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**Presented by:  
SALEM Amar**

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**Prejudice, Violence and Death  
in Alex La Guma's *A Walk in  
the Night* and Richard  
Wright's *Native Son***

Board of examiners:

Zerar Sabrina, MCA, Université Mouloud Mammeri de Tizi-Ouzou, Présidente

Riche Bouteldja, Professeur, Université Mouloud Mammeri de Tizi-Ouzou, Rapporteur

Maoui Hocine, MCA, Université Badji Mokhtar d'Annaba, Examineur

Titouche Rachid, MCB, Université Mouloud Mammeri de Tizi-Ouzou, Examineur

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis is concerned with the comparison of two writers from two different countries but almost the same period of time: Richard Wright (1908-1960), a black writer from the United States of America, and Alex La Guma (1925-1985), a Coloured writer from South Africa,

Both writers had first-hand knowledge about their communities; Richard Wright's Native Son and Alex La Guma's A Walk in the Night reflect the plight of the South African and American blacks, a plight which has as "symptoms" racism, segregation, and injustice.

The aim of our study is to investigate these two literary racial protest works and bring out the major points in common. The aim is also to show how similar socio-political systems, namely Jim Crow and Apartheid, affect the content and even the form of their two works. In fact, in spite of the remote distance between North America and South Africa, Native Son and A Walk in the Night hold many affinities; they are satires on the obnoxious systems of Jim Crow and Apartheid. They deem these systems responsible for the plight blacks suffer from.

The study will be divided into 1) the contextual part and 2) the analytical part. The first part comprises two chapters: the first one is about the historical background of both Black America and South Africa, and the second one is about what I consider as biographical affinities between the two authors.

As for the second part, it begins with the third chapter which deals with the way the black man is represented in the perception of the white man; he is regarded less than a human being and very close to the high mammalian species. He is perceived as savage, primitive, and uncivilised.

The fourth chapter deals with violence, mainly against the black man, which is considered as the outcome of the negative representation of the Negro and the prejudice held against him. Poverty and degrading living conditions imposed on blacks are regarded as one part of the white man's violence. The second part of violence is a physical one carried out again by the white man against his black victim. The third part consists in the harmful ways and the aggression of the blacks worked against each other.

The fifth chapter deals with the predominance of all the senses of death in a land of oppression; no room is left for the feelings of love and compassion.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that the thesis is an attempt to bridge the gap between the African and the Afro-American literatures in a racially unjust context by highlighting the literary affinities resulting from the hard conditions confronted by both the American and African blacks.

## **Introduction**

Conflict is a natural phenomenon proper not only to Man, but even animals as well, within the same or different species, are subjected to conflict to survive. Man does not escape the rule. He is always exposed to struggles and clashes with others within the same or different ethnic groups.

Thus, many works in the world of literature deal with the theme of inter-human conflict wherein the stronger tries to oppress the weaker, and in his turn the latter tries to resist the former's oppression as much as he can. In this respect, Richard Wright's Native Son and Alex La Guma's A Walk in the Night deal with the theme of racial conflict. They depict a conflict between mainly two races, whites and blacks, in two different places in the world, but in nearly two similar periods of time –the 1930s USA and 1950s South Africa respectively.

Richard Wright's Native Son is set in the 1930s USA in various places in Chicago. It is about the obnoxious Jim Crow System at that period of time. In fact, blacks are leading lives of dogs; dire living conditions added to little economic opportunities, lack of education, unemployment, and the insulting attitudes of both white population and officials.

Thomas Bigger, the protagonist, a twenty-year-old black boy, unemployed, deprived of education, going through harsh frustration, and suffering from inferiority complex mixed with fear of and resentment against whites, happens to unwillingly kill a young girl who belongs to the white bourgeoisie. Consequently, all the white community of Chicago set out to hunt him. Once he is captured, he is sent to the court of justice where he is going to be tried. When facing mob dominated trials characterised by insulting expressions and prejudices, he remains with a determined challenging

attitude to the white system. Despite the serious attempt of his defender Max to save him from capital punishment, Bigger is at last sentenced to death.

As for Alex La Guma's A Walk in the Night, it is set in Cape Town in District Six, in one night somewhere in the late 1950s. The time setting represents Apartheid South Africa, and hence, the novella depicts the abusive attitudes and methods of white South Africans against their black compatriots.

Alex La Guma's novella is, in fact, about the harsh attitudes and actions of the obnoxious Apartheid system which the black community has to endure, and on the other hand, it is about little opportunity given to blacks to lead normal lives. In this respect, Michael Adonis and Willieboy are set as the epitome of the unfortunate black youth; unemployed, apparently uneducated, and exposed at any moment to the abusive methods of the police. In this way, Michael Adonis, Willieboy, and many other young blacks of District Six in Cape Town, cannot find a way out except into delinquency. Willieboy is engaged into petty crimes and aggressive acts in order to survive, and Michael Adonis, under the effect of an illegitimate dismissal from his job, resorts to a membership of Foxy's gang that is specialised in robbery and petty crimes. Worse yet, still under the rage of the recent sacking, he happens to unwillingly strike dead an old dying peaceful Irish man (Mr. Doughty) out of a dispute over a bottle of wine. As a reaction, the police get engaged in a frenzied chase of the wrongly supposed murderer. In fact, without holding enough evidence, Constable Raalt, a cruel white policeman, as he comes face to face with the innocent Willieboy, shows no hesitation to shoot him dead.

My dissertation consists in comparing Richard Wright's Native Son and Alex La Guma's A Walk in the Night, two important works whose main themes are segregation, discrimination, and racial violence. Richard Wright is an African American writer

engaged in defending his community against racial injustice that they have endured since the dawn of time. Adopting Communism as ideology –at least up to the time he completes Native Son in 1940, he thinks that the disease of the USA lies in the disparity and inequality between social classes justified by the myth of superiority of one race over other races.

Similarly, Alex La Guma is a committed South African writer engaged in defending the legitimate rights of his down-trodden community. He sees in Communism the most appropriate system to remedy what is wrong with Apartheid South Africa in what concerns race relations between the different racial components which have coexisted there for more than three centuries.

In addition to the sameness of their ideological belief, the two writers belong to the black community<sup>1</sup> facing the social, economic and political scourge that whites are pouring on them, which pushes them to create in their fiction characters which represent authentically the hardships of the black community. And as they have close knowledge about the characters they create, their fiction comes as a mirror of reality. In fact, they break boundaries between reality on the ground and fiction. Therefore, when reading either work, the reader cannot easily feel that he is reading a piece of fiction.

More studies have been conducted on Richard Wright's Native Son than those conducted on Alex La Guma's A Walk in the Night but no study has put together the two works to compare them. Hence, I assume that mine is, to my knowledge, an original study dealing with a never tackled issue.

It is worth mentioning in this introduction the fact that I have found many more studies on Richard Wright's novel than on Alex La Guma's novella. However, I do not think that this will affect my study since I feel that I have understood things about Alex

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<sup>1</sup> The Coloureds are considered as blacks throughout this thesis except when a distinction is mentioned.

La Guma's novella through the studies done on Richard Wright's novel, and vice versa. This is due to the close affinities in the two works in terms of the subject matter, style, and the mood.

Concerning the literary studies on Richard Wright's Native Son, I can mention Robert Felgar's Student Companion to Richard Wright (2000), Edward Margolies' The Art of Richard Wright (1969), Richard Bucci's Richard Wright's Native Son (1996), Lola Amis' Native Son Notes (1971), Kenneth Kinnamon's The Emergence of Richard Wright a Study in Literature and Society (1972), Robert Bone's Richard Wright (1969), Michel Fabre's "Wright's Exile" (1971), Joyce Ann Joyce's Richard Wright's Art of Tragedy (1986), and Andrew Warnes' Richard Wright's Native Son (2007).

For instance, the latter shows the different voices along with the theme of violence which pervades the context of Native Son. He means by voices the literary echoes contained in other works and are felt in the novel; such as, the voice of the African oral culture (songs, sermons, tales) that Harlem Renaissance writers celebrated very often in their writings, the Dostoevskian voice, the blues' voice, and Bigger's vernacular voice.

To finish with Abdelioua Abderrezak's Richard Wright: the Vision of a Black American Writer (1988) which I find more interesting for my study for it is about, among other issues, the analysis of Richard Wright's vision of violence in White Man Listen related to that of Frantz Fanon's The Wretched of the Earth focusing on the similarities of the two visions. Then he shifts to Wright's three works: The Man Who Lived Underground, The Outsider, and Native Son showing that the existentialist voice is of a prominent importance in these works in what concerns the Negro's (attempt at) identifying the purpose of his existence in a very restricted world of alienation, isolation, and even condemnation.

As for what has been written on Alex La Guma's A Walk in the Night, Balasubramanyam Chandramohan's A Study in Trans-ethnicity in Modern South Africa: the Writings of Alex La Guma (1992) shows how La Guma moves away from his focus on the Coloureds of Cape Town especially in his early works, into other groups mainly in his novel Time of the Butcherbird.

In their turn, S.O. Asein's Alex La Guma the Man and his Work (1987), Vincent Ntagara's Alex La Guma Short Stories in Relation to A Walk in the Night: A Socio-Political and Literary Analysis (2005), and Ghania Bedrici's Violence and Counter-Violence in Alex La Guma's Novels (1991) also deal with one or another aspect of La Guma's writings. I feel Bedrici's thesis more suitable to my research since it deals with all the works of La Guma showing how they fit in the three stages of violence as they are shown by Fanon. According to her, La Guma's novels move from the first stage when violence is monopolized by the colonizer, to the second stage when violence is led by the colonized against each other, to the third stage when the consciousness of the colonized progresses so much that they start fighting the source of violence, the colonizer.

I will try to show in my study the close affinities of the two works in question. These affinities are the outcome of similar social conditions in the Jim Crow USA and Apartheid South Africa on the one hand, and the outcome of similar harsh experiences that both authors go through on the other hand. In other words, since both authors, along with their respective communities, live under two identical political systems based mainly on segregation, discrimination and injustice, and share many biographical similarities, their works come up with many close affinities in mainly the content. In fact, Richard Wright and Alex La Guma belong to the same race –black race. They both write about the plight of their races, i.e., they are members of the racial groups about

whose plight they write. Richard Wright might well be a compatriot and neighbour to the Thomas family, Bessie, Jack, and Gus among other Chicagoan black characters, and in his turn, Alex La Guma can well be imagined as a compatriot and neighbour to Michael Adonis, Willieboy, Joe, and Franky Lorenzo among other Coloured characters of Cape Town District Six. Consequently, they both have a close knowledge about these characters and share their frustration and plight, and their aspiration and hope, which inspires them to shape their two respective works within the same mould, the one of protest against unjust racial policies implemented by two identically racist political systems.

Besides, Richard Wright and Alex La Guma adopt the same ideological system, Communism, to explain in their works the origin of the racial conflict of their communities. In fact, Communism considers the racial conflict not more than material at the basis; hence, the propaganda made by the bourgeoisie and decision-makers to dwarf the natural value of the black man is a means to merely political and material ends. In other words, World Capitalists try hard to inculcate into the minds of the white population racial prejudices to reap economic profits to the detriment of the black population.

Additionally, both authors use techniques of literary naturalism which aims at accentuating deplorable social conditions and disastrous events. In fact, both Native Son and A Walk in the Night emphasize the negative image of the Negro as represented in the perception of the whites. According to this image, the Negro is “harmful”. He is a “drug addict”, “thief”, “pervert”, “sadist”, “criminal”, and intellectually “inferior”, therefore, the whites have the right to treat them in a disrespectful way. They also think that it is pointless to treat the blacks the way they do their white compatriots; on the

contrary, they should deal with them brutally in order to master them and avoid their “danger”; no lenience and tolerance should be adopted with the “cruel beasts”.

These unreasonably unfair white attitudes, added to the exploitative capitalist systems in the 1930s USA and 1950s South Africa, represent a favourable environment for engendering neurotics among the oppressed. Thus, many young blacks, like Bigger, Michael Adonis, Willieboy, and Foxy, are prone to fall into the world of delinquency and violence. If they are not able to resist temptation, they become a real threat to any one they face regardless of sex, skin colour, and age. The fault, even if it is to hide, is that of the white system. The blame should be put on the white officials who create such a corrupt environment for the sake of obtaining material and political interests that have nothing to do with justice and fairness.

This study will be conducted within the psychoanalytic scope which is concerned with the inner side of the individual; fear, hatred, frustration, and all the negative feelings that dominate blacks as being the oppressed and whites as the oppressors. Still, I deem the Psychoanalytic branch as a whole too general for my study; therefore, I feel it necessary to select Fanon’s Black Skin White Masks, as the appropriate work, for the analysis of the third chapter, The Wretched of the Earth for the fourth chapter, and finally, Freud’s concepts of Death and Life Instincts for the fifth and last one.

I will start my thesis by the contextual part which consists of the first chapter which is about the historical background of South Africa and that of black United States of America, and the second chapter which is about the biographical affinities between Richard Wright and Alex La Guma. In fact, the first part is meant to contextualise the analytical part in order to first make the study sound more clear, and secondly show the motives which pushed the authors to come up with the messages they convey to the

reader and the judgements they pass on the policies of the two unjust systems, namely Jim Crow and Apartheid.

Then will come the analytical part which starts by the third chapter “Blacks in the Whites’ Perception” to which I, as it was mentioned in the previous paragraph, will apply Fanon’s Black Skin White Masks. Fanon adapts some of the key psychoanalytic concepts which were originally created for the European context; and which I still deem relevant to the analysis of the third chapter. These concepts are used by Fanon to fit in the racist colonial environment in Africa and the Antilles. Concepts such as the Adlerian Superiority and Inferiority Complexes and the Jungian Collective Unconscious are relevant under the system of Jim Crow and that of Apartheid wherein the white man lives with the requirements of the myth of white supremacy considering the non-white man as inferior to him.

In Fact, Fanon comes up with a diagnosis of the psychological problems the Negro endures when confronting the white world. Inferiority complex for instance is one of the main handicaps the Negro usually endures in front of the white man. This handicap is mainly due, as it is mentioned just above, to the mythical concept of white supremacy which has been inculcated in the perception of whites. Accordingly, the concept of white supremacy affects the European Collective Unconscious which is often manifested on the one hand by the ascription of sublime human qualities to the white man, and on the other hand the ascription of the bad attributes to the Negro. So, according to the myth of white supremacy, the white man is associated with intelligence, elegance, reason, purity, and virtue; whereas, the Negro is associated with low intelligence, emotional sensitivity, impurity and sin. The Negro, in the light of this myth, is intellectually inferior and endowed with animal traits such as strange physical

endurance and unstrained sexual potency. Consequently, the white man has every right to exploit him and be careful of his potential danger to the purity of the white woman.

In the fourth chapter, I will borrow some Fanonian assumptions about violence as they are presented in The Wretched of the Earth. In fact, Fanon argues that violence goes progressively through three stages. In the first stage, it is the monopolization of violence by the white colonizer who oppresses the non-white colonized without the latter showing any reaction; they undergo the pains of the white violence “successfully”.

In the second stage, the colonized react but in a wrong way; they direct violence against each other because they are not conscious enough to perceive the real source of their troubles.

In the third stage, the consciousness of the colonized reaches a certain degree of maturity and progress, which enables them to target the real source of evil; it is but in this stage that they start to respond by a series of actions in order to break the yoke of oppression. And I assume that only the first two stages of violence that are depicted by Richard Wright’s Native Son and Alex La Guma’s A Walk in the Night with the total absence of the third stage which often consists in the armed struggle between the colonizer and the colonized.

In the fifth (last) chapter, I will base my discussion on the Freudian assumption that Man is controlled by only two types of instincts: Death Instincts and Life Instincts. The first category includes all the negative feelings and obsessions such as fear, hatred, frustration, tendency to destroy, etc., and the second category includes all the positive feelings such as love, comfort, joy, tendency to unite, etc. Thus, I notice that both novels show that under such obnoxious political systems the instincts of death and tendency to destroy dominate and the instincts of life withdraw and vanish.

Accordingly, I will divide my comparative thesis into two parts: the first one is concerned with the contextual aspect of the study whose first chapter begins with the historical background of South Africa from the early times up to the 1950s and then Black America from the seventeenth century up to the New Deal Era. The second chapter deals with the biographical affinities shared by the two authors. Through the first part (chapters one and two), I try to convey implicitly the fact that the two identical contexts make the two authors produce two identical literary works.

As for the second part, it is concerned with the analytical aspect of the study. It begins with the third chapter which is about the image of the Negro as it is represented in the white perception. In other words, it is an attempt to dive into the mind of the white man to discover the reduced status of black folk into “blerry skollies,” “effing hotnot bastards,” “sonsofabitch,” “dogs,” “rapists,” “thieves”, “drug addicts”, “murderers”, and all other negative attributes that stem from the dogma of white supremacy and black inferiority.

The fourth chapter is about the theme of violence -with its psychological and physical dimensions. In fact, violence as it is depicted by both works is in the first place due to the white racist system that tries to perpetuate the bad image of the non-whites in order to obtain political and material interests. The system restricts to the maximum the primary rights of black people; they are deprived of the right to respectable housing, employment, and education. Moreover, the system shows no mercy to the helpless blacks, and even resorts to physical violence to remind the Negro of his lower place.

As a result of harsh restrictions, lack of opportunity, and lack of security, the black man, in order to survive, very often resorts to counter-violence but very often against victimized people like him. In other words, the system, following well strategically adopted methods of injustice, alienation, discrimination, and violence

“manages” to produce and direct dangerous black neurotics to exercise violence against their black fellows; the goal which is not always attainable; for sometimes, these black neurotics cause some troubles to even white people –the case of the Daltons who have their daughter murdered by a black young criminal (Bigger).

Finally, the fifth chapter deals with the prevalence of death at its widest senses, and the absence of love. This sombre situation comes as a result of first the prejudices held by whites to misshape the black man, which leads to the illegitimacy of the ill-treatment and violence against the latter, which at last leads to the prevalence of an atmosphere of fear, hatred, and death at the expense of love, compassion, and tenderness in Apartheid South Africa and Jim Crow America.

Hence, I deem it more appropriate to entitle my thesis Prejudice, Violence and Death in Alex La Guma’s A Walk in the Night and Richard Wright’s Native Son. “Prejudice” as a reference to the third chapter, “Violence” to the fourth chapter, and “Death” to the fifth chapter.

# PART ONE

## **Chapter one: Historical Background:**

### **A-South Africa**

South Africa is a multi-racial country. Blacks, whites, Coloureds, and Asians have peopled South Africa in most cases for more than three centuries. The controversy was which group was first to settle there. Some white claim is that Europeans and Africans settled nearly at the same time. But in fact, Africans arrived much earlier than the first white settlers; in this context, Roger Omond puts it clearly:

White mythology is that Europeans and Africans arrived roughly at the same time: this leads some whites to claim territorial segregation one of the main of latter-day apartheid, is justified. In reality, the Africans arrived in South Africa much earlier than the first Dutch settlers who reached Cape Town in 1652. Radiocarbon dating, says the liberal historian T.R.H. Davenport, 'has produced evidence of negroid iron age settlement in the Trans-Vaal as early as the fifth century AD.'<sup>1</sup>

The first Dutch settlers who reached Cape Town in 1652 were stock farmers; they often had to move in search of new grazing. Thus, not long after their arrival, they started to move north and east. They encountered the Khoi-khoi (Hottentots), the San (Bushmen), and then the Africans –all competing for land. Many Khoi-khoi died; killed by white hunting parties, in wars, and by small pox.<sup>2</sup>

Marriage between whites and blacks was forbidden by the first 'Immorality Act' in 1685, but continued to be permissible with half casts, which caused many people to be born to the Coloured community. On the other hand, intermarriage of the Khoi-khoi with slaves from the East Indies and East Africa formed "the basis of what is called today the Coloured Community."<sup>3</sup>

As for the Indians, they were imported after 1860 as indentured labourers to work on the sugar plantations in Natal:

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<sup>1</sup> Roger Omond. *The Apartheid Handbook*, 1986, p12.

<sup>2</sup> See Ibid, pp 12-3.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p13.

Between 1860 and 1911 some 150,000 Indians were shipped to Natal as 'indentured' labour –contracted for three to five years – and made to live in 'coolie lines' (primitive barracks) and work ceaselessly, under pain of being flogged.<sup>4</sup>

As a conclusion of all what we have seen, South Africa is made up of mainly four ethnic groups: 1)Africans were the first racial group to people South Africa, 2)Coloureds were the second group to exist there for they came mainly from two origins; the intermarriage of the Khoi- khoi and slaves from the East Indies and East Africa on the one hand, and from the intermarriage of whites with half casts on the other hand, 3)whites with mainly two different origins: the first Dutch settlers came there as early as 1652, and the British who made their first apparition in 1806, and finally 4)Indians first came in 1860 as indentured labourers.

In Alex La Guma's A Walk in the Night, all these four racial groups are mentioned; though, the focus is on the Coloureds and whites. On page 4, in a café, a black waiter scruffily dressed comes to wait on Michael Adonis, "the Swahili waiter came over, dark and shiny with perspiration, his white apron grimy and spotted with egg yolk." As for the Indians, they are represented by another waiter; "the old Indian came back with the cup of tea Michael Adonis had ordered."<sup>5</sup> Even the Jews, Greeks, and the Portuguese are represented in the novella too, "shopkeepers, Jewish, Indian, and Greek, stood in the doorways along the arcade of stores on each side of the street, waiting to welcome last-minute customers."<sup>6</sup> And "the Portuguese pushed a box over towards him and he lit the cigarette."<sup>7</sup> The author mentions these different nationalities to convey the idea of multiracial structure of the South African society in general and that of Cape Town in particular. Finally, the white and Coloured communities are represented by many important characters that are repeated again and again throughout the novella; in fact,

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<sup>4</sup> Robert Harvey. The Fall of Apartheid the Inside Story From Smuts to Mbeki, 2001, p30.

<sup>5</sup> Alex La Guma. A Walk in the Night, 1967, p67.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, pp7-8.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p92.

the novella is about a struggle between the white government and the Coloureds of Cape Town; it is not worth mentioning examples of these two ethnic groups since they are dominantly present in the novella.

This ethnic diversity has led to acute racial conflict since at latest the beginning of the nineteenth century; in fact, by the end of the eighteenth century many of the Boers<sup>8</sup> were in the present day Eastern Cape. Cases of wars and uneasiness with Africans –mainly the Zulus characterized their life. And with the permanent settlement of the British in 1806, they had to undergo another type of rivalry and uneasiness. In this context, Omond states:

Into this conflict came the British government whose permanent settlement began in 1806. London, or its local administrators, felt the only way to maintain control in the colony was through large-scale immigration. In 1820 just over 5,000 Britons came to farm around Grahamstown. With these settlers came a more efficient system of government and some liberal thinking[...] Missionaries from London cast what the Boers called ‘unjustifiable odium’ on their treatment of blacks. In addition, an attempt was made to suppress the Dutch language.<sup>9</sup>

As a response to these various conflicts, the Boers were committed to a long walk which was historically called the Great Trek. In fact, the first Trekkers went to Natal around 1836. Soon they had to leave Natal because of wars with the Zulus and the British. They left for Transvaal and the Orange Free State where they “enshrined the principle of ‘no equality in church or state’”.<sup>10</sup>

Thus, the Cape and Natal colonies were controlled mainly by the British, and Transvaal and the Orange Free State by the Boers. In the Cape and Natal, the British enshrined some democratic principles in their rule. In the Cape, franchise was granted to all races from 1853; however, in the 1870s blacks were excluded. In Natal, many Indians were brought as indentured labourers after 1860. They did not enjoy the right to

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<sup>8</sup> Whites of Dutch descent in South Africa.

