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The portrayal of black personality in the south African fiction : a study of Alan Paton's cry,the beloved country and Peter Abraham's "mine boy"

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UNIVERSITY OF BURUNDI

INSTITUTE FOR APPLIED PEDAGOGY

ENGLISH DEPARTMENT

THE PORTRAYAL OF BLACK PERSONALITY IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN FICTION: A study of Alan Paton's *Cry, The Beloved Country* and Peter Abrahams' *Mine Boy*.

By

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Bujumbura, May 2007

DEDICATION

To the Almighty God,
To my parents,
To my brothers and sisters,
To peace making and truth seeking people all over the world,
I warmly dedicate this work to them.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The completion of this work has been possible thanks to the contribution of many people to whom I owe much gratitude.

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Ernest Nzirorera

ABSTRACT

This work examines how fiction writing in South Africa during the tense period of Apartheid was influenced by racial segregation and how both the white and the coloured South African writers portrayed black personality from their different ethnic and racial backgrounds.

The study equally attempts to show how this marginality of the social experience of the white and the coloured writers affected them in what they perceive as the social problems and the vision they hold for the future. On this note, this study is built on the hypothetical contention that the South African novel of the Apartheid era has been significantly influenced by racial segregation that characterised the society of the time. It equally presupposes that there are discernable differences in the portrayal of black personality in the points of view of Alan Paton's *Cry, The Beloved Country* and Peter Abrahams' *Mine Boy.*

Written against the background of the Marxist and Sociological approaches, this work concludes that, while the coloured writer's image of the black man is more like the black man's image of himself, that of the white writer is much more different. This is because of the social distance that separates the black and the coloured South Africans against the whites.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Pages

DEDICATION.....i
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....ii
ABSTRACT.....iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....iv

GENERAL INTRODUCTION 1

CHAPTER ONE: OVERVIEW OF RACIAL SEGREGATION IN SOUTH AFRICA.....12

CHAPTER TWO: THE WHITE'S PORTRAYAL OF BLACK PERSONALITY.....22

CHAPTER THREE: THE COLOURED'S PORTRAYAL OF BLACK PERSONALITY.....42

GENERAL CONCLUSION.....62

WORKS CITED.....67

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Racial segregation in South Africa became formalised through Legislation such as The Population Registration Act of 1950. This Act made it compulsory for people to be registered as members of either white, coloured or black group. The effect of this on a society was varied. In literature, the oppressive Apartheid system, the resultant social tension and resistance to it, became the preoccupation of most writers. Serious fiction writers, whether Black, coloured or white, have all in various degrees and from varying perspectives, concerned themselves with the protest against the dehumanising social system of Apartheid. Lewis Nkosi expresses this view in *Tasks and Masks: Themes and styles in South African Literature*, stating that, "with very few exceptions, the literature of South Africa is wholly concerned with the theme of struggle and conflict"(4). As Terry Eagleton puts it in *Marxism and Literary criticism*, "Art reflects social reality, and must portray its typical features"(43). The typical features of South African society under Apartheid were Racial fragmentation, Economic inequality, oppressive political system and, on the other hand, resistance to the status quo. But these social realities did not apply to the various racial groups in a similar way. The experience in the different racial group was very different and this extended to the writer. Nadine Gordimer, Alan Paton, Doris Lessing and other white writers were not, for example, affected by the Pass Laws, the imposed inability to develop economically, and other restrictions that Alex Laguma, Peter Abrahams and, perhaps even more so, Ezechiel Mphahlele, Lewis Nkosi, Bloke Modisane among others, went through.

Would such writers with such varied experiences respond in a similar way in portraying, examining and criticising this society? Or is there any unanimity in South African Literature as the quotation from Lewis Nkosi would suggest? Or indeed, as Landeg White and Tim Couzens in *Literature*

and South African Society question, "is there then, a single South African Literature?"(1) These are some of the questions this study seeks to explore.

The selection of these two authors (ie Alan Paton's *Cry, The Beloved Country* and Peter Abrahams' *Mine Boy*) among a proliferation of South African writers is influenced, on one hand, by three basic considerations: first is the commitment to the cause of change, which all the two, to varying degrees, have demonstrated through the novels under study. This provides a level ground on which the impact of Racial segregation on their approach can be analysed. Second is the period in which they have been writing. The third consideration is the artistic seriousness the writers have demonstrated and which, although different from each other is, in all case, quite intriguing.
On the other hand, their distinct racial community groups and social experiences in relation to the black community are also outstanding in portraying Black personality.

Alan Paton was born on January 11, 1903 in Pietermaritzburg South Africa. He studied in his Native town; when he grew up, he became a teacher and finally the Principal of the Diepkloof Reformatory in July 1935 where he remained for 13 years. Paton and his first wife Dorrie also spent time working, for a nominal fee, in a Tuberculosis Hospital, called the Toc. T.B. centre. He was aware that there was much wrong with his country, but felt as yet unable to challenge it. There was the beginning of a campaign of civil disobedience, but Alan Paton felt that the time was out of joint. He believed he had some kind of duty to attempt to set it right. But for the time being his work at the T.B. centre was a kind of halfway house. Paton was opposed to Apartheid not only on humanitarian grounds, but also because of his Christianity. He has declared in *The long view* that: "Because I am a Christian, I am a passionate believer in human freedom, and therefore in human rights"(7).

His love of God was perhaps equal to his love of his country and both were important to him than the love of literature and writings of South Africa, the "Beloved country". In *Cry, The Beloved Country*, he opines that

> Like any other country, it has ineffable dreams and slouching beasts on their way to Bethlehem. Good and Evil struggle here day and night. Despair bows us down today and hope lifts us tomorrow, we laugh and cry.(6)

It was in 1953 that Alan Paton became one of the four Presidents of South African Liberal Association, which grew into the Liberal Party of South Africa. Inspite of his outspoken opposition as the Acting National Chairman of the Liberal Party. Alan Paton, unlike many of his colleagues and friends, was not imprisoned, but; his passport was taken away after a broadcast he made in 1960 in America, the year of the Sharpville Massacre, when many black Africans were shot by the Police during a demonstration against the Pass Laws. In 1969, he married Anne Hopkins. He died on April 12, 1988 after a short illness.

Peter Abrahams, on the other hand, was born in 1919 in Vrededorp – Johannesburg. He remained in South Africa until he was twenty. His early years were experienced in the slum of Vrededorp in Johannesburg. But on the death of his father, he was sent to live with Eliza, his Aunt and Sam, his uncle. Sam worked in the mines. In *Tell Freedom*, Peter Abrahams puts it thus: "The white men ran after us – Hottentot! They began petting us with stones – your fathers are dirty, black baboons"(31). When trying to resist white people's scorn, his uncle Sam beat him in front of the white man whose child was supposedly offended saying: "You must never lift your hand to a white person. No matter what happens you must never lift your hand to a white person"(34). Uncle Sam beat him until the white man said: "Alright Sam".

Fetched by his brother and sister at Ellensburg, Peter Abrahams got a job of gathering dirt at a Chinese man's shop, a shop reserved for non-Europeans

who had to pay the rent. His boss was Boeta Dick. The bucket of sand into which he spat. "Changing the sand daily was only part of my job I hated" Peter Abrahams said. When he went to Johannesburg, he discovered concretely the destiny of black people. The note "Reserved for Europeans only" was everywhere. In searching for a job he had to show first his pass. As a worker, he was not exempted from carrying a pass: picked up without it, he was sent to jail for two weeks. As he knew how to read and write, he was sent to Bantu Men's social centre (B.M.S.C.) where he got a job as a Librarian. There he read American Negro's Literature, thanks to which he became a nationalist, a colour nationalist as he asserted it himself in his work *Song of the city*, saying; "I realized quite suddenly that I was rapidly moving out of this coloured world of mine, but of the reach of even by dear mother and sister"(13).

He then got a scholarship at the Diocesan Training college at Pietersburg where he began to write some African Verses, and it was the beginning of his career as a writer. When he came back to Johannesburg he felt out of place. In 1938, he went into the world searching for the meaning of life. He lived in England and later on, he moved to Jamaica where he settled together with his family. There, he worked as a broadcaster and commentator.

Before we proceed, it is necessary to define some key terms that will enhance our understanding of this work. These terms are "personality and commitment". According to *Webster Third New International Dictionary*, personality is defined as "the qualities of a person that constitute or fix his legal status or general legal capacity". Black personality is therefore referred to as those distinctive features, qualities or behaviour of a black man that make him different from people of other racial groups, those traits that make a black man socially appealing. The same dictionary defines commitment as "the obligation or pledge to carry out some action or a policy; or to give support to some policy or person".

In the context under study, commitment is the author's social and political consciousness and the extent to which he uses his writing to promote it in society.

The intention of this study has been to establish how fiction writing in South Africa during the tense period of Apartheid, was influenced by Racial segregation and how both the white and coloured South African novelists – represented by Paton and Abrahams portrayed black personality. The study therefore attempts to establish how this marginality of social experience of the white and coloured writers affected them in terms of what they perceive as the social problems and the vision they hold for the future.

This study is based on the hypothetical contention that the South African novel of the Apartheid era has been significantly influenced by the Racial segregation that characterized the society at the time. It presupposes that there are discernable differences in the portrayal of the Black personality, in the points of view and social commitment in the fiction of authors from different racial groups.

The discussion of South African Literature has often recognized the significance of the race question, although the issue has not been addressed in the specific terms this study adopts. Some critics have ignored the real issue, preferring to examine the development of individual authors and texts with no reference to the unique context. They do not seem to appreciate the determinative influences of the unique social realities they operate from. Although references are made to the social context of the works, these are largely incidental and do not represent a coherent appreciation of the factor of racial segregation.

Ursula Barnett has demonstrated this awareness by categorizing the fiction along racial lines. Barnett identifies and surveys a category she refers to

as Black South African Literature in English. In her book, *Vision of order: A Study of Black South African Literature in English 1914-1980*, Barnett points out the distinctive nature of this literature, stating that: "Two main streams feed Black South African Literature: Black consciousness and a struggle for freedom"(34). Barnett does not, however, peruse the literary implications of the observations in these statements to specific texts. Instead, she prefers a general discussion of what and how the literature deals with. While she sees this literature as distinct, she does not attempt to establish how the Racial segregation could have affected the various features in it.

Opkure Obuke in his Essay, "South African History, Politics and Literature: Mphahlele's Down Second Avenue and Rive's Emergency", observes that South African fiction is influenced by historical realities. He explores how history and politics have been manifested in the fiction. He therefore moves from the point of context of the novels demonstrating how true to South African history and political situations, works are.

The criticism however, avoids the evaluation of the unique reality of history and policies which has affected fiction writing of different races.
Other critics have shown more sensitivity to this issue, setting out to examine how writing in such a fragmented society affects the realized works of fiction.

February Vernie, in her book, *Mind your colour: The coloured stereotype in South African Literature*, sets out to examine the portrait of the coloured person that emerges from South African Literature from Afrikaans writing to recent English works. She points out that the portrayal is informed by the ambiguous attitude towards the coloured people in the community.

Lewis Nkosi, in his *Tasks and Masks: Themes and styles in African Literature*, makes significant observations about race and literature in South Africa, although he does not go on to examine the relationship between them in specific texts. His perceived difference in the motivating influence for Blacks and whites is that Black writers are moved by "a sense of obligation to

expose the wounds and to make the knowledge public"(77). On the other hand, he contends that the white author reminds the white public of the "many things" to which it has closed its mind.

