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**Research Article**

Section: Literature, Languages and Criticism



Published in Crewe,  
England by Steadfast OA

Volume 2, Issue 1, 2022

**Article Information**

Submitted: 17th Jan 2021  
Accepted: 9th March 2022  
Published: 27th April 2022

Additional information is  
available at the end of the  
article

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**How to Cite:**

Essuman, J. (2022). Violence, the language of the oppressor and the oppressed: Alex La Guma's *The Stone Country*. *Steadfast Arts and Humanities*, 2(1). Retrieved from <https://steadfastoa.com/index.php/sfah/article/view/9>

## Violence, the language of the oppressor and the oppressed: Alex La Guma's *The Stone Country* (1967)

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**Abstract**

The 19<sup>th</sup> century invasion and domination of Africa by Europe was informed by capitalism and the quest for economic domination. Thus, European colonization of Africa is better described as a surrogate of capitalism. In order to achieve economic domination in South Africa, colonial authority institutionalized different methods of discrimination and oppression thus racism became an important weapon for the colonization of the country. This paper sought to investigate the very element of violence that colonizers perpetrated on the natives of South Africa and to bring to the fore how the protest writer – Alex La Guma – skillfully uses his style of writing to protest the oppressive system. This was done by adopting a critical content analysis of the primary text; *The Stone Country*. However, other secondary materials were consulted to aid in the analysis of the text. It was discovered that the minority whites used violence in two main forms; political and social. This paper concluded that the marginalized were mainly maltreated not because they offended the whites but for the purpose of socio-political and socio-economic domination, they became victims of violent oppressions and hence recommended that such atrocities could only be fought against if more and more writers use their skill of writing to protest against such system.

**Keywords:** apartheid, La Guma, maltreatment, South Africa, violence

### Public Interest Statement

Even though protest literature which was geared towards colonial oppression is no more, this research brings to the fore the very element of oppression – violence – which in one way or the other has not existed even in this postcolonial era. Readers will however understand the very causes of the recent happenings in South Africa (Zenophobia). The traumatic effects of the violent nature of the white minority during the Apartheid period has metamorphosed into hatred hence, history serving as a rich source of understanding current situations. This research has aptly demonstrated to readers the various forms of violence that were perpetrated against the natives of South Africa.

### Introduction

African natives have experienced various kinds of domination by the whites or Europeans ever since they settled on the African continent. In South Africa, the natives suffered a system of separation and racial discrimination which was termed Apartheid. This system operated basically on segregationist policies against the non-whites in the country. According to Larson (2019), Apartheid was a system that “a tiny white majority ruled over an overwhelmingly black majority by denying them access to the political system, restricting their economic opportunities, amassing vast wealth on the backs of African labor, and forcing them to live in designated; tribal homelands’.” With this system, the enforcement of oppression was done through the use of widespread security and police force that characteristically used violence against black South Africans.

One major element that characterizes the apartheid system is violence. Violence becomes the main tool for oppression and the victims also respond with the same tool. According to the *World Health Organization* (WHO) (2002), violence is defined “as the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation” (p. 4). La Guma therefore artistically uses language to inform or persuade his readers to respond to or accept ‘the intentional use of physical force or power’ to manipulate one’s self, another person or a community.

A scholar and critic of African Literature, Charles E. Nnolim has explained that African Literature in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries reflect the times, engulfed as it were in slavery, colonialism, post-colonial struggles and disillusionment. Referring to the literature of the time as ‘a weeping literature’, Nnolim (2006) attempts an explanation thereof in this way:

Africans, having lost pride through slavery and colonialism, created a modern literature from the ashes of these past experiences. It became a literature with a strong sense of loss: loss of our dignity; loss of our culture and tradition; loss of our religion; loss of our land; loss of our very humanity. Is it any wonder that the titles of our most celebrated literary works highlighted these losses? Have we forgotten Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*; Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s *Weep Not, Child*; Alan Paton’s *Cry the Beloved Country*? And protest literature over apartheid further irrigated Africa’s tears because of man’s inhumanity to a people dubbed the wretched of the earth. (p. 1)

This explanation above shows that the literatures of this period were about the struggles of African societies and writers of that period sought to bring to light these struggles of the Africans. Alex La Guma who finds himself in this period also writes about his country, South Africa, in the apartheid era and the violence that characterized it.

