much of South African literature: police terror, prison life, the physical and emotional violence of urban life, the fight for survival, arbitrary brutality and gratuitous death are its most common ingredients.

Though violence is viewed from at least two different perspectives, the black and the white, it remains a salient feature of South African writing. Most of the Blacks, if not all, deal overtly with the violence which pervades their existence as marginals in a white - ruled world. Dennis Brutus' collection of poetry, Sirens, Knuckles and Boots, Richard Rive's novel, Emergency and Peter Abrahams' Nine Boy are quite illustrative in this respect.

The brutality inflicted upon those who are condemned to a

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9- Bloke Modisane, Blame Me on History (London: Panthers, 1963) p. 20.

marginal existence is sometimes bitterly exposed by some white writers too. Rosa Burger, the central figure of Nadine Gordimer's Burger's Daughter, shouts out of indignation:

Rampage, pure cruelty gone beyond control of the humans who had spent thousands of years devising it ... The infinite variety and degradation of suffering by lash, fear, hunger, solitary confinement, the camps, concentration labour, resettlement, the Siberias of the snow and the sun, the lives of Mandela, Sisulu, M beki (...), the deaths by questioning ... the lights beating all night on the faces of those in cells.<sup>10</sup>

As vehement as it may sound, such cataloguing of injustices cannot substitute for the pain in the flesh and in the soul felt by those who are at the receiving end of Apartheid. Alex La Guma was one of those who dealt most openly with the brutality of existence in South Africa. His novels bear

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10- Nadine Gordimer, Burger's Daughter (London: Jonathan Cape, 1978 ), p. 208.

the mark of general unrest, and present a tense painful and dramatic picture of life. Violence oozes through all his books. They are permeated with a general sense of insecurity, crime and death brought forth by images of destruction and blood. His fiction illustrates the predicament of the blacks and the effects of Apartheid on their lives. Nadine Gordimer's comment on the peculiarity of the South African Black experience is most appropriate to La Guma's fiction :

It is as a dispossessed proletariat that the African emerges in black South African literature; a people's struggle under the triple burden of industrialisation, colour and class discrimination in a capitalist economy which orders their lives as if they were living in a feudal age .<sup>11</sup>

La Guma's own experience in South Africa has provided him with first-hand knowledge of the deprivations and hopes of the black South African population in whose fight he felt personally involved. The horror of every day life strikes deep into his imagination. His themes cover almost every aspect of repression. They throw a revealing light on the

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11- Nadine Gordimer; The Black Interpreters ( Johannesburg, Raven Press, 1973), p.81.

contemporary situation. They convey the alienation of those whose life is lived under oppression, doomed to an unbearable existence and overwhelmed with a sense of guilt.

His novels give an account of a tormented, struggling world pervaded by fear, hatred and frustration. They illustrate the constant warfare between the blacks and the whites. The assassination of Willieboy in A Walk in the Night, the torturing of Elias in In the Fog of the Season's End, the murder of Timi, the execution of Edgard Stopes and Hannes Meulen in Time of the Butcherbird, exemplify the physical confrontation between the two racial groups.

In addition to the depiction of injustice, confinement, squalor, misery and political oppression, his books convey also the blacks' violent response to Apartheid. La Guma's fiction thus copes, on the one hand with state violence, expressive of colonial oppression, and on the other hand, with the gradual emergence of revolutionary counter-violence.

As we shall ultimately see it through the works, the blacks' response fits with Fanon's perspective: it grows from acceptance to protest, resilience and finally resistance. This evolution is itself the mirror - image of the historical



circumstances which form the background of each book. Hence the necessity for us to adopt a chronological approach. This will provide us with a framework within which we can critically evaluate differences in outlook, and hopefully in style, from one novel to another.

We shall begin with a chapter directly related to the broad socio-historical backdrop against which La Guma's novels came to be written and published i.e, from the early fifties to the late seventies. Initially we intended to concentrate on specific decades within that larger framework, as each novel seems to be set in an easily recognizable time span. However, such pigeon-holing would have sounded arbitrary and artificial since some works, though belonging to the same period, they differ stylistically. Therefore, we thought it appropriate to write two chapters on the sixties and two chapters on the seventies. To come back to the fifties, they are illustrated by A Walk in the Night (1962) which comes in chapter II and is La Guma's first novel. None of the characters in it are politically conscious. Even though a note of passive resistance is sounded, none actually resists. In And a Threefold Cord (1964) studied in the third chapter, the central character is politically conscious but

inarticulate. In the fourth chapter, political awareness is present. The main protagonist of The Stone Country (1967) is a political detainee. La Guma's last two books, in chapters five and six respectively, show an unwavering and more purposeful militancy. Contrary to Michael Adonis who joins a gang at the end of A Walk in the Night, Beukes is involved in the political struggle in In the Fog of the Seasons' End (1972). In this fifth chapter, the protagonist is actively spreading the word for the anti-Apartheid cause. Political commitment is also obvious in his last book, Time of the Butcherbird (1979). Murile, the central character, is determined to act against his personal enemies who are also the enemies of his people. In this sixth chapter, we shall attempt to show that the murder committed by Murile is not the outcome of individual revenge only. Before joining the angry, rebellious crowd, he 'puts the weapon in his pocket, holding the shotgun in his blouse.'<sup>12</sup> Cannot this defiant gesture be interpreted as a call to armed struggle? Is not this the prelude to the revolutionary

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12- Alex La Guma, Time of the Butcherbird ( London: Heinemann, 1979 ), pp. 13-4.

counter-violence invoked and celebrated by Frantz Fanon ?

A number of critical works have brought a significant contribution to the analysis of La Guma's novels. They have certainly enabled us to have a better understanding of his work. These can be classified into three categories. There are those which not only recognise his commitment but also pinpoint the literary quality of his works. Paul. A. Scanlon holds:

And a Threefold Cord, The Stone Country and In The Fog of the Seasons' End all of which mine the socio-racial vein make progressively greater claims as artistically persuasive works of fiction.<sup>13</sup>

Chris Wanjala, for his part, writes:

La Guma is the one writer from the African continent whose literary style will remain unchallenged for quite some time. He compares well with Anton Chekhov and Fyodor Dostoevsky of the nineteenth century in portraying life as it is.<sup>14</sup>

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13- Paul.A.Scanlon 'Alex La Guma's Novels of Protest: The Growth of the Revolutionary' in OKIKE, Part II, 1979, p.39.

14- Chris Wanjala 'The Face of Injustice: La Guma's Fiction.' Journal of Commonwealth Literature, 1977, April, p. 319

Reviewing A Walk in the Night, B.Lindfors explains:

Nothing is wasted. Nothing is irrelevant. Every description, every action, every character serves a function in the story. In such a carefully interwoven and closely knit fabric, there are no loose threads or gaping holes. La Guma's compact and sturdy structures are built to last.<sup>15</sup>

Abdul. Jan. Mohamed writes in the same vein. He comments on La Guma's fiction as follows:

La Guma's fiction - as socio-political praxis - with its constant preoccupation with the political reality, and the various forms of marginality leads to an awareness of history, furnishes direction and specific goals, reveals the authenticity of previously alienated being and allows the individual once more to control his destiny.<sup>16</sup>

The second category is represented by his fellow

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15- B. Lindfors, 'Form and Technique in the Novels Of Richard Rive and Alex La Guma' Journal of the New African Literature and the Arts, 1966, Part II, pp. 12-3.

16- Abdul. Jan. Mohamed, Manichaen Aesthetics: The politics of literature in colonial Africa (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1983), p. 289.

countryman, Lewis Nkosi, who puts forward the view that La Guma's political commitment has been detrimental to his artistry, particularly in his later books.

The deft characterisation which was the most startling feature of A Walk in the Night has increasingly given way to clichés' in which La Guma struggles valiantly with the portraiture of an underground leader like Elias. (One of the main protagonists of In The Fog Of The Seasons' End) But despite the mass of details with which he provides us, the main character remains shadowy and elusive.<sup>17</sup>

Cecil Abrahams, on the other hand, lays the emphasis on the contents of La Guma's novels. In his richly documented Alex La Guma, he provides a lengthy biography of the writer as well as an analysis of the themes of the books. He substantiates his arguments with long interviews he had with La Guma both in London in 1978, and in Havana in 1981. However, Cecil Abrahams neglected totally the structure of the novels. Like many critics, he has written extensively on the

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17- Lewis Nkosi, Tasks and Masks (Longman Group Ltd, 1981), p. 85.

political content. But far less attention has been devoted to the form of La Guma's fiction. Very little consideration has been paid to the linguistic dimension in particular. Furthermore his argument sounds all-too polemical. His criticism verges on pamphleteering at times .

Neither Cecil Abrahams' attitude nor other critics' sound unbiased. Obviously, the truth lies somewhere in between. Being uninvolved in the South African struggle, but at the same time fully aware of its implications as a result of the broad similarities between colonised Algeria and present-day South Africa, I shall attempt to steer a middle course, i.e, analyse both form and content so as to get as an objective view of La Guma's novels as possible.

Indeed the stylistic analysis helps us go beyond the mere surface interpretation entailed by an exclusively thematic approach. I shall call attention to the metaphorical use of the language, as well as variations in tone and register. I shall try to gain insight into the way La Guma modulates his prose to express certain shades of meanings. Does he use the same style or does the latter change according to the subject-matter ? My findings about the operations of

language will surely enhance my interpretation of the novels. I shall thus show that violence is not only a theme but a technique of writing as well. Characterisation, plot or lack of it, dialogue and narrative can be interpreted as expressive of a certain stylistic violence.

Since La Guma is not without political beliefs and convictions, I shall see whether he has been able to preserve the artistic value of his books, notwithstanding the specific South African circumstances. In this context, I shall investigate whether his books refute Lewis Nkosi's claim that because of the journalistic fact which pervades south African writing, writers should stop writing until the south African problem is solved.<sup>18</sup>

Furthermore, as Marxist criticism is concerned with the socio-historical dynamics of a people's experience and focuses on the historical and social conditions which give rise to a work, I find it proper to rely on it in my interpretation of La Guma's novels; all the more as he was a Marxist throughout his adult life. As Adrian Roscoe puts it:

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18- Lewis Nkosi, "Fiction by Black South Africans" Ulli Beir Introduction to African Literature (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1977), 233.

The elements of commitment in his work, both as a writer and a political activist bear out his avowals. He is a Marxist. La Guma resembles Ngugi in so far as his politics, frankly Marxist, seem as if they had grown out of a shackled response, an instructive response to human suffering, and not from either library or lecture hall. The human condition is sensed, examined and understood; then a politics is embraced to cure seen ills.<sup>19</sup>

A writer's biography cannot be disregarded as society impinges inescapably, upon literature. Because fiction absorbs pressures and influences around the writer, the link between society and art is dialectical and must be analysed as such. Raymond Williams explains:

All practice is still specific in the most serious and genuinely committed writing in which the writer's whole being and thus necessarily his real social existence is inevitably being drawn upon, at every level from the most manifest to the most intangible. It is literally inconceivable that practice can be

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19- Adrian Roscoe, Uhuru's Fire: African Literature from East to South (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977) , p. 233.



separated from situation. Since all situations are dynamic, such practice is always active, and is capable of radical development.<sup>20</sup>

In much the same way, George Lukacs claims that reality is mainly historical; it is not static but in a constant flux. As a result, history is the backbone of Marxist criticism and henceforth, it is the frame of reference within which criticism is pursued.

As a Marxist, La Guma showed no flight from the significant moments of his time. His stories are firmly grounded in the South African soil and society, and bear the marks of the Apartheid era. It is as though La Guma had made his Lukacs' doctrine of typicality, which can be broadly summarised thus:

A character is typical (...) when his innermost being is determined by objective forces at work in society. Vautrin or Julien Sorel, superficially

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20- Raymond Williams, Marxism and Literature (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 204

eccentric, are typical in their behaviour: the determining factors of a particular historical phase are found in them in concentrated form.<sup>21</sup>

La Guma has shown that art cannot be sealed off from the great issues of one's epoch.<sup>22</sup> Realism, which in essence tries to reproduce the concrete reality of historical existence, characterises almost every single line of his writing. This accurate depiction of reality reminds us once again of Lukacs' views:

Realism to my mind implies truth of detail, 'the

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21- Georg Lukacs, The Meaning of Contemporary Realism (London: Merlin Press, 1972), p. 122.

22- Ezekiel Mphahlele makes an interesting comment in this context: 'Some people say that they can write novels in which place does not matter, in which place and time do not need physical and temporal qualities. They can create a theatre in the mind. This kind of experiment goes against everything I hold sacred in the composition of fiction. The tyranny I would rather try to understand and deal with, so that I learn how to reconcile its imperatives, its diversities in relation to that far-off divine event! Ezekiel Mphahlele, 'Exile, the Tyranny of place and the literary compromise' Unisa English Studies, Vol. ~~XVII~~ p. 51.

truthful reproduction of typical characters under typical circumstances.' Characters do not act in a vacuum; their actions derive from social and historical conditions, and are reflective of the interests and activities of a class. It is therefore, the writer's duty to see what makes a particular society in a particular historical moment, to see class struggles in their true perspective, and depict them accurately.<sup>23</sup>

Since his novels reproduce reality, commitment becomes incontrovertible. Albert Memmi writes:

The true commitment of the writer is not to sign manifestoes ....; it is to dare represent truth as it is.<sup>24</sup>

Dennis Brutus explains the specificity of the South African situation:

In South Africa commitment is not a problem. You don't have to be a hero to be committed. You are

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23- Quoted by Emmanuel Ngara in Art and Ideology in the African Novel ( London: Heinemann, 1985), P;14

24- The Writer In Modern Africa, Afro-Scandinavian writers conference, Stockholm, 1967) p. 83 My Translation.

involved in a situation so fraught with evil that you are brought into collision with it.<sup>25</sup>

La Guma's commitment is apparent in his indictment of the exploitative nature of capitalism as it operates in South Africa. He has consciously sought to influence his readers and change their opinions. This relies on the assumption that literature awakens individual consciousness. As a Marxist he recognised his duty to engage in the struggle making a weapon of his art.

As he remarks:

One cannot separate literature from life, from human experience and human aspirations. When I write that the poor in South Africa are compelled to buy water itself from their exploiters, then, I also entertain the secret hope that when somebody reads what I have written, he will be moved to do something about those robbers who have turned away my country into a material wasteland for the majority of the inhabitants.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> ibid, p. 33

26- Alex La Guma in Lotus Magazine, a quarterly review of the Permanent Bureau of Afro-Asian writers, October, 1978, p. 23.

La Guma seems to be championing the cause of an art which leads to action . He strongly believes that art cannot be insulated from social realities:

The dynamics of the South African people will always be represented by the writing of those who do not fear to reflect the real struggle that is the struggle to overthrow white supremacy.<sup>27</sup>

This is quite in line with Marxist aesthetics whose originality does not merely lie in the historical approach to literature but also in its revolutionary perspective.

Charles Haroche points out:

By claiming a truthful painting of society, Marx and Engels exacted evidently more than an accurate description (...) of a given society. The literary realism they were preconising is deeper. It lies in an artistic and revolutionary vision of the world.<sup>28</sup>

It is in the light of the Marxist conception of literature - one which not only interprets the world, but also seeks to change it - that we shall analyse La Guma's novels.

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27- Quoted by Whitman Scarlet, The African Communist, N°77, Second quarter, 1979, p. 111.

28- Charles Haroche, Les Langages du Roman (Paris:Les Editeurs Français Réunis, 1976), p. 3. My Translation.

# I

## ALEX LA GUMA'S SOUTH AFRICA

"Did ever a race of men have for so long a time the horror before their eyes? (.....) I know that in war horror fills the minds of all, but even wars pass. The horrors that confront negroes stay in peace and war, winter and summer, night and day."

Richard Wright.

In criticism and critical Theory, Colin Mercer, a critic, writes:

If for linguistics language is a system of signs, for literature it must be understood as a practice in which we have to account for the ways subjects specifically redistribute those signs. The first stage and it is only a necessary preliminary stage - is to see literature as Kristeva puts it, 'seized in the space of the subject its topology, history and ideology.'<sup>1</sup>

This is to stress, at the outset, the need to bring to light the South African background as a preliminary step towards examining the novels of Alex La Guma. We shall provide a historical retrospective of white violence going back to the year 1948, a date which marks the beginning of the racist Nationalist Party's legal access to power. With the institutionalisation of Apartheid the laws passed in the fifties ensured that Blacks were inferior human beings. It is in the context of this manichaean society that our writer's early fiction was written and must therefore be analysed.

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1- Colin Mercer, "Literature's structuralism and the problem of literature", Criticism and Critical Theory (London: Edward Arnold Publishers Ltd, 1984) p. 41.

The early sixties are also an important period . With the renewed victory of the Nationalist Party in October 1960, the legislative apparatus was buttressed with new repressive laws. South Africa's withdrawal from the Commonwealth and the proclamation of the Republic marked the beginning of the political isolation of the country. It closed on itself and strengthened its hold on non-white groups and on anti-Apartheid political movements, which responded by 'going underground'. The fear of internal subversion provoked a hostile attitude on the part of the government . Consequently, more than ever before, any social or political movement in favour of justice and freedom was interpreted as a danger threatening the very existence of the Afrikaner community which forms the bulk of the European population of South Africa. And La Guma introduces in his early fiction aspects which flow directly from this very background, as we shall presently show.

The context in which La Guma wrote was a colonial one. Though South Africa bears all the characteristics of an advanced capitalist state it also shows those of a colony. The fact that the majority is denied the right of citizenship, that it cannot own land or any other property, work, move or choose its place of residence as it pleases is ample



evidence of the colonial relationship between black and white.

The major cleavages are not only economic but racial too, as the persistent line of division is ethnic in character. Comparing white affluence to black poverty, René Lefort writes:

"The indigeneous population is submitted to an extreme colonial oppression, to poverty, exploitation, deprivation of all democratic rights, to the political domination of a group which does its best to enhance and perpetuate its foreign character, 'European' African reserves show a total lack of industry, communication, transport, energy which is characteristic of African territories under the colonial yoke in the rest of the continent. "(2)

However, south African colonialism has unique features. It does not conform to the classical colonial model. It is of a specific type. It is an internal colonialism as both the "motherland" (métropole) and the colony are one and the same country. Pierre Van Der Berghe explains that what makes South Africa a complex multi-racial society is that it is:

↳ René Lefort, Histoire d'une crise, (Paris; Maspero, 1977) p, 140

My translation.

An internal colonial empire in which Africans are dealt with arbitrarily without any representation in sovereign law-making bodies. The Whites also monopolise the means of violence: military service and the right to carry fire arms are limited to Whites (.....) A rural population of less than half a million owns 87 % of the land whereas four million Africans are squeezed into the remaining 13 % which make up the impoverished, eroded, overgrazed native reserves. The whites keep for themselves all the better paying occupations (.....) The Non-Whites are left with domestic services and semi-skilled jobs in industry, mining and agriculture. <sup>3</sup>

Having stressed the peculiar nature of 'The South African Colony' we shall now look more closely at those aspects of it which are relevant to our study.

This chapter consists of three sections. The first section will be concerned with the state's political and economic

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3- Pierre Van De Berghe, Race and Racism, (New-York: John Willy & Sons, 1981), p.10.

violence. We shall attempt to describe the functioning of the law in the central government, in bantustans, in the economic sector as well as in Education. The second section revolves around some of the complexities of cultural fragmentation. It touches upon the disruptive effect of censorship on the artist as well as on culture in general. The last section deals exclusively with La Guma's life and political activities.

## 1. The State's Political and Economic Violence

It is worth noting right from the start that state violence is what characterises the South African government. The latter holds sway over the apparatus of state in such an autocratic way that what in modern democracies is quite normal becomes, in South Africa, reprehensible. The implementation of the system of Apartheid has dominated political life and race relations since 1948. The Afrikaners established statutory segregation to protect their identity, tradition and 'Western Civilisation'. They are convinced that any alteration of any aspect of this policy would lead to a 'one man one vote' situation. This desperate search for survival has resulted in a large scale violation of human rights; a situation which still persists today despite the recent ending of "petty Apartheid".

From 1948 on, the Blacks have been subjected to intense pressure. Their fundamental rights were eroded as the segregationist government of Smuts was succeeded by the more reactionary government of Daniel F. Malan in the late forties. When the latter came to office, segregationist measures became increasingly rigid and inclusive: the Boers erected the

main pillars of Apartheid by reconstructing the country's laws.

The Nationalist Party's struggle to protect the credibility of its ideological position became imperative. Its policy has a "philosophical" and theological basis which lies in the calvinistic interpretation of the notion of predestination, salvation, and damnation. The essence of its dogma is that whites are superior beings, herein lies the core of their ideology.

Though segregation dates back to the arrival of the white man in South Africa in 1652, it became official policy in 1948, enshrined in the constitution and law of the country. As a consequence successive governments have played their parts in laying out laws and regulations which impose separation in all fields.

The strength of Apartheid lies in the reduction of inter-racial contacts in all fields. Because its main target is the policy of separate development, Apartheid is articulated in terms of separateness. This is its raison d'être. It can then be defined as a series of laws oriented to prevent any inter-racial mingling. Each race must develop according to its own characteristics in its own geographically determined area.

Unconvincingly, this policy is based on the premise that

European and African societies have different ways of developing .  
T.E. Donges, Nationalist Minister of the interior of the South  
African Republic, said in 1949:

The policy of the Nationalist Party, with regard to  
Apartheid, means that in their national development,  
there shall be separation between European and  
non-European. And this will give the non-Europeans  
an opportunity to develop their own national character.<sup>4</sup>

This is indeed a questionable policy as we shall see  
presently. Any investigation of the laws aiming at putting  
into practice this policy, will show that far from promoting  
national growth, it simply perpetuates in a legitimised form,  
White 'superiority'.

The law which is founded on racial prejudice at the expense of  
four-fifths or 80% of the population is codified to perpetuate  
White domination. Legislation, which represents the theoretical  
grounding of Apartheid is a key part of the government. Propounding  
differences between races, it is implemented in all domains for  
the subjugation of the majority. As a result Blacks are, relegated  
to the status of second-class citizens. They are deprived of

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4- Quoted by I.S. Lyod , "Apartheid, South Africa's New Native  
Policy" Political Quarterly, Vol IX , April-June 1949,p.127.

the opportunity to develop in any way but the one laid down by the State.

Since Apartheid's aim has been the separate development of races, it was imperative for the government to designate which race must live together and which must be separated, so as to determine to whom segregation is applicable. The Population Registration Act (1950) made it compulsory for every individual to be classified as one of the following racial groups: Black, White, Yellow or coloured. Hence relatives since long dead were referred to to determine whether one was White or not. In South Africa - This is no longer true - every child is classified at birth according to his skin pigmentation. This classification controls his entire life from the cradle to the grave.

This policy is evident in all aspects of life. Blacks are not represented in Parliament, an injustice paving the way to all others. Until the sixties, White authorities were in charge of the administration of black people and all their affairs. The Blacks' limited rights were little by little restricted, to be abolished in 1968. Fearful of being submerged by African masses and convinced that this African majority presents a direct threat to the Whites' very existence, the authorities adopted a policy intended to safeguard their security. As a consequence, no Black

is entitled to vote. This political exclusion is expressed by Prime Minister Vester in 1966:

It is true that there are Blacks working for us. They will continue to work for us for generations in spite of the ideal we have to separate them completely .... But the fact that they work for us can never entitle them to claim political rights, not now, nor in the future.<sup>5</sup>

The colonial yoke is institutionalised through bantustans. Having been deprived of political rights in the central government the Blacks are dumped in 13% of the total territory called bantustans. The South African legislation promoted the policy of bantustans as a suitable means of perpetuating the reserve system, legislating the Black to their tribes. The process began in 1951 with the Bantu Authorities Act under which tribal authorities were set up in tribal areas. Theoretically Africans were to possess the rights they had been deprived of

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5- Bonnie Yengwa, Massabala 'The Bantustan' in Alex La Guma's Apartheid, (Berlin: Seven Seas Books, 1971), p,93.

The constitution 1985 further reinforced the foundations of Apartheid. It intended to draw Asians and Coloureds to the Whites' side against the Blacks by allowing them to elect their own representatives. But since the Blacks were excluded, these two minorities boycotted the elections, of their separate parliaments thus siding with the Blacks. The vote remains, as it has always really been, the exclusive right of the white South African population.



They were also expected to work, reside and develop their language and culture.

As we have pointed out, the main aim of this policy is to achieve the racial separation of the different groups. However in the economic sector the professional and geographic mobility of black workers proved imperative. That the bantustans cannot support their inhabitants was carefully planned. They can only constitute a wide reservoir of cheap labour. Thus economic interdependence of all groups proves inevitable. Nevertheless in order not to oppose the official policy, the growing migration of these workers towards urban zones is curbed by a whole arsenal of legislation, which forms a barrier to any integration.<sup>6</sup>

The Group Areas Act also divides the heterogenous population ethnically. Passed in 1950, this law constitutes an impermeable barrier to social integration, as separate areas are set aside for each group.

It thus becomes clear that Apartheid is an ideology and a

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6- It is an indiscutable fact that many constraints control the life of urban Blacks. To halt the process of African urbanisation, the labour bureaus control the exit and entrance of Africans in each zone. The pass law which no longer exists now, was first introduced in the Cape in 1760; the pass book had to be carried by Blacks over sixteen. This document regulates every minute of his life, all his movements his work, employer; wage, where he might reside or travel. It is important to remember that the demonstration in Sharpeville and elsewhere in 1960 which resulted in bloodshed arose out of protest against the pass law.

policy at the service of exploitation. This is conspicuously obvious in the economic sector. For what must not be disregarded is that the vital force of Apartheid lies in the exploitation of cheap labour. The 'primitive, uncivilised' African should never strive for any social progress. This justifies the traditional, colonialist ideology based on the 'White man's country, the Black man's labour'. This systematisation of economic exploitation is consolidated politically. In Dr Voster's words:

To say that integration exists simply because Africans were employed in factories and on farms ...then the asses, oxen and tractors were also integrated because they were indispensable.<sup>7</sup>

In South Africa education for Africans is also subordinated to the overriding demands of racial domination. Bantu Education is imposed to help perpetuate discrimination by preparing the children for economically and politically subordinate positions in society. The Separate Amenities Act, passed in 1953, has affected schools. Thus there are separate primary and secondary schools for White, Indian Coloured and Black children. This separation, not unlike others, is absolutely congruous with the economic policy pursued by the Nationalists. Education is a barrier to upward mobility. It became a major issue as the Blacks

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7- Quoted in Apartheid, Op.Cit., pp, 3-4

The law protects White labour from Black competition, curbing black infiltration in skilled jobs. It also ensures a wide disparity between black and white wages.



could no longer aspire to the same privileges as their White schoolmates. The statement made by Prime Minister, Hendrick Verwoerd in 1953 is explicit:

If the native in South Africa in any kind of school in existence is being taught to expect that he will live his adult life under a policy of equal rights, he is making a big mistake. There is no place for him in the European community above the level of certain forms of labour .<sup>8</sup>

It is worth noting; also that duress is a constant weapon resorted to for the maintenance of the status quo . A particular feature of the South African situation is the regime's increased use of force to suppress all forms of political opposition. As the latter have grown, the government has expanded

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8- Quoted by T.T.Moyana, "Problems of a Creative Writer in South Africa" Christopher Heywood's Aspects of South African Literature (London: Heinemann, 1976), P.20.

Before the Bantu Education became a law, some Africans could benefit from missionary schools. African children followed the same curriculum as the Whites; but this act destroyed these schools, depriving them of subvention. As a result, African education was transferred from the department of Arts and Science to the Bantu Education so that African children cannot be prepared for professions for which Whites aspire. The University Extension Act (1959) made their access to White Universities impossible, except some such as Witwatersrand for example.

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its armed forces and undertaken harsh repressive action to counter the growing resistance against the system.

Branded subversive to the maintenance of the social order, any form of opposition is suppressed by a complex web of legislation. Declared illegal, resistance is shackled by military and police repression. The regime's use of armed force is backed by a vast array of laws. The government does its best to suppress resistance to Apartheid. One of the devices for preserving it is the Suppression of Communism Act passed in 1967. Besides, a series of laws for detention without trial and for renewable periods buffeted anyone suspected of political activities against the government. This law is a stark illustration of the system's increasingly punitive attitude. Torture is a routine method to extract confessions from detainees. It is estimated that:

In 70% of the instances investigated, reports were recorded of frenzied security police violence with any weapons at hand (.....) Victims of this state terror had their toes crushed with chains or bricks, their heads banged against a wall or a table and were dragged about by their hair. A man ..... was

found by the court to have his teeth broken by a pair of pliers during one of the sessions.<sup>9</sup>

Police brutality has long been a feature of South Africa. In the Bulhoek massacre in May 1921, one hundred sixty-three Blacks were killed. In December 1930 the police opened fire in Durban on pass demonstrators. The police shot strikers in 1946 killing nine Blacks and injuring hundreds. Again, during the big strike of May 1950, eighteen died and thirty were wounded. In March 1960, sixty-nine were killed and One hundred seventy-eight were injured in Sharpeville; peaceful demonstrators were shot in the back as they fled. The seventies witnessed a spectacular growth of suppressive police force. Some estimates of those killed during the Soweto uprising 1976-7 are as high as one thousand. And at least fifty were killed during the demonstration of 1980. In March 4th, 1985, the police opened fire on a burial procession in Langa, in the East of Cape Province, killing Twenty-one black people and hundreds more subsequently. The process goes on unabated.

