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COLONIALISM AND RACIAL SUPREMACY IN THE CARIBBEAN AND SOUTH AFRICAN LITERATURES: A CRITIQUE OF GEORGE LAMMING'S *IN THE CASTLE OF MY SKIN* AND ALEX LA GUMA'S *A WALK IN THE NIGHT*

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Abstract
The history of the West Indies, as well as South Africa, will remain incomplete without reflecting on issues of colonialism and racial injustice. These colonized territories had peculiar, unpleasant experiences as they wallowed in racial abuse, both in physical, psychological or spiritual terms. The issues of racial supremacy, therefore, are a general phenomenon in the Caribbean Islands and South Africa and have been and still are the key component of these regions' experiences. This paper, therefore, examines this issue with its attendant effect on the shaping of the Caribbean and South African Literatures, since literature to some extent responds to history, social reality and individual reactions to those realities. This research primarily aims at examining the depth of social disharmony and disillusionment prevalent in an atmosphere of inequality and injustice as portrayed by popular West Indies and South African writers, specifically by George Lamming and Alex La Guma, by using Edward Said's essay "Reflection on Exile". This paper builds on his theory of Exilic Experience, which shows the struggle for survival in the face of oppression and alienation in various Caribbean and South African colonies. Furthermore, colonialism is naturally surrounded by iron walls of racism, hence the feelings of loss, nostalgia, despair and loneliness. In the end, it found out that Caribbean and South African Literature is anchored on a sad portrait of animosities arising out of a history of fear or abuse of one group by the other and concludes that propagation of harmonious racial co-existence is the only true panacea to the problem of racism in human society and by extension, global conflict, using George Lamming's *In the Castle of my Skin and* Alex La Guma's *A Walk in the Night as* sign posts.

Keywords: Colonialism, Racial Supremacy, Caribbean Literature, South African Literature

Introduction

The literature that emerged within a compound of many languages and cultures, which include English, German, Spanish, French and Dutch, are remnants of the colonizing powers

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and their historical encounter with the religion. David Babydeen and Nana Wilson- Tagoe are of the view that, in spite of the separation created by geographical distances and the existence of independent West Indian states, it is still possible to talk in general terms of a West Indian Literature of English expression. The common experience of colonization, displacement, slavery, indenture, emancipation and nationalism has shaped most West Indian environments, creating a unity of experience that can be identified as particularly West Indian.

According to these scholars, it (Caribbean Literature) began in the eighteenth century and exploded in the 1930s and 50s, and its growth into a new dimension in the late twentieth century reflects the progress of West Indian engagement with history, with political and social adjustment. Jude Agho, a renowned critic, also agrees that the 1950s could be taken as the decade that represented the watershed in the development of the literary culture of the West Indies, whether in the sense of having established identity for the writers, an awareness of common themes in the literature or the coming on the stage of significant writers. He goes further to observe that the idea of West Indian Literature as a distinct, coherent discipline is a recent development, the long history of West Indian creative writing notwithstanding. This is to say that the West Indian creative writing existed from the eighteenth century onwards; it is not until the first quarter of the twentieth century that authors of real ability began to appear. Bruce King, in his introduction to the book, *West Indian Literature,* traces the beginning of a consciously Jamaican Literature (and by extension) West Indian Literature to the novel written by Thomas MacDermot. Caribbean Literature is not just entertainment literature. It encompasses the historical issue of enslavement and forced migration (the Trans-Atlantic dehumanization), the related theme of homelessness, disillusionment, exile, colonization, poverty, social inequality and so on. Oni observes that "The literature (Caribbean literature) vociferously lampoons the object state of poverty that has eaten into the black skin of the Caribbean, an inequality caused by colonial denigration". There is hardly any sphere of human endeavour that the colonialists did not abuse. Such background explains why Rose Acholonu argues "colonization in the West Indies as well as in other Black communities of the African Diaspora was much more traumatic than in Africa. While Africa was colonized, the West Indian was enslaved and this meant a complete loss of his personal and cultural identity" (78). Similarly, Rhonda Cobham is of the view that the West Indian writers so far have treated the area of racial tension as a problem which is the result of mutual suspicion and mistrust. Considering how significant the colonial experience and racism have shaped much of West Indian Literature, it is important to dwell on this concept. No doubt, colonialism and racism have been given various notions by writers. As it affects the West Indian, Cobham notes that "the exile of West Indians is an extreme form of alienation which most West Indians have had to accept" In a related manner, King-Aribisala observes that "In case of the West Indian, the heritage of ancestral enslavement engendered significant cultural dislocation and self-alienation. Cut off from known tradition, custom and values…" (40).

