

Arresting Historical Violence: Revolutionary Aesthetics and Alex La Guma's Fiction

by

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Abstract

In the wake of apartheid system of racial and class discrimination, blacks and underprivileged South Africans suffered diverse forms of violence, ranging from the political, economic, cultural and social. As a policy of double standards, apartheid appropriated violence and brute force to sustain its ideological ethos of racial intolerance and class stratification. In negating the crude logic of violence (apartheid system), Alex La Guma's novels, *A Walk in the Night* (1962), *The Stone Country* (1967) and *In the Fog of the Season's End* (1972) are artistic responses to overturn the logic of apartheid; they are crafted to upturn equitable order as well as to circumvent this grisly historical era. Although a refraction of social realities, La Guma's fiction is modelled upon negating the contradictions engendered by apartheid. This is achieved through an artistic consciousness couched in revolutionary aesthetics, which is art of protest for societal change and human advancement. La Guma's aesthetic vision has culminated in post-apartheid South Africa: it is part of the ensemble that engendered change as evident in post-apartheid era. The relevance of this paper is that La Guma's artistic vision is part of the process that reversed the history of apartheid South Africa.

Keywords: Revolutionary aesthetics, La Guma, South Africa, historical violence, Apartheid.

Introduction: Apartheid, History, Writing and Violence

“Any valid discussion of the phenomenon of violence in the African literary imagination must be concretely predicated on the historical contexts in which the bulk of that literature has been created”.

--- Chidi Amuta, *Towards the Sociology of African Literature*, 1986.

The message is always the same. We need to treat today’s victims not only for their own sakes, but for the sake of the generations to come. The web of violence and abuse which traps every newborn member of long-ensnared families must be destroyed so that future generations may be born free.

--- Renvoize, *Web of Violence*, 1978.

Though apartheid is in the past (and arguably buried in the rubbles of history), it is relevant to bring it into perspective for deeper understanding of contemporary South African political history. One of the major ways of making this possible is through literary engagement. As Fredric Jameson asserted, every text must be read as a symbolic meditation on the destiny or history of a society (1981: 70). By the same token, in his Inaugural Lecture at the University of Ilorin captioned “Literature and Society on the Border of Discourse”, Olu Obafemi averred that “literature reflects, represents and refracts the reality of the world across age and time. It is not just a work of imagination aimed solely to give pleasure” (1997: 7). Consequently, in *Trotsky on Literature and Art*, Paul Siegel comments that the historicist dimension of literature is about the capacity of art to be committed to the cause of a people or community in a given social matrix (1970: 13). It is necessary at this point to tease out the interface between literature and society by quoting at length Lukacs’ statement in his important work, *The Historical Novel* (1983), which reverberates with the internecine relationship between literature and society’s inner workings:

What Marx said of legal institutions applies in wide measure to literary forms. They cannot stand higher than the society which brought them forth. Indeed, since they deal with the deepest human laws, problems and contradictions of an epoch they should not stand higher – in the sense, say, of anticipating coming perspectives of development by romantic-Utopian projections of the future into the present. For the tendencies leading to the future are in fact more firmly and definitely contained in what really is than in the most beautiful Utopian dreams and projections. (qtd. in Lee 2008: 238)

A basic lodestar needs to be established here: even though literature and society are in a soulful union as sociological critics and writers believe, the latter should “entertain and please, but to change the world in the process” (Osundare 2007: 30).

It is under this rubric of change that the community spirit as well as revolutionary fervour enshrined in La Guma’s craft to change the history of violence precipitated by repressive, violent and cruel system of apartheid, starting from where he was born, District Six, Cape Town, comes pointedly to the fore. This method of artistic representation bears out his artistic commitment to give South Africa’s history a different bent:

Having read South African literature, I have discovered that nothing satisfactory or worthwhile from my point of view had been written about the area from which I sprang. So I think there was a conscious effort on my part to place on record the life in the poor areas, working class areas, and perhaps for that reason most of my work is centred around that community. (Abrahams 1991: 19)

It is on this score that Chinweizu et al. indicated that writing literature that borders on “destiny” of a people as Jameson observed above, is about

A matter of orientation, a matter of perceiving social realities and of making those perceptions available in works of art in order to help promote understanding and preservation of, or change in the society’s values and norms. (1980: 253)

This is what La Guma set himself to do; his writings bristle with the Jamesonian “political unconscious” as well as reverberates with apartheid South Africa’s “national allegory” (Ahmad 1986: 3). This artistic sensibility valorises using literature to portray historical conjunctures and to upturn social justice.