White Landeg and Tim Couzens, among the sampled critics, come nearest to the point through their Anthropology of critical writings, *Literature and Society in South Africa*. In the introduction, they ask whether one can speak of a single South African Literature. quite correctly, they point out that the writer's experience in the society is hampered by racial segregation, and this in turn, limits the writer's capacity to write effectively about the society in general. In the case of a white South African writer, they point out that: "so much is happening from which even the most concerned white observer is excluded by the facts of a divided society"(72). In the same perspective, Nadine Gordimer notes in particular the deleterious effects of censorship on so explicit a medium as prose saying that: "no fiction of any real quality has been written since then by a black writer still living in South Africa"(51).

The Black writer will not touch controversial subjects except those already made too familiar, in the hope of attracting less attention from the over-sensitive censor and the Police. Ezeckiel Mphahlele, in his *The African Image* admits this saying that,

> ...as long as the white man's politics continue to impose on us a ghetto existence so long shall the culture and therefore literature of South Africa continue to shrivel up; to sink lower and lower and so long shall we in our writing continue to reflect only a minute fraction of life.(109)

While critics have acknowledged the impact of racial segregation on fiction writing in South Africa, the tendency has been either to generalise or isolate a particular author, dealing with flat social issues of racial discrimination, colour bar and the like. In this respect, we note that previous studies have not pin-pointed specific areas of this influence in terms of literary aspects. Yet, this

study seeks to explore that when one looks at the fiction of such writers as Alan Paton and Peter Abrahams, one discovers interesting differences in their approaches: The character portrayal and social commitment are some of the features which should be focused on to bring out the impact of social divisions. Thus, my work differs from what has been written in the fact that it deals with the characterisation of the victims by the writers of different racial groups.

The implied significant relationship between social reality and literature in the topic of this study, would call for Marxist and sociological approaches to the study.

Social phenomena like Racial segregation in South Africa, are aspects of the sociological experience of the communities. Social realities influence the ideological orientation of a particular people. There is, therefore, a relationship between those two concepts (Marxist, Sociological), and also an interplay in their relationship to literature. the study is therefore carried out from the general Marxist and sociological approaches.

According to Rene Wellek and Austen Warren in The *Theory of Literature*, "literary works should be studied in perspective"(40). This is therefore a perspective study of South African fiction in English, which refers it to the social, economic, political and indeed, the literary context.

As far as The Marxist approach is concerned, John Saul and Stephen Gelb in their work, *The crisis in South Africa*, note that the South African society is not a simply a class society. The capitalistic exploitation has been reinforced with racial segregation, domination, giving rise to what they have referred to as "racial capitalism". The social divisions become "race-classes". The Marxists, for example, see society as composed of social classes in hierarchy of economic well being. Those at the top strive to maintain the status quo while those below struggle to move up. In Apartheid, it is the law that forces people to live apart according to races, and those social classes are not flexible as to let in other members.

As far as the sociological approach is concerned, the sociological critics believe that a work of art is an expression of society in the sense that it mirrors current social situation. The writer must take a response to his community and writes for an audience which is the society. Sociological criticism concentrates on the relation between literature and society, because a work of art is not created in a vacuum, it is a product of society.

One of the proponents of the sociological theory is Hippolite Taine. According to him, three main factors "Milieu", Race and Moment" determine a literary text. By "Milieu", Taine refers to the environment of the writers which is an important element that a sociological critic has to focus on. By "Race", Taine focuses to the national traits or characteristics found in a given work of art made by a particular artist of a given society. Finally, by "Moment", Taine refers to the age, the period that influences the writer. These three factors are reflected in Alan Paton's C*ry, The Beloved Country* and Peter Abrahams' *Mine boy*. Indeed, in writing their respective novels, both authors were geared by the socio-political climate of the Apartheid era.

Another proponent of this theory is Austen Warren. In his book *Theory of Literature*, Warren focuses on the importance of heredity and environment to account for the social attitude and opinions which appear in the work of art. Warren pays attention to the audience for which the work is intended, that is, the impact and influence of a work on its readers. In the case under study, both authors champion the cause of the repressed races. However, the natural social experiences they are forced to endure affects their capacity to write effectively about other races.

From the Marxist-sociological point of view, this study proceeds from the stand point that a work of literature, although influenced by the social group it emerges from, does not represent a "constructed totality" of the world view of that group.

This study recognizes that social effect on a work of art starts from social effect on the writer. It therefore takes into consideration Eagleton's View in *Terry Eagleton, Marxism and Literary criticism* that "Literary works are not mysteriously inspired…they are forms of perception, particular ways of seeing the world"(6). Eagleton goes on to point out that "Individual Psychology is also a social product"(7).

The study, however, recognizes that it is wrong to overemphasize the social context and the writer at the expense of the text. Primary attention should be paid to the text and how it reveals itself.

Worth noting is Jefferson's view, in Ann Jefferson and David Robey's, *Modern Literary Theory*, that "Both fiction and psychoanalytical narrative depend on structures of reception in order to make sense of experience, retrospectively"(151).

The study therefore brings to the debate focus which is founded on highlighting the impact of social divisions and black personality at the levels of points of view and social commitment.

This work is divided in five sections: The general introduction, three chapters and the conclusion. The general introduction covers the background of the study, statement of problem, motivation, the authors' biographical backgrounds, definition of key terms, the purpose of the study, hypothesis, theoretical framework and the structure of the work.

The first chapter, entitled "Overview of Racial segregation in South Africa" will show how racial prejudices hampered black people's self-actualisation in their own country.

The second chapter entitled "The White's Portrayal of Black Personality" examines how black personality is portrayed in the white South African fiction with emphasis on Alan Paton as a white novelist.

The third chapter entitled "The Coloured's Portrayal of Black Personality" will examine the portrayal of Black personality in the coloured South African fiction, focussing on Peter Abrahams' *Mine boy*.

The conclusion will summarize the major arguments raised in the work and will propose some recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER ONE

OVERVIEW OF RACIAL SEGREGATION IN SOUTH AFRICA

Before the coming of white men in South Africa, black people had a well structured society. They had their own values which helped to keep their communities in social harmony and order. But, with the European settlements, black people experienced a tragic destiny. They faced a very serious racial problem.

The South African white government was based on highly elaborated capitalist system and on the difference of colour determining the difference among people. Compartmentalization of life in South Africa was the order of the day: a white living in the city of Johannesburg, yellow man conducting the construction of an Enterprise and a black man using a plough in his cornfield or doing the manual, dirty work in the city.

Those are people of different races and origins. The first priority is to the white, the second to the yellow and finally the third to the Black man. Each of them, according to the Racist anthropologist, is a sample of a particular type of race having its own physical characteristics, its way of thinking, its way of feeling and acting.

Robert Huttenback, in *Racism and Empire: Stereotyped Images of Blacks*, characterises blacks as follows:

> Just like children...the blacks are always laughing or quarrelling. They are good-natured and passionate, indolent, but will work hard for a time, clever up to a certain point, densely stupid beyond. The intelligence of an average Negro is about equal ten years. A few, a very few go beyond this but these are exception to the ordinary intellect of English man. They are fluent talkers but their ideas are borrowed. They are absolutely without originality, absolutely without investing power. Living among white men, their imitative faculties enable them to attain a considerable amount of civilisation.(19)

Without any reasoned proof, they have judged the black race inferior to the white one. From then on, they have adopted details to divide people following the colour of the skin, the colour and shape of eyes, the nature of hair, shape of front, the lips and the nose fix limits peculiar to a race.

In the same perspective, coloured South Africans under Apartheid regime experienced the impact of double discrimination. Being non-white, they were victims of white supremacy, but at the same time, together with the Indian minority, they were a focus of suspicion from the black majority. This placed them in an ambiguous and uncertain social position of tentative belonging.

Michael Wade in *Modern African Writers* refers to the coloured community of the Transvaal to which Peter Abrahams belongs as "self-contained, fairly endogamous and hypersensitive to racial issues"(1). Even in the legal classification of race, Michael Wade goes on to define them in reductionist terms as "people who are neither this or that"(4).

Pierre L. Van Den Berghe in his Article, "Racial segregation in South Africa: Degrees and kinds", has analysed the situation and found that there are three degrees of segregation. First, there is what he calls "Micro-segregation"

which is applied on "Public and Private facilities" such as washrooms, waiting rooms, and the like. Second, there is a "Meso-segregation" characterized by a physical separation resulting from the existence of racially homogenous residential ghettos within multiracial urban areas. Third, a "Macro-segregation" which is the segregation of racial groups in discrete territorial units, such as Native Reserves.

Innocent people therefore undergo different forms of segregation perpetrated by the happy few Afrikaners, white South Africans. For example, the problem of land ownership has been acute in South Africa since the early days of the white people's occupation. The country was cut up into separate areas where whites could live without blacks and blacks without whites; where blacks could farm their own land, mine their own minerals, if any, and administer their own laws. Consequently, black people were compelled to stay in the zones ascribed to them by the law established for that purpose.

They could not buy land anywhere they liked nor could whites buy a land in the black area. Ezeckiel Mphahlele, in his work *Down second Avenue*, posits that, "Once and for all, residential segregation was tightened up by the law, a black man could not buy farm in "released areas". He could only buy from a white man and vice-versa"(136).

However, in the areas reserved for whites, all portions of land could be bought by white individuals who could sell them to get money or for other purposes. African people could neither possess anything in the white areas nor live there except in some particular conditions and white people could not live in the black areas either.

After the white people's settlement in the country, there was a progressive impoverishment of the land on which most of the whites lived. To solve this problem – the white's problem – black people were savagely driven from their fertile land and "were piled up" in the so-called "homelands".

Before, they could build their huts, they lived in tents surrounded by barbed wires, dispossessed not only of their ancestral land, but also of their wealth, for they only carried with them what was light and easily portable.

Living only on agriculture, Africans needed fertile land for their share. Since, the "Reserves" were not meant for cultivation at all, the African population (Natives) were plunged in a political and economic situation of inferiority that was hard to secure. In *Report on Southern Africa*, Basil Davidson reports that

> It is erroneous to regard a Native reserve as an agricultural area. It would be more accurate to speak of it as a well-spread out residential area, where the average family unit makes no more out of his land around in the backyard garden.(65)

This situation did not end with the 19th century, Africans have always been moved anytime necessity was felt by the ruling race. Land segregation had been supported officially by law and has therefore reinforced the white people's desire of making South Africa a country of white people.

Racial segregation appears everywhere and at all levels of life. The church and public places like the museums and zoos are all separated, some for blacks and others for whites. The church in the residential areas, even if God is for whites and blacks without discrimination, no black is allowed to enter it. This situation results from the fact that white South Africans do not consider other citizens as human beings. They even support the unbelievable idea that God, having created the colour-line shows that natural inequalities exist between different races.

According to these beliefs, some people are born superior to others, and there is no way a white and a black can be equal. There is a clear-cut distinction between them simply because of the colour of the skin.