<sup>9</sup> Roger Omond. *The Apartheid Handbook*, 1986, p13.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, p14.

vote since their country of origin had no 'representative institutions founded on the parliamentary franchise'. In 1890 as Omond said, "India, of course, did not have these: and the measure also disqualified the Africans."<sup>11</sup>

The four states (the Cape, Natal, the Transvaal, and the Orange Free State) had considerable difficulty coexisting easily for decades. All attempts to reach a national unity were in vain. When diamonds then gold were discovered, the economy started to lose its agricultural base, and the British began to enter with greater number the Transvaal (called the South African Republic) with the intention to make money and extend the Empire. The evolution of this harsh competition led to the Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902 which ended with the British victory and put an end to the political independence and freedom of the Boers.<sup>12</sup>

Finally, in 1910, the Union of South Africa from the four colonies saw the light after a talk of unity during the eight years which followed the war. Although the divergence was sharp between mainly the British and the Afrikaners (as they were calling themselves), the union was maintained by virtue of a compromise agreement on accepting franchise policies by all four colonies, rather than imposing a general system over the country. Still, these franchise policies did not concern blacks in the Transvaal (as it had reverted to be called) and the Orange Free State. Things were not much better for non whites in the Cape and Natal for:

The Cape's non-racial franchise was allowed to continue. By that stage 15 per cent of the electorate was black<sup>13</sup>, with two Coloureds for every African. Natal's token non-racialism, with less than one per cent of the voters' roll black, also continued. Parliamentary seats in the new House of Assembly and Senate were, however, reserved exclusively for whites.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid, p14.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, p14.

<sup>13</sup> Here the Coloureds included in the black group, having the right to 10 per cent of the electorate while the purely blacks had just 5 per cent.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, p15.

The Union of South Africa saw the light in 1910. It had one historically enigmatic aspect in its structure; it was not the British winners in the Anglo-Boer War eight years ago that acceded to the leadership, it was the Afrikaners that would take power for the following 84 years:

Eight years after the Boer defeat, their principal military commander was in charge not just of the voortrekker republics, but the whole country. It was a reversal of fortunes *without precedent in history*, and proof, if such were needed, that the British Empire was nothing if not magnanimous [*italics mine*].<sup>15</sup>

The similar parallel with what happened in South Africa in 1910 was the political shift that had occurred in the USA just after Reconstruction (1865-77). In fact, after the Civil War, the Confederacy was crushed down by the Union; the South fell under the power of the northern authorities. The former secessionist leaders of the South were waiting for what sentence the North would pass on them. All the affairs of the South became in the hands of three categories: the northern “Carpetbaggers”, the southern “Scalawags”, and the blacks. But twelve years later, the South astonishingly regained their high political rank which they had enjoyed before the War of Secession, and the blacks lost the freedom they had gained during the Reconstruction. The same “reversal of fortunes” that happened in South Africa in 1910 had already happened in the South in 1877.

Thus power fell into the hands of the Afrikaners. In May 1910 the Constitution was introduced and Botha, one of the former Boer War Generals, became the first prime minister for the whole South Africa. Now, the road became free before the Afrikaners who could easily put into practice policies which would reflect the feeling of white, and more precisely, Afrikaner supremacy. The white-black struggle that they had undergone since their arrival in 1652, and the white-white struggle they had done since the coming of the British in the early nineteenth century, came into an end, or at least subsided a

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<sup>15</sup> Robert Harvey. The Fall of Apartheid the Inside Story From Smuts to Mbeki, 2001, p32.

great deal. Their inherited patriotism, their attachment to Afrikaner supremacy, and their strong belief in God making them the elected was reincarnated in the political achievement they made by May 1910. This Victory paved the way for carrying out policies based on segregation and apartness. In fact, Apartheid as an appellation had not seen the light yet; it was not until 1945 that it was promulgated by the National Party (Afrikaner party) in what seemed to be the 1948 General Election Campaign. But as a principle, Apartheid had started to exert its influence on the political level of the country by the coming of Botha into power in 1910:

From 1910 racial discrimination began to be institutionalized. The 1913 Natives Land Act forced hundreds of thousands of Africans off farms they had either bought or were squatting on in the Transvaal and Free State. As part compensation, the African 'reserves' –today forming the basis for the self-governing and 'independent' homelands –were to be for Africans only. The legal reservation of jobs for certain races was implemented in the Mines and Works Act and strikes by contract workers forbidden. Some years later the beginning of separate political institutions for Africans were shaped.<sup>16</sup>

Hence, black workers had no right to skilled jobs; they were left almost with only unskilled and menial jobs; besides, they had no right to strike; as a result, they were easy to dismiss. In A Walk in the Night, Michael Adonis has been dismissed by the white foreman for he just dared answer him back;<sup>17</sup> so, for any reason, futile as it is, a black worker risk to find himself out of work.

From 1910 onward it was the way to the institutionalization of racial discrimination; the legal double standard was to be implemented in many vital economic and social spheres. By the 1930s many segregationist laws had been passed such as: Natives' Land Act, the Group Areas Act and the Industrial Conciliation Act.

These acts were meant to:

- (1) expropriate African land and minerals,
- (2) procure cheap African labour,
- (3) control the deployment and movement of African labourers; and

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<sup>16</sup> Omond, Op. Cit., p15.

<sup>17</sup> See Alex La Guma. A Walk in the Night. 1967, p4.

(4) eliminate inter-racial competition.<sup>18</sup>

About the Industrial Conciliation Acts of both South Africa and Southern Rhodesia

David Chanaiwa wrote what follows:

The Industrial Conciliation Acts of both South Africa and Southern Rhodesia were labour-relations laws covering all industries, sectors and workers of the economy. But they did not *recognize African trade unions nor African workers as employees*. Instead, they authorised industrial councils consisting of white employers and workers to negotiate on wages, conditions of work and benefits on behalf of the Africans. Africans *were not allowed into apprenticeship programmes, and had no right to strike or to collective bargaining* [italics mine].<sup>19</sup>

As a result for the absence of the African right to strike and trade union, the white employers managed to secure cheap African labour. In fact, A Walk in the Night depicts the poverty of the Coloureds including even the employed ones; for instance, Michael Adonis, until the moment he is dismissed from the sheet metal factory, cannot afford money to buy smart clothes:

The young man wore jeans that had been washed several times... he also wore an old khaki shirt and over it a rubbed and scuffed and worn leather coat... his shoes were of the moccasin type, with leather thongs stitching the saddle to the rest of the uppers. They had been a bright tan once, but now they were worn a dark brown, beginning to crack in the grooves across the insteps. The thongs had broken in two places on one shoe and in one place on the other.<sup>20</sup>

. In other words, these coercive measures, taken by the government, were meant to perpetuate the African plight and improve the economic situation of the white employer and employee by guaranteeing them the African cheap labour and eliminating the African potential competition as though black South Africans did not share the same citizenship with white South Africans. The non-whites were getting more and more impoverished and the whites more and more enriched.

From 1910 on the country witnessed the rise of Afrikaner nationalism. Its original reason was to improve the social and economic level of the poor Afrikaners and

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<sup>18</sup> David Chanaiwa, "Southern Africa Since 1945", in Africa Since 1935. 1999, pp 251-2.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, p252.

<sup>20</sup> Alex La Guma. A Walk in the Night, 1967, p2.

preserve their culture and language which had been threatened by mainly the English culture. By the 1930s the government launched programmes to help the poor whites which eventually resulted in the growth of the industrial and commercial potential of the Afrikaner community. The same decade also witnessed “the re-enactment of the Great Trek, increased national confidence which demanded equal status with English for the Afrikaans language, and the ‘theologizing’ of apartheid.”<sup>21</sup> In this respect, we should also mention that the play of the Afrikaner nationalism was not only on the improvement of the Afrikaans language which had been threatened by the domination of English, and the living standards of the poor Afrikaners, but also their guarantee of economic growth which would place them in more safety from the more affluent economic situation of the English community and the threat of the black proletariat in the working field. The growth of the Afrikaner nationalism led eventually to the National Party’s 1948 General Election victory which surprised many politicians, including Nationalist leaders. This victory made it easy for them to opt for the institutionalization of Apartheid. Indeed, from 1948 on the newly elected Afrikaner government set to reinforce the segregation policy which was a result of their strong belief in white supremacy. Thus, segregation became the law of the land affecting every sphere of the South African society: religion, education, housing, health, churches, cemeteries, schools, hospitals, etc. Each of them became separately devoted to only one race.

In Alex La Guma’s A Walk in the Night squalor and bad housing in the area where the Coloureds live are acutely depicted. In fact, the tenement in which Cape Town District Six Coloureds live inspires despair and a tendency to violence; there, dirtiness is dominating:

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<sup>21</sup> Roger Omond. The Apartheid Handbook, 1986, pp15-6.

The decorative Victorian plaster around the doorway was chipped and broken and blackened with *generations of grime*. The floor of the entrance was flagged with white and black slabs in the pattern of a draught board, but the tramp of untold feet and the accumulation of dust and grease and ash had blurred the squares [...] A row of dustbins lined one side of the entrance and exhaled the smell of rotten fruit, stale food, stagnant water and general decay [*Italics mine*].<sup>22</sup>

Similarly, the café which Michael Adonis the protagonist and his Coloured fellows frequent can be seen as a sample of the badly cared for public facilities where, of course, non-whites go to in order to be served and take some rest:

Ancient strips of flypaper hung from the ceiling dotted with their victims and the floor was stained with spilled coffee, grease and crushed cigarette butts; the walls marked with the countless rubbing of soiled shoulders and grimy hands. There was a general atmosphere of shabbiness about the café...<sup>23</sup>

This segregation in housing and public facilities as depicted by the novella is but an example given by the author to reflect the unjust policies of Apartheid over all the vital institutions during the 1950s. In effect, the segregation included not only housing and public facilities, but all key institutions and fields, as it has been mentioned above, in 1950s South Africa in general and Cape Town in particular.

As a reaction to segregation policies led by the Afrikaner government, African political parties such as the African National Congress of South Africa and Southern Rhodesia urged a political “war to achieve Equal rights for civilised men, irrespective of race and colour.”<sup>24</sup> In 1952, the African National Congress (ANC) and its allies (Indians, Coloureds, and white liberals) “organized a nationwide Defiance Campaign during which 8500 people were arrested.”<sup>25</sup> For more detail about the Defiance Campaign which took place in 1952, Mandela, one of the eyewitnesses and leaders, says:

On that first day of the Defiance Campaign more than 250 volunteers around the country violated various unjust laws and were imprisoned. It

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<sup>22</sup> Alex La Guma, Op. Cit., p21.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, p3.

<sup>24</sup> David Chanaiwa, “Southern Africa Since 1945”, in *Africa Since 1935*. 1999, pp 255.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, p258.

was an auspicious beginning. Our troops were orderly, disciplined, and confident.

Over the next five months, 8,500 people took part in the campaign. Doctors, factory workers, lawyers, teachers, students, ministers, defied and went to jail. They sang, 'Hey, Malan! Open the jail doors. We want to enter.' The campaign spread throughout the Witwatersrand, to Durban and to Port Elizabeth, East London and Cape Town, and smaller towns in the eastern and western Cape...The campaign received an enormous amount of publicity and the membership of the ANC shot up from 20,000 to 100,000, with the most spectacular increase occurring in the eastern Cape, which contributed half of all new members.<sup>26</sup>

In 1955, a Congress of the People, representing Africans, Coloureds, Indians and whites adopted a 'Freedom Charter for the Democratic South Africa and a bill of basic human rights.'<sup>27</sup> As a reaction to this African political activism, the Nationalist government launched repressive measures to maintain its political monopoly. It opted for the prohibition of meetings, political parties ban, police surveillance and harassment, and the torture and imprisonment of individuals:

with the tacit support of the United Party and the Progressive Party, the all-white parliament passed successive repressive laws such as:

- (1) the Group Areas Act of 1950 which required the classification of all South Africans by race;
- (2) the Suppression of Communism Act (1950) which categorized any person or organisation that criticized *apartheid* or advocated non-racialism and civil liberties as a communist. The Communist Party itself was also banned in 1950;
- (3) the Native Labour (Settlement of Disputes) Act (1953) which legally abolished the rights of freedom of association and collective bargaining for African workers;
- (4) the Criminal Law Amendment Act (1953) which made it an offence to protest or support any campaign against any law; and
- (5) the Mines and Works Act (1956) which prohibited Africans from doing skilled work in the mines.<sup>28</sup>

The Suppression of Communism Act (1950) and the Criminal Law Amendment Act (1953) were meant to keep legally the non whites unable to ask for social and political justice. They also gave strength to censorship so that non whites could not oppose the policies of Apartheid. In A Walk in the Night a Coloured taxi-driver wants to awaken

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<sup>26</sup> Nelson Mandela. Long Way to Freedom: The Autobiography of Nelson Mandela, 1994, pp151-2.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, p258.

<sup>28</sup> Chanaiwa, Op. Cit., p258.

the consciousness of his community by conveying the idea that the white/capitalist system is the responsible for racism and segregation and hence the degradation of the black situation in the country. Each time he wants to go on criticizing the capitalist system, Mr Greene interrupts him by saying “that’s politics. Cut out politics.”<sup>29</sup> Censorship seems to be so strong that only few people dare criticise the system of Apartheid.

The second and the fourth acts were meant to legitimize the imposed censorship on non-whites. They were meant to eliminate any potential opposition to the system of Apartheid.

This set of statutes formed the backbone of the system of Apartheid which was meant to establish segregation as the only source of all policies which should rule the land and the people. In fact, many public facilities were being segregated: hospitals, schools, restaurants, hotels, parks, bars, theatres, cinemas, etc. as A.J. Christopher says, “legal segregation was imposed on many aspects of life, most of which received little or no attention in the geographical literature until repeal in 1990.”<sup>30</sup> In effect, there is a little allusion in Alex La Guma’s A Walk in the Night to the segregation of locations; Andries, a Liberal English speaking police van driver, wishes that his tyrant colleague Constable Raalt will be transferred to a white area to avoid his abuse of power against Coloureds; “they ought to post him somewhere, in a *white area*, where he will have little opportunity to do anything dishonourable [italics mine].”<sup>31</sup>

Moreover, churches, which were supposed to host all people providing they shared the Christian faith, were paradoxically subjected to segregation. Likewise, cemeteries were segregated not only on the basis of the difference of faith, but also on

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<sup>29</sup> Alex La Guma. A Walk in the Night, 1967, p17.

<sup>30</sup> A.J. Christopher, “Segregation and Cemeteries in Port Elizabeth, South Africa”, in The Geographical Journal, 1995, p 38.

<sup>31</sup> Alex La Guma. A Walk in the Night, 1967, p40.

the basis of the difference of the skin colour; thus, there were, for instance, cemeteries for blacks, others for whites, and others for Coloureds, all belonging to the Christian faith:

Legal segregation was imposed on many aspects of life, most of which received little or no attention in the geographical literature until repeal in 1990 (Horn *et al.*, 1991). In view of the pervasive nature of segregation it is, therefore, scarcely surprising that spatial apartheid was imposed *even in death. Indeed spatial apartheid in the place of the last repose paralleled that enforced in life* [italics mine].<sup>32</sup>

In the same respect, Omond reports news about a segregated beach “in January 1984 seven people – a lawyer, a nuclear chemist, a chartered accountant, a computer manager, a teacher, a nurse and a law student - were arrested for being on a ‘white only’ beach.”<sup>33</sup> He also says:

The Reservation of Separate Amenities Act, Number 49 of 1953, says that public premises ‘whenever expedient’ can be reserved for ‘the exclusive use of persons belonging to a particular race or class’. The Cape, in 1955, and Natal, in 1967, passed ordinances giving the provincial authorities similar powers. In all cases, the term ‘public premises’ is defined to include beaches.<sup>34</sup>

Similarly, in A Walk in the Night, Joe and Michael Adonis have the following conversation about the segregation of beaches:

‘I heard they’re going to make the beaches so only white people can go there,’ Joe said.  
‘Ja. Read it in the papers. Damn sonsabitches.’  
‘It’s going to get so’s nobody can go nowhere.’<sup>35</sup>

The curse of segregation also inflicted non whites on a larger scale; districts, and even towns were not allowed for non whites to go to without permits. On the other hand, the Africans, by means of the Bantu Self-government Act and the Bantu Investment Corporation of 1959 “were divided into black homelands corresponding to

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<sup>32</sup> (Ibid, p 38).

<sup>33</sup> Omond, Op. Cit., 1986, p61.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, p6.

<sup>35</sup> Alex La Guma, A Walk in the Night, 1967, p10.

the traditional ethnic groups of the Zulu, Sotho, Xhosa, Tswana, Tonga and Venda.”<sup>36</sup>

The Bantustan policy was meant to undermine African nationalism as it is shown by Chanaiwa:

The Bantustan policy was basically a ‘divide and rule’ technique designed to *balkanize African nationalism* and to buy time while consolidating white supremacy. The idea was to revive and revitalize ethnic rivalries of the Mfecane era by reversing the unifying factors of pan-Africanism, education, intermarriages, urbanization and nationalism... Legally, all Africans in ‘white’ South Africa became temporary sojourners, without title to civil liberties and property ownership [italics mine].<sup>37</sup>

Between the restrictive measures of the Apartheid government and the resistance of the non-whites did political life develop in South Africa. Very early in the seventeenth century when the first Dutch settlers first came to South Africa, bloody wars started between the natives and the white settlers. White-white conflict was also present; it consisted mainly in the struggle over wealth between the Afrikaners and the British settlers, which resulted in the Anglo-Boer War 1889-1902. Then an important uprising occurred in the Witwatersrand in 1922 marking an important landmark in the history of the African resistance to the white domination.

In 1948 the National Party came into power after winning surprisingly the General Election, which made it easy for the newly elected government to implement legally Apartheid policies. As a protest against these policies, the African National Congress (ANC) and its allies went on a nationally widespread Defiance Campaign which lasted six months and ended with the arrest of 8500 people. The freedom struggle continued; the Congress of the People emerged as a multiracial organization made up of many parties [the African National Congress (ANC), the South African Indian Congress (SAIC), the South African Coloured People’s Organisation (SACPO), and the South

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<sup>36</sup> Chanaiwa, Op. Cit., 1999, p258.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, p258.

African Congress of Democrats (COD)] drew the famous Freedom Chapter at Kliptown on June 25 and 26, 1955 which advocated equality and fair deal for all races and the sovereignty of the people. Another peaceful demonstration was organised in 1956 and ended with the famous Treason Trial of not less than 156 leaders. After that, protest did not stop; on the contrary, it went even more important until 1961.

Being upset with the ANC's multiracial approach, Robert Sobukwe, a young university lecturer split from the ANC to found a new purely African party. Thus, the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC) was founded in 1959. The founding president (Sobukwe) considered all whites as "shareholders in the South Africa Oppressors Company."<sup>38</sup> For him they were all the same; their only objective was to make profit from the country no matter what the means was. The PAC called for the organization of a campaign for pay raise and the suppression of the Pass Laws. He led a crowd of blacks who left their passes at home and went in a demonstration to defy the police to arrest them. The demonstrators demanded pay raise and total abolition of the passes. The campaign "which took place in several locations in South Africa, ended in the tragedy of the Sharpeville Massacre."<sup>39</sup> The peaceful demonstrators suffered many casualties; 72 were killed and 186 wounded. The government put the blame of this tragic event on communist conspirators, and banned the ANC and the PAC. As a result of the ban, in 1961 some ANC leaders founded an underground movement for armed struggle called "Umkhonto we Sizwe" (the Spear of the Nation). The PAC in its turn founded another underground movement called Poqo.<sup>40</sup>

The struggle for freedom persisted in the sixties, the seventies, the eighties up to the beginning of the nineties; in parallel, the repressive actions of the government persisted too during this period to perpetuate segregation and racial inequality. But as

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid, p259.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, p260.

<sup>40</sup> Roger Omond. The Apartheid Handbook, 1986, p19.

the novella in question – A Walk in the Night, was first published in 1962, I find it unnecessary to speak about South Africa in the sixties and what came after, still, I may mention things about this period when appropriate, if at all.

## **B- The Black USA**

The first settlement of the Afro-Americans in the present day United States of America went back to 1619 when a boat unloaded 20 black slaves at Jamestown, Virginia. From 1660 onward slavery institution became more important, especially for the southern planters. With the growth of their great plantations, their demand for slaves became necessary. Therefore, slave trade flourished and many categories of people took part in it. Africans from Senegal, Gambia, Guinea, among other West African countries, became engaged in hunting slaves whom they took into the coast to sell them to European slave traders who, in their turn, would ship them away to America to sell them mainly to the southern planters to work their lands.

Slavery in the independence era was not affected; no abolition was aimed at and slave trade continued. In 1787 the number of slaves was estimated at approximately 700.000, and in 1860 it grew up to four million. The value of a slave also increased; it was but a few hundreds of Dollars in 1800, in the mid-nineteenth century it reached 2000 Dollars.<sup>41</sup>

With the Civil War (1861-65) came the “declaration of slave independence”; the Emancipation Proclamation was signed on January 1, 1863 to set all enslaved people free. But it was not until the end of the War that slaves gained freedom. Thus, the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution (1865) abolished slavery, the Fourteenth Amendment granted the newly freed people American citizenship, and then the Fifteenth One the franchise.

During Reconstruction, the Freedmen’s Bureau was introduced to help the former slaves. In fact, blacks started to benefit from education. Besides, they were given

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<sup>41</sup> See Claude Lévy. Les Minorités Ethniques aux Etats-Unis, 1997, pp76-7.

pieces of land to work in order to gain their living. Furthermore, 700.000 out of four million blacks had their names in the electoral roll.

Despite the abolition of slavery for good, many blacks benefited little; they no longer worked on plantations as slaves, but as sharecroppers, they had to leave the more important part of their harvest to the landowners.