In literature, violence is not always portrayed physically due to the fact that it is highly regarded as inappropriate to demonstrate or expose violence without any limits. The grouping of the society into aristocrats, bourgeoisie, and many others indicate that not all behaviours are considered to be appropriate depending on which class you are dealing with. Anifowose (1982) has observed that:

Violence has been used by groups seeking power, by groups holding power and by groups in the process of losing power. Violence has been pursued in the defense of order by the privileged, in the name of justice by the oppressed and in fear of displacement by the threatened. (p. 1)

This statement above clearly reveals to readers that anybody living in a politically unstable society is both a culprit and a victim of violence. Thus, violence becomes a part of society and rather reigns supreme in a society battling with power and oppression.

During this system of separation and racial distinction, the non-whites and disadvantaged natives of the South African land went through varying types of maltreatment – economic, social, psychological, political and cultural. Alex La Guma uses his novel, *The Stone Country* (1967) is an artistic response to overturn the reason of class discrimination and its accompanying violence. Alex La Guma in an interview with Robert Serumaga says: “(I write) . . . to expose the situation with a view of changing peoples’ ideas or their acceptance of ideas, so that they can move forward and take down the barriers that exist between the different peoples” (Duerden and Pieterse, 1972, p. 91). This is to say that La Guma was passionate about the liberation of his people from the oppression of the minority white in South Africa.

The imprisonment of George Adams and Jefferson Mpolo, the two political activists in the novel, takes place against the background of “the Emergency” (p. 20). The ‘winds of change’ that were blowing on the African continent in the 1960s, the decade of decolonization, provided the optimism that underpins the political action in the novel.

Pathetically, the South African situation witnessed the culmination of racism into an open apartheid system and ultimately into the nagging apartheid regime. To enrich themselves and to impoverish the South Africans, the racists employed class structure and alienation as surrogates of racism. All of these are indices of the South African colonial experience.

As a reaction, the South Africans themselves evolved diverse revolutionary measures to implement the decolonization phenomena. Such revolutionary measures which are anti-racist and anti-apartheid are what this paper finds in La Guma’s characters in *The Stone Country*. In this novel, La Guma presents the reduction of South Africa into a prison setting where colour bar, class dichotomy and segregation of all sorts are predominant. The author presents prison as a metaphor to readers. This is to say that the South African community has been aptly compared to the violence and the various hardships that exist inside the prison walls. As evidence, La Guma dedicates this novel to ‘the daily average 70,351 prisoners in South African gaols in 1964’. (Guma, 1967, p. 6)

Moreover, most South African novelists attempt to diagnose the social, moral, psychological and economic problems of the country through the aesthetics of the prison. Such writers include; Herman Charles Bosman, Ruth First, Alan Paton, Dennis Brutus and Lewis Nkosi. This is attested by Ogunjimi (1988) who opines that South African natives are smothered in the dark ocean of a “dungeon wall and wave-like living grave” (p. 78). The gloomy situation in the novel is similar to that of Zwelonke’s *Robben Island* (1973). In this novel like other novels which treat prison aesthetic, the picture of the “twentieth century man forced back to the cave” (Ogunjimi, 1988, p. 78) is succinctly addressed. In the prison,

human beings are victimized, intimidated and subjected to various oppressive gangrenes of the oppressing classes. In actual fact, the oppressed classes in the country are denied the freedom pronounced by man and Nature. We are presented with a social formation where the human psyche, nerves and physique are mutilated. As his works are subjected to censorship, the South African artist becomes a prisoner in his homeland.

