

## A SOCIOLOGY OF APARTHEID LITERATURE

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RESUMO: O autor estabelece uma relação entre as teorias eurocêntricas da História associadas à idéia de progresso desde o final do século XIX, bem como um certo darwinismo social e o racismo como ideologia da alienação que vai se implantar na África do Sul. Reminiscências deste etnocentrismo vão surgir e permear a literatura do apartheid possibilitando o surgimento de uma ideologia da alienação.

UNITERMOS: África do Sul, Sociologia da Literatura, Apartheid

... A groaning symphony  
Of grim discordant notes of race and creed  
Of writhing snakes of ideologies  
And twangling tunes of clashing color themes.  
Where Wealth and Power and Blood reign  
worshipped gods.  
And Merit, Truth and Beauty serve as slaves!<sup>1</sup>

### RACISM AND EURO-INTELLECTUALISM

In 1841, Dr. Thomas Arnold in an Inaugural Lecture as Regius Professor of History at Oxford perceived human history in terms of "the survival of the fittest" theory. People with brilliant creativity and natural potentialities dictate the pace of human history and progress. "The mass of mankind" that lack these qualities "receive the impression of foreign elements so completely that their own in-

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(1) H.I.E. Dholomo's "The Valley of a Thousand Hills" quoted from Ezekiel Mphahlele. *The African Image*. London. Faber and Faber, 1974, p. 220.

dividual character is absorbed and they take their whole being from without"<sup>2</sup>. They are not the architects and makers of their own history, history is made for them by superior human species.

In 1963, another occupier of the same post, Professor Hugh Trevor-Roper, said in a television broadcast in Britain that "Perhaps in the future, there will be some African History to teach. But at present there is none; there is only the History of Europeans in Africa. The rest is darkness... and darkness is not a subject of history"<sup>3</sup>. Professor Karls Pearson also authenticates this Euro-centric and Manichean view of African history:

This path of progress is strewn with the wreck of nations, traces every where to be seen of the hecatombs of inferior races, and of victims who found not the narrow way to a greater perfection. Yet these dead peoples are, in very truth, the stepping stones on which mankind has risen to the higher intellectual and deeper emotional life of today<sup>4</sup>.

Paradoxically, Pearson attests to the greatness of the "inferior races" and admits the parasitic culture of "the race of princes".

Madison Grant, Chairman of New York Zoological Trustee American Museum of Natural History, contends that "the great lesson of science of race is the immutability of somatological of bodily characters with which is closely associated the immutability of psychical pre-disposition and impulses"<sup>5</sup>. Grant applies the cephalic index for the classification of races. Based on this anatomical experiment, he acclaims the Nordic race as the best in terms of body structure and intelligence. The other races are inferior. Cases of overlapping in physical traits are treated with bias and rationalisation. A strong advocate of anti-miscegenation, Grant asserts that "if the valuable elements in Nordic race mix in-

(2) Thomas Arnold. *Introductory Lectures on Modern History: Inaugural Lecture* (London, B. Followers 1843) p. 29.

(3) See "The Listener" November, 28, 1961 or Ali Mazrui. *Ancient Greece in Africa Political Thought*. (Nairobi, East African Publishing House, 1967), pp. 22-5.

(4) Karl Pearson. *National Life from the Standpoint of Science* (London: 1905), p. 21.

(5) Madison Grant. *The Passing of the Great Race or the Racial Basis of European History*. (Belt & Sons Ltd; 1928) p. xix.

ferior strains or die through suicide, then citadel of civilization will fall for mere lack of defenders"<sup>6</sup>.

The most prominent and notorious proponent of racist ideology is Joseph Arthur De Gobineau in *Essai sur l'inegalite de race Human* (1853 - 1855). Gobineau identifies three major races - the white race (Caucasian), the yellow race (Altaic, Mongol, Finnish and Tartar), The Black race (Hamites)<sup>7</sup>. The Negroid variety is at the last stratum. Using Gran's cephalic index, he perceives the Negro as that with low intelligence and mental capabilities, because his intellect always moves in a narrow circle. Like Lucien Levy-Bruhl, he describes African mode of thought in terms of "prelogical mentality". Gobineau attributes to the Negroid variety characteristics such as rapacity, capriciousness, brutality and violence. He asserts the supremacy of the Aryan race, "the master of races".

Gobineau accepts theoretically, the monogenist theory. Being from an aristocratic background, he scientifically and philosophically defends "elitism" and is antagonistic to miscegenation of race. To him, miscegenation is inimical to developmental process in the that it contaminates the perfect intellect of "the race of princes". Like Grant, Gobineau is against the unitarians' philosophy of history and human development that all mankind is capable of the same improvement if brought under similar institutions and environment. Evolution cannot be effected by legislation, neither does education encourage racial improvement.