Furthermore, “Black Codes” were introduced by the southern state governments to maintain the status of black subordination to and dependence on whites:

Through 1865 and 1866 the whites of the South assumed the responsibility of governing their people. The greatest concern of the southerners was *the problem of controlling the Negro* [...] Black Codes bore a remarkable resemblance to the antebellum Slave Codes and can hardly be described as measures that respected the rights of Negroes as free persons. Several of them undertook to limit the areas in which Negroes could purchase or rent property. Vagrancy laws imposed heavy penalties that were designed to force all Negroes to work whether they wanted to or not. The control of blacks by white employers was about as great as that which slaveholders had exercised [Italics mine].<sup>42</sup>

Then, Franklin and Moss, Jr. continue to show the limits to which Negroes must restrict themselves and the types of punishment which could be inflicted on those who dared violate these harsh codes:

Negroes who quit their jobs could be arrested and imprisoned for breach of contract. Negroes were not allowed to testify in court except in cases involving members of their race. Numerous fines were imposed for seditious speeches, insulting gestures or acts.<sup>43</sup>

Finally, they pointed that by these Codes, no political hope was secured for the former slaves; there was, of course, “no enfranchisement of blacks and no indication that in the future they could look forward to full citizenship and participation in a democracy.”<sup>44</sup>

Worse yet, the Ku Klux Klan, a terrorist organisation, was created in 1866, to make the situation of the blacks even worse. The terrorists threatened blacks so much

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<sup>42</sup> Franklin and Moss, Jr. From Slavery to Freedom a History of Negro Americans, 1988, pp205-6.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, p206.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, p206.

that many of them renounced their political rights. The Ku Klux Klan resorted to lynching black people or setting fire on their huts or crop yields to prevent them from exercising their rights such as voting. In this respect, Michael J. Klarman says about lynching at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century:

In the years 1895-1900, an average of 101 blacks were lynched a year – mostly in the South. In 1898, a white supremacist campaign to eliminate black political influence culminated in a race riot in Wilmington, North Carolina, which killed at least a dozen blacks.<sup>45</sup>

The Ku Klux Klan persists later on even in the North. It is depicted by Richard Wright's Native Son as an organization which adopts religion as a means to terrorize non-whites. For this reason Bigger rejects the cross which priest Hammond has hung round his throat; he considers it not the cross of Jesus Christ, but the cross of the Ku Klux Klan; he takes the cross from his throat and throws it away without caring about its salvation the priest speaks about just before his potential capital punishment. For him, religion is no longer the philosophy of love and human compassion that Jesus Christ brought, but a means used by white supremacists to perpetuate their domination over non-whites.<sup>46</sup>

In the same context, Richard Wright writes in his autobiographical book Black Boy about his Aunt Maggie's husband, Uncle Hoskins, who has been killed by a white man simply because of his successful liquor business; whites do not like other people to compete with them financially.<sup>47</sup> So lynching was among the techniques used by whites against non-whites to perpetuate the domination of the former over the latter. To link history to fiction, in Native Son, Bigger's father was killed by a white mob in Mississippi, which pushed the widow to leave with her children for the North and live eventually in a single tenement room on Chicago's segregated South Side.

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<sup>45</sup> Michael J. Klarman, From Jim Crow to Civil Right: the Supreme Court and the Struggle for Racial Equality, 2004, p3.

<sup>46</sup> Richard Wright. Native Son. 1993, pp 391-393.

<sup>47</sup> Richard Wright. Black Boy. 1991, p53.

## **Jim Crow Laws**

Year 1877 marked the end of Reconstruction when the northern troops withdrew from the South. Thus, the hope of a real emancipation of blacks vanished and southern states found it easy to re-institute the already established *Black Codes* which were meant to deprive blacks of their rights as full citizens.

In 1896, in *Plessy v. Ferguson*, the Supreme Court gave the green light to segregation in the railroads of Louisiana and decreed that racial segregation voted by a state be not unconstitutional. In this way, the Separate but Equal principle was legally established. Hence, blacks were not allowed to travel side by side with whites, go to the same restaurants, the same hotels, the same churches, nor even bury their dead in the same cemeteries. In this respect Andrew Warnes speaks about the ‘complicity’ of the national government in establishing officially segregation in the South, and the role played by the Supreme Court in implementing Separate but Equal policies:

During the 1890s the national government’s indifference towards such segregation turned into active consent. Entering what the historian Hugh Brogan has called ‘its dimmest intellectual period’, the Supreme Court concocted ‘barely plausible constitutional arguments for upholding the racist legislation of the Southern states to provide ‘separate but equal ‘ facilities on the basis of colour difference. Segregation from this point forward was thus deemed constitutional.<sup>48</sup>

In fact, *Plessy v. Ferguson* was concerned with transportation. It all went back to 1890 when the Louisiana legislature passed a law to segregate the Louisiana railroad. A black committee challenged the law; they selected Homer Plessy, a working class Afro-Creole, yet white skinned, who, when getting into the train, informed the conductor of his African blood-sharing (eighth Negro blooded). The conductor ordered him according to the current law to leave the car because it was for whites only. Plessy ignored the conductor’s order and remained in his place. The litigation wound its way to

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<sup>48</sup> Andrew Warnes. Richard Wright’s Native Son, 2007, p4.

the Supreme Court which confirmed the law, which gave a strong support to the state segregation policies later on.<sup>49</sup>

These segregationist policies were called Jim Crow Laws after a black character of a song-and-dance caricature of Afro-Americans first performed by white actor Thomas D. Rice in 1832.

By the end of the Nineteenth century most of the laws which had granted blacks their civil rights during Reconstruction were repealed. Instead, segregation affected all important fields; transportation, education, health, religion, housing, etc.

Education did not escape the rule; it was one of the fields affected by segregation. In 1899, In *Cumming v. the School Board of Richmond County, Ga.* the Supreme Court prepared the ground for segregation in education. It all started by the local authorities closing up a black secondary school while keeping in the area two white secondary schools open. The case reached the Supreme Court which approved of the decision of the local authorities.<sup>50</sup>

On a larger scale, Franklin shows the generalization of segregation in education all over the South:

By 1900, every state in the South had enacted laws that provided for separate schools for blacks and whites, and through the years the courts made it that even though the law did not specify that the schools for both races should be equal, the law assumed that they would be equal. The compliance in the South with the provision of equality in educational facilities was nowhere more than slight; and in most instances there was a studied disregard for the principle of equality.<sup>51</sup>

He also provided some figures which show the unfair government spending on education provided for blacks and whites:

Nothing was more persistent in the first half of the twentieth century than the disparity between the money spent for education of white children and that spent for the education of black children. In fact, in many instances the

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<sup>49</sup> See Michael J. Klarman. From Jim Crow to Civil Right: the Supreme Court and the Struggle for Racial Equality, 2004, p8.

<sup>50</sup> Franklin and Moss, Jr. From Slavery to Freedom a History of Negro Americans, 1988 p473.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid*, p361.

differential increased as time went on. In 1900 for every two Dollars spent for the education of blacks in the South, three Dollars was spent on whites; but in 1930 seven Dollars was spent for whites to every two Dollars for blacks. In 1935-1936 the current expenditures per white pupil averaged 37.87 Dollars, while such expenditures per black pupil averaged 13.09 Dollars. In the new educational services, such as transportation, visual aids, laboratory equipment, modern building and the like, the differentials were even greater.<sup>52</sup>

Disparity in education of the blacks and the whites in the South is alluded to in Native Son. Bigger and his companions in misfortune; Gus, G.H., and Jack Harding, are victims of lack of education; they are almost illiterate, poor and unemployed. They cannot fulfil their ambitions because they are short of money and education as the following conversation between Bigger and Gus sets it clear:

“I *could* fly a plane if I had a chance,” Bigger said.  
“If you wasn’t black and if you had some money and if they’d let you go to that aviation school, you *could* fly a plane,” Gus said.<sup>53</sup>

In other words, being black in the USA during the first half of the twentieth century was a real misfortune which would accompany the concerned all their lives. It prevented blacks from fulfilling their dreams. Bigger and Gus understand well the effects of being non-white; they can by no means realize their ambitions; blackness seems to be a perpetual condemnation, “if you wasn’t black and if you had some money and if they’d let you go to that aviation school, you *could* fly a plane,” Gus said to Bigger.

The right to education is not enjoyed by the Negro. Max in his long speech highlights again and again the fact that it is high time to provide equal opportunities in all fields including education to all Americans irrespective of racial belonging. He condemns the system for its neglect of the Negro’s right to education, “every school teacher knows the restrictions which have been placed upon Negro education.”<sup>54</sup>

Another institution that provides a good means to acquire knowledge, in addition to schools, is public library. But unfortunately for blacks the majority of the libraries

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid, p361.

<sup>53</sup> Richard Wright. Native Son. 1993, p17.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, p459.

which were functioning in the South were not at their disposal. If we have to put it in figures, the number of libraries that were disposed to blacks was much less than those disposed to whites, as late as 1935, for example, “only 83 of the 565 public libraries in 13 Southern states were reported to be giving service to Negroes.”<sup>55</sup>

In this respect, as it is put in his autobiographical book, Black Boy, Richard Wright had an anecdote about his stealing into the Memphis library which was not at the disposal of blacks because of Jim Crow bans. He resorted to forging a note of a white person in order to have access to H. L. Mencken’s books. He entered the library and handed the note to the white librarian to give him some Mencken’s books for a certain Mr. Falk. She showed some reluctance because Mr. Falk did not write the titles of the books he wanted to read. Finally, she handed him two books and said “I’m sending him two books, but tell Mr. Falk to come in next time, or send me the names of the books he wants. I don’t know what he wants to read.”<sup>56</sup>

This anecdote can be read as a means used by a black boy to survive in the hard conditions of Jim Crow system at a time when blacks were prevented from getting the adequate means of education as well as sufficient material means to sustain their lives on earth. The Separate but Equal policy which prevailed in the South during the Jim Crow era seemed to fail to be for both separation and equality between the two races; it was only for separation but not for equality since, for instance, a self-educated black teenager of 1920s Memphis had no right to use the public library which was for whites only. Equal opportunity as a principle failed to exist since the treatment of different races was unjustly different.

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid, p368.

<sup>56</sup> Richard Wright. Black Boy, 1991, pp235-6.

## Segregation even in the North

It was not only the South that was affected by segregation; the North did have its share as well. Though it was mainly de-facto segregation, it had bad effects on the conditions northern blacks were living in. In fact, most of the events of Richard Wright's Native Son are set in the North, in Chicago's South Side which is inhabited by almost only black people and which is not adequate for human beings to live in. Blacks get frustrated with the reality of being incapable to live in the area where the whites live. Speaking about Bigger, the narrator says:

He knew that black people could not go outside the Black Belt to rent a flat; they had to live on their side of the "line." No white real estate man would rent a flat to a black man other than in the sections where it had been decided that black people might live.<sup>57</sup>

In this respect Warnes points out, "de-facto segregation led to acute overcrowding, disease and the spread of other problems among the black migrants of the South Side (of Chicago)"<sup>58</sup>. To a lesser extent, segregation still existed in the North, mainly during the Inter-War Migration:

Most of the Northern states were inclined to provide separate schools for blacks, especially where white patrons brought pressure to bear upon school officials. [...] the tendency toward segregation increased as white students engaged in strikes and violence in the effort to prevent Negro students from attending schools open to all, and as white parents kept children away from school in the effort to force the authorities to set aside separate facilities for Negro pupils.<sup>59</sup>

In this respect too, Woodward comes with more detailed analysis of the hard race relations that the Negro underwent in the North. He showed that the North by 1860 was not much better to blacks than the South:

Leon F. Litwack, in his authoritative account, *North Slavery*, describes the system in full development. 'In virtually every phase of existence,' he writes, 'Negroes found themselves systematically separated from whites. They were either excluded from railway cars, omnibuses, stagecoaches, and steamboats or assigned to special "Jim Crow"

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<sup>57</sup> Richard Wright. Native Son. 1993, p288.

<sup>58</sup> Andrew Warnes. Richard Wright's Native Son, 2007, p7.

<sup>59</sup> Franklin and Moss, Jr. From Slavery to Freedom a History of Negro Americans, 1988, p362.

sections; they sat, when permitted, in secluded and remote corners of theatres and lecture halls; they could not enter most hotels, restaurants, and resorts, except as servants.<sup>60</sup>

He continues his report to show that segregation in the North affected even religion, education, prisons, hospitals, and cemeteries:

They (Negroes) prayed in “Negro pews” in the white churches, and if partaking of the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, they waited until the whites had been served the bread and wine. Moreover, they were often educated in segregated schools, punished in segregated prisons, nursed in segregated hospitals, and buried in segregated cemeteries.<sup>61</sup>

Woodward comes with details to show that racism was not peculiar to the South; the North did have its share. Still in this respect, he speaks about the Inter-War Migration to the North which did not improve the situation of blacks as they expected it to:

More joined the exodus of migration to the North in quest of high wages in the war industries [...] the war-bred hopes of the Negro for first-class citizenship were *quickly smashed in a reaction of violence that was probably unprecedented*. Some twenty-five race riots were touched off in American cities during the last six months of 1919 [...] *Many of them occurred in the North and the worst of all in Chicago*. During the first year following the war more than seventy Negroes were lynched, several of them veterans still in uniform [Italics mine].<sup>62</sup>

Thus, we come to a conclusion that discrimination and tense race relations existed all the time and everywhere –in the South and the North. For one reason or another, white Southerners as well as Northerners seemed to be reluctant to sacrifice their privileges for the sake of racial justice. If there was tolerance and justice-like deal from whites, it was not out of principle; the reason of the injustice, even whites tried to justify it by “their supremacy”, was politico-economic at the basis. In fact, the “myth” of “white supremacy” would prove false later on. All the pseudo-scientific studies which were being held in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries to evidence white supremacy and black inferiority did not hold water. On the contrary, the reverse was proved:

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<sup>60</sup> C. Vann Woodward. The Strange Career of Jim Crow, 2002, pp18-9.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, p 19.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, pp114-5.

After much reluctance, the scientists had conceded that the Negro was a human being; in vivo and in vitro the Negro had been proved analogous to the white man: the same morphology, the same histology.<sup>63</sup>

In fact, all the attempts made by the radical southerners to re-enslave blacks on the one hand, and the militancy of the northerners during the War of Secession to free black slaves, and the efforts made by them during Reconstruction to maintain the freedom of the freedmen on the other hand, were only for political and economic ends. All the play of enfranchisement or disfranchisement of the Negro, of his respect or contempt, recognition or ignorance, humanisation or dehumanisation, were neither for nor against blacks per se, but behind all this play lay, as I mentioned just above, white material and political motives and purposes. In this context, Woodward reports the viewpoint of Populist leader Tom Watson in what concerns the issue of colour prejudice:

Watson told the two races: 'You are made to hate each other because upon that hatred is rested the keystone of the arch of financial despotism which enslaves you both. You are deceived and blinded that you may not see how this race antagonism perpetuates a monetary system which beggars you both.'<sup>64</sup>

Watson's viewpoint is also reported by both David Brown and Clive Webb:

In the words of Populist leader Tom Watson: 'The coloured tenant is in the same boat as the white tenant, the coloured labourer with the white labourer and...the accident of colour can make no difference in the interests of farmers, croppers and labourers.'<sup>65</sup>

White supremacy was always used as a pretext by which whites perpetuated their privilege over the non-whites, "the redeemers who overthrew Reconstruction and established 'Home Rule' in the Southern states conducted their campaign in the name of white supremacy."<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Frantz Fanon. Black Skin White Masks, 1986, p90.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid, p63.

<sup>65</sup> David Brown and Clive Webb, Race in the American South From Slavery to Civil Rights, 2007, p186.

<sup>66</sup> C. Vann Woodward. The Strange Career of Jim Crow, 2002, p31.

## **Black workers in the 1920s**

During the 1920s, America witnessed a considerable economic growth, which enabled many Negroes to get jobs in factories and in personal service. They found employment in “the automobile and allied industries, in glass factories, paper and bag companies and in the tobacco factories.”<sup>67</sup> Other blacks made gains in the clothing, food industries, in transportation and communication. In the South the textile industry grew tremendously but paradoxically only a small number of blacks were employed there.

In spite of the fact that an elevated number was employed in the industrial sector, transportation and communication, blacks were not integrated into trade unions:

Almost everywhere white labour tended to exclude black workers from the unions. A large number of affiliated unions of the American Federation of labour barred or segregated blacks, while the various railway brotherhoods excluded them altogether.<sup>68</sup>

Then, Franklin and Moss, Jr. set to speak about attempts made by Negroes or their white sympathizers to found unions for blacks as a response to white hostility, violence, discrimination, and exclusion. However, these unions would stop before even making any achievement in what concerned the working rights of blacks. They cite cases of some unions such as the Friends of Negro Freedom (1920) which after few years proved ineffective. Similarly, the National Association for the Promotion of Labour Unionism among Negroes was organized in the same period. The association ceased before even meeting its end which was the organization of Negro laundry workers. Another organization, the American Negro Labour Congress (October 1925), knew the same end; “it succumbed under the weight of disunity among blacks and indifference and hostility among whites.”<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Franklin and Moss, Jr. From Slavery to Freedom a History of Negro Americans, 1988, p339.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid, p339.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid, p340.

As for the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters and Maids, it was founded to “secure from the Pullman Company better conditions of work and higher wages.”<sup>70</sup> It was relatively successful despite the problems it faced from the employer; since, “in 1937 more than eight thousand employees benefited by a wage increase of 1,152,000 Dollars.”<sup>71</sup>

### **The Blacks during the Depression and the New Deal**

It is worth mentioning that most of the events of Native Son are set in the 1930s during the Depression and the New Deal Era. Bigger embodies the sufferings of the black youth at this period of time. He is unemployed like many black young people; eventually, he is offered a job on the relief as it is said by the state attorney Buckley, “a wealthy, kindly disposed white man, a resident of Chicago for more than forty years, sends to the relief agency for a Negro boy to act as a chauffeur to his family.”<sup>72</sup> But workers who act within the framework of the relief system are underpaid. Mr. Dalton talks with Bigger about the job he is about to offer him, “the pay calls for 20 Dollars a week, but I’m going to give you 25 Dollars.”<sup>73</sup> And remember Mr. Dalton charges Mrs. Thomas, Bigger’s mother, 8 Dollars per week for the rent of one-room apartment. She is charged one third of her son’s wage. Relief is in reality a way to perpetuate the exploitation of the poor officially; there is no fair deal in the New Deal America.

As for the southern Negro farmers, things went even worse. In reality, the Depression had already started for them in the early twenties at a time when the whole country was enjoying prosperity and abundance. Not only had they been unfairly exploited by white landowners, they suffered soil erosion, the boll weevil, and the hard competition of foreign tobacco, cotton, and sugar cane as well. Likewise, black and

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid, p340.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid, p340.

<sup>72</sup> Richard Wright. Native Son. 1993, p477.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid, pp56-7.

white people, working in shipbuilding, coal mining, and the textile and shoe industries “were not enjoying the prosperity of the so-called new economic era.”<sup>74</sup> So, in the mid-twenties; “thousands of Negroes lost their jobs.”<sup>75</sup> In fact, when the Economic Depression started in October, 1929 many blacks had already been submerged in economic depression. In other words, all the degraded situation which occurred by the time the Great Depression started did not represent any change in the already sad situation of many Negroes. All that happened in October, 1929 onward, consisted in the fact that a large number of Negroes other than those who had been already suffering from the Depression was added:

When the crash came in October of 1929 many Negroes were already suffering from economic depression. As businesses closed, banks failed, and mines shut down, a larger number of black workers became unemployed. In cities they lost their jobs rapidly, while in the rural areas they were driven to starvation wages.<sup>76</sup>

A few years after the beginning of the Great Depression millions of Americans became helpless. By 1934, 17 percent of the whites and 38 percent of the blacks became a heavy charge on the relief programme which had been launched for the purpose of leading this category of people to safety. In October 1933, about one third of the Negroes of several cities were on relief. In Atlanta, in 1935, 65 percent of the employable Negroes were in need of public assistance, while in Norfolk, the rate of this black category went even more substantial –not less than 80 percent. In the North, the situation was not less bad as Schoell reports “in 1935 about half of the black families were without any resource (my translation.)”<sup>77</sup> Worse yet, Negroes were given less help than whites:

Even in starvation there was discrimination, for in few places was relief administered on a nonracial basis. Some religious and charitable organizations, in the North as well in the South, excluded Negroes from

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<sup>74</sup> Franklin and Moss, Jr. From Slavery to Freedom a History of Negro Americans, 1988, p341.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid, p341.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid, p341.

<sup>77</sup> L. Franck Schoell. Histoire des Noirs aux Etats Unis, 1963, p144.

the soup kitchens they operated to relieve the suffering. In many of the communities where relief work was offered, Negroes were discriminated against, while in the early programs of public assistance there was, in some places, as much as a six-dollar differential in the monthly aid given to white and black families.<sup>78</sup>

The New Deal came as a reaction to remedy the Hoover Laissez-Faire policies in running the affairs of the nation. It was an attempt to redress the dire situation America went through. In 1932, the American electorate put their trust in Franklin Delano Roosevelt to remedy what was wrong with the socio-economic situation of America. For this purpose, many New Deal agencies were promoted to provide public assistance to the victims of the Great Depression regardless of skin colour. Yet, these agencies, especially in the South, failed to avoid discrimination and double standard when dealing with both races:

Despite the official non-discriminatory policy of New Deal agencies, southern blacks did not receive their fair share of federal government support. The cause of the problem was the reliance of the Roosevelt administration on state and local officials to administer relief and recovery programmes [...] the racial prejudice of white officials resulted in their restricting the allocation of federal resources to African Americans. Although aware of the racial bias of southern authorities, Roosevelt did not attempt to challenge them.<sup>79</sup>

The reluctance of the New Deal agencies to give the same assistance to whites and blacks occurred mainly during the first mandate of Roosevelt. Then things seemed to change positively for blacks when New Deal services were offered to blacks during the Second New Deal:

From 1936, the Roosevelt administration made an increasingly substantial commitment to the cause of racial egalitarianism [...] African Americans gained greater access to relief and recovery programmes. The Public Works Administration invested more than 40 million Dollars in the construction and renovation of black schools, libraries and hospitals... African Americans also received more than 50 percent of federally-subsided housing units in the South. Southern blacks moreover secured an increasing share of the job opportunities provided by public works programmes such as the CCC.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Op. Cit., p342.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, p242.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid, pp248-9.

Despite this change in the officials' attitude towards blacks in terms of public assistance, discrimination still persisted. In this respect Bernstein and Conkin -as it is reported by Brown and Webb; "dismiss what they describe as the empty rhetoric of New Deal officials on race matters."<sup>81</sup> But still many blacks started to have optimistic visions towards the Roosevelt administration, in fact:

Most scholars now recognise that African Americans drew strength and inspiration from a federal government that for the first time in more than half a century expressed a public commitment to equality of opportunity.<sup>82</sup>

Moreover, many higher personalities within the Roosevelt administration like Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt were deeply committed to the purpose of securing racial equality for all Americans irrespective of racial belonging; however their attempts were not enough to reach this noble purpose, hence, the sufferings of most of the black Americans went on.

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid, pp248-9.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid, p249.