We must take into account the part played by the judicial system in strengthening the country's laws, justifying state violence. Indeed it is this system that authorises the

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9- Quoted in Torture is Part of the System, Published by the ANC, (nd) London, p.11.

government to imprison, exile and ban anyone. It is this very system that prohibits public meetings, organisations, restricts peoples' movements, assigns them to house arrest, detains them or even executes them. In the light of what precedes, it is clear that legislative measures are devised to defend white minority against the opponents of the regime. The unrivalled part and the strong impact of juridical regulations are cogently pointed out:

Violence imposes order and applies differences and unequal rights. From then on, the law has the authority. And violence is only a threat.<sup>10</sup>

## 2. Cultural Violence:

The restrictions of individual liberties are also apparent in the cultural domains. South Africa is a gagged society where any free utterance is strangled. What must always be borne in mind is that Apartheid is carefully contrived and reinforced by coercive means of control. Therefore censorship becomes part of this interlocking apparatus of repression. In South Africa a

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10- Valentin Hribary, "La Violence de la Transsubstantiation et le défi du Fétichisme" La Violence, Actes de Milan, 1977 pp. 68 - 8. My Translation.

deliberate breaking down of communication is resorted to. Artists are forced into silence. They cannot communicate with their own environment. Freedom of thought is suppressed.

The range of prohibitions widened with the Publications and Entertainment Act of 1963 which exerts political pressure on the directors of Publishing houses and printers. This is part of the Apartheid policy to maintain social order. Not only does this act decide which works may be imported, but can ban books produced within the country.

Control of the black mind is the main aim of censorship. The Suppression of Communism Act (1950) prohibited the import or printing of what is declared to be Communist propaganda. Consequently, leftist publications (the ANC's, the PAC's and the African Communist) are published abroad. Moreover, because they are judged to be subversive to the State security, thousands of books are kept off the country T.T. Moyana comments:

The operation of these censorship laws has led to the banning of an estimated 15000 books by March 1971

..... The writings and speeches of 750 persons, including all the best known African and Coloured writers have been banned under the Suppression of



Communism Act. All the best known black and Coloured writers live in exile.<sup>11</sup>

As a result, Africans cannot read what their fellow country-men have written as their works are invariably banned. Repressive conditions at home drive many writers to exile. Besides, they are made voiceless as they become blacklisted in South Africa. Once there, the South African legislation strips them off a large part of their audience: they are victims of the Suppression of Communism Act which enables the Minister of justice to ban South Africans who no longer live in the country. Ezekiel Mphahlele, a South African writer, bitterly observes:

Most South African writers living in exile are banned from their native readership. They must continue writing for that vaguely defined or non-existent world intelligence. They can never know what the people think of them whose concerns they share in South Africa, who make the material for their writing. They may be applauded or discarded by people whose critical standards they don't care for. They are,

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11- "The Problems of a Creative Writer", Op-Cit., pp.88-9

indeed, like disembodied voices that echo from hill to hill.<sup>12</sup>

Like Mphahlele, Lewis Nkosi, another black South African writer in exile, has an interesting remark on this point. In much the same way; Nkosi explains:

A writer needs his roots; he needs his people perhaps more than they need him in order that they should corroborate the vision he has of them . . . . . These messages tossed away into the ocean thousands of miles away, written about a home one has not seen for fourteen years ( . . . . . ) Who reads the fiction, the poems and the biographies of South African writers ? Certainly Europeans, Americans, Indians and Chinese. Everyone but the people in whose name one is writing.<sup>13</sup>

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12- Ezekiel Mphahlele, "Exile, the Tyranny of Place and Aesthetics: The South African Case" The English Academy Review, Johannesburg, 1991, p.41.

13- Lewis Nkosi, "Art Contra Apartheid; South African Writers in Exile" in Genève Afrique, Vol XVII, 1983, n°2, p.68.

It was, then, impossible for writers of La Guma's generation to be read at home as their works could not and still cannot get into the country. Besides the fact that the media, ready to publish them was very restricted; it was limited to those designated to left wing journals such as Fighting Talk or New Age. However it is important to note that the situation now, in South Africa, is not as it was in the sixties. Our writers are more fortunate than their predecessors. Even those who went to exile such as Mphahlele and Richard Rive could come back home.

Communist Party, as he was President of the South African Coloured People's Congress. Alex La Guma explains his enthusiasm to fight Fascism in Spain in favour of democracy in 1938:

The world, then, was confronted with the Fascist uprising in Europe and naturally, being a member of a political family, one got the news of these events all the time. The events were discussed in the family and at the meeting which took place in our house.<sup>34</sup>

He joined the Young Communist League in 1946 and became one of its members till its banning in 1952. In 1954, he was a member of the Coloured People's Organisation and was elected to the Executive Committee. In 1955, he was elected chairman of the South African People's Congress. The fifties were a period of intense revolutionary activity for him. The principal aspect of the revolution he preached was, quite obviously, equality of civil rights, on the basis of one man one vote in a democratic

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34- Cecil Abrahams, Alex La Guma (Op.Cit.), p.5.

South Africa. Speaking at a protest meeting in Capetown in 1955 , he said:

We do not object to being called Africans. When the government classifies us as Africans, it subjects us to all the life-destroying burdens of the African people. If we all unite under the banner of the Congress, we cannot lose the struggle for freedom and democracy. We have the strength of millions on our side, not only in South Africa, but outside. The freedom Charter is going to be the basis of a new South Africa and the future belongs to us. <sup>35</sup>

Because of his outright opposition to Apartheid, Alex La Guma was subjected to a series of imprisonments and house arrests in South Africa. On December 13 th, 1955 along with a hundred and fifty-five anti-Apartheid leaders, La Guma appeared in the Treason Trial. It was only in 1960 that they were acquitted. The Congress Alliance formed by the ANC, the Indian Congress, the Congress of Democrats and the South African

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35- Quoted by Z.N. Nkosi; "Death of Alex La Guma, Writer and Freedom Fighter" in The African Communist, n°104, 1986, p.90.

Coloured People's Organisation adopted the Freedom Charter which aimed at a democratic South Africa. After his acquittal, and during the State of Emergency that followed the Sharpeville Shooting, he was arrested again and goaled in Worcester prison for seven months, for organising a strike protest against the Verwoerd Republic. When the Sabotage Act was passed, he was one of its casualties. He was confined to house arrest for Twenty-four hours a day. Nothing he said or wrote was allowed to be quoted or printed. As a result of his grim struggle against Apartheid, La Guma was isolated both socially and politically from his friends and relatives. He explains:

This meant that I could not go beyond the gate of my house without permission from the authorities. It meant I couldn't work at any gainful employment. I was not permitted visitors. I even had to apply for a permit to have my wife share our house with me. The only oversight of the authorities was that they did not prevent me from using my pen. They have seen how dangerous this can be and how they won't permit any form of writing.<sup>36</sup>

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36-Alex La Guma, Op.Cit., p.15.

A tough and determined fighter for his ideas, he was an ardent believer in Marxist principles. It is important to note in this context that in 1946, he was dismissed from his job as a factory worker in Metal Box Company in Cape Town, because he organised a strike for better working conditions.

La Guma has always given a privileged attention to the predicament of man. But this growing interest and involvement in politics cost him dearly. In 1963, he was held in solitary confinement. He was detained again in 1966. The repression was so intense that after his release, he went to exile. But even in exile, he tried to give voice to contemporary South Africa. He never considered himself outside the struggle. His conditions did not hinder him from being in touch with his fellow countrymen. For as an exile, he assumed the role of the spokesman of the oppressed. His exile did not weaken his commitment, but on the contrary, reinforced it. He himself observes that he went to exile but to carry the struggle forward/

Well it was more of a mixture of decision and requirements of the sort of political struggle. It was felt that after having spent four years under house arrest and going into the fifth year with the prospect of another five years there was no point

in remaining locked up in one's home, definitely. One could be more constructive and freer outside. So we came to Europe to carry on what we were doing on another front.<sup>37</sup>

La Guma wrote energetically in London in favour of the South African Liberation Movement, chairing meetings, moving from one area to another, making speeches to make the British people aware of the Blacks' plight. Utterly devoted to the cause of social justice, he travelled to Cuba where he became the ANC representative, both in this country and in Latin America. Among his other political activities was his adherence to the Afro-Asian Writers' Association of which he became Secretary General in 1977. An Association whose aim is to fight against all forms of exploitation. He openly showed his unfailing hatred towards tyranny. The following statement gives clear expression of his attitude vis-à-vis injustice in the world:

As writers, we shall continue to dedicate our work for the sake of peace. We shall sing the positive, fundamental side of man, his humanism and goodness ....

We shall condemn for ever the negative features which engender hostility and hatred. Our association of

writers has: never diverted from politics and from the people's struggle against imperialism, colonialism, racism under all its forms and the ill-treatment of man by man.<sup>38</sup>

La Guma was one of those who had the finger on the pulse of the masses. He vigorously condemned the appalling brutalities which are still endlessly inflicted upon them. This vision of man's debasement in a totalitarian society, where every aspect of life is linked with politics grew out of his observations of the political scene. This implies that political affiliations motivated him to write. This background was, as a matter of fact, an intense, creative stimulus for him. His close emotional engagement with his people served as a primary source of his inspiration. It is precisely the whole atmosphere of violence and insecurity in which his fellow countrymen were confined that inspired him to write short stories and novels. He has always sought inspiration from the daily rhythms of life. When he was awarded the Lotus Prize in 1969 by the Afro-Asian countries, La Guma was explicit in his argument:

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38- Quoted in Lotus Magazine Op.Cit., p.52. My Translation.



I would not be a writer without the people who inspired me to write thousands of words in books published, bearing my name on the cover. The life of men, their love, hatred, sadness and aspiration .... The history of a people includes actions of human beings their efforts and difficulties. It is often written with blood often with canons and rockets in South Africa.<sup>39</sup>

He explains that because history moulds literature, it is impossible to separate or draw distinct lines between literature and politics. In his speech at the 1967 Afro-Scandinavian Writer's Conference in Stockholm, he made explicitly the point. He sees the two- art and politics-as one unbreakable whole:

South African Literature, I am prepared to say it that literature which concerns itself with the realities of South Africa. And what are the realities of South Africa? We are, as writers, faced with the reality

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39- Ibid., p. 134, My Translation.

that 80% of the population lives below the breadline standard. We are faced with the reality that the average daily population of prisoners in South African prisons mounts to 70.000 persons. We are faced with the reality that half the non-white people who died last year were below the age of five years. These are the realities even if we want to ignore these gruesome details and think in terms of culture and art in South Africa. Today people are not allowed to develop their minds along the lines which they prefer.<sup>40</sup>

Alex La Guma felt deeply the need for social commitment in his writing. The social environment imposes this responsibility. It is this very responsibility which proves his only literary reality. He formulates the issue at hand saying:

By deepening our consciousness and widening our feeling for life, it reminds us that all ideas and all actions derive from realism and experience, within social realities .... Literature, art, culture civilisation, these are not abstract conception, as some

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40- Quoted by Samuel, Omo Asein " The Revolutionary Vision in Alex La Guma's Novels" in Black Images, Vol 3, n°2, Summer 1974 ; P.16 .

Martin Tucker has spoken of 'the fusion necessary for literature' the heat of ideas distilled by the cold purity of form, the commingling of two elements, art and socio-politics in which each is servant to and in harmony with the other. "Martin Tucker in Africa in Modern Literature: A Survey of Contemporary Writing in English ( New-York: Frederick Ungar, 1967), p.16.

would imagine. They define the direction and basis of our actions at a particular time. They must therefore be understood and interpreted on their revolutionary paths, as the ethos which drives man forward or retards his progress, according to the dynamics of that civilisation.<sup>41</sup>

This survey of La Guma's South Africa and of his political beliefs and activities has provided us with a clear frame of reference, within which a detailed discussion of his novels finds its appropriate place.

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41- Quoted in The Revolutionary Vision in Alex La Guma's Novels,  
Op.Cit., p. 17.

III

THE END OF THE TETHER  
THE END OF THE TETHER

A WALK IN THE NIGHT

We have no hero and no war  
Only victims of a sickly state  
Succumbing to the variegated sores  
That flower under lashing rains of hate.

We have no battles and no fights  
For history to record with trite remark  
Only captives killed on eyeless nights  
And accidental dying in the dark.

Dennis Brutus.

A Walk in the Night was first published by Mbari, in Ibadan, in 1962. La Guma wrote this book when he was under house arrest, and before the state of Emergency was declared in 1960.

The plot hinges on Michael Adonis, the main protagonist, who offers the perfect example of a social victim. The story opens with this coloured boy sacked from the factory in which he worked because he answered his foreman back. Shortly after, he is harassed and humiliated by two policemen. This incident inflames his anger and indignation. Out of frustration, he gets drunk and, inadvertently, murders Uncle Doughty, a senile and drunken Irish former actor. But it is Willieboy, one of Michael's acquaintances, who is mistakenly identified as the murderer and killed as a consequence by a sadistic policeman called Raalt. In the meantime, Michael enters the gang world of the slums.

The author brings to light the tragedy of a people whose situation goes from bad to worse in a society where they are outcast and by which they are unconditionally rejected. La Guma's aim is to draw our attention on the corrupting nature of white society, and on the way it crushes the individual.

This situation calls to mind that experienced by the young protagonists of afro-American fiction. In this connection, we shall refer to Richard Wright's Native Son, and make a few allusions to Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man. Like La Guma, these American

writers raise similar questions: how can Blacks respond to a racist capitalist environment? How can they survive in society? We shall try to bring out their nearly identical responses in relation to their respective back grounds: The American South and District six Capetown. Furthermore, the world of Native Son is in many ways similar to that of A Walk in the Night. Both novels deal with the dominant forces that control black lives. Both Bigger Thomas and Michael Adonis are victims of injustice. As Blacks trying to survive in a racist-white society, they are ineluctably led to delinquency and enter ~~the~~ underworld of crime.

The background plays an important role in their gradual estrangement from 'normal life'. The urban setting is significant in itself as an element of the plot. It is also a contributory factor in character development. For it is this very environment that shapes their lives. The setting of A Walk in the Night is minutely and fully described. These remarkably lengthy descriptions of a naturalistic vein invite comparison with those of Emile Zola. This is to stress the essentially documentary nature of La Guma's prose. This does not mean that A Walk in the Night cannot be read metaphorically.

A Walk in the Night is drawn from life. This book is based on the author's own experience or on those of people he knew or met. For instance Michael is modelled after a boy he personally knew:

I remember a particular boy friend of mine, Daniel, who lived just opposite my house... Daniel was an African boy of my age and we were great chums and he was a great favourite of mine, because he was a cheerful, light-hearted fellow and we spent a lot of time as children together .... One day I was grown up .... I met Daniel again. He was not the same Daniel I had known before. He had become a gangster, been to prison and his whole life before him didn't hold any sort of cosy prospects. It was quite a moving experience for me to meet again an old school friend who had become a victim of the circumstances which he could not cope with.<sup>1</sup>

Like Daniel, Michael Adonis is a helpless victim of marginality whose destiny is controlled by others. As La Guma explains:

I tried to make of Michael a typical, Coloured person. During the years I lived in District Six I played with, and met characters like him: young men, who because of their colour, have been prevented from achieving anything progressive and from achieving any ambition,

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1- Cecil Abrahams, Alex La Guma, (Boston : Twayne Publishers, 1985) p, 18.

have been forced into Michael's situation. So what Adonis experienced in the book, I haven't personally experienced as an individual. I have seen it going around me; that made it easy for me to write and create such a character.<sup>2</sup>

The character of Uncle Doughty is also drawn from a man of flesh and blood. La Cuma says that he was really

An old man who had been an actor and found himself living in a room in District Six. He was found dead one morning by his landlady. So I used this in order to complete the picture. In fact, I might confess that he was a relation of ours. He was my mother's second cousin or something like that, who had landed up in drunk but nothing could be done with him anyway.<sup>3</sup>

The author relies again on facts, rather than on his imagination to create the character of Willieboy. He himself read in a newspaper that:

A so called hooligan had died in the police van after having been shot in District Six.<sup>4</sup>

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2- Quoted by Cosmo Pieterse and Dennis Duedern in African Writers Talking (London: Cox and Wyman Ltd, 1972) p, 93.

3- Alex La Cuma, Op.Cit., p, 18.

4- Ibid., p, 22.



La Guma holds that it is this very piece of news which made him recreate the scene in the novel:

I just thought to myself how could this fellow have been shot and could have died in the police van? What happened to him? And so I sort of created the picture fictitiously, but in relation to what I thought life in District Six was. And so I wrote the sad story of A Walk in the Night.<sup>5</sup>

And La Guma to conclude:

In terms of material, I think I am one of the fortunate people who has got ability to recall things which appear obscure to other people but register with me as being useful in creating a picture in District Six is based upon actual characters and events. I used this information and connected events in order to create the whole picture.<sup>6</sup>

This novel, then, is strongly anchored in District Six. But La Guma transcends mere journalistic writing. Intertextuality is at play in this first novel of his, enhancing it with reverberations of meanings. The epigraph of the book is from Shakespeare's Hamlet, Act I, scene 5.

I am thy father's spirit

Doom'd for a certain term to walk the night

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5- Ibid., p,22

6- Ibid., p,24

And for the day confined to fast in fires  
Till the foul crimes done in my days of nature  
Are burnt and purged away.

This epigraph enables us to draw more meanings from the novel, than meet the eye. The first effect the title has upon us is one of defamiliarisation.<sup>7</sup> It conveys a sense of strangeness, of a breakaway from our ordinary experience. The collocation walk night seems incongruous: while the former word is associated with activity, the latter denotes, on the contrary, passivity. But this seeming dissonance can be elucidated by reference to Shakespeare's play. Hamlet's father had been put to death by his own brother, and his ghost comes to inform his son of the foul deed. This spirit is doomed to darkness because the sins committed are not expiated yet.

La Guma's characters also appear at night. As the gang leader sums up:

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7- According to the Russian Formalists, "Literary texts tend to ... dislocate our habitual perceptions of the real world so as to make it the object of a renewed attentiveness." ( Formalism and Marxism, (Tony Bennett, Methuen: London, Coltd, 1979) p, 20. According to Shklovsky, "Literature creates a vision of the object instead of serving as a means for knowing it. It does not as does science organise the world conceptually, but rather disorganises the forms through which the world is customarily perceived, opening up a kind of chink through which the world displays to view new and unexpected aspects." Ibid., pp, 24- 5 .

"We are walking around all night."<sup>8</sup>

However, if Hamlet's father's ghost is motivated by revenge, the District Six's ghosts are overwhelmed with frustration. The political system is so harsh that the mobility of the individual is subjected to a strict control. Therefore they take shelter in darkness which attenuates, more or less, the oppressive authority of the system.

As Frantz Fanon puts it:

During the period of colonisation, the native never stops achieving his freedom from nine in the evening until six in the morning.<sup>9</sup>

Paralysed by the law, hindered from acting freely, they seize the least opportunity offered by darkness to get rid of the frustrations of the day. Night is the only moment when they can assert—even aggressively—their humanity. We go along with David Rabkin when he writes:

The characters who are condemned to walk the streets of District Six are there not for their foul crimes, but as a consequence of the social and political system. Salvation is therefore release from an extremely imposed condition.

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8- A Walk in the Night, (London: Heinemann, 1962), p. 38.

9- Frantz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth (New-York: Ballantine Books Inc. 1973. Translated by Constance Farrington), p. 52.

Here hell is not a state of mind but a system of  
legislation.<sup>10</sup>

The South African poet Oswald Mtshali underlines the same  
problem in one of his poems.

I am the nocturnal animal

**That steals through the fenced fair**

I meet my mate

And flees at the break of dawn

before the hunter and the hound

Run me to ground.<sup>11</sup>

The theme of the hunt is brought out through the many sequences  
where constable Raalt is seen obsessively pursuing Willieboy until  
he

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10- David Rabin, "Alex La Guma and the Reality in South Africa" in  
Journal of Commonwealth Literature, Vol VIII, n°1 June 1973  
p, 54.

11- Oswald Mtshali, "Night Fall in Soweto" in Sounds of a Cowhide  
Drum (Johannesburg: Penoyster Books, 1971) p, 55.

Lewis Mkosi makes an interesting remark in this regard: "Africans  
learned that if they are to remain sane at all, it is pointless  
to try to live within the law. In a country where the government  
has legislated against sex, drink, employment, free movement  
and many other things, which are taken for granted in the  
Western world, it would take a monumental kind of patience to  
keep with the demands of the law. A man's sanity may even be in  
question by the time he reaches the ripe age of twenty five. So  
Africans have accepted the status of outlaws ... and have  
involved an elaborate system of escaping, hoodwinking and  
battling the law." (See Lewis Mkosi, Home and Exile, (London:  
Longmans, 1965), pp, 39-40)

Had his quarry trapped and ... was quite sure that he would conclude the hunt successfully.<sup>12</sup>

Thus the metaphor of the hunt forcefully shows that the Blacks are subjected to the predatory raids of the police at all time, and are therefore hindered from any free motion. The 'walk in the night' then is emblematic of the black man's frustration. Michael's story is typical in this connection. Right from the start, we know that something is wrong with him:

The young man dropped from the trackless tram, just before it stopped at Castle Bridge. He dropped off ignoring the stream of late afternoon traffic rolling in from the suburbs, lolled and ducked the cars and buses, the big rumbling delivery trucks deaf to the shouts and curses of the drivers, and reached the pavement.<sup>13</sup>

He is in a very bad mood seemingly. As we may notice, the rhythm is fast. The sentence flows in one single stream; action is described in only one breath. Michael did not reach the pavement as soon as he alighted; many hindrances got in his way. His movements are hampered with the things he has to contend with. These obstacles and the confused things around him, by which he is buffeted but

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12- A Walk in the Night, Op.Cit., p. 85.

13- Ibid., p. 1.

which he cannot understand, add insult to injury. The injury of being unjustly fired from his job. From then on, he will inevitably drift into the underworld.

The social situation of other characters is no better. Joe is a homeless youth who lives off handouts. He does not know what normal family life is. He tells us how his father ran away because he was jobless and unable to feed his family. As a result, his family was unfeelingly thrown out by the landlord because the rent was not paid.

Willieboy epitomises the fate of those who are chronically unemployed. His social and family life are similar to Joe's. He wants above all to be accepted. Even his name is meaningful. Like Joe, it is not a family name for he belongs to nowhere. He is neither strongly identifiable nor individualised. He is anonymous and replaceable. He is homeless and an outcast. But unlike Joe, Willieboy is already a tsotsi, a hooligan. He was caught stealing and taken to a reformatory. He has always been deprived of love and warmth. His reminiscences of his childhood experiences help us understand his present anti-social behaviour. Willieboy's lack of affection at home, his hunger and intolerable life are motives likely to give birth to violent outbursts, as soon as the occasion arises. He acts rashly and aggressively. Having been beaten at Gypsy's, he vents his spleen on Mister Green. The sociologists Claire and W.H.S Russels, have deeply investigated into people's

tendency to violence. Their argument helps us understand Willieboy's:

The people who are deprived of love feel deeply its absence, and are prepared to show violent reactions during new frustrations. Besides, a loveless upbringing during which corporal sanctions are frequent predisposes the child, reared in this way, to use violence himself in his adult life.<sup>14</sup>

Society deprives him of his individuality, and it is this tension between the individual and his environment which bears on the question of identity. La Guma has succeeded to convey the frustration of his characters in a subtle way. Some acts and gestures are used as good substitutes for words, hence their cinematic quality. For instance, conspicuous scenes of characters smoking dagga cigarettes cut the narrative, underlying their problems and their frustrations. It seems that only these private acts help their authors avert their attention from the harsh external world.

Willieboy is reminiscent of the central character of Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man. Like Willieboy, the latter is in search of identity and fulfillment in a hostile environment which

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14- Quoted by Anthony Storr in L'Instinct de Destruction, (Paris: Calmann-Levy, 1952), p, 52. My Translation.

denies him recognition as a human being. This anonymous character has not even the vaguest notion of who he is. He is not only alienated from the world but from himself too.

I am an invisible man .<sup>15</sup>

Both Willieboy and Ellison's character are made invisible by their environments hence the predominance of the ghost motif in both novels. They are psychologically alone and subsequently restless. Both are society's refuse because of the colour of their skin, and both want to be accepted, to belong to society. It is precisely in these terms that tensions in both novels emerge: if Willieboy tries to escape from anonymity, wearing a special attire, Ellison's anonymous protagonist switches on, symbolically, 1369 light bulbs for others to see him.

The frustration of La Guma's characters has a disintegrative influence upon their psyche. Having been pitilessly ignored, they resort to unlawful means to survive in a world where decency is denied. Being deeply affected psychologically and spiritually they develop a neurosis which is the bitter fruit of their existence. They can only turn into delinquents in their struggle to survive in a world where 'survival is for the fittest'.

This then is broadly speaking the predicament of the Black in South Africa. This plight is in many respects, similar to that

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15- Ralph Ellison, Invisible Man, (New-York: Vintage Books 1972 ),p,3.



of the black American. Dorothy Fisher sums up:

'Our society puts negro youth in the situation of the animal in the psychological laboratory in which a neurosis is to be caused by making it impossible for him to try to live up to these never to -be questioned national ideals as other young Americans. 16

Like their American counterparts, South African urban misfits are induced by their cramped destiny to violence. For the act of transgression is the only one which offers them a sense of power. Only brutality gives meaning to their chaotic existence. Richard wright and Alex La Guma insist upon the fact that their characters' agressiveness is not atavistic. They ascribe their deplorable weaknesses to society's failings.

The description of the background is another evidence of the realistic import of the book. The Blacks are not only deprived of work, chance and fulfillment but live in miserable physical conditions as well. 17 They dwell in depressingly drab apartments

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16- Quoted in Richard Wright, The Critical Perception, (ed by Reilley John and D. Franklin, co Inc, 1978), p, 64 .

17- La Guma's description of the South African slums seems to be echoed by some verses by Phyllis Haring:

And when you are leaving slum town  
When your tour is done  
Turn and see our hovels  
Huddled in the sun  
Rows and rows of coffins  
See them from afar  
it is a grave yard  
Where my people are

(See Harris Phyllis "Slum Town" in Sechaba Magasine, January 1986, p, 30)

and in desperate squalor. These abodes which are infested with insects, vermins coackroaches and rats are part of the general atmosphere of violence. The curtains are colourless and dirty, the windowpanes are grimy, the atmosphere is gloomy and threatening. There is not even enough light. The area is appropriately compared to a grave. Characters move through 'catacombs of darkened doorways' (p,46), the air in bars is 'hot like a newly-opened tomb'(p,25), and silence 'hangs like a shroud on the upper floor of the tenement'(p,45).

La Cuma's descriptions are so close to reality that the reader feels nauseated and asphyxiated. Preponderant images of urine with accompanying offensive smells are made more repellent still with images of vomit. The descriptions are so vividly conveyed through the use of strong verbs and adjectives that we feel the presence of the grime on the tenement's walls, as well as the mounds of rubbish. But this kind of description is not a weakness on the part of La Cuma. On the contrary his minute and lengthy descriptions are typical of the naturalistic mode of writing. This emphasis on the dominant power of the environment is in the tradition of literary naturalism. Emile Zola explains:

Les romanciers naturalistes décrivent beaucoup parcequ'il entre dans leur formule de circonstancier de compléter le personnage par le milieu. L'homme ... est une bête pensante qui fait partie de la grande nature et qui est

soumise aux multiples influences du sol où elle vit.

C'est pourquoi un climat, un pays, un horizon, une chambre ont souvent une importance décisive. Le romancier ne sépare donc plus le personnage de l'air où il se meut ....

Il note simplement à chaque heure les conditions matérielles dans lesquelles agissent les êtres et se produisent les faits pour être absolument complet, pour que son enquête sur l'ensemble du monde évoque la réalité toute entière.<sup>18</sup>

Probing beyond the surface, La Guma has used what is suitable to his purpose. Naturalism is appropriate for his social criticism as his aim is to present the experience of the entrapment of the individual socially and historically unfree.

Characters are exposed to overwhelming pressures from outside. They live their passions and crises on the level of the faits divers. We feel the brutal and immediate presence of the world around them. La Guma bases his argument on the premise that society is malevolent, attacking as a result, its, main pillars; Zola again:

'Nous cherchons les causes du mal social nous faisons l'anatomie des classes et des individus pour expliquer les détraquements qui se produisent dans la société et dans l'homme. Cela nous oblige souvent à travailler sur des sujets gâtés, à descendre au milieu

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18- Emile Zola , Le Roman Expérimental , (Paris: Garnier Flammarion, 1971), p, 72.

des misères et des folies humaines. Nous sommes les actifs ouvriers qui sondons l'édifice, indiquant les poutres pourries les crevasses intérieures. Les pierres descéllées, tous ces dégats qu'on ne voit pas du dehors, et qui peuvent entraîner la ruine du monument entier.<sup>19</sup>

Zola attaches considerable importance to background. He insists on its forceful capacity to shape man's behaviour and life, to make of him what he is, dramatising the close connection between the individual and the environment which breeds him. As a spokesman of Naturalist writers, he argues:

Nous estimons que l'homme ne peut être séparé de son milieu, qu'il est complété par son vêtement, par sa maison, sa ville et sa province; et dès lors, nous ne noterons pas un seul phénomène de son cerveau et de son coeur sans en chercher les causes et le contrecoup dans le milieu.<sup>20</sup>

Zola's comment elucidates the fact that the misdeeds of La Guma's characters fall back on society itself. Society not the individual, is held responsible for the former has a force and a function of its own. Like La Guma, Zola underlines the potentialities of society

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19- Ibid ., p, 133.