Thus, La Guma’s works – ranging from his journalistic enterprise to fictive works – follow a shadow; his creative consciousness mediates a past, which is largely rooted in violence. Consequently, Alex La Guma’s fiction constantly challenges and interrogates the conscience of apartheid, whose operational ethos is verged on violence. In the words of Lloyed Vogelmann, founder and former director of the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation, the violence that is still besetting post-apartheid South Africa today is rooted *ad nauseam* in history (1990: 1). It has to be established *prima facie* that this study is non-historical, but shall be arguing that La Guma’s fiction intersects with the historical developments that permeate apartheid; this will situate his fiction within the borders of historical enquiry into the dynamics of apartheid and its corollary. The history referred in this instance is that of violence that characterised apartheid South Africa.

Part of European expansionist ideology finds resonance in apartheid policy, a political and ideological ruse to dispossess black South Africans of their lands and inheritance. By the end of the nineteenth century, on the heels of the routing of Mzilikazi's impi by the Voortrekkers at Mosega in about 1837, Dingane's invasion at Blood River in 1838 and Cetshwayo's defeat by the British imperialists at Isandlwana in 1879, the *modus operandi* of land dispossession had been concluded. The overpowering of blacks by the white settlers from the various wars fought to maintain white hegemony, culminated in effective deprivation of black as well as coloured people's political rights. Together with Werner Eiselen, one of the pioneers of apartheid, Hendrik Verwoerd, often considered the father of apartheid, for his leadership in shaping the institutionalisation of the policy during his time as prime minister, helped ensconce apartheid as separate but equal policy. In consonance with this, according to Christopher Heywood, "apartheid is a political ideology pursued by the government of South Africa (and) respectfully called separate and equal development" (1976: 125).

South Africa under the apartheid system was a society built on "a vertical separation of races" (Davenport 1987: 323). The Caribbean sociologist, Patrick Wilmot in his book, *Apartheid and African Liberation: The Grief and the Hope*, sees apartheid in this light:

Apartheid signifies many things to many people, to some, an object of blind outrage, to others a system of economic exploitation, to some – a system of racial segregation, to others a political organisation of a European minority to deny the liberty, rights and dignity of the African majority. (1980: xi)

No matter the way it is considered, apartheid is essentially one of the ugly faces of colonial movement comprehending in one dimension discrimination, alienation and exploitation, and in another, enslavement and cultural violence (Egudu 1978: 46).

Given the multivalent implications of apartheid through history, politics and culture, La Guma directs his artistic dart towards destabilising the very foundation of Afrikanerdom and its power establishments. Therefore, La Guma's historicisation and literary representation of the landmarks in the development of Afrikaner nationalism is a conscious artistic inscription of dissidence and revolt that takes the form of "a paradigmatic appropriation of South African socio-historical realities during the period of apartheid" (Kehinde 2010: 19). This form of literary representation resonates with revolutionary aesthetics, a literary engagement that is aimed at re-humanising the de-humanised for societal emancipation. The strategy La Guma uses in this instance is that of violence by the oppressed to transcend the emasculation and disempowerment of black South Africans perpetrated as well as sustained by the hideous system of apartheid by the white minorities.

Alex La Guma: A Brief Profile

Alexander (Alex) Justine La Guma (20th February 1925-11 October 1985) was born in District Six, Cape Town in 1925. He was the son of Jimmy La Guma, a pioneer member of the liberation struggle who was vibrant in the left wing movement to upturn truth and justice in apartheid South Africa. This revolutionary consciousness gained from his parenting characterised and prepared Alex La Guma for his revolutionary literature and political activism. Thus La Guma's fiction, which include *A Walk in the Night* (1962), *And a Threefold Cord* (1964), *The Stone Country* (1967), *In the Fog of the Season's End* (1972) and *Time of the Butcherbird* (1979) pass through a filter: gradual accentuation of revolutionary spirit to transcend the inanities and imbalance created by apartheid system. La Guma's writing includes *A Soviet Journey* (1978), a snapshot of La Guma's travel writing while he was on exile as well as interviews, public speeches and colloquia.