Concerning the museums and zoos, they were visited by blacks according to a schedule established by the white men. Ezeckiel Mphahlele in his *Down Second Avenue* says:

> In a sense we were happy enough that we could visit public places like the museum, the zoo, and the union buildings and so on, on certain days when the whites would not be there as well.(99)

Concerning the buses, seats were all separated; there were some reserved for blacks, others for whites. Coloured passengers were given a limited corner upstairs or, in most cases, they used a most regular train service reserved for blacks. They used stuffy trains while whites travelled in their clean buses.

In his novel, *Cry, The Beloved Country*, Alan Paton tells us in which train Reverend Kumalo travelled to Johannesburg;

> Kumalo climbed into the carriage for non-Europeans, already full of the humbler people of his race, some with strange assortments of European garments, some with blankets over their strange nudity of their primitive dress, though these were all women.(14)

If a non-European made a mistake and took a lift for whites for example, the latter took him for a mad man.

Mphahlele again tells us about the hard time he went through when he entered a lift that had no attendant and found himself among a group of whites: "Some looked at me as if I were an owl that had blundered into daylight, but they did nothing more than look at me"(172).

Another important domain that was concerned with the Apartheid segregational policy was Education. After having overcome the black resistance, Europeans have determined harsh measures impeding all possible means of Africans' development. It is to be mentioned that "Bantu" Educational system has been kept at a low level, thus maintaining black people

in darkness. In that way, they were doomed to manual work and the problem of rivalry between Europeans and non-Europeans were cancelled.

The UNESCO report in "Apartheid, Its Effects on Education, Science, Culture and Information" reiterates the idea that to educate non-Europeans would constitute a danger for their own "Western Civilisation". They argue that;

> We should not give the Natives an Academic education as some people are too prone to do. If we do this, we shall later be burdened with a number of academically trained Europeans, and who is going to do the manual labour in the country.(42)

The first priority of the "Bantu" Educational system was mass literacy and the extension of Primary Education at the lowest level. African schools were imposed a program and expansion of primary schools. Facilities could be done within the limitation set up by the lack of economic means.

This was shown in teacher's low salaries, in the type of schools which could be built and in the facilities of those schools. Administratively, African schools were of four types: Private schools run by religious communities of any denomination, which could, if they wanted, apply for official recognition and state aid; subsidized mission schools founded by church organization subsidized by the state and whose syllabus was decided by the Provincial Education Department. Government schools run by an Education Department Community or Tribal schools, where communities or tribes assumed the responsibility for the maintenance of the school.

Peter Abrahams, in *Tell Freedom*, stressed the importance of religious community in Education of African children saying;

> The real burden of non-European Education was carried by missionaries. Without missionaries of all denominations, but mainly the Anglican missionaries, much less than the half a million students would have been at school that year. And certainly, less than 2,4%, probably less than 5% would have received any post Primary Education.(182)

Everything was done by the Apartheid Policy to discourage African children at school. The school feeding scheme was withdrawn from African children while European children were to be fed at a rate increased by "sixpence" per day. This was done behind the motive of speeding up the supply of black child labour on farms and in cities.

For these reasons, it is noticeable that very few blacks would attend schools as Alan Paton, in his work *Cry, The Beloved Country*, says, "In Johannesburg, not more than four out of ten are at school. But of those four not even one will reach his sixth standard: six are being educated in the streets"(66).

The setting up of syllabus for non European primary schools was not less concluding. It was linked with the motive of filling non-European children with theories which cut them off their "Bantu culture" and therefore made "the educated native" a stranger to his people.

In addition, they were mainly taught according to what they were expected to fulfil within the African community; UNESCO Report further says that, "Africans were to be trained only insofar as the economics of the African community could absorb them, they were not to be trained to serve an integrated South African community"(48).

On the other extreme, education was compulsory for white children with ages of 7 to 16 years. It was not only compulsory, but also free as Peter Abrahams puts it in *Tell Freedom*, "I had to go to work before I went to

school. Many had never gone to school. Free compulsory Education was 'reserved for Europeans only"(223).

The white primary and secondary schools were given all facilities and were financed by provincial taxation and partly by a subsidy from the central government. The teachers were qualified and were given high salaries. The content of textbooks followed the official school programs.

Concerning the University Education, some universities practised segregation, others did not. The universities of Pretoria, the Orange Free State and the Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education did not accept non-white students. But the so-called "open universities" that is The Universities of Cape Town and witwatersrand accepted non-white students with a certain amount of segregation when extra-curriculum activities were concerned.

The white and non-white university students had the same tuition, the same syllabus and the same examinations. But still, non-whites were not completely integrated in the white students' groups. Ezeckiel Mphahlele contends that

> Exactly two years before, I had to come to the same hall to graduate in B.A. honours English. The European graduation ceremony had been held earlier in Pretoria city. Although the University of South Africa had the same tuition by correspondence, the same syllabus, and conducted the same examinations for both its European and non-European students, Apartheid forbade a joint ceremony.(197)

Thus, thousands of black South Africans without land and having little or no education still go on living on whites' who were using them as cheap labour. To avoid resistance, legislative measures have been adopted bringing blacks in the monetary system and forcing them to work as servants or in the factories, in farms or in the mines in accordance with the so-called "Job Reservation".

The prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act was followed one year later by The "Immorality Act". The former Act prohibits any form of mixed marriages, and the later, any sexual relationship between whites and non-whites. Whoever breaks these Laws runs the risk of being imprisoned.

However, sexual intercourse between a white man and a black or a coloured woman is tolerated, but that between a black or a coloured man and a white woman is fined by the law.

To live in the "wrong area" – an area declared white or Indian or coloured can be a crime for Africans. South African Apartheid laws turn innumerable innocent people into "criminals" Apartheid stirs hatred and frustration among people. Young people who should be in school or learning a trade roam the streets, join gangs and wreak their dead-end alley of crime.

This is what Alan Aubrey Boesak observes in his article "Farewell to Innocence" saying;

> This is the situation in which the black people find themselves: slavery, domination, injustice: being forced to a life of contradiction and estrangement in their own country/in exile, where fear and the urge to survive made deception on way of life, being denied a sense of belonging, discrimination, all these were realities which have almost completely broken down the sense of worth of black personhood.(29)

It is therefore this dehumanising system of Apartheid that has informed the view points of the two racially representative authors on the personality of a black man.

CHAPTER TWO

THE WHITE'S PORTRAYAL OF BLACK PERSONALITY

Alan Paton and Nadine Gordimer are two of the leading white South African novelists. Alan Paton could be said to have heralded the South African novel in English with *Cry, The Beloved Country*, as Nadine Gordimer could be credited with bringing it international acclaim. Both in South Africa at the time, and like all other serious writers, they were committed to opposing Apartheid and transforming society. Being white however, their experience of Apartheid was much different from that of the coloured or black writers. In the overall social context, theirs was a privileged position, which made most people complacent. This affected their writing in a number of ways.

In terms of commitment, both white and black novelists were insistent that the Apartheid system was unhealthy and untenable. In as much as they demonstrated, this rentless attack on the forces that were dehumanising and disintegrating society, they could all be said to have been committed – that is, committed to protest against Apartheid.

However, while all these writers were committed to a need for a transformed society, the unique experiences of the writers in the different racial compartments, impinged significantly on the elemental orientation of this commitment.

Ann Jefferson and Robey Davidson in *Modern Literary Theory* subsume that characters "are seen as internalised images which are a result of past experiences in the unconsciousness of the author"(147).

And in an environment where the author is marginalized in the overall social experience, his interaction with the different racial groups forming up the society is limited and regulated. The "Internalised images" are prone to be incomplete, especially where personalities from other race groups are

concerned. The affected author is more likely to have recourse to stereotyped perception of people in groups other than their own.

The dilemma for the writer to project himself across the colour lines is indeed real as reiterated by Nadine Gordimer in Nancy Topping and Marylyn Dallman's, *Conversations with Nadine Gordimer* when she says:

> But there are areas where I know there are things I can not write. For instance, if I were to want to write a novel about a black child..., say, living in a country area, who perhaps doesn't even speak a word of English – there are many like that – and perhaps a few broken words of Afrikaans – I think that the concept of reality, the relation to the entities in the life of that child would be something beyond my imaginative powers as a writer, even though writers are extraordinary people.(167)

The result of this has been telling on South African writing where the personality of the fictional character is so unique. In profound amazement, after examining the character landscape of Alex Laguma's *A walk in the Night*, Robert W. July in "The African Personality in the African Novel" exclaims: "...the people are African, but where is the African Personality?"(229)

In *The African Image*, Ezeckiel Mphahlele, in his book's chapter entitled "The white Man's Image of the Non-white in Fiction" examines the evolving portrait of the black personality in white South African Literature over the years. He identifies a number of stereotypes which include, the black man as savage, sometimes brutal and sometimes noble, the degenerate version of man, the child of the wasteland and finally, the migrant labourer. The migrant black man in the unfamiliar environment of the city becomes the attraction of South African fiction in the forties when the trend was emerging, and is reflected in Alan Paton's *Cry, The Beloved Country*.

The following study of the novel establishes the results of Paton's attempts to project himself across the race line. It examines the black personality that emerges from Paton's point of view, given his experiences as a white South African.

The personality of the black in the city was typified by Alan Paton and Peter Abrahams in the two respective novels, *Cry, The Beloved Country* and *Mine boy*. And as Mphahlele points out, with the former novel, for the first time in white South African fiction, the black man looms very large and is actually the central focus.

In Peter Abrahams' *Mine boy*, the black man's migration from the country to the city is also the central focus. However, the realisation of this personality in the two novels reveals once again the significant intervention of race relations and perception in the South African fiction.

Cry, The Beloved Country is not basically about the migrant black in the South African society. It nevertheless raises the consequences of social transplantation. The black man uprooted from the simple rural existence, finds himself in the city where he is overwhelmed by the influence of corruption. This, apparently, is because he cannot understand or tame the forces around him.

Alan Paton sees the black man in the city environment as a displaced being. He is living in a socio-economic and cultural environment, for which he is not suited. Because of either the level of his social development or some inherent characteristic, Paton is not categorical about the explanation. The African is portrayed as being incapable of or unsuited for the fast, urbanised and capitalist world.

It is on this inference of some inadequacy in the Black personality that Alan Paton founds the development of his black characters, but rather, nearly all of them are flat. On the same premise, he bases the examination of the relationship between the black characters and their white counterparts.

To start with this relationship, Alan Paton disingenuously reveals a reversed racial prejudice where, intriguingly, it is the white man who gains understanding and develops from the experience of interacting with the blacks. On the other hand, from interacting with the whites, the black man only confirms his place as deserving to be treated more charitably by the white man.

James Jarvis, the white farmer, had lived in the countryside, side by side with his black neighbours but had hardly noticed them. To him, they lived in another world, and he had never considered the moral question of the Apartheid social system, which so advantaged the white man over the non-white. His journey to the city to bury his son who had been killed by a black man, alters his attitude. It becomes an edifying experience with ennobling consequences.

James Jarvis reads his son's written speeches and diary notes, with high moral ideals of social justice, and gradually loses the insulation constructed around him by Apartheid beliefs.

The disarming understanding and sympathy with which he meets Reverend Stephen Kumalo, the father of the killer of his son, can be attributed to the moralising arguments of his son. By the end of the journey, he not only decides to donate money to support his fallen son's cause, but even more tellingly, resolves to help the impoverished black community in his village of Ndotsheni.