20- Quoted by P.Martino in "Collection U2", Le Naturalisme Français, ( Paris: Armand Colin, 1964) p, 74.

in moulding the individual, and in determining the development of his personality, his behaviour his tendencies as well as his relations with members of his community. The unrivalled power of the environment is evinced by La Guma's characters. They are brutalised by an unfriendly environment and shattered by emotional conflicts. It is precisely from this very source that violence emanates as a continual exercise in social life. La Guma explains what makes the youth violence-prone:

Lounging around and waiting, slums, disease unemployment, lack of education, the terrible weight of the colour bar which withholds the finer things of life. All help to grind them until many of them become beasts of prey roaming in an unfriendly jungle.<sup>21</sup>



Like Richard Wright, Alex La-Guma suggests that delinquency is the symptom of a social malaise. This phenomenon is not one which suddenly appears out of a vacuum. It is a corollary of a combination of forces. For the growth of repression can only jeopardise the tendency of the unfortunates to violence; and it is the political system which catalyses such violence. There is an element of fatality mixed with aggression: Michael was not a delinquent but he became one. Because his integrity is destroyed by social pressures he shows that criminality, insecurity and violence

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21- Alex La Guma, "The Dead-End Kids of Hanover Street" in New Age, 2, n° 47, September, 1956.

are interdependent phenomena (22). Bigger, whose case is not different from Michael's explains hysterically:

They own everyting. They choke you off the face of the earth .... They even do not let you feel what you want to feel .... They kill you before you die.<sup>23</sup>

However, where violence becomes tragic is when it culminates in crime. Two of La Guma's characters are murdered; and a clear distinction must be made between these two murders.

The main motive of Raalt's crime is racial hatred. Willieboy is pitilessly killed, though innocent of the crime imputed to him. This act betrays the brutality of the South African police. The latter, who are supposed to safeguard security, are themselves agents of insecurity. Raalt, who represents them does not, in the least,

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22- This point is developed further by Makhily Cassama: "Si la criminalité est particulièrement développée dans la communauté noire d'Afrique du Sud, il n'y a guère lieu d'attribuer ce phénomène à la nature de la race noire. L'exemple donné par les personnages du romancier Wright, qui, en conséquence, comme guidés par une fatalité aveugle commettent crime après crime est un exemple fort instructif, contraint de bafouer les règles les plus élémentaires de la morale. Obligé quotidiennement de s'annihiler en tant qu' être humain, l'homme asservi ... se dégrade d'une manière ou d'une autre à travers son désir de vengeance. En un mot, sous un régime fasciste, l'être dominé est non seulement condamné à la stagnation, mais par là-même, assiste à l'effritement de ses valeurs parcequ'il se trouve enfermé dans un système dont il ignore les rouages, vit dans un univers de valeurs dérisoires et fragmentaires." (See Makhily Cassama, "L'Apartheid Ou Propos Sur les Tigres du Bengale" in Présence Africaine. Fourth Quarter 1966, p, 66.)

23- Richard Wright, Native Son ( New-York: Harper x Row, 1940), p, 92.

restore peace and order but sows utter disorder killing an innocent youth. His portrayal is consonant with his personality. His name, which is guttural and harsh, is congruous with this metallic appearance. This robot-like man represents the coldness of the Whites in general, as seen by the blacks:

They had frozen faces, as if carved out of pink ice and hard dispassionate eyes, hard as pieces of blue glass.<sup>24</sup>

Willieboy's death is pathetic for he pays for a crime he did not commit. His assassination is a fierce condemnation of the South African system. His death gives also rise to irony. What is noticeable in this specific context is that violence proves inevitable in such socio-political circumstances. But the irony which emerges from the two crimes is that the two victims are the most innocent of the two groups.

Michael's murder of Uncle Doughty happened, on the contrary, inadvertently, Anthony Storr comments:

A distinction must be made between the deliberate criminality and accidental violence. Psychopathic criminality is more accidental than deliberate.<sup>25</sup>

Psychopathic violence is indeed what characterises A Walk in the

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24- A Walk in the Night, Op.Cit., p,11.

25- L'Instinct de Destruction, Op.Cit., p,56. My Translation.

Night. Even La Guma seems to insist on it. Michael is a psychopath who is deeply galled by a force he cannot understand. His bitter rejection from the factory slammed at his face the door of a law-abiding existence and, simultaneously, opened those of vice, crime and delinquency. Society hastens the propensity of the youth to violence. Belonging to an unfriendly milieu, the outcasts are faced with a series of handicaps, of familial and social order, which are themselves very often expressed in violence. Affectively wounded, they feel that everything is against them. What is then noticeable is that La Guma's analysis sounds like a real case-study on the causes of delinquency.

La Guma's characters' fight in the darkness of District Six sends us back to a symbolic scene in Invisible Man, where the protagonist together with other Blacks, are expected to fight each other for the pleasure of the white man. These fighters are blindfolded with bands of white cloth. This can be associated with the white society which rejects his integration. He only struggles in darkness to defend himself as a groping blindman whose fight and future are uncertain. The main interest for La Guma's characters is to exteriorise their violence and get rid of so much accumulated bitterness inside them. This is not necessarily planned or directed



against the source of evil. (26)

Michael's case is, in many instances, similar to bigger's. The latter, to fill the gnawing void in his life, breaks through the routine of his daily existence by committing murder. This is a precise concordance that can be established between the two protagonists. Though the difference between the two crimes is that one is planned and the other unpremeditated, the analogy can be made as far as their author's impulses to commit murder are concerned, as well as in their relations to gangs and in their feeling of defiance after their crimes.

What is tragic is that these characters can only find fulfillment in the most violent defiance of the society which victimises them. When he killed Uncle Doughty, Michael thought he had found the means to prove his ability and his existence as a human being. He has discovered in crime a release from frustration. He felt a kind of elation, as if he were above all the others; T.T. Moyana points out. Drinking, violence and sex bound people together as nothing else did, for even murder was a form of one's presence

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26- Lewis Nkosi raises also this crucial problem: "The desperate 'tsotsi' ... attempting to feel or assert his own sense of being is almost totally irrational and motiveless, for every so often, there was even the desire to rob the victim. Only the American negro slang word 'flip' accurately describes the personality disturbance which precedes these stablings. In Sophiatown, I once saw a boy walking up a street, then, for some inexplicable reason, he suddenly 'flipped', pulled a knife and began stabbing away at anyone who was in his way." (See Home and Exile, Op.Cit., p,17.)

and vitality.<sup>27</sup>

As a result of what has been said, we can assert that the assassination of Uncle Doughty shows that this novel is, besides being a naturalist novel, a symbolist one. La Guma has used two main strands which have nourished the plot. The first is centred on the characters' life and the second is centred on the ghost motif which is the more literary and symbolic aspect. It is in the death of Uncle Doughty that these two strands merge. Though intra-communitary violence is a sociological reality, it is also symbolic as violence takes wider if not cosmic proportions. It is this metaphoric reading of the text which enables us to see the story of Willieboy and Uncle Doughty as a tragedy which is extended to the relationship between the two racial groups, i.e, involving the two communities. Their death, which is a fait divers becomes a tragedy which is symbolic of the relationship between Blacks and Whites.

What further reinforces this metaphoric reading of A Walk in the Night is the impressionistic description of the background. The depiction of the dilapidated black tenements is meant to mirror the moral decay of society as a whole. The material squalor which is conveyed

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27- T.T.Moyana, "Problems of a South African Writer" in Christopher Heywood, Aspects of South African Literature, (London: Heinemann, 1976), p,6.

conveyed in images of physical degradation is, partly, an external sign of moral desolation. For the filthy abodes inhabited by these wretched protagonists is metaphorical: it stands for the staleness and rottenness of society. Though A Walk in the Night is basically a naturalist novel, it has an underlying metaphoric design whose effect is the implicit denunciation of Apartheid.

No attentive reader can fail to notice that none of the characters is politically conscious. They are so stunned by what befalls them that they are unable to perceive the source of their wretchedness. For instance, Willieboy cannot understand "Why they want to chase (him) for?"<sup>28</sup> There are only slight allusions to the political system. Even the main protagonist is totally ignorant on this score:

What the hell do you mean-capitalis system? .... What's this capitali's system you talking about?<sup>29</sup>

Politics is evoked by the driver but he does not go further as Mister Green hushes up the conversation: "Cut out politics".<sup>30</sup>

These unconscious victims of alienation are only race-conscious, and David Rabkin is right in some way when he observes:

A Walk in the Night is not about politics, it is about crime.<sup>31</sup>

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28 - A Walk in the Night, Op.Cit., p, 83.

29- Ibid., p, 17.

30- Ibid., p, 17

31- Alex La Guma's Reality in South Africa, Op.Cit., 54.

None of them questions the system which enslaves them. They are passive sufferers of their fate which is too dark for them to comprehend. At this stage, there is strong emphasis on fate and on the helplessness of man. Defeated by an acute sense of loss, they are either resigned or they resort to robbery and murder. Michael's revolt is restricted to a personal level. It is inspired, as we have seen, by mere emotions rather than by political awareness. His failure is testified to by the fact that his attempt to assert himself leads to his own destruction. He neither attacks the source of his sad predicament nor perceives the intricacies of the system. In this context, it is well to quote J.M.Coetzee:

La Guma presents a critique of the Coloured proletariat which includes the following three articles:

- 1) It has become a social class in a capitalist society.
- 2) Uncertainty before the promise of bourgeois security creates a lack of cohesiveness in it.
- 3) It lacks political awareness.<sup>32</sup>

In this novel then, emphasis is on the destruction of man. This is the system's crucial achievement. The results are disastrous. As a consequence, this could adequately correspond to Fanon's first phase in his theory of violence: That of colonial tyranny on the one hand, and a passive submission to social forces on the part of the

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32- J.M. Coetzee, Black Fiction (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974), p, 123.

III

AND A THREEFOLD CORD :

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THE NEED FOR UNITY .

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Marcher seul il a besoin d' autrui

C'est un pêché que d'être seul

Car alors on s'apitoie sur soi-même

Et que l'on se nourrit de ses peines

Tandis que le monde assoiffé brûle

pour un flôt de larmes .

Baccham.



negative impact of Western Christianity on the non-white. The latter's subsequent hostile attitude towards the church is not exclusive to the black South African. It is not only reminiscent of the black Americans but of the colonised as a whole. All these factors function in conjunction with one another to establish some of the main foundations of the colonial system. It is precisely this very atmosphere of violence and tension, metaphorically symbolised by bad weather, that gives birth to a feeling of solidarity among the oppressed ; a point we shall also try to bring into relief.

It is fairly obvious, as we shall try to show in the next chapter, that the main protagonist of La Cuma's third book, The Stone Country, is a politically mature character. George Adams defies the prison system and the political regime at large.

Charlie Pauls, the central character of And a Threefold Cord, does not have Adams' political awareness. However his actions and comments already show signs of rebelliousness. The latter is not foregrounded, it is only because it is newly born. The embryonic state of rebellion is reflected in his shaky position within the story.

The gloomy world of this book is somewhat attenuated by the attitude of the main protagonist. That Charlie is an outcast is unmistakable; but what makes him different from Michael is that he is not a delinquent. Moreover, it is he who is anxious to repair the leaking roof of his family's only abode. It is also he who

exposes the hypocrisy of Western Christianity. Furthermore, he proclaims a significant tentative statement for the oppressed to stand united:

And a Threefold Cord is a grim presentation of the degeneration of human life in the shanties. The author probes deeper into the hardships, frustrations and insecurity of the marginal coloured community. La Guma naturally concentrates on the slum life he knows so intimately as this social setting fits exactly with the requirements of his theme.

As social marginals, the Blacks suffer from a deep sense of alienation, both material and spiritual. Though La Guma does not deal overtly with Apartheid laws, we feel that he implicitly questions them. The Pauls live in a precariously crumbling ghetto on the periphery of Cape Town, as dictated by the Group Areas Act ( 1950 ).

The author's attention is fastened upon the ominous reality of South Africa. The cramped house the Pauls live in has neither tapped water nor electricity. The indigence of this family is illustrative of the poverty of the larger community. Their shack is in a rundown state.<sup>1</sup> Consequently they are haunted by the fear

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1- Ezekiel Mphahlele has also described South African slums:

"Marabastad, like most locations, was an organised rubble of tin cans .... The houses stood cheek by jowl, rusty as ever on the outside, as if they thought they might as well crumble in straight rows if that was to be their fate. Each house, as far as I remember has a fence of sorts. The wire always hung limp. The standards were always swaying in drunken fashion. (See Ezekiel Mphahlele, Down Second Avenue, Berlin: Seven Seas Books, 1982 ), p.30.



that their shack will tumble down as a result of the stormy weather.

The Pauls and their neighbours are so poor that they use less what is needed. This poverty, noticeable everywhere, brings about a variety of problems. It exacerbates their vulnerability to illness and accident. Witness the death of Frederick Pauls, the father, whose family could not afford to pay for a doctor's fees. Furthermore, it is privation and destitution which are held responsible for the death by burning of Freda's children. The author selects a dramatic incident which illustrates that the two unfortunates would certainly not have been killed had Freda's primus stove not been faulty.

La Guma's emphasis is essentially on the story of a community which is hemmed in by serious difficulties. Henceforth the plot of this novel is virtually non-existent. The reader can notice that the author's purpose is to document the plight of a whole community rather than focus attention on a plot. His intention is to paint the milieu as one of tension and violence.

La Guma does not present poverty in abstract terms. On the contrary, he conveys the slumdweller's experience through a concrete depiction of their immediate background. The power with which he describes the desperate situation of the slumdweller is prominently inspired by his own experiences and observations of similar conditions. Hence the authenticity of his descriptions. As he explains:

Well, I suppose I am fortunate that first of all, I lived

in a slum. I grew up with the people and also my political and ideological development allowed me to understand them and identify with them. As you say, not many see them from the point of the observer. I was often involved in the problems of the slum dwellers, and I think that I did not confine myself to an ivory tower. While trying to write, I also participated in and shared the problems which the people experienced all the time.<sup>2</sup>

La Guma traces fully the physical setting of the shacks and their surroundings. However he does not describe only for the sake of description. His target is twofold. He comments:

Possibly, other authors have looked at the slums with too critical an eye as simply a blot on the surface of the slum country. They miss the fact that the slum is a situation which they grew up in and is therefore a part which they participated in. I think there's a difference between being politically involved and being a social worker. The social worker goes among the slums and says: 'what shall we do about it? It is such a terrible place' and so on; a politically involved person is concerned with preventing the slums from happening again. And I think I'm lucky that I have been able to combine both roles.<sup>3</sup>

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2- Alex La Guma, Op.Cit., p,30.

3- Ibid., p, 33.



Political violence worsens the outcasts' situation. La Guma makes the reader feel that South Africa is a police state. He explains the reason of the recurrence of police violence in his works:

I believe that in South Africa we live with the police. Black people are continually being harassed by the police. If it is not for the pass laws, it is for drunkenness or other social problems. If you read the statistics you find that South Africa has one of the biggest prison populations in the world. The police play a big part in the work one cannot leave out the police. I think therefore that the presence of the police in my work is not so much intentional as inevitable.<sup>4</sup>

Under the auspice of the law, nothing hinders the police from imposing their will upon black people. Consequently, their rights are so negated that they fall prey to police invasion. There are some instances in the book where the Blacks are indiscreetly harassed by the police. Charlie, on his part, is humiliated when asked to produce the pass, he did not have, at night in Freda's shack:

"Put the handcuffs on him and take him out. I want to search this room. May be they've got dagga or kaffir beer here."<sup>5</sup>

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4- Alex La Guma, Op.Cit.,p,34.

5- And a Threefold Cord, (Berlin: Seven Seas Books, 1964),p,133.

We have shown in the first novel that violence is essentially of a criminal nature. Michael is a member of a gang and Willieboy is subject to racial violence. And the latter, as we have noted, is induced by the political system. This politically-rooted violence shows here too, but it is latent and only hinted at.

State oppression is symbolised here by the weather. The book opens with a description of the coming rainstorm. Some words give a sense of tension and confinement. Witness the prison imagery below where rain is beautifully likened to a wall. It is, like the political system, a hindrance to the black man.

In the North-West, the rain heads piled up first in cottony tufts, blown by the high wind, then in skeins of dull cloud and finally in high, climbing battlements. Like a rough wall of mortar built across the horizon so that the sun had no gleam, but a pale phosphorescence behind the veil of grey. <sup>6</sup>

Rain is a spectral presence. The novel begins and ends with its oppressiveness. Great emphasis has been placed upon the function of rain. It is destructive and constantly reminds us of an immanent danger, of a threat. Personified, it functions as a violent and a repressive force: First It provokes a leak in the roof which itself provokes the mother's restlessness:

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6- And the Threefold Cord, Op.Cit., p,17.

Is damp in our room too.... The whole house look like  
it's falling in .<sup>7</sup>

Its malevolence is further evidenced by its contribution to the death  
of those who lack any protection against the cold. Ma Pauls  
observes:

"Look like a bad weather. It won't be good for your  
Pa .... There's people going to be whashed out when it begin  
to rain." <sup>8</sup>

Rain is no mere background. It is part and parcel of the story.  
It strikes our attention by its conspicuous recurrence and impending  
presence. Rain is a leitmotif. Every scene and chapter opens and ends  
with detailed descriptions of it. The agressivity of the rain is  
conspicuous. Forceful words are used to bring it out : Rain

"... slashed at the seams of the roofs".<sup>9</sup>

"The wind...drove the rain against the house." <sup>10</sup>

"The rain tore at the roof." <sup>11</sup>

"...rain pounding against the roof and the sides of the  
house." <sup>12</sup>

Even when it stops, its threat to come back very soon is there, as  
the sky is overcast from the beginning to the end of the story.

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7- Ibid., p, 25

8- Ibid., p, 25.

9- Ibid., p, 165.

10- Ibid., p, 22.

11 - Ibid., p, 23.

12 - Ibid., p, 23.

Rain is used as the objective correlative of Apartheid. The violence of nature is associated with that of the white man.

La Guma himself admits his symbolist intention:

'Somebody asked me a while ago why I always wrote about the weather in South Africa. Well, part of the fact is that the weather plays a part in creating the atmosphere and it helps to describe the scene and so on. There is also the fact that overseas people believe the South African regime's tourist propaganda that it is a country with a perfect weather. I had an idea that we could use the weather as a feature of South Africa, but also in terms of its symbolic potential, and thus at the same time make it or try to make it genuinely South African. In other words, that contesting the official propaganda of South Africa's natural beauty and trying to show the world that the tourist poster world of wonderful beaches and beautiful golf life is not the total picture. 13

The 'chill of winter in harmony with the coldness of the oppressor. That this inimical and antagonistic force stands for Apartheid is confirmed and highlighted by Charlie's struggle to repair the roof. His endeavour to prevent the downfall of the house can be interpreted as a metaphor for the individual's contention against

the oppressive system. The stifling of the individual by the regime is set in parallel with the ferocity of the weather.

This association is further illustrated by a white character's failure to mingle with the black community. It is worth noting that George Mostert who owns a crumbling petrol station is a victim of the system just as his black neighbours are:

Mostert's service station and garage looked like a beggar waiting for somebody to toss a coin into his cup. Lonely as a leper-house, its grimy covered walls bore a look of scabrous abandonment. 14

South Africa is morally decayed. The glaring contrast even among whites themselves emphasises the rottenness of the system. George is humiliated because of his poverty. A rich man who came to Mostert's garage to fill up his car,

had an air of condescension about him, as if he realised that he was doing the business a great favour. He glanced around at the peeling shabbiness, the stock of worn tyres, the tattered advertisements and the then novelty-propeller, spinning slowly above the dusty bottles of lubrication oil. 15

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14- And a Threefold Cord, Op.Cit., p,160.

15- Ibid., p, 161.

La Guma insists that the racist system is a system of class too, affecting Blacks and Whites alike. Mostert himself is not exempted from alienation: he cannot overcome the senselessness of his existence. Left behind by the affluent society, this misfit reminds us of Uncle Doughty. Both are poor Whites who live on the margin of capitalist society. However this analogy breaks at an important point: while Uncle Doughty lives within the same tenements as the Blacks, George Mostert, though miserable and poor, is careful not to mix with the Blacks. He not only rejects Suzie Meyer, the Black prostitute, but he is also unable to accept Charlie's invitation to spend some time in the coloured community. What needs emphasis here is that though he made up his mind to join the Blacks, rain dissolves his decision; thus the attempt at racial rapprochement fails. Hence the mischievous role of the rain which is symbolically that of Apartheid. For it is the latter which forbids any attempt to establish inter-racial contacts. Its harmful power is rendered in unsparing detail:

And then the rain started and dissolved what little courage he had screwed up in the flimsy scrap of his will. He had brought a bottle half-full of brandy with him... as a sort of gesture of fellowship; but now he suddenly decided to return to his garage and finish it himself. He preferred to go back and risk the sharp hooves of loneliness.<sup>16</sup>

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16- Ibid., p, 162.



In addition to drugs, alcohol and physical violence, religion, is also a form of withdrawal from the harsh realities in society. The Blacks are so burdened with daily torments that some of them find solace in religion only. They are taught to accept all that befalls them in this world; for their plight is ordained by god. This religious indoctrination is illustrated by the attitude of Ma Pauls as she takes shelter in the world's religious beliefs. Uncle Ben is seemingly a religious conformist too. Charlie's conversation with him, on poverty and religion, is very telling. It conveys a significant insight into the functioning of the church. That Christianity is part and parcel of the white plans for controlling Black life is underlined by Uncle Ben's remark:

Sound almost like a sin. That bible say you mustn't covet other people's things.<sup>17</sup>

The sharp irony of this statement is that this warning works one way only. While the downtrodden are forbidden to plunder other's riches the oppressors accumulate wealth and expropriate the poor.

Religion does not always serve for moral strength. Charlie denounces in a subtle way the treacherous aspect of its teachings:

Ma read the bible every night. It don't make the poor old toppy better.<sup>18</sup>

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17- Ibid., p, 83.

18- Ibid., p; 82.

In this particular context La Guma thinks in a way diametrically opposed to that of Alan Paton. For while the former denounces religious toleration, the latter on the contrary, encourages it as appears in Cry the Beloved Country, a book which may have been influenced by the doctrine of non-violence in South Africa. In this novel, two families one black and the other white, accept one another strikingly but unconvincingly. Paton attributes their sense of cooperation and mutual understanding to their religious faith. He advocates plainly cardinal Christian virtues as a key to the South African conflict. However, this solution is artificial for in reality religion does not question the foundations of South African society but advocates submissiveness and resignation.

Frantz Fanon has vehemently denounced the violence of religion. It is chiefly used as a means of subordination and cultural deprivation. It strengthens discrimination and perpetuates the widening gulf between the world of the coloniser and that of the colonised:

"A belief in fatality removes all blame from the oppressor; the cause of misfortunes and of poverty is attributed to God. He is fate. In this way, the individual accepts the disintegration ordained by God, bows down before the settler and his lot, and by a kind of interior restabilization acquires a stony calm."

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Though uneducated and poor, Charlie does not hand over his responsibilities to the Lord. Having reached some sort of awareness, he dissociates himself from his mother's reliance on fate. Hence his lashings against religious hypocrisy and the alienating nature of religious faith. What is implied here is that religion is 'the opium of the people' as Karl Marx called it. It is minutely plotted to blind the oppressed and weaken their will to resist. This in turn is echoed by Steve Biko:

'Missionaries ... constantly urge people to find faults in themselves, and by doing so, detract them from the essence of the struggle in which the people are involved. Deprived of spiritual content, the black people read the Bible with a gullibility that is shocking'.<sup>20</sup>

Ezekiel Nphahlele writes in the same vein:

'To us the church has become a symbol of the dishonesty of the West. I am still suspending belief and disbelief as far as the necessity or uselessness of organised religion goes. All I know is that I found no use for it in South Africa. That since 1947, when I stopped going to church I have become progressively nearby of all the trappings of mystical formalism that go together with South African Churchiality. 21

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20- Steve Biko, I Write What I Like, (London: Heinemann 1978), p,131.

21- Down Second Avenue, Op.Cit., p,222.

Many African writers have denounced Christianity. Consider David Diop's verse:

In those days  
When civilisation kicked us in the face  
When only water slapped our cringing brows  
The vultures built in the shadows of their talons  
The blood stained monument of tutelage.  
  
Of foreigners who did not seem human  
Who knew all the books but did not know love. <sup>22</sup>

This fact is not confined to South African society only. Black Americans are religiously indoctrinated for a very similar purpose.

Richard Wright comments:

"Some of the negroes ... felt that Jesus would redeem the void of living felt that the more bitter life was in the present the happier they would be in the thereafter." <sup>23</sup>

Richard Wright does not in the least hesitate to expose the monumental lie which crushes any black initiative towards understanding himself. In this regard, one is reminded of Bigger Thomas again. It is illuminating to quote him for his reflexion is born out of similar premises than Charlie's. He tells Max (his lawyer) how religion is a devise aimed to divert the minds of the sufferers from

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22- David Diop, "The Vultures" in Gerald Moore and Illi Beir Modern Poetry From Africa, London: Penguin Books, 1963), p, 64.

23- Richard Wright "How Bigger is Born?" in Native Son, Op.Cit., p, 111.

more earthly pursuits:

I didn't like it. There was nothing in it. And all they did was sing and shout and pray all the time. And it didn't get 'em nothing. The white folks got everything... I want to be happy in the world not out of it .... The white folk like us to be religious then they do what they want with us.<sup>24</sup>

This is the stark truth in both the American and the South African cases. It is the poor conditions in which Digger and Charlie live that make them sceptical about religions. Their scepticism about the healing nature of religion is not begot by mere indifference but by social awareness.

As in the previous novel, the milieu crushes the individual. Charlie is like other marginals, condemned to suffer the fate of those who are mercilessly shunned. Therefore emphasis is still on man's impotence. In And a Threefold Card the individual is an object rather than a subject. This effect is obtained thanks to the naturalistic approach.

The deadly atmosphere of insecurity, anxiety, endless fear and financial strain is brought to notice, as we have shown, by two forces: police raids and rain. It is from a combination of these two elements that La Guma's moral purpose emerges: Black South

Africans cannot survive unless they unite. In such conditions, friendly support is what people need most. The narrator's call to cooperation is brought forth through characterisation. Old Nzuba is a Black and is in good terms with Ma Pauls, a coloured. La Cuma insists on this solidarity. To this black woman, unity is a social ethos. It is based on the premise that problems shared are problems lessened:

"We all got to stand by each other" 25

This plea is articulated with more cogency by Charlie. He realises after the problems that have affected his friends and family, the death of his father, the imprisonment of his brother and the death of Freda's children that:

'People can't stand up to the world alone. They got to be together ... is not natural for people to be alone.' 26

This central message of unity and togetherness is constantly reiterated. Instead of staying merely at the level of denunciation, we see the narrator trying to raise people's consciousness. Here 'We must unite'. It is underlined by a biblical epigraph (Ecclesiastes:IV(9-12) from which the title of the book is drawn:

Two are better than one; because they have

A good reward for their labour.

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25- And a Threefold Cord, Op.Cit.,p, 112.

26- Ibid.,p, 74.

For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow;  
But woe to him that is alone when he falleth ;  
For he hath not another to help him up.  
Again, if two lie together, then they have  
Heat, but how can one be warm alone ?  
And if one prevail against him, two shall  
Withstand him. And a Threefold Cord is not quickly broken.

La Guma justifies the use of the title in these terms:

'This excerpt (from the bible) emphasises the idea that the individual alone cannot survive, that he has to have somebody around him to which to cling in times of difficulty and adversity, and I tried to convey the idea the loneliness of people, the loneliness of individuals is one thing but at the same time or another, they've got to turn away from their loneliness and try to associate with other people. And I try throughout in this novel to show that while people have got their own problems or what they believe to be their own problems, these problems are not their own, but are shared by other people. 27

Aziz Chalisehar, an Indian writer, emphasises the importance of solidarity for the individual and the masses as a whole:

An individual cannot succeed when he wages a lone battle.

He must be part and parcel of a group. Apologists of the anti-popular aesthetics regard the pronoun 'we' as an entity which is both monothitic and plural, made up of individuals who find in it the spiritual sustenance they badly need. But when we speak of such a hero, what we have in mind is a courageous personality reaching towards a definite goal, not a person preening only to fail lamentably at the least difficulty. 28

In this regard, La Guma is at one with Frantz Fanon. In The Wretched of the Earth Fanon underlines the fact that under the shackles of oppression, the marginals huddle together, in solidarity against the oppressor. This fact is, indeed, testified by La Guma's characters right from the first novel. In A Walk in the Night Michael and Willieboy are not friends, but are drawn together as comrades in trouble. Furthermore when Willieboy is charged with Uncle Doughty's assassination, the inhabitants of the tenement are very reluctant to give any information, to the police out of solidarity with their neighbours. When John Abrahams begins to talk, Franky Lorenzo shouts:

"You've said enough, Johnny." 29

This message of mutual succour comes out repeatedly in the author's second book. The solidarity of the Pauls' family is

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28- Quoted in Lotus Magazine, n°54, 1981, p,21. My Translation.

29 - A Walk in the Night, Op.Cit., p,62,



illustrated by Charlie. Feeling accountable for the welfare of his friends and relatives, he shoulders his responsibilities and in so doing removes himself from the world of Michael. He is undeniably the source of sustenance as he fights against Roman to protect his brother and struggles to repair the leaking roof. Moreover, he stands by Frede after the death of the latter's children.

We must note that this small family is used as a microcosm of the whole community. For this family cell widens to encompass and represent the whole community. The effectiveness of solidarity at a family level bears testimony to ~~its fruitfulness at the communal level.~~ What the writer seems to imply is that the attempt to achieve unity among the family members and friends is a stepping-stone to ensure that of the whole community.