La Guma is best known for his fiction concerning racial oppression under the apartheid system in South Africa. In his novels and short stories, he conveys, as Nadine Gordimer says in her *The Black Interpreters: Notes on African Writing* (1973), "the sight, sound and smell of poverty and misery, so that the flesh-and-blood meaning of the colour bar becomes a shocking, sensuous impact." Driven into exile in the mid-1960s, with his books banned in his own country, La Guma gained international recognition for his efforts to bring down white-minority rule in South Africa through his journalistic and literary enterprise (Nkosi 1986: 91). Because of La Guma's commitment to using the instrument of writing to wage war against apartheid system, he was jailed and remained on the banned list of writers as well as his wife, Blanche until he was exiled in 1966.

La Guma's outstanding literary contribution characterised by photographic portrayal of events, vivid style, and realistic depiction of social facts and sympathetic presentation of oppressed, poor groups in apartheid South Africa culminated in his reputation as one of the most prominent South Africa writers of the 20th century (Nwagbara 2001: 7). He was also awarded the Lotus Prize in 1969 while in exile. As a commentator on the monstrosity of the apartheid state malaise, Alex La Guma rose to international prominence during the struggle against apartheid in the 1960s and 1970s. The entire gamut of La Guma's intellectual, journalistic and artistic enterprise resounds with an enduring mediation on the writer's responsibility to a society made prostrate following moral, political and ideological thralldom precipitated by apartheid. This is largely why he joined the staff of *New Age* in 1956. Apartheid is a system that sustains double standards and racial discrimination. La Guma's writing is manifested in the passionate and realistic strategies he employs to achieve this commitment. The high-water mark of social responsibility in the thinking of Alex La Guma crystallises in interrogating the ugly faces of apartheid - subjugation and racial discrimination - as a response to changing the apartheid South African political landscape.

Beginning with La Guma's artistic primer, *A Walk in the Night* (1962) to his last fictive work, *Time of the Butcherbird* (1979) to his journalistic writing, essays and interviews, his commitment to change the oppressive apartheid landscape is demonstrated in his anti-apartheid struggle for equitable order in apartheid South Africa that has culminated in the dividends of post-apartheid South Africa.

Theoretical Clarification

This study is predicated upon appropriating revolutionary aesthetics to transcend the contradictions engendered by historical violence in Apartheid South Africa. During the apartheid years in South Africa, violence was used as a tool by the white minority for advancement of racial segregation, social inequality and class oppression. In changing the pattern of racial relations that this system of racial discrimination made possible, art was part of the change process. The art of revolution as La Guma envisioned is encapsulated in revolutionary aesthetics. Alex La Guma was one of the leading writers that sought a way of making this change possible, which is artistic vision of post-apartheid: conquering historical violence. For La Guma, in order to change an oppressive regime, art is a *sine qua non*. This artistic preoccupation finds expression in the tenor and craft of his writing, which is anchored in revolutionary aesthetics for the liberation of repressed black and coloured South Africans.

In defining this concept, "revolutionary aesthetics is the literature of protest and social metamorphosis for the re-humanisation of the dehumanised in a given social matrix" (Nwagbara 1995: 9; 2001: 1). In another breadth, Chidi Amuta refers to this kind of art as sheer collective awakened consciousness of the oppressed to change an unjust order; the definitive heroic drive in fiction of revolutionary inspiration (1986: 99). According to Lenin in his *On Literature and Art*, he considers this concept as thus:

Revolutionary literature and art are part of the whole revolutionary cause... they are indispensable cogs and wheels in the whole machine... if we had no literature and art... we could not carry on the revolutionary movement and win victory. Failure to recognise this is wrong. (1970: 25-6)

Similarly, in his work, *Revolutionary Aesthetics and African Literary Process*, Udentia O. Udentia sees revolutionary aesthetics as literature of combat that brings about freeing of humanity from the cordon of oppression (1993: 18).