Michael Biddis and Padmore argue that the racial theory of Gobineau is the root of that brand of pernicious political thought that culminates in the ideology of Nazism, Facism and racialism of America and apartheid of South Africa<sup>8</sup>. In terms of social and economic modes, these ideologies defend capitalism, using "the inferior races" as "stepping stones" for development as argued by Karl Pearson. Racism is employed by Gobineau for socio-political explanation and a symbol of class consciousness. Gobineau's doctrine and Marxism are antagonistic. While the former argues for the elitist capitalist culture, the latter advocates a revolutionary culture for the alienated.

The Darwinian evolutionary theory is vital in the discussion of a racist and class ideology. In this *The Origin of Species* published in 1859, Charles Darwin re-affirms the Hobbessian viewpoint that "all nature is at war". Formulating a scientific theory from the Malthusian theory of population, Darwin develops the ideas of "The Struggle For Survival" and "Natural Selection based on the Sur-

(6) *Ibid.*, p. xxxi.

(7) Gobineau: *Selected Political Writings* ed. & intro. Michael Biddis (London, Jonathan Cape, 1970), pp. 134-144.

(8) *Ibid.*

vival of the Fittest"<sup>9</sup>. Darwin proves that because of natural factors, modes of feeding and inimical forces of the ecosystem, a capable few will survive the test imposed by climatic and edaphic conditions.

Sociological Darwinism is the brainchild of the theory advocating free play for all processes involved in the struggle for existence. In the struggle between individuals, the theory justifies cut throat competition and laissez-faire policies. Also in the struggle between groups of people, the theory justifies the use of force. Engels in a letter to Lavrov in 1875 stressed the relevance of such theory to bourgeois economic doctrine of competition and Marxist idea of class struggle.

An intellectual affirmation is thus given to the irrelevant biblicism and pseudo-theological foundation of the myth of the chosen Race. The Manichean syndrome in the myth is evident in common antithetical combination viz Abel and Cain, Good and Evil, Light and Darkness. Paradoxically, the idea of "la mission civilisatrice" is contradicted by the amorality of Christian Nationalism in South Africa. These polarizations abound in South Africa literature.

Ethnocentrism is the summation of these race theories. Ken Booth in his book *Strategy and Ethnocentrism* argues that ethnocentrism is employed by strategists in the spheres of hegemony consolidation, diplomacy and authoritarianism<sup>10</sup>. Hegemony is effectively codified in the draconian legislation of South African government. These inhuman laws include; The Bantu Administration Act (1927), Entertainment (Censorship) Act (1931), Suppression of Communist Act (1950), Criminal Law Amendment (1950) Riotous Assemblies Act (1953), Prisons Act (1959), Unlawful Organizations Act (1960), Terrorism Act (1967) and many others. This administrative nihilism forms the distinctive features of South African socio-culture and aesthetics.

#### RACISM: THE IDEOLOGY OF ALIENATION

In the sphere of economic exploitation and appropriation, racism and ethnocentrism constitute the most effective weapon of imperialism and capitalism. Albert Sarraut, the French Colonial Secretary of State in 1928 at the Ecole Coloniale in Paris re-affirmed the ideological implications in the race theories of Grant, Gobineau and Darwin. He asserted that "the origin of colonization is noth-

(9) See Charles Darwin *Natural Selection* ed. R.C. Stavfer (London. Cambridge University Press, 1975) pp. 172-274.

(10) See Ken Booth. *Strategy and Ethnocentrism* (London. Croom Helm 1979).

ing else than enterprise of individual interests, a onesided egotistical imposition of the strong on the weak"<sup>11</sup>. Eric Williams in *Capitalism and Slavery* argues that racism is just a galvanizing force for capitalism. In *The Diplomacy of Imperialism*, William Langer concludes that the 19th century cultivation of racialism as a means of commercial profit through tyranny was history's most agonizing chapter. All these validate Fanon's thesis that:

Vulgar racism in its biological form corresponds to the period of crude exploitation of man's arms and legs. The perfecting of the means of production inevitably brings about the camouflage of the techniques by which man is exploited, hence of the forms of racism<sup>12</sup>.