The reader perceives that while A Walk in the Night is set in a ghetto, And a Threefold Cord is set on the periphery of a shanty town. As a consequence, while the former is centered on the individual who is lost within a mass, And a Threefold Cord, centers on the contrary, on family life. This aspect of the book is important as La Cuma's attention is not focused on one individual but on the misfortunes which hit a whole family.

And a Threefold Cord is different from A Walk in the Night in terms of characterisation too. The reader can detect here the beginning of a certain social awareness. The protagonist knocks out a policeman; and his gesture is not neutral. It is this very

non-neutrality which attributes Charlie a distinguished position as compared to that of Michael. For if the latter did not look in the eyes of a policeman, Charlie not only answers him back but slugs him too:

"It was a hard, snapping blow, with all its weight behind it, and the policeman's feet left the ground and his back struck it with a hard, muddy plopping sound, as if he had been dropped from a great weight." 30

C Charlie Pauls proves then to be a much more important character than he at first appears. First the corrupting environment does not affect him as it does the others. As a result he does not travel the path of self-destruction. Furthermore neither selfish nor irresponsible he brings to light a significant insight into the individual's responsibility. Contrary to Michael who is a delinquent, Charlie is a family man. It is he who announces George Adams, the politically mature character of La Guma's third book, The Stone Country. The significance of Charlie is reinforced by the political views he puts forward:

If the poor people all got together and took everything in the whole blenny world, they would not be poor any more. 31

It also displays the author's bias towards Marxism. His protagonists are shown to be exploited, writhing in desperate agony. Charlie

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30- And a Threefold Cord, Op.Cit., p, 141.

31- Id. p. 35.

suggests a solution to their predicament. He alludes briefly to Communism: redistribution of wealth and the unity of the poor to see the world clearly and straight.

However though the protagonist is conscious of some realities, he is not in a position to face them. He displays no adequate awareness of the mechanism of White violence. Though he understands the plight of the shack-dwellers, he can do nothing to change it or improve the situation. As a result despite the fact that an orientation towards unity is marked out, and the spirit of resistance is present, La Guma's call is understated for Charlie does not go further in his statement. What is needed is an ideological support which would underline his clarity of purpose. Charlie speaks of unity but he does not perceive it as a struggle between the political system and the working class. This will only appear in The Stone Country where the reader feels the beginning of political unity at work.

Therefore this call, heard between the lines, is rather muffled. This spokesman of solidarity more of Communism is not very articulate. Words fail him. He is not one who galvanises the oppressed against injustice thanks to his political eloquence, nor does he show that he is fully aware that society is wrong somewhere at the root. This tentative statement which is extremely significant is, unfortunately too evasive. So this unity which conditions the salvation of the oppressed is only at its embryonic stage. This reflects the South

Africa of the sixties. It may represent La Guma's thinking then .

Charlie's (undeveloped) class consciousness is precisely another main point which differentiates him from Michael. Though this consciousness is only incipient, compared to that of the main protagonists of the three subsequent novels, it is fairly obvious that Charlie is relatively more outspoken as compared to Michael. La Guma himself says that Charlie is

"morally and psychologically higher than the characters of A Walk in the Night".<sup>32</sup>

If fatality is all powerful in A Walk in the Night, And a Threefold Cord indicates more possibilities of development. Charlie has been able to lift himself some way upward from the world of Michael. He is the first to seek his way out of the world of submission to that of resistance. Indeed, the book is characterised by the emergence of human will and initiative, though this emergence is only in its under developed stage.

If it is easy to see that Black characters lead a wretched existence, it is easier to grasp the fact that these have opted for life, whatever its cost. The novel records the dignified attempt of shanty-dwellers to survive amidst hunger, cold and Apartheid. This is nowhere more apparent than in the character of Ma Pauls. La Guma's belief in man's survival, even in extreme situations, is evident in this woman character as she manages to rise

above the crippling environment:

Ma Pauls sat in her chair in the bedroom and rocked slowly backward and forward, her body hunched and her face withered with sadness. She sang in her old mind and thought back on Dad Pauls, on Freda's children.<sup>33</sup>

Despite all that has befallen her family and despite her old age and misery, she is made to remain hopeful. In the face of this, Ma Pauls ~~is~~ ~~embodies~~ ~~extraordinary~~ ~~strength~~, keeping faith in the ultimate unity of her family.

La Guma expounds the unpardonable harshness of Apartheid and its socio-economic aftermaths. But what he emphasises more is that this material impoverishment does not affect the oppressed's moral integrity. Despite the endless struggles of the individual to keep alive in a defiant world, he is capable of preserving his human decency. The author makes it clear that Charlie Pauls is able to transcend all hindrances that can do violence to his personal integrity. This is a consistent expression of his will to live. This determination is symbolised by the resistance of the Pauls' household i.e. that of the whole community:

Miraculously, the house held ... the rain lashed at it, as if in anger of frustration. Finding the leak in the ceiling blocked, the water steered towards the ends of the roof and seeped down the walls inside, but the house

seemed to clench its teeth and cling defiantly to life.<sup>34</sup>

It is this resilience which gives birth to hope. La Guma ends his second book, as he did the first, with hope symbolised by birth. Caroline, Charlie's sister, gives birth to a baby as Franky Lorenzo's wife does in the previous book. Moreover, what strikes us is that amidst so much filth, rust and mud,

a lone carnation grows on the dump ... against the flaking brown rust its bright scarlet ... rears in the pallid sunlight.... The flower stands alone ... wonderfully bright, red as blood and life, like hope blooming in an anguished breast.<sup>35</sup>

Thus the prevailing filth does not hinder hope from springing out. Dejection is counter-balanced by hope thanks to which the very shadow of despair is slightly lifted. Apart from this plant imagery which symbolises the coming of light after darkness, a bird is also used as a symbol of hope and freedom. It accentuates the idea that things will change for the better even in the pit of hell. All these images stand out in relief against the grim and deadly atmosphere of slum life:

As he looked at the rain, he saw to his surprise, a bird dart suddenly from among the patchwork of roofs of the shanties, and head straight, straight in the sky.<sup>36</sup>

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34- Ibid., p, 166.

35- Ibid., p, 167.

36- Ibid., p, 169.

IV

THE DAWN OF CONSCIOUSNESS

THE STONE COUNTRY

"I got more liberated in prison. And the physical identification with your beliefs is more satisfying than articulating them on a platform. I am not saying it is best in prison. But under circumstances where it is a question of which prison is better, the prison outside or inside—the whole country is a prison for the black man—and when you are inside, you know why you are there and the people who put you there also know."

Winnie Mandela.

The frustrated and marginal characters of the first two works who transgress Apartheid regulations end up inevitably in jail. From the distress that besets the thoughts of the protagonists of the previous novels, La Guma turns now to the prison system and the abuses therein.

La Guma wrote The Stone Country inside South Africa, after a five months spell in prison. The terms he served in detention for his defiant actions find echo in this novel. The cells in which he was thrown at various times prove, in some grim sense, useful. For they provide him with a ready-made background for the setting of some of his short stories and of this novel. Set in a tightly closed space, La Guma's The Stone Country is based on the universe of prison and dedicated to the 'daily average of 70.351 prisoners in South African goals in 1964'.

Indeed, this book is a fictionalised account of his prison experiences.<sup>1</sup> The events he records actually happened. La Guma explains that the novel is:

essentially based upon my experiences and the experiences of other prisoners in South African prisons. I used at-

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1- It is the weight of experiences like these which James Baldwin, the black American writer, highlights: "Memory is the ultimate guide beyond imagination. All the time you want to forget many things... The truth is that we just do the opposite. .... We can only write from one's own experience. The main thing in an experience is not what happens to someone but to whom it does happen." See James Baldwin, 'Ni Bla.c ,Ni Noir' in Horizon 2000, May, 24 th, 1986, p, 17, My Translation.



the accounts and stories related by other people who have been in prison to produce the novel. Most of it is completely authentic, but of course, from my point of view. I even personally shared the cell with a young boy who is the Casbah Kid in the novel.<sup>2</sup>

The Stone Country revolves around the main protagonist, George Adams. By coming into close contact with convicts, petty and dangerous criminals, this prisoner informs us about the appalling realities of prison life. George and his jail mates bear the burden oppression. The lack of primary commodities, the brutality of the warders, the aggressiveness of a "cell boss" and the unbearable hostility of the environment coerce and destroy them. However, while some ill-treat others, try to escape or wait to be executed, George distanciates himself from this crippling world. La Guma heightens his decent attitude all through. It is thanks to forebearance that he does not collapse as do the misfits around him. A fact which enables him retain his own respect and humanity.

This book describes vividly and with deep insight the horror of prison life in South Africa. It draws our attention on those who are driven to jail by socio-economic circumstances, informing us about their plight. It also presents us with the grounding of a class-consciousness, loosely articulated in the preceding novel. It hinges upon the awakening of the individual, though this awakening is

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2- Quoted in Alex La Guma, Op.Cit., p,66.

not general but limited to remarkably very few characters. The focus here is certainly on George Adams, a coloured political militant, arrested for political subversion. It is through George's recollections that some aspects of prison life are brought to light. It is also through his consciousness that the reader can perceive the entrapment of the individual in a vicious circle of physical and psychological violence dictated by the regime of Apartheid.

It deserves to be stressed that a significant aspect of this novel arises from the fact that not all prisoners are misfits. George is different from the marginals around him. He is neither a burglar nor a delinquent but a political activist. Therefore though stress is put on the moral degradation of mankind behind bars in a totalitarian state, the focus is on the main protagonist. The latter questions some of the foundations of the Apartheid regime, thus epitomising for the first time, the beginning of the political awareness of the black South African. Out of the squalor and dumbness of this environment, there emerges for the first time a politically conscious protagonist.

As a consequence, we shall pay attention to George Adam's actions and comments and bring forth his particular attitude. The Stone Country is nourished by George's reflexions and beliefs. These can be regarded as a catalyst of his fellow prisoners' awareness.

Our study will also be devoted to the environment. We shall

lay emphasis on this setting on the one hand because it is different from those of the previous novels and on the other hand because it is this very background which makes of the story an allegory. This we shall try to bring out through an analysis of some indicators: the spacial element, its impact on the inmates, as well as its symbolic importance for the country as a whole. In this context, we shall contrast this book with similar writings which strengthen the thematic aspect of The Stone Country. For this purpose, we have selected a few poems, namely Oswald Mtshali's "The Detribalised" which focuses on the dehumanisation and grinding down of the individual in the chaotic universe of South Africa. We shall equally refer to two autobiographical works: Breyten Breytenbach's Confessions of an Albino Terrorist and D.M. Zwelonke's Robben Island, as well as to Dennis Brutus's poem "On the Island"; these works corroborate La Guma's thesis on the tyrannical South African carceral system.

The stylistic procedures will not be neglected either. The author has used rhetorical devices such as metaphors, parallelism and repetition. These elements play an essential part: they direct the spotlight on to the themes and they inform us about the evolution of La Guma's vision, even though this development is not clear-cut at this stage yet.

The Stone Country shuts us more forcibly than the first two books in the 'Kafkaesque' world of totalitarian South Africa. If the characters of A Walk in the Night and And a Threefold Cord are

confined to District Six, Cape Town, those of this novel are behind bars.

Like A Walk in the Night , this novel carries us straight into the world of outlaws, who appear in various shapes and categories ranging from petty thieves to dangerous criminals. A part from George and another political activist, Jefferson, prisoners come out of the same social stratum. These law - offenders fill a long list of:

ragged street corners hoodlums, shivering drunks, thugs in cheap flamboyant clothes and unknowledgeable looks, murderers, robbers, house breakers petty criminals, rapists, loiterers and simple permit - offenders.<sup>3</sup>

If violence prevails in The Stone Country , and if La Guma is still preoccupied with crime, brutality and law - breaking we must emphasise the fact that this preoccupation is shared by many other writers. Ezekiel Mphahlele makes it clear that the South African writer, who is part and parcel of his people, is neither aloof from nor unfamiliar with the universe of criminal life for the sheer reason that he himself:

Lives inside violence, breathes it, feeds on it whether it be vindictive or wanton. Robbery, murder and thuggery sum up his environment, where negro fights against his own kind as well as against whites, and even turns his

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3- The Stone Country, (London: Heinemann, 1967), p,19.

violence upon himself.<sup>4</sup>

The predominance of violence in most South African writing is underlined by another black South African writer, Lewis Nkosi, to whom the law -offender,

is a living example of that defiance against the social limits placed on the majority by a hateful regime, which the middle class and ordinary workers would like to defy, but have neither the courage aptitude, nor the means with which to defy them.... In their frustrated wishes, he at once shows the way and mocks their lack of care.<sup>5</sup>

This recurring emergence of the criminal character in black South African fiction is a symptom of social maldjustment and consequently a manifestation of social disaffection. Bloke Modisane concedes:

Like me my characters were invested with a contempt for the law, their efforts were reduced towards a flaunting of the law; my heroes were social maladjusts in a society where heroism is measured by acts of defiance against law and order.<sup>6</sup>

La Guma brings to the fore some characters who are led astray by Apartheid society. Unable to escape the confines of daily existence, they could only end in the black hole of a prison cell;

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4- Ezekiel Mphahlele, The African Image (London:Faber & Faber,1974) p,187.

5- Lewis Nkosi, "Alex La Guma, the Man and his Works", in South Africa: Information and Analysis, 59, January, 1963, p, 3.

6- Blame Me on History, Op.Cit., p, 39.

a hole where the marginals are shoved as their presence within society is unquestionably unwanted. They are destined to live in darkness with the least hope of the future since the present itself is uncertain.<sup>7</sup>

This small universe of prison is also one in which we find, in a very concentrated form, inter-racial violence which was the subject of La Guma's earlier two works. Prisoners are also subjected to aggressions. They are confronted with another world with its own particularities and regulations. An atmosphere of constant insecurity and continual threat prevails. First prisoners are exposed to the racial hatred of white warders who wield their authority as they please. As a result, racial animosity determines entirely the whites' Behaviour vis-à-vis the Blacks. They are not only subject to psychological oppression brought about by claustrophobia - as we shall see later - contempt and insult on the part of the warders, but they fall prey to their brutality: the prisoners

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7- These prisoners are reminiscent of those characters Upton Sinclair portrayed in The Jungle. Obviously Sinclair's implicit denunciation of injustice is permeated with a sharp sense of bitterness; he poses clearly the problem: "They were hardened criminals and innocent men, too poor to give bail; old men and boys literally, not yet in their teens. They were the drainage of the great feltering ulcer of society. They were hideous to look upon, sickening to talk to. They were swindlers and thieves of pennies and dimes, and they had been trapped and put out of the way by the swindlers and thieves of millions of dollars". Quoted by David Craig & Michael Egan in Extreme Situations (London: Macmillan Press, 1979), p, 211.

'Who seemed slow were urged with a slap or a shove from a long-timer or a shout from another guard. 8

Besides the narrator conveys an instance in which the guards become ferocious torturers. Gus, who failed in his attempt to escape, was beaten:

Gus... screamed again as the guard booted him viciously in the ribs. Somebody else clubbed him across the shoulders with a truceon; he shrieked ... grovelling at their feet. 9

Morgan, another would-be escapee, undergoes a similar kind of treatment; the author uses a cluster of words that underscores the warders' brutality:

He emerged slowly out of consciousness, groaning with the stabbing pain that rocked his body. There was blood in his mouth and all over his face. His eyes were swollen into great, aching bulges and his bones ached. 10

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8-The Stone Country, Op.Cit., p,19.

9-ibid., p,161.

10-ibid., p,161.

Physical violence mercilessly inflicted on Black prisoners is not at all unfamiliar in South African prisons. Many political prisoners have written on that horrifying time they spent in South African dungeons. D.M.Zwelonke's Robben Island is based on the author's true experience; he insists forcefully on this aspect, recording in a vivid way the aggression undergone by a black prisoner in the character of Oom Joe: "Two warders lashed at him .... He twisted like a worm pierced by a nail .... They diverted all their energy to the body. The result: Oom Joe sank down with crushed ribs .... Oom Joe could not stand up or lift a leg .... He died later in a Capetown hospital." See D.M. Zwelonke, Robben Island (London: Heinemann 1970).

The lack of communication and deep-rooted animosity between black and white is metaphorically heightened. The scene of a cat teasing a mouse is meaningful. Besides being healthy, the cat is very aggressive. Like the white, she inflicts punishment to the weak mouse:

The cat lay upon its belly ... watching the dazed mouse ... with cruel ...eyes. The curved predatory claws stretched menacingly ... the mouse trapped ...the cat reached out ... and cuffed it aside .... The cat flashed forward, surrounded it with its forepaws while it crouched, wounded and panting.<sup>11</sup>

This account of a cat in its obstinate chase of a fearful mouse is tightly related to the Black and White relationships. No attentive reader can fail to notice how instinctly the cat is identified with the White and the mouse with the Black. What further confirms this association is that when the mouse tried to escape from the ferocious cat,

Something huge and shiny-it was the boot of a guard- tried to block its passage.<sup>12</sup>

This image connotes the predatory nature of the regime. This analogy is further strengthened through the main protagonist's interior monologue:

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11- The Stone Country, Op.Cit., p,125.

12- Ibid., p,127.



You were on the side of the mouse, of all the mice, George Adams thought. The little men felt kicked in the backside all the time. You got punched and beaten like that mouse and you had to duck and dodge to avoid the claws and fangs ... You were on the side of the little animals, the weak and the timid who spent all their lives dodging and ducking.<sup>13</sup>

The theme of violence is insistent. The brutality the prisoners undergo at the hands of white warders is not the only one they encounter. There is an utter lack of communication even among the Blacks themselves. The prison inmates are coerced by the regime to fight each other. George Adams expresses this bitter truth pointing out the 'divide and rule' policy:

'What waste! here they got us fighting each other like dogs.'<sup>14</sup>

La Guma brings to the fore many instances in which these misfits engage in self-destroying bloody-violence. The case of the fight between Yusuf and Butcherboy is the most exemplary. Supported by his henchmen, Butcherboy treats ruthlessly other weak prisoners in the cell. He is depicted as a tyrant, a savage whose portrayal alone is very suggestive:

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13- Ibid., pp, 127-8.

14- Ibid., p, 74.

The huge man was leaning against the wall, his vast body slouched ugly and brutal as a Neanderthal, the eyes savage as a wild boar's .... He sneered showing the irregular rows of striking carious teeth. 15

This imagery serves as a thematic matrix. The author uses on purpose a cluster of words which connotes stabbing and cutting perfectly in harmony with Butcherboy's personality. His name which is associated with blood and death has a symbolic function. Alienated and deprived, Butcherboy seeks self-assertion in brutal encounters with his weak cellmates. He does not refrain from using his fists whenever he wants:

He seized a prisoner by his waist and ... lifted him high then flung him carelessly across the cell ... the man's body struck the wall and slid to the floor where he lay, making sounds like a hurt animal. 16

Butcherboy's degradation is poignant and pathetic. He epitomises the psychological degradation of a personality in a dehumanising situation. Thus his delusion of grandeur stems from the acute tragedy of alienation and anonymity. Though a prey to degeneracy, he believes himself to be superior to other outcasts, and it is this very obsessive desire for domination which accounts for his psychopathic behaviour. His hatred of the oppressor is

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15- Ibid., p, 53.

16- Ibid., p, 35.

transferred on to the defenceless.<sup>17</sup> Deprived of the conditions for the free fulfillment of their personalities, the frustrated find release in violent acts, directing them against frightful members of their kin.<sup>18</sup> This illustrates Frantz Fanon's thesis in The Wretched of the Earth according to which the colonised, humiliated and frustrated and unable to attack the coloniser, vents his aggressiveness on weaker members of the community. Fanon, who has studied the mentality of the colonised people has cast some light on this problem.

The colonised man will first manifest this aggressiveness which has been deposited in his bones against his own people. This is the period when the niggers beat each other up and the police and magistrates do not know which way to turn

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17- This repelling monster is reminiscent of Smiley Abrahams and his boss in La Guma's short story: "Out of Darkness". After one of his brutal acts, a prisoner rightly observes: "Here he is king. Only here, not outside; he can't be a hard case with them. That was really meant for us. It.... The king must make it known that he is still king of the jungle." (La Guma, 'Out of Darkness' in Richard Rive's Quartet, (London: Heinemann, 1971), p.35.

18- Jacques Alvarez-Pereyre has insisted on the prevalence of violence in the townships. He explains how common fights in black townships are: "De la Township se dégagent des impressions dominantes toutes vérifiées par les enquêtes sociologiques: la faim, la misère, la peur pour les plus nombreux; une aisance relative et la violence pour les autres. Car dans cet univers de défavorisés, un ordre inverse s'est instauré où les marginaux, 'les Tsotsis' reignent en maîtres." Les Guetteurs de l'Aube, Op.Cit., p.35.

Oswald Mtshali's attitude is of the same vein. He heightens the tragedy of the oppressed who let out their anger on one another, worsening their situation: "Nous sommes des moutons, notre courage se dissipe dans les querelles après-boire. Notre violence aveugle nous lance les uns contre les autres. Ibid., 351.

when faced with the astonishing waves of crime in North Africa.<sup>19</sup>

The Black American who experiences a comparable racial exclusion is, likewise, helplessly caught in a similar grip of violence. Richard Wright comments:

The shame and anger we felt for having allowed ourselves to be duped crept into our brows .... The hate we felt for the white man...went into the blows we threw at each other.<sup>20</sup>

This phenomenon is evident in Native Son. Again, Bigger reacts in an identical way, as his South African counter-part. Explicitly the motives of Bigger's morbid violence are made clear to the reader.

His confused emotions had made him feel instinctive that it would be better to fight Gus and spoil the plan of robbery than to confront a white man with a gun.<sup>21</sup>

La Guma brings out cogently the characters' defencelessness and isolation in an insignificant world, where a total lack of security prevails. He insists that even in jail there is no possibility of

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19- The Wretched of the Earth, Op.Cit., p, 52.

Fanon elaborates his analysis asserting that: "While the settler or the policeman has the right the livelong day to strike, to insult him and to make him crawl to them, you will see the native reaching for his knife at the slightest hostile or aggressive glance cast on him by another native. For the last resort of the native is to defend his personality vis-à-vis his brother." Ibid., p, 54.

20- Native Son, Op.Cit., p, 37.

21- Ibid., p, 39.

is no possibility of trust as 'survival is of the fittest'.

Therefore though prisoners are forced into close contact they are morally too withdrawn to communicate: they live in a world of fear of utter and permanent distrust.

Paralysed by isolation, prisoners are gnawed by a terrible sense of solitude. Because the motto is 'everyone for himself' individualism reigns supreme. Persecuted by overwhelming forces prisoners have become individualistic, as everyone is shut and deeply thrust in his own egostical world, endeavouring to survive in conditions of decay and degradation.<sup>22</sup> Consequently no one cares for the misfortunes of others. The Kasbah Kid is sentenced to death but none of the misfits feels compassion or sympathy for him. On the contrary, some are even pleased at his fate "they going to hang

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22- La Guma's characters are confronted to the law of existence 'eat or be eaten'. However what must be borne in mind is that this widespread individualism is not a characteristic feature of the black people. Robert Tresselt in The Ragged-Trousered Philantropist (1914) has sharply criticised the capitalist system in England. He states, poignantly, railing against such a selfish materialism "We must be selfish; the system demands it. We must be selfish or we shall... die in the gutter, in the battle of life. Only the selfish and cunning are able to survive.... None can justly be blamed for acting selfishly-its a matter of preservation- we must injure or be injured. It is the system that deserves to be blamed. (Quoted by Peter Nazareth, An African View of Literature, Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau, 1972, pp, 16-7). This attitude is also reminiscent of Chris' argument, a character in Arthur Miller's play 'All my Sons' in his scathing condemnation of American capitalist society: "This is the law of the great, big dogs, you don't love here, you eat him. That's the principle, the only one we live by.... This is a zoo." Barry Cross "All My Sons and The Larger Context" in Critical Essays on Arthur Miller, Boston: Massachusetts, 1979, p, 187.

him moss, Brakes Laughed.<sup>23</sup>

What is in line with this individualism is a lack of plot in the novel. There is not an event we follow from beginning to end and around which the plot revolves. There is instead a series of sub-plots. This plurality reflects the fragmentation of society. What keeps us reading the story is a number of events through which the action goes on: the tyranny of Butcherboy, his death, the dramatic situation, the fate of the Kashah Kid, the attitude of the main protagonist and the attempt of the three convicts to escape. If some events happen in prison, they are only selected to bring to notice these characters and unveil their passions and states of mind. As in the previous novel then, there is no plot for character and environment are more important than plot. A vivid presentation of human nature is conveyed instead.

What the narrator underlines also in relation to these prisoners is that environment is an important factor which urges them to violence. Prison is insistently shown as another means of repression. Instead of changing them, it worsens them. Perhaps nowhere else are the author's characters so plainly determined by environment as in this book. It is through his exposure of the prison system that we come to his lashing at the functioning of jail, its absurdities and brutality. For what he highlights in relation to these

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23- The Stone Country, Op.Cit., p.37.

character prisoners is the constant erosion of their humanity; and the way the system relegates man to sub-human status.

The degrading conditions in which they are crammed are forcefully demonstrated through rich precision of description. The inmates' bodies are undescrivably dirty. They are huddled in grimy, overcrowded cells and deprived of any moral value. The inmates' manner of eating and drinking underscores their degradation. Besides they are seen crawling, writhing, performing some activities which degrade them. We feel that part of the purpose behind the choice of these performances is obviously the suggestion that what we are watching is a mass of animals.<sup>24</sup>

The sordid setting and bleak surrounding are drawn in length. The colour grey is added to this repelling picture. It is this atmosphere which gnaws the prisoners psychologically. This greyness is also dealt with by the poet Dennis Brutus, drawing from his experience in Robben Island:

Cement-grey floors and walls

Cement-grey days

Cement-grey time

And a grey sussuration .<sup>25</sup>

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24- Not unlike La Guma, Oswald Mtshali sets forth the extent to which racial hatred and economic exploitation contribute enormously to the destruction of one's humanity: Man has ceased to be man  
Man has become beast  
Man has become prey.

Night Fall in Soweto, Op.Cit., p,42.

25- Dennis Brutus 'On the Island' in Simple Lust (London: Heinemann, 1973), p,15.

Besides, a terrible sense of despondency pervades the atmosphere. Characters are immured in a world of metal and stone. The author uses a specific group of images related to imprisonment. The recurrence of certain words bears the force of overall restriction: bars, keys, lock, unlock, metal doors open and shut.

Incarceration is brought forth by words which connote control and immobility. And the impression which flows from this heavily adjectival description is that Blacks are circumscribed in a very closed space, where they await or struggle against an imminent death. Moreover, the prisoners' confinement and desire for freedom is juxtaposed, artistically, with animal imagery:

a flock of pigeons dropped out of the sky and landed on the parapet of the cell block.<sup>26</sup>

This image is related to captivity, seizure and enclosure. Our attention is called to this insistent symbol of the bird which is contrasted with the passivity of the prisoners. It is used in collocation with incarceration, with the captives' lack of freedom. The freedom of the birds has a symbolic value for their free movements contrast markedly and are set in parallel with the prisoners' lack of motion. James Mathews has also used this kind of imagery to better convey the loneliness of prisoners:

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26- The Stone Country, Op.Cit., p,70.



Birds parading the grass  
Rehearse a mocking serenade  
Its notes sharp-edged  
Adding to my torment.<sup>27</sup>

The presence of the birds is not accidental as they are used purposefully to negate the prisoners' wish fulfilment. Incarceration is thus conveyed on the one hand through the description of the setting and on the other hand through this powerful image of the birds. It is the combination of these two levels that creates a sharp and impressive effect.

La Guma's detailed naturalistic descriptions provide a good understanding of the general climate of inertia. The prisoners' days are filled with emptiness. Monotony drags on. Time hangs heavily for those who are trapped in a captive sense of aloneness. Various references to the circumscription of space are contrasted with the extension of time. Emphasis is on this mechanised monotony and its impact on the human mind. The grim account of the intensity of human suffering-around which our sensations spin-are deliberately harrowing. Repetition concretises and emphasises this theme in such a way that the suffering of prisoners seems real.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> James Tutuwa Passing the Yearball (Athlone: Bloc Publishing House 1977), p. 15.

<sup>28</sup> That this vacante atmosphere destroys, psychologically, prisoners is emphatically underlined by Ineten Breitenbach: "Prison is for me the absolute stripping away of all the protective layers: sounds are raw, sights are harsh, smells are foul .... You are reduced to the lowest common denominator .... You lose all sense of importance, of hierarchy, of standards and norms. The confessions of an Albino terrorist (London: Faber&Faber, 1984), p. 258.

The majority of prisoners are on the sidelines of the political scene. They cannot care less about their plight. None is stirred to an act of self-assertion, and the narrator provides a clear insight into their spiritual sterility through the behaviour and comments made by some of them. This spiritual inertia and exceptional lack of dare, the feebleness of will, which are the consequence of their selfish introversion, is emphatically brought forth by Oswald Mtshali again:

He knows

He must carry a pass

He don't care for politics

He don't go to church

He knows Sobukwe

He knows Mandela

They're in Robben Island

'So what ? that is not my business',<sup>29</sup>

Like a Naturalist, La Guma provides expository data about prisoners and the setting. He analyses the forces that drive them to their destinies, pinpointing a certain determinism which guides their common fate and precludes any individual choice, exactly as was the case in the two preceding novels. Because the essence of naturalism is determinism, the individual is still basically

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29- Oswald Mtshali's 'The Detribalised' Op.Cit., p, 84.

insignificant as he is unable to alter his personal fate.