Furthermore, the theme of disillusionment and exile in the Caribbean literature is usually illustrated by the feeling of being isolated from the roots (African) and alienation anchored on racial institutions. George Lamming describes the situation as paradoxical in its sense of "roots and rootslessness" and "home and homelessness" at the same time. It is evident that the fragmented nature of society consciously and unconsciously imposed on the West Indians an acute sense of disillusionment and exile, which is illustrated in its literary content. In other words, the literature of the area reflects attempts to come to terms with the consequences of slavery and colonization. Edward Baugh (3) describes it as "colonial

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literature" that aims at celebrating a new identity. Erna Brodber 1983 shares this view, which is expressed as follows "You who feel the pain of historylessness, look at the work patterns, the dance, the dream, the song and the memories of your forefathers, analyses these and you will be writing your history". In the same vein, Vidiadhar Naipaul is of the view that the inhabitants of Caribbean islands are not bound by any sense of belonging to one culture. As a result, there is the creation of the formless, casual society with haphazard standards, and the emergence of the confused, traumatized man who is helpless in a sterile and unfriendly landscape. Succinctly put, Caribbean Literature follows closely with history, and its history is conditioned by the struggle between the colonial masters and their Caribbean slaves, which led to flourishing writings of George Lamming, Derek Walcott, and Michael Anthony, among others.

Similarly, Alex La Guma's novella, *A Walk in the Night*, frowns or totally condemns the Apartheid policy in South Africa. Alex La Guma's fiction, *A Walk in the Night,* falls into the category of what Breidlid (2002: 3) refers to as 'resistance literature, 'and he opines:

> 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. (Cited in Nwagbara 2011:9)

Breidlid (2002:15) point out that *A Walk in the Night* is a way of restoring a voice which had always been suppressed by the apartheid government". Alex La Guma in this work tries to show the world the sufferings of the native Black South Africans in the Apartheid regime; this is further explained by Amar (2010:9), "Alex La Guma is a committed South African writer engaged in defending the legitimate rights of his downtrodden community". Amar further adds that, "Alex La Guma, sees in communism the most appropriate system to remedy what is wrong with Apartheid..."In this novella, La Guma expresses this thought through the character Taxi Driver when the latter states that, it's the capitalist' system... Heard it at a meeting on the parade. Whites act like that because of the capitalist' system' (p.17). Alex La Guma suggests that capitalism is the main thrust behind apartheid.

Background to Caribbean and South African Literature

The history of the Caribbean, according to Julia Udofia is quite peculiar. It does not evolve gradually and naturally out of a remote mythological and archaeological past, but begins with the "discovery" of the Bahamas in 1492 by Christopher Columbus. This abrupt beginning has led historians, such as Eric Williams (1970), to assert that "the Caribbean is merely a geographical expression which lacks a noteworthy history." Naipul in particular claims that the West Indies is a sterile, static, manufactured society due to the accidental nature of its discovery and the brutal mode of occupation and violence among the colonizing forces. Many scholars, according to Udofia, have also observed that the Caribbean is "historyless" and unlikely to proceed further than its crude and violent beginning. Naipaul concludes that history is built on creation and achievement and nothing was created in the West Indies. It is against this background that Udofia remarks that the West Indies can be referred to as an artificially created society because with the exception of the indigenous Indian population, which was swiftly exterminated, the inhabitants of the Caribbean either migrated or were forcefully transported there. With this conglomeration of people with