At the Symposium, "Cultural Day on South Africa" organized by the Society of Africa Culture in Paris in 1971, Alex La Guma discussed the ultimate goal of the Bantu education Act of 1945 to the racist and International monopoly capital. The blacks are to become "hewers of wood" and "drawers of water"<sup>13</sup>. This corroborates Yusuf Dadoo's view that "national and racial oppression in South Africa is not a by-product of capitalist exploitation but it is an organic part of it"<sup>14</sup>. Dadoo discusses the effects of NATO politico-military propaganda in the Third World countries. In the recent times ideological offensive in the form of anti-communist, anti-socialist and anti-Soviet propaganda has been directed from the capitalist centres to Asia, Africa and Latin America<sup>15</sup>. Ideologically, apartheid is a weapon for checking the red scourge of communism.

Sol. T. Plaatje's saga, *Mhudi*, is the earliest artistic expression and denunciation of the unholy alliance of racism and economic imperialism. Tim Couzens remarks that "... Mhudi is not only a defence of traditional custom as well as a corrective view on history, but it is also an implicit attack on the injus-

(11) Quoted from Kwame Nkrumah's *Africa Must Unite* (London. Heinemann Educational Books Ltd; 1963) p. 21.

(12) Frantz Fanon "Racism and Culture" in *Toward the African Revolution*, trans. Haakon Chevalier. (London: Writers & Readers, 1980) p. 35.

(13) Alex La Guma "The Condition of Culture in South Africa" in *Presence Africaine* N° 4, 1971, p. 113.

(14) Yusuf Dadoo "Crisis of the Racist System in South Africa" in *World Marxist Review* (N° 12, Dec. 1982) p. 32.

(15) Yusuf Dadoo "The Military-Political Trend in the Strategy Neo-Colonialism" in *World Marxist Review* (N° 15, May, 1981).

tice-of land distribution in South Africa in 1917<sup>16</sup>. The radiating force for the economic culture of apartheid is the obnoxious Pass Law. Geographical and occupational immobility is the result of this legalized illegality. The Bantustanization scheme was conceived as cheap labour reservoirs. The rigid racial division of labour reserves skilled supervisory and managerial jobs for the whites and menial jobs for the blacks.

Two research findings on labour economy in South Africa explain the link between the apartheid regime and the cartels of the West. H. A. Bulhan in his article "Psychological Research and Imperialism in Africa" sees the Euro-American psychological research in Africa as a scandalous facet of imperialism". He observes that:

Euro-American psychological research has for long served as a rationalizing bulwark, stifling consciousnesses as well as conscience regarding the ruthless exploitation of the African<sup>17</sup>.

Bulhan asserts that the most intensive psychological research for expropriating African labour is carried out at South Africa's National Institute for Personnel Research (N.I.P.R.). Attached to the South African Department of defence, the Institute is financially supported by the apartheid regime in South Africa and the Anglo-American cartels monopolizing the gold, diamond and iron industries. The Institute experiments on the "African psyche, intelligence, cognition, perception, neuropsychology, nutrition, effects of routine work, psychomotor, learning, ergonomics, absenteeism, labour turnover etc"<sup>18</sup>. These suggest a psychoanalytic discourse in art.

Allen Cook's research on prison labour in South Africa proves apartheid as an atavism born of crass materialism.

The lease system and the contract system are the two methods of hiring out of prison labour. While the lease system was abolished in Britain in 1802, the contract system persisted in the United States of America until 1929. Apartheid promotes these anachronistic facets of capitalism. White farmers are given

(16) See Introduction to Sol. T. Phatje's *Nhudi* (London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1978).

(17) H.A. Bulhan "Psychocological Research and Imperialism in Africa" *Presence Africaine* n° 116, 1980 p. 32.

(18) *Ibid.* p. 34.

the power of life and death over Africans. In South Africa, jails and prisons have become viable economic enterprises for capitalism. The politics of labour economies engenders alienation and ideological contradictions. Cook comments on this:

Working under harsh conditions and subject to extreme exploitation, these men are victims of the pass laws and other related apartheid laws, Not only do they form a body of cheap and powerless labour for agricultural and other sectors of the economy, but their condition is one of the threats given force to the pass laws as a means of controlling black workers and holding down their wages<sup>19</sup>.

With the exception of Ezekiel Mphahlele's *The Wanderers*, this facet of South African life has not been given a proper delineation in art.

Reminiscences of euro-intellectualism abound in apartheid literature. The inherent dichotomy in social formation, the rural-urban shift in plot structure, the contorted posture of the protagonist and other characters and the predominant culture of violence are commonplace in South African literature. The psychoanalytic syndrome, the sociology of crimes and the struggle for survival reflected in characterization are all elements of apartheid literary culture. The literature of the backyard and minty alleys and the race and class compartmentalization of the social and physical setting sum up the concept of alienation and ideology in apartheid literature. The profuse use of somatic images, symbols of corrosion epitomizing Eliot's "Wasteland" and derogatory zoological images are the authentication of the 19th century intellectualism in art.

