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***Introduction Reclaiming Agency: How to Walk
out of the Dark in Alex La Guma's *A Walk in
the Night* and *In the Fog of the Season's End*.***

Chérif Oumar DIOP*

Dans sa création romanesque, l'écrivain Sud-Africain Alex La Guma révèle, d'une part, les différentes formes de violence utilisées par le système d'Apartheid Sud-Africain pour subjuguier les Noirs et autres personnes de couleur et, d'autre part, les stratégies de résistance déployées par ces derniers pour mettre un terme à leur oppression. Dans cette analyse de la lutte contre la violence raciste en Afrique du Sud dans l'œuvre de La Guma, nous nous fondons sur les travaux du psychologue Heinz Kohut pour mettre en exergue les limites objectives des réactions individuelles et impulsives contre l'odieux système discriminatoire dans *A Walk in the Night* et les relents salvateurs des actions concertées au sein d'une organisation politique dans *In the Fog of the Season's End*.

In documenting the mores and experiences of black and colored South-Africans in his literary works, Alex La Guma unveils the structuring principles of violence in the Apartheid system, their logic, their dynamics, and how the victims of violence strive to end the white supremacists' tyrannical rule. In this paper, using Heinz Kohut's study of the self, I will focus on Blacks' and Coloreds' resistance to Apartheid violence.

According to Kohut (1971 120), the healthy self emerges from two processes of self-formation: first, the grandiose or assertive self that strives to be independent and original; second, the self that seeks approval and is eager to be loved. The ambitions of the grandiose self and values of the idealized self-object are

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paramount to the achievement of self-identity. Thus, the failure to fulfill our ambitions or the feeling of being ostracized may lead to a narcissistic rage. Such anger, according to Strozier (1985), translates into fanaticism or exclusivism in the context of socio-historical crisis.

In Alex La Guma's novels, violent attacks on the Black and Colored grandiose selves and the absence of the idealized self leave the Black and Colored youth psychologically fragmented and socially disoriented. Thus, the violence that stems from the loss of dignity and unjust economic conditions ranges from individual impulsive outbursts to large-scale organized violence. While exploring the counter violence that Black and Colored people oppose to the Apartheid system, La Guma exposes the limitations of the impulsive emotional outbursts in *A Walk in the Night* (1967) and walks us through the painstaking process of the constitution of collective, redemptive resistance in *In the Fog of the Season's End* (1972).

In April 1960, at the time of the Sharpeville massacre, La Guma completed *A Walk in the Night*, a poignant portrayal of racist repression. Michael Adonis, the main protagonist, has just lost his job. To add to his anger and frustration, he encounters the sadistic constable Raalt and his assistant, who humiliate him. Drunk on cheap wine in a pub, Michael returns to his tenement, where his drinking with Old Doughty ends in tragedy: in an impulsive outburst, Michael vents his pent up rage on the old, decrepit Irishman and kills him. Willieboy, one of Michael Adonis's acquaintances, who accidentally discovers the corpse is mistaken for the murderer of Old Doughty and shot dead by Raalt.

A walk in the Night dramatizes the recurrent vicious assaults on Black and Colored youth that lead to their psychological fragmentation and social disorientation. As such, the protagonists are "doom'd to walk in the night ... and for the day confined to waste in fire" (La Guma 1967 26). This plight, which is the substratum of the deterministic undercurrent of the novel, is buttressed by the way the brutality of the Apartheid system and the disintegration of District Six profoundly and irremediably affect the life of the characters.

As a case in point, Michael Adonis's dream for self-fulfillment is constantly dashed. His irreversible destitution leads to his

alienation, with its corollaries of deep frustration and humiliation. According to Kohut (1977 18), the “nuclear self (core self)” or “bipolar self” consists of two poles of ambitions and ideals as well as a tension arc created by these poles.

He uses the term ‘bipolar self’ in accounting for two opportunities that the person has to build a healthy cohesive self. The first opportunity is through adequate mirroring by the early selfobject. This requires empathic mirroring of what he earlier referred to as the grandiose self. The second prospect for a healthy cohesive self is from appositive relationship to an idealized selfobject. Thus, the self’s failure to seize these opportunities and to fulfill its aspirations may translate into narcissistic rage and, in the context of socio-historical crisis, escalate into fanaticism or exclusivism (Strozier 1985 9). Because of his disenfranchisement and shame¹, Michael Adonis is overwhelmed by a feeling of rage, and can neither hear nor see what goes on around him.