## Chapter Two: Biographical elements

Biographical elements, along with historical background, help the reader to get a better understanding, and the literary critic to conduct a better analysis. In fact, social conditions and personal experiences of a writer are likely to influence his writings. In this context, Richard Wright's life in segregation was a determining factor in shaping his writings which reflect fully the racism he and his community endured as it is shown by Andrew Warnes:

Wright's works would prove wonderfully alert to the paradoxes of such behaviour. More than any other American writer, he would expose the intellectual dishonesty of racism...no other novelist is more alive to the vicious contradictions involved in racial segregation.<sup>1</sup>

This statement can also be applied to Alex La Guma's life and writings which were the product of a notoriously specific socio-political system as it is stated by Vincent Ntaganira:

No critic can claim to adequately analyse any of La Guma's works without understanding his background. Like any human being, La Guma was a product of his past. *So were his writings*. In fact, his life explains the orientation and meanings of his creative writings [*Italics mine*].<sup>2</sup>

In this way, historical background and biographical elements clarify more the general view of any literary research. In fact, some literary theories, for instance cultural materialism, deem these two aspects essential for any literary study.

As far as my study is concerned, I deem it, thus, necessary to include what can be regarded as biographical affinities between the two authors in question. Many biographical works were written about both authors in detail, but this study will be concerned with only the points that sound like affinities between them and that influenced their careers as famous literary figures.

In fact, the compatibility of the biography of Richard Wright and that of Alex La Guma is strikingly obvious. In the first place, both writers belong to the same race –black race.

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<sup>1</sup> Andrew Warnes. Richard Wright's Native Son, 2007, pp 2-3.

<sup>2</sup> Vincent Ntaganira. Alex La Guma's Short Stories in Relation to A Walk in the Night, 2005, p7.

Besides, they are both Communist activists engaged in the awakening of the consciousness of their communities. Both received no high formal education under discriminatory governments. Both were subjected to racial abuses of the whites. Both endured family affective deficiency. At last both were directly or indirectly excluded from their countries; they had to live abroad; La Guma in permanent exile in England then Cuba, and Wright in France.

To come back with all these elements with more details, Richard Wright was a black American who was born in Mississippi in 1908. At that time to be born black in the South meant an inevitable state of being subject to racism, poverty, violence, etc. which was the case of Richard Wright, his family, and all the southern blacks. Robert Felgar illustrates well the hard circumstances that the black people of Mississippi had to undergo:

To be born black in Mississippi in 1908, when accurate records of the time of birth of black children in that state, was to be denied most opportunities for literary accomplishment, although Wright is obviously an exception. In 1908, black Mississippians could not vote, live where they wanted to, attend white schools (which were much better financed than black ones), or ride on integrated train cars.<sup>3</sup>

The deprivation of the blacks of the right to education is emphasized more than once in Richard Wright's Native Son. Max, Bigger's defender, raises the problem of lack of education at the court of justice to justify partly Bigger's murder, "he has no education. He is poor. He is black. And you know what we have made those things mean in our country."<sup>4</sup> Again, not long before, Max reminds the court of the fact that Negroes do not enjoy the same rights to education as whites do, but "every school teacher knows the restrictions which have been placed upon Negro education."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Robert Felgar, Student Companion to Richard Wright, 2000, pp 1-2.

<sup>4</sup> Richard Wright. Native Son, 1993, p470.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, p459.

Richard Wright was also prone to undergo white violence in addition to the obstacles made on his educational life. He did experience personally an aggressive act done by whites in his boyhood:

Although the young Richard Wright lived in a nearly all-black world, he did experience white racism during his youth. One day, a car occupied by young white men offered to let him hold on while he was riding his bicycle. The car pulled him along until one of the whites smashed a bottle in his face, which caused him to crash his bike.<sup>6</sup>

As for Alex La Guma, he was born on Friday, February 20, 1925 in District Six, Cape Town to a Coloured family. The Coloureds formed one of the main four racial groups according to the South African civil legislation, and they are considered by the whites as blacks in many respects. In Alex La Guma's A Walk in the Night, Michael Adonis, addressing Willieboy, complains about his white foreman, "called me a cheeky black bastard. Me, I'm not black."<sup>7</sup> This shows that Coloureds in the eyes of whites are not more than black<sup>8</sup>, and blackness represents shame on black people.

As a Coloured child, Alex La Guma did not escape the frustration of racism. It had affected him deeply, the reason which may have been behind his determined commitment to racial equality later on:

My mother took me to the circus for the first time. Anyway, the circus was on; it was very exciting, and when we were in the big top watching the performance I discovered that I couldn't see anything that was going on in the ring. For some reason or another, the performers were always looking the other way, performing in the other direction. And I asked my mother why. This was so and she told me we were sitting in the seats of black people and the main concentration of the circus was on the white audience, so we had to take our chance with the entertainment being provided.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 2000, p 3.

<sup>7</sup> Alex La Guma. A Walk in the Night, 1967, p4.

<sup>8</sup> In fact, the division of the South African population into whites, Blacks, Coloureds, and Indians was not practically very useful since the white rulers used to classify the Blacks, Coloureds, and the Indians into the same category of the oppressed without granting any privilege to any racial group over the rest. It was only when these three disfavoured groups confronted each other that they were provoked to struggle on the basis of the skin colour in order to forget the real enemy –the white exploiters. This legal division was nothing but a divide and rule technique of the white rulers to weaken the resistance of the other races.

<sup>9</sup> Vincent Ntaganira. Alex La Guma's Short Stories in Relation to A Walk in the Night, 2005, p 8.

This unfair deal that both American and South African blacks went through was not all evil; it had some good effect, for instance, “the injustices that La Guma experienced from whites from childhood onward were another source for his revolutionary ideas.”<sup>10</sup> So, his commitment to Communism was as a result of the injustices he experienced personally from whites or saw his compatriots experiencing them. As for Wright, he was attracted to Marxism because he found it good for providing a good explanation to the exploitative systems and practises that the few used to make huge profits over the many:

Marxism offered him a way of explaining the systems and histories that has generated the terrible conditions of his upbringing as well as those still being endured by Chicago’s black youth. The black and white street-speakers who drew crowds all around the South Side, denouncing the *ghetto as capitalism’s offspring*, the sign of its addiction to *underpaid labour and dependence on inequality*, convinced Wright [Italics mine].<sup>11</sup>

In fact, La Guma’s and Wright’s commitment to Communism was the outcome of the abuses of capitalism which was meant by the rich minority to secure as much wealth as possible even at the expense of the poor majority who were expected to provide cheap labour for these capitalists. The troubles which were inflicted on blacks and, on a larger scope, all the non whites, were being carried out by capitalism which imposed a cultural and ideological perception which presented the white as the abler and the Other as the weak vessel. The problem of the conflict in what concerned race relations in the world in the eyes of the Communists, including Wright and La Guma, in reality had economic motives which had nothing to do with racial divergence; in other words, discrimination on grounds of race was meant by the white capitalists to perpetuate their material interests; therefore, they always raised ideas and philosophies which considered the whites as being at the top of the hierarchical order of peoples, which would permit them to legitimate the exploitation of other races.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p8.

<sup>11</sup> Andrew Warnes,., Richard Wright’s Native Son, 2007, p8.

Their strong beliefs in Communism are reflected in the two novels under study. In Native Son the Communist assumptions in Richard Wright are embodied by mainly lawyer Max who is in charge of the defence of Bigger. Max's forty-page speech<sup>12</sup> before the judge is first and foremost the analysis of the social problems caused by the current system. He ascribes violence in American society to the unjust system which causes the deprived to feel desperate and frustrated. The system makes them lead purposeless lives, which might transform them into a real threat to the whole society. The speech also states that the system enriches the few and impoverishes the many by virtue of the colour bar which is used by the decision-makers as a pretext to justify their implementation of unjust policies.

In Alex La Guma's A Walk in the Night, the taxi-driver represents the communist conviction of the author. He cannot explain it well because he is apparently illiterate, but his conviction is deeply rooted in him. When speaking about the violence of the whites against blacks all over the world, he puts the blame on the capitalist system, "it's the capitalis' system," the taxi-driver said. 'Heard it at a meeting on the Parade. Whites act like that because of the capitalis' system.'"<sup>13</sup>

In addition to the affinities which are firstly related to their racial belonging and secondly to their commitment to Communism, both writers received no high formal education despite their desire to get as much education as possible. The system based on racial discrimination did not help them to. The white exploiter is the enemy of education for the Negro for fear of demanding his legitimate rights, which may disturb the interests of his master; the Southern plantation-owners in the antebellum era considered the teacher as their enemy as it is reported by Fanon:

When a Negro talks of Marx, the first reaction is always the same: "We have brought you up to our level and now you turn against your benefactors, Ingrates! Obviously nothing can be expected of you." And then too there is

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<sup>12</sup> See Richard Wright. Native Son, 1993, pp 444-73.

<sup>13</sup> Alex La Guma. A Walk in the Night, 1967, 17.

that bludgeon argument of the plantation-owner in Africa: Our enemy is the teacher.<sup>14</sup>

Still in this respect, Andrew Warnes quotes Leon F. Litwack telling a story which depicts the reason why the white man is worried about the Negro's education:

Curtailing the educational opportunities of blacks, along with segregation, and disfranchisement, were important mechanisms of *racial control* .... A story that would make the rounds among blacks... revealed ... a marvellous insight into the workings of the white mind. As he was leaving the railroad depot with a northern visitor, a southern white man saw two Negroes, one asleep and the other reading a newspaper. He kicked the Negro reading the newspaper. 'Would you please explain that? The Northerner asked. 'I don't understand it. I would think that if you were going to kick one you would kick the lazy one who's sleeping.' The white southerner replied, 'That's not the one we're worried about [*Italics mine*].<sup>15</sup>

Thus, both writers did not escape the hurdles put by the white system on their way to a high formal education; still, their perseverance enabled them to reach the status of famous writers.

To begin with, Wright received no high formal education. He started school late; it was not until the age of 12 that his grandmother enrolled him in a school near Jackson. However, he did not last for long there. Then he attended a public school for a few years. As he was "autodidact,"<sup>16</sup> he managed to publish his first story "The Voodoo of Hell's Half Acre" in newspaper **Southern Register** when he was but 16. He had several menial jobs in the period 1925-1927. During this time he started to read and write so much; he discovered the works of H. L. Mencken, Theodore Dreiser, Sinclair Lewis, Sherwood Anderson, and Gertrude Stein. In this period, he wrote articles for Communist newspapers **Daily Worker** and **New Masses** to contribute to the awakening of the consciousness of the masses and the fight against capitalist oppression and exploitation.

As for La Guma, he left high school at the age of 17 to enlist in night school courses at the Technical College of Cape Town. He worked as a clerk, bookkeeper and factory worker.

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<sup>14</sup> Frantz Fanon. Black Skin White Masks, 1986, p23.

<sup>15</sup> Op., Cit. p 2.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, p5.

In 1955, he began to write articles for an activist newspaper in Cape Town –**New Age**. In 1965 – at the age of 40, he took courses at London School of Journalism as a correspondent student.

In fact, his Communist militancy through journalism reminds us of that of his Afro-American counter-part Richard Wright who also devoted a great part of his time writing for Communist newspapers as a contribution to anti-racist activism.

In addition to educational affinities, they had an important feature in common which marked their lives –their proximity to their communities respectively. In fact, this close relationship to the conditions of their black compatriots, their frustration and aspiration, helped them so much to shape in their writings characters that represent authentically the plight of the black community. Their position close to the black miserable youth led them to adopt naturalism to portray the tragic conditions of this category of people. In this respect, on his side, Wright had a close knowledge about people who experienced the same fate as his tragic hero Bigger. In this context, Wright states in the epilogue:

The birth of Bigger Thomas goes back to my childhood, and there was not just one Bigger, but many of them, more than I could count and more than you suspect. But let me start with the first Bigger, whom I shall call Bigger No I.<sup>17</sup>

Still more, he himself shared some of the abnormal behaviour of Bigger, however this did not lead him to the same disastrous end as that of Bigger:

At four he was a pyromaniac, at six an alcoholic who exhibited disturbing signs of anal eroticism, and as an adolescent he was involved in theft and a number of petty crimes with other Negro boys.<sup>18</sup>

Thus, his closeness to the deprived African American youth and his involvement in their deviance provided him with the first-hand knowledge about the sociological environment after which the setting of Native Son was modelled.

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<sup>17</sup> Richard Wright. Native Son, 1993, p506.

<sup>18</sup> Edward Margolies. The Art of Richard Wright, 1969, p4.

Likewise, La Guma recalled in a BBC interview that a character like Michael Adonis is a typical person modelled after his young contemporaries in the slums of Cape Town District Six:

I played with and met characters like him, young men, who, because of the lack of opportunity and because of their colour have been prevented from achieving anything progressive and from achieving any ambition –have been forced into Michael’s situation. So that what Adonis experienced in the book, I haven’t personally experienced as an individual. I have seen it going on around me. That made it easy for me to write and create such a character.<sup>19</sup>

Besides, La Guma spent an important part of his life in District Six, which made it useful for him to portray authentically and skilfully in detail the mood of the environment in the area:

La Guma concentrates as much on the visual response of the reader as on his assumed sense of smell. He deliberately evokes the sordid qualities of the environment and blends details of suburban squalor with the ruggedness and somewhat decadent values which he identifies with the characters that inhabit the locations. Thus in varying degrees, all his characters embody one or another of the symptoms of pervasive decay and stupor.<sup>20</sup>

Another characteristic shared by the two writers, though to a different extent, consisted in their suffering from family affective deficiency in the early childhood –the period which is decisive in the shaping of the psychological and sociological aspects of the character of the individual. The lack of emotion in childhood leads to hypersensitivity which can have disastrous effects later on in adulthood. However, in the case of the writers in question, they reaped some blessing out of this lack; it provided them with energy and inspiration to make great literary achievements; in other words, it helped them to produce such great literary works as Native Son and A Walk in the Night which set them as genius figures in the world of literature.

What is sure at this point of comparison is that Richard Wright went through more accentuated lack of family affection; however, Alex La Guma had his share in such misfortune. Richard Wright’s father deserted his family before Richard was six. Now and then

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<sup>19</sup> S. O. Asein Alex La Guma The Man and his Work, 1987, p 48.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, p 49.

his mother grew harsh towards him. One of the bad experiences he had with her, as he told in his autobiography –Black Boy, occurred when he set his grandparents’ house on fire; she beat him nearly to death. On the other hand, his mother, normally the source of affection, failed to provide him with sufficient motherly love because she suffered from several paralytic strokes, which may have been, on the contrary, the source of several moments of his anxiety. Also, when still a child, he learned about his Uncle Hoskins’ lynching by white mobs who envied his successful saloon business, which made him realize that the white privileges were the outcome of the constant threat of lynching.<sup>21</sup>

His maternal grandmother’s definite religious belief was sometimes behind his frustration. She always insisted that he conform to her Seventh Day Adventism, which he found rather stressful. She would force him according to the Seventh Day Adventist tradition not to work nor to read worldly books on Saturdays; the boring thing he cannot stand. “Indeed, his grandmother once threw a boarder out of her house for reading Bluebeard and His Seven Wives to her grandson.”<sup>22</sup>

As for La Guma, he lacked the presence of his father at home; the latter was very often busy awakening the consciousness of the Coloured community. When he asked his mother why his father was seldom at home:

He was told that his father was busy in meetings, using Lenin’s teachings to liberate his people. La Guma’s own words are more convincing: “My mother explained that my father was a follower of Lenin; that Lenin had been the leader of the great change in Russia which had done away with poverty so that people no longer need be poor.”<sup>23</sup>

The sufferings of both authors can be viewed as the inspiring source for their creation of miserable black characters in Native Son and A Walk in the Night. For instance, Richard Wright’s father’s family abandonment can be viewed as the source of Richard Wright’s inspiration to make Bigger’s father subjected to lynching by a white mob. The permanent

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<sup>21</sup> See Robert Felgar. Student Companion to Richard Wright, 2000, p4.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, p4.

<sup>23</sup> Vincent Ntaganira. Alex La Guma’s Short Stories in Relation to A Walk in the Night, 2005, p7.

absence from home of Mr. Wright the senior by desertion can hold the same effects on his family as the absence of Bigger's father by lynching. This can be seen as the cause of the writer to create the idea of the lynching of the father of Bigger. In other words, fiction is the reflection of reality.

Still in this context, Bigger, Gus, G.H., and Jack Harding on the one hand, and Michael Adonis, Willieboy, Joe, and Mr. Greene on the other hand, have suffered injustice and lack of family affection a great deal, which can be seen as the result of the projection technique used probably unconsciously by both authors to express their own real sufferings.

In this sense, the frequent absence of Jimmy La Guma (Alex's father) at home, when Alex was a little child, can be paralleled with the desertion of Joe's father for his family. Jimmy La Guma used to be very often away for political preoccupations; hence, Alex felt the lack of his father's presence at home; he may have suffered emotionally. Likewise, Joe's father's desertion caused Joe to feel miserable and frustrated; however, the specificity of Joe's peaceful character makes him able to accept his bitter reality without resorting to violence.

In what concerns resistance and activism, La Guma showed more activism against the system of Apartheid than Wright did against the system of Jim Crow. Still, it is worth saying that Wright had many sides to resist to; his community, family, Communist leaders and the capitalist system. Contrarily, La Guma's target was only the ruling system.

Jimmy La Guma (Alex's father) had been a Communist activist by the time Alex was born. He became secretary of the Western Cape African National Congress (ANC). Between 1935 and 1939 he was also active with the National Liberation League (NLL). After his retirement from active politics, he was persuaded to head the South African Coloured People's Organisation (SACPO). "It was into politically committed background that La Guma was born."<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Nahem Yousaf. Alex La Guma Politics and Resistance, Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2001, p vii.

Thus, Alex La Guma had been influenced by his father's political activism since his early childhood. In 1947 he became a member of the Young Communist League but three years later the League was dissolved; he resorted to journalism to continue his militancy. In fact, through his writing for **New Age** he led his political battle with Apartheid until he became a banned person in 1962:

Cecil A. Abrahams has specified the character of La Guma's activism against the restrictive apartheid policies: "He gave leadership in attacking the government's 1955 Race Classification Bill and the 1956 South African Act Amendment Bill, which removed coloured voters from the electoral roll ... he led the bus boycott of April and May 1956." La Guma's high profile in antigovernment agitation led to his being perceived as a potential threat to the state ... The government had him arrested along with 154 others in the infamous Treason Trial of 1956-61. After the final acquittal of all the accused, as late as 1960, La Guma was arrested on several more occasions before being placed under house arrest for five years... finally his writing was suppressed under the Publication and Entertainments Acts of 1963.<sup>25</sup>

While La Guma was opposed only to the ruling system, Richard Wright was at odds with many institutions; the capitalist ruling system, his black community, his family, and even his Communist fellows.

He opposed capitalism which he regarded as the source of the frustration of his ambitions and those of his community; he joined the American Communist Party in the thirties which later on he found as "a conspiratorial conclave of capitalist and imperialist oppressors,"<sup>26</sup> which explains at least partly why he broke with the Party in 1942; still, he remained Marxist, "believing in a socialist upheaval of society."<sup>27</sup>

He also showed his disapproval of the policies followed by certain African countries when involved in the African Nationalist activities when in a visit to Ghana; he argued that Ghana would rather have to industrialize to catch up with the West.

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid, pp viii ix.

<sup>26</sup> Edward Margolies. The Art of Richard Wright, 1969, p6.

<sup>27</sup>.Ibid, p7.

Besides, as his tendency to agnosticism was rooted in him since his childhood, he had not grown in tune with the religious tendency of his grandmother and his aunt with whom he had troubles as it is reported in Black Boy.

As we can notice there are some differences in the type of resistance of both writers but what they had in common in this respect, was their rebellious temperament and uncompromising stand against what they deemed unjust, frustrating, and unreasonable; the characteristic which was behind their great achievements in the world of literature despite the multiple hurdles they confronted on their way to success and fame.

# PART TWO

### Chapter Three: Blacks in the whites' perception

I shall start by contextualizing the issue of how whites look at blacks; how they perceive them. In this respect, Richard Wright's Native Son and Alex La Guma's A Walk in the Night turn around various cases of interactions between whites and blacks. They depict the type of race relations between whites and blacks in respectively the Jim Crow USA and Apartheid South Africa. The coexistence of the two races goes back to the early times in the history of the two countries. Through this very long coexistence the image of the Negro has taken shape in the perception of the white man.

In this context, white Jim Crow America is not less racist than Apartheid South Africa. The prevailing white American's attitude to the Negro is one of underestimation and disdain; the white man should be severely careful about the distrustful Negro. In this respect, James Kimble Vardaman, a white governor in the South during the period that preceded Wright's birth, won eminence and respect from whites for his unjust policies towards the Negro:

Vardaman rose to eminence by prescribing for sound race relations in this way: "the way to control the nigger is to whip him when he does not obey without it, and another is never to pay him more wages than it is actually necessary to buy food and clothing."<sup>1</sup>

In 1947, thirty eight years later James Kimble Vardaman's 'prescription', another strong racial prejudice against blacks was passed, this time by Theodore Gilmore Bilbo, then an American senator, who pointed, "the nigger is only 150 years from the jungle of Africa where he cut up some fried nigger steak for breakfast."<sup>2</sup>

Moreover, it is by no means arguable that evolutionist theories found a large area of agreement in the USA in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Spencer's view set the Anglo-Saxon race at the top of the hierarchical order of races; the view which would suit the Laissez-Faire Policy which was based on the principle of harsh competition in order to

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<sup>1</sup>Keneth Kinnamon, The Emergence of Richard Wright A Study in Literature and Society, 1972, p5.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p5.

survive; it is for the most suitable people (the elected by nature or by God) to win. Of course the Negro has no share in the fortunes of this theory; he has to be independent on and subordinate to the more evolving races. He is thought to be inferior not capable to run his affairs properly.

Many are the late nineteenth century American scholars who advocated the Darwinian view of the evolution of species by means of natural selection; Asa Gray, professor at Harvard University, Edward L. Youmans, William, Graham Sumner, John Fiske, John W. Burgess, Josiah Strong were among other thinkers of the Gilded Age who developed the theory of Social Darwinism after Darwin's and Spencer's models to fit in the harsh competition for more wealth which was in vogue during the Gilded Age. Even some religious men showed no opposition to Darwin's theory; on the contrary, Henry Ward Beecher (1813-1887) a religious scholar was among the advocates of Darwin's theory of evolution.<sup>3</sup>

Similarly, the white man in South Africa, be he Afrikaner or of British descent, puts blacks in a position between human beings and the highest animal species –the apes. For him, the Negro has not evolved much more than monkeys have. Therefore, it is pointless to treat the Negro and the white man in an equal way. Alfred Milner points out that “a political equality of white and black is impossible.”<sup>4</sup> He thinks that it is only the white man who must rule simply because “he is elevated by many, many steps above the black man; steps which it will take the latter centuries to climb.”<sup>5</sup> Blacks are “primitive” “heathen”, “uncivilized”, and they “occupied a position somewhere between the white man and animals.”<sup>6</sup> No difference between the Afrikaner and whites of British descent in what concerns their prejudices against the blacks and their attitudes towards the prevailing racist system of Apartheid; the majority

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<sup>3</sup> For more information see Mohammed Haddadou's The Philosophical Origins of Jim Crow Laws: From Racial Prejudice to Scientific Racism, Tizi-ouzou Univ. 2008, pp176-84.

<sup>4</sup> - Robert Harvey. The Fall of Apartheid, 2001, p31.

<sup>5</sup> - Ibid, p31.