#### LIBERALISM: A SCAPEGOAT IN ART

Liberalism can be historically explained by race and economic factors. The compartmentalization of the world into race categories, the imperialist and capitalist ideology inherently visible in colonialism and the subsequent elitist ide-

(19) Allen Cook, *Akin to Slavery: Prison Labour in South Africa*. Fact Paper on Southern Africa n° 11 (London: International Defence & Aid Fund, 1982) p.1.

ology, are all summed up in the ideology of liberalism. H. M. Drucker comments on the dilemma of liberalism:

... the new purified doctrine seeks to be neutral between the proponents of capitalism and those of socialism. On a political level, they seek to be neutral between capital and organized labour<sup>20</sup>.

For the exploited class, liberalism is an anathema, since racism and labour economies are the sources of ideological contradictions in Africa and other Third World Countries.

In South Africa, racism is tempered by a vague nationalism, which hypocritically seeks for harmony among races. Such nationalism is flawed by a "life in the soul". Liberalism boosts apartheid and capitalism by providing a convenient moral justification for capitalist's desire to remove his money to the most likely lucrative use, without government's restraint. It also allows individual ownership of wealth and prevents the formation of a strong working class culture. Drucker rejects such an ideology "based on an obnoxious notions of humanity". The most subversive and conservative posture of liberalism is exposed by Mao Tse-Tung:

Liberalism rejects ideological struggle and stands for unprincipled peace, thus giving rise to a decadent, philistine attitude and bringing about political degeneration in certain units and individuals (among the oppressed) ...and objectively has the effect of helping the enemy i. e. (imperialism)<sup>21</sup>.

For the liberal artists in South Africa, the inability to conceal racism instinctively constitutes another dilemma. Writers like Alan Paton, Gordimer, Breytenbach and others produce art that conforms with the theoretical formulations and practice of liberalism. Fearing the inevitability of Fanon's prescription

(20) H.M. Drucker, *The Political Uses of Ideology* (London: The Macmillan Press, Ltd., 1947), p. 129.

(21) Quoted from Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, *Writers in Politics* (London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd: 1981) p. 20.

of revolutionary violence in the decolonization process, they create emasculated characters, heavily dosed with Christian tenets of peace love and brotherhood. The mood and setting suggest a non-violent literary culture in a "situation that requires less than military to redress wrongs done to any section of a people"<sup>22</sup>.

Liberalism has of recente become a weapon of espionage and propaganda in the hands of the West. Ayi Kwei Armah in his review of Breytenbach's book, *The True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist*, elaborates on the hypocritical position of liberals in South Africa<sup>23</sup>. Ckhela, the white liberal pseudo-revolutionary group that sends Galaska on a "schlemiel assignment" does not support the African National Congress, the only authentic revolutionary force against apartheid. Okhela is on the pay-list of the American, French and Israeli secret services. Breytenbach, the liberal artist detests a revolution in Azania. He pleads to the blacks not to take arms against his kit and kin. Liberalism like capitalism negates conscientization and dialectical materialism, the essential praxis of any revolutionary aesthetics. As such it becomes a scapegoat of its own set goals.

#### VIOLENCE, PSYCHOANALYSIS AND EXILE

For a black man to live in South Africa in the second half of the twentieth century and at the same time preserve his sanity, he requires an enormous sense of humour and a surrealistic kind of brutal wit, for without a suicidal attack on Dr. Verwoerd's armed forces, these qualities seem to provide the only means of defence against a spiritual chaos and confusion which would rob any man of his mental health<sup>24</sup>.

Hegemony re-affirmation through the aesthetic culture of submission poses problems in the area of "psycho-affective equilibrium" to use the words of Frantz Fanon. Whether in a reactionary or revolutionary form South African literature is a study in violence. It is a critique of the politics of "double think", the type castigated by Orwell in *1984*. Psychical and physical disintegration of the oppressed is achieved through various coercive strategies:

(22) See *The African Image* p. 50.

(23) See Ayi Kwei Armah "A Requiem for Okhela" in *West Africa* 21st January, 1985 pp. 108-110.

(24) Lewis Nkosi *Home and Exile* (London & New York, Longman, 1983), p. 25.

The social group militarily and economically subjugated is dehumanized in accordance with a poly-dimensional method; exploitation, tortures, raids, collective liquidations, rational oppression take turns at different levels in order to make of the native an object in the hands of occupying nations<sup>25</sup>.