In prison literature, the prisoner is created to be engaged in strenuous, tedious and hard labour under the strict supervision of the well-armed prison guards. In the novel, the white guards keep order, control, bully and scourge and brutalize the blacks even on their own soil. Hence, more than any other literary work in South African literature where colonialism is presented, the apartheid and oppressive situations in the novel are worse. This is why Coetzee opines that the novel is “a microcosm of the South African society” (Coetzee, 1974, p. 17).

### **Violence as Language**

Narratively, the main sequence of events covers the events of two days in the prison. George Adams being the major character is arrested for belonging to ‘illegal organizations’ and is kept in remand section of the prison. He asserts his right to have blankets and a mug as a part of the prison rules. The prison warder, Fatso, becomes upset about the challenge posed to his authority by the rebellious prisoner. As a result, he indirectly hints to his henchman Butcherboy Williams to ‘take care’ of him. Adams is saved from Butcherboy by Yousef the Turk, a lanky gentleman-gangster who holds the political prisoners as a cut above the ordinary criminals. The second part of the novel deals with George Adams’ imprisonment in the isolation block as a punishment for insubordination. His cell-mate, The Casbah Kid, is condemned to death for murder. Adams wins the affection of the inmates due to his benevolent act of sharing his food with them. He is also able to instill a sense of optimism in the prisoners.

Moreover, Adams’ desire for change arises out of his distaste for the conditions prevailing both outside and inside the prison. He does not have any regrets about the political activity that leads to his imprisonment. He contemplates:

You did what you decided was the right thing, and then accepted the consequences. He had gone to meetings and had listened to the speeches, had read a little, and came to the conclusion that what had been said was right. He thought [...] there’s a limit to being kicked in the backside [...] (p. 74).

Adams bravely tries to transform the conditions in the prison by managing to alter the state of minds of his prison mates. He challenges the authority that Fatso, the warder, exercises over the inmates of the prison. Even though he fails to rally round the prisoners into going on strike for food, Adams manages to win the sympathy of other prisoners for political detainees like himself. He succeeds in his attempt to change the attitudes of some of the prisoners by sharing the goodies that he receives from well-wishers outside the prison.

Essentially, *The Stone Country* expresses various kinds of violence which for the sake of this paper have been categorized into two forms: political violence and social violence. There is no doubt that politics cannot be separated from the social lives of the people and that one may deem it appropriate to discuss the violence in this novel as a socio-political kind of violence. But for the sake of this study, we would want to separate politics from the social lives of the people in order for readers to understand clearly how the indigenous people suffered oppression perpetrated against them by the Settlers.

To begin with, political violence is the form of violence that pertains to the political

environment of a particular country. This type of violence can be identified in the novel. A critical look at the title of the novel will help in the development of the discussion of political violence. *The Stone Country* suggests to readers a prison which has its walls made of stones. Symbolically, stone as painted by La Guma in the novel, probably indicates unresponsiveness and goes on to outline how the apartheid system wears-out the citizens to their shadow of history. In addition to this, it also represents intimidation, apprehension, famine and death where there is typically no hope of having light, water and food. It is a nation of emptiness and drought where people are bound to suffer.

Evidently, the author through his major character in the novel, George Adams makes it clear to readers that the country in which they are living is a stone country. As the narrator informs us:

. . . He could hear the guards impatient snapping, and he dried himself as best he could with his towel, and then pulled on his trousers. The other newcomers were already filing out through the gate into the square, and George Adams, jerking on his shoes, irritably cursed the guard, cursed the jail, cursed the whole country that was like a big stone prison, anyway. (p.58).

The simile at the end of the paragraph, 'like a big stone prison', is suggestive of the sufferings of the people in the country. The whole country is being compared to a prison made of stone indicating that everybody is entangled in oppression as a prisoner. There is no doubt then that the title of the novel *The Stone Country*, is suitable because people in the country are really living in a stone country.