In another book of his, *Ideological Sanction and Social Action in African Literature*, Udentia helms in on the imports of revolutionary art:

Revolutionary art (aesthetics) which is an integral part of the revolutionary ideological world outlook, i.e., an art that holds the highest premium and regard for the values of life and the worth of man. Revolutionary struggles, seek to create people who love one another, live in close bond of brotherhood, and who hate everything that is obscene, vulgar and debasing. (1994: 35)

In this same train of thought, revolutionary aesthetics engages revolutionary consciousness and social vision steeped in revolutionising or changing people's social relationship about their outlook and philosophy of existentialism (Kettle 1976: 28). As Edward Said (1993: 19) affirmed, political domination and inequities as well as crude use of power and wealth are perennial facts of human society. Consequently, in transcending this grisly landscape, literature is part of the process. Thus,

*The political turbulence forced some of the writers to change their literary outlook. For example, Alex La Guma's early writings concentrate on diagnosing and exposing South Africa's political problems, his recent novel, *In the Fog of the Season's End*, openly advocates armed struggle about change. (Shava 1989: 47)*

Unearthing Historical Violence: Racial Imbalance and Literature

La Guma's fiction is largely informed by socio-economic disequilibrium as evidenced by South Africa's history of violence and conquest. La Guma's novels despite the criticisms that have been levelled on them (Mzamane 1985: 39) are steeped in unveiling the crisis period in the history of black-white confrontation, which still casts long shadows in the contemporary time in South Africa. Beginning with *A Walk in the Night to Time of the Butcherbird*, La Guma's main concern is to portray how blacks try to bring to an end the capitalist motive as well as oppression behind the Great Trek, which was informed by the desire to expand the white man's economic coast through forceful acquisition of the indigenes' land for economic reasons. Novels such as Peter Abrahams' *Wild Conquest* (1951), Sol T. Plaatje's *Mhudi* (1920) and Thomas Mfolo's *Chaka* (1925) as well as some poetry collections and biographical writings that demonstrate the impact of the coming of the Boers are cast in this aesthetic mould. In consonance with the foregoing, according to La Guma,

South Africa has become a hunting grounds of international capitalism. Superficially the country is ruled by white South Africans. In essence, however, the power rests with South African monopolists and the international consortium of imperialism. The combination of racialism, capitalism and international imperialism has made South Africa a colony of a special type. (1978: 13)

In the worldview of colonialists, the correlate of capitalist pursuit is violence, which finds ample evidence in history of colonialism. To this end, in his *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections*, Slavoj Žižek traced the historicity of violence within the confines of capitalism (2008: 10-11) and human quest for power.

It is this quest to transcend the debasing position that blacks faced during apartheid that La Guma's characters in his fiction have to fight for the fate of their community and its people who are inexorably drifting towards tragedy and annihilation. The community spirit brought to bear by these heroes finds expression in revolution. They thus see revolution as power and clout to take back the natives' lands and possessions that have been taken by the white men. In the thinking of Onyemaechi Udumukwu, "revolution is about power understood as ability and control. It implies taking power from those who wield and possess it as a right to be used by a new group" (2006: 121). This is what Paulo Freire instructs in his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1985). In the Fanonist sense, this translates into fighting phase, when the native turns himself into an awakener of the people through sheer praxis and combat.

As has been discussed elsewhere, the socio-economic, political and ideo-aesthetic implications of revolutionary aesthetics, "resistance literature" (Bredlid 2002: 3), is highly contested. However, our analysis in this paper is aligned with the Fanonist aesthetics, which technically articulates a disruption of "literary style" (Fanon 1968: 239) in the manner of advancing alternative mode of representation that finds amplitude in confrontational discourse. This pattern of literary representation ossifies the inversion of Manichean binarism as the hallmark of resistance representation (JanMohamed 1983: 3). It also dismisses the claim that such literary mode of representation is bedevilled with the problematic of referentiality and mimesis. In fact, La Guma himself supports this line of thinking when he said that his fiction "is a matter of recording history or recording situation" (Abrahams 1985: 70). But more than mere representation of racial lines in apartheid South Africa, La Guma has used his fiction to widen the political space for more involvement of the alienated black South Africans in the political process as evidenced in the realities of post-apartheid epoch. Revolutionary aesthetics impacts on intellectual awareness as well as consciousness of one's history in order to possible change it. This is seen through

the capacity for intellectual awareness of one's environment and the position one occupies in the power structure of one's society. It helps individuals to demystify ideology and to limit the impact of the constraints of a hegemonic order in social relations. (Ramphela 1993: 5)

This is the essence of La Guma's art of revolutionary aesthetics: to arrest and possibly transcend the realities of racially disempowering and inhuman treatment of blacks and other underprivileged people in apartheid South Africa.