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different races and religious beliefs and with different motives being in the Caribbean, it was difficult to create a common ethos, especially given the fundamental inequalities created by the institution of slavery. It is on this premise that Oyigbenu asserts that "the Trans- Atlantic slave trade was an expansive transoceanic phenomenon that precipitated centripetal and centrifugal discourses that indubitably shaped events, attitudes and new cultures across the entire Atlantic world, culminating in a web of new, oceanic interculture of intellectualism; creolization, hybridity and religious interface". He goes further to observe that "this massive and unprecedented dispersal of Africans across the Atlantic world in contested spaces and locales is juxtaposed against the antecedent cultural transmutations with far-reaching cultural, political historical, literary and religious consequences for the .enslaved African in the new world" (2).

The Atlantic slave trade, according to Kilson and Rotberg (1976), has therefore now been unequivocally revealed in all its atrocities as a prolonged exploitative device by which millions of Africans were brutalized and dehumanized in order to bring wealth to those who organized it. It is therefore appropriate to regard the West Indies as imported people in a largely imported environment. Udofia notices that the early and later imperialists in the Caribbean had the sole aim of exploring the natural resources, both for personal benefits and for the good of their various mother countries. It was the lure of goods, sugar and slaves that thus precipitated the imperialist foray into the area by Spain, Portugal, Britain, France and the Netherlands. Furthermore, the European's inability to impose a common creolized cultural ethos on the slaves who were multi-cultural ethos or on the slaves who were multicultural in origin, exacerbated by the imperialists' lack of interest in the continuous spiritual and physical welfare of the island and its inhabitants. As a result, the Africans were largely embroiled in a state of disillusionment, homelessness, exile, and abandonment, which find expression in the thematic preoccupations of its literature.

In the same vein, *A Walk in the Night* is a thrilling story with its setting in Cape Town, Apartheid South Africa. Alex La Guma succeeds in producing a powerful work of imagination, so that scholars refer to this novella as the best work of art during Apartheid that remains relevant in the post-apartheid era. La Guma in this novella accurately reflects the harsh realities encountered by the blacks in Apartheid South Africa, not just as a mere narration of historical facts but as an enthralling work of African Fiction. The greatness of this novella cannot be overstated, as evidenced by its thematic preoccupations, vivid language use, and narrative techniques that delve into the inner thoughts of the characters. What makes Alex La Guma's story *A Walk in the Night* a success is that he not only brings to the table the sufferings of the people of native South Africa but also suggests a system that will make society more habitable for people of all races, which is Communism. As a writer with Marxist influence, La Guma does not believe in class division and totally condemns the ideology that one race is superior to another.

Theoretical Framework

It is expected that any committed work of literature bears an underlying principle if it must be classified as empirical literary enquiry. In this regard, George Lamming and Alex are known as writers whose dependence on the content of their messages to advance their ideological inclinations is well established and again evident in *The Castle of My Skin* and *A Walk in the Night.* The Formalist literary criticism is chosen as a veritable tool for interrogating the subject in focus. At this point, it is significant to review one or two definitions of Formalism as a literary theory. According to *The Penguin Dictionary Theory of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, "the Russian formalists were primarily interested in

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the way that literary texts achieve their effects and in establishing a scientific basis for the study of literature. Formalists collapse the distinction between form and content; to them, the writer is of negligible importance." This implies that Formalism is concerned with the linguistic structure of a literary text and not with the origin, historical or cultural context. Formalist focuses on the literary work itself, avoiding external factors. That is, the emphasis is on the literariness of a text's structure, rather than its human content, such as actions, emotions, reality, and ideas, among others. This is demonstrated in the text under study, where Lamming La Guma uses the principle of analogy in the lines of their novels to emphasize the intensity of racial experience that characterized the fates of West Indians in South Africa under colonial regimes. The writers' exposition of the situation tends to make the readers feel disgusted.