<sup>6</sup> - Ibid, p33.

of whites of British descent “shared the Boer prejudices against the blacks. The great bulk of the English speaking community deems the established racist order natural and satisfactory.”<sup>7</sup>

Philosophy of racial discrimination is developed and supported by the Afrikaans churches. Moreover, one of the important sources of the Broederbond concept of Afrikanerdom stemmed from religion; “Afrikanerdom and the whole concept of apartheid – apartness- is bound up with the mystical exclusiveness of Calvinist Protestantism.”<sup>8</sup> In fact, Calvinism itself preached apartness; the Damned must keep aside from the Elect. As the Dutch Reformed Church puts it:

Every nation and race will be able to perform the greatest service to God and the world if it keeps its own national attributes, received from God’s own hand, pure with honour and gratitude... God divided men into races, languages and nations. Differences are not only willed by God but perpetuated by Him. Equality between Natives, Coloured and Europeans includes a misappreciation of the fact that God, in His providence, made people into different races and nations... far from the word of God encouraging equality, it is an established spiritual principle that in every community ordination, there is a fixed relationship between authorities... Those who are culturally and spiritually advanced have a mission to leadership and protection of the less advanced.<sup>9</sup>

Now it is quite apparent that the dogma of white natural and religious supremacy was rooted in the minds of many people from Europe, America and white South Africa. Thus, the non-whites in America and South Africa have no important status in the eyes of white supremacists.

In fact, Richard Wright and Alex La Guma grew in a world dominated by the white supremacist dogma which was the origin of the misfortunes they and their communities went through. Consequently, their works come as a reflection of the attitudes of whites which express the feeling of exclusion, alienation, dehumanisation, injustice, oppression, violence, humiliation, and all other ingredients which biased race relations in both Jim Crow America and Apartheid South Africa.

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<sup>7</sup> - Ibid, p33.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p51.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p51-2.

Thus, Richard Wright's Native Son and Alex La Guma's A Walk in the Night depict the way the Negro is perceived by the white man. The Negro is in the workings of the Collective Unconscious of the whites a thief, drug addict, and a sexually dangerous person among other negative attributes which constitute the eternal prejudices which have been held against him for a long time.

In Native Son, Bigger is believed to be a thief. Once he goes to Mr Dalton's home to ask for a job, he has the following conversation with Mr Dalton:

“But they said you were always in trouble. How do you explain that?”  
“I don't know suh.”  
“Why did they send you to the reform school?”  
His eyes glared at the floor.  
“They said I was stealing!” He blurted defensively. “But I wasn't.”<sup>10</sup>

Bigger's involvement in stealing is probable. And that he has been condemned by the law, by sending him to the reform school, without evidence is also probable. But the only thing we readers are totally sure of is that the reason why he resorts to such a petty crime is beyond his responsibility. It is the lack of opportunity that has thrown him “in the whirlpool world of poverty, petty crime and violence.”<sup>11</sup>

Again, when wandering alone in the neighbourhood of Mr Dalton's home, Bigger has a feeling of fear and uneasiness; he is afraid of a probable police patrol that will take him for a potential criminal:

But there was none. Other than the front gate, there was only a driveway, the entrance to which securely locked. Suppose the police saw him wandering in a white neighbourhood like this? It would be thought that *he was trying to rob or rape somebody* [Italics mine].<sup>12</sup>

He is afraid simply because he knows how whites perceive a black walking alone in a white neighbourhood. For the whites all the blacks are easily tempted to do wrong. According to the

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<sup>10</sup> Richard Wright, Native Son, 1993, p56.

<sup>11</sup> Borrowed from Alex La Guma's A Walk in the Night, p4, about Willieboy and Michael Adonis

<sup>12</sup> Richard Wright, Op. Cit., p49.

colour prejudice blackness is always associated with evil and impurity; “virtue is white as sin is black.”<sup>13</sup>

This image of black theft is alluded to in A Walk in the Night too. Young Michael Adonis is taken for a thief by a white policeman without having any evidence; the only evidence is Michael’s blackness. It all happens, when in an ordinary patrol, two white policemen come across Michael and set out to search him:

‘Jong, turn out your pockets,’ the first one ordered. ‘Hurry up.’  
Michael Adonis began to empty his pockets slowly...  
‘Where did you steal the money?’ the question was without humour, deadly serious, the voice topped with hardness like the surface of a file.  
‘Didn’t steal it, baas.’  
‘Well, muck off from the street. Don’t let us find you standing around, you hear?’<sup>14</sup>

Hence, beforehand, without any evidence, Michael Adonis has been condemned as a thief. If he has money it is because he “steals” it; no other means for him to get it in the opinion of the white policeman. Although, in the reality on the ground, many blacks earn their living by doing the most strenuous jobs for whites for low wages without resorting to theft, the policeman takes young Adonis for a thief since he has found in his pocket money; the Negro is in the white Collective Unconscious associated with impurity and sin.

The Negro having a strong desire for sex is an idea that is rooted in the mind of the white man. “The sexual potency of the Negro is hallucinating...God knows how they make love!”<sup>15</sup> “The Negro is viewed as a penis.”<sup>16</sup> “The Negro symbolizes the biological danger. For the Negro is only biological. The Negroes are animals.... Whoever says rape says Negro.”<sup>17</sup> The white man is convinced that the Negro is a beast, “if it is not the length of the penis, then it is the sexual potency that impresses.”<sup>18</sup> All these prejudices against the Negro woven in the

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<sup>13</sup> Frantz Fanon, Black Skin White Masks, 1986, p106.

<sup>14</sup> Alex La Guma, A Walk in the Night, 1967, p12.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, p122.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, p123.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, p127.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, p131.

perception of the white man through a long time caused the latter to be cautious and vigilant of the Negro's threat to the purity of his daughter, sister, or wife. White women in their turn are influenced by the myth of the strange sexual potency and, by transition, sexual threat. "The big blonde trembles (of fear) whenever the Negro goes near her. Yet she has nothing to fear, since the factory is full of white men."<sup>19</sup> Still, when it is to take the issue scientifically, "the average length of the penis among the black men of Africa, Dr. Pales says, rarely exceeds 120 millimetres... Testut, in his *Traité d'anatomie humaine*, offers the same figure for the European."<sup>20</sup>

Here is a case of a white woman whose job as a prostitute enabled her to have sex with men of both races. At the beginning she had that feeling that black men were much more sexually potent than whites, but with time, through her experience, she came to know the truth that no difference existed between white and black men, and all that had been inculcated in her mind and the mind of white people about the extraordinary sexual potency of the Negro was but a prejudice:

A prostitute told me that in her early days the mere thought of going to bed with a Negro brought on an orgasm. She went in search for Negroes and never asked them for money. But, she added, "going to bed with them was no more remarkable than going to bed with white men. It was before I did it that I had the orgasm. I used to think about (imagine) all the things they might do to me: and that was so terrific."<sup>21</sup>

The sexual prejudice against the black race is depicted by Native Son and A Walk in the Night alike. In fact, the entire story in Native Son revolves around a murder and rape committed by a young Negro against a white girl. The reaction of the white folk expresses clearly all their prejudice against the blacks in what concerns the sexual impurity and transgression. The event is also a good opportunity to seize in order to obtain some political or material interests –the case of David A. Buckley who is up for re-election.

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid, p120.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, p131.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, p122.

The press expresses also the harsh attitude of whites towards the whole black community in a situation where one single black man kills or rapes a white woman. It is enough for all the blacks to be harshly punished if one single person among them commits a crime against any white soul. *The Tribune* entitles in bold: **NEGRO RAPIST FAINTS AT INQUEST** then come the details of and comments on the event which show how really the Negro is represented in the minds of the white ordinary people and officials. Some parts of the almost three-page *Tribune* article read as follows:

Overwhelmed by the sight of his accusers, Bigger Thomas, *Negro sex-slayer* fainted dramatically this morning at the inquest of Mary Dalton, millionaire Chicago heiress...

“He looks exactly like an ape!” exclaimed a *terrified* young white girl who watched the black slayer...

Though the Negro killer’s body does not seem compactly built, he gives the impression of possessing *abnormal physical strength* ...His lower jaw protrudes obnoxiously, reminding one of a *jungle beast*...

His arms are long, hanging in a dangling fashion to his knees. It is easy to imagine how this man, in the grip of a brain-numbing sex passion, *overpowered little Mary Dalton, raped her, murdered her, beheaded her* ...

The moment the killer made his appearance at the inquest, there were shouts of “Lynch ’im! Kill ’im!”...

He acted like an *earlier missing link in the human species*. He seemed out of place in a white man’s civilisation [Italics mine].<sup>22</sup>

Considering the article, we wonder if the murderer were a white person, would his skin colour be mentioned in the title in bold? Then would the skin colour of the supposedly white murderer be mentioned time and time again all through the three pages? And would racist expressions such as: “ape”, “jungle beast”, “earlier missing link in the human species”, etc. be repeated? Would threatening expressions of white mobs such as: “Lynch ’im! Kill ’im!” be shouted? Or it would be another story because the murderer belonged to a race that is completely different to the “primitive” one. These are but rhetorical questions to be considered only; they do not need answers.

It also reinforces our thesis in that the Negro is in the eyes of the white people a potential threat to white woman’s sexual safety; “it is easy to imagine how this man, in the

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<sup>22</sup> Richard Wright. *Native Son*, 1993, pp 322-3.

grip of a brain-numbing sex passion, overpowered little Mary Dalton, raped her, murdered her, beheaded her.”<sup>23</sup> In this respect, Fanon points:

For the majority of white men the Negro represents the sexual instinct (in its raw state). The Negro is the incarnation of a genital potency beyond all moralities and prohibitions.<sup>24</sup>

In this way, white men are aware of the threat and act accordingly; they do not want their women to be near the Negro. In fact, by means of the workings of the white Collective Unconscious that shapes the Negro as a generator of terror whether by sexual immoral acts or by physical crimes; whites may catch Negrophobia, as it is expressed by McCulloch:

Through the mechanism of projection, the imago of the ‘genital nigger’ absorbs that fund of sexual guilt which is the inevitable product of cultural development... Fanon argues that sexual anxiety, prevalent among negrophobes, has its origins, not in actual traumatising experience, but in a substratum of phantasy material transmitted to the individual during childhood by the surrounding culture.<sup>25</sup>

Unlike other phobias which are the outcome of bad experiences the phobic has gone through, negrophobia is the outcome of a transmitted culture from generation to generation. It is the surrounding culture that vehicles the seeds of negrophobia.

If we consider the following radio broadcast of the reaction of some whites we come to understand that uneasiness of the white man about all the blacks is obvious in case there is any act of violence from one single black neurotic like Bigger:

In a radio broadcast last night Mayor Ditz warned of possible mob violence and exhorted the public to maintain order... It was reported that several hundred Negro employees throughout the city had been dismissed from jobs. A well known banker’s wife phoned this paper that she had dismissed her Negro cook, “for fear that she might poison the children”.<sup>26</sup>

This white collective reaction can only be explained as a result of the workings of the white Collective Unconscious that represents blackness as a symbol of crime, rape, and, in general, evil. After the crime committed by Bigger every black person becomes subjected to counter-

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid, p323.

<sup>24</sup> Frantz Fanon. Black Skin White Masks, 1986, p136.

<sup>25</sup> Jock McCulloch. Black Soul White Artifact, 1983, p74.

<sup>26</sup> Richard Wright. Native Son, 1993, p283.

violence from whites. In the same context, Jack and Jim, black friends to Bigger, have this conversation:

“But, jack, *ever*’ nigger looks guilty t’ white folks when somebody’s done crime.”

“Yeah; tha’s ’cause so many of us act like Bigger Thomas; tha’s all. When yuh act like Bigger Thomas yuh stir up trouble.”

“But, Jack, who’s stirring up trouble now? The papers say they beatin’ us up all over the city. They don’t care whut black man they git. *We’s all dogs in they sight!*”

“We’s all murderers t’ them, Ah tell yuh!” [Italics mine].<sup>27</sup>

All the Negroes are put into the same basket at the critical moment; no distinction between perpetrators, suspects, and innocents. Many black employees are fired for no reason except that one neurotic Negro, somewhere in Chicago, raped and murdered a white girl; the whole race has engaged to revenge their victim; mobs, officials, newspapers, etc., are now pouring their fury on the blacks whom they qualify as being a true potential danger. We readers can imagine that if the murderer were a white man and the victim black, the white public opinion would have another judgement; they would point out that the murderer had psychic disorders resulted from social problems; then the patient really would need psychological and social assistance which would remedy what seemed to be the trouble.

As for Alex La Guma’s novella, it also depicts the sexual prejudice against the black race. In this respect, three American men, two whites and one swarthy, come with three young Coloured women into Miss Gipsy’s place to have a drink and spend the night. As they are sitting they start to enjoy their time with each other. Willieboy happens to be present with them; he has already courted Nancy, one of the girls, but she has just ignored him and gone with one of the three men. Therefore, he gets jealous of the foreigners playing with the Coloured girls; he addresses the landlady –Miss Gipsy:

‘These jubas. They just messing our girls.’

‘That any of your business?’

‘I don’t like them messing our girls,’ Willieboy said again, staring at the three men. ‘To hell with them.’<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid, pp290-1.

If we read this episode with Fanon's Black Skin White Masks in mind, we can have the idea that even black women are thought to have extraordinary sexual desire for white men. This is why the white Americans come to Gipsy's to have sex with Coloured girls, which makes Willieboy absolutely furious.<sup>29</sup> He keeps repeating, 'These jubas. They just messing our girls.' The Coloured woman is fondly desired by the white man because he thinks she shows effervescent energy when having sex.

This prejudice can be evidenced by the information given to Michael Adonis by an apparently desperate man:

'Howsit, Mikey?'

'Okay, how's business?'

'Not bad. American ship came in this morning. Been driving those Yankees almost all day. Mostly to *whore houses* [Italics mine].'<sup>30</sup>

This episode, like the previous episode, shows how much white American men are attracted to black women who are thought to have stronger sexual potency than white women.<sup>31</sup>

And not far from this episode, we can read about the fact that white men think the Negro is a threat to their women; they react violently at any attempt from him to win a love relationship with a white woman:

The haggard man, Greene, hiccoughed and chipped in, saying, 'I read how they hanged up a negro in the street in America. Whites done it.'

'Huh?' Michael Adonis said.

'Read it in the paper the other day. Some whites took a negro out in the street and hanged him up. They said he did look properly at some woman.'<sup>32</sup>

In addition to the white representation of the Negro as being a source of evil by his "innate predisposition" to theft, sexual deviance, and criminality, both Native Son and A

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<sup>28</sup> Alex La Guma. A Walk in the Night, 1967, pp53-4.

<sup>29</sup> See Frantz Fanon, Op. Cit., pp28-44.

<sup>30</sup> Alex La Guma, Op. Cit., p 16.

<sup>31</sup> Fanon does not speak about black women as being thought wrongly by whites to have strong sexual potency, but this prejudice was widespread in the white culture and literature. We can read it, for example, in Conrad's Heart of Darkness, as embodied by Kurtz's African Mistress who epitomizes the strong sexual desire of the African women as compared to his white Intended who symbolizes Western woman's chastity.

<sup>32</sup> Alex La Guma, Op. Cit., p 16.

Walk in the Night depict the idea of black inferiority inculcated in the mind of the white man. In fact, the white man considers himself superior and the black man inferior. This perception is confirmed by even the black man himself; “the Negro enslaved by his inferiority, the white man enslaved by his superiority alike.”<sup>33</sup> The Negro is in the eyes of the white man an animal, ugly, of a low level of intelligence, primitive and savage. The white man is elegant, intelligent and civilized. The Negro, in his turn feels inferior in front of the white man whom he considers much more elevated. The only criterion that determines the degree of superiority in this case is the skin colour. For instance, in the case of the Coloured Antilleans or the Coloured South Africans, they feel inferior to the white man but superior to the coal black Negro. The whiter you are the more elevated you feel, the blacker you are the lower you feel; this is the image that has been inculcated into the mind of the white man.

In Native Son, there are many pieces of evidence that show the image of inferiority of the Negro in the perception of the white man. I will content myself with a few of them; I will stick to just a few illustrations. The Negro is shown in the novel as a beast, a species that has not evolved enough in the evolving process of mankind; his intellectual capacities are limited; a long term education is out of his reach and cannot benefit him anyway.

As we have seen in the previous article in *the Tribune*, a young girl exclaims with horror as she sees Bigger for the first time after his capture:

He looks just like an ape! [...] His lower jaw protrude obnoxiously, reminding one of a jungle beast [...] He acted like an earlier missing link in the human species. He seemed out of place in a white man's civilisation.<sup>34</sup>

One of the comments that come from the South shows that Negroes are in the eyes of the whites incapable to assimilate more education; their mental capacities are limited:

We of the South believe that the North encourages Negroes to get more education than they are organically capable of absorbing, with the result that northern Negroes are more unhappy and restless than those of the South.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> See Frantz Fanon. Black Skin White Masks, 1986, p44.

<sup>34</sup> Richard Wright. Native Son, 1993, pp322-3.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, p324.

In this respect, Fanon's Black Skin White Masks picks up in various places the image of nigger animal in the white Collective Unconscious. Accordingly, they are positioned in a place between the white man and animals.<sup>36</sup> Fanon speaks about his questionnaire addressed to a sample of some 500 Europeans:

Over three or four years I questioned some 500 members of the white race – French, German, English, Italian. I took advantage of a certain air of trust, of relaxation; in each instance I waited until my subject no longer hesitated to talk to me quite openly –that is, until he was sure that he would not offend me. Or else, in the midst of associational tests, I inserted the word among some twenty others. Almost 60 per cent of the replies took this form:

*Negro* brought forth biology, [...] athletic, potent, boxer, [...] savage, *animal*, devil, sin<sup>37</sup> [Italics mine].

Likewise, White Apartheid system, as presented by La Guma's novella, underestimates nonwhites. The dismissal of Michael Adonis for a futile reason occurs because a black employee is in the eyes of a white employer not more important than a beast of burden or a machine. Workers in the factory from which Michael has been fired are not given enough time to relieve themselves:

'Every time a man goes to the piss house he starts moaning. Jesus Christ, the way he went on you'd think a man had to wet his pants rather than take a minute off. Well, he picked on me for going for a leak and I told him to go to hell.'<sup>38</sup>

Again the white police treat blacks with lack of respect and even brutality. In this context, when searching Michael, one policeman addresses him impertinently:

This policeman asked in a heavy, brutal voice, 'Where's your dagga?

'I don't smoke it.'

'Jong, turn out your pockets,' the first one ordered. 'Hurry up.'

Michael Adonis began to empty his pockets slowly...

'Where did you steal the money?' the question was without humour, deadly serious, the voice topped with hardness like the surface of a file.

'Didn't steal it, baas.'

'Well, muck off from the street. Don't let us find you standing around, you hear?'

'Yes, (*you mucking boer*).'

'Yes, what? Who are you talking to, man?'

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<sup>36</sup> See Frantz Fanon. Black Skin White Masks, 1986, pp 85, 86, 127, 134, 151, and 171.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, p128.

<sup>38</sup> Alex La Guma. A Walk in the Night, 1967, p4.

‘Yes, baas...’<sup>39</sup>

The unjustifiable harshness with which the policemen treat Michael Adonis can be explained by the lack of respect on the part of the white man towards the Negro. This disrespect is due to the fact that the Negro is in the white man’s mind inferior. For the white man, the Negro should be treated like a little child, he should always be reminded of his low position, and he should always address his superior by the title “*baas*”.

In his turn Constable Raalt, a Boer policeman, holds a humiliating estimation of the blacks; he considers them as primitive, ‘I wish something would happen. I’d like to lay my hands on one of those bushman bastards and wring his bloody neck.’<sup>40</sup> And just before, he announces to his colleague Andries his underestimating attitude towards the blacks; ‘okay, man. If you’re not bloody fed up with riding around looking at these effing hotnot bastards, let’s go.’<sup>41</sup>

Contrarily to Constable Raalt, Andries sounds full of sense of responsibility; however, he is affected by the white Collective Unconscious that considers the white race as being the superior; therefore, he is worried about the white reputation to be affected by the brutality of white people like Constable Raalt:

The driver was young and perhaps over-conscientious of his status both in the police force and in society, and he thought, He is one of those who will disgrace *us whites*. In his scorn for *the hotnots and kaffirs* he is exposing the whole race to shame. He will do something violent to one of those *black bastards* and as a result *our superiority will suffer* [Italics mine].<sup>42</sup>

All these pejorative “titles” used over and over again by Constable Raalt and the like about the blacks as being “hotnots,” “bastards,” “bushmen,” “kaffirs,” “rookers,” “skollies,” etc. bring out the scorned image of the black man which is rooted in the perception of the white people.

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid, p12.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, p39.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, p31.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, p39.

Thus, the Negro has been reduced to a status not much higher than that of animals by means of prejudices and irrational judgment passed on him, which has resulted in his complex of inferiority which is often accompanied by two types of feelings: fear of and resentment against the white man.

In fact, this idea of the feelings of hatred and fear in the Negro is emphatically present in both works -- Native Son and A Walk in the Night. The Negro cannot help holding a grudge against the person who enslaved him for centuries and continues to inflict on him all types of suffering and pains. At the same time, the Negro keeps afraid of the white man's potential danger.

In Native Son, Bigger embodies the idea of fear and resentment of the Negro as a result of his inferiority complex. It is clearly shown in the robbery attempt episode; Bigger Thomas along with his friends tries to rob Old Blum's. He is actually afraid of the white proprietor but he tries to hide his fear from his black fellows Jack, G.H., and Gus. Hence, he resorts to make Gus a scapegoat for his withdrawal from the planned robbery; he beats him cruelly as an act of blaming Gus for his fear; but in fact, even Bigger himself is afraid of engaging in robbing a white man's shop.<sup>43</sup>

Again the feeling of hatred and fear rises up in Bigger when he heads for the Dalton's to ask for a job:

He grew angry. Why had he come to take this goddamn job? He could have stayed among his own people and escape feeling this fear and hate. This was not his world; he had been foolish in thinking that he would have liked it.<sup>44</sup>

Once he obtains the job as a chauffeur for the Daltons, he drives Mary Dalton to meet her boyfriend Jan Erlone who is one of the young Communists of Chicago. Mary introduces her boyfriend to Bigger; "oh Bigger this is Jan. And Jan this is Bigger Thomas."<sup>45</sup> At that instant

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<sup>43</sup> See Richard Wright. Native Son, 1993, pp 24-31 and pp 41-4.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, pp49-50.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, p75.

Bigger feels ill at ease; he has never been accustomed to such kindness from a white man; he finds difficulties shaking hands with Jan. The latter tries to put Bigger at ease:

“We may as well get to know each other,” Jan said. “I’m a friend of Mary’s.”

“Yessuh,” he mumbled.

“First of all,” Jan continued, putting his foot upon the running-board, “don’t say *sir* to me. I’ll call you Bigger and you call me Jan. That’s the way it’ll be between us. How’s that?”