It needs to be emphasised however that our interest is vividly called to a quite different type of prisoners. These are jailed because they are dangerous to the maintenance of the status quo : they dared oppose the government. There are unmistakable differences between George Adams' behaviour and that of other prisoners. It is precisely this very point which calls for elaboration, for it is this idea which makes The Stone Country different from A Walk in the Night, and And a Threefold Cord.

If Charlie refuses to become a delinquent, George is a good spokesman of those who are determined to change the system. He is the only one who is conscious of the nature and implications of his acts, What the narrator plainly brings to the fore is that his significance, as a character emerges from the fact that he is the first character of La Guma's who reaches the stage of political awareness ;an awareness which carries its full weight, and which La Guma brings to light for the first time. This awakening is summed up in a single but forceful sentence: "These's a limit to being kicked up in the backside".<sup>30</sup>

George has been involved in political struggle. We are told about the circumstances in which Jefferson, a Negro, and himself were

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30- The Stone Country, Op.Cit., p, 127.

arrested. They are La Guma's first characters who dare work against the government and who thus represent a new stage in the history of Black South African resistance (in the fictional world, naturally).

George's attitude in prison confirms this new consciousness. His behaviour vis-à-vis the white guards is revealing. Being unmindful of the danger, he challenges them all:

Adams did not move but continued to look into the flushed face. He was thinking be damned if I am going to let them go away with it. They expect you to crawl for everything: please baas can I have this? Please, can I have that? <sup>31</sup>

Obviously, his recalcitrant stare at the warders is not innocent at all. He is unlike Michael who does not "look at the buckle of this policeman's belt".<sup>32</sup>

And the narrator of A Walk in the Night reports that one:

learned from experience to gaze at some spot on their uniforms ... but never into their eyes, for that would be taken as an affront by them. It was only the very stupid who dared look straight into the law's eyes, to challenge them or question their authority. <sup>33</sup>

George dares do it, deliberately, to challenge their power.

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31- Ibid., p, 11.

32- A Walk in the Night, Op.Cit., p, 11.

33- Ibid., p, 11.

He is here to question the system. He is given a certain revolutionary potential, for he stands up to the warders. His reaction symbolises resistance against injustice in the country as a whole. He does not accept the place assigned to him, and to all the Blacks. He is aware of the rights of the individual and fights for them. He condemns the administration and urges prisoners to protest against the dehumanising system. This political maturity shows his will to change and his motivation to reject fatalism. George's humanity is apparent in his attitude towards the Kid. He shows compassion towards him and earns his sympathy. It is he who intercedes on the Kid's behalf and shares his food with him. Furthermore, George is the cause of some positive changes in prison. The Kid is gradually transformed to a sociable person; he trusts George and tells him about his bitter past. Change is also perceivable in the character of Yusuf the Turk. The latter intervenes, on his behalf, when George was beaten by Butcherboy, and even speaks of man's responsibilities. Yusuf is indoctrinated and begins to change.

It is George who interprets and comments on the relations between Black and White, on the relations between the blacks themselves, as well as on White rule, emphasising the defects of the system. It is he who describes the prisoners' emotional reaction, and the behaviour of the guards. He acts as a link between the characters and the reader. La Guma rightly remarks that Adams: "is a telescope through which to see what is going around".<sup>34</sup>

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34- Alex La Guma, Op.Cit., p,70.

Adams' struggle against the power of darkness-to regain control over his own destiny- goes hand in hand with his insubordination, marking the commencement of a new phase of the struggle. Hence the author reveals a change in the perceptions and visions of the central character. George represents a qualitative shift in the attitude of La Guma's protagonist. His attitude conveys the idea that the time of self-assertion has begun. Adams represents a landmark in the political awakening of La Guma's fictional character. He is politically committed and convinced of his beliefs:

Adams did not have any regrets about his arrest. You did what you decided was the right thing and accepted the consequences. He had gone into meetings and had listened to the speeches, had read a little and had come to the conclusion that what had been said was right.<sup>35</sup>

La Guma unfolds George Adams' thoughts, exposes his actions and their driving force: political maturity. When the kid showed indifference at taking any form of initiative, Adams tried to make him change his mind, explaining that: "people try (ing) to change things all the time."<sup>36</sup>

The activities he undertakes in jail are of a great significance. Stubbornly committed to humanity before anything else, he continues

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35- The Stone Country, Op.Cit., p,74.

36- Ibid., p,14.

the crusade for justice he had begun before his arrest. He tries to fight the divisive forces among the oppressed. Contrary to other prisoners who are consumed by internecine fights, George-by keeping out of the world of violence-preserves his humanity. He does not resort to violence but to persuasion. Here lies the source of his resistance and self-assertion.

Besides, George is also the narrator's alter ego. This adds a new dimension to the narrative technique. It is through his consciousness that the events which take place in prison are recorded. Contrary to the previous novels, the reader is presented on the one hand with George's feelings and convictions, the way he opposes the government, and the way also he assumes his humanity, and on the other hand, with his descriptions and analyses of the situation of prisoners, their emotions, as well as the attitude of warders and rulers at large. Here his role is that of a critic of society.

We can conclude, therefore, that if deprivation is a predominant phenomenon which determines fatalism in both A Walk in the Night and A Threefold Cord, the unshakable rebelliousness of George rejects, unconditionally this fatalism. Thus though The Stone Country is concerned with the self-destroying violence of urban marginals, the fate of the individual is a suggestion that this aggressiveness must be directed rather against the system, once the defects of the regime and the obvious injustices it perpetuates have been pointed out. Therefore by the time we come to his third book, the author's

protagonist is not only awakened to injustices around him but rejects them defiantly. He is not Michael the apolitical introvert, nor is his stance understated by ideological shallowness as Charlie Pauls' is. In opposition to Michael who cannot comprehend the mechanism of his plight, and Charlie who cannot articulate his political consciousness, George is outspoken. He represents the budding generation in the revolutionary struggle. He epitomises the emergence of a prise de conscience and its concreteness. As a result, the emergence of consciousness apparent in Charlie seems to have borne fruit in Adams. It is this fact which makes George convincingly the forerunner of the protagonists of the next novel. For with George, the process of psychological liberation has begun and is being put into effect,.

There is then an obvious step forward on the part of Alex La Guma. His protest is much more overt than it was in the previous novels, as his protest is carried on by his main protagonist. The Blacks react now against the representatives of the system. In the preceding books, the confrontation was mainly between minor characters and the police. In The Stone Country, the conflict becomes more political. Leaders of both Black and coloured communities - Jefferson and George - are emerging; they oppose the warders who represent the police state, thus symbolising and incarnating the spirit of resistance.

However the political consciousness displayed by George is not



developed yet. Counter-violence which will be the groundwork of his next two books, shows only in its budding form. It is true that, through this character, La Guma alludes to the political awakening of the oppressed but this awareness and the positive effects of the psychological reaction of the downtrodden is only incipient. For the awakening from the Apartheid nightmare is limited to George and Jefferson. All others are politically immature. A brief but significant scene testifies to this idea: when one prisoner asks George about the cause of his imprisonment and when he answers, "political, working against the government", not one but, "the three paused in their silent game of cards to look at him with curiosity."<sup>37</sup>

In this context, we may remark that violence is always established in closed spaces. In the first novel, violence is limited to the ghetto; in the second it is restricted to a community. This confinement reaches its climax in the closed universe of prison.

Unlike the settings of A Walk in the Night and And a Threefold Cord, that of The Stone Country has a metaphorical dimension. The author displays his skill in expanding the metaphor in which the prison in the novel and South Africa merge into one huge, concentrationary universe. For this minute depiction of life behind bars is only a miniature which broadens to symbolise the whole country. The circumscription of the prison environment has a wider dimension.

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37- Ibid., p, 38

Prison is a perfect symbol of Apartheid. And by analysing the destructive potentialities of prison, the narrator casts some light on the ramifications of the system's, own entrapments. It is obviously a microcosm of the larger society without with its hatred fear, and segregation. George, and Jefferson, who were jailed together do not see one another once in jail. Jefferson who is also politically mature perceives that easily and puts it forwards:

This jail is a small something of what they want to make the country. Everybody separate: African, coloured; regulations for everybody and a white boss with a gun and a stick.<sup>38</sup>

It may be argued then that prison is an ineluctable condition of life in the country. It is an actuality before it is a symbol. We are presented with the naked fact of the prison itself which encompasses the whole country. Prison is highly symbolic of a world of brute force. For the harshness and brutality of prison life is emblematic of the harshness of the whole country. Jail is an insistent metaphor and a symbol of geographical and mental restraints:

This was the country behind the coast lines of laws and regulations and labyrinthine legislation; a jungle of stone and iron, inhabited by jackals and hyenas, snarling wolves and trembling sheep ... monsters with the hide of ignorance and brutality, trampling under foot those who tried to

claw their way from the clutches of the swamp.<sup>39</sup>

Weighed with serious political overtones, the book is about society in its very essence. Hilda Kuper, a sociologist, also likens South Africa to a prison; she enlightens us on this point in these terms:

South Africa has become a vast and terrifying prison.<sup>40</sup>

Hence the appropriateness of the title: The Stone Country, a country made of stone. This metaphor directs the spotlight to the callousness of the environment, to its violence and unfriendliness. It connotes coldness and is utterly devoid of warmth. Furthermore the material it is made of is stone, therefore the country's harshness seems unalterable and its definite rigidity reinforced.

In addition to this, the outward appearance of the prison is conspicuously, that of the country, corroborating the equation between jail and South Africa:

Outside the façade had been brightened with laws and flower-beds: the grim face of the executioner hidden behind a holiday mask.<sup>41</sup>

The outward shape contrasts, remarkably, with the inward one. These architectural differences epitomise the contradictions within

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39- Ibid., p, 81.

40- Quoted by Pierre Van Der Berghe, Race and Racism, Op.Cit., p, 111.

41- The Stone Country, Op.Cit., p, 17.

society as a whole. They are a symbol of a society replete with antagonisms. La Guma unrolls the spurious image of the country, which is given to the foreign public; for in reality:

in this world no trees grew, the only perfume it knew came from night soil buckets and chains ... the only music the regulations allowed was composed out of the slap-slap of bare feet, the grinding of boots, counterposed by shouted orders, the slam of doors and the tintinabulation of heavy keys. Anything else smacked of rebellion.<sup>42</sup>

La Guma has then shifted from the background of District Six to that of prison. The latter, with its internal structure and exclusive functioning, together with the particularity of its considerable potentialities for physical and spiritual destruction serves as a setting for this novel. It is also a suitable occasion to draw the affinity between jail and country. It gives a clear idea about some aspects of the South African life, for as the poet C.J. Driver puts it:

What books like Lewin's, Zwelonke's, Brutus' and Sachs' can give us is an imaginative share in the common experience of black South Africa. The truest view of South Africa is not the view from the finance houses of Johannesburg or the suburbs of Cape Town, but the view from Makana Island.<sup>43</sup>

Nonetheless despite the bitterness of experience, light glimmers

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42- Ibid., p, 18.

43- C.J. Driver "The view from Makana Island" in Journal of Southern African Studies, Part II , 1975, p, 119.

even in the darkest corners of this jail. The especially appropriate animal imagery which is carefully handled to adumbrate the future escape of the three convicts, accounts for his optimism. The narrator uses a symbolic incident to announce a future event: the success of the mouse is paralleled with the success of Gus to recuperate the blades from Solly, as well as the escape of Koppee:

The cat spun round too late. The time taken to turn by the cat gave the mouse a few seconds, head away and it was off .... It swerved skilfully ... and it headed into the hole ... the mouse dodged ... and gained entrance to the hole.<sup>44</sup>

The cat and mouse scene is interrupted by Solly who has undertaken the operation of passing blades to Gus so as to cut the bars. Thus the scene between the cat and the mouse is split by Gus' efforts to get the saw blades from Solly; and these interruptions are functional for they have a role in the narrative: the effect of interruption creates a double suspense. Our attention is drawn to two scenes which happen simultaneously. The narrator deals with Gus and Solly. But before we know what happens next he continues with the cat and mouse episode. Subsequently our curiosity is more aroused, shifting from animals to prisoners and vice-versa, while the narrative goes on till the denouement where both the mouse and Solly succeed. This scene is

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44- The Stone Country, Op.Cit., p, 126.

ironical. Irony lies in the fact that the mouse which is fearful, manages to deceive the powerful cat. This success in fact is minutely calculated to foreshadow the escape of Koppee. This escape is a kind of coup de théâtre for none expected the scared prisoner to outwit the authorities. The fact that the least determined to escape managed to, is not incidental on the part of La Guma. It is used on purpose to convince us that the common man, not necessarily the very courageous can rise against the barbarity of the 'Republic'; a victory the narrator loads with hope. George's comment that "even a mouse turns someday"<sup>45</sup> heightens La Guma's point that confidence and optimism will prevail.



AWARENESS AND DEFIANCE

IN THE FOG OF THE SEASONS' END

Sirs you have turned our country into  
graveyards  
You have planted bullets and organised  
massacres;  
Sirs, nothing passes as you think without  
retribution.  
All that you have done to my people is put  
on the record.

Mahmoud Darwish.

The revolutionary ethos which timidly emerges from the previous book is more apparent in In the Fog of the Season's End. We can safely argue that the author's fourth book is an elucidation of the activities of George Adams' successors. Characters like George, who are deeply convinced of their political engagement and are, consequently, determined to oppose unconditionally the regime of Pretoria reappear under different guises in this book.

La Guma is preoccupied here with the theme of political rebellion. From the congested world of the previous novel, we are taken to the world of politics and guerilla warfare. The present chapter focuses on the post-Sharpeville period. After a study of The Stone Country with its airless and macabre atmosphere of prison life, we now turn to the more open spaces of In the Fog of the Season's End.

La Guma provides us with a analysis of the changes that occurred in South Africa when the struggle for freedom began to intensify. The author shows us the beginning of the move from passive resistance to defiance against the system. Like the novels produced at that time,<sup>1</sup> In the Fog of the Season's End is characterised by an active

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1- Peter Abrahams' A Night of their Own (London: Faber & Faber, 1965) and Richard Rive's Emergency (London: Faber & Faber, 1964). In his autobiography the latter explains what motivated him to write the book: "I watched Phillip Kgosana's historic march from Langa to Cape Town with 30,000 blacks, and attended protest meetings all over the Peninsula until these were banned. The following year, I decided to write a novel spread over the three most crucial days of the Sharpeville unrest, 28 th to 30 th March". (Richard Rive, Writing Black, Cape Town: David Phillip, 1981, p, 19).



involvement in the political struggle. If criminality informs the plot of A Walk in the Night, political motivation does that of In the Fog of the Seasons' End. Motivated by the impositions of this new-born era, Blacks prepare to purge away the injustices pictured in A Walk in the Night.

The plot focuses on a few days in the life of some political activists who are involved in the distribution of illegal leaflets, calling on people to strike. The central figures, Beukes, Elias and Isaac, work for a banned organisation. The author illustrates the dangers of this underground work, as well as its hindrances. He conveys some aspects of the life its members lead, the dangers they are continuously exposed to as well as the sacrifices they are expected to make: Elias is tortured Beukes escapes with a wounded arm and Issac leaves South Africa to be trained as a freedom fighter.

This novel is not a record of hardships only; it focuses on political assertion too. In opposition to the first book, what we come upon in his fourth one is not only the suffering Black but also his vitality and determination to change the status quo. La Guma enlightens us on this point in these terms:

One must also realise that apart from the people bewailing their fate, there are also people struggling against it, and that the political and revolutionary movement in South Africa was a part of the South African scene. And that one way or another, people have always been fighting against

this situation. The political and revolutionary movement has to appear somewhere in the picture; and I hope that In the Fog of the Seasons' End is a start. I tried to represent the underground struggle against the regime as part of the picture of South Africa.<sup>2</sup>

We shall attempt to define and identify the positions of the protagonists in the book, by investigating their thoughts and attitudes. Though they represent to the eyes of the authorities an anonymous mass comparable to the outcasts of The Stone Country they are, in reality, very different from those. In In The Fog of the Seasons' End, even minor characters are politically concerned, a point which did not show in the preceding novels.

La Guma's political evolution is conspicuous. It lies in his open advocacy of armed resistance as the sole means of liberation, a point we shall insist upon because it is precisely this which marks a shift from passive to active resistance. We shall show that this evolution is brought forth through the actions and reflexions of the protagonists on the one hand, and through authorial intrusion on the other hand. Moreover, since the main theme is revolutionary violence it is this aspect we shall look at more closely by making use of Frantz Fanon's The Wretched of the Earth, as well as the Marxist theory of violence in nineteenth century Europe in relation to the

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2- Alex La Guma, Op.cit., p, 92.

South African contemporary realities.

We shall in particular try to focus on some important elements which distinguish this novel from the previous ones, in terms of - to name only a few - the narrator's tone of voice, characterisation and style. For these elements put together contribute to bringing forth a significant message which informs the thematic of In the Fog of the Seasons' End, i.e., the advocacy of armed resistance. We shall lay emphasis on this point because of its importance in the history of the South African resistance movement, as well as in the development of the author's own philosophy.

In this connection, it is worth noting that this new attitude has an impact on the narrative technique. Naturalism ends now as La Guma focuses on his characters' efforts to rise above their circumstances. He shifts from Naturalism to Critical Realism, and even to Socialist Realism. His characters defy society and thus transcend the limits imposed on them. It is in this struggle against their bonds that Realism lies.

Though this novel did not appear before 1972, it was, like his first three books, written while he was in South Africa. Like these it too digs into the same socio-ethnic problems but its subject is more ambitious in scope. It centers on a vigorous account of underground work in the post-Sharpeville era,

We must add that 'a Guma's own involvement in underground

activity in South Africa motivated him to write In the Fog of the Seasons' End. This novel is based on his own experiences; witness the following statement:

I knew these people. They were my friends. They came from all walks of life. Every race, every religion; we worked together. And when one of us was arrested, we were all worried; but we knew we had to carry on, come what may. I am proud to have been associated with them; and I think one can say that this story is my way of remembering them thanking them.<sup>3</sup>

The theme of physical violence is most consistent and pervasive. In the Fog of the Seasons' End fustigates the South African tyrannical oppression. Elias, a member of the underground movement accused of subversion, is tortured because he remains faithful to the organisation. The appalling treatment and the terrible method of questioning inflicted upon the political detainee is convincing evidence of the harsh realities of this police state. The prologue of the book tells us in no uncertain terms. What La Guma's purpose is: Torture hits us in the face from the start; therefore, we are not deluded by the 'cosmetic' peace that breathes from chapter one. We take it for what it is, a fraud:

In the centre of the park was an ornamental pond with water lilies patching its transparent brown surface, and reddish gold fish jerking nervously below them.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup>- In the Fog of the Seasons' End, (London: Heinemann, 1972), p. 8.

The image of tranquility in a violent environment thus becomes incongruous if not indecent.

The cruelty of the state becomes conspicuous when innocent people are gunned down. In chapter nine, the author brings into view some poignant aspects of the Sharpeville carnage. The pass, the core of the disaffection of the Blacks with the regime, placed this township in the spotlight across the world's headlines on March 20<sup>th</sup> 1960. And La Guma's making that massacre come alive again in this novel alerts us to the possibility of its recurrence in the years to come.

The torturing of Elias, like the Sharpeville massacre, are climactic moments in the on-going process of oppression and exploitation which is not only racial, but economic as well. The reader grasps easily the on-going antagonistic relations between the working class and the ruling one. We know that Elias' mother is awarded only forty pounds compensation for her husband's death, whereas White widows receive fifteen pounds per month for the rest of their lives. Elias himself works for a mere pittance for a white shopkeeper who later on fires. He is reluctant to go back to the countryside and is alienated by urban life. The narrator thus underlines the fact that cultural and social estrangement stem from the economic disparity resulting from Apartheid.

That appalling social conditions emerge from economic warfare

is also evidenced in the eviction of an elderly woman. Her clothes and furniture symbolise her shattered life and signify her desolation. She represents all those who are helplessly trapped in and pressed down by the system:

An old woman was sitting in an old deckchair in the middle of the crowd amongst a pile of furniture. The canvas of the chair was worn .... The old woman did not move; she just sat in the middle of the crowd, with the furniture and stared straight ahead.<sup>5</sup>

The systematisation of racial segregation and exploitation suggest that oppression draws its source from a class society. According to Karl Marx, problems like those stated above are one of class. By diagnosing the proletarian malaise, he indicts the bourgeoisie of his time. He comes out very sharply against the expropriation of those labouring at the bottom, and left at the mercy of social disadvantages. Still according to him, the main motivation of capitalists is the accumulation of capital; and it is on this basis that workers are exploited. It is on this reservoir of cheap labour that the rich get richer and the poor poorer.

Consequently, Marx believes strongly in the overthrow of capitalism as a prerequisite to the liberation of the modern proletariat. He

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5- In the Fog of the Seasons's End, Op.Cit.,p,28.

objects to the very existence of capitalism. Marxist theory conceives a violent insurrection against the social system as a normal process. This is the ultimate phase of the revolutionary process.

Furthermore revolutionary struggle-which will eradicate the roots of evil- is to be initiated and led by the proletariat. Marx maintains that workers-and no other social class- are instrumental in the overthrow of the existing social systems. They are the 'grave diggers' of capitalism. Marx insists that it is unquestionably the major force of change. Because they are the most exposed to domination, they are also the most disposed to struggle for liberation.

Acutely sensitive to human exploitation, Fanon also recognises that violence exists in the very structures of capitalism, as it legitimises excesses on the colonised. Fanon, whose vantage point is the Algerian and other liberation movements,--Kenyan and Guinean- studies the characteristic features of colonial domination, insisting on the political, military and cultural violence brought about by the colonial system. He stresses the fact that the Black is oppressed both as a Black and as a member of the working class.

Fanon ponders over the problem of colonial violence. Affected by the image of man suffering under intolerable wrongs, he is like Marx, much concerned by injustices inflicted upon to the down-trodden by the capitalist machinery. In The Wretched of the Earth he shows violence as a polymorph phenomenon, and expands on its effects on both

colonised and coloniser. He explains that this violence-which is the basis of colonisation at first and exploitation later-ensures the permanance of white domination. It is precisely this reactionary violence which exists institutionally which gives birth to revolutionary counter-violence.

South African society, as is remarkably well shown in In The Fog of the Seasons' End, has taken a similar historical direction. The political and economic alienation analysed by La Guma are not different from those found in Marx and Fanon. The social, cultural and economic grievances exacerbated by political repression at Sharpeville opened new avenues for the colonised.<sup>6</sup>

The emergence of this new phase in the history of the revolution is symbolised by the title itself; In the Fog of the Seasons'End. We can conjecture that the seasons'End stands for the end of passive resistance and that the beginning of armed resistance has begun. This book reflects the growing revolutionary consciousness of the Blacks in South Africa. Its author does not gloss over his didactic purpose.

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6- This decisive shift is stated thus by Lewis Nkosi: "Sharpeville was the culmination of a political turmoil during a decade in which it was still possible in South Africa to pretend to the visibility of extra parliamentary opposition. Sharpeville ... brought us back in 1960 and into a different era altogether. Henceforth, the times will be troubled indeed. There will be violence, murder and suffering. "(See Home and Exile, p, 8).



He tells his oppressed countrymen that the time of passive resistance is over.

The growing consciousness of the proletariat is manifested in its rejection of the status quo. The conflict is political and it is well articulated. Beukes holds that there is no path out but in action, voicing the author's opinion on the matter: "no-violence now is a thing of the past".<sup>7</sup> Indeed the book's meaning cannot be sought outside the context of this struggle. La Guma's position is confirmed by the following statement:

Deprived of the right to live according to their own values, our people are engaged in a struggle that will lead to full expression in terms of their.<sup>8</sup>

We can easily notice that while the author depicts the exploitation of the colonised, he also shows his rising consciousness of this oppression, and his defiance of the oppressor. The antithetical relationship between black and white, in terms of coloniser-colonised relationship is pointed out. The reader's attention is called to South Africa's basic historical truth; Apartheid's blind violence and

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7- In the Fog of the Seasons' End, Op.Cit.,p,143.

This is an attempt of the ANC to operate underground. The intensification of the government repression is concomitant with the modification of strategies adopted by the African Resistance Movement.

8- Alex La Guma, "Literature and life" in Lotus Magazine, I, January 1970 p, 239.

tyrannical policy drives inevitably the colonised to fight back with violence.

La Guma shares Fanon's view that the colonised hates the coloniser and attempts to fight him.<sup>9</sup> The irrationality and hostility of colonisation have bred, in the colonised, feelings of hatred and ruthlessness. La Guma's characters have developed a gut hostility against them. There are passages in the book which illuminate the point under discussion. This is well represented by Isaac's earnest interest in guns and weapons:

Isaac had taken interest in regular and irregular military warfare. He had read history books, and the smuggled books on guerilla fighting. He had examined pictures and drawings of small arms of every sort.<sup>10</sup>

As well as by Elias' revolutionary dream:

To be a warrior like them(his ancestors) ... to fight these people who lived in this country, yet behaved like foreigners like jackals and birds of prey .... He saw the raised

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9- Hatred is not on one side of the coin. Fanon underlines this feeling on the part of the coloniser: "On the logical plane, the manicheism of the settler produces a manicheism of the native. To the theory of 'the absolute evil of the native' the theory of 'the absolute evil of the settler'." (See The Wretched of the Earth,) Op.cit., p,50.

10- In the Fog of the Seasons' End, Op.Cit., p,101.

assegais, the hide shields like great pods and heard the stamp of feet ... and he saw men like Wasserman (the shopkeeper) who called him a black thing ... fleeing before him.<sup>11</sup>

In this context the allusion to the ancestors is very significant in relation to the plot. La Guma revives the African past in order to encourage the youth in their present struggle; he refers to the ancestors to sustain the fighters.<sup>12</sup> It is the struggle, the ancestors waged in the past which will be pursued by future guerillas. The author prepares us for a new kind of a struggling community.

La Guma justifies the legitimacy of the Blacks' preparation for the confrontation. If it is easy to realise that the author condones guerilla warfare, it is easier to see that it is the radical intransigence of the enemy which spurs the colonised to armed opposition. By emphasising the external conditioning of his characters, he pinpoints their responses. Having closed in upon the harsh social economic,

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11- Ibid., pp, 124-5.

12- La Guma explains: "Les troubles surgis sur le continent Africain ont produit de grandes épopées historiques qui sont la chronique de la grande époque de la résistance contre l'agresseur colonial. Au seul Cap, neuf importantes guerres ont été menées contre les envahisseurs et alors que ces guerres se déroulaient au Nord, des Zoulous avaient une machinerie militaire jamais vue auparavant en cette partie du monde." (Littérature Sud Africaine sous l'Apartheid" in Lotus Magazine, July, 1976, p, 12. Translated by Ismat Raafat).

cultural and political realities that fetter the black, La Guma suggests a possibility to free them. Adrian Roscoe points out the conclusion which the reader is invited to draw:

The violent solution at the end of In the Fog of the Seasons' End is drifted towards, not preached from the outset. From pointing out human and economic injustices to attacking the regime by way of ugly pictures of it, and suggesting that the victims of oppression ought to band together, there emerges timidly and hesitantly the idea of violence as the only course of action that holds out hope of action the regime will respect.<sup>13</sup>

The central characters are dodgedly decided to form a strong counter-point to the racist system. Their efforts are overwhelmingly positive. Beukes, who is obviously La Guma's mouthpiece makes this point explicit. In the following passage, he expresses his own and his peoples' distrust of the government:

If the law is made for them, without their consent ... under circumstances prevailing in our country, I must ask myself what does this law defend? Law defends injustice, prosecutes and persecutes those who fight injustice. Then I am under

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13- Uhuru's Fire, Op.Cit., p, 258.

Then I am under no obligation to uphold it .(15) .  
Beukes assessment is indicative of the writer's own involvement.  
Reader sense a degree of authorial manipulation in the narrative:  
The ideological principles that inform the novel are not hidden .  
La Guma diffuses through certain characters some dissident and  
revolutionary feelings loading their conversations and actions with  
his own belief. And it is this kind of biased and ideologically  
loaded characterisation George Lukacs approves of and underlines  
as a necessity in a work of art:

"Characterisation that does not encompass  
ideology cannot be complete. Ideology is  
the highest form of consciousness; ignoring  
it, a writer eliminates what is most important  
in his delineation of a character's conception  
of the world(...) provides a significant refle-  
ction of the general problems of time.16

Beukes who has undertaken the difficult task of the revolutionary is  
a determined man, who is conscious of the conditions of the blacks.

15-In the Fog of the seasons' End(op, cit) pp114-5.

Mohamed Dib's character in La Grande Maison shows a similar rebellious  
attitude:"Je ne veux pas me soumettre à la justice, clamait-il;ce qu'ils  
appellent la justice, ce n'est que leur justice. Elle est faite uniquement  
pour protéger, pour garantir leur pouvoir sur nous, pour nous réduire et  
nous mater. Aux yeux d'une telle justice, je suis toujours coupable .  
Elle m'a condamné avant même que je sois né. Elle nous condamne avant  
sans savoir besoin de notre culpabilité. Cette justice est faite contre  
nous parcequ'elle n'est pas celle de tous les hommes. Je ne veux pas me  
soumettre à ,elle."(See Mohamed Dib, LA Grande Maison, PARIS:Edition du  
seuil, 1952,p,52.