However, it is not only the title of the novel that depicts violence but also the dedication. The novel's dedication indicates the theme of violence in an oppressed nation. *The Stone Country* is "dedicated to the daily average of seventy thousand, three hundred and fifty-one (70,351) prisoners in South African gaols in 1964". South Africans living in the apartheid era resisted oppression and this resulted in as many as seventy thousand, three hundred and fifty-one of them imprisoned daily for their political ideologies. People resort to violent acts as a revolutionary measure to fight the perpetrators of oppression in the country.

Politically, some characters in the novel resist the oppression of the white and also react violently against the oppressors. The writer employs the technique of flashback to reveal to readers what heralds the apprehension of George Adams. This arrest is made possible by his decision to battle out with the ruling government to upturn the political system of the country. George Adams, Jefferson Mpolo, and many other committed members make and distribute political pamphlets:

Adams lighted a cigarette and thought of the bundles of illegal leaflets on the back seat of the car. He was a little apprehensive about them, and wished that they had done with the delivery, that the bundles were out of their hands and that they could both go home. He was not scared, he told himself, but you always felt this way when you had to travel distances with this kind of thing. (p. 46/47).

The word 'illegal' which has been used as an adjective to modify 'leaflets' reveals to readers the extent to which these political activists go in order to fight oppression. This clearly indicates that what these people are doing is something against the law. This distribution is done in the dark in order to escape the interrogations of the guards. One can glean from this quotation that the distributors of the leaflets especially the leader, George Adams, do not in

particular fear their apprehension but rather the thought of fear is a constituent of the task they perform – the delivery of the leaflets.

La Guma chooses a strong character in the person of George Adams to fight the oppression of blacks in the 'stone country'. George Adams, the protagonist of the novel, epitomises unity of purpose, moral strength and solidarity in transcending cruelty and injustice. Adams' moral strength and character in appealing to fellow prison mates enables him to gain their support and solidarity to protest against apartheid. It is on this score that George Adams eventually wins the respect of most of the inmates, who look up to him as a source of inspiration and moral fortitude. Adams winning the respect as well as solidarity of fellow prisoners is made possible by mass education of the inmates through the distribution of liberation leaflets, raising money for political struggles and attending and speaking at political forums in the cell. Though a political prisoner, George Adams' appeal to the moral courage of the inmates as well as his instilling of revolutionary consciousness into the prisoners to challenge the apartheid regime is evident here:

. . . You were on the side of the mouse, of all the mice, George Adams thought. The little men who get kicked in the backside all time. You got punched and beaten like the mouse, and you had to duck and dodge to avoid the claws and fangs. Even a mouse turns, someday . . . Okay. But he was glad the mouse had won out eventually, had managed to escape the slashing claws. You were on the side of the little animals, weak and the timid who spent all their lives dodging and ducking. (p. 127/128)

From this passage, words like 'kicked', 'punched', and 'beaten' are suggestive of the violent actions carried out against the non-white in this political environment. These action verbs bring to bear the atrocities perpetrated against the indigenous people of South Africa. The non-white South African as compared to the mouse here have to suffer many forms of violent actions. He is 'kicked in the backside all the time' and 'punched and beaten like the mouse.' Readers are made conscious of the oppression that the non-white South African goes through. The words 'claws' and 'fangs' are used as symbols of oppression. 'Claws' which are the sharp nails of the cat and 'fangs' being the canine teeth of an animal or the venomous teeth of a snake represent the White's oppressive nature. These words help us to understand that the Whites are very barbaric when it comes to dealing with their non-white counterparts – they will pounce on you with their 'claws' and 'fangs' in an attempt to devour you. They use their 'claws' and 'fangs' to torment and maltreat the non-white to destroy their very human nature and consequently they spend 'all their lives dodging and ducking.' This boldness and fervour of appealing to the moral courage of the inmates to change an unfair system that is brought about by revolutionary consciousness perpetuated by Adams' revolutionary political struggle shows that "no power on earth can stop an oppressed people, determined to win their freedom" (Mandela, 1967, p. 119).