Reverend Stephen Kumalo may "loom large" in the events of the novel, but the evolution of character consciousness which happens to James Jarvis, is conspicuously missing. His social outlook, like his conscious appreciation of the forces at play in this mal-system of social structure, has been cast and stowed away in Pseudo-Christian humility.

Reverend Kumalo's interaction with the white man has taught him to be humble and that is how he has remained. He is so fixed that he cannot see the role of the social system, as promoted by the white supremacist, in creating the criminal from black man.

In reality, Paton's portrayal of the Black Personality is informed by the same basic prejudices which had nurtured Apartheid in the mindset of the white supremacists. It is premised on the opinion that there is a basic difference between blacks and whites in their inherent natures.

In the novel *Cry, The Beloved Country*, statements bearing this view are rather common. The narrative voice describes Reverend Stephen Kumalo's wife as sitting silently at the table "with the patient suffering of a black woman, with the suffering of oxen, with suffering of any that are mute"(10). And when Kumalo meets a white man, he says: "...it is thus with a black man, who has learned to be humble and who yet desire to be something that is himself"(7). In these observations, coming from the omniscient narrator, the emphasis on the unique nature of the black man is apparent.

With this presumed difference, the novel highlights three generic characteristics of the Black Personality, which in particular cases and circumstances lead to varied and even opposed character traits, but all illustrating the same perception.

The black man is simple minded, vulnerable and dependant, in one word, he is a child. In this scheme of attitude, the novel wins sympathy for the black man but does not claim an equality between him and the white man. Instead, it sees him as degenerate in some sort of way.

Reverend Stephen Kumalo represents these traits most classically. From the time we meet him in Ndotsheni village, before he leaves for Johannesburg, he seems to be incapable of making out the simple facts concerning his son and sister in the city. As a church minister, he is in the circumstances, above the average black in the village in terms of exposure. It is incredible therefore,

even when one can argue that he is blinded by the great affection for his son, that he fails to appreciate the irretrievable influence the city has on Absalom Kumalo. It is his wife who wakes him up to the fact that Absalom Kumalo is gone for ever.

Even more disturbing is Stephen Kumalo's total loss of faith in, not only African religious practices, but also in the black man's way of life and indeed the ability of the blacks to overcome their problems. Talking to his wife about their son, Absalom, he says:

> He went to Johannesburg, and as you said when people go to Johannesburg, they do not come back. They do not go to St. Chard's, to learn that knowledge without which no black man can live.(9)

In losing faith in the black people, Stephen Kumalo has without reservation embraced the white people's way of life and their opinion of him. This loss of faith in his people cultivates in him an inferiority complex. Not only does he then believe that the African ways are inferior, but he also comes to accept himself as inferior to the white man.

Through Stephen Kumalo, Alan Paton portrays a character of the outsider who weeps more than the bereaved. Stephen Kumalo has embraced the Christian teaching of turning the other cheek so literary that he has eschewed all protest even when there is racist dispossession and violence all around him.

Thus, Alan Paton strives to draw our sympathy towards Reverend Stephen Kumalo, and although this is successful, it is only as far as the religious sentiments are concerned. His humility and general simple nature are so complete as to support the view that Alan Paton's intention is to convince his audience, the white South African, that the black man is his simple and humble brother, who deserves a fairer and more charitable treatment.

Within this scope, the Black Personality that emerges wins the condescending sympathy of the white audience. And for being a humble and modest man white audience. And for being a humble and modest man with no vengeful feeling against any one, not even his oppressor, he wins the Christian administration.

In the social system that so blatantly discriminates people on the basis of racial difference, disproportionately disadvantaging some while one race is inordinately privileged, and where religion is used to entrench racism, humility and any other such religious sentiments are futility. This is what Ezeckiel Mphahlele observes in his *The African Image*:

> In all cases, whenever the white ruling class took a step forward with discriminatory legislation, white Christian leaders have taken three steps in retreat, both parties claiming that they were acting in the name of Christianity.(64)

In this respect, the Personality of Stephen Kumalo falls far below the expectations of the sociological critic whose hero acts and organises towards social justice and improvement. Thus, to seek to oppose Apartheid regime simply by ideological or biblical arguments would mean to accept the nationalists' oppressive practices.

This is what Alan Paton subsumes with the characterization in *Cry, The Beloved Country*. He rationalises Apartheid, perhaps inadvertently, by highlighting the perceived basic differences between blacks and whites.

In terms of genuine social change, Reverend Stephen Kumalo is a negative character, both uninspiring and compromising. The portrait of Stephen Kumalo, as representing the personality of the black man, only goes to confirm the basic principles underlying Apartheid which brings into doubt the very humanness of the black man. Reverend Stephen Kumalo aspires to nothing and is all too grateful for any gesture of good will come from the whites. This is largely because he lacks the consciousness to understand the

social forces at play, which have kept the blacks in a position where they will continue to need the sympathy and charity of the white man. Stephen Kumalo is awestruck when a white man helps a black man. The narrative reveals his response to charity thus: "Stephen Kumalo's face wore the smile, the strange smile not known in other country, of a black man when he sees one of his people helped in public by a white man"(200).

The attempt of the narrative to typify the African from the example of Reverend Stephen Kumalo as in the observation above, betrays the stereotyping underlying Alan Paton's portrayal of the Black Personality. To project Stephen Kumalo as a representative character of the blacks is, in the circumstances, to reiterate the basic racial prejudices at a more profound level. Fundamentally, this only helps to entrench the attitude which would serve to replenish Apartheid.

In Stephen Kumalo, Alan Paton looks over the social and political dimensions to ultimate Christian redemption in which the rewards are beyond earthly life. Thus, Reverend Stephen Kumalo can look forward his death.

Alan Paton's commitment is informed by Christian outlook and it is within this cosmos that the consciousness of his leading character is defined. Therefore, Stephen Kumalo's mental world is dichotomised like the physical world to which it is paralleled in the novel's structure. The idyllic world of Ndotsheni in its pristine state is the heaven from which the blacks are now fast descending to enter the evil world of Johannesburg. Reverend Stephen Kumalo's mission to Johannesburg aims at a Christian moral redemption of the souls of his son and sister. It is a mission that is oblivious of the social fraud and its causative factors.

In terms of social relationship, Reverend Stephen Kumalo is under the paternalism erected by the white authorities. He has accepted his total emasculation, thus the inability to appreciate the real to be done. Even when he returns to Ndotsheni with knowledge of what happens to people in the city, his

concern is not how to end the suffering as he and his family have gone through, but rather how best to live with it. Telling is the surrendering complacency that emerges from the following conversation with his friend back in the village of Ndotsheni:

> I have never though that a Christian would be free of suffering, umfundisi. For our Lord suffered, not to save us from suffering, but to teach us how to bear suffering. For he knew that there is no life without suffering. Kumalo looked at his friend with joy. You are preacher, he said.(210)

In some sense, however, Stephen Kumalo's travel in the city of Johannesburg has raised his eyebrows such that he begins to wonder how Ndotsheni may be regenerated to be a place of life for his people.

He seeks to raise the issue with the chief of the village, who, as it turns out, is equally at a loss as to what could be done. Once again, in this arrangement of paternalism, it is the white man who comes to the rescue of the village. James Jarvis gives milk to the children dying of malnutrition, and hires an agricultural demonstrator for the village. So grateful is the black man for this charitable attitude.

The black man in Alan Paton's novel does not seem to realise that the greater wrong is that he has been pushed into a position where he has to survive on charity and sympathy of others.

This perception that the black man is a child underlies the principle on which the other major characters in the novel are created. Although John Kumalo, Stephen Kumalo's brother who lives in the city of Johannesburg where he is popular as a political activist, is portrayed as an antithesis of his brother, the difference is only in the detail of their behaviour and disposition, influenced by the way of life each person has chosen. The essence of their personality – that is the black man as a child – is clearly manifest in both of them.

John Kumalo represents the enlightened blacks who are able to appreciate the dynamics of the social problem they face in the racist social set up. In this position, he is expected to be the rallying point around which the oppressed could be organised to oppose the white supremacism. In fact, he understands quite lucidly what is at stake as he explains to his brother:

> Go to our hospitals, he said, and see our people lying on the floors. They lie so close you cannot step over them. But it is they who dig the gold. For three shillings a day...We live in the compounds and we must leave our wives behind. And when the new gold is found, it is not we who will get more for our labour. It is the white man's shares that will rise...They bring more of us to live in the compounds, to dig under the ground for three shillings a day. They do not think, here is a chance to pay more for our labour. They think only, here is a chance to build a new house and buy a bigger car.(29)

John Kumalo is able to realise that exploitation is the underlying problem and resources have to be more fairly distributed if there is to be any real social harmony. It is clear that this cannot be achieved through moralising. He reminds his brother that the church "with a fine voice" has been speaking against the social ills for half a century and things have only been getting worse not better.

With such a developed social consciousness, John Kumalo would have been a positive and a hopeful point in promoting the black man's cause in society. Being a gifted and powerful public speaker with the ability to move audience, he would have become an asset in mobilising blacks to stand up against the oppressive system.

However, Alan Paton undercuts this would be a positive character with such negative qualifications that he eventually emerges as a cunning but cowardly agitator, with personal rather than public interest as his motivation.

Alan Paton's depiction of John Kumalo is predictable in the novel's structure. The novel's moral focus is not the argumentation of social equality. It is the emersion of the black man's soul in Christian spiritual consciousness such that the humble, meek and dependant blacks can then deserve the charitable sympathies of their white superiors.

In eschewing Christian ideals, John Kumalo must of necessity become a villain. Ultimately, therefore, he is not truly committed to the cause, in addition to being a coward. And when his son is arrested and accused of participating in the murder of Arthur Jarvis, he has no moral qualms about lying. To him, the uppermost concern is how to get his son out of the danger of conviction and possible execution. While Stephen Kumalo seeks his son's moral salvation, prevailing on him for the truth, as he prays and hopes for mercy, he, on the other hand will look for any loophole in the legal system to extricate his son from conviction.

The relationship between the two brothers is an aspect that Alan Paton fails or chooses not to exploit for further possibilities. Instead, John Kumalo's pragmatism is conveniently used to portray the evil of a corrupted black mind in the city setting, which indicates a deliberate attempt to vilify the category. The unscrupulous personality of John Kumalo as opposed to the unsuspecting innocence of his brother is deftly established.

In the unique circumstances under which the black man lives in the Apartheid rule in the city, the reaction of John Kumalo could be understood, as it is informed by the overriding necessity for survival under the oppression.

John Kumalo is quite aware that to expect mercy from the white man is delusion. He knows that salvation will not come from the church and its fine sounding humanistic appeal for charity. It is a realization forced on him, and others like him in the city, through experiences with the white man. This is evident in the following exchange with his brother in the novel: "Yes! Yes!

John Kumalo interrupts him and smiles at him. Who will believe your son? He asks. He says it with meaning, with cruel meaning"(136).