In a sense therefore, La Guma's fiction presents characters and situations that make overturning the historical landscape of apartheid South Africa crucial for change. His art depicts people who are "organically bound to historical, political and economic change" (Swingewood 1975: 129). Therefore,

In spite of the seemingly overwhelming pessimistic outlook of the narrative... La Guma's symbols puncture the narrative to counter its pessimistic impact. Here..., the images function as a reminder that a portrayal of the desperate condition of black people under apartheid is by no means a surrender to it. (Balutansky 1990: 52)

In advancing this position, the "images" and counter-narratives that La Guma's writings inform throw up the dialectic espoused in books such as *The Empire Writes Back* by Bill Ashcroft et al., *Culture and Imperialism* (1994) by Edward Said, *Resistance in Postcolonial African Literature* (1990) by Neil Lazarus and *The Novel and Revolution* (1975) by Alan Swingewood, among others. In literature, books such as *Petals of Blood* (1977) by Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Kill Me Quick* (1973) by Meja Mwangi, *Things Fall Apart* (1958) by Chinua Achebe and *Tell Freedom* (1954) by Peter Abrahams, among others orchestrate this resistance literature. The overarching message of the above books – fictive and intellectual – is inherited here, which shall be quoted at length:

The concept of resistance literature refers more to reconstituting the fragmented colonial self and subverting the colonial representation of the subaltern and, also, of remapping and redefining colonial worlds without necessarily insisting on the implacable enmity of Fanon's Manicheism and its location squarely within the liberation struggle. Here the emphasis is more on personal and social reconstruction and multi-faceted types of agency rather than a direct, uncompromising and one-dimensional reaction and opposition and struggle against the oppressor. (Bredlid 2002: 3)

This is the worldview of La Guma; he articulated this in all his writings – journalistic or literary – until his death in exile in Havana Cuba in 1985.

La Guma and Revolutionary Aesthetics: A Synopsis of Fiction

La Guma's literary aesthetics is a response to socio-economic, political and cultural practices that impeded the growth as well as emancipation of black South Africans. This is explicit in the way La Guma portrays his characters that are frustrated, brutalised and caged by the apartheid system; but determined to bring to an end their conditions. Ebele Eko's piece: "From Vagrancy to Concerted Action: Progressive Commitment in Three Novels of Alex La Guma" paints in a bold relief the colouration of La Guama's characterisation towards this aesthetic commitment:

The dominant image which La Guma creates is that of too poor, too frustrated, too full of destructive individualised hatred, too busy scratching out a miserable living, too ignorant of anything happening outside their world, too hunted and running scared, too isolated in their little self-centred action against the system that has so debased. (1982: 48)

The above portraiture is inherited in Michael Adonis, the protagonist of *A Walk in the Night*. Adonis' consideration of apartheid regime's paternalistic inhibitions is demonstrated here, as he reflects:

... nursing a little growth of anger the way one caresses the beginning of a toothache with the tip of the tongue ... his (Adonis') thoughts concentrated upon the pustule of rage and humiliation that was continuing to ripen deep down within him. (1)

It is as a result of this revolutionary spirit to change an unfair system that culminated in Adonis killing Uncle Doughty unwittingly because he feels that the reason for his frustrated condition is verged on colour bar. Though Adonis' killing of his victim was directed on the wrong target (Shava 1989: 37), he had to kill as a vent to show his dissatisfaction with the society, and to demonstrate that violence could help change the unjust South African order for freedom and happiness of the blacks. Certainly, after killing Doughty, Adonis

was suddenly pleased and proud of his predicament. He felt as if he was the only man who had ever killed another and thought himself a curiosity at which people should wonder ... It was just something that, to himself, placed him above others, like a poor beggar who suddenly found himself the heir to vast riches. (66)