Bigger did not answer.<sup>46</sup>

Bigger’s reluctance to welcome Jan can be read as the outcome of the outrageous array of scornful acts of the white man against the black man. It is the outcome of the prejudices held against the latter as being inferior; Bigger has the inferiority complex rooted in him for many years in the few years he has spent in his life. He is used to disdain and impertinence of the white man and now all of a sudden he is amazed by friendliness and sympathy from two white people; this is too kind of whites to express their “excessive” respect for him.

As for Alex La Guma’s A Walk in the Night, The episode of Michael Adonis being searched by the two policemen epitomizes well the mixed feeling of the Negro in front of the white man:

‘Where are you walking around, man? [...]

‘Going home,’ Michael Adonis said, looking at the buckle of the policeman’s belt. You learned from experience to gaze at some spot on their uniforms, the button of a pocket, or the bright smoothness of their Sam Browne belts, *but never into their eyes*, for that would be taken as an affront by them. It was only the very brave, or the very stupid, who dared look straight into the law’s eyes, to challenge them or to question their authority [...]

‘Well, muck off from the street. Don’t let us find you standing around, you hear?’

‘Yes, (you mucking boer).’

‘Yes, what? Who are you talking to, man?’

‘Yes, baas (you mucking bastard boer with your mucking gun and your mucking bloody red head).’

They pushed past him, one of them brushing him aside with an elbow and strolled on. He put the stuff back into his pockets. And down inside him *the feeling of rage, frustration and violence* swelled like a boil, knotted with pain [Italics mine].<sup>47</sup>

Again, Michael Adonis’ feeling of revenge on the white foreman who has fired him is suggestive of hatred on the part of the black oppressed against the white oppressor but this

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid, p75.

<sup>47</sup> Alex La Guma. A Walk in the Night, 1967, pp11-2.

hatred is not easy to exteriorize for fear of being struck back by the foreman who is superior and more powerful. This is not the case with Mr. Doughty who despite his whiteness cannot strike back because he is “dying of alcoholism, diabetes and old age... [he is also] a deserted abandoned ruin...waiting for death, trapped at the top of an old tenement.”<sup>48</sup> Therefore, Michael Adonis finds no difficulty to satisfy his desire for taking revenge and killing this old white man despite his dove-like peacefulness.

What happens to the protagonist (Michael Adonis) is that he has been filled with resentment of the white foreman who has dismissed him and the two white policemen who, in their turn, have ill-treated him but he cannot exteriorize this resentment because he feels inferior to and afraid of them. But as soon as the opportunity comes to him, he shows no hesitation to turn his resentment into action and kill an old peaceful white man. We readers can think of him as a neurotic who is not able to differentiate between a person who is worthy of punishment and a person who is not so. His neurosis prevents him from looking at things neatly deep inside; the only criterion for him is the skin colour; all whites are guilty and deserve punishment.

Inferiority complex including the feeling of resentment mixed with fear is the product of colonialism as McCulloch shows it clearly:

In Fanon’s work The Wretched of the Earth the sensitivity of the Negro, his crippling sense of inferiority, and his perpetual nearness to rage all relate to a single psychic structure supposedly engendered by colonial dominance.<sup>49</sup>

The colonized went through a long process of inferiorization inflicted on him by the colonizer through different means: the press, education, religion, culture and history among other means.

The press in the colonial context has never been innocent; it serves the colonial interests by inculcating into the mind of the colonized the idea of the merit of colonialism. It

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid, pp24-5.

<sup>49</sup> Jock McCulloch, Black Soul White Artifact, 1983, p67.

presents the colonizer as the superior who deserves to run the affairs of the colonized because the latter is not mature enough to lead his affairs on his own. In Native Son, the idea of the role of the press in serving the colonial interests is obvious. After Bigger's crime, the press sets out to blow up the size of the event and tries to insist on the idea of the impurity of the black man. Bigger is presented by the press as the archetype of all blacks who should be kept aside. They should not enjoy the same amount of opportunity as the whites should simply because they are inferior and a potential threat to civilized white people.<sup>50</sup>

In A Walk in the Night, the idea that the press in the colonial context serves the government is there. In fact, each time the taxi-driver tries to put the blame on "the capitalist system,"<sup>51</sup> Greene orders him to "cut out politics" because the only politics allowed is that which serves colonialism -not which opposes its interests. Greene keeps interrupting the taxi-driver because of the danger which may befall anybody who tries to go against the oppressive flow. This censorship on the level of the public presupposes a more important censorship on the official level -the press among other things.

As for the use of education for the colonial interests, it can be evidenced in the two works alike by the almost absence of education for the blacks in both the South Belt in Chicago and Cape Town District Six. All the black characters in the South Belt in Chicago are deprived of their right to education. They are presented as almost illiterate: Bigger, Jack, Guss, G.H. among others are taught in their turn to answer white people by "yessuh," "nawsuh," "yessum," and "no'm" in order to serve them and perpetuate their superiority.

Similarly, all the Coloured characters in La Guma's novella belong to the non educated category of people. We assume that the probably little amount of education of the taxi-driver, Greene, and Michael Adonis among others is meant to serve the interests of the white system

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<sup>50</sup> See Richard Wright. Native Son, 1993, pp322-4.

<sup>51</sup> Alex La Guma. A Walk in the Night, 1967, p17.

by using the same language; for instance they are taught to reply when addressed by the authority by “yes baas” and “no baas”.

In addition to the press and education, religion is also used to perpetuate the idea of the Negro’s dependency on and subordination to the white man who is associated with virtue compared with the non-white man who is associated with evil. The rejection of religion by the oppressed black youth in both works can be read as a rebellious attitude towards the white man and his religion that causes them to fall into the position of dependency and subordination. In Native Son, the violent behaviour of Bigger towards the black religious man who comes to his cell to comfort him and remind him of the divine grace expresses his rejection of religion which is the source of his plight and that of his race. Bigger keeps rejecting the religious man and all the things he preaches which he considers as something belonging to the white culture. In A Walk in the Night, religion is totally absent among the Coloured youth. The narrator presents at the beginning of the story Willieboy as a young Coloured boy who shows no interest in religion, “he wore a sportscoat over a yellow T-shirt and a crucifix around his neck, more as a flamboyant decoration than an act of religious devotion.”<sup>52</sup> Here, the author hints through the character of Willieboy at the carelessness of the Coloured youth about religion. He wears a crucifix around his neck as an object of decoration only. For him the crucifix is like any piece of jewellery which has no connotation of religious faith. In fact, Willieboy and his companions have no commitment to religion.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that this chapter is essential for all the following issues in the following parts of our study since it serves as the basic of all the Negro’s problems which we will discuss later on; it is the starting point of the long tragedy of the man of colour who lives under the umbrella of the white racist system anywhere in the world.

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid, p3.

In fact, the Negro was not subjugated, enslaved, wronged, and exploited until he was perceived and represented as a creature that was between mankind and animals. The Negro did not have his culture eradicated, his language ignored, his land confiscated, his family dispersed, his mother, wife, and daughter violated, and his body exploited until he was thought to be inferior; he was not much more important in the eyes of the white people than a beast of burden or a ferocious jungle animal.

The next chapter will be on the theme of violence which originally stems from the white man's transgression against the Negro. Violence in this case is the outcome of the position of the blacks in the perception of the whites. In other words, the first chapter of our study "Blacks in the Whites' Perception" is the starting point of the issue of the brutal methods of the white man; violence is a consequence of lack of estimation of blacks by whites. This was the reason why I put the problem of the misrepresentation to which the Negro has been subjected at the beginning of my study before the problem of violence which I assume to logically classify in the second position before moving to the last chapter.

## Chapter Four: Violence Grows in the Land of Injustice

As we have said, this chapter is the logical follow-up of the previous chapter. White violence against blacks comes as a result of the degraded image of the blacks in the minds of white people. It is not until the Negro is reduced into almost a status of beasts that the white man ill-treats and deals with him cruelly.

This chapter will deal with violence in its extended meaning –psychological and physical types of violence. In fact, the concept of violence for P.R. Gottier does not consist only in the actions which are intended to hurt others physically but it comprises all types of disrespect and ill-treatment as well:

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>

In his turn, Frantz Fanon theorizes about violence in his book The Wretched of the Earth. He thinks that violence as a process has three stages. In the first stage, the settler uses violent actions and holds aggressive attitudes towards the colonized that can do nothing but undergo the effects of this violence as much as they can. In the second stage, the colonized start to react but against each other; they lack enough consciousness to discover the real source of evil. But, in the third stage, with the awakening of the consciousness of the victimized by, for instance, political activists, they will start to locate the source of their plight and then organise themselves to fight this primary source of evil (the settlers).

As far as Richard Wright's Native Son and Alex La Guma's A Walk in the Night are concerned, I assume that they depict only the first two stages in the process of violence as it is shown by Fanon; in fact, none of the works treat, for instance, the activism of strategists committed to awaken the consciousness of the oppressed. In fact, the two works are not about

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<sup>1</sup> P.R. Gottier. Dialogue ou Violence, quoted in Bedrici Ghania. Violence and Counter-Violence in La Guma's Novels, Algiers University, 1991, p1.

organized movements through which the oppressed use violent acts against the oppressor. On the contrary, both works depict on the one hand, the violent methods of the white oppressor against the non-white oppressed, and on the other hand, the violent actions of the oppressed against each other in order to survive. The obnoxious systems of Jim Crow and Apartheid, as they are depicted by Native Son and A Walk in the Night, incarnate all types of state unjust and brutal methods against blacks like the Thomas family, Bessie, Gus, Michael Adonis, Willieboy, Joe, and Franky Lorenzo, among others. And in their turn, some black characters – the major ones in both works, as a result of their suffering, resort to violence against victims like them as a means to fulfil themselves and to survive.

The state policies of alienation, exclusion, contempt, injustice, discrimination, and segregation against blacks are the basic reason of the phenomenon of violence in Apartheid South Africa and the Jim Crow USA. These policies are the fundamental source of all feelings of frustration, despair, and uncertainty in the minds of blacks. They consequently lead to cases of neuroses and even psychoses within the oppressed.

As an illustrative example, Michael Adonis goes through an abusive measure at work; he was dismissed from the factory for he dared answer back the white foreman. Presently, he is stopped by two severe policemen who take him for a thief and a drug addict. When in their searching task, they treat him harshly and at last, they order him to leave the area and warn him to not find him there again next time. From that moment on, he becomes resentful of the whites; as a result, he joins Foxy's gang that is specialized in robbery and petty crimes. afterwards, and still under the grudge against the foreman, he happens to meet Uncle Doughty, an Irish white man whose old age does not intercede for the "sin of his whiteness" (in the eyes of Michael Adonis); he kills him semi-accidentally out of an argument over a bottle of wine.

So, Michael Adonis and his Cape Town District Six delinquent companions; and similarly, Bigger Thomas and his Chicagoan delinquent companions embody the theme of violence against derelicts like them. Victims of state violence as they are, they direct their violence towards victims like them in order to come out of their psychological pains and meet their material needs:

The colonized man will first manifest this aggressiveness which has been deposited in his bones against his people. This is the period when the niggers beat each other up and the police and magistrates do not know which way to turn when faced with the astonishing waves of crime.<sup>2</sup>

As it has been mentioned above, racial injustice which is being implemented by the 1930s USA and 1950s South Africa political systems is at the core of the phenomenon of violence in both countries. Segregationist measures and unjust practices generate disappointment and displeasure on the side of the colonized man, which may cause him to express his state of disagreement with the coercive policies and unjust deal of the system. In order to establish law and order in such unjust conditions, the system resorts to reinforce the different means of repression such as multiplying the number of barracks and police stations, equipping the agents of repression (the policeman and the soldier) with adequately efficient means to repress the oppressed. Within the same context Frantz Fanon better puts it as follows:

The colonial world is cut in two. The dividing line, the frontiers are shown by barracks and police stations. In the colonies it is the policeman and the soldier who are the official, instituted go-betweens, the spokesman of the settler and his rule of oppression...in the colonial countries, on the contrary, the policeman and the soldier, by their immediate presence and their frequent and direct action maintain contact with the native and advise him *by means of rifle-butts and napalm not to budge* [Italics mine]<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Frantz Fanon. The Wretched of the Earth, 1963, p40. This idea of Fanon is reported by Halford H. Fairchild: "Fanon incorporates a hydraulic metaphor in his analysis: The colonized exist in a state of tension created by their poor material and political status in relationship to the colonizer. This tension is released in violence and aggression that is initially directed within (accounting for 'Black on Black' crime and violence) but later becomes transformed into a thirst for liberation." (Fairchild, "Frantz Fanon's The Wretched of the Earth in contemporary perspective", Jstor, 2010, p193.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p29.

The cause of this high security cost is obviously the ‘separate but unequal’ policies which accentuate the disparities between the colonizer and the colonized in all fields: in housing, education, health, wealth, public commodities, etc., as it is overtly put by Fanon, the world of the oppressor is the antithesis of that of the oppressed:

The settler’s town is a strongly built town, all made of tone and steel. It is a brightly lit town; the streets are covered with asphalt, and the garbage-cans swallow all the leavings, unseen, unknown, and hardly thought about. The settler’s feet are never visible, except perhaps in the sea; but there you’re never close enough to see them [...] the settler’s town is a well-fed town an easy-going town [...]

The town belonging to the colonized people, or at least the native town, the Negro village, the medina, the reservation, is a place of ill-fame, peopled by men of evil repute. They are born there, it matters little where or why; they die there, it matters not where, nor how. It is a world without spaciousness; men live there on top of each other, their huts are built one of the top of the other. The native town is a hungry town, starved of bread, of meat, of shoes, of coal, of light.<sup>4</sup>

Considering the disparities between the world of the colonizer and that of the colonized as a basically important part of violence process for which it is only the colonial system that is to blame, Native Son and A Walk in the Night depict this discrepancy between an easy world and a dire one.

In fact, the hard living conditions of the Thomas family, Bessie, Gus, Michael Adonis, Willieboy, Franky Lorenzo, and Joe, among others incarnate an important link in the chain of the complex phenomenon of violence in 1930s South Side in Chicago and 1950s District Six in Cape Town. The bad images portrayed inspire nothing but despair, frustration, and pessimism among the oppressed. They cause the oppressed to lead purposeless existences and live bad lives, worse than those of dogs. Richard Wright’s rendering of the hard conditions of Bigger and his companions exemplifies in a way white rulers’ notoriety for injustice. Similarly, Alex La Guma’s portrayal of the dire living conditions of the oppressed in Cape Town District Six with minute details reflects the obnoxiousness of the white rulers through the dehumanization process of the oppressed.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p30.

Bigger's and his companions' environment on the one hand and that of Michael Adonis and his companions are filled with various miseries such as: unemployment, bad housing, poverty, dirtiness, lack of education, and all the phenomena which lead to despair and frustration.

As Richard Wright's Native Son and Alex La Guma's A Walk in the Night focus more on the degrading living conditions of the oppressed, I shall start by this theme and contextualize it within the process of violence as depicted by the two works. First of all, it is worth mentioning that the degrading environment of the non-whites of the South Belt of Chicago and Cape Town District Six is an important reason of their frustration which leads some of them to delinquency and violence.

Richard Wright's Native Son conveys the idea of the hard living conditions the non-white people live in. In fact, the novel opens right from the beginning on a scene of harsh living conditions of the Thomas family who, composed of a mother, a sister, and two brothers, live in a "one unventilated, rat-infested room."<sup>5</sup> The whole family members have to get up early in order to permit the mother or the sister to tidy the room. The two boys have to keep "their faces averted while their mother and sister put on enough clothes to keep them from feeling ashamed,"<sup>6</sup> and the mother and the sister have to do the same while the boys dress.

Besides, the little room is not in safety from the danger of rats. In fact, while having a harsh argument, a big black rat causes almost all the family to live a real emergency. They start to shout and scream out of fear "Hit 'im, Bigger," "Kill 'im." Fortunately, at last, Bigger manages to kill it and settle the problem.<sup>7</sup>

The frustration of Bigger for adequate housing goes more important when he enters the Daltons' house, and particularly when he is shown the room that will be his while working for them:

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<sup>5</sup> Richard Wright. Native Son, 1993, p377.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 1993, p2.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, pp2-5.

He went to his room. He stood in the middle of the floor, looking at the walls...the room was large and had two radiators. He felt the bed; it was soft...He would not slip around any more...He would not have to sleep with Buddy and stand Buddy's kicking all night long.<sup>8</sup>

The author uses the juxtaposition technique –the Thomas' house and the Daltons', to emphasize the frustration Bigger goes through when he notices the discrepancy between the two rooms; a large one belonging to Mr. Dalton as his boss, which he can use as long as he works for him, and the tiny one belonging to Mr Dalton too as his mother's landlord, which the Thomas family live in as long as the mother pays high rent for the very Mr. Dalton too.

The theme of dirtiness and lack of hygiene in Native Son is not as much accentuated as it is in A Walk in the Night, but it is still noticeable. In addition to the rat-scene that suggests that no importance is given to cleanliness and hygiene, the strong rebuke of Bigger by his mother; “we wouldn't have to live in this garbage dump if you had any manhood in you,” implies that dirtiness is evident in one of the ghettos of the South Belt of Chicago where the black people, including the Thomas family, live.

Concerning Cape Town District Six, when one reads carefully A Walk in the Night, one notices that dirtiness and lack of hygiene there are used as a motif; they are repeated time and time again. The motif of degrading conditions is noticeable throughout the work to insist on the gravity of this depressing phenomenon.<sup>9</sup> Still, in this study I try to select and discuss the most representative and illustrative examples in the novella.

The tenement where the protagonist lives is presented as a deplorable area which inspires despair and humiliation:

The decorative Victorian plaster around the doorway was chipped and broken and blackened with *generations of grime*. The floor of the entrance was flagged with white and black slabs in the pattern of a draught board, but the tramp of untold feet and the accumulation of dust and grease and ash had blurred the squares [...] A row of dustbins lined one side of the entrance and exhaled the smell of rotten fruit, stale food, stagnant water and general decay [Italics mine].<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p66.

<sup>9</sup> See Alex La Guma. A Walk in the Night, 1967, pp 21, 23, 26, 33, 34, 35, 38, 40, 48, 60, 61, 78, 82, 83, and 95.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p21.

With minute details does La Guma present a vivid picture of a place which is frequented by the protagonist every day; it is the place where he lives. The author describes the area with minute details according to the conventional techniques of literary Naturalism to emphasize the outrageous and deplorable conditions of the victims so as to make the reader feel pity for them. La Guma's rendering of the scene is achieved without making any comment to let the reader make the adequate comment on his own –an easy task to do. In fact, Michael Adonis, a young boy, is all the time surrounded by a decaying atmosphere which along with his recent dismissal will probably throw him into the whirlpool of delinquency and violence.

In the same context, at the end of the tragedy, John Abrahams, lying in bed with the smell of “the sweatiness of his clothes and the ruin that was his body,”<sup>11</sup> cannot help thinking repeatedly of his regret for his collaboration with the wrong system that caused him to live in misery and dirtiness. He goes on thinking, “dully, what's it help you, turning on your own people? What's it help you?”<sup>12</sup> –Addressing himself. La Guma with this brief scene suggests implicitly that it is wrong to collaborate with the system of Apartheid which is based on injustice and little care for the black citizens; in other words, unless you shun the collaboration with such a system, you will regret like John Abrahams.

The scene which shows the degrading conditions of the head of the Lorenzo family is very expressive; the father, and the pregnant mother, and their five little children live in one room:

Four of their children [...] slept under the one thread-bare, worn, sweaty blanket [...]. In time they would turn and twist in their sleep and the legs would become entangled, or they would kick one another and wake up, complaining and whimpering [...] all the heads pressed into the coverless, partly disembowelled, greasy striped pillows.

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid, p95.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, p95.

The fifth child was on her mother's hip, sucking noisily from a ginger beer bottle fitted with an ancient teat, drinking sugared water.<sup>13</sup>

Along with other deplorable factors, squalor and inadequate housing generate frustration and despair that are prone to throw people into the world of crime and violence; neither hope, nor ambition, and nor patience are expected from anybody conscious of such deplorable conditions when they are imposed on him. In fact, the two authors intend to convey the idea that everybody can be a Bigger, a Michael, or a Willieboy under such conditions. It is an inevitable fate caused by the systems of Jim Crow and Apartheid which are the only sides to blame for the social ills and violence in the 1930s USA and 1950s South Africa.

In addition to squalor and bad housing, the scourge of poverty is evident in Native Son and A Walk in the Night. In fact, almost all black characters are living below the poverty line; they are not able to meet their material needs; they are just surviving; some of them resort inevitably to unlawful methods to survive.

In fact, Native Son deals with the theme of poverty as being a social curse which leads to violence. Poverty as it is depicted in the novel is one of the major reasons of the deviance of Bigger and his companions in misfortune. He has lost his father for a long time; the latter was killed in the South by white racists when Bigger was a little child. His mother is the only one who works among all the members of the family. She cannot cover the family needs since she earns meagre wages by taking in the laundry of other people; therefore, she always keeps rebuking him for being with no job; "we wouldn't have to live in this garbage dump if you had any manhood in you."<sup>14</sup> Moreover, she sometimes goes so desperate of him that she complains bitterly about the fate of birthing him; "Bigger, I wonder why I birthed you."<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p36.

<sup>14</sup> Richard Wright. Native Son, 1993, p7.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, p6.

Poverty on the one hand, and the inadequately small house on the other hand, render him desperate. He cannot find a solution for himself and his poor family; he starts to feel ill at ease with himself, his family, and other people:

He hated his family because he knew that they were suffering and that he was powerless to help them. He knew that the moment he allowed himself to feel to its fullness how they lived, the shame and misery of their lives, he would be swept out of himself with fear and despair [...] He knew that the moment he allowed what his life meant to enter fully into his consciousness, he would either kill himself or someone else.<sup>16</sup>

The logic of the white world restricts his; even when he gets a job, things will not be improved because the wages which are proposed to him are not sufficient to make him hopeful and optimist about his future. Indeed, Mr. Dalton for whom he will work as a chauffeur proposes for him a-25 Dollar-wage per week. Their tiny house rent is one third of his wages -8 Dollars per week; the white capitalists pay meagre wages and charge high rents.<sup>17</sup>

As far as the family affective deficiency is concerned, Bigger suffers a great deal. Disorganisation is the dominant feature which marks the Thomas family. The death of the father during Bigger's early childhood has a marking effect on the stability of the family. He is the eldest of Mrs. Thomas' Children; a position between a father and a brother; consequently, more pressure is put on him. In fact, his mother, as we have seen just above, keeps rebuking him harshly mostly because he does not work. She even prophesies that misfortunes will inflict him and the family:

“Suppose you wake up some morning and find your sister dead? What would you think then?” She asked. “Suppose those rats cut our veins at night when we sleep?”... “Well, I'm telling you agin! And mark my word, some of these days you going to set down and cry. Some of these days you going to wish you had made something of yourself, instead of just a tramp. But it'll be too late then.”  
“Stop prophesying about me,” he said.

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid, p9.

<sup>17</sup> Kenneth Kinnamon. The Emergence of Richard Wright A Study in Literature and Society, 1972, p5, reports a statement of a certain James Kimble Vardaman, a southern governor around 1908 who stated overtly: “the way to control the nigger is to whip him when he does not obey without it, and another is *never pay him more wages than is actually necessary to buy food and clothing* [Italics mine].”