To expect John Kumalo to respond with high moral sentiments in the situation where a white man has been killed by a black man is to be dishonest. Alan Paton plays down his moral and intellectual abilities to appreciate the fundamental causes of the existing situation. Instead, he transfers the expression of this analysis to a white man, Arthur Jarvis, John Kumalo, nevertheless, acquits himself when he realises the tantalising promise of solving the socio-political problem by Christian moralism. Indeed, as Arthur Jarvis in his unfinished speeches: "The Truth about Native crime", writes:

> The truth is that our Christian civilisation is ridded through and through with dilemma...The truth is that our Christian civilisation is not Christian, it is a tragic compound of great ideal and fearful practice, of loving charity and fearful clutching of possession.(162)

Yet, interestingly, the narrative does not attempt to highlight this context of John Kumalo's reactions, preferring to depict his behaviour as another example of how unsuited the black man is to the city dynamics where he cannot stem the corrupting influences.

John Kumalo is not touched by the moralistic inclination of his brother, an illustration of how irredeemable the black man is within the environment of such corrupting factors. He is rather rejecting the paternalistic exploitation of the black masses by the white minority. In effect, if looked from a different angle from the part of view of social justice, John Kumalo's efforts address a moral problem concerning the irreverent suppression and exploitation of the majority by the minority based on racism. In the novel, he articulates his views as follows:

> We know we do not get enough, John Kumalo says. We ask only what these labouring men fight for in every country in the world, the right to bring up our families as decent men should. They say that higher wages will cause the mines to close down. Then what is it this mining industry? If it is only our poverty that keeps it alive? They say it makes the country rich, but what do we see of these riches? It is we that must be kept poor so that others may stay rich?(29)

Such is the consciousness of the novel that the above moral paradigm is deliberately underplayed by the narrative. When John Kumalo speaks he "growls" and fellow activists listen to him with "contempt". What is implied is that John Kumalo is playing to the gallery and no conviction in the campaign to demand for the rights of the black people.

This is the personality of the black man in the city that emerges from the portrait of John Kumalo. It can conveniently be pointed out that within the black community in a city like Johannesburg, such individuals could have been found.

However, in the structure of the novel, John Kumalo is a representative portrait and as such, his creation is a pointer to the opinion about the enlightened blacks in the city. As such, these are presented as cowardly, selfish and pitifully incapable of being relied upon to lead a successful campaign for the betterment of the rest of the blacks.

On the other hand, among the whites, the character with negative attributes is presented as an individual. For example, Harrison is selfish, racist and thoughtless, but his negative character is balanced by white characters who are understanding and generous. He therefore represents an attitude among whites and not a racial group as is the case with the Kumalo's.

Absalom Kumalo is a petty criminal, and the murder he commits is in the context, unfortunate, a tragic incident resulting from the conditioning that

the Racial segregation and domination has through experiences cultivated in him. Therefore, Alan Paton suggests that Absalom is society made, and the murder of Arthur Jarvis is very much the responsibility of the social order as advocated for and practised by the white supremacists. However, this does not mean that Absalom is depicted in a positive light as a black character. His guilt is a social system's guilt, but his innocence is suggested by highlighting his incapacity, again it appears because of his racial identity, to deal with issues more complete than his simple nature was meant to. In the end, this simplicity of mind and the incapacity to cope overshadow his innocence. He is a bewildered simpleton at sea in the great city and what happens to him comes with a sense of inevitability; and he drifts along, reacting only instinctively.

In court, he answers questions with honesty, but it is honesty arising out of mind. He shoots a man because he was afraid, and he carried a revolver around to frighten people, because he had heard that the city is a dangerous place. Yet, he cannot explain what kind of danger there is. Even more belittling is his plea of guilty, in which his repentance and prayer are not out of fear, an animal like design for self preservation. In no conscious way does he intend to take responsibility for his actions. He pleads guilty only with the hope that he will be excluded from the grave consequences he expects. By denying Absalom Kumalo any rationality even in planning, executing and covering up an evil deed, and again denying him any conscience and remorse in the aftermath, Alan Paton seems to deny him any claim to being a human being.

The personality of the black man that emerges from Paton's portrayal of the three major black characters and their relationship with their white counterparts can hardly be regarded innocuous, leave alone positive. The black personality is denied his full humanness although he is sympathised with, whereas, the white man is projected as self consciously superior, with charitable disposition towards the blacks. A basic dichotomy on qualities and abilities is established between the two.

On this ground, the white man is persuaded that with a more condescending, if not genuine philanthropy, he would have a less guilty conscience on the race question, but even more so the black man could be tamed. As Robert W. July, in his Essay "The African Personality in the African Novel", inquires, we may be excused to exclaim at the end of the novel thus: "These are Africans but is this the African Personality?"(229).

The white novelists, like most other South African writers, were opposed to Apartheid. In their writing, they sought to challenge and undermine principles and beliefs on which it was founded. Alan Paton in his *Cry, The Beloved Country* reiterates this idea saying that: "A liberal cannot accept that the use of any means is justifiable if the end is good"(66).

Nevertheless, the white novelists commitment and social vision bear distinctive shades, as result of social separation. Much of the dilemma emerges from particular individuals developing a consciousness that rejected the artificial superiority and inferiority of race implied in the Racial segregational policies of the Apartheid system.

In Dennis Duerden and Cosmo Pieterse *African Writers Talking*; Nadine Gordimer, talking about her own life, refers to this critical process of self-discovery when she says;

> ...for a long time I regarded the specific situation of blacks to be the natural order of things. It wasn't until later, during my adolescence, thanks to the reading I was doing, that I began to see a parallel between my daily life and what I discovered in books – particularly about class struggle. Was it a natural order or, on the contrary, was it an order – which was unjust – created by people.(93)

Gordimer as a white South African experienced Apartheid from an apparently privileged position though she later challenges the view that the white South African was not adversely affected by Apartheid.

Indeed, while liberal whites oppose Apartheid and advocate its elimination; they do so by persuading the white South African to think again and hopefully change attitude. Thus, their commitment is directed at the white audience, whom they seek to convince that Apartheid is negative even to them.

Nonetheless, the social limitations which denied the white writer, and indeed the others, full social interaction, influenced the way he perceived reality. This brought him unique dilemmas and thereby determined his concerns. It also meant that he could not conceptualise people of other races without refractive effort of alienation.

As a result, there is no radical formula to change society, nor is there unequivocal distinction between right and wrong or good and evil. This tentativeness in the approach to the social problem is further reflected in the lack of hard and fast solutions. Thus, even when the social vision is one of a society with equal opportunities, they envisage it as a gradual process of re-evaluating and reforming values.

Alan Paton, as a white South African novelist, has struggled to make the country liveable for all citizens. His vision of non racial community became transmitted into the practical endeavour of the Liberal Party which he demonstrates, based on non racial principles, the viability of a non racial society in South Africa.

In his collection of Essays *The Long view*, Paton describes South Africa as "a white fortress; each day, each month, each year, the nationalists make it stronger. They make the walls thicker, they make them higher"(47). He added however, the phrase from which the title of his series derives saying: "Yet, in 'the long view', no one believes that the fortress will endure..."(47). The essays in *The Long view* were written by a man who believes that the fortress will not endure. According to him, the only political questions worth discussing in such a society are the following;

> How do we move, by sound and constructive steps, away from white supremacy? How do we avoid violence and catastrophe? How do we get white people to agree to want to share liberty, responsibility, and power?(47)

These are some of the major issues, Alan Paton has implicitly displayed in his novel, *Cry, The Beloved Country*. Through his main characters, Paton expresses the view that much "native crime" is a result of white people destroying the old ways. It has suited the whites to break up the tribes and to strip the chiefs off power, but in doing so, they have forced many black people into a vacuum with no hope, no money, no education and no self-respect. Hence, young people leave the land and wander to Johannesburg where many sink – for as Msimangu questions of the city "are there any customs here?"(32)

Absalom Kumalo epitomizes the young man from the tribe who has gone astray. He commits the ultimate crime of murder. Through the medium of his trial, Paton explores the ideas of who is responsible for "Native crime". Gertrude Kumalo came to Johannesburg to see her lost husband. While there she falls into bad ways. John Kumalo is the Reverend's brother and a trade-union Leader. Blessed with a powerful voice, and inspired by ideas of freedom and equality, he is a force for change but he is corrupted by his love of power. John Kumalo is a rogue whose treachery sickens us. He serves as a warning of what could be if black Africans seek simply to take white power. On the contrary, Msimangu, who has lived in Johannesburg for a long time, is more worldly-wise than any other character in the novel. He is a devout Christian and a hater of violence like Alan Paton himself. It seems likely that Paton puts his own ideas into Msimangu's mouth, saying;

> I see only one hope for our country and that is when white men and black men, desiring neither power nor money, but desiring only the good of their country, come together to work for it...(34).

Reverend Msimangu is a man with whom the reader establishes a close bond and affection. Msimangu is a person for whom we feel deep respect. With a few exceptions, such as Arthur Jarvis and his friend John Harrison, the white people in the novel do not regard black people as individual humans with wants and aspirations.

In his unfinished speeches on "The Truth about Native crime", Arthur Jarvis says: "Whether we be fearful or no, we shall never, because we are Christian people, be able to evade the moral issues"(129).

With their strengths and weaknesses, these characters engage our sympathy or dislike. They are real. They deserve far more than their country permits them. The book ends with a hopeful note, for Mr. James Jarvis, the father of Arthur Jarvis, uses his wealth to appoint to Ndotsheni a man who will teach them how to farm successfully, preserving and enriching the land. Paton does not believe naively that simple people like Kumalo can rebuilt what has gone. The young generation, represented by the agricultural demonstrator can.

Christianity is another moral issue in the novel. Kumalo is a Parson, and it is to a religious community that he goes for help in Johannesburg. There, he meets Msimangu and father Vincent, whose wisdom and kindness support him throughout his darkest hours, providing the "comfort in desolation". Paton is suggesting that Christianity may be the way to unite blacks and whites. The novel ends back in the village of Ndotsheni, which is centered on the mission. Also, one of Mr. James Jarvis' acts of contrition and forgiveness is the promise of building a new church for the village.

Alan Paton, if not optimistic about the future of South Africa, is suggesting strongly that whites and blacks can come together in this way. He also allows

Stephen Kumalo to rescue some of the characters – the girl and his own little nephew. Even Absalom Kumalo, who must die, wished to return to Ndotshoni and never leave it again. Even in Johannesburg where so many are lost in its vastness and anonymity, there is hope, for there are also acts of kindness. Indeed, it is in Johannesburg that Stephen Kumalo meets Reverend Msimangu and Father Vincent. Thus, by the end of the novel, Reverend Kumalo is aware that Johannesburg has broadened his awareness of the world.

Alan Paton has succeeded to invoque the spirit of desperation among the disadvantaged blacks. He has shown the sympathising actions of a few liberal whites but he does not go so far as to advocate or propose measures which would ameliorate the situation. Through his man character Stephen Kumalo, Alan Paton is against youth uprising. He is concerned with love and non-violence in the struggle to restore the oppressed black South African to his ancestral heritage.

Yet, what is required in a situation such as the one which was prevailing in South Africa is not a sedative but a combative art. Such an innocent face in a society ruled by hate and brutality makes him a fool. In this regard, Chinua Achebe in "The African Writer and the Biafran Cause", recognizes the dual role of the Artist. According to him, an artist must give a sense of direction to the people and identify with their problems. He states;

> ...(a)...creative writer who tries to avoid the big social and political issues of contemporary Africa will end up being completely irrelevant – like the absurd man in the proverb who leaves his burning house to pursue a rat fleeing from the flames.(8)

We know, however, that a social protest novel does not have to be a strident propaganda, and one of the virtues of Paton's novel is that it convinces as an art.