In the novella, *A Walk in the night*, La Guma's characters are "helpless victims who have no control on their fate" (Mkhize 1989: 95). This is clearly evidenced in Raalt's killing of Willieboy, a black boy. Raalt's thoughtlessness and violence against Willieboy demonstrates psychological and somatic violence against the blacks in the apartheid era. In sum, La Guma's preoccupation in the novella is to offer a panoptic picture of inhumanity and a naturalistic picture of black-white dichotomy:

La Guma's achievement is to present a particularly lucid description of the resultants of white oppression in self-destructive black violence and to embody his novels a growing political understanding of the process in the consciousness of a developing protagonist. (Coetzee 1992: 358)

In another novel, *The Stone Country*, La Guma presents us with a grimmer outlook of discrimination and racial alienation in apartheid South African milieu. Most of the situations and locale are the prison that La Guma has artistically described as a stone country – a place where survival is almost impossible. The realities that the writer depicts in the work are part of his personal experiences as a prisoner of conscience and a real prisoner, which have been translated into his craft to show the dimensions of the apartheid system as well as near state of immobilisation that the system imposed on the discriminated. Thus,

The Stone Country presents us with true realities experienced by the writer himself, and as it progresses, it views the entirety of South Africa as a besieged nation, barricaded by huge stone-walls of law – a real prison indeed. (Wa-Belinye 1991: 136)

In corroborating the above, as Ben Okri avers, every piece of fiction, at least from a sociological wavelength, reverberates with the experiences of the writer as well as the history of an epoch: “If you want to know what is happening in an age or in a nation, find out what is happening to the writers, the town criers ... that calibrate impending earthquake in the spirit of the times” (1995: 3).

Etymologically, stone as La Guma paints in *The Stone Country* signifies lifelessness, stalemate and continues to silhouette how apartheid worn the natives to their historical shadow. It also chronicles a continuation of the truth about disparity in social relations, which the craft of *A Walk in the Night* complements. But apart from these, it presents particularly to readers a dose of what La Guma experienced himself as a prisoner: brutality, mayhem and discrimination. Harping on the cruelty, antagonism and brutality that permeate the South African society, we see that

The heat in the cell was solid... you could reach out in front of your face grab a handful of heat, fling it at the wall and it would stick. With over forty prisoners locked up in the middle of summer, the smell of sweat was heavy and cloying as the smell of death. The heat seemed packed in between the bodies of the men, like buyers of cotton wool, like a thick sauce which moistened a human salad... Many already depraved and several old and abandoned sucking hopelessly at the bitter, disintegrating butt of life. (80-1)

The parallel between prison and the outside world as breeding grounds for apartheid policies is well documented in *The Stone Country*. But at variance with this obnoxious political and socio-economic system, lies the message of La Guma’s craft. He artistically illustrates how clandestine solidarity could triumph over oppression and unjust social structure (Shava 1989: 42). Thus, *The Stone Country* is a precursor to early development of revolutionary aesthetics (Udenta 1993: 18) in La Guma’s revolutionary struggle to upturn justice as well as change the tide of historical violence in apartheid South Africa.

In *The Stone Country*, George Adams, the protagonist of the novel, epitomises unity of purpose, moral strength and solidarity in transcending cruelty and injustice. Adams' moral strength and character in appealing to fellow prison mates enables him to gain their support and solidarity to fight apartheid to a standstill. It is on this score that "George Adams eventually wins the respect of most of the inmates, who look up to him as a source of inspiration and moral fortitude" (78). Adams' winning the respect as well as solidarity of fellow prisoners is verged on mass education of the inmates by sharing liberation leaflets, raising money for political struggles and attending/speaking at political forums in the cell (Nwagbara 2001: 67). Though a political prisoner, George Adams' appeal to the moral courage of the inmates as well as his instilling of revolutionary consciousness into the prisoners to push the boundaries is evident here:

You were on the side of the mouse, of all the mice... The little men who get kicked in the backside all time. You got punched and beaten like the mouse, and you had to duck and dodge to avoid the claws and fangs. (127)

Adams' revolutionary bent is tantamount to what Paulo Friere calls conscientisation (consciousness elevation) in his acclaimed book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. This culminates in one of the characters raising the bar in this instance – he "... irritably cursed the guard, cursed the jail, cursed the country that was like a big prison stone" (88). This boldness and fervour to change an unfair system that is brought about by revolutionary consciousness perpetuated by Adams' revolutionary political struggle shows that "no power on earth can stop an oppressed people, determined to win their freedom" (Mandela 1965: 119).