While nursing his anger, Michael Adonis is quasi deaf to “the buzz and hum of voices and the growl of the traffic,” (La Guma 1967 1) and is engulfed by the “pustule of rage and humiliation that is continuing to ripen deep down within him” (La Guma 1967 1). Michael’s introversion does not and cannot obliterate the devastating effect of the shame he is experiencing.

But Michael’s feeling of worthlessness might have been alleviated if he had joined the chorus of lamenting voices of misery. Such a connection with his people might have helped him unveil the root cause of his plight. Failing to do so, all he can hear is the buzz, hum, growl, and mutter that epitomize a high level of unintelligibility that derives from the lack of a meaningful interaction with the outside world. Jeffrey Alexander (2004 2) posits that to gain reflexivity and to move from the sense of something commonly experienced to the sense of strangeness that allows us to think sociologically, we need to be rooted in the social life-world. Such rootedness, he argues, is the soil that nourishes intelligibility.

According to Kohut (1966 441), shame arises when the ego is unable to provide a proper discharge for the exhibitionistic demands of the narcissistic ideal self. Thus shame is the result of the feeling of being a failure.

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Thus, Michael's inability to relate to his world prevents him from engaging and decoding the social text. Consequently, he feels more and more ashamed and alienated. When he looks right through the workers and fails to see them, he is missing the opportunity to have a reflection of himself. His feeling of shame focuses his gaze on an image of himself constructed by the Apartheid system. Kathleen M. Balutansky (1990 17) considers *A Walk in the Night* replete with representations of the tensions black people experience when they have to face their self-images. La Guma, Balutansky (1990) argues,

sets a literal as well as a figurative tension between the miserable reality created by Apartheid and the dignity and humanity that might have existed without the oppression and racism of the system (17).

In contrast is Joe's selflessness and love for nature as well as in the compassionate relationship between Michael Adonis and him which is illustrated in the following exchange:

"You eat already?"

"Well...no...not yet," Joe said, smiling humbly and shyly, moving his broken shoes gently on the rough cracked paving.

"Okay, here's a bob. Get yourself something. Parcel of fish and some chips."

"Thanks, Mikey."

"Okay. So long, Joe" (La Guma 1967 9).

These feelings of compassion and generosity spring from the selflessness that never fails to perceive the other's needs. The natural and spontaneous tone of this exchange highlights some of the human values the Apartheid system diametrically opposes. As a case in point, the following encounter between Michael Adonis and the police contrasts strikingly with the above scene.

[...]

Then he went up the street, trailing his tattered raincoat behind him like a sword-slashed, bullet-ripped banner just rescued from a battle. Michael Adonis turned towards the pub and saw the two policemen coming towards him. They

came down the pavement in their flat caps, khaki shirts and pants, their gun harness shiny with polish and the holstered pistols heavy at their waists. They had hard, frozen faces as if carved out of pink ice, and hard dispassionate eyes, hard and bright as pieces of blue glass (La Guma 1967 10-11).

Michael's gay and carefree appearance suddenly changes into that of a banner rescued from a battlefield when he meets the policemen, those agents of the Apartheid system whose sword has indeed slashed the Blacks' true identity and whose bullet has constantly been aimed at their humanity. There is no doubt that Michael is in a war-zone and has to deal with deadly ambushes every so often. The coldness of this encounter and its chilling effect on Michael underscores the tension the Blacks permanently live with: to remain your true self in a viciously adverse situation. The juxtaposition of the two scenes reveals the schizophrenic paranoia that haunts the Apartheid victim. This technique gestures towards the two conflicting images that inhabit the Blacks' and Coloreds' psyches. One image embraces the beauty of a life, and the other must be frequently ready to confront the demons of Apartheid as the following passage demonstrates:

Where are you walking around, man? The voice was hard and flat as a snap of a steel spring, and the one who spoke had hard, thin chapped lips and a faint blond down above them (La Guma 1967 11).