The Formalists aim to ensure that a literary work is autonomous, meaning it should be separated from any historical context. The analysis of Lamming's *In the Castle of my Skin* and La Guma's *A Walk in the Night* is applied in this research, for example, is carried out within the context of their contents. They (Formalists) advocate close reading and detailed textual analysis of … rather than an interest in the mind and personality of the writer, sources, the history of ideas and political and social implications. To Formalists, therefore, a work of art is not primarily a social, historical, or biographical piece; it is a literary work that can be understood only by reference to its intrinsic literary features, that is, those elements found in the text itself. It's against this background that this research essentially centered on textual analysis of the work under review. If a Formalist critic intends to analyze a text, what stands out for him is not the author's life or the historical milieu in which it is written, but the words that make up the text. The features of a text, style, plot, techniques, imagery, tone and genre are some of the basic considerations in a formalist criticism. A noteworthy fact is that these features are not treated in isolation.

The Formalist approach to literature focuses closely on the language form and structure of literary texts. The choice of words (diction) goes a long way in defining the message of the society. This is clearly manifested in Lamming's *In the Castle of my Skin* and La Guma's *A Walk in the Night.* These literary pieces, through their choice of words, vividly portray disillusionment occasioned by racial injustice, which constitutes the social realities of African migrants. The writer succinctly demonstrates his protest against the agent of oppression and injustice and calls for regime change and by extension, a social, political and economic construct of the society.

From the analyses of Formalism in this research, it has become obvious that the literary theory or approach insists that a text should be independent, that is, it should stand on its own. Emphasis should be on the internal features of a text, such as grammar, syntax and literary devices, excluding external factors or influences like the historical, cultural, social and political context. Thus, Formalists are concerned with literariness, that which makes a given work a literary work and tries to make their critical discourse objective and scientific. The above scholarly views imply that there exists a relationship between internal features and the ideological leaning of the work under review, namely: *In the Castle of my Skin and* La Guma's *A Walk in the Night.* It is against the backdrop of the above theoretical and critical propositions that this research seeks to explore the ideological positions in George Lamming's writings, particularly his critical stance against racism.

Synopsis of *In the Castle of My Skin*

The Castle of My Skin by George Lamming centres on the social hierarchy that plays a prominent role in the novel. At the top of the hierarchy in his castle on the hill is Mr.

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Creighton, the white landlord, who owns the land that the villagers live on. They pay him rent to live there. Following Mr. Creighton are the black overseers, who work for the landlord and help keep order in the village. The villagers are at the bottom of this social hierarchy. They have little freedom and live in severe poverty. While the villagers exist at the bottom of the hierarchy, they do not see themselves as enslaved. Instead, the villagers have a sense of freedom that comes from their allegiance to the English Empire. However, their lack of resources and legacy leave the villagers at the whims of both men and nature. The social hierarchy is enforced through those in power. In the beginning, Mr. Creighton holds power. This man has a conflicted sense of responsibility. On one hand, Mr. Creighton wants to do what is right for the native people; on the other hand, he remains shackled to an economic system that places monetary values above human Worth. The ex-school teacher turned politician, Mr. Sline overthrows Mr. Creighton's power, who, instead of sympathizing with the cause of the natives, greedily hoards the land, evicts some of the natives and charges the rest an exuberant amount of interest on the rented property. This hierarchy marks rigid boundaries within the novel, which G attempts to transcend by attending high school or gaining an education. While his education enables him to leave the island, he does not develop the sense of identity necessary for achieving his freedom. The narrator tried Trumper returns from America at the end of the novel. He explains that in order to achieve identity, the narrator must break himself from Barbados and seek an understanding of his race.

Analysis of *In the Castle of My Skin*

European colonists felt that the darker-skinned people were primitive and inferior. For many years, slavery was the cornerstone on which the West Indian economy was built. A debate ranges among the scholars as to whether the European racism caused African slavery or whether European racism was constructed to explain the necessity of slaves, but what is undisputed is that by the twentieth century, the island of the British West Indies had two very distinct primary social classes, white land owners and professional of English descent and black manual labourers whose ancestors came from Africa. The lessons of racism and black inferiority were taught everywhere, though usually cloaked in the ideology of the "white man's burden". The notion of benevolent white settlers improving the lives of benighted salvagers in Africa and the Americans. In places such as Barbados, where more than eight percent of the population is considered to be of African descent, people are encouraged to join the white society by means of hard work and education. Successful people become metaphorically more "white", whereas those who remain low on the social ladder retain their "blackness". Lamming describes the process of socially separating black overseers from the villagers as thus: Low-down nigger people was a special phrase the overseers had coined… the image of the enemy, or the enemy was my people, my people are low down nigger people. My people don't like to see their people get on…

