

Workers Violence in the novel of Alex La Guma's 'And a Threefold Cord'

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Abstract

The centrality of the working class in the matrix of social tension and strife in South Africa is revealed in the works Alex La Guma. La Guma's *And a Threefold Cord* forms a starting point, a key, to the pattern which his novel form. The purpose of this paper is why the workers become violent in rainy environment and its effects on the working class family, La Guma expands to the macro-environment of the working class in the novel. The family and the working class district form the background to which the political movement can be understood. The underground liberation movement is portrayed as a working class organisation fighting against racist oppression and exploitation.

Keywords – Workers, class, violence, Exploitation, rain

Introduction

This novel is published in 1964 and is set in the Cape Flats, an impoverished area near Cape Town. It analyses the predicament of the shanty dwellers in terms of class inequality and economic exploitation, rather than in terms of racial discrimination. This ensures the novel's continuing relevance in a South Africa where far too many people are inadequately housed in ever-growing "informal settlement. This book is a critique of apartheid South Africa. The plot of *And a Threefold Cord* is slight and may be summarily outlined. The Pauls family - Dad and Ma Pauls, their sons Charlie, Ronald and Jonny - live in a miserable three-roomed "pondokkie" somewhere on the Cape Flats. As the narrative begins, the onset of rough weather is posing an additional threat to the already precarious security of their lives.

In this regard the focal point of La Guma's art is the working class which plays an important role in the portraits of struggle in the novels. In this study the term "working class" will be used to denote the labouring social category involved in production in an industrial economy. This implies a contrasting social group, a hostile class, the bourgeoisie, which, unlike the working class, owns property. Although the actual counter term for "bourgeoisie" is "proletariat", within the context of this study we shall prefer working class, having in mind the fact that the term proletariat has a more specialized meaning and is used often to mean a working class in the actual process of struggle as an ideological and political force fighting against the bourgeoisie.

What is Violence and Politic

Mark Vorobej's says "We all live that are to an extraordinary extent, mired in violence". This sentence seems to articulate an incisive experience motivating the whole enquiry. This statement is a general consideration about the irreducible character of violence in human societies and lives that qualifies this phenomenon as a matter of philosophical enquiry as a concept for thinking. For Vorobej the concept of violence is "a complex, unwieldy and highly contested concept" as well as "highly ambiguous and extremely vague".

Violence needs philosophy. The quest to fully understand what violence is, why violence raises fundamental social, political and moral questions, and whether violence can ever be justified, would suffer immeasurably unless it took full advantage of the skills that are peculiar to those trained in philosophy. Violence has captured the imagination of philosophers; the interest has tended to focus on specific forms of violence, such as terrorism or nature as communal beings. In a move reminiscent of Sade's, Hegel argues that individuals rise to the level of Being-for-self only by denying their communal nature in an act of violence against other human beings. By defining violence as the destruction of the social realm by social beings, Hegel shows both his romantic heritage and the fundamental insight of romanticism, namely that violence is only and always a form of human conflict. Nevertheless, his desire to trace the purely logical development of Being-for-itself transforms violence into a logical device, an idealism, serving his definition of being. Indeed, violence is the primary educator of Being-for-itself: in the life and death struggle of violence, the self discovers a violence (the violence of the other) that escapes its violence and that threatens its entire existence, thus recognizing the reality of other individuals. Through violence, the self attains a universal point of view in which the dynamic of self and other may be conceptualized.

Research methodology

The searcher adopts descriptive, analytical, interpretative and textual method. The researcher will collect the primary and secondary data from various sources such as e-library NDL system and would use critical texts for the research and also apply visit different libraries for the collection of data. The researcher will adopt the post colonial theories for the study. The researcher will apply narrative theory as a tool for interpretation and understanding of the novels and to a great extent try to let the texts speak for themselves through extensive use of quotations. The researcher will use Webliography for the in- depth study.

Aspects of Working Class

In the works of Alex La Guma three main aspects can be "isolated which are essential to his artistic technique and which also are indications of his ideological orientation. The first is his relation of character to circumstance. This springs from the materialist view that circumstance, like the base determines character. The second is the broad emphasis in the portrait of the working class and the central role the class is given in the novels. Tied closely to this is La Guma's emphasis on the youth of this social category which indicates his faith not only in the working class as the motive force in the national liberation struggle in South Africa, but also his faith in the youth as the bearers of hope for the future. Thirdly there is in La Guma's narrative technique the implicit expression of optimism in all his novels which shows his firm belief in the future.