In his novel *Cry, The Beloved Country*, Alan Paton has therefore confirmed Ezeckiel Mphahlele's idea of the role of the white writer. In *The African Image*, Mphahlele talks of the white writer saying:

> The white writer is the writer who, if he can live down his innate prejudices, is in the unique position to unveil the sham and stupidity with which the politicians of his race are perpetrating, the yawning gulf between us.(131)

Alan Paton's commitment is to persuading the white community to be sympathetic to others, especially to the black man. It is a kind of commitment to a more just society which, nevertheless, falls short of affirming racial equality.

CHAPTER THREE

THE COLOURED'S PORTRAYAL OF BLACK PERSONALITY

In the two novels under study, even when both authors focus on the black man's displacement as he is forced to leave the rural familiar environment for the morally and socially degenerate ghetto life in the city, Alan Paton sees the trend as ill advised and it should be reversed if the black man is to hope for rejuvenation and progression. Alan Paton goes on to patronisingly suggest that the black man is unsuited for the urban environment. Peter Abrahams, on the other hand, sees the trend as inevitable and points out the possibilities of the black man resisting the corrupting influences and actually discovering his social consciousness in the city. Peter Abrahams reiterates the immanent humanness that transcends the racial boundaries.

In his novel *Mine boy*, Xuma, the protagonist, discovers himself as a human being in the universal sense, not just as a black man, and also his will power and strength in the city. Xuma leaves his village to come to Johannesburg in search of employment in the Mines, because of the typical reasons of land becoming unproductive such that the young cannot engage themselves profitably. When Xuma arrives in the city, there is no one he knows to help him start off, and when we first meet him, he is lost in the sprawling slum of Malay Camp.

But unlike Reverend Stephen Kumalo, who on arrival in the city is conned of a pound by a young black man, Xuma is received, although cautiously, with hospitality and taken in for food, drink and shelter. This is an early indication that the human spirit still survives here. This is significant because Peter Abrahams intends to show the resilience of this spirit even under dehumanising conditions under which the blacks in Apartheid South Africa were made to live.

Leah, the shebeen matron who welcomes and accommodates Xuma is the archetype of the enduring black woman in the slums. She has taken her misfortunes in her stride and is determined and resourceful enough to ensure that life moves on. She runs a home with a number of dependents through illegal sale of local brew. Within this household where he stays for a month, Xuma completes his introduction to the city. Indeed, Leah's household is a cosmic representation of black slum life of the mining city of Johannesburg.

"Daddy", otherwise Francis Ndabula, represents those blacks who have failed to stem the degenerating forces such that they are now a clowning rag of humanity, psychologically sustained only by being in a perpetual state of drunkenness. The only justification for the continued care and tolerance he receives from Leah and her household is the tenacious memory of his glorious past. Thus, Ma Plank admonishes Xuma for despising him when he sees him in sleep, wallowing in his own urine on the floor. She reveals that he had just come to the city, he was a man who inspired others;

> Men thought it a honour to be his friend and women longed for him. And when there was trouble about Passes, he stood at the head of the people and spoke to hundreds of them and the police feared him.(81)

Through Ma Plank, the author indicates that his vulnerability was because "he understood too much" and tried to fight. Peter Abrahams suggests that a heightened consciousness in face of hopelessness as to what one can do to change the situation, is a recipe for despair and disillusionment.

On the other hand is Eliza, a teacher, whose formal education has created a crisis of identity in her personality such that she does not want to belong to where she belongs. She represents those alienated from their people, because the formal education as designed by the white man, has opened their eyes to the possibility of owning the material possessions, otherwise exclusive to whites. But the possibility remains only catalectic as education does not

guarantee one a good job or economic capacity to acquire those things. The educated blacks realise they cannot live the white man's life, but; at the same time they wish to rise above the squalor of the majority of the black people. Eliza finds herself at the centre of this dilemma and her attempt to purge herself of the "sick madness" of desiring the white man's things is futile. She eventually runs away from Xuma, the man she loved dearly, but who could not provide her the lifestyle of her longings.

The other members of Leah's household can be categorised into two groups. Drunk such as Liz, Lena and J.P. Johannes are a shade of the general slum life that is reduced to a purposeless existence with a habitual escape into alcoholism. Getting drunk is the only thing that seem to bring back to them life and happiness. Johannes is boisterous and confident when drunk, but the moment the effect of alcohol wears off him, he remains completely emasculated, a shadow of the man he would have been, as revealed in the following description:

> Johannes drunk and Johannes sober were two different people. The one was loud and boastful and arrogant and told the world that he was J.P. Williamson and he would crush any sonofabitch. He joyed in fights and in his great strength and dared anybody at anytime. The other was a lamb and seemingly ashamed of his great size and strength. And almost afraid of looking at anybody and always just too ready to step aside and very hard to provoque.(29)

His girl-friend Lena was "pretty when she was sober", but in her drunken state, she got appalling fits.

In the other category are Maisy and Ma Plank. Maisy is a young woman who, when juxtaposed with Eliza, is realistic and therefore more at peace with her situation. Above this, however, she has a very mature and had selfless affection for Xuma. Ma Plank is an old woman who is wise in her reticent

way. She helped Leah and advised the young people around her. Unlike the others, they kept their heads above the general rot around them, resisting the alcoholism. Between them, they carried the hope Peter Abrahams wants to communicate that the human spirit and dignity could survive these conditions. Among these people, Xuma makes his first contact with the city, and this is only a transitory contact because he has to move out to the rest of the city to get a job and strike out on his own. Worth noting about Xuma in this contact with the city is that his moral code is in sharp contrast with the people he meets. The very moment he enters Leah's house, he is upright to a wrong he sees when Dladla strikes Daddy for laughing at his expense. But it is with Leah, who in every sense is a good woman, loving, caring and strong; although tough, that the value divide between Xuma and the city is revealed with emphasis.

The survival instincts and imperatives cultivate in the city people an individualist attitude to project themselves and move on. The communal sense that obliges the individual to be responsible for what happens to others is absent. It is the latter morality that Xuma comes with the city. Therefore, when Leah buys information about the intended police raid on illegal brew selling, pragmatics demand that she keeps it to herself or else the police would become suspicious that the brew dealers are being tipped off. Consequently she leaves the other women in business to be arrested. Xuma finds this hard to appreciate and it remains an uneasy point in their relationship with Leah constantly telling that he is a "fool" with people.

When Xuma strikes out in the larger Johannesburg community, he takes along with him this morality of communal responsibility and a sense of dignity and justice. This, for a black man in the Apartheid experience of the city, is highly unconventional and indeed dangerous.

His out of ordinary reaction is soon revealed when he knocks down a policeman in retaliation for an undeserved assault. The look of "strange

surprise" that appears in the policeman's eyes explains how unexpected his retaliation is to the police who are used to an intimidated street populace. The black man in the city has learnt the hard way to expect no rationality. Xuma's reaction has every sign that it is a result of lack of this experience rather than an inherent consciousness that rejects unjust treatment.

The big suspense question that hangs around Xuma's reactions is how long he is going to hold out as he experiences the city more. The feeling that Xuma will go through like everybody else when he gets to appreciate the dynamics of the conditions more, takes prominence as we note the attitude of those who seem to admire his courage at first. The wife of the coloured man who had helped Xuma to elude the police, after establishing that Xuma is in the city, plays down the significance of the incident, telling her husband that, "that is why he struck the policeman"(17). Later on, Xuma helps a black doctor carry a man who had injured himself, running from the police. This is done against the clearly disapproving and menacing attitude of the police. A similar feeling that Xuma is reacting out of lack of the characteristic experience the rest have, crops up again in the way the doctor reacts to him as we notice in the following conversation:

> The doctor took out a cigarette and handed the packet to Xuma.
>
> What is your name?
>
> Xuma
>
> Been in the city long
>
> Three months
>
> I see.(14)

The finality in the doctor's expression of understanding and the immediate loss of interest in Xuma, heightens the expectation. The sad irony is that Xuma who has a raw racial prejudice, with intense feeling that Blacks are different from whites and the latter are up to no good, finds himself falling in love with Eliza.

His attraction to Eliza is, surprisingly, the small, delicate and smooth features, which he himself identifies so closely with the white women. Rationality tells Xuma that it is Maisy with whom he would be happy, but his feelings for Eliza are stronger, even with all her personality problems such that whenever he is with Maisy, he wishes it were Eliza treating him so.

However, Xuma does not double cross the two women and throughout the turbulent relationship with them, he remains admirably above any pettiness. This is one aspect in respect of the portrayal of the Black Personality through which Abrahams reaffirms the dignity and the resilience of the human spirit of the black man, even within the degenerate environment of the city. Therefore, even when Xuma leaves the countryside and is cast amidst the depravation of the city slums, he is not overwhelmed by the influences around him. Unlike the Kumalo's in *Cry, The Beloved Country*, Xuma is not bewildered or corrupted by the city. He takes the strange new world in his stride and there is an urgent sense that he leaves his imprint, in a moral sense, on the social spectrum he traverses.

The nobility of Xuma in the way he conducts himself in his quest for love need not be qualified. Where he would have taken advantage of Maisy for sexual fulfilment, Xuma prefers to be honest and frank even when it means hurting Maisy. Their conversation, as illustrated here, is based on honesty and respect:

> You are very good, Xuma, and I like you very much, she said softy looking steadily at him.
>
> Xuma saw the tenderness in her eyes and looked away.
>
> I like you too, Maisy, very much, but…
>
> Maisy smiled. Yes, I know.
>
> No, you don't ! You think I want to like her but is not so. She is no good for me and I knew. But I cannot help myself. She is like a devil in me. I stayed away because I know she is like a devil in me.
>
> And the ways of the white folk are like a devil in her.
>
> Yes
>
> I am sorry Xuma
>
> But I do like you, Maisy. You are the one who makes me laugh when I feel heavy I come to you you are a good one and I know it. But if that one smiled at me I would go sick with longing for her.(13)

Xuma is ruled by his heart and like in other aspect of his social life, he is not encumbered by considerations of what is prudent, or by the likely consequences of the choices, actions and reactions he undertakes. But it is not because he does not understand his environment, as is the case with Absalom Kumalo in *Cry, The Beloved Country*. It is rather because he has a keen conscience and deep respect in the dignity of man. Xuma's sentimental self overrules the contingent considerations in the city situation, where life is reduced to an unprincipled fight for survival, and his initial insistence on following his feelings for Eliza is a pointer to this distinction.

Xuma's resistance to temptations of compromise in the survival game is reflected in the parallel line of development in his character. In his social and political consciousness, Xuma starts from an equally innocent position, unencumbered by shrewd considerations of choice. Accordingly, he is frank,

natural and forthright in his views. Apart from the unique and strong moral code with which he comes to the city, Xuma's social consciousness is informed by a strong racial prejudice where he sees black people as distinct from the whites. With the restricted social exposure, and also because of the rigour with which the Apartheid system was being enforced in society, the divide between the racial groups had become, in Xuma's mind, an inherent and wide one. He therefore cannot conceive being friends with a white man, he reiterates this view in a number of frank exchanges with Paddy, Di and Dr. Mini, among others.