“I prophesy much as I please! And if you don’t like it, you can get out. We can get along without you,” she said.<sup>18</sup>

Home that is supposed to be the place where people find hope, tranquillity, and peace of mind turns, in the case of Bigger, into a place where he has to confront verbal violence which consists in arguments and bad omens. Therefore, Bigger resorts to leave out to seek moments of peace; “he was sick of his life at home. Day in and day out there was nothing but shouts and bickering.”<sup>19</sup>

Under this continual pressure, “Bigger’s mind hit a blank wall and he stopped thinking.”<sup>20</sup> So, the only solution for his critical situation is to seek refuge outdoors and join the lost youth of the streets who live on violence and robbery.

Similarly, in A Walk in the Night, Character Michael Adonis has apparently been far away from the world of crime before he loses his job. It is his illegitimate firing from the sheet metal factory, along with the police harassment, that throws him into the world of delinquency and violence. Mainly these two problems push him to kill an old helpless and derelict white man and join Foxy’s gang. As readers, we guess that before the dismissal he managed to lead a balanced life however a little wage did he use to earn; he could do well with the low wage, but as soon as he comes to lose the only lawful source of his living, he inevitably resorts to the unlawful means of living. Thus, poverty generates violence.

In his turn, Willieboy has suffered from poverty since his childhood as it is rendered in a flash back:

He felt cold, however, and wished that his mother would spare another blanket to warm him. The rain beat against the window of the tenement room and he shivered under the thin scrap of blanket on the floor. On the bed his father and his mother slept together in a bulky jumble. Once his mother woke up and turned and turning her head shouted at him to stop complaining. He said: I’m cold, ma,’ but received no further reply.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>Richard Wright. Native Son, pp7-8.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, p12.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, p12.

<sup>21</sup> Alex La Guma. A Walk in the Night, 1967, p93.

Again, in a flashback, Willieboy, a seven-year-old child, is selling the evening paper; he has earned a few pence commission from the sub-agent for whom he sells papers. Instead of taking the money home, he has bought a big parcel of fish and chips because he feels ravenously hungry. When he goes home without the money his mother slaps his face again and again “so that his head jerked loosely on his shoulders and his face stung from the blow. He wept through the pain.”<sup>22</sup>

A little child working for a paper sub-agent earns a little money with which he can only have a single meal; he cannot keep any penny aside in case he is hungry and wants to have a meal. He will grow up with such an unjustly imposed dilemma; whether satisfying some of the financial exigencies of his family or satisfying his biological needs; he is not well paid.

This seems to be the reason why he will be determined in his youth to no longer work for anybody, especially for whites, as he will announce it to Michael Adonis; “working for whites. Happens all the time, man. Me, I never work for no white John. Not even brown one.”<sup>23</sup> Besides, as a principle, he hates the very concept of work; “to hell with work. Work, work, work, where does it get you? Not me, pally.”<sup>24</sup>

In this way, Willieboy can be considered as a poverty stricken person; he has led a life of a disaster victim since his early childhood; the disaster which seems not to come to an end; the only shelter before him is violence into whose whirlpool he has been thrown.

He has never been guided to lawful methods to lead a normal life. In his early childhood he did not enjoy any care neither from his family nor his state. He suffered from family affective deficiency; he was subjected to the tyranny of his parents who used to beat him harshly. He was subjected to poverty which made it impossible for him to have adequate bedding to protect him from cold in winter.

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid, pp83-4.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, p4

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, p4.

Besides, like Michael Adonis, no education seems to have been provided to him; apparently, he is a fully illiterate boy, no consoling religious faith has been inculcated into his mind, no real home to go to; he, like Michael, no longer lives with his family; he just leads a life of vagrancy; all in all, he has “been thrown in the whirlpool world of poverty, petty crime and violence.”<sup>25</sup>

The theme of violence in Native Son and A Walk in the Night is an equation with many elements. The chief element is the role of the system to give birth to violence and strengthen it when it is on the way to subside. The system carries out unjust policies against the oppressed blacks; it urges wars against them using all the efficient weapons of poverty, poor education, unemployment, bad housing, squalor, low wages and high charges. This war is meant to block all possible access to opportunity; there is a total lack of opportunity; it is difficult for a black person to obtain a job, and in case he gets it, it is for a meagre wage, and very likely to lose it; the Negro is the last to hire and the first to fire in the unjust systems like Jim Crow and Apartheid.

In addition to the shortage of the means which help people to lead normal lives, all the doors leading to evil are opened; drugs, alcohol, prostitution, robbery, gambling, and bribery among other social ills; they are available and within the reach of the oppressed. In other words, delinquency and violence are imposed on the oppressed by the unjust ruling system; how can a thin branch resist in a stormy day?

In this context, characters like Bigger, Michael Adonis, and Willieboy, among others embody the theme of violence as being imposed on them; they are victims of harsh circumstances and hard conditions which lead them to use violence to survive.

Now let us start the exploration in the two works to discover the response of these victims to the violence exercised against them. The theme of violence in Native Son directed

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid, p4.

at blacks is obviously embodied by the protagonist. As we have seen, Bigger, going through all types of frustration, feels like a bird which has his wings coercively broken. He is sure that he can never fly despite his vaulting ambition to fly high and high:

“(A plane) Looks like a little bird,” Bigger breathed with child-like wonder.

“Them white boys sure can fly,” Gus said.

“Yeah,” Bigger said, wistfully. “They get a chance to do everything.”....

“I *could* fly a plane if I had a chance,” Bigger said.

“If you *wasn't black* and if you had some money and if they'd let you go to that aviation school, you *could* fly a plane,” Gus said [*Italics mine*].<sup>26</sup>

Thus, when he goes conscious of his frustration, he feels hatred of the whites burning his entrails; however, he cannot harm them because they are much more powerful than he is. He feels afraid of them too, so his hatred is mixed with fear. As he can scarcely reconcile the two feelings (fear and hatred), with time he turns into a real neurotic.

Like Michael Adonis, to see white skin is enough for Bigger to provoke his hatred and fear. Remember that Michael Adonis has killed semi-accidentally the helpless Mr. Doughty despite the kindness of the latter towards him, and now it is the turn of Bigger to kill semi-accidentally the helpless Miss Dalton despite her sympathy for him and his community. In fact, these tragic events happen because Bigger and Michael Adonis have turned into real neurotics; filled with resentment and fear of the white people who are responsible for their frustration. They become blind; not capable to differentiate between helpful and harmful whites, they put the white people into the same basket; Miss. Dalton and Mr. Buckley are the same in the eyes of Bigger, and similarly, Mr. Doughty and Constable Raalt are the same in the eyes of Michael Adonis as long as they are white.

In this context, it is worth mentioning that these black neurotics are the pure product of the white system that causes them to suffer from hatred and fear, that bars their ways into

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<sup>26</sup> Richard Wright, *Native Son*, 1993, p17.

opportunity, that cuts down their ambitions, and that throws them into the world of violence.

In this respect, Lola Amis points:

All the characters are, in effect, native sons –products of the white caste ideology. All of them exist in abject conditions of shame, hatred and, most of all, fear. They are treated by the whites as less than human; existence is possible only with excesses of religion, sex, whiskey, or –violence.<sup>27</sup>

As for La Guma's novella, it opens on a scene of Michael Adonis in a frenzy of rage is walking without noticing what is around him because he has just been dismissed from the sheet metal factory illegitimately. Not much later he is stopped and humiliated by two white policemen with "hard, frozen faces as if carved out of pink ice, and hard, dispassionate eyes, hard and bright as pieces of blue glass."<sup>28</sup> We readers know about the hostility between the white ruler and the black citizen in Apartheid South Africa, and we can imagine that this kind of hostile feeling existed in Michael Adonis even before his recent dismissal and humiliation. Thus, as a young desperate boy already full of hatred mixed with fear of the white man cannot be expected to react peacefully in case he obtains the least opportunity of vengeance upon a helpless white person.

Now the opportunity is there; an old, helpless, derelict, and weak white man; Mr. Doughty is greeting him, "why, hallo, there, Michael, my boy [...] How are you, Michael boy?"<sup>29</sup> In this moment, Michael's resentment towards the whites grows up to the maximum; he cannot be kind to Doughty despite the latter's warm greeting. Still, he replies but with hatred; "'Okay,' Michael Adonis answered, staring sullenly at the old man."<sup>30</sup> All the kind words with which Mr Doughty addresses him are not sufficient to render him peaceful and kind. Even Mr. Doughty's invitation to a drink is not efficient to remove Michael's resentment; at the beginning he refuses impertinently the offer, "I don't want to drink your

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<sup>27</sup> Lola Amis. *Native Son : Notes*, 1971, p7.

<sup>28</sup> Alex La Guma. *A Walk in the Night*, 1967, p11.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, p24.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, p24.

wine,' Michael Adonis said."<sup>31</sup>Moreover, Mr. Doughty reminds him of the fact that he was married to a Coloured woman before she died. Again, he reminds him of being, like him, a victim of the system; though, he was a famous artist, and served in the two wars, he is neglected by the system, he becomes like a deserted ruin nobody cares about him; he is just ignored and left alone in the darkness of a derelict tenement to die peacefully. All Doughty's attempts to regain Michael's understanding and sympathy are in vain; at last, he kills him semi-accidentally out of resentment and the effect of liquor.

In such circumstances no reconciliation is expected between whites and blacks, no possible understanding occurs between them; Michael has been victimized all his life by the obnoxious white system; he is no longer capable to stand living with whites. He goes even further to put the blame on the victim, "well, he didn't have no right living here with us Coloureds."<sup>32</sup> Presently, he joins Foxy's Gang to enter the world of crime forcibly.

Willieboy, like Michael Adonis, is presented as a lout living on petty crimes. Besides, he is presented as a wild beast reacting instinctively to the external stimuli; he attacks or runs away in case he feels any danger. When he is in need of food or alcohol, he uses all means including violence to satisfy his desires. Like all his companions in misfortune in the urban area of Cape Town District Six, he has no educational background, no religious faith, no family, no love, no wife, no girlfriend, no car, no job, and no trade among other means to earn a living normally. He is just "grazing" in the streets of Cape Town to satisfy his biological desires; he is dehumanized by the system of Apartheid that has modelled him not more important than a wild beast.

As he is without money and feels thirsty for alcohol, he comes to Miss Gipsy to implore her to give him alcohol on credit:

'Hullo, Miss Gipsy. Miss Gipsy, I thought maybe you'd give us a little something on the book. You know, mos.' His hands came up, describing a bottle in the air.

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid, p25.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, p29.

‘That’ll be the day. You think I’m here to support all your bum hangers?’  
‘Hell, come on, Miss Gipsy. I’ll mos pay you soon as I get money.’  
‘Soon as you get money? You mean soon as you rob somebody again.’<sup>33</sup>

Still, Miss Gipsy cannot help giving him a bottle of cheap wine on credit since he has no money to pay in cash; he is imploring her again and again until he gets the thing he needs.

Another scene in the novella that brings out the personality of Willieboy which is almost totally bestial is when he becomes jealous of three American men playing with three Coloured girls at Miss Gipsy’s. He repeatedly expresses to Miss Gipsy his disappointment and anger, ““these jubas. They just messing our girls.””<sup>34</sup> Despite the attempts of Miss Gipsy and some of the Americans to quieten Willieboy, the tension grows up in him until he takes out his knife with the intention to chop the people who are messing the girls.

As we have just seen, Willieboy sometimes meets his needs by means of “begging” – for example, his deed with Miss Gipsy- and sometimes by attacking hopeless people like old Mister Greene:

‘Hullo, old man,’ Willieboy said. ‘Give us five bob, man.’  
‘No, man, I haven’t got, Mister Greene gasped, his voice quavering with fear. He was scared that the boy would pull a knife.  
‘Come on, pally. Let’s have five bob.’  
‘Please, man. Please.’  
Greene tried to pull away, but the boy held onto him, then suddenly his legs were kicked expertly from under him and he was flat on the pavement and the boy standing over him....  
He kicked Greene again and again.’<sup>35</sup>

This (aggression) episode shows the bestial behaviour of the dehumanised Willieboy. All means are good for him as long as they lead him to satisfy his biological desires; begging, robbery, and scrounging are permissible; he does not feel ashamed because he has lost his human dignity out of misery.

Finally, when he is being chased by Constable Raalt, fear overwhelms him and starts to have the responses of a weaker animal being chased by a predator; “he crouched like a fear

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid, p50.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, p53.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, p73.

crazed animal at bay.”<sup>36</sup> Then the chase ends with Constable Raalt, with no hesitation, shooting him dead.

In this way, the Coloured youth of Cape Town District Six are reduced to the status of animals living in an urban jungle wherein the strong among them crash the weak with the white man, as a spectator, having a pleasure to watch their fighting in safety and prosperity, but once the white man is harmed, he uses weapons to kill the threatening animals (the blacks).

Violence as it is depicted in Native Son and A Walk in the Night is, in effect, a strategy being adopted at the highest level. Violence is the product of racism which is in its turn the product of the interests of a few whites who occupy the highest rank in the hierarchical order of the 1930s USA and 1950s South Africa. These are referred to as capitalists who try to perpetuate mainly their interests by means of dividing society into different groups fighting each other; in other words, it is a divide and rule technique used to weaken any potential threat from the oppressed. They have power over all the chief institutions to repress or contain any attempt from the oppressed to rise up against the unjust policies of Jim Crow and Apartheid systems. The police institution in Cape Town District Six is simply used by the highly ranked capitalists to terrorise the majority of the non-white community in order to perpetuate their political and material interests. In Chicago, white capitalists do not need the police as much as their South African counterparts do because in Chicago the whites are the majority; they can easily repress the Negro by provoking white mobs to strike him in case he shows any type of resistance to the prevailing system.

This system resorts to the use of propaganda to contain the resistance of the black people and secure the interests of the white rulers.

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid, p86.

In Native Son, the issue of the use of propaganda and even violence against the oppressed for material and political interests of the few (capitalists) is even more evident than in A Walk in the Night. In addition to the segregation which wants the blacks to live apart in the South Belt ghettos, and a line fence to be drawn between this area and the area where whites live, a very complicated strategy is being conducted to secure the interests of the few. The unfair reward the employers award their employees; especially blacks in order not to allow them to improve their conditions to get rid of the state of subordination to them (the employers), as Max points out:

They hire people and they don't pay them enough; they take what people own and build up power. They rule and regulate life. They have things arranged so that they can do those things and the people can't fight back...and the rich people don't want to change things; they'll lose too much.<sup>37</sup>

Besides, in his long speech to defend Bigger at the court, Max denounces all the hysteria provoked by the press and the mob frenzied reaction; he deems this public tension far from being spontaneous:

“Your Honour, that mob did not come here of its own accord! It was *incited!*” [...] “Who, then, fanned this latent hate into fury? Whose interest is that thoughtless and misguided mob serving? Why did every agency of communication in the city suddenly spew forth lies, telling our citizens that they owned against Bigger Thomas and men like him? Who provoked this hysteria so that they might profit by it?” “The State’s Attorney<sup>38</sup> knows, for he promised the Loop bankers that if he were re-elected demonstrations for relief would be stopped! The Governor of the state knows, for he has pledged the Manufacturers’ Association that he would use troops against workers who went out on strike! The Mayor knows, for he told the merchants of the city that the budget would be cut down, that no new taxes would be imposed to satisfy the clamour of the masses [...] each of them –the mob and the mob-masters; the wire pullers and the frightened; the leaders and their pet vassals – know and feel that their lives are built upon a historical deed of wrong against many people, people from whose lives they have bled their leisure and their luxury.<sup>39</sup>

So all the measures that lead to the security of the interests of the white decision-makers are good to take even at the expense of the safety of the majority of the citizens;

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<sup>37</sup> Richard Wright. Native Son, 1993, p500.

<sup>38</sup>The state Attorney is standing for the following election; so, he tries to draw profit by condemning the murder in order to gain more votes from the white voters, and above all to gain support from the bankers.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, pp488-9.

inciting racial conflicts is good as long as it secures the interests of the white few (capitalists). In fact, they use their power to fight anyone who constitutes a threat to their material interests; similarly, they corrupt anyone who can bring a plus to their interests; they try to manipulate governors, judges, mayors, etc. to reach their goals; in other words, these high agents are not more than mercenaries working for the capitalists for some material advantages.

The white “wire pullers” have at their disposal the most important communication agencies which serve them. In Native Son, all the calls launched against the blacks to accentuate violence in the white population are meant to cover the social injustice from which black and white workers suffer from. In this context, Bigger’s murder of a white girl is used as a pretext to incite the white public and lead them into a way which is likely to secure the advantages of the few and the disadvantages of the many (masses). As it is explained by Bigger’s lawyer, Max:

“Every conceivable prejudice has been dragged into this case. *The authorities of the city and state* deliberately inflamed the public mind to the point where they could not keep the peace without martial law. Responsible to nothing but to their own corrupt conscience, *the newspapers and the prosecution* launched the ridiculous claim the Communist Party was in some way linked to these two murders [...] the hundreds of innocent Negro homes invaded, the scores of Negroes assaulted upon the streets, the dozens who were thrown out of their jobs, *the barrage of lies poured out against the defenceless people* [Italics mine].<sup>40</sup>

In fact, the long speech of Max at the court of justice turns around mainly the source of violence for which he deems the white leaders responsible, and hence, his attempt to show the harsh circumstances that pushed Bigger to become a murderer in order that he escapes death penalty.

In A Walk in the Night, the taxi-driver who seems to be conscious of the source of the plight of the non-whites tries to awaken the consciousness of his community but censorship seems to be dominant. He deems the white capitalists the same all the world over; “they all

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid, pp447-8.

the same all over.”<sup>41</sup> But his companion Greene seems to be afraid of taking any further discussion against the system; he objects, ““that’s politics, cut out politics.””<sup>42</sup> Still, the taxi-driver keeps blaming the capitalists; ““it’s the capitalis’ system, heard it at a meeting on the Parade. Whites act like that because of the capitalis’ system;””<sup>43</sup> and Greene still keeps recommending his ‘interlocutors’ to stop talking politics because it can produce a potential trouble with the system; he resorts to alcohol to avoid all problems; ““have a drink and cut out politics Greene said.””<sup>44</sup>

Violence, whether psychological or physical, is the main theme dealt with by the two works; in other words they make a veritable diagnosis of the scourge of violence. In the first place, it is produced, as we have seen earlier, by the dehumanisation process of the oppressed carried out by the oppressors by means of poverty, squalor, inadequate housing, poor education, unemployment, alcohol, drug, and prostitution among other things; as a result, many oppressed cannot help resorting to aggression in order to fulfil themselves and to survive.

Secondly, violence whether physical or psychological, is practised by the white authorities and white population against the non-whites.<sup>45</sup>

Thirdly, violence is de facto permissible in case it is undergone by the non-whites; moreover, the system does everything in order that the oppressed (the blacks) turn against each other to forget the main source of evil, as it is clearly presented in Richard Wright’s and Alex La Guma’s works under study. In fact, all the aggressive acts directed against the non-whites go unnoticed; the perpetrators are not punished. For instance, Willieboy attacks Greene

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<sup>41</sup> Alex La Guma. *A Walk in the Night*, 1967, p16.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*, 17.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, p17.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, p17.

<sup>45</sup> In addition to the Cape Town District Six police harassment against Michael Adonis on page 12, Constable Raalt strikes with his hand the olive-skinned man then takes a bribe from him; on page 42.

without being chased or pursued. In another situation; on an ordinary patrol, Constable Raalt addresses driver Andries, “anyway, let these hottentots kill each other off for all I care.”<sup>46</sup>

In Native Son, Richard Wright points overtly the fact that the white authorities do not care about violence as long as the Negroes are targeted. Speaking about Bigger and his gang, the narrator brings the fact into evidence:

They have always robbed Negroes. They felt that it was much easier and safer to rob their own people, for they knew that white policemen never really searched diligently for Negroes who committed crimes against other Negroes.<sup>47</sup>

Many reviewers of Native Son have not failed to express the idea of the intention of the white officials to encourage blacks to practise violence against each other. In this respect, Lola Amis points out:

On the other hand, it is easy to think about robbing blacks, even doing it, because white policemen never really try to solve crimes against blacks. The white policeman turns his head indifferently to what is happening in the black neighbourhood. Only when a black man strikes out a white man is there any official police concern. Bigger hates this double standard, but he is ultimately frightened of it.<sup>48</sup>

On his part, Keneth Kinnamon raises the idea again; “Bigger and his companions have committed numerous crimes against blacks, but robbing a white delicatessen is quite a different matter.”<sup>49</sup> Doing harm to the master is quite a risky task which Bigger and his fellows do not dare think of easily let alone do it. This double standard is intended by the white rulers to secure their system by protecting the ordinary white population and using them as a defence line against the Negroes, and meanwhile encouraging the latter to live on violence against one another.

In this respect, as he is closely linked to 1950s Algeria, Fanon comes with a more elaborated analysis of the phenomenon of hatred and violence of Algerians targeting their

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<sup>46</sup> Alex La Guma. A Walk in the Night, 1967, p39.

<sup>47</sup> Richard Wright. Native Son, 1993, p14.

<sup>48</sup> Lola Amis. Native Son : Notes, 1971, p13.

<sup>49</sup> Keneth Kinnamon, The Emergence of Richard Wright a Study in Literature and Society, 1972, p131.

compatriots instead of doing the French colonizer.<sup>50</sup> This, of course occurs when the political consciousness of the colonized is not mature enough to perceive the origin of their plight. But when more politically mature leaders among the colonized start to awaken the consciousness of their masses, the latter can then direct their fight not against the colonized among themselves, but against the colonizer.

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<sup>50</sup> The complete text in Frantz Fanon. The Wretched of the Earth, 1967, pp248-49, is as follows:

In the colonial context, as we have already pointed out, the natives fight among themselves. They tend to use each other as a screen, and each hides from his neighbour the national enemy. When, tired after a hard sixteen-hour day the native sinks down to rest on his mat, and a child on the other side of the canvas partition starts crying and prevents him from sleeping, it so happens that it is a little Algerian. When he goes to beg for a little semolina or a drop of oil from the grocer, to whom he already owes hundreds of francs, and when he sees that he is refused, an immense feeling of hatred and an *overpowering desire to kill* [Italics mine] rises within him: and the grocer is an Algerian. When after having kept out his ways for weeks he finds himself one day concerned by the *caid* who demands that he should pay 'his taxes', he cannot even enjoy the luxury of hating a European administrator; there before him is the *caid* who is the object of his hatred - and the *caid* is an Algerian. The Algerian, exposed to temptations to commit murder every day -famine, eviction from his room he has not paid the rent, the mother's dried breasts, children like skeletons, the building-yard which has closed down, the unemployed that hang about the foreman like crows -the native comes to his neighbour as a relentless enemy. If he strikes his bare foot against a big stone in the middle of the path, it is a native who has placed it there; and the few olives that he is going to pick, X—'s children have gone and eaten in the night. For during the colonial period in Algeria and elsewhere many things may be done for a couple of pounds of semolina. Several people may be killed over it. You need to use your imagination to understand that: your imagination or your memory. In the concentration camps men killed each other for a bit of bread. I remember one horrible scene. It was in Oran in 1944. From the camp where we were waiting to embark, soldiers were throwing bits of bread to little Algerian children who fought for them among themselves with anger and hate. Veterinary doctors can throw light on such problems by reminding us of the well-known 'pecking order' which has been observed in farmyards. The corn which is thrown to the hens is in fact the object of relentless competition. Certain birds, the strongest, gobble up all the grains while others who are less aggressive grow visibly thinner. Every colony tends to turn into a huge farmyard, where the only law is that of the knife.