This dehumanized voice and the tone of its address are in sharp contrast with the encounter between Joe and Michael. The inhumanity that prevails in this interaction is captured by the voice as a metonymy of interracial relations under Apartheid. Whether it mutters or shouts obscenities, the voice expresses the ongoing tension between Blacks and the white system. During this encounter, the reason why Michael Adonis dare not look at the constable in the eyes is not just out of fear of repression but also out of shame. There, in the eyes of the constable, Michael can see a reflection of his own distorted image, the Apartheid-concocted

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image of the Black. The afore-mentioned tension is again dramatized when John Abrahams' loss of touch with the crowd leaves him at the mercy of Raalt.

John Abrahams was now beginning to feel the effect of the abrasive stares of those around him and his bravado commenced to collapse, falling from him like dislodged colored paper decorations. He shuffled and stared at his feet and fingered his nether lip, trying to salvage some of the disintegrating sense of importance. 'Listen, man, 'Raalt told him. 'If you don't want to talk now you can still be forced to appear in court and say what you know before the magistrate (La Guma 1967 63).

John is caught between two adversarial worlds: the people of District Six and the police. The deep-seated fear that makes him yield to the pressure of Raalt alienates him from the crowd. By urging John not to break the collective silence of defiance, the crowd is inviting him to join in the protection of the stronghold that shields Blacks in a context where they are permanently targeted by the system. Unfortunately John's attitude as an expression of self and communal disintegration undermines resistance to the system by legitimizing its acts of random violence and thus giving Raalt license to roam District Six and go after any "young rooker ... with a yellow shirt" (La Guma 1967 60).

Even more debilitating is the structural violence that denies Blacks and Coloreds basic amenities and plunges Michael, as well as Willieboy, into a world of destitution and crime. Their hopes and dreams are shattered by a socio-economic determinism that casts them into the realm of violence and criminality. Everything in the Blacks' and Coloreds' whereabouts is in decay:

[...] stretches of damp, battered houses

[...]

[...] cracked walls and high tenements that rose like left-overs of a bombed area in the twilight; vacant lots and weed-grown patches where houses had once stood; and deep doorways resembling the entrances of deserted castles[...] row of dustbins lined on side of the entrance and exhaled the smell of rotten fruit, stale food, stagnant water and general decay (La Guma 1967 21).

This disintegrating physical world epitomizes Michael's fragmentary inner world which harbors feelings of anger and self-pity. His frustration and resentment, under the effect of the alcohol he has been drinking, "curdled into a sour knot of violence inside him" (La Guma 1967 26). This pent up violence is a result of the laceration of his bipolar self, to use Kohut's (1977) concept, for Michael's aspirations are dashed against walls of racism and humiliation. Clearly then, the networks of relations formed by the effects of the decaying world on Michael and his desperate needs for survival and recognition have dangerously compromised the chance for his healthy self to prevail.

When in fury Michael calls Old Doughty "a blerry ghost" and later on shouts "You old bastard," [...] can't a boy have a bloody piss without getting kicked in the backside by a lot of effing law?" One can sense how the black youth is haunted by the specter of his white tormentor who has wrecked his world and fragmented his self. In a flash, Old Doughty appears as the agent that shatters his self. Whether a death threat to Michael's self or just an apparition of *self-fragmenter*, the old man becomes for the black youth the epitome of mortal danger. Michael's impulsive act dictated by his fear is followed by a feeling of deep remorse: 'Jesus' he said and turned quickly and vomited down the wall behind him [...] "God I didn't mean it. I didn't mean to kill the blerry old man." [...] "Well he didn't have no right living here with us colored" (La Guma 1967 29).

In reaction to the shattered self, Ragland-Sullivan (1986) argues, "the avatar of aggressiveness arises and shows itself in projected blame. The goal of aggressiveness is to protect the *moi*

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from perceiving the tenuous fragility of its own formation" (38). What has made Michael so insecure and vulnerable is his isolation from the masses. As has been mentioned, by distancing himself from the workers he could not hear distinctly the noises around him. In so doing, he bears the burden of his humiliation and frustration alone. His rage becomes corrosive and self-blinding. Even when Greene and the taxi-driver are trying to drive him out of his self-centered world, Michael dissociates himself from them. Michael's state of confusion prevents him from connecting with the social group he belongs to.