The *In the Fog of the Season's End* opens with a revealing prologue (Nwagbara, 2001: 28) offering a panoptic view of gruesome scenes of psychological and physical tortures of an underground activist, who is a victim of apartheid security agents. This artistic prolepsis ensures boring explications, and rather foregrounds the *raison d'être* for La Guma's characters' revolutionary bent. In gearing up to arrest this system of oppression, we notice that one of the protagonists of the novel, Beukes, whom La Guma has portrayed as a generation changer has to employ revolutionary tactics to upturn justice. The author's account of Beukes' feeling towards changing apartheid system bears credence to this: "... And those who persist in hatred and humiliation must prepare" (180). In addition, in demonstrating that *In the Fog of the Season's End* is an optimistic novel committed to changing the political history of apartheid (Shava 1989: 61), Tekwane, one of the major characters averred as thus: "you (whites) are reaching the end of the road and going downhill towards a great darkness, so you are selfish and greedy and afraid of the coming darkness" (6).

From *A Walk in the Night* to *Time of the Butcherbird*, La Guma's last novel (which is not part of our textual analysis), his aesthetic response passes through a filter: gradual inflection of revolutionary fervour to transcend apartheid's grisly landscape. As David Callenberger suggested, one South African writer who would not be covered is La Guma, whose writings constantly challenged as well as wrestled power with apartheid system (2006: 83). This aesthetic commitment is in tandem with what has been identified as "enduring mediation on the writer's responsibility to a society in a state of moral and political siege" (Diala 2005: 5). This has led Lewis Nkosi, one of La Guma's contemporaries and a South African writer of note, to say that his writings dwell on a "ruthless selection of what counts" (2005: 262). In advancing the logic that La Guma's art is a commitment to incorporate ruthlessness as part of the process of using violence to purge South African society of moral, political and socio-economic thralldom, Adrian Roscoe, a commentator on apartheid South Africa, says:

The violent solution at the end of In the Fog of the Season's End is drifted towards, not preached from the outset. From pointing out human and economic injustices to attacking the regime by way of ugly pictures of it and suggesting that victims of oppression ought to band together, there emerges, tiredly and hesitantly, the idea of violence as the only course of action that holds out hope, the only course of action the regime will respect. (1977: 258)

It is to this end that *In the Fog of the Season's End* is a delineation of political struggles of Blacks on the heels of the Sharpeville catastrophe.

The three main characters (Tekwane, Beukes and Isaac) in the novel continue to work underground for a banned political organisation committed to using violence and political agitation to change the *status quo*. These main characters meet varying fate: though Beukes escaped death after receiving a bullet wound in the arm, Elias Tekwane died from torture (172), while Isaac flees South Africa to an enviroing state. However overcast the horizon of freedom was in the apartheid system, Beukes was geared up to change the unjust order:

Beukes stood by the side of the street in the early morning and thought, they have gone to war in the name of a suffering people. What the enemy himself has created, these will become battle-grounds, and what we see now is only the tip of an iceberg of resentment against an ignoble regime, the tortured victims of hatred and humiliation. And those who persist in hatred an humiliation must prepare. Let them prepare hard and fast – they do not have long to wait. (180-181)

Conclusion

From the foregoing, it is appreciable that Alex La Guma's fiction is an artistic response to use violence, which he considers as the only language that the oppressor understands (and possibly respects) to engender change. His artistic predilection in this light is also a failure of other amicable means to reconcile history of violence and brute force that characterised apartheid South Africa. It is to this end that the aesthetic of revolution is the bedrock of La Guma's artistic response to a society in moral, political, socio-economic and cultural siege. So for La Guma, in order for the oppressed, suffering blacks to break loose from such grisly contraption that culminated in apartheid system, revolutionary aesthetics is a *sine qua non*. This method of representation is part of the ensemble to upturn justice in apartheid South Africa, which was a cauldron of violence, discrimination and brutality. And this revolutionary consciousness percolates La Guma's craft starting from his artistic primer, *A Walk in the Night* to *Time of the Butcherbird*.

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