16- George Lukacs, Writer and Critic (London: The MERlin Press Ltd,1978  
p,151.

and prepares to reorder society. He has seen through the mask of Apartheid and wants the others to do the same. He also wants their involvement in the struggle for national consciousness. His short conversation with Beatie Adams in the park is revealing. He is adamant when he says: "Why should it be our life? We are as good or as bad as they are." 17

Beukes' remark is extremely important. For resignation of the oppressed is mainly motivated by ignorance, and the blind acceptance of the myth of white superiority. This myth, the very source of the unquestioned barrier between Black and White-upon which the pillars of the Manichaean society have been strongly built-is taken for granted. And it is this very questioning which testifies to the awakening of the people and the subsequent unveiling of the spurious mask which has been deceiving them.(18)

This step is an important factor which contributes to the self assertion of the marginals, and the revindication of the right they have been of. If man's personality is cramped in the previous book the characters of this novel are acutely aware of their need for wholeness of personality and a worthwhile existence. This very idea is aptly put forth by the narrator:

17- In the fog of the Seasons' End,p,11.  
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18- Fanon has significantly stressed this self-awareness:"the native discovers that his life,his beating heart are the same as those of the settler(....)And it must be said that this discovery shakes the world in a very necessary manner. All the new revolutionary assurance of the native stems from it. For if, in fact, my life is worth as much as the settler's, his glance no longer shrivels me nor freezes me, and his voice no longer turns me into stone."  
(See The wretched of the earth,p,45.)

"He thought that all this knowtowing to stupid idiots who cheriched the idea that they were God's chosen just because they had white skins had come toan end (...)(he) almost felt sorry for these people who believed themselves to be the master race, to have the monopoly of brains yet who were vindictive, selfish and cruel."<sup>19</sup>

This novel records the awakening of a people who want to put this awakening into practice. Articulate, they express the ideas they stand for. They are conscious of the overwhelming sense of the falsity of society and colonial mentality. Teir lives are fragmented, and it is this very fragmentation they want to transcend through struggle . Tus they prepare with others to become hunters; as a matter of fact, this song Beukes hums as the emblem of the stuggle: we'll go."<sup>(20)</sup>

La Guma's view of decolonisation seems to tally with that of Fanon. The proletariat asserts inself as the main protagonists decide to challenge the law, assuming a dynamic, political role. Coninced that their intolerable condition can be changed, the colonised have reached the stage of challenging foreign domination rejecting the

19- In the Fog of the Seasons's End (op. Cit.) p 97

20- Ibid,p 86

Basic ideology of the colonialists. They are in a mood of defiance and their awareness of the roots of their problems and their convincingness of the necessity to end them is apparent in their actions and comments. Hence if in the previous books emphasis is on the psycho-social crisis resulting from Apartheid, it is now on the violent response of the colonised and their violence is not psycho-pathological.

This novel suggests, in Cecil Abrahams' terms, "the burning rites of revolution". For as active as always, Beukes incites his compatriots to rise and fight against the Pretoria regime. He tries to educate and organise the down trodden for the liberation struggle. Indefatigably, he stimulates them towards readiness. It is thanks to his indoctrination that Flotman, the teacher, is 'recuperated'.

Teach that everthing is ordained by God.... I am going to have to give up one day.<sup>20</sup>

And in the end he sends recruits aboard who will form the core of the guerilla bands which will overthrow white supremacy through planned rather than spontaneous activity.

The point which must be borne in mind, in this context is that Isaac, Michael and Paul who are sent for military training are not heroes. The author does not present us with epic heroes who embody.

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extraordinary power and outstanding qualities. They are, on the contrary, of common extraction. It follows from this that freedom comes from the masses. Liberty is vested in the ordinary man, not in the superman. It is this responsibility of this very man to shape history. Moreover, the individual expression of this responsibility takes on a wider sense: Elias is a proletarian with a rural background. Isaac is a factory worker and Beukes belongs to the working class too. Because revolutionaries are represented by the proletariat, it is characters like these who form the expected revolutionary class which will, according to Marxist thought, eradicate capitalism and oppression. It is the lumpenproletariat, 21 subject to the harshest exploitation, which is supposed to become the striking force in the struggle against the capitalist regime. 22

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21- The lumpenproletariat is described by Karl Marx "as the refuse of all classes, a disintegrated mass, comprising ruined and adventurous offshoots of the bourgeoisie, vagabonds, discharged soldiers, jailbirds pickpockets, brothel keepers, rag-pickers, beggars, etc... upon whom Louis Bonaparte relied in his struggle for power. (" See A Dictionary of Marxist Thought, ed by Tom Bottomore, Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1983, p, 341.

22- Frantz Fanon has not missed this point either. He has evinced a similar view in the wretched of the Earth; le lumpenproletariat... brings all its forces to endanger the security of the town, and is the sign of the irrevocable decay, the gangrene ever present at the heart of colonial domination. So the hooligans, the unemployed and the petty criminals, urged on from behind, throw themselves into the struggle for liberation like stout working men. (The wretched of the Earth, Op. Cit., p130)

This book betrays a basic evolution in La Guma's philosophy. His greater commitment goes hand in hand with the book's increased scope. History unmistakably stimulated this change. He has gained consciousness and a deeper insight into the mode of historical change. Noticing this point of book in a review of in the fog of the seasons . End, Gerald Moore remarks:

The publication of in the fog seasons' End marked the convergence of his fiction with his own long held position as an uncompromising revolutionary.

La Guma's ideological leaning are laid bare. A comparison between Michael and Beukes reveals the author's political development . While Michael is merely in the position of a victim, Beukes makes common cause with the plight of his people, trying to counter the destructive power of Apartheid. Therefore, if A Walk in the Night is an analysis of the political weakness of the black community, in the Fog of the Season's End, is conversely an investigating into the political maturity of the black community as a whole.

Contrary also to And a Threefold cord where the processes of gnosis knowing did not yield to praxis ( doing ) , the processes of praxis and gnosis are closely linked in this novel. The Blacks now refuse to

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23- Gerald Moore "Thought Suffering to Resistance" in Twelve African Writers Talking, London; Hutchinson University Press, 1980PP? 106-7.

bend their heads. It is in this spirit that Elias defies his tortures; now the struggle between colonised and coloniser is expressed in overt ideological terms:

You are going to torture me, may be kill me; but that is the only way your people can rule us . You shoot and kill and torture because you cannot rule in any other way a people who reject you. You are reaching the end of the road and going downhill toward a great darkness.<sup>24</sup>

Elias offers us a perfect example of true commitment. Uncoowed by the state's highhandedness, he remains faithful to the cause resisting torture. It is thanks to his silence that Beukes remains unknown to the authorities. The fact that suffering is used at the beginning and at the end of the book stresses the extremely expensive price of commitment. Furthermore the absence of internecine fights, egotism and individualism is a marked departure from the deep sense of fatalism and victimisation experienced by the characters of the previous books. Now characters put their families, jobs and lives after the cause. The sense of egotism which characterises the precedent books is transcended. This is perfectly illustrated by Elias who' hoped Beukes had gone away from them. He had heard somebody shoot, let it not that he was shot<sup>25</sup>

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24- In the Fog of the Seasons' End ,Op.Cit.,p, 6.

25-Ibid.,p,153.

The author's faith in revolution is undoubtedly strong. This is evident in his portrayal of characters. The latter are only described through speech and action. None is physically perceivable. La Guma analyses their motivation and actions and we only know them by observing their conversations and comments.

Another aspect of the narrative is the use of the flashback technique. However the discontinuity of the narrative is deliberate? and the meanderings of the plot are not fortuitous. This is congruent with the insecurity of the main protagonists. The shift of the narrative to and fro is juxtaposed with their movements, the dangers imposed by the tasks they have undertaken as well as with the fear of arrest. A strong impression of restlessness is conveyed as the plot follows Beukes' peregrinations. The impression this generates is one of a society on the move, in opposition to the immobility that prevails in The Stone Country.

La Guma's style contributes to enhancing his call to action. There is a remarkable development in his style as it is surprisingly much less descriptive than that of the preceding novels. This departure from a Naturalistic presentation of events derives from the author's choice as he presents a new perspective. Realism is as descriptive as naturalism. It is in the writer's attitude to the subject matter that the difference lies. La Guma now tells much and shows little. For Naturalism-with the determinism and even fatalism

it implies- is a realm that the colonised have passed. Critical realism lessens the idea of static and frozen situations. New issues call for new concerns, hence for a new approach.

La Guma adopts Critical Realism for this mode accomodates his vision. It serves best his purpose in translating the new historical demands. Raymond Williams makes an interesting remark in this context:

Art can be seen as reflecting the essential forces and movements underlying them. This was, in turn, made the basis for distinction between realism (dynamic) and naturalism (static).<sup>26</sup>

~~It is important to note the fact that this process~~ is paralleled with La Guma's political evolution. Because his characters awaken from the passivity and prepare for action, he shifts from the naturalistic mode to Critical Realism which Lukacs, an exponent of Marxist aesthetics, defines as follows:

The realist manner of writing means discovering the causal complexes of society unmasking the prevailing view of things as the view of those who are in power. Writing from the standpoint of the class which offers the possible abstraction from it.<sup>27</sup>

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26- Raymond Williams, Marxism and Literature, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p, 96.

27- George Lukacs, Aesthetics and Politics, (London: Verso Editions, 1980) p, 159.

La Guma would agree with Lukacs' praise of Critical Realism. By investigating the main foundations of the political regime, La Guma not only reveals the falsity and absurdity of the system, but also directs our attention to a system whose existence must be eradicated.

Lukacs adds:

The goal of the realist novel is to penetrate the laws governing objective reality to uncover the deeper, hidden, mediated not immediately perceptible network of relationships that go to make up society.<sup>28</sup>

This is only possible through action. It is this strong motivation to action which characterises his realism; Lukacs pursues further:

Realist literature reflects human beings in action. The more vigorously the social and individual character of men finds expression in their deeds, or rather in the mutual interaction of their external circumstances, their emotions and their deeds, the greater the scope of realist presentation.<sup>29</sup>

If the relations between action and character change from A Walk in the Night to In the Fog of the Seasons' End it is because the

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28- Ibid., pp, 38-9.

29- George Lukacs, Studies in European Realism, (London: The Merlin Press Ltd 1972), p, 189.

aesthetic aspects are linked to the political context. Form is determined by the kind of matter it has to embody and translate. This development in the literary form flows from a shift in the writer's political attitude. It embodies a new stance in his perception of social reality.

This new mode could also be motivated by another impulse: the individual's self-assertion. The individual encounters forces which hinder him from gaining assurance ; nevertheless. He believes in possibilities of transcendence and freedom, and emphasis is on self-realisation. His emergence from the anonymous mass, the claims he dares make and the rights he openly asks for, for his own sake and own self as a human being, testify to his awakening. It is this rejection of this mass (in which he is invisible) which makes realism an appropriate means of expression here.

Thus if Naturalism emphasises the causality of human tragedy and underscores pessimistic determinism, it is of no use in this novel for man has become, in George Lukacs' terms, "a responding being", one with a choice . Hence, emphasis is on his dynamism, his choice and free will. As socio-economic determinism is counter-acted by individual resistance, the balance sways away from determinism to the individual's power of assertion.

Nevertheless, the Blacks are still in a state of disarray. They

do not seem to be aware that their passive resistance is a first step towards a more active involvement in political struggle. The goal is, as a result, uncertain and remote. This uncertainty is symbolised by the 'fog' enhancing a lack of assurance at this specific historical period which separates the foggy present from an **enlightened future** ; a period which represents the very time when the activities of the rebels are tested and their capacities are tried. For the end the narrator has artistically translated it into an imperceptible target. Blacks are still wrapped in the mists of indifference. Secondary characters respond to their context diversely. There are those who seek their new self and those who refuse involvement. Tommy takes shelter in the world of music, retreating as far as he can from the harsh reality of life. The Bennette, also, show apathy to the cause. Arthur Bennett cannot be trusted; all he can do is volunteer with a donation of ten shillings for the movement. There is also another character who disappears quickly from the plot: Beatie with her simplistic view of life. When Beukes tells her that injustice prevails in South Africa all she can say is "that is life. Isn't it? It is so hopeless. You only get into trouble." <sup>30</sup>

La Guma seems to suggest in this context that as long as these characters remain silent, independence remains uncertain. Nevertheless

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30- In the Fog of the Seasons' End, Op.6it., p,11.



this hedonism and political disengagement is counter-balanced by the commitment of some others. The balance is lifted up by a van driver, Henry April, and by other minor characters, in whose contribution hope lies and thanks to whom the 'foggy' weather can be cleared up as a result of their commitment to the revolution.

In the end though the future is too blurred to make out, the tone of the book remains optimistic. This is apparent in the style itself; Even the movement of the narrative is patterned in this sense. It is constructed on a shift from darkness to light. The first sentence is : "They arrested him"<sup>31</sup> but it ends with an affirmation of hope expressed, partly, by nature. There is a sense of coming light with dawn, hence the defeat of night and obscurity discernible in the concluding paragraph of the novel:

He ... turned back to where the children had gathered in the sunlit yard.<sup>32</sup>

This is deliberately used by the author to load the closing scene with a feeling of rebirth, as contrasted with the opening. The significance of these two parallel scenes, whose connotational distinction is pertinent, is worth underlining. Etienne Jouy pointedly observes that:

Les premières et dernières phrases du roman occupent une place stratégique dans la mesure où s'y décide le mode d'apparition et de disparition du texte. Ces zones limitent ces phrases-

31- Ibid., p, 1.

32- Ibid., p, 181

seuils sont saturés de signes sociaux puisque s'y déclenche la réalité fictive et la réalité référentielle, et que s'y déclenche un procès de communication.<sup>33</sup>

Optimism is heightened. This is typically a Marxist view of history. Triumph is on the side of the proletariat, manifested in the success of the underground movement:

Beukes had already read the reports with astonishment. The headlines splashed in black, astounded letters' explosions scatter pamphlets .... Underground movement still active.<sup>34</sup>

The departure of young fighters for training camps outside South Africa-to destroy forever the country of stone-calls for hope. La Guma corroborates this hope by using, as an epigraph some lines from the Guinean writer, Conte Saigon Titian's Martyrs in which he confidently holds that the shackles of subordination imposed on Africans by European oppressors will

Be shattered like the spider's web

In the Fog of the Seasons' end.

After this analysis, one can observe that though the story is rooted in the political actuality of South Africa, La Guma's imagination saves it from being labelled as a mere piece of propaganda. The revolutionary

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33- Etienne Jouy Roman et Société, Colloque du 6 Novembre 1971, Armand Colin, 1973, p, 271.

34- In the Fog of the Seasons' End, Op.Cit., p,144.

fire which informs this book does not weaken it aesthetically. La Guma patterns his experiences fusing characters, landscape and historical events in a successful way. Though fiction merges with history, he finds scope to create character and situation. The historical context is delineated but his fiction is no mere historical reporting. Despite its political tone and its author's political commitment, the artistic quality of the work is not spoilt because La Guma treats imaginatively. Though deeply engrossed with the political concerns of his country, he does not disregard the artistic standard by means of which correlation between fact and art is achieved.

Whether this misty atmosphere will be blown away as Walt Whitman's "On the Beach at Night" suggests:

Weep not child

The ravening clouds shall not be long victorious

They shall not long possess the sky.<sup>35</sup>

is what we propose to study in the chapter that follows.

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35- a poem used by Ngugi Wa Thiongo' ho as an epigraph for Weep Not Child.

THE THEOREMES OF EXPIATION

TIME OF THE BUTCHERBIRD

"La violence qui est faite au nègre se trouve de surcroît garantie par la constante éventualité d'une violence policière. Il est donc bien vrai que la lutte constitue son unique recours, et que cette lutte armée par tout un système d'exploitation et contre tout un appareil de repression n'a aucune chance d'aboutir si elle n'est largement collective. Or comment le deviendrait-elle sinon par la prise de conscience d'un destin commun, celui d'un groupe d'hommes, si commodément désignables par le blanc dans le cadre de la colonisation, à titre de Noirs en tant que 'race inférieure'. La prise de conscience de l'aliénation économique se confond ici plus ou moins dans la phase actuelle avec une prise de conscience de l'aliénation raciale."

Frantz Fanon.

Perhaps the first remark to be made about La Guma's last novel is that it is not one we would expect to come in the wake of In the Fog of the Seasons' End. Time of the Butcherbird does not seem to fulfill the promise of the novel considered in the preceding chapter. The reader expects to meet characters who are members of Umkhonto We Sizwe, ANC's 'Spear of the Nation', dedicated to acts of sabotage against public institutions and government installations. But the protagonist of this book is, to our surprise, a "delinquent". He is not employed in campaigns of political subversion. He does not follow in the steps of Peter, Paul and Michael, the guerilla fighters we saw at the end of In the Fog of The Seasons' End. Abdul Jan Mohamed, the American critic, claims that this book is ideologically regressive. in spite of- or rather because- of its 'blatant, unconvincing' call to arms. He holds that Time of the Butcherbird

tends to displace entirely the more complex meditations and insights of the previous novel. As a consequence the ideological function of Time of the Butcherbird becomes simpler. It straightforwardly advocates and valorises heroic participation in an armed war.<sup>1</sup>

And yet, a thorough study of the book reveals that the issue of

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1- Abdul Jan Mohamed, Manichean Aesthetics: the Politics of Literature in Colonial Africa (Amhrest: University of Massachusetts Press, 1983), p, 288.

the liberation struggle is subtly woven in the rich texture and structure of the work.

Alex La Guma's fifth novel is the first book which was not conceived in South Africa. The plot is about the personal revenge of shilling Murile, a young man who grows into an outlaw. We know through a flashback, that some years ago Murile and his brother Timi, working on an Afrikaner farm, were needed to give a hand at Meulen's sister's wedding party. But as they got drunk and let the sheep loose, they became subject to his brutality as well as to Opperman's, (Meulen's foreman). And Timi died tragically thereafter, while Murile was unjustly sentenced to a term of imprisonment after a tentative revenge on Opperman. Therefore, on his release from jail he kills Meulen, the one surviving murderer as well as Stopes, an English-speaking travelling salesman.

The other story which crosses with the central one deals with the mass removal, in the same area, of a whole black community from its birthland because some minerals are discovered in it.

The Meulens are involved here too. An important point which needs scrutiny and on which we shall, lay emphasis is the background.

Time of the Butcherbird is set in the country. We shall try to explain the importance of this shift from the city to a rural area.

Though the brutalities of the system still prevail, it is shown that it is possible to fight this power and defy the regime

it sustains. Expropriation is met with collective resistance now. This new form of struggle, openly defiant, is brought into relief precisely as a result of this shift of perspective.

Characterisation is another element of importance. First, the peasants are not led by their chief, Hlangeni, but by his sister, Mma-Taw. The emergence of a remarkably strong-minded woman character ought to be noticed. We shall see how, unlike the previous novels women characters were either weak, propelled by fate, fearful, indifferent or merely absent from the political scene, Mma-Taw sows the seeds of resistance in her people's minds. We shall focus on her characterisation because it seems to give an interesting clue to its significance in the struggle. It brings to the fore the idea that time has come for women, in La Guma's literary output, to participate in the liberation struggle, and that their collaboration and militancy is a prerequisite to the destruction of South African colonialism.

White protagonists also play a role in the plot. But they are there to convey their decadence and degradation. The events in which they are involved and their life stories point to this degeneration: the married life of Edgar Stopes and Maisie Barends, the tragedy of Oupa Meulen and the attitude of the Afrikaners towards the Blacks.

Time of the Butcherbird also lends itself to symbolic interpretation. One of the hallmarks of La Guma's style here is the effective use of

images drawn from the South African environment. As we shall see later these have some bearing on the theme itself. We shall also concentrate on certain linguistic features and motifs which recur with some frequency and explore their ramifications in depth.

Shilling Murile is urged to one act, one act only: avenging his brother's death. This forms the central movement of the book. We know right from the outset that Murile is gnawed by mental unrest. This unrest will culminate in tragedy:

"I will do something", he thought and rolled the bitterness in his mouth .... Death lay at his feet and waited to be aroused.<sup>2</sup>

He is mesmerised by the past. His brother's violent death, of which he has himself been an eyewitness, has bred in him a hatred which crouched like a leopard ... waiting but alive with the arousing blood of bitter memory.<sup>3</sup>

We know through flashback how both were tied to fence posts as untamed beasts. Here again, the Whites' ruthlessness is laid bare:

Shilling Murile wrestled with the flex but Opperman, in his

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2- Time of the Butcherbird, (London: Heinemann, 1979), p,66.

3- ibid, p,76.



rage, had been brutally efficient. .... They could not move: movement brought pain; afterwards there was only a numbness and muscles and veins and nerves barely functioned, as the constricting wire restricted the flow of blood.<sup>4</sup>

They spent all night in this painful position; they had been so brutally treated that by the next morning, Timi" lay like a broken doll"<sup>5</sup>

Infuriated by his brother's death, Murile cut Opperman's arm with a broken bottle:

Opening it to the bone so that he ~~was~~ ~~seized~~ ~~with~~ ~~pain,~~ ~~staring~~ at the belching blood.<sup>6</sup>

To our surprise, it is Murile who was sentenced to ten years' imprisonment whereas his tormentors and his brother's murderers had only to pay a fine. ~~This points~~ to the corruption of the judiciary.

Because racial hatred still holds sway, violence is here again the main theme of the book. It is no abstract violence either. Witness the climatic bloody execution of Hannes Meulen by Murile:

Hannes Meulen (awed and aghast at what he saw) did not recognise his own latest model automatic shotgun either, but wondered for a second why the black man had it because that wasn't allowed. Behind him Edgar Stopes saw the look of anger then

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4- Ibid., p, 75.

5- Ibid., P, 76.

6- Ibid., p, 76.

the flash, and heard the blast; the next thing was a slither and a heavy thump together with a wet slap across his cheek which was made by one of Hannes Meulen's ears as his head was blown off, and the whitewash of the passage-wall suddenly decorated with blood and brains and pieces of bone and fragments of teeth like pomegranate pips.<sup>7</sup>

Meulen's death sends us immediately to the main theme of the book. The butcherbird is the central thematic metaphor of the novel. A comprehensive understanding of imagery requires a knowledge of the South African myth and background. The butcherbird lives in areas where there are farm animals: cattle and sheep are harassed by small insects that suck their blood; and it is these very insects the butcherbird hunts to free the livestock from these parasites. This purging activity is ascertained in La Guma's following statement:

The title of the novel comes from African folklore. One of the riddles from the oral tradition indicates that the butcherbird represents something which did not only cleanse the cattle but also cleanses the society. It does away with the wizards, the sorcerers and those people who have a negative effect on society. It does away with the wizards, the

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7- Ibid,,p,110

sorcerers and those people who have a negative effect on society. What I am trying to say is that conscious **resistance** of the people heralds the time when the butcherbird will cleanse South Africa of racism, oppression and so on.<sup>8</sup>

We can conclude, therefore, that Murile is the butcherbird. The analogy between this character and the bird is determined by their singlemindedness. This likeness is corroborated by their cleansing activity:

Yes I know the butcherbird, Murile tells Madonele, that he is a hunter and smeller out of sorcerers because he impales in insects.<sup>9</sup>

The title alludes to the central theme of the book and sums its meaning: time has come for white oppressors to pay for the debts they have been accumulating for years. Hannes Meulens, the representative

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8- Alex La Guma, Op.Cit.,p,118.

This is reminiscent of a similar scene in the Moroccan Mohamed Kheir-Eddine's Une Odeur de Mantèque, where one of the characters says: "Dis plutôt à tes compatriotes qu'ils sont du même sang que toi, qu'il va falloir bientôt étriller le pays et le décharger de ses parasites; car il faut en finir avec ces insectes qui vous bouffent le sang". (See Marc Gontard, La Violence du Texte (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1981),p,143.

9- Time of the Butcherbird, Op.Cit.,p, 42.

of Afrikaner community, is associated with blood-sucking parasites. As a matter of fact, symbolism is obviously heavy. Conceiving his book abroad the author relies much on his imagination to create character. He explains this fact saying:

The characters in the novel are more symbolic than the ~~characters~~ characters in the other novels. I suppose because the characters in the previous novels are people whom I knew directly. Here I portrayed people whom I hoped were representative of the South African scene. I collected enough scenes of South African 'Bantustan', praying for rain, people in the desert and then I wrote. I tried to combine symbolism, character and action.<sup>10</sup>

This association we made above is further testified to by a detail in the second story which deals with the resettlement of the Blacks. It is Meulen who takes the matter of their dispossession in hand before the authorities, so that Afrikaner businessman can benefit by exploiting the land. It is he who carries out these aggressive plans. As he explains, speaking of the government:

They will set up the company fifty-two percent held by the government through them and the other forty-eight will be offered to the public. I, of course pointed out that you and I are interested in buying a substantial amount of these

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10- Alex La Guma, Op.Cit., p,117.



as Meulen's if South Africa is to be cleansed of negative forces.<sup>13</sup>

The reader can easily notice the irony of the book. Only when Meulen and stopes are executed are the Boers' prayers for rain fulfilled. These two characters are offered then as a sacrifice. Their execution is an operation of expiation.

La Guma seems to share here, Krapchenko's views of socialist realism:

Socialist realism takes part in the struggle against the survivals of the 'old world', against its noxious influence. It aims at extirpating these influences.<sup>14</sup>

What must also be borne in mind in relation to Murile's brutality is that violence proves to be the ultimate ratio. It is not a pathological symptom or a mere explosion after a loss of control as was the case with Michael Adonis. Contrary to the latter's violence which was self-inflicted, Murile's is a constructive one. He kills as an act of creation. His aggressivity frees him. It is therapeutic in true Fanonian fashion. Unlike the protagonists of the other books, Murile shakes off the status quo. He takes the law in his own hands and his act is an act of justice. And only when he ~~strikes back~~ ~~does~~ he b

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13- Alex La Guma, Op.Cit., p124

14- Mikhaël Krapchenko La Personnalité de l'écrivain et l'évolution littéraire (Moscou: Editions du progrès, 1974), p,248. My Translation

he becomes a man. Though he cannot change the world yet, he is no longer a nonentity. Emphasis is on the creative role of violence. Frantz Fanon has insisted on this fact. He states that:

At the level of individuals, violence is a cleansing force.

It frees the native from his inferiority complex and from his despair and inaction.<sup>15</sup>

Murile then becomes a rebel, a Robinhood-like figure. He is also reminiscent of the romantic outlaw of the nineteenth century European literary tradition or bandit d'honneur. Murile's action is emblematic of social re-ordering. As we have shown, his brutal behaviour proves a prerequisite for the restoration of an order that transcends the constraints of Afrikanerdom. It is vividly apparent that only counter-violence can guarantee such a new order.

Very significant then is the fact that the white is at the receiving end of deliberate Black violence. The victim turns now at the victimiser. This wind of change cannot be better illustrated than by Murile's attitude:

Murile put the weapon down in his pocket holding the shotgun in his blouse.<sup>16</sup>

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15- The Wretched of the Earth, Op.Cit., p,94.

16- Time of the Butcherbird, Op.Cit., pp,13-4.

Murile's attitude is reminiscent of that of Mamadouche, an urban character in Mohamed Dib's Le Métier à Tisser. At the end of the novel, Mamadouche buys a weapon and says it could be of some use someday.

Furthermore Murile's vengeful behaviour may have far-reaching implications. It could stand for the premonition of civil war. For the three protagonists, Murile, Stopes and Meulen, represent the three South African communities: ~~Black, English and Afrikaner~~. The narrator's point is that the situation of the colonised cannot be bettered unless they are committed to violence action.

The gradual maturation of his central character is evidenced by the upward movement from the first to the last novel. The main protagonist of And a Threefold Cord ascribes his people's oppression to the class system. More articulate, George Adams works against the oppressor and is consequently detained in The Stone Country. In In the Fog of the Seasons' End political action is resorted to and in the last book Murile undertakes a cleansing task. Commitment to the struggle has gone crescendo. The evolution of the attitude of the main protagonists parallels the development of the history of the black resistance in South Africa. This could correspond to the post-Soweto era when the oppressed became politically mature and deeply persuaded of the necessity of the armed struggle.

Retribution is carried on symbolically as well. Opperman's accidental death gives the narrator an opportunity to revive the myth of the ancient Zulu culture (where the importance of the snake is considerable). Opperman's superstitious mother affirms that:

A Kaffir knows snakes .... He and the snake, they are friends  
.... And does the snake not represent the first evil, the



Devil of the Garden that tempted Mother Eve? Ja, a black is a great friend of the snake.<sup>17</sup>

Opperman's death has ironical undertones. He is bitten by a poisonous snake. There is a sort of natural communion between the Black and the snake. This very union is emphasised by the fact that the snake paid Opperman back. Besides the place where he is bitten-the kloof- is sacralised by the Africans and symbolises resistance.

In this novel the author seems to urge the African to go back to his roots. He is preoccupied with his peoples' deprivation from their ancestral lands, which goes back to 1652. La Guma himself acknowledges that removals strike at the very basis of a people's life:

In the other novels, I have shown that there are so many aspects of South African life. If one is to give a good picture of South Africa, one must deal with some of these aspects. I believe that one of the most serious problems of South Africa is that of mass removal of millions of African people from their well-established homes, and the government programme to establish or reinforce 'Bantustans'.<sup>18</sup>

The countryside is fundamentally affected by capitalist penetration in its various forms manifested here by land expropriation. Owing to

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17-Time of the Butcherbird, Op.Cit., p,98.

118- Alex La Guma, Op.Cit., p,115.

the rapid growth of capitalism and to the Whites' ruthless chase after profits, hapless black peasants are forced off their land.<sup>19</sup> If in the preceding books urban life was the focus of attention where ghettos were hotbeds of crime, delinquency prostitution and unemployment, conditions of existence in rural life are no less harsh. The permutation of the geographic setting is significant. The antagonism between black and white has widened to encompass the whole country.