Dennis Brutus writes about "patrols uncoil along the asphalt dark/hissing their menace to our lives" and the monolithic decalogue of fascist prohibition". La Guma's *The Stone Country*, Zwenloke's *The Robben Island*, Mtshali's "Nighfall in Soweto" to mention a few deal with culture of violence. Reactionary violence buttresses the strength of capitalism. Herbert Marcuse argues that the totalitarian universe of technological rationality is the latest transmutation of reason. The technological character reveals its political attitude as it becomes the great vehicle of better domination, in creating a truly totalitarian universe. Economic machine, he asserts, has introduced a cynical machiavellianism into politics.<sup>26</sup>

The Darwinian ecological theories that the means by which human beings compete for space and economic advantages in any community influence their existence, implies the dialectics of class struggle in apartheid literature. Pauperization and bastardization in the process of alienation reduce the oppressed to what Walter Bromberg terms "aggressive psychopaths"<sup>27</sup>.

Alexander Frantz attributes aggressive psychopathy to the inability of the social environment to provide the necessities which the social setting is supposed to provide<sup>28</sup>. Characters are defined by "frustration aggression" syndrome, a psychoanalytic approach to the sociology of crimes in South African literature. Racism and capitalism breed a mutilating environment which in turn provokes the "misery theories". The misery theories often exemplify the Marxist view that people will rebel when they have "nothing to lose but their chains".

Various levels of exile in South African literature emanate from this psychoanalytic crisis. The perpetual psychocological gangrene in which the op-

(25) *Toward the African Revolution* p. 135.

(26) Herbert Marcuse "One Dimensional Society" in *One Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society*. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1964), pp. 1-84.

(27) Walter Bromberg, *Crime and the Mind* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood, Press Publishers, 1972), p. 55.

(28) Alexander Frantz *Fundamentals of Psychoanalysis* (London: George Allen Unwin Ltd., 1949) pp. 202-203.

pressed find themselves is a level of exile. The walls of detention camps, prisons, prisons-farms illustrate physical exile in its proper perspective. "Ideas under arrest"<sup>29</sup> or censorship in another critical facet of exile. A review of the past issues of *Index on Censorship* stigmatizes South Africa as the most ruthless in this strategy of alienation.

Emile Durkheim's analysis on "Suicide" further elucidates the crisis of the Darwinian ecological theories. Egoistic suicide occurs when the social constituents of the society cannot identify themselves with their socio-culture. Alienation by hostile system provokes suicidal instincts<sup>30</sup>. The theories of Darwin and Durkheim produce a dialectic which explains the existentialist perception in South African literature. Psychopathology and suicidal instincts logically produce existentialism. Suicidal acts committed by some South African artists are extreme facets if the misery theories. In South African literature, there is a meeting-point between the atheism of Marx and the existentialism of Sartre.

Racism, the weapon of capitalist ideology dictates the literary culture of South Africa. Angus Calder in a letter to Pio Zirimu depicts the ideological relevance of the imperialist economy to the study of African literature in general<sup>31</sup>. The South African artist cannot escape the thesis of Georg Lukacs on "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat"<sup>32</sup>. Inevitably, he cannot overlook Chalmers Johnson prescriptions of revolutionary violence in correcting social dysfunctionality because: "known methods of non-violent change are blocked by the ruling elite"<sup>33</sup>.

ABSTRACT: In this work the author establishes a relation between the Eurocentric theories of the history associated with the idea of progress since the final of the XIX century, as well as a certain social Darwinism and also the racism as an ideology of the alienation that took place at South Africa. Reminiscences of the ethnocentrism arises and intervene in the literature of the Apartheid, giving chance to the appearance of an ideology of alienation.

(29) See Daniel P. Kunene, "Ideas under arrest: Censorship in South Africa" *Research in African Literatures* vol. 12 n° 4 Winter, 1981.

(30) See Emile Durkheim *Suicide: A Study in Sociology* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1952) p. 319. Also see Fatima Meer *Race and Suicide in South Africa* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1976) pp. 18-21.

(31) Andrew Gurr & Angus Calder Ed. *Writers in East Africa: Papers from a colloquium held at the University of Nairobi 1971* (Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau, 1974), p. 207.

(32) See Georg Lukacs *History and Class Consciousness* (London: Merlin Press, 1971) pp. 83-149.

(33) Chalmers Johnson *Revolution and the Social System*. (The Hoover, On War, Revolution and Peace, Stanford University, 1964), p. 6.