The depiction of Creighton's village bears the hallmark of a literary work determined to illuminate neglected lives and reveal the nature of the oppressive colonial system. The residents of the village are shown everywhere to be subjected people, torn by distorted self-perception and so hurt by years of oppression by white overlords, they "accepted instinctively that others, meaning the whites were superior" (19).

Synopsis of Alex La Guma's *A Walk in the Night*

The story revolves around Michael Adonis, a young coloured South African who has just been fired from his job in a sheet-metal factory for daring to speak back at his white boss, and was later harassed by two white policemen who were on a daily check routine. On his

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way home, he stops at a Pub hoping that by so doing, he will purge himself of the shame and humiliation of his encounter with the white foreman, which had resulted in the loss of his job and the harassment from the white policemen. However, when Michael gets home, he meets his decrepit and inebriate Irish co-tenant, Mr. Doughty, and an argument ensues between them over a bottle of hard-wine. Michael, already bottled-up with anger as a result of his earlier experience with whites, spits at his antagonist. He loses his self-control and unintentionally kills Mr. Doughty with the wine bottle.

This incident turns Adonis into a murderer. He flees from his tenement to avoid arrest. His friend, Willieboy, arrives at the scene to ask if Michael can give him some money out of his pay-off, and discovers the corpse of the old Mr. Doughty. Willieboy flees from the tenement to avoid being taken for the murderer, but John sees Willieboy suspiciously leaving the tenement and reports this to Constable Raalt. The rest of the narration centres on the hunt for Willieboy. Raalt finally identifies Willieboy. He is shot in the leg by Constable Raalt, and in no time, he dies.

Analysis of Alex La Guma's *A Walk in the Night*

Alex La Guma, through this novella, fulfills the mission of literature as he reflects the realities of life in South Africa, especially as they affect the black population. In the same train of thought, Olu Obafemi, in his Inaugural Lecture at the University of Ilorin, captioned *Literature and Society on the Border of Discourse*, opines 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). La Guma's works are so influential that Ngugi Wa Thiong' o classified him among the best African writers, and Wole Soyinka, with particular reference to *A Walk in the Night* claims that La Guma 'had managed to do in 91 pages what African writers had been trying to achieve for years (Soyinka 1978:133) as cited in Breidlid, Reisistance and Reaction in Alex La Guma's and A Threefold Cord (retrieved online- the paraphrase is ours).According to J.M. Coetzee, "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" (1992: 358).

Alex La Guma sees Apartheid as the reason why Blacks have no other hope in South Africa but to live a life of crime, accompanied by alcoholism. Egudu (1978: 46) also in an outright manner condemns Apartheid when he opines, "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" (as cited in Nwagbara 2011:4). The Caribbean sociologist, Patrick Wilmot(1980:xi) 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 system of racial segregation, to others a political organization of a European minority to deny the liberty, rights and dignity of the African majority.

La Guma, in this novella, *A Walk in the Night*, sees Apartheid in the same light as Patrick Wilmot. This novella exposes the harsh realities of the obnoxious Apartheid system, which the Black community has to endure and the little opportunity given to Blacks to live a normal life. This is supported by Mkhize (1989:95) as he opines, in the novella, *A Walk in the Night,* La Guma's characters are 'helpless victims' who have no control over their fate' (cited in Nwagabara 2011:11). This is seen in the character of Willieboy, who is murdered by Raalt, the police.