However while the poor Blacks are deported to arid areas to starve, plants and flowers are, in contrast, to be removed elsewhere to be preserved. The dialogue between Meulen and rine, his fiancée, receives a resolutely ironic treatment as he promises her "to rescue plants and flowers from the drought".<sup>20</sup>

Even nature comments on the general theme of dispossession. If in And a Threefold Cord the Coloured community is threatened by rain heat and drought are now used to symbolise the cruelty of the system. The weather accentuates hostility of the environment. Its role is emphatic as it highlights the aridity of the area and reinforces the

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19- This process is still underway and continues unabated. Speaking about the inhabitants of Mathopestad who are faced with removal, Monique <sup>the</sup> Blanchet, a journalist, witnesses: "Ils sont trainés jusqu'aux cars, laissant derrière eux leurs racines enfouies sous les décombres. Une combine pour le gouvernement Sud Africain: trois millions et demi de personnes ont déjà été placées de cette manière. Deux millions et demi sont encore menacées". ( Monique Blanchet, "Un Village Menacé" in Revue Autrement, n°15, Novembre 1985, p. 122.

20- Time of the Butcherbird, Op.Cit., p.62.

harshness of the setting. Heat creates a climate of tension. The heaviness of the atmosphere and a sweltering heat are set in parallel with the prevailing violence. However what strikes the reader's attention is that the Blacks seem to be at one with nature. This is testified by the fact that none of ~~them~~ complains about the heat. This is not at all the case of the white people who find nature awesome, and powerful. They cannot bear it and, as a consequence, pray for rain. To take only a few illustrative examples, Rina observes: "Isn't this heat frightful?"<sup>21</sup> And Maisie Barends,

leaned on the balcony wall eleven storeys up in the block of flats and left the heat, tropic in intensity, like a branding-iron on her skin.<sup>22</sup>

Dust is another pervasive symbol in the novel. It is used throughout and this recurrence is not uncalled for. Its first meaning may be stated briefly. Jean Chevalier and Alain Cheerbrant explain that:

secouer la poussière de ses sandales est une formule qui symbolise l'abandon total du passé, une rupture complète.<sup>23</sup>

This can be applied to Muril. He rejects totally the past, a past loaded with painful reminiscences. This is well illustrated by his

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21- Ibid., p, 59.

22- Ibid., p, 54.

23- Jean Chevalier and Alain Cheerbrant Dictionnaire des symboles (Paris: Editions Robert Lafont, SA, 1969), p, 785.

interior monologue: "I am not long for this place, he thought, no long."<sup>24</sup>

Dust also intensifies the impression of general decay, of sterility.<sup>25</sup>

It is congruent with the macabre atmosphere which seems to have swallowed those who are deported.

There is another **symbol** drawn from nature. A strong determination on the part of the Blacks is likened to the growth of a tree. Kobee, one of the peasants, states:

We have been told that we must go from our land ... but it is a very difficult thing to do, to uproot an oak of many years.

The roots of such a tree are very deep. Certainly one take an axe and cut down such a tree, that is easy but the roots remain and are very hard to dig up. You see, the tree really remains.

The tree goes on .<sup>26</sup>

Cultural identity is brought into focus through plant imagery. The sense of belonging is created through imagery drawn from the local environment. Its relevance is immediately obvious. The peasants are intimately bound to the land of their ancestors. The tree

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24- Time of the Butcherbird, Op.Cit., p,14.

25- This striking recurrence of dust is reminiscent of George Orwell's Nineteen Eighty-Four. This element conveys the atmosphere of general decay caused by the totalitarian government under attack. Here are two illustrative examples: "Winston Smith...slipped quickly through the glass doors to prevent a swirl of....dust from entering along with him".(p,5).Dust is even used in the portrayal of a woman character: "One had the impression that there was dust in the creases of her face."(George Orwell, Nineteen Eighty-Four (London: Penguin Books, 1949),p,20.

26- Time of the Butcherbird, Op.Cit., p,12.

symbolises their strong bonds with their native soil. The repossession of land has more than an economic dimension. Peasants are emotionally and psychologically attached to it. Apparently the narrator wants us to view the tree in a metaphorical relation to the determination of the peasants. The tree, with its roots deep underground, epitomises resistance and suggests regeneration. This image is very appropriate. For the point is that both have something in common; both continue to grow and none stops in its growth. The narrator resorts to metaphors but the latter are always part of his pastoral elements as they are based on the fauna and flora of South Africa. None of his images is exotic but all are appropriate to the immediate environment and its own culture. Hence we can safely conclude that the novel is both realistic-metonymic and symbolic-metaphoric.

La Guma's other purpose in writing this book was to

deal with the attitude of the white community to this issue of mass removals and to study their attitude to Blacks as a whole.<sup>27</sup>

In contrast to the previous books where the Whites were referred to as an authoritative and powerful force, in the present book, they are a spent force. The author develops a new attitude towards the exposure of the Whites. Some aspects of their inner lives are shown but only

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27-Alex La Guma, Op.Cit., p,116.

to reveal how mean they are. La Guma brings us closer to white characters only to vilify them. He portrays this segment of society in greater depth ~~but only to explore the spiritual poverty of their lives.~~

The author strips the myth of white civilisation from its unreality. He makes it clear to the reader that the civilisation they want to protect is in serious trouble. First, white characters are alienated and very superficial. The narrator underscores the vacuity of their lives. They are not themselves satisfied within society:

There were boys now and then, men in the foyers of cinemas.

There would be Tony Curtis but soon the tony Curtis' hairstyle became too common.... So after the matinée there would be the milkbars, the hot-dog counters secret cigarettes, the daring gin and lime,<sup>28</sup>

The narrator makes an implicit comment on their empty lives in a world of collapsing values. Edgar Stopes' instability is stressed. Maisie Barends' alienation is unmistakable:

In between counting money she could sit and read the film magazines or look at the latest fashions in the girls' clothes. But it could be a bore too.<sup>29</sup>

She even plans to kill her husband to inherit his pension.

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28- Time of the Butcherbird, Op.Cit., p,33.

29- Ibid., p,32.

Besides, their feeling of superiority determines their behaviour.

Christopher Meulen, Hannes' father, who is persuaded that

the Afrikaner dervolk is not the work of man but the work of God.<sup>30</sup>

is radically against any political change:

Can we believe in ourselves if we also allow ourselves to be influenced by the changing way of life in (overseas) countries.<sup>31</sup>

However Oupa Meulen, Hannes' grandfather, is the most fascinating instance of the alienated person. The past to which he clings desperately has impinged upon him in a special way. Mesmerised by past prestige, he is isolated from the world around him. Oupa is utterly careless about the present. All he remembers are the old days of glory and prestige. His deep concern for the past is corroborated by the narrative. We are told that when his granddaughter celebrates her marriage, his mind goes back to the day of his own marriage. This is one of his wistful and nostalgic recollections:

The old times, the old man thought painfully; the guests started arriving soon after sunrise. The carts, wagons drew up on the werf .... As noon draws near, the line of saddles has extended and the ox-wagons and cape-carts stand under the

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30- Ibid., p, 58.

31- Ibid., p, 58.

trees.<sup>32</sup>

Oupa's degradation appears through a depiction emphasising his powerlessness:

Dried out and stingy, Oupa Meulen was a bloodless and tough as biltong, the jerked meat he had loved on for most of his early years and seemed almost stubborn to refuse to leave this earth.<sup>33</sup>

His countenance is cadaverously wan. Oupa shows that those who were in the heyday of their lives end up despicably. His death is devoid of pathos. It epitomises the general pattern of disintegration. The author seems to stress the coalescence between Oupa's death and the fading away of the white South African community. Being too proud of his origins to make concessions, he turns his back on the present; hence his downfall.

The attitude of the white protagonists testifies to the fact that white South Africa is a putrefying sore. Their humanity is withering away. They are trapped in a world of chaos they have themselves created. The narrator insists on the fading away of ancient prestige and nobility, as the ~~earth's white strong community~~ has become morally limp. Their unscrupulousness is only an outward manifestation of an inner moral

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32- Ibid., p, 69.

33- Ibid., p, 58.



decadence. Colonial capitalist society is breaking down because it is too bound to a past which has lost connection with reality.

Afrikaners take their superiority for granted. Hence the indignation inadequation between reality as it manifests and the idea they have of the world. All that recalls the past is sacralised, magnified and venerated. We have some allusions to their 'heroic' past. As a Marxist the author bears history in view. His approach to the past is an attempt at clarifying the present: the Great Boer Trek,<sup>34</sup> The Boer War,<sup>35</sup> Dingaan's Day,<sup>36</sup> they celebrate enthusiastically. This establishes a

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34- The Great Boer Trek 1836-1854 is an important historical event. Several thousands Afrikaners migrated northwards across the Orange River. They left the Cape colony to penetrate deeper into the interior. When the British took possession of the Cape in 1806, the Boers became uncumbered by laws and taxation. Besides in 1835 English became the exclusive language of parliament. Having been faced with the loss of the culture of their ancestors, they had to subject to the English or leave. They did not migrate for ideological reasons only. The economic factor motivated them too. The abolition of slavery in the British empire in 1833 deprived frontiersmen of cheap labour. The Boers fled the Cape to become masters in independent free states. Their territorial expansion went unabated till the proclamation of the independence of Transvaal in 1852 and of Orange Free State in 1854.

35- The Boer War. The conflict between the Boers and the English began with the british occupation of the Cape. There were sporadic conflicts between the two rivals for supremacy. Both wanted to consolidate their gains. Their rivalry worsened with diamond and gold discoveries during the second half of the nineteenth century. This culminated in a war which lasted three years, 1899-1902. It ended by the Treaty of Vereeniging with the military defeat of the Boers.

Dingaan's Day,<sup>36</sup> they celebrate enthusiastically. This establishes a definite historical atmosphere. It is through this excessive bondage to the past that the author illustrates the policy which protects an outdated model of society.

The erosion of moral values, the hollowness of knowledge and physical skills have led to the dying out of traditional boer prestige.<sup>37</sup>

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- 36- Dingaan's Day (1839) is for the Afrikaners the commemoration of the day when the Trekkers defeated one of the most powerful kingdoms. Fearing the Boers' settlement at Natal, Dingaan, the Zulu king, besieged the Trekkers. But he failed in his attempt to face the Boers' expansionist movements; and three thousands Zulus were massacred in Blood River on December 16th, 1838. It has since then been celebrated by Afrikaners for whom it symbolises the power of the Trekkers. A monument is built there as a place of pilgrimage.
- 37- A discussion of Time of the Butcherbird invites comparison, on a thematic level with William Faulkner's The Sound and the Fury. The latter, which is a pertinent account of the old South, reflects a similar concern with decadence. The mood of the former is akin to that of the latter. There is a general resemblance between the two. The Snopes we meet in The Sound of the Fury are not different from the Snopes we see in Time of the Butcherbird. We have the same kind of characters and the same situation. Both authors present society in utter decadence. The fall of the house of the Compsons (replaced by the rise of the Snopes) is the symbol of the fall of the old, aristocratic order in the South. Faulkner shows that the loss of traditional principles and moral values has traumatic effects when undergone by a whole family: being affected by Northern, debased and corrupting values. The Compsons who were once representative of honor, courage, dignity, love and respect for traditional culture have become inward-looking and so selfish that their children suffer from a lack of love. Caddy, the daughter, is the symbol of social decadence as she leaves home and becomes a prostitute. Only Quentin is preserved. Like Emily in "A Rose for Emily", he rejects the principles of the new world and its mechanised civilisation. He bitterly fights in defence of his sister's honour. Moreover he is obsessed by time for the latter makes him aware of the change that occurs. A fact which makes him throw away his watch; this is very significant in relation to the theme as they believe in the values of the inherited tradition.

This irreparable decline of white civilisation is expressed by a character in J.M. Coetzee's Waiting for the Barbarians. That ~~such an~~ ~~exposures~~ ~~comes from~~ the pen of a white writer gives it a dramatic intensity:

What had made it impossible for us to live in time like fish in water, like birds in air like children? It is the fact of empire .... One thought above preoccupies the submerged mind of empire: how not the end, how not to die, how to prolong its era. By day it pursues its enemies; it is cunning and ruthless; it sends its blood-hounds everywhere. By night it feeds on images of disaster; the sack of cities, the rape of population, pyramids of bones acres of desolation.<sup>38</sup>

The author condemns the settler's ideology in their fierce protection of white civilisation. In a pamphlet "What is Destroying Civilisation in South Africa?" the historian Arthur Kepple Jones writes:

Civilisation is not defined by the colour bar, and that unless non-whites cease to be society's refuse, the verdict of history on the evanescent European civilisation in South Africa would be that it was a flame that flickered for only a few generations and then became a mere historical interlude

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38- J.M. Coetzee, Waiting for the Barbarians (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1981), p, 133.

between two dark ages.<sup>39</sup>

Besides their commitment to old-fashioned ideals, Whites are too acquisitive. The destructive power of capitalism is denounced; for the more wealth they acquire, the poorer they become spiritually.

Christophel Meulen is interested in nothing but in the accumulation of wealth. To him the country

is not only a geographic entity, an anthem, celebrations of 'Dingans Day' 'the Dry of Blood River' but a matter of who owns the flat, dreary red and yellow plains and the low, undulating hills, the grass and the water.<sup>40</sup>

The Whites are bereaved of moral values, Their decadence is explained in historical terms. Viewed in this light, Whites are wickedly unhuman. It is they who form a tribe and remind us of tribalism, as their greed drives them to primitiveness.<sup>41</sup>

The dying out of colonialism is, apparently, at the heart of this book. Indeed we are made to witness the gradual deterioration of a

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39- Arthur, Jones Keppel "What is Destroying Civilisation in South Africa?" in South African Institute of Race Relations (nd),p,11.

40- Time of the Butcherbird, Op.Cit.,p,57.

41- Marlow, the narrator of Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness makes an interesting remark in a similar context: "This jealousy of the world they have wrought with bell bearing and alarm clocks, this metallic wisdom has engineered a mutation in these people themselves." (Joseph Conrad, Heart of Darkness (London: J.M.Dent Sons, 1967),p,61.

Colonialism: The desire for material aggrandizement<sup>42</sup> has blinded the Whites to the immoral implications of their pursuits. The petty-mindedness of the Meulens and the Stopes alike is ample evidence of their decadence.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, there stands indomitable ~~Mmag-Taw~~. Unlike the previous books where women had no place in the struggle-Beukes tries to indoctrinate some male characters but not his wife, Mrs Bennett shuns politics and so does Beaties ~~Adams~~ ~~Mma-Taw~~ heads her people in their resistance to enslavement. Her portrayal deserves a detailed analysis. Physically, she is very strong:

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42- This fact evokes also Kurtz, the central character of Heart of Darkness. This novel, which is a document on brutal exploitation, demonstrates the consequences of an irresponsible heart. It records a journey into the darkness of self. Kurtz who is a promising agent in the company which sends ivory from the Congo to Brussels, becomes the embodiment of human meanness. Foregrounding this explorer's encounter with the primitives, the author reaffirms Kurtz's alliance with darkness and radical commitment to savagery. He is so interested in material wealth that he is turned into a devil, a savage, a barbarian. More, he is a criminal. His desire 'to exterminate all the brutes' (p,72) is put into practice. That he kills some of the natives and puts their heads on stakes around his house furthers the claims of true savagery. Like La Guma, Conrad shows how greed, wealth and selfishness destroy ethical values. Morally isolated, Kurtz is a portrait of moral deterioration. But only at this deathbed does he realise it: "The horror ! The horror !" he shouts. His death is ridiculed. Like Oupa, he is empty and hollow inside: "He is immobile looking like a winding sheet". (p,85) He is so greedy that this greediness is dramatised by Marlow: "I saw him open his mouth, it gave him a weirdly vocacious aspect as though he wanted to swallow all the air, earth, men before him." (p,85)

A heavy square woman. She looked as if she had been constructed out of blocks of darkwood of various sizes.<sup>43</sup>

Even her name is parallel to her strength and intrepidity: the she-lion. Madonele, the shepherd, likens her mighty voice to a roaring:

Her roaring would frighten everybody into obedience.<sup>44</sup>

Her physical force seems to mirror her remarkably impressive moral strength. She is a very determined woman. Very eloquent are the speeches she makes to shake off the passivity of her people. There are good clues in her language to support this evaluation. Some segments of dialogue may help us illustrate this. She bristles with anger and indignation:

Must we obey everything, as sheep obey the shears, or a cow at a milker's hands ?<sup>45</sup>

She shows no tolerance. She has a strong personality and this individualises her. Conscious of the potentialities of the masses she gives them spiritual sustenance. Perhaps the first point to note about her speech is that it is authoritative. Some verbs are in the imperative mood which is an essential clue to the meaning of her speech. The imperative is quite appropriate; Marc Gontard explains its function:

Les morphemes de l'impératif ... demandent au recepneur qu'il ne

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43- Time of the Butcherbird, Op.Cit., p,45.

44- Ibid., p,47.

45- Ibid., p,46.

se borne justement pas à décoder le texte, mais que, guidés par les injonctions du texte, il passe à l'action, c'est-à-dire qu'il change les données de la situation.<sup>46</sup>

Our attention is struck by her defiant behaviour. She is firmer and more articulate than Beukes. She spews out:

rage in the blood, the blood of people and law and guns have no blood.<sup>47</sup>

Mma-Taw symbolises the spirit of resistance and defiance and. She is a courageous articulator of this spirit. Her attitude bears an important relation to the plot. She opposes vehemently the government's policy and rouses admiration by her consistency. She possesses political wisdom and tries to convert her people to her own vision. Her portrayal seems indeed to unmask the author's political stand. For as the Marxist critic Gugelberger significantly remarks:

Since Marxists hold that the working masses are the true makers of history, the images of the masses, contained in literature are crucial signals of a writer's political standpoint.<sup>48</sup>

Mma-Taw shows more manliness than the male characters themselves. Her driving force throughout is the need to be free and it is this courage

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46- La Violence du Texte, Op.Cit., p,39.

47- Time of the Butcherbird, Op.Cit., p,47.

48- J.M. Gugelberger, Marxism and African Literature (New-York:Longman, 1985), p,71.

that impresses them most. She mobilises the black social forces and her people listen to her exhortations. She is reminiscent of Arfia, in Mohamed Dib's La Danse du Roi, who says:

Il faut qu'ils se réveillent .... Il faut quand même qu'ils ouvrent les yeux.<sup>49</sup>

And later on:

Et moi qui disais à mes hommes là-bas dans les montagnes: 'Que ce qui compte, c'est de donner la vie ! De se battre et de défendre la révolution ! Si personne n'accepte de se sacrifier, on y passera tous.'<sup>50</sup>

What is also striking in her description is that she wears man's boots. It is reasonable to assume that these boots stand for manliness. There is no denying the fact that it is her masculine aspects which are stressed. She is evocative also of Sélima in Salah Fellaoui's Les Barbelés de l'existence, whose political awakening is apparent in her clothing too:

Sélima la femme stérile, condamnée, jugée était morte. Sélima la révolutionnaire venait de naître et ses vêtements masculins, signe de sa résurrection, avaient brisé le lourd carcan de la tradition.<sup>51</sup>

It may be argued that boots, which are given special attention in

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49- Mohamed Dib La Danse du Roi, (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1968), p,174.

50- Ibid., p, 175.

51- Salah Fellaoui, Les Barbelés de l'existence (Algiers: SMED, 1967), p,88.



this book, are associated with awareness and assurance. It is of interest to draw attention to this element which recurs conspicuously in the story, and is brought out by two protagonists: Mma-Taw and Kurile. They are associated with will and bear overtones of courage, persuasion as well as of motivation. The interpretation given by Jean Chevalier and Alain Cheerbrant about shoes is very welcome in this regard as it casts a clear light on the message hidden by this symbol, suggesting its richness and profusion:

La chaussure est symbole d'affirmation sociale et d'autorité  
.... La chaussure est le signe qu'un homme s'appartient à lui-même, qu'il se suffit et qu'il est responsable de ses actes.<sup>52</sup>

We can conjecture that boot here points to the theme of land reappropriation. Mma-Taw refuses to be removed from the land of her ancestors, An idea she definitely thrusts in her people's minds. Here again, Jean Chevalier and Alain Cheerbrant expound that:

Mettre le pied sur le champ ou y jeter sa sandale, c'est en prendre possession. La chaussure devient aussi le droit de propriété.<sup>53</sup>

As we have shown, Mma-Taw dominates successfully the action of this sub-plot. With regard to her behaviour, it is difficult to go along

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52- Le Dictionnaire des symboles, Op.Cit., p, 218.

53- Ibid., p, 218.

with David Dorsey when he says:

The chief's sister articulates little and achieves less and "she is right but impotent and worse irrelevant."<sup>54</sup>

Nothing makes her irrelevant. On the contrary, her significant role is undeniable: it is time for women to take part in the struggle. La Guma's fifth book is a novel with an unequivocal political message. Not only men but women too must participate in the resistance struggle against Apartheid. It is through her that he stresses the importance of women's involvement in the struggle. This shift from male to female protagonists indicates the author's growing concern with the issue of revolution. Fanon does not overlook the considerable position of women in the political struggle either. He underlines their support and concrete assistance as they play their role as co-fighters and co-liberators for the emancipation of their country. The Algerian case is a good illustration:

Jusqu'en 1955, le combat est mené exclusivement par les hommes. Les caractéristiques révolutionnaires de ce combat, la nécessité d'une clandestinité absolue obligent le militant à tenir sa femme dans une ignorance absolue .... La décision d'engager les femmes comme éléments actifs dans la Révolution

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54 - David Dorsey "Time of the Butcherbird" in Books Abroad, Winter 1980, p.162.

Algérienne ne fût pas prise à la légère .... Progressivement l'urgence d'une guerre se fait ressentir .... La femme doit répondre avec autant d'esprit, de sacrifices que les hommes .... C'était évidemment une attitude totalement révolutionnaire d'asseoir la révolution en un point quelconque sur son activité, c'était une option importante.<sup>55</sup>

Furthermore the liberation movement is not given shape by men-women collaboration only. It is also sustained by the different racial groups of the marginal community: Blacks and Coloureds must unite. By this stage, the author's insight is coherently developed. In A Walk in the Night and And a Threefold Cord we were only concerned with Coloured protagonists. So was The Stone Country where the whole emphasis was laid on George Adams, a Coloured, and only a very slight allusion was made to Jefferson, a Blackman. But by the time we come to La Guma's latest two books, we meet Black protagonists. Elias is a Blackman; and so are Mma-Taw and Murile. The scope of involvement widens. The communal sense is enhanced: men, women, Black and Coloured are all involved now.

The geography of this novel is vast and humanly varied. As we have shown before, we have for the first time a panoramic view of South Africa. La Guma's characters are not limited to one particular section.

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55- Frantz Fanon, L'An V de la révolution algérienne (Paris: Editions Maspéro, 1959), pp, 30-1.

Though cut off from his raw material, when he wrote this novel, he does not seem to fall prey to what Ezekiel Mphahlele calls "The tyranny of place". La Guma has succeeded to bring forth a total picture of life in a class-stratified society. He explains:

I tried to draw pictures of the Coloured people in my earlier books. Having dealt with them to a certain extent I then turned to other scenes in our society. I started in In the Fog of the Seasons' End where we not only have Coloured people but the rest of society comes into the picture in the country and their relationships.<sup>56</sup>

Contrary then to Alan Paton's Cry the Beloved Country where the passivity of the Blacks is emphasised, La Guma's characters refuse to turn the other cheek. While Alan Paton preaches resignation and patience to all injustices, La Guma presents characters who are stubbornly committed to change. Besides his characters are autonomous. They receive no assistance from white Liberals as Paton's characters do.

La Guma seems to support Ezekiel Mphahlele's view that:

You must reject the Liberal because he does not know that his soul, his mind is in chains.<sup>57</sup>

Mma-Taw's indoctrination of the peasants and the iron will she has

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56- Alex La Guma, Op.Cit., pp, 116-7.

57- Ezekiel Mphahlele, The Wanderers (New York: Longman, 1971), p, 164.

been exerting on her people have borne fruit: they have succeeded in driving back the authorities:

A youth hurled a stone at the sergent ... the clerk panicked and fled, dropping his file of papers, the official documents, skidding across the land .... The clerk was climbing wildy into the randrover, as a black bounced from the wire mesh over the windscreen .... The crowd of villagers advanced behind the hill of stones that starred windows and gashed paintwork.<sup>58</sup>

What further energises these people is music. Because the latter bears elements of defiance, it is a strong counterpoint to the system. Communal consciousness is expressed through the freedom songs to strengthen the Blacks' will to resist. This illustrates significantly the use of culture for political ends. Highly political in content, it stirs patriotism in them as its avowed role is consciousness-raising. This is the reason why the peasants.

commenced to sing again, moving with the rhythm of the song.<sup>59</sup>

When the authorities came to relocate them. The significance of such songs is plainly expressed by La Guma:

Dans la lutte politique, le chant et la chanson politique

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58-Time of the Butcherbird, Op.Cit., p,111.

59- Ibid., p,112.

sont en même temps protestation et appel, souvent même le travail difficile peut-être mieux maîtrisé avec le chant.<sup>60</sup>

Protest then found fertile ground in rural environment too. The government's attempt to enforce the law is resisted. That Mma-Taw's poor and uprooted peasants drove away the officers is very ironical on the part of La Guma. For this success is a poignant answer to the sergent's belief in their inability to do anything against the government:

Who would have thought that these bloody Kaffirs would start something like this ?<sup>61</sup>

The fact that the colonised succeed to shake off the established order calls for deeper attention. This is another feature of the Socialist Realist doctrine for according to Frederick Engel's definition:

Un roman à tendance socialiste remplit parfaitement sa mission quand par une peinture fidèle des rapports réels, il détruit les illusions conventionnelles sur la nature de ces rapports, ébranle l'optimisme du monde bourgeois à douter de l'ordre existant.<sup>62</sup>

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60- "Litérature en Lutte", Entretien avec Alex La Guma in Newe Dtshe literatur n°2, 1983, p, 32. Translated by Mr Attiche El-Hadi.

This point is also emphasised by the artist, Madhlope Phillip, who affirms that his songs "are part of the armoury of our people. They are marching side by side with them, they are a way of life". (Quoted by A. Siemsky's "Anthem of Freedom" in The Third World Book Review, Vol. II n°s 182, 1986, p, 105).

61- Time of the Butcherbird, Op.Cit., p, 113.

62- Quoted by Haroche Charles, Les Langues du roman (Paris: Les Editeurs Français Reunis, 1979), p, 29.

Mma-Taw's people would not succeed if they were not united. She explains to Murile the inefficacy of individual fights, and the way individual freedom is bound up with all members of the oppressed group:

You can be of use to us. You have hatred, strong hatred.

The desire to find justice. But do not be satisfied with your personal achievement of justice. If you find it, it is a small thing when compared to the people's need for justice ....

A man with your desire belongs with the people.<sup>63</sup>

Accordingly the narrator uses the first person plural instead of the first person singular, thereby enhancing stylistically this theme. Mma-Taw convinces her people of the efficiency of solidarity in action. What exists at the individual level has only meaning once it is perceived as part of the totality: ambitions, aspirations, emotions have to transcend the individual level for the survival of the individual. Fanon expresses the same idea:

The practice of violence binds them together as a whole. Since each individual forms a violent link in the great chain, a part of the great organism of violence which has surged upward in reaction to the settler's violence in the beginning. The groups recognise each other and the future nation is already indivisible. The armed struggle mobilises

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63- Time of the Butcherbird, Op.Cit., p, 80.

the people. That is to say, it throws them in one way and in one direction.<sup>64</sup>

In the end the reader notices a change in Murile's attitude. His vision, which was first personal becomes collective as he joins the masses and supports their efforts to cleanse society and rid it of its suckers. What began as an individual concern becomes a communal one. His personal desire embraces a communal will for a complete social change. If at the beginning of the third book we were concerned with the character of Charlie Pauls and with his reaction to the claim of his family, by the end of the sixth chapter, the author's central figure responds to those of the community. This novel presents characters who strengthen their ranks against their common foe. Oppression then plays the role of a catalyst in the liberation struggle. It is the cement which binds them together for it is their wretchedness that unifies them.<sup>65</sup>

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64- The Wretched of the Earth, Op.Cit.,p,98.

65- What is implied here is the Marxist idea that it is a people's economic conditions that determine their consciousness. Marx observes: "In the social production which man carry on, there enter definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will; these relations of production correspond to a definite stage of development of their material powers of production. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundations on which rise legal and political structures to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness .... It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but on the contrary, their social existence which determines their consciousness." (Karl Marx, A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy (London: Penguin Books, 1965),p, 5.