Paddy, his immediate boss, is a liberal white man who wants to counter the view that a black man is not as human as a white man. Besides this belief, however, he has developed a strong respect for Xuma who has distinguished himself in the mines as a head mine boy. Paddy is desperately trying to become his friend, but Xuma finds it hard to conceive how this could be possible. He muses;

> His white man had even tried to make friends with him because the other mine boys respected him so much. But a white man and a black man cannot be friends. They work. They work together. That's all, he smiled. He did not want the things of the white man. He did not want to be friends of the white man. Work for him. Yes. But that is all.(63)

Xuma seems to hint on accepting the white man as a master, but his proud sense of belonging and identity convinces him that being black is in no way negative. Later on when Paddy invites him into his house for supper, Xuma reiterates his view by telling Paddy's wife how unlikely it is for him to be friends with her husband. He also tells her about Eliza, saying it is foolish of her to keep wanting to live like the white people. And in the succeeding conversation, this deep seated opinion is revealed;

It is not foolishness, Xuma
She cannot have your things
But is not the heart the same.
No, I care only for my people
But, it is so and where is the good in wishing?
Listen Xuma. I am white and your girl is black. But inside we are the same. She wants the things I want and I want the things she wants. Eliza and I are the same inside, truly, Xuma.
But it cannot be
It is so, Xuma, we are the same inside
A black girl and a white girl
The same?
The same
But it is wrong
It is right, Xuma, I know
No!
Yes
It cannot be. You are good but It cannot be.(66-67)

It is on the basis of this conversation that Di and her husband Paddy stage an argument about his humanness. Di believes that in as much as Xuma believes the black man and the white man are inherently different, and does not conceive the quintessence of all races in the universal humanness, he is not yet a human being.

This argument, however, is not about whether Xuma is a human being or not, in the basic sense. As it turns out, what Di means by humanness is the social consciousness of the individual to recognize that the racial differences and lifestyles are peripheral, and all men are the same in the primary sense. Abrahams' intention in the debate between Paddy and his wife is far from revealing doubts in, nor affirming the humanness of the black man. His

purpose is to train the flood light on the need to accept blacks as equal beings only in as far as they remain humble, obedient and dependant. This counters the patronising attitude advocated in *Cry, The Beloved Country*. Di says of this attitude: "They want to lead him [Black man]. To tell him what to do. They want to think for him and he must accept their thoughts. And they like him to depend on them"(68).

Yet, although Di lumps Xuma in this group of the "good" native, he does not belong there. Xuma stands opposed to much of what Paddy wants him to see, and even in the mines, Xuma has opinions which some times are at variance to those of his white bosses.

In addition, he is blinded to this awareness by the resentment generated by the unfair system. Dr. Mini, who is also a black man, has outgrown this condition due to the exposure through education. He can therefore answer to Xuma's observation that he lives like a white man correcting him thus: "You are not copying white man when you live in a place like this. This is the sort of place a man should live in because it is good for him. Whether he is white or black does not matter"(75).

Xuma must reach this point awareness in his development to positively exist his noble and moral qualities to, not only his personal psycho-sociological liberation, but further and more meaningfully, to social change that is urgently needed. That Xuma emerges from a social level different from that of Dr. Mini, even when both are blacks means he is more vulnerable to succumbing like the average black has always done in the circumstances. It is this that makes Xuma's case even more intriguing. He is from that massive stable of the unskilled black migrant labourers who leave the reserves for the city in search of employment. Ordinarily, almost all end up in the mines and the slums, where they deteriorate into alcoholics and criminals. Xuma stands the temptation to turn to alcohol even when bedevilled by setbacks in his

relationship with Eliza. His dignity resists going under like Daddy and Johannes.

We note, therefore, that while two years later, Paton was to portray the black man as incapable of resisting the corrupt influences of the city. Abrahams demonstrates in *Mine boy* that generalisations are erroneous.

Moreover, like in all communities, the black community has both the weak and the strong, the good and the evil, the conscious and the unconscious, which are the distinguishing mark of human society. Peter Abrahams seeks to highlight the exception to the presumed rule and points out the fallibility of the stereotyped personality of the black man, as represented by many white writers in South Africa.

In the same vein, although Xuma represents a group or the personality of it in the social setting of the novel, at the same time, he can stand out as an identifiable individual with credible development. We can sympathise and even empathise with him as he struggles with his love and social upheavals. He is the unfallen and dignified personality of the black heritage. Michael wade in *Modern African Writers* states of this bi-level portrayal of Xuma as follows:

> Xuma exists simultaneously and convincingly as an individual as well as a representation of a class. He is not merely the stock hero of stock gold mine situations whose reactions to specific aspects of it acquire universal significance.(35)

And this universalism is the reiteration of the black man's humanness and not uniqueness, in that he can respond to situations as a man not as a black man. Initially, Xuma does not think of himself as a black man, but a man first, although he thinks and acts as a black man in general. To this destination, that is, to think of himself as a man in the universal sense and not as a black man, is geared by the development of his consciousness.

His moral strength, noble innocence and human dignity, must be anchored on a foundation of socio-political awareness Xuma accomplished this journey. Instead of these qualities getting swamped by the social decay around, they are resilient enough to weather the storm and emerge reinforced. This awakening begins with Paddy's enunciation that being a man precedes being a black man and that Xuma should begin thinking like a man first. Xuma ponders:

> The vision carried him along. He could see himself and Eliza and Paddy and Paddy's woman all sitting at a table in one of those little tea places in the heart of Johannesburg and drinking tea and laughing and talking. And around them would be other people all happy and without colour...(35)

This only comes to Xuma as a wishful picture of what it would be like without the racial segregation. Nevertheless, it is a kind of vision that irreversibly changes Xuma's life intruding on him in his every waking moment. It is a vision that sees man as an individual not a stereotype of a racial group. He can now gauge the present social swindle against the ideal of that vision.

From this point of awakening, Xuma is never the same again as he tries to find answers to the feeling of pain that has replaced the emptiness in him, the pain that comes with consciousness in an unequal society. This propels him to climb the final rungs elevating himself to full "humanness", in Di's sense of the word, hitherto suffocated by the Apartheid conditioning. His reactions, although not much changed from those when he had just arrived from the countryside, begin to take on definite purpose. When in the end he stands up to the white man in the mines, it is, in the true proletarian spirit of the Marxist's view, to project his people against merciless exploitation. His political consciousness has come to fruition in this action, "and now, suddenly he knew that it could be so. Man could be without colour"(181).

Interestingly, Xuma discovers himself, his strength, and his consciousness; indeed, his humanness through his experiences in the city. Where the majority have failed, giving in to despair and alcoholism, he makes his transition from the unconscious heroism to political consciousness and commitment. Through this development, the new Xuma has sloughed off the spontaneity of instinctive and uncalculated response to situations. Now he must think with his head not with his heart. The love quest and his socio-political awareness meet at this point, symbolised through related decisions.

First, after knocking down a policeman at the mines where he had led his men go on a strike to protest against the working conditions in the mines, Xuma runs off in panic. In his discovered consciousness, he realises that to run is to abdicate his responsibility. He decides to walk to prison himself, telling Ma Plank who tries to stop him saying;

> I must go. If I do not go I will not want to live for the disgust I will have against myself. I must go. The Red one is there. He is not black but he is going to jail for our people, how can I not go? And there are many things I want to say too. I want to tell them how I feel and how the black people feel.(183)

Xuma comes of age at this point. Now he can assert that he is human and the black people are human and should be accepted as such. He may be the lone outstanding black figure in the sea of impaired humanity, and again he may be a little romanticised, as Abrahams is worn to do with his leading characters. In spite of this, Xuma speaks volumes in making the statement that black people are not degenerate and dependant misfits, unsuited for the urbanised existence.

In the second decision, Xuma opts for rationality in his love relationships. It is with Maisy that he can carry on with his new responsibility, because she is reasonable, understanding and selfless in offering to help. Accordingly, he asks her to marry him, having made up his mind to forget Eliza, who had been too sentimental.

Clearly therefore, Peter Abrahams' black man is not Alan Paton's black man. Abrahams social position which enabled him to have a closer contact with the blacks in the city meant that he could see the individuals as human beings standing out of the sea of run down, compromised masses in the slums.

Alan Paton, blinded by the lack of a similar experience and falling back to the conventional and approximate picture, could only see the stereotype of degenerate black man, with whom he sympathises but cannot empathise, let alone equate himself.

Peter Abrahams, on the other hand, looks in the mass of derelicts, bums, domestic workers and so forth and sees human beings in their individual capacities with worries, cares, loves and hopes. He sees each reacting to specific situations not as black men would react but as an individual human being would under similar circumstances.

The study of South African Literature in general is affected by the country's social experience of Apartheid. At one level, there were the censorship policies that ensured that some literary works could not be distributed or possessed, let alone published within the country, without the risk of arrest and persecution. This meant that much of the serious fiction like that of Alex Laguma and of many black South African writers remained inaccessible for critical study within the country.

At the second level, the isolation of the South African society by the International community aimed at exerting pressure on the authorities to abolish Apartheid, resulted too, in the isolation of South African Literature not only from major fora but also institutions dealing with literary study. It is true that the literature has not been totally neglected, and some interesting studies have indeed been done. It is therefore the view of this study.

However, given the unique nature of the socio-political environment in which South African Literature has been produced, and also the unique nature

of the literature that has emerged, especially in relation to the rest of the continent, more focus is deserved than what has so far been given.

As the country and indeed the literary production emerge from the delimitating influence of Apartheid, there is a need for criticism to give a sociological perspective to the literature, much of which was undoubtedly fashioned by the historical realities of the Apartheid era. Therefore, a writer who wishes to portray a comprehensive reality of entire society, which is so formally segregated, faces many limitations.

Stephen Claingman in "Writing in a fractured society: The case of Nadine Gordimer" quoting Nadine Gordimer holds that Nadine Gordimer, herself a liberal white South African writer, who has consistently denounced the oppression of non-white races was to rescind her earlier view that Racial segregation would not affect a writer fundamentally. She wrote thus, "Living in a society that has been so deeply and calculatedly compartmentalised as South Africa has been, under the colour Bar, the writer has inescapable limitations"(161).

The limitations Nadine Gordimer refers to can be identified at least from two levels: First is the consciousness of the writer which directly relates to his point of view. How the writer perceives the typical features of the social reality, will very much be determined by his particular experience of that reality. And the social vision the writer conceives for the community will follow from his conditioning in the specific experience of a particular racial group. This, in the South African experience, is very marginal.

Eventually therefore, even when the writers agree that the system is unfair, their different and marginal experiences inform their particular social visions and points of view.

The second level concerns forms, the aesthetic realisation of the work. Landeg White and Tim Couzens in *Literature and society in South Africa* pose the question that must concern all writers in this situation. They ask: "What

kind of form is necessary to convey this marginality, and to whom are the resultant novels addressed"(8). Even more demanding on the writers is the situation of how to depict the experiences of other racial groups from which they are, by law, separated. It is then, not only the question of commitment, but even more specifically, the demands this situation places on the imaginative capacity of the writer.

Stephen Claingman sums up this dilemma in his Essay "Writing in a Fractured society: The case of Nadine Gordimer" in the following words:

> This is not just a question of the writer being moulded by his social situation, but it seems there are definite, externally constructed social limits beyond which the writer's imaginative range cannot extend.(162)

The challenge is to find the form and technique that will help avoid, stereotyping, where one's experience of other racial groups is minimal. There is a clear indication that writers from different social groups have reacted to the situation with some peculiarities.