Besides, another aspect of political violence that is presented to us in *The Stone Country* is the dehumanization of the people especially those within the prison walls. La Guma while expertly using the parameters of language to skillfully bring across his message reinforces that message by the use of carefully selected imagery. This is exemplified in the cat and mouse chase as shown in the following lines. The cat represents the white oppressors while the mouse represents the oppressed blacks/non-whites.

The prison cat had caught a mouse and was in the process of worrying it to

death before devouring it.

The mouse, small and grey, had no intention of being devoured, but there, in the hot glare of the sun that practically blinded it, and dizzy from the blows it had received from the cat's great paw, there seemed little hope. Standing splay-legged in the sunlight, it now watched the great blur that was the cat. The tiny lungs of the mouse panted as it strained for breath. It stood with its bluntly-pointed head up, ears cocked and tail limp on the hot asphalt, the dusty-grey body throbbing.

Suddenly, it attempted to dash sideways, the body darting through the sunlight, but the cat clubbed it casually and it spun away and then tumbled over and over, and the cat followed it swiftly, fur rippling and tail swishing, and clubbed it again with the balled paw.

...

The cat lay on its belly, forepaw extended, watching the dazed mouse with cruel, glowing, yellow-green eyes . . . The head of the mouse twitched, darting from side to side, looking for refuge . . . (p. 124/125)

This dramatic presentation made of the cat and the mouse is something really interesting and informs us about the non-white's effort to escape the white's oppression. Words like 'worrying', 'devouring', 'clubbed', 'tumbled', 'rippling', 'swishing', 'watching', 'trapped', 'forepaws', 'horrid', 'wounded', 'crouched' and 'cruel' are suggestive of the white oppressors' ways of inflicting pain on the indigenous people. The whites also show different levels and kinds of violence depicting both elements of situation and of character. The very first paragraph of this passage is an indication of the white oppressors' actions, not to just 'devour' the oppressed but rather 'worry' them to death before 'devouring' them.

In contrast to this, words like 'blinded', 'dizzy', 'panted', 'strained', 'throbbing', 'dash', 'dazed', 'darting' and 'refuge' are the representation of the oppressed black. Because the oppressed 'had no intention of being devoured' or crushed, he has to seek for shelter as a means of 'refuge'. This is to tell readers that the African knows that if he must survive, he must 'attempt to dash sideways' to seek 'refuge' while the cat 'tumble over and over, following it, its fur rippling and tail swishing'. The choice of words used in this dramatic display by the mouse and cat is a vivid demonstration of how violence is perpetrated against the blacks by the white oppressors.

In this depiction of the cat and mouse, La Guma presents to us a pattern, an organized structure, of words, of punctuation marks, of lengths of paragraphs—all of which are used deliberately to underline both the literal and symbolic meanings of violent actions as they emanate from the South African situation.

The running away of the mouse probably signifies the desperate struggle for survival by the non-whites as seen in this passage:

The cat spun round; too late. The time taken to turn by the cat gave the mouse a few seconds headway, and it was off, hurtling across the square again. Something huge and shiny—it was the boot of a guard—tried to block its passage, but it swerved skillfully, and its tiny muscles worked desperately, and it headed into the shade.

The cat was a few inches behind it, but it swerved again and the blurred, dark hole of a drain-pipe loomed somewhere to its right, seen out of the corner of one pain-wracked eye. The mouse dodged a splashing, sabred paw by a hair's

breadth, and gained the entrance to the hole.

The paw struck again, just as the mouse dashed in, raking the slender tail, but the mouse was gone, and outside the spectators were chuckling over disappointment of the cat as it crouched waiting at the hole.