The resistance movement spreads to the Karoo hills. The connection between this uprising and the violent outbursts in the cities is established by Mma-Taw who came to the country to continue the activities she began in the city. Violence flares up in various parts of the country as a reaction to local grievances. It has become endemic. What is called for is the raising of the struggle to a new level of combining action in town and country. The fermenting burden of grievances provides material for political agitation says La Guma:

In addition of course, it is not only the fact of the 'bantustans' but also the attitude of the people and the resistance that's been put upon various levels in the rural areas to this policy. When the idea of writing a novel on this came to me, I thought it was necessary to combine the effect of 'the bantustans' and the resistance of the people.<sup>65</sup>

This resistance is not there for its own sake. La Guma not only shows the flaws of capitalist society but aims insistently at destroying it. This is another particularity of Socialist Realism. For Ibiola Irele defines this method as

a work whose conscious direction is towards the attainment of a social ideal established through the presentation of exemplary characters and situation. The artist's role in this

conception becomes that of both witness and reformer.<sup>67</sup>

The revolutionary process does not degenerate in Time of the Butcherbird. The revolutionary prise de conscience is still present. If in the first, three books man is crushed by social forces, now there is an effective counter-force to these forces. Though Hlangeni's people are removed to a sterile land, and though the strike geared towards the right to possess the land was quelled, the oppressed are resilient still. Mma-Taw's people go up the hills to carry forward the struggle, perhaps also make preparations for a more advanced phase. Their protest bears their unrestrainable desire to be free. This attitude corroborates further the Realist Socialist doctrine. For as Sholokhov puts it:

Le Réalisme Socialiste porte en lui l'idée d'une rénovation de la vie, de sa réorganisation pour le bien de l'homme ..... Son originalité réside en ce qu'il exprime une conception du monde qui n'admet ni attitude contemplative, ni l'abandon de la réalité, qui appelle au combat pour le progrès de l'humanité ... et qui éclaire les chemins de la lutte.<sup>68</sup>

The Blacks' attitude is certainly a symptom of the militant spirit. Hence while La Guma vilifies the Whites and shows their decadence, he

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67- Ibiola Irele, The African Experience in Literature and Ideology (London: Heinemann, 1981), p,158.

68- Quoted in "La Personnalité de l'écrivain et l'évolution littéraire", p,250.

Re-asserts the dignity of the Blacks. Indeed, the idea of black regeneration is insistent. First, the shepherd finds water in the Kloof, the very place where opperman died. And this - regeneration is artistically illustrated by the narrative structure: the narrator offers us a structural irony, beginning with the whites at the top and ending with their downfall. While time of the Butcherbird traces the descent into despair on the part of the whites, it stresses the upward movement of the Blacks as they come little by little to occupy the front scene and rise.

It may be somewhat simplistic to suggest merely that La Guma adopts Frantz Fanon's view for we have no evidence so far of any indebtedness of his. But contrary to the marxist theory of violence of nineteenth century Europe, whereby the peasantry was not really developed for any action, here situations and characters could better be considered from the point of view of Frantz Fanon's theory of violence; because the latter function as the framework within which a course of action can be pursued towards the destruction of colonialism .

In his last book, the author moves towards a more socialist concern; this widened scope seems to explain again this shift of perspective from critical Realism to Socialist ealism:

"Le réalisme reflète les contradictions très aigues de la société, ignore les voies de sa transformation. Le Réalisme Socialiste ne se contente pas de montrer la nécessité de rénover le monde mais il voit aussi les possibilités et les

moyens de réaliser ces changements de la vie même.<sup>69</sup>

It is in the people's resistance and solidarity that hope seems to lie. A note of confidence is struck by a rain as well as by a bird, a symbol of freedom. The general climate of tension created by heat is released as the latter precedes thunder, emblematic of battle:

It seems that the air, heavy with the heat begins to move. It has weight it moves soundlessly and heavily, gathering momentum. Something has created a movement of the hotter air that must find its way down.... The movement of the wind builds up and carries the stinging dust ... Then the thrust of the wind lessens and the difference in air makes life possible again .... The yellowing afternoon light puts a golden colour on the land. A flight of birds' swoop overhead towards a water-pole.<sup>70</sup>

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69- Ibid., p, 251.

70- Time of the Butcherbird, Op.Cit., p, 119.

C O N C L U S I O N

An exhaustive reading of La Guma's novels leads us to the conclusion that these can be divided into two distinct categories. While the first three have been concerned with the brutalities and polymorph violence inflicted upon the oppressed, the last two have been dealing with their ~~resentment against the racist and capitalist oppression.~~

La Guma does not understate the fact that the colonised have also the status of Blacks in a white racist society. He has drawn attention to the unbearable burden of racism in the country. He asserts in one of his articles

I have been faced by incredulous people who expressed doubts about the shocking truth of racism in South Africa .... No doubt people could have expressed similar incredulity about Nazi Germany when told that soap had been manufactured from the fat of victims of concentration camps.<sup>1</sup>

La Guma's books depict outstanding features of colonialism, its shattering effects as well as the revolutionary violence which colonialism generates. They convey the nature of subjugation together with the dynamics of gradual rebellion against Apartheid. The protagonists develop from the state of alienation to that of recognition. If the first three novels focus on the experiences of the alienated individual, the last two concentrate rather on those of the self-asserted. In all his books we witness colonial violence-as exemplified by police violence-

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1- Alex La Guma, Apartheid, Op.Cit., p,11.

which generates self-inflicted violence. Being unable to fight back, the Blacks fight one another. But from In the Fog of the Seasons' End onwards, though colonial violence, i.e, state violence is present, we witness the emergence of revolutionary violence. The reader's attention is drawn to the image of violence from the perspective of the Black. In this context, we can observe that the author does not go through the itinerary of the colonised writer as Frantz Fanon put it.<sup>2</sup> He rather goes straight to the last phase. All his books bear the burden of protest right from the first one. His novels which produce reality correspond to the subject of his quest as they call to protest.

La Guma makes it clear that the colonised cannot attain his freedom unless he destroys the colonial order. And the gradually changing role of his protagonists, from the first to the last novel, is not

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2- Fanon explains; "In the first phase, the native intellectual gives proof that he has assimilated the culture of the occupying power. His writings correspond point by point with those of his opposite members in the mother country. His inspiration is European and we can easily link up these works with definite trends in the literature of the mother country .... In the second phase we find the native is disturbed, he decides to remember what he is. This period of creative work approximately corresponds to that immersion which we have just described. But since the native is not a part of his people, he is content to recall their life only .... Finally in the third phase, which is called the fighting phase, the native after having tried to lose himself in the people and with the people's lethargy and honored place in his esteem, he turns himself into an awakener of the people." (The Wretched of the Earth) Op.Cit., p, 155.

incidental. This progressively stronger feeling of self-validity becomes the drama of recognition between the individual and society.<sup>3</sup>

It is important to add in relation to this evolution that the progression of La Guma's books reveals the evolution of the writer himself, together with that of the South African political situation: from passivity, as evidenced by the ANC's policy in Albert Luthuli's time, to active resistance, as evidenced by Nelson Mandela's and further to the liberation struggle following the post-Soweto era.

The reader notices easily the way colonial violence, which is exercised by a white, racist class gives rise to anti-colonial counter-violence, which is headed by a black class. A& is clearly shown in the last books, the colonised rise against the coloniser. Peasants and workers protest against the capitalists. And the very defeat of capitalism is set in parallel with the upward movement of both the peasantry and the lumpenproletariat. This shift is adequately conveyed through some indicators: characters the general themes, as well as the situations in which these characters are implicated.

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3- La Guma wants the colonised to recover his dignity. The writer's role as a witness and reformer is patently put by Chinua Achebe: "The worst thing that can happen to any people is the loss of the dignity and self-respect. And it is the writer's duty ... to help them regain it by showing them in human terms what happened to them. What they lost." (Quoted in African Writers on African Writing) Op.Cit., p.8.



This evolution from violence to counter-violence is also perceptible stylistically. From our analysis of his books, there appears an interaction between the forms of the novels and their substance. The movement of fictional, novelistic technique from Naturalism to Critical Realism, and lastly, to Socialist Realism reflects the movement of historical change.

The historical aspect of the novels is evident. The writer's fiction is closely tied to political development as it depicts the growth of the political awareness of his protagonists. They trace the various stages in the development of the revolutionary struggle. La Guma's stories forms a coherent itinerary which evolves simultaneously with the revolutionary praxis, disclosing a progressive intensification of the author's vision. His fiction is busied with a presentation of the various steps of the Blacks' struggle against colonisation, providing the development of the tempo of the revolution. His books present an overall picture of South African reality. They provide us with an idea of the different periods of the South African situation from the fifties onwards. After reading his novels-which emerge as a direct response to specific political, historical, social and economic factors-the reader acquires a total view of the South African situation and is made aware of the different strains that overwhelm the Black.

La Guma's work is imbued with the atmosphere which manifests in the struggle of the liberation movement; indeed, according to Terry

Eagleton,

To write well is more than a matter of 'style'; it also means having at one's disposal an ideological perspective which can penetrate to the realities of man's experience in a certain situation.<sup>4</sup>

The ideological function of La Guma's books is to bring to light various aspects of the colonial experience. But if the ideological function of the first set of books is to capture the alienation of man, that of the second focuses on the individual's coming to consciousness. This proximity of art and politics testifies to the powerful influence of the colonial context on the literature it gives birth to.

It is then in art that La Guma finds the means of voicing his people's grievances. This function is underpinned by Roland Barthes who explains that:

L'écriture est une fonction. Elle est le rapport entre la création et la société; elle est le langage littéraire transformé par sa destination sociale. Elle est la forme saisie dans son intention humaine et liée ainsi aux grandes crises de l'histoire.<sup>5</sup>

La Guma's novels are directly related to his country and to its concerns. He does not retreat into a mythical universe. He situates

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4- Terry Eagleton, Marxism and Literary Criticism, p,8

5- Roland Barthes, Le Degré zéro de l'écriture, Op.Cit., p,14.

his stories in South Africa, a country where his formative experience took place. And both place and time are important elements as the former witnesses the psychological evolution of characters in a particular place. This is conform to Lukacs' definition of realism as 'the reproduction of typical characters under typical circumstances'. La Guma's books are records of human experience, an experience which is given a socio-historical meaning. He presents us in the language of art the history of the country, hence the human relevance of this writing. The Nigerian critic, Kalawole Ogungbesan, affirms that:

The writer is a member of society and his sensibility is conditioned by the social and political happenings around him for these issues form a part of the substances of life within which his instinct as a writer must struggle.<sup>6</sup>

Consequently by concerning himself with problems created by colonialism, white settlement and racism, and by exploring his imaginative potentials to reflect some aspects of life, La Guma acts as a historian... He is among those Luc Bérinmont alludes to when he writes:

Qui donc laissera le témoignage de notre temps ? Qui dira la

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6- Ogungbesan, Kalawole, 'The Modern Writer and Commitment,' a paper presented at the conference on Literature and Modern West African Culture, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, September 11-15, 1972, pp. 5-6.

v vie, cette chose incroyable et menacée, cette légende quotidienne, cette bête aux flancs creusés avec sa langue hors de sa bouche ? On demande des poètes de sang, on demande des poètes signés de notre angoisse.<sup>7</sup>

He is the spokesman of his oppressed countrymen, as is Dennis Brutus who says:

Ma bouche sera la bouche des malheureux qui n'ont point de bouche, ma voix, la liberté de celles qui s'affaissent au cacbot du désespoir.<sup>8</sup>

La Guma is no mere prose writer. He shares Fanon's and Césaire's view that part of the responsibilities of a man of culture is to understand the world in all its intricacies, and try to change it. He demonstrates that man must be free from all the forces that hinder him from developing his full potentials:

I have tried in all my literary work to convey the life of the people living under Apartheid and racial discrimination, and their spirit of resistance to national occupation.<sup>9</sup>

And by doing so, he works in parallel with the liberation movement. His art he puts at the service of the liberation struggle, makes him that

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7- Quoted in Les Guetteurs de l'aube, p,135.

8- Quoted by Jacques Rabemanjoro "Le Poète noir et son peuple" in Présence Africaine 1957, Fourth Quarter, p,4.

9- Kenneth, Parker, "La Guma's Walk to Freedom" in The Third World Book Review, Vol II, n°s 1&2, 1986, p,8.

'gadfy' Socrate speaks about:

I am that gadfy which God has attached to the state, and all day long in all places am always fastening upon you, arousing, persuading and reproaching you. You will not easily find another like me, and therefore, I would advise you to spare me.<sup>10</sup>

From a discussion of his novels so far, we can safely conclude that La Guma's revolutionary fervour has not diluted the artistic value of his work. His involvement in politics does not mar the literariness of his novels. His imaginative treatment of violence has made his art part of a historical reality, adapting the form to the political weight the literary work has to carry. He has been able to put forth his political image without impairing the aesthetics of his art. His themes which are deeply human in the presentation of painful subjects, found an adequate means of expression. He balances well between the requirements of both art and the political demands of the revolution. La Guma proves that form and subject matter are indistinguishable; and though engrossed with political and public issues, his commitment is in no way detrimental to his artistic potentials. Hence his success as a writer thereby decrying Lewis Mkosi's statement- we referred to in the introduction.

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10- Plato, "Apology to Socrate's Defence" in Dialogues of Plato (New York: J.D.Kaplan, 1950), p, 25.

~~Introduction which becomes now debatable~~ Nkosi himself

compared his writing in some respects to that of Doestoevsky, which one considers that the Russian writer is one of the greatest of all time is high praise indeed. But while I agree that La Guma is a vastly talented writer, the impact that his novels had on me was that he had a very good mixture of the genius of a Damon Runyon mixed up with some of the pre-revolutionary policies of Gorki.<sup>11</sup>

Part also of La Guma's achievement lies in that his literature does not only reflect his people's struggle for emancipation, but re-invigorates them for this very struggle. Unshakably convinced of the triumph of peace over tyranny, he gave his people a sustaining image of hope. Accordingly, his books do not hold defeatism but optimism to transform an unjust system into a democratic one. Hence what all his novels have in common is faith in survival brought forth by a note of rebirth at the end of each. He insistently puts forward hope that the oppressed will live on. He underpins this vision below:

In the face of tremendous odds, in the face of pressure put upon us, we do not fear the future. Confident in the final emergence of the true ideals of humanity, culture and progress in our country. Although many of us have been forced into exile to live as refugees in strange countries, I do not

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11- Quoted by an ANC veteran in Sechaba Magazine, January, 1986, p,31.

believe we have become so demoralised as to doubt the final victory.<sup>12</sup>

He ensures his fellow countrymen at home that there is a way out of this moral chaos. His position is reminiscent of Pushkin's who proclaims the optimistic perspective for a better future:

And I will long be dear to my people  
For I roused with my lyre good sentiments  
For in my cruel time, I praised freedom  
And brought comfort to the fallen.<sup>13</sup>

La Guma's hope for a bright future, to which all his books open a window, is strong. His preoccupation is not limited to past and present but transcends them to the future. As a result, he seems to have avoided the problem Clive Wade Raises :

Is African literature so absorbed in the present state of Africa that it forgets its future as literature ? ;.:. Is the present African literature of the present state and immediate past simply of interest only to the sociologist and historian, or the academic literary historian?<sup>14</sup>

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12- Alex La Guma "The Condition of Culture in South Africa" in Présence Africaine fourth quarter, 1971, p,121.

13- Quoted By George Lukacs in Writer and Critic, pp. 248.

14- Clive Wade, The Writer in Modern African State, Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1986.

La Guma died in October 1985. He died, ironically, before seeing the fruit of what he had been ardously working for: a Democratic South Africa. Therefore, he could never say what Ezekiel Mphahlele said, after his return home, though before freedom is won:

I was usually quite mystical. I have a strong attachment to my ancestors; and I knew I eventually would have to return to my birthplace.<sup>15</sup>

Nevertheless, his name will certainly live on. For according to Paul Valéry:

Il reste d'un homme ce que donne à penser son nom et les oeuvres qui font de ce nom un signe d'admiration, de haine ou d'indifférence.<sup>16</sup>

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15- Quoted by Shreeve David, "A Rebel and his Roots" in The Guardian, May 7th, 1979, p. 12.

16- Quoted by Marcel Manville in Memorial International Frantz Fanon 31 Mars-3 Avril Fort de France, 1982, p. 24.



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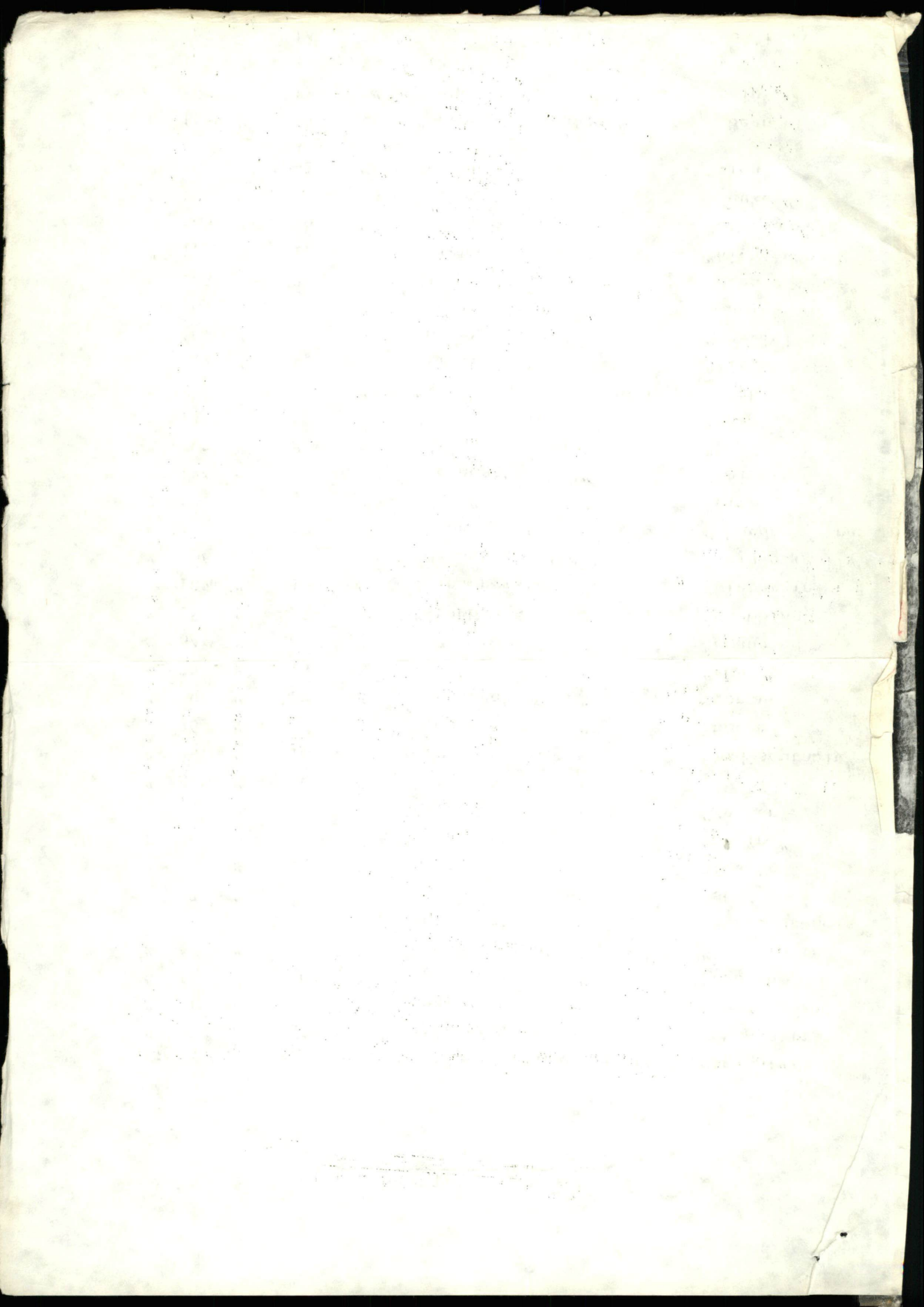
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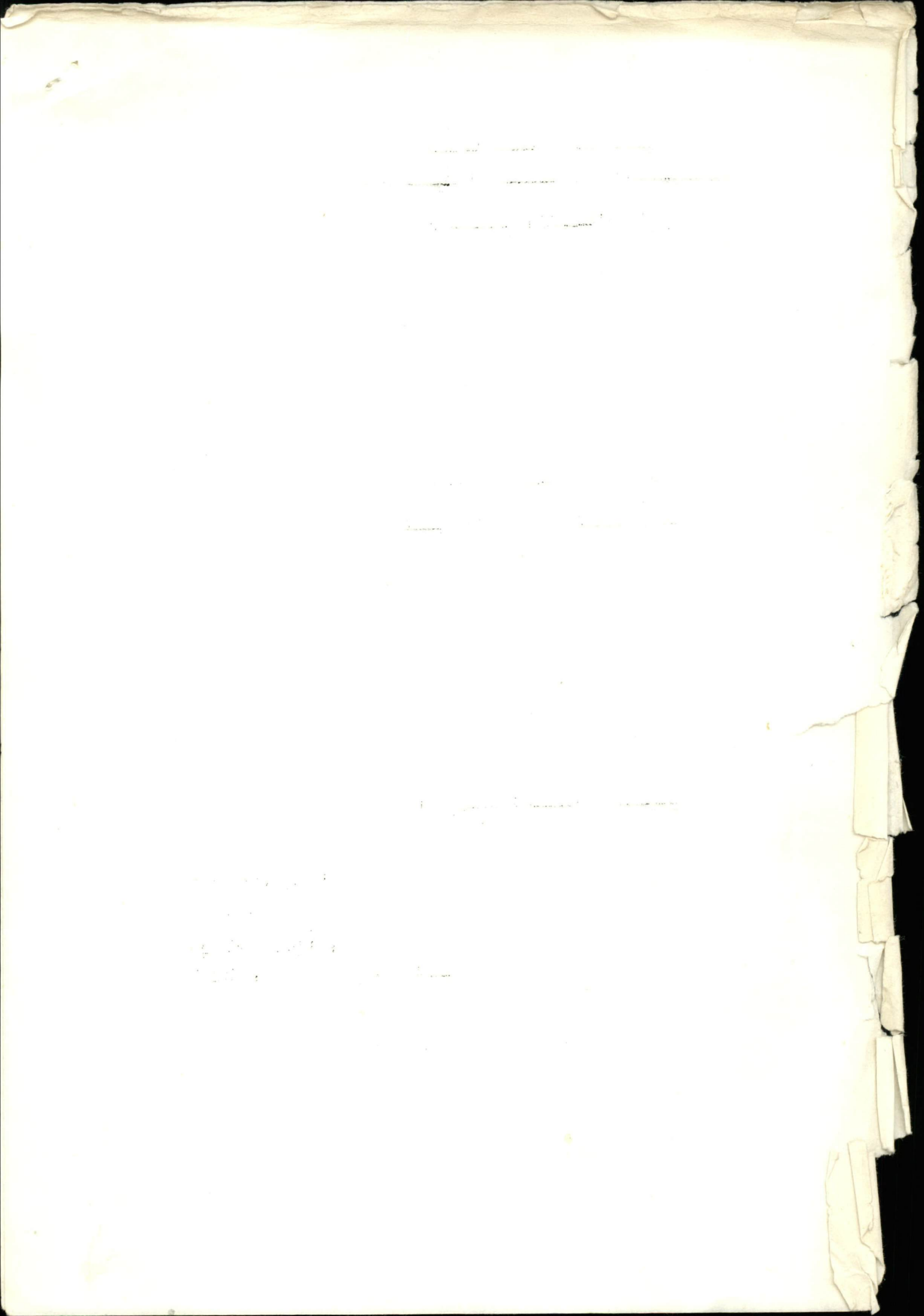
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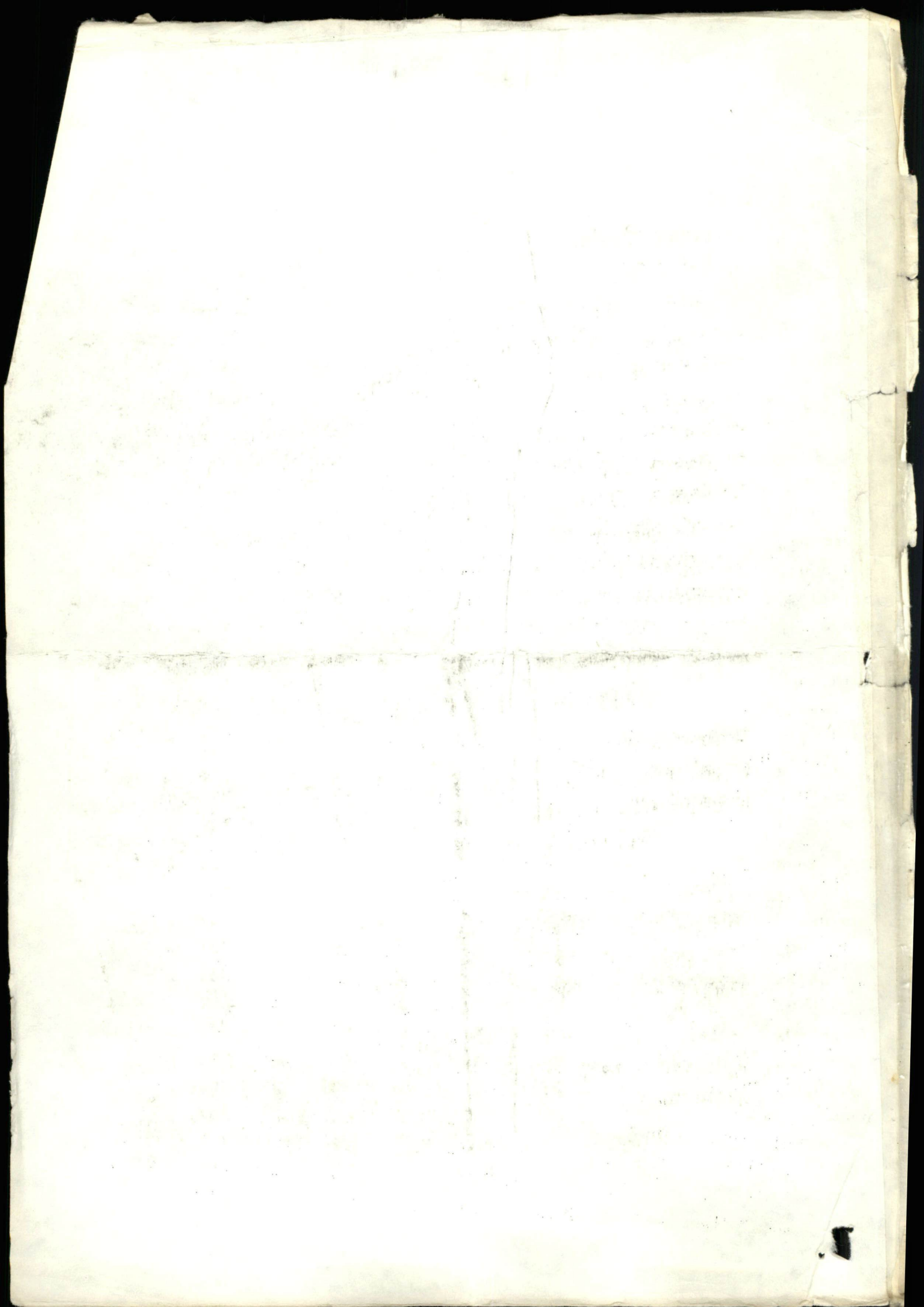
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الهدف الذي ترمي اليه هذه الرسالة هو دراسة موضوع العنف والعنف المضاد عند كاتب جنوب افريقي الكس لاغوما . ان اختيارنا هذا الموضوع يرجع الى اهمية ومكانة هذا الكاتب في الصراع الذي ما فتىء يفرق افريقيا الجنوبية . اضف الى ذلك ان كاتبنا يعد رمزا وتمثيلا صادقا للجيل الذي ينتهي اليه .

غير ان دراستي هذه تتناول موضوعا من وجهة نظر ادبية ، الشيء الذي يجعلها تتأرجح بين الخيال والواقع ، وهذا ما يجعلها تنتمي اثر العنف الذي يشكل الخيال في مؤلفات لاغوما . وهي بذلك ترمي الى اظهار صورة العنف من منظور الانسان الاسود .

بالإضافة الى ما سبق فان اهتمام الاديب بموضوع كهذا يدل على العلاقة الوثيقة بين العامل السياسي الاجتماعي والابداع الفني . وهذا طبيعي لانه يعود اصلا الى الالتحام الموجود بين النص الادبي والاجتماعي ، وعليه فلا غرابة ان يهتم الاديب بقضية كهذه .

نظرا لطبيعة الموضوع فان التوزيع المنهجي للدراسة يكون كالتالي :

نبدأ اولا بعرض تاريخي لتباين الشياق الاجتماعي السياسي لهذه الظاهرة .

بعد ذلك نتناول بدراسة قصص لاغوما خمسة فصول حيث تتم تغطية الفترة من اواخر الربيعينات الى اواخر السبعينات . توزيع الدراسة الى خمسة فصول يعود الى الاختلافات الاسلوبية التي يميز هذه القصص .

بعد دراسة التفسيرات ان على مستوى الاسلوب ارفع مستوى مواقف ابطال القصة ، يتبين لنا ان هناك تحولا عاما في تفكير لاغوما .

يتمثل هذا في ان الكاتب في بداية حياته الادبية يصور لنا الانسان الاسود كضحية لنظام عنصري . غير ان هذه الصورة تتغير بعد ذلك اذا نواه يصور لنا انسانا يريد تأكيد ذاته بالاضافة الى هذا نجد كتابات لاغوما تصور لنا السمات المميزة والعنف الثوري الذي ينتج عنه .

ولكن رغم حدة الصراع والمعاناة فان لاغوما استطاع ان يتجاوز اثار الاباتيد التي من شأنها ان تؤدي الى التدمير والاعتراب والخناء الاخر . اما من الناحية اللفظية فيمكن القول بأنه رغم تداخل الحقيقة مع الخيال ، فان الكاتب تمكن من ايجاد الفضاء اللازم لشخصياته والاطار المناسب دوران يكون ذلك على حساب المعايير الفنية التي بواسطتها يتحقق ربط العلاقة بين الواقع والفن .