Even when Greene and the taxi-driver are trying to drive him out of his self-centered world, Michael dissociates himself from them: when Greene tells him that " 'some whites took a negro out in the street and hanged him up,' " he replies: well the negroes isn't like us [...]

It's the capitalis system, the taxi-driver said. [...]
Whites act like that because of the capitalis system. What the hell do you mean—capitalis system? Michael Adonis asked (La Guma 1967 16).

Michael cannot hear any other voice than his own. That voice is overwhelmed by anger and leads him to a state of confusion that prevents him from connecting with the social group he belongs to. The narrator uses the image of a knot of rage that is formed inside Michael like the quickening of the embryo in the womb to describe his mood. Pregnant with futile rage, Michael can deliver only the futile random violence that claims the life of an innocent old man. Ironically, his blind violence causes and parallels Raalt's killing of Michael's alter ego, Willieboy.

Furthermore, Michael's decaying world is comparable to the world of predilection of the cockroach that "paused over the stickiness and a creaking of boards somewhere startled it, sending it scuttling off with tiny scraping sounds across the floor" (La Guma 1967 95). At this same moment, as if in echo to that lonesome creature of decay and filth, John Abrahams "thought dully, What's help you, turning on your own people?" (La Guma 1967 95). To emphasize the need to be connected with one's community, we

might add, thinking of Michael Adonis, “What’s help you turning your back to your people?”

The imperative need for communal bonding in the fight against the Apartheid system brings forth the novel’s final message, which is wrapped in the metaphor of “...the relentless, consistent, pounding of the creaming waves against the granite citadel rock” (La Guma 1967 96). At the close of *A Walk in the Night*, it appears that the only form of violence that can erode the granite citadel of Apartheid is organized communal violence and not isolated random violence. For where Michael has been nursing “the foetus of hatred inside his belly” (La Guma 1967 21) which led to the deaths of Old Doughty and Willieboy, Grace Lorenzo, who remains constantly in tune with the masses, is feeling the knot of love and life within her. In contrast to the knot of rage which has consumed Michael and led to senseless violence, Grace’s knot of life symbolizes the imminent birth of hope.

In the Fog of the Season’s End (1972) focuses on how to make the imminent birth of hope happen by foregrounding the undertakings of a secret underground movement fighting to end the Apartheid system. The plot describes the activities of Beukes, the “colored” operative, and is framed by the account of the torture of Elias Tekwane, the Black organizer. Beukes sacrifices a happy personal life to devote himself to the revolution. His political activities, which include distributing anti-Apartheid pamphlets and coordinating the efforts of the movement to withstand full-scale repression, are interspersed with memories of happier times spent with his wife and his young child. He has been separated from them since being forced underground. The narrative is also interlaced with the activities of Isaac, the young office clerk who escapes arrest and eventually re-emerges as Paul, the third recruit to be smuggled out of South Africa for guerrilla training.

While growing up, Elias and his mother “lived on anaemic ears of corn, [...], on sinewy chicken now and then, on remains of meals begged in town, and on the kindness of the village community” (La Guma 1972 79). Such a precarious situation made Elias angry. However, unlike Michael Adonis in *A Walk in the Night*, Elias was not consumed by rage and shame. Instead, his anger “grew inside him like a ripening seed and the tendrils of its

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burgeoning writhed along his bones, through his muscles, into his mind" (La Guma 1972 79), and he started mulling over his predicament, asking why the Whites have bigger land, and more money; why his people work for the Whites instead of trying to make a little corn grow among the stones of their own patches (Laguma 1972 79).

On his journey from the countryside to town, his list of questions included the living conditions of Blacks in the shanties and the poor working conditions of workers. Through a number of experiences ranging from police harassment to workers' strikes, Elias understood progressively that the disenfranchisement of Blacks and Coloreds is inherent to the Apartheid system. Such awareness led him to the conclusion that his people must acquire both the techniques and the means for fighting a war against the white supremacists (La Guma 1972 143).

After weeks of surveillance, the police capture Elias Tekwane, torture, and beat him to death. By refusing to reveal any information, Tekwane protects the movement and allows Beukes to escape and help smuggle three freedom fighters into neighboring countries.