Thus, white Landeg and Tim Couzens' conclusion, in their work *Literature and South Africa society*, is apt in this case when they state that autobiography is a result of "a reflection forced on the writers by the special circumstances in which they have become writers, of a quality of consciousness, a nagging awareness"(3). These writers have felt deeply about the conditions under which they grew up. However, most of their writings were done in exile. Having run away, leaving behind millions of fellow blacks under the same dehumanising conditions, the writers in exile show a kind of guilt, which, it appears, they try to expiate in their writings. This is what Ursula Barnett in her book *Vision of order: A study of South African Literature in English*(1914-1980) observes saying;

> The writers welcome the opportunity to write what they feel about their homeland, to confess and purge their conscience of 'running away', and to express the dreams for the future.(223)

The same Ursula Barnett, further points out distinctions in the approaches of the two opposing racial groups in their fiction saying: "The white approach is characterized by the primary of the individual (individualism) while the black approach is characterized by the primary of the community"(162).

In terms of commitment and social vision, the relationship between society and the individual is another key aspect that distinguishes the coloured approach from the white one.

Thus, Peter Abrahams and Alan Paton's writings as representing respectively the coloured and the white South African fiction cannot be said to be homogeneous. There are distinctive features which we can highlight from the foregoing examination of the two novels: Alan Paton's *Cry, The Beloved Country* and Peter Abrahams' *Mine Boy*. These features also attest the view that there are significant influences on the writers and their writings, from the social reality of racial segregation.

Indeed, by the time the coloureds were beginning to exert themselves politically. Peter Abrahams was already outside the country. Abrahams left South African before Apartheid revealed its true and vicious face, although one could argue that the covert of Apartheid of the late 1930°s was no less obnoxious and painful. In the Cape, the tendency to accommodate is responsible for greater frustration and confusion. The gulf between black and "coloured" seems however less in the North. The "coloured" as a bi-cultural being is less noticeable in the North. The works of Peter Abrahams as a Northerner are still characterized by Romantic idealism. Thus, *Mine Boy* is an earlier forerunner of Alan Paton's *Cry, The Beloved Country*, possibly falling

into Lewis Nkosi's categorization of "Jim comes to Jo'burg". It deals with the fairy familiar picture of the black man in the city.

Concern for the minority is more obvious in Peter Abrahams' writing. His point of view challenges the conventional views on Apartheid, where the supremacist is the sole perpetrator of racism and the black man, the long suffering victim. Abrahams sees the problem facing the minority as double edge. One had to deal with the disadvantages imposed by Apartheid, but at the same time confront the rejection by the black majority. Abrahams' view is that it is the tendency to social exclusivism of any kind that causes negative social systems like Apartheid.

All South African novelists of consequence are unanimous on one general point, they all oppose Apartheid. They were committed to the view that Apartheid is wrong, harms the society and should be ended. This notwithstanding, the commitment and social vision of South African authors is influenced by the unique consciousness of their racial identity. The different social experiences of the different social groups cultivate varying shades of social consciousness and thereby commitment. In general, each author's primary concern is with his racial group, from where they look out to the rest of the society.

The point of view of white South African fiction follows from their commitment and social vision. At the same time it is determined, in significant ways, by the social reality the writers are in. the tentativeness in the commitment is clearly evident in the narrative approach. Influenced by the limited social experience, the point of view in their fiction is that of the white South African in paradox of negative privilege. The white novelist projects from a position of personal dilemma and conflict, where privilege also means guilt. Even worse, is the ceding of the freedom to act and live as an individual. The central character in the white fiction is white.

However, where the black man has taken centre stage as a character in fiction, the result has been stereotype and caricature. *Cry, The Beloved Country* demonstrates this failure of the black man to go along this fiction as an individual and human being.

In the coloured fiction, the point of view is clearly that of the minority who demand to be recognized as an integral part of the society. The coloured writer's concern with the future is related to the uncertainty about his acceptance within the post Apartheid South Africa. His crisis of identity and belonging was created by the rejection from the black community. The coloured writer is committed to ensuring a place for the coloured minority in the post Apartheid South Africa. There is a clear attempt to see the minority integrated in the rest of the society. In his fiction, he looks beyond Apartheid reality in the present, and challenges racial exclusivism as a tendency. We can therefore note here that the commitment of the coloured writer, as that of the other groups slants towards his own community.

Therefore, social divisions under the Apartheid social system affected points of view and social commitment in the resultant writings. Terry Eagleton in *Marxism and Literary Criticism*, supports the view of Leon Trostsky on the theory of Literature when he argues that "Form is discovered, proclaimed and evolved under the pressure of an inner need, of collective, psychological demand which, like everything else…has its social roots"(24).

This concurs with Georg Lucas' observations on the relationship between literature and the writer's social experiences. In his work, *The Historical Novel*, he argues that

> Every writer is a son of his age...It is very difficult for the writer really to free himself from the currents and the fluctuations of his time and within them, from those of his class.(254)

In South Africa of the Apartheid era, the unique social experiences of each has given rise to unique fiction from different racial groups.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

South African fiction is unique in at least two respects which would qualify it as a distinct literature. First it is different from the rest of African literature especially on the subject matter it deals with. The unique social situation of Apartheid is so overbearing that all, but the very peripheral of South African fiction in English relates to it directly. This is the obvious impact of the social divisions on the fiction, which distinguish it from other African fiction. Much of the rest of African fiction is concerned with Africa's pre-colonial heritage, the clash of cultures in the advent of colonialism, the struggle for independence and the subsequent disillusionment. For the South African writer, where Apartheid was denying some sections of society their very humanness; challenging the social system became the inevitable concern of most writers. In his *Tasks and Masks: Themes and Styles in African Literature*, Lewis Nkosi, himself a victim of the system and who, as a writer, was affected in the same way posits that

> In other parts of Africa, the conditions of Independence have enabled the writer to turn back to the past in a more leisurely exploration of his pre-colonial heritage. In South Africa, the pressure of the future is so enormous that looking backwards seems a luxury.(79)

Indeed, in an environment where people lived in perpetual fear and deprivation due to Racial oppression and brutality, the pressures of day-to-day superseded even that of the future. At that time, the existing reality of Apartheid became the typical subject of the fiction.

The second distinguishing mark of South Africa fiction is its very diversity. Within the same environment and on the same subject, varied shades of commitment, points of view and indeed social visions emerge along racial

lines. These differences are sometimes so glaring that one wonders if we can speak of a single South African Literature.

This study has established that in South Africa of the Apartheid era, where society was compartmentalised on the basis of race, the fiction that emerged distinguished itself along racial lines. It affirms that social divisions have affected fiction writing in that the writers from the coloured and white groups, have perceived and portrayed the black man with distinct inclination to their particular social experiences.

The examination of the portrayal of the black man by the two racial groups reveals that the image of the blackman is not uniform. While the coloured writer's image of the black man is more like the black man's image of himself, the white writer's image is much more different. This is explained by the social distances between the black man and the two (coloured and white).

Two elements characterize the portrayal of the black man in the white fiction: in the first place is the attitude that the black man is a unique human being, different from the white man. This is an attitude represented by Alan Paton in *Cry, The Beloved Country*. Informed by this view, Alan Paton represents the black man as a simpler being. He deserves to be treated well, but is not expected to attain the same sophistication of the white man. In this way, Alan Paton suggests that he is not suited for the complex city environment as he is easily corrupted into crime and other forms of self-abasement. His place is the simpler rural setting to which his nature is adapted.

The second element in the portrayal of the black man is the stereotype. Progressive white fiction does not so overtly denigrate blacks. In Alan Paton's novel, there is a clear attempt not to make statements about the humanness of the black man. However, because of the social live as little contact between the two, the writer has resorted to preset images of the black man. Thus, when a black character is above a domestic servant, miner or a gangster, he falls in

three typical categories. He is either the disillusioned intellectual who sees no end to Apartheid and therefore lives in the present or the passionate and dogmatic radical of black consciousness. Besides the two, is the compromising individual who attempts to lessen the impact of Apartheid by obeying the white authorities. These stereotypes populate the landscape of white fiction. In the coloured fiction this uniqueness disappears. The black man is a human being with the usual weak and strong points. In Peter Abrahams' *Mine Boy*, the black character is varied and does not fall in fixed categories. Indeed, there are representative characters of particular consciousness, but these are not so because they are black. Peter Abrahams directly challenges Alan Paton's portrayal of the black man as unsuited for the city by presenting an individual (Xuma) who finds purpose and commitment through the city experience. Doubtlessly, this portrayal results from the closer contact the coloured writer has had with the black community as compared to the white writer. Therefore, the black personality that emerges from the characterization in the fiction of the coloureds is less stereotyped. Themselves, victims of Apartheid, the coloured writers lack the condescending, charitable sympathies of white writers like Alan Paton. This, coupled with the fact that in terms of social interaction, they had more contacts with the blacks, meant that they could see them less as a group and more as individuals.

In consequence, the emergent black characters are individual human beings. The point therefore is not so much that those writers are what they write as the main stream Marxist theory would presuppose. It is rather that their experience of the general society is limited because they are forced to live in narrow, racially defined social compartments which in turn affects their portrayal of the black man.

As a point of view, Alan Paton has shown the tendency, in his approach to fiction, of his social situation. There is the white writer perceiving the oppression of the non white especially the black man, from a sympathiser's

point of view. This approach exposes the indefensible attitude and practice of the white supremacist, calling on him to be more human to the black man, whom, however, it does not recognize as equal to the white man. It is an approach that has been attacked by African critics for lack of genuine commitment.

As Nancy T. Bazin and Marilyn D.S., in *Conversations with Nadine Gordimer* observe: "some of these writers have, to use Gordimer's words, 'dared to do it from a black point of view' "(221) trying to project themselves into the psychological disposition of the black consciousness. This, however, has sometimes resulted in an obtrusive caricaturing of the African Personality as is classically represented by Reverend Kumalo, a character in Paton's *Cry, The Beloved Country*, who, self-effacingly, looks up to the white man for charity and good will.

The coloured writers are also committed to the transformation of society from the Apartheid hold. However, in addition to this generic concern, the coloured writer reveals a particular preoccupation with the question of belonging. This is a noticeable attempt to bring the social minority into the main fold of society, and to reaffirm and ensure their place in the evolution of the society.

All in all, South African fiction in English of the Apartheid era is hyperconscious of the race relations. It is one fiction in as far as it is unanimously focussed on the Apartheid issue of racial segregation and in as much as it indicts the Apartheid social system. When it comes to aspects like social commitment and black character portrayal, this unique identity does not hold. There are differences in these aspects, which sometimes quite overtly follow racial lines.

Indeed, when Peter Abrahams and Alan Paton portray the black man in their respective novels; subtle differences occur as it is evident here. And this is not so much in its recognition that social divisions impinge significantly on

literary production, as in the proposal that to understand this influence, we must bring into comparative study, Literature that is produced at about the same time and for the same cause – opposition to Apartheid in this case. This literature, however, is produced by people who have lived in different social, political and economic conditions although in the same society.

As a way of contribution to literature, this study in an open gate to debate and further research not only in south African literature but also in other literatures where peculiar situations like that of Apartheid South Africa exist.

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