Alex la Guma's novel *And a Threefold Cord* tells the story of a rain drenched ghetto in South Africa. At the centre of this ghetto, pulsating with hate and love, despair of poverty and a passionate strife for freedom from squalor, whose clutch is as real as the rain that pours incessantly, is the Pauls family: there is Charlie, Ronny and Johnny, their sister Caroline, their mother and an aged and ailing father. The Pauls are pitted against nature, harsh and unrelenting on the one hand, and on the other, there is the harsh and brutish action of the police. The rain, and later the police, are portrayed as competing to submerge the ghetto and the people living in it into darkness and pain: On the north-west the rain heads piled up, first in Cottony tufts blown by the high wind, then in skeins of dull cloud and finally in high climbing battlements like a rough wall of mortar built across the horizon, so that the sun had no gleam, — but a pale phosphorescence behind the veil of grey.² I \ Beneath "the rough wall of mortar" the Pauls and other ghetto dwellers are forced - a shivering horde crudely improvising to keep away the chill and the wetness. In spite of their efforts the darkness still engulfs them with the blankness of a sealed cave. With this coldness and darkness of nature is the metallic coldness and violence of the police who lurk in the shadows and the swamped door-yards, their boots "sucking and belching"

Nature as Enemy

Lacking the means to adequately defend themselves against the onslaught of bad weather, they encounter onslaught of bad weather, they encounter Nature itself as a hostile force, an enemy as malevolent and inscrutable as the police convoy that comes in the darkness and wet to devastate their lives. Indeed, rain and wind preside over the police raid like willing henchmen, exacerbating the misery of those who have been turned out of their homes and arrested. But when the police depart, their confederates in oppression remain, growling "like 11 hungry monster", attacking the squatters "with ferocity" (p.79)

Condition of Working class family

The condition of a working class family in South Africa as it is portrayed in the novel *And a Threefold Cord*. The purpose is also to show how the micro-environment of the family is affected by the exploitative and oppressive society around it. The effects of exploitation and the extent of other social pressures which confound the # family to a daily existence of misery, privation and general squalor are brought out by the author in this novel. The Pauls are shown as a typical working class family, a unit struggling to live within a broader class of people already far removed (expropriated) from all means of production. We see idleness, joblessness, lack of proper shelter and medical attention, and a general absence of all those amenities and conveniences that would make life passably comfortable. The incidence of all these inadequacies falls on the family as the smallest unit in society. The results are disastrous, as the pressures lead to an internal disintegration where the members of the family cannot stand these tensions emanating from society. The examination of the family therefore provides a starting point towards a general understanding of the larger social category, i.e., the working class in South Africa.

La Guma in this novel focuses on the Pauls family, as a typical unit from the working class, the inclusion of brief statements about the rich white South African family serves the purpose of illuminating two things. First it tells us that on that on the other side of the rain drenched, chilly and depressing slum is a well ordered, r comfortable and rich haven of the rich. The workers who live in the dreary atmosphere of the slum have contributed to the beauty of the rich by working to set up those conveniences that the rich enjoy. Charlie's reference to "laying pipes by Calving" is an indication of this. Although the workers create the beauty, they live in wretchedness and perpetual want. Although Charlie lays water pipes leading to the big mansions, the Pauls can hardly find water to bath the dead Dad Pauls or Caroline's new born baby. Secondly, Charlie's statements referring to the whites I bring out the reality of apartheid: "Jubas like me can't even touch the handle of the front door." This is later seen in the relationship between Charlie and George Mostert. Mostert would like to strike a friendship with Charlie, but we learn that he chooses to do so under cover of darkness. Although the rendezvous between the two is not kept, their conversation reveals the uneasy relationship between on black and white.

The novelist gives focus on the economic deprivation on the lives of the inhabitants of the ghetto. For the Pauls it means an inadequate diet, poor living quarters, poor sanitation, non-existent health facilities, joblessness, and a generally insecure livelihood. Old Dad Pauls is compelled to live in a damp environment in his poor health. He eventually dies without proper medical attention. Caroline is compelled to have her baby on a bed of newspapers and rags. And Freda loses her house and children in a fire accident which guts her shack. In the novel we see that the people, shut in this vault-like situation, live a precarious existence. The bad situation is worsened by the added terror of the police who patrol the ghetto, interrupting whatever little peace there is. The occurrence of violence at the slightest provocation, seems to indicate that the pressure on the people is unbearable.

In this research paper we have seen a portrait of a working class family and how it is conceived with the matrix of economic exploitation, segregation and oppressive social arrangement. The family being smallest social unit was examined first here as it relates to the pattern discerned in the works of A La Guma. In understanding the place and condition of the working class family it will be easy to understand the condition of the working class in general. La Guma, in starting from the particular (the micro-environment of the family) and building towards the general (macro-environment of the society) builds a relation.

Conclusion

The condition of a working class family in an exploitative and violent social environment. La Guma's portraits of struggle spring from its centrality in the social and political arena of South Africa. La Guma however does not ignore in his portraits the participation of other social classes or groups nor does he spare the working class itself. He brings out as effectively the weaknesses and limitations, its errors and failings as he demonstrates its successes, its strengths and its historical centrality in the politics of South Africa.

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