To frame the narrative, the novel uses historical landmarks that typify the Blacks' conditions in South Africa: the Sharpeville massacre of Blacks protesting against the pass, the ritual of obtaining pass cards, the Bantu Homelands Constitution Act, the Segregation Laws, the Pass Laws, the Bantu Education System, the Group Area Act. *In The Fog of the Season's End* articulates the fragmentation of Blacks as a result of their victimization by the white supremacist system. It also re-presents and deconstructs the white supremacists' attempts to rationalize and legitimize the inhumane treatment of Blacks:

I do not understand the ingratitude of your people... Look what we, our Government, have done for you people. We have given you nice jobs, houses, education. Education, *ja*. Take education for instance. We have allowed your people to get education, your own special

schools, but you are not satisfied. No you want more than you get (La Guma 1972 4).

Ironically the Blacks are presented as ungrateful recipients of services from white benefactors preoccupied by the Blacks' well-being. The whites' "mindfulness" has gone as far as opening special schools to meet the needs of the Blacks. The irony also gestures towards the fact that the relationship is primarily paternalistic and dismissive: you do not have what is required not to refuse our decision. Why would you be unsatisfied? The paternalism is rooted in the racism that excludes and disqualifies Blacks for a certain number of services.

I have heard that some of your people even want to learn mathematics. What good is mathematics to you? You see, you people are not the same as we are. We can understand these things, mathematics. We know the things which are best for you. Yet you want to be like the Whites. It is impossible. [...] We understand that you must have certain things, rights, so we have arranged or you to have things you need, under our supervision (La Guma 1972 5).

The evident social dichotomy in the use of I (we) and you (people) shows the exclusion of the Blacks from the decision-making process even in matters concerning their social and intellectual well-being. The whites' government has the power to decide where and how to educate Blacks and the location and type of housing that is suitable for them. The major statement here is an expression of what is at the core of the philosophy of Apartheid. That philosophy is the basis of all the above-mentioned forms of legalized acts of violence. Put against the backdrop of the Apartheid system, the Major's statement is a proclamation of the white supremacists' inhumanity and is countered by Elias's response:

You have shot my people when they protested against unjust treatment; you have torn people from their homes, imprisoned them, not for stealing or murder, but not having your

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permission to live. Our children live in rags and die of hunger. And you want me to co-operate with you? It is impossible. (La Guma 1972 5).

Elias' intransigent stand pitted against the major's rhetoric of justification heralds the tensions that rock the Apartheid system. His statement functions as a credo of the anti-apartheid movement. It is a manifesto that not only unveils the truth behind the lame euphemisms of the major's discourse but further points at the rhetorical flaws of a deceptive statement that fails to accurately account for reality.

The realities that the major euphemistically refers to as education and housing are, as the prisoner points out, the apartheid system's inhumane programs that marginalize the Blacks. Their names are Bantu Education System and Bantu Homelands Constitution Act. To the Major's rhetoric of justification which is essentially a rhetoric of concealment and deception, Elias responds with a rhetoric of denunciation that unmasks and exposes the violent nature of Apartheid. As such, it is defiant, and while opposing all that operates for, or with the system, it legitimizes all operations whose ultimate goal is to restore the Blacks' trampled dignity and humanity. As Balutansky (1990) has it,

the irreconcilable impulses of the rhetorical as well as essential tensions that underlie the style and tone of both the prisoner's and the Major's remarks introduce the overwhelming tensions portrayed in this novel; ..., La Guma turns the two hackneyed statements into a ritualized performance that symbolizes the forces Apartheid pitches against each other (82-3)

The technique of juxtaposition is thus utilized to re-present the contradictions between two communities that are entrapped in a deadly cycle of violence. Their ways of mapping the same reality are diametrically at odds. However, since language and ideology are intimately related to the socio-economic environment, the naturalistic instances of *In the Fog of the Season's End* are not just descriptive; they are strategies that help gauge the veracity of discourse.