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Colonialism and Racial Supremacy in the Caribbean and South African Literatures

As earlier mentioned, Caribbean Literature is essentially a response by the individual writers to the historical realities of the area. The Caribbean Island has been described as a plural society made up of people displaying different modes of behavour who are held together by economic realities rather than by a sense of a common culture. This divisive unity was a result of different responses and modes of adjustment to the void created by dispossession. This is expressed in the experience of slave ancestors who had been dispossessed of their motherland and forced to live in an alien and hostile environment in which they were made to feel racially and culturally inferior. This deep-seated sense of inferiority and lack of confidence became intensified by the structure of education, which encourages further reproach about the African past and pushes blacks towards accepting white superiority and values. There have been various literature responses to the realities of these historical experiences. Many writers reject the West Indies and claim Africa as their spiritual homes. These writers generally act as spokespersons for their society and consistently endeavour to reflect on their antecedents and prospects within the existing social setting of Caribbean society. From the foregoing, it is clear that there is in Caribbean and South African literature, the predominance of alienation in various forms: disillusionment, exile, racism, oppression, among others. Hence, the primary commitment of the Caribbean and South African writers remains a search for identity and self-discovery. In Lamming's work, for instance, the world of childhood becomes part of the societal ethos and of the general disintegration evoked and dramatized in *The Castle of My Skin.* The children's response to their environment, their interpretation of adult standards and their confusion about history and race reflect both confusion and fantasies of childhood and the sensibilities of a colonial upbringing. Although Lamming uses the children's lives to suggest a typical West Indian childhood, his emphasis is on the maturing consciousness of his child narrator, transforming them into a hero. Thus, the boy whose personal and political growth are finally charted and linked with the frustration and integration of the old order becomes Lamming's portrait of disconnection and alienation prevailing among the black community.

In the same vein, the pains of racial injustice constitutes the dominance preoccupation in La Guma's *A walk in the Night* where the protagonist Michael Adonis laments that he has been fired by the white foreman because he talks back at him, thus: "…got pushed out of my job at the factory... answered back to a effing white rooker"(p.4). The whites oppress the blacks at the place of work, on the streets, and even in their homes. The law is at the fore front of oppression; this is seen where police men harasses Michael Adonis on his way home, "you learned from experience to gaze at some spot on their uniforms, the button of a pocket, or the bright smoothness of their Sam Browne belts, but never into their eyes, for that would be taken as an affront" (p.11), They, police officers, oppresses Adonis for no just cause.

According to Abrahams (1991:23), "Black people are continually being harassed by the police… so that when one is concerned with social situations, one can't leave out the police." David Welsh (2009) in *The Rise and Fall of Apartheid* says that:

> Even in 1948, racial segregation was not new. Governor van Riebeeck had ordered that a fence be built between blacks and whites in Cape Town in 1659. The Natives Land Act of 1913 declared that Africans could buy land only in reserves. Africans were only sojourners in urban areas; whites had preference in certain jobs, and residential segregation was in place...

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Legally, in South Africa, the whites segregated against the blacks. The conversation between Joe and Michael Adonis: Omond in January 1985 reported about a segregated beach where seven people were arrested for being on a 'white only beach'. Alex La Guma is inspired by such obnoxious law that rides on the backs of blacks. As a fundamental aspect of the colonial experience, race has consistently been a crucial issue in colonial relations, manifesting in various dimensions in the literature of the West Indies and South Africa. The simplicity of the colonial society, as observed by Naipaul, was the very simplicity of its value of money and race and in the coloured structured society united only by consensual acceptance of the inferiority of "negroness". To him, race was an appalling definer of value. It comes up not only in the relationship between the European white master and the black slave, but also between various gradations of the colour hierarchy. Such consistent debasement "negro-ness" had two major psychological repercussions and by extension racial. It instilled in the black slaves an overwhelming awe of everything white and at the same time bred a sense of inferiority and self-abasement in their innermost consciousness. These are the realities on which the thematic concern of the Caribbean and South African literature thrived.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the peculiar history of the Caribbean Island as well as South Africa and their attendant effects on these regional literatures, since Caribbean South Africa Literature are also to some extent a response by individual writers to the historical realities of the area. It is also realized that the feeling of colonialism and racism, which thrived on social inequality, is a prevailing phenomenon among the black community of the West Indies and South Africa and concludes that the Caribbean South Africa system should endeavour to expand its political, economic and social space that would promote a strong interracial integration and multi-ethnic harmony.

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