## Chapter Five: The Omnipresence of Death in Loveless Lives

This chapter is, like the previous one, about the outcome of the misrepresentation of the Negroes in the perception of the white man. In other words, it is because the Negroes are in the workings of the white mind savage and ignorant that they are subjected to violence and death which leave no place for peace and love in the Jim Crow and Apartheid worlds.

In Richard Wright's Native Son and Alex La Guma's A Walk in the Night death and the tendency to destroy are omnipresent, whereas love and the tendency to unite are absent.

The relationship between parents and children which is supposed to be one of love and tenderness turns to be that of uneasiness, aggression and violence. The relationship between husbands and wives which is supposed to be one of love and tenderness turns into that of obsession and threat. No friendship exists between even the companions sharing the same situation. No confidence reigns between husbands and wives, colleagues, and members of the same family. No respect is shown towards one another. Hostility, fear, and tendency to kill are the predominant feeling of the people of the South Belt of Chicago and the Cape Town District Six.

In this respect, Freud distinguishes between the ego or death instincts as being the source of aggression and hostility between people as opposed to the sexual or life instincts as being the source of the establishment of great unities and then their preservation. As it is written in the International Dictionary of Psychoanalysis:

Freud introduced the concept of the death drive as a negative term in opposition to the life drive: "The opposition between the ego or death instincts and the sexual or life instincts would then cease to hold and the compulsion to repeat would no longer possess the importance we have ascribed to it" <sup>1</sup> ...Toward the end of his life, Freud recognized that "the dualistic theory according to which an instinct of death or of destruction or aggression claims equal rights as a partner with Eros as manifested in the libido,..."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ed. Alain De Mijolla. International Dictionary of Psychoanalysis, 2005, p371.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p372.

As a deduction from the above Freudian assumption, I understand that all the human behaviour revolves around two types of instincts; all the emotional expressions and manifestations of Man are accordingly related to one or the other type. For instance, laughter and smile may be related to the instinct of life (love); while frowning and weeping may be the instinct of death.

Thus, if I have to speak with this Freudian assumption in mind, I shall say that the death drive (death instincts) is predominating in Native Son and A Walk in the Night and the life drive (life instincts) is absent in them. The atmosphere of fear and resentment is depicted over and over again in these two works. And that of love and rest does not exist at all throughout the two stories; it is a total absence of the life instincts.

It is in the boiling desert of fear and resentment, despair and frustration that the scenes and episodes of the two novels are set; no even a small oasis of love and affection is there amid the surrounding resentment and death; in other words, when it is to hate and hurt, it is anybody's business, but when it is to love and help, it is nobody's business.

Thus, the people of the South Belt of Chicago and those of Cape Town District Six live in a sterile environment which inspires nothing but the curse of uneasiness and hatred. Even in the moments of expecting a new birth, the pregnant woman and her husband feel upset and embarrassed. And even in the moment of obtaining a new job, the formerly unemployed boy does not feel happy.

In Native Son, Mrs. Thomas sometimes wishes that she has not birthed her eldest child Bigger:

“Bigger, sometimes I wonder why I birthed you,” she said bitterly.  
“Maybe you oughtn't've. Maybe you ought to left me where I was.”  
“You shut your sassy mouth!”  
“Aw, for Chrissakes!” Bigger said, lighting a cigarette.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Richard Wright. Native Son, 1993, p6.

Again, Mrs. Thomas, as a mother, is not, what she is supposed to be, the source of affection and motherly love for her child Bigger. She is always rebuking him for one reason or another. She even allows herself to launch an array of bad prophecies to inflict Bigger and the whole family in the near future. In the quotation below, the author by means of the repeated question and exclamation marks renders the situation in an emphatic way:

“Suppose you wake up some morning and find your sister dead? What would you think then?” she asked. “Suppose those rats cut our veins at night when we sleep? Naw! Nothing like that bothers you! All you care about is your own pleasure! Even when the relief offers you a job you won’t take it till they threaten you to cut off your food and starve you! Bigger, honest, you the most no-countest man I ever seen in all my life!”  
“You told me that a thousand times,” he said, not looking round.  
“Well, I’m telling you agin! And mark my word, some of these days you going to set down and *cry*. Some of these days you going to wish you had made something out of yourself, instead of just a tramp. But it’ll be too late then.”<sup>4</sup>

Similarly, Franky Lorenzo and his wife Grace, the archetype of the poverty-stricken families in the Cape Town District Six, are having an argument over their coming childbirth; they are poor and they already have five children living in one single room! They are blaming each other for this bad news –the expectation of a new birth:

He said aloud, ‘Again. For what you want to get that way?’  
‘Well, it isn’t my fault,’ she told him.  
‘No. it isn’t your fault.’  
‘You talk like it’s all my fault. Whose fault is it then?’  
He sat up and shouted angrily, ‘Christ, you could do something. Drink something for it. Pills.’  
‘Maybe you ought to stop thinking of your pleasure every blerry night,’ she flared back.  
‘Well, I got a right. Don’t I say?’  
‘Ja. That’s all you think about. Your rights.’  
She started to cry softly, hugging the child at her hip. The children on the bed woke up, stared out over the ragged edges of their blanket.<sup>5</sup>

From the last two passages, we can get the idea of the omnipresence of death and disaster in the mind of Bigger’s mother; she is actually inculcating this image of death into the mind of Bigger: “I wonder why I birthed you,” “ find your sister dead”, “rats cat off our veins

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid, pp7-8.

<sup>5</sup> Alex La Guma. A Walk in the Night, 1967, pp36-7.

when sleep,” “ cut off your food and starve you,” “ some of these days you going to set down and cry,” “ it’ll be too late then”. Notice all these expressions are about death or what inspires death. As the helpless mother is overwhelmed with these gloomy images of death, starvation, and destruction for a very long time by the South Belt environment of segregation, discrimination, injustice, violence, and fear; she, in her turn, transmits these cruelly pessimistic images to her progeny, mainly her eldest child –Bigger. Hence, the whole family is under the effect of these images of death and destruction; the death drive is growing up in their minds at the expense of the love drive which is fleeing them then.

Besides, Bigger, the protagonist, went through a hard experience in his childhood; a white mob lynched his father; he has become fatherless since the early years of his life; neither motherly affection nor fatherly protection has he enjoyed in all his existence. It is either frustration –with the death of his father, or provocation –with the constant rebuke of his mother that live in his inner psyche. Never in all his life has he known the meaning of family warmth; he very often goes outside to forget the frustrating atmosphere at home. Unfortunately, the outdoor atmosphere is not hospitable; on the contrary, it is hostile. Even with his companions in misfortune, he does not find friendliness either, he may have a harsh dispute with one of them over a futile issue in order to show his bravado, fulfil himself, and get momentarily rid of his fear of the white man. In fact, when planning to rob a shop belonging to a white man; he along with all the members of the gang feel powerless to dare engage in such a robbery; they have a phobia of white folk; Bigger thinks of finding a scapegoat on whom he puts the blame for their failure; finally, he succeeds in pouring his anger on Gus and set to beat him cruelly, in order to hide his inability to challenge the authority of the white man.

So, the death instinct and all the elements which it comprises such as hatred, resentment, and horror contain him entirely; he has been left with nothing that inspires love

and affection; his heart is totally filled with fear and hatred which control all his behaviour and; as a result, his actions come in compatibility with the overwhelming feeling of fear and hatred. In this respect, Margolies expresses well the rootedness of fear and hatred and their effects on his behaviour and attitudes:

All Bigger's actions stem from his fear. Bigger hates whites because he fears them. He knows they are responsible for his immobility, his frustration, yet he is unable to admit even his fear. Were he able to do so he would be admitting simultaneously a profound self-hatred. He thus rechannels his hatred and aggressions towards other Negroes –and thereby, momentarily at least, assuages his ego. He is afraid, for example to steal from a white storekeeper and he is terrified that his friends can read his heart –so he attacks them to prove to himself his courage [...] Bigger's nature is composed of dread and hate. He hates what he fears –and his bravado and violence are merely compensatory illusions of his terror.<sup>6</sup>

Similarly, A Walk in the Night depicts no case of easiness, rest, or love even between members of the same family. We have already seen the effect of the coming childbirth on the Lorenzo family; the husband is disappointed with his wife and puts the blame on her. This leads to a big argument between them over what is supposed to be good news in a normal situation. But in the environment of the Cape Town District Six no place is devoted to rest and comfort; no ambition, no joy, no satisfaction, and no pleasantness can be expected between the members of the whole society. It is only the feeling of discontent, dissatisfaction, fear, hatred and readiness for revenge.

Willieboy is depicted as a boy who has never experienced joy, affection, or love. Even in the innocence of his childhood he failed to enjoy parental affection; on the contrary, his parents used to beat him mercilessly. His mother did not live moments of love with her husband who used to beat her and her child (Willieboy) harshly. In her turn, she would take revenge on Willieboy. It was only hatred and violence that prevailed in their home. It was the omnipresence of the death instincts in loveless people:

His mother beat him at the slightest provocation and he knew she was wreaking vengeance upon him for the beatings she received from his father.

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<sup>6</sup> Edward Margolies. The Art of Richard Wright, 1969, p109.

His father came home drunk most nights and beat his mother and him with a heavy leather belt. His mother crouched in a corner of the room and shrieked and whimpered for mercy. When his father is through with her he turned on Willieboy, but sometimes he managed to escape from the room and did not return until late in the night when the father was snoring drunkenly and his mother had cried herself to sleep. His mother, unable to defend against her husband, took revenge for her whippings on Willieboy.<sup>7</sup>

The problem of the physical abuses of Willieboy during his childhood by his father and mother is referred to so repeatedly<sup>8</sup> in many places in the novella that we readers have the impression that the author wants to convey an important message. The most apparent interpretation is that the author is blaming the system for pushing heads of Coloured families by means of poverty, segregation, racial injustice, and violence to have recourse to alcohol abuse which leads them to abuse their children and their wives; and thus, create within the home a gloomy atmosphere of hatred, fear, and violence instead of peace, love and family warmth.

The character of Joe who epitomizes peace and patience among the Coloured characters is also presented as a victim of family disintegration. In fact, his whole family suffered from starvation, which caused his father to abandon them. As a result the rest of the family (Joe, his mother, his sister, and his two small brothers) got disintegrated; all of them went back to his maternal grandmother in the countryside except Joe who did not want to go with them; he preferred to run away.<sup>9</sup> So, the whole family fell a prey of disintegration because of financial problems, instead of leading a life of unity and integration, they led one of loneliness and separation. Of course under the umbrella of Apartheid no peace is expected, no family stability is possible; it is only disintegration and loneliness; the situation which is related more to death instinct than life instinct.

The sense of family conflict is not proper to the Coloureds; it is peculiar to the whites as well. The prevailing feeling of Constable Raalt towards his wife is one of suspicion and lack

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<sup>7</sup> Alex La Guma. *A Walk in the Night*, 1967, p84.

<sup>8</sup> See Alex La Guma. *A Walk in the Night*, pages: 83, 84, 90, 91, and 92.

<sup>9</sup> See Alex La Guma. *A Walk in the Night*, pages 69-70.

of trust. It is even one of readiness for murder. In fact, by means of the stream of consciousness does Alex La Guma render repeatedly Constable Raalt's "gloomy thoughts about his wife" to convey the omnipresence of a profound sense of inner trouble; he is continuously obsessed by the potential infidelity of his wife; he even gets ready to kill her in case he finds further evidence, "I wonder what she's doing now, the verdomte bitch, I'll break her neck if I catch her at something."<sup>10</sup> Raalt's obsession is so accentuated that it disturbs even his young colleague Andries the driver:

He (the driver) was somewhat irritated by the sullen presence of Constable Raalt who nursed gloomy thoughts about his wife [...] He's got trouble with his wife, and what have I got to do with troubles his troubles? What has his troubles got to do with this patrol? Let him leave his domestic troubles at home. He is dangerous, too, when he's like this and I don't want to get involved in anything.<sup>11</sup>

All the injustices practiced by the two obnoxious systems generate inevitably poverty, frustration, hatred, fear and insecurity, and other negative feelings which are favourable for the tendency to murder and devastate.

In the light of what is presented in Native Son and A Walk in the Night, the logic of killing becomes predominant. Right from the beginning of A Walk in the Night Michael is introduced to the reader as being furious and swearing to take revenge on the white foreman for his illegitimate dismissal; he keeps repeating "I'll get him"<sup>12</sup> which expresses his determination to take revenge on the foreman in order to extinguish the burning fire of resentment in his heart. Constable Raalt is prone to murder his wife at the least piece of evidence of her implication in marital infidelity; "I'll break her neck if I catch her at something."<sup>13</sup> Bigger, filled with hatred and fear, brings out what is turning in his inner side when speaking about the white folk; "maybe they right in not wanting us to fly, 'cause if I

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p61.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, pp78-9.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, pp4-5.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p61.

took a plane up I'd take a couple of bombs along and drop 'em as sure as hell..."<sup>14</sup> He is filled with frustration at not fulfilling his cherished dream to fly a plane; it is not permissible for him to become an aviator because he is black and poor; blackness and poverty seem to be an iron barrier between a person and his ambition. He is filled with resentment and fear of the white man; some day he will kill somebody, definitely.

In effect, after obtaining a job for a white bourgeois (Mr. Dalton) as a chauffeur; instead of becoming optimistic and ambitious, this sounds as if it does not interest him at all. He is imprisoned in his obsession of hatred and fear of the exterior world. When in the late evening helping Mr. Dalton's daughter Mary into her bed because she is drunk. Her mother happens to come and check if she is in her bedroom. Filled with fear of being discovered with a white girl in her bed, he smothers her with a pillow so that she cannot make any noise for her mother to discover the truth. Thus, he kills her accidentally but without feeling regret; on the contrary, he feels as if he gets rid of the fear he has suffered from for a long time. He also lets out the revengeful energy; besides, he satisfies his desire for fulfilling himself through the murder. So murder becomes the logic of the terrible Jim Crow world. In fact, no sooner has he killed Mary Dalton than he murders Bessie, a poor black girl, with whom he often had sex. Hence, his dream of destruction comes true now; no principle prevents him from committing murder. The unjust Jim Crow world has cultivated in him fear and hatred which lead him to destroy other people's lives. He is not able to love in the hostile world because love has never been at his disposal. Love has abandoned him even before he becomes aware of his aimless existence; "he had killed within himself the preacher's haunting picture of life even before he had killed Mary; that had been his first murder."<sup>15</sup> No room has been left for life (love); his tendency to kill even himself has overwhelmed him; his first murder liberates his repressed desire for murder:

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<sup>14</sup> Richard Wright. *Native Son*, 1993, p17.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, p328.

“I didn’t want to kill!” Bigger shouted. “But what I killed for I *am!* It must’ve been pretty deep in me to make me kill! It must have felt it awful hard to murder...”

“What I killed for must’ve been good!” Bigger’s voice was full of frenzied anguish. “It must have been good! When a man kills, it’s for something....I didn’t know I was really alive in this world until I felt things hard enough to kill for ’em...”<sup>16</sup>

Even in his cell, the will to kill is still intact, but this time directed upon himself; “out of the mood of renunciation there sprang up in him again the will to kill. But this time it was not directed outward toward people, but inward, upon himself.”<sup>17</sup>

The white Chicagoan society has been breastfed with tendency to kill and destroy other people, especially non whites before the birth of Bigger; it has become a rooted culture there; why not transmit it to Bigger and his fellows. In fact, once Bigger is captured after Mary’s murder, the white mob start shouting automatically, “kill ’im!”, “lynch ’im”, “that black sonofabitch!”, “kill that black ape!”<sup>18</sup>; the culture of killing the Other is rooted deep in the white culture.

In short, to relate again the issue (of Bigger and the white society) to Freud’s assumption, I shall say that once racial injustice and alienation become the law of the land, death and its derivation –hatred along with horror, settle in force inside people, and life and its derivation –love and comfort withdraw away from them.

Similarly, the Cape Town District Six society is haunted by the instinct of death. Regarding Willieboy, subjected to the parental cruelty when still a little child, and the violence and alienation of the whites later on, he becomes a real threat to anyone he has to confront; when it is possible, he attacks people in order to survive. When he fights, the first thing he starts with is the taking out of his knife with the intention to kill his rival. When he encounters the police, he runs away even if he does not do anything wrong because he sees in them a source of danger; in short, he is conditioned to expect death when he comes face to

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid, p501.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, p316.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, pp313-4.

face with them without him knowing the reason why they are so harmful to him; “he thought, What they want to chase me for? What did I do? I did nothing. I did nothing. What they want to chase me for?”<sup>19</sup>

In the same context, Michael Adonis, like Willieboy and Bigger, has gone through many frustrations; he apparently has no family, no job, no adequate house, no wife, no girlfriend, and no education; and besides, he is subjected to the white man’s violence; he then turns into a destroying machine against anyone who comes on his way. Even people who are friendly to him might undergo harm from him. In fact, even Mr. Doughty, an already dead old man does not escape death when he has to deal with the young Michael Adonis. Alienation, contempt, violence have conditioned the latter to resort to murder when it is possible; he is not familiar with love and peace.

On the other hand, hostile white people like Constable Raalt inspire only death and destruction; they make the whole land smell death and devastation. In fact, as we have seen before, when chasing Willieboy, Raalt, without hesitation, but with sangfroid, shoots his prey dead.

The culture of murder among mainly the white people of the Cape Town District Six is well rendered by Alex La Guma at the beginning of chapter 17. After hearing Raalt’s fatal firing, the whole crowd starts to thunder:

‘Shot him in cold blood, the bastards.’  
‘They just know to shoot.’  
‘Is he dead?’  
‘How the hell do I know.’  
‘Move over, I want to see.’  
‘Shot him down in cold blood.’  
‘Awright, they’ll get it, one day. You’ll see.’  
‘Who is it, anyway?’  
‘Don’t know. Some rooker they was chasing.’  
‘Must have been one of those skollies. Always interfering with people. They all end up like that. Did he have a knife?’  
‘Shot the poor bastard in cold blood.’  
‘That’s all they know. Shooting us people.’  
‘Move over, man. I also want to see mos.’

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<sup>19</sup> Alex La Guma. *A Walk in the Night*, 1967, p83.

'Stop shoving. The bastards.'<sup>20</sup>

This lively rendered scene suggests the idea that the people of the Cape Town District Six are so filled with all the senses of death and hatred that no room is left for life and love; in other words, it is the omnipresence of death in loveless lives.

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid, p86.

## Conclusion

In the harshness of injustice, segregation, and violence, the non-white Americans of the 1930s and the South Africans of the 1950s are doomed to live as victims of the systems of Jim Crow and Apartheid respectively; it is an imposed deadlock on people whose only fault is to be born non-white. The colour bar seems to be a determining factor; while it is lawful for whites to fly high in the immensity of sky, it is forbidden for non-whites to dream of a walk in the daylight.

The latter are victims of poverty, illiteracy, and squalor for which their victimizers keep blaming them; they suffer all types of the hardships of the whites and, to add insult to injury, the disdain and contempt for these hardships. They undergo the scourge of the white violence and paradoxically react against victims among themselves; they are not able to perceive the source of their plight; they are “doomed to walk in the night”. In this context, Richard Wright’s Native Son and Alex La Guma’s A Walk in the Night depict this bitter black reality.

In fact, blacks hold a pessimistic image, so sombre and painful, but behind it lies hope for a better time; after the cold of winter, its rain and sombreness comes spring with its beauty and prosperity, with its twittering birds, fragrant flowers, and sweet breeze.

In other words, hope in the two works under study, though not easily noticeable, can be perceived at least at the underlying level. In fact, the two authors’ rooted convictions in socialism imply the existence of hope within their works. In this respect, when speaking about Boudjedra and Ngugi, Benaouda Lebdaï says:

Both believe in the telling of history which looks towards the future [...] Boudjedra and Ngugi move away those African writers who describe the ills and the faults of the post-independent era through disillusionment, despair and a sense of failure [...] Boudjedra and Ngugi convey through their works not only criticism but also hope, because their convictions are rooted in their socialist opinions.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Benaouda Lebdaï. Post-Independence African Literature, 1995, p6.

So, at the surface level, it is total despair and pessimism throughout Native Son and A Walk in the Night, it is the social determinism and the law of the jungle; no relief can be expected for the 1930s American Blacks and the 1950s South African Coloureds. But at the underlying level, it is hope for a good time to come soon.

For instance, the sense of rebellion and defiance in the black youth of Chicago and that of the Coloured youth of Cape Town foretells that their victory will not take long to come. Likewise, the uplift of reverend Hammond in Native Son and the patience of Joe in A Walk in the Night are hints for a better time to come. The bloodshed of Bigger and Willieboy at the end of the two stories respectively waters the seeds of noble life to come soon.

The last paragraph but one in A Walk in the Night tells about the walk of Joe towards the sea, the symbol of freedom and beauty:

Somewhere the young man, Joe, made his way towards the sea, walking alone through the starlit darkness. In the morning he would be close to the smell of the ocean and wade through the chill, comforting water, bending close to the purling green surface and see the dark undulating fronds of seaweed, writhing and swaying in the shallows, like beckoning hands. And in the rock pools he would examine the mysterious life of the sea things, the transparent beauty of starfish and anemone, and hear the relentless, consistent pounding of the creaming waves against the granite citadels of rocks.<sup>2</sup>

In the morning, when the darkness of the night vanishes, Joe and all the black community will be happy with their closeness to the sea, the symbol of freedom and generosity; nobody will persecute them; justice and democracy will be the law of the land. It is a question of a very short time and all the pains will disappear, and collective suffering will give way to collective happiness.

And then, follows the very last paragraph about Franky Lorenzo and his wife waiting for the dawn to come to get rid of their suffering which has lasted for a whole night, “Franky

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<sup>2</sup> Alex La Guma's A Walk in the Night, 1967, p 96.

Lorenzo slept on his back and snored peacefully. Beside him the woman, Grace, lay awake in the dark, restlessly waiting for the dawn.”<sup>3</sup>

In effect, in less than thirty years after the time setting of each of the two stories, the hope will come true for the black Americans and South Africans. In America by the sixties, the Jim Crow Law will have collapsed for good, and in South Africa, by the end of the 1980s the system of Apartheid will have become something of the past. Furthermore, at the beginning of the 1990’s a black South African man will become president for all the ethnic groups including the whites, and likewise, at the end of 2010’s a black American man will be promoted to the White House as president of the United States of America.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p96.

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