In its attempt to misname the flaws of the Apartheid system, the white supremacists' rhetoric of justification is occasionally debunked by the novel's imbedded irony. Ironic pointers appear whenever the narrative's naturalistic tones foreground a level of authenticity that unequivocally dispels the fallacy of the racists' discourse. Realism, then allows the narrator to introduce exhibits that give credibility and eloquence to the indictment of racism. Thus, realism in the novel, is not just the representation of potentiality and the effects of action; it functions rhetorically as part of the set of strategies used to reveal the duplicity of the Apartheid discourse of violence that, on one hand, does not say what it does and on the other hand tries to transform the victim into a culprit.

Along with these double-edged mimetic and symptomatic techniques, the narrative uses other strategies to reflect the violent tensions that tear apart the South African society. A variety of signs constantly remind the protagonists of their marginalization.

In the following passage, the use of the colon associate portrayals of characters and their plight as down-trodden second class citizens:

“It was a little baggy under the arms and around the chest, but it would pass: no one noticed second-hand clothes on a member of a second-class people.” (La Guma 1972 163).

Second-hand clothes are all these second class citizens can afford. They live on the junk of white masters, being junk in junkyard themselves. Their living conditions, a vivid expression of structural violence, are an integral part of the dehumanization process to which the Blacks are subject. The second-hand clothes are indicative of the social devaluation of the Blacks. In actual fact they are literally heaped up like valueless object in their dwellings. Furthermore, they are submitted to various forms of harassment. As a case in point:

When African people turn sixteen they are born again or, even worse, they are accepted into the mysteries of the Devil's mass, confirmed into blood rites of servitude as cruel as Caligula, as merciless as Nero. Its bonds are the entangled chains of infinite regulations, its rivets are driven

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in with rubber stamps, and scratchy pans in the offices of the Native Commissioners are like branding irons which leave scars for life (La Guma 1972 81).

The ritual of pass distribution like any other rite of passage introduces the initiates to another symbolic realm with new social status and attributes. For the Blacks, the reception of the pass as an induction into a world charted with racist regulations means anonymity, hence depersonalization. Rebirth is literally recreation of non-persons commoditized as labor force to serve the interests of the white establishment. A violation of the regulations means that

All permits are cancelled so that you cease to exist. You will be nothing, nobody, in fact you will be de-created. You will not be able to go anywhere on the face of the earth, no man will be able to give you work, nowhere will you be able to be recognized...you will be as nothing (La Guma 1972 82).

By wielding their power to re-create and to de-create, the white supremacists delineate the social as well as the psychological bounds where being is conceivable for and by the Blacks. The acceptance of such conditions that set the perimeters of existence means total subjugation and annihilation. The terms of the Blacks' dehumanization are epitomized by people being identified with allegorical names: the Washerwoman, the Bicycle Messenger, the Outlaw. This symbolic death is the prelude to their physical liquidation when they stand against the law of their re-creator.

The shooting, singing, chanting, laughter went on. The sun was hot and the sky steely with thunder.

[...]The sound of the shot was almost lost under the chanting, the singing, the laughter. Silence dropped from the gaping mouths of those who saw and heard, gaping in sudden wonder...

The bundles of dead lay under the sun, with the abandoned pop bottles, fluttering pass-books, umbrellas, newspapers, all the debris of life and death. Among the dead was the

Washerwoman...Those who found the outlaw discovered that he took some time to die... (La Guma 1972 104-5).

The juxtaposition of scenes of merriment and mourning as well as the metaphor of the thunder under the sun reaffirm the contradiction at the heart of the society. The last paragraph points at the co-presence of life and death: the life of the anonymous masses, cluttered in bundles of dead. The tragedy is a wakeup call for all these people who were unable to capture the foreshadowing signs that have been flashing through the structural racial tensions. This random and sudden violence is symptomatic of the breaking point years of oppression brought. In *In the Fog of the Season's End*, fatality as the outcome of decades of Apartheid makes resistance and sacrifices inevitable as illustrated by Elias's death and the daily risks associated with revolutionary clandestine operations.

A Walk in the Night and *In the Fog of the Season's End* dramatize how racist violence permeates, disrupts, and destroys the lives of Blacks and Coloreds in South Africa. Furthermore, the novels expose how the protagonists react to the violence they are victims of. Whereas in *A Walk in the Night*, anger has led to shame and senseless violence, in *In the Fog of the Season's End*, it has burgeoned into political awareness and urgency to overthrow the Apartheid system.

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