Inside, in the cool, familiar darkness, the mouse lay panting to regain its breath.  
(p. 126/127)

The passage above signals to readers the violent means that the white oppressors use in exploiting and dehumanizing the non-white race. La Guma as a revolutionary writer creates an avenue for the mouse to escape. He reveals to readers through his choice of words the necessity to escape aggressively or violently if need be from such violent oppression. The adverb 'skillfully' describing the verb 'swerved' clearly suggests the ways in which the oppressed should use in escaping the oppressive nature of the whites. The non-whites, particularly the blacks and the 'coloured' must act swiftly when it comes to escaping the exploitations of the whites. The mouse being blocked 'by the boot of a guard' indicates that even the act of escape is not easy. An attempt to escape might be hindered by a third force but as exhibited by the mouse, one has to act intelligently to escape such oppression and dehumanization. This is to inform readers that when it comes to escaping the oppression of the white man, it takes smartness and wisdom.

Again, the political division of the country is revealed to readers when George and his colleague, Jefferson, are captured by detectives during their night work of distribution. Upon seeing George and his counterparts, the guard says: "[. . .] 'George-ovski. Why isn't your name George-ovski. You buggers should be in - - - Russia. Not here.'" (p.49) The reference to Russia clarifies to readers the political ideology of George and his colleagues. The Russians are particularly noted for their communist ideology and for the detective to compare George to a Russian is apt. According to the Centre for European Studies, Communism "is a political ideology and type of government in which the state owns the major resources in a society...". The communist is of the view that the society owns everything and that everyone shares the benefits of labor equally. Earlier, George Adams had been referred to as a communist by the prison warder: "'Another - - - Communist,' . . . 'This - - - jail is getting full of - - - Communists.'" (p.24) These two statements of mockery validate why the blacks or the coloured living in South Africa at the time of apartheid are regarded as inferior beings to the whites. The adjective 'Another' tells readers that there have been several other people who are firmly resisting manipulation by the whites. That the benefits of the country should not be enjoyed only by the people in power but by all and especially the natives of the land is the ideology that George Adams and his fellows hold.

Notwithstanding these forms of violence – political – the novel brings to the fore and discusses social violence. As stated earlier, the title of the novel chronicles a continuation of the truth about disparity in social relations and also presents particularly to readers a dose of what La Guma experienced himself as a prisoner. People go through different forms of social violence in apartheid South Africa and these forms of cruelty, antagonism and brutality that permeate the South African society are evidenced in the novel. For instance, in the passage below:

The heat in the cell was solid . . . you could reach out in front of your face grab a handful of heat, fling it at the wall and it would stick. With over forty prisoners locked up in the middle of summer, the smell of sweat was heavy and cloying as the smell of death. The heat seemed packed in between the bodies of the



men, like layers of cotton wool, like a thick sauce which moistened a human salad of accused petty thieves, gangsters, rapists, burglars, thugs, brawlers, dope peddlers, few of them strangers to the cells, many already depraved and several old and abandoned sucking hopelessly at the bitter, disintegrating butt-end of life. (p. 80/81)

The similarity between the prison and the outside world as breeding grounds for apartheid policies is well documented in *The Stone Country*. But at variance with this obnoxious political and socio-economic system, lies the message of La Guma's craft. He artistically illustrates with language the persisting violence in the unjust social structure of apartheid South Africa.

The 'heat' as used in the passage above is a symbol of oppression and from the sentence 'The heat in the cell was solid', one can understand that the oppression that exists in the cell is nothing small but 'solid'. 'Heat' is an abstract noun and to modify it as being 'solid' is to objectify it, making it so intense as to seem palpable. 'Heat' therefore becomes an objectifying image and this same 'heat' is also felt by those outside the cells. They are also prisoners of conscience or they are psychologically imprisoned and they also experience this same heat – 'solid'. The activities being compared to the 'heat' indicate how violently people have lived outside the walls of the prison. Though the writer uses the adjective 'accused' to qualify the nouns, 'petty thieves', 'gangsters', 'rapists', 'burglars', 'thugs', 'brawlers', 'dope peddlers', yet there is no doubt that probably some prisoners could have indulged in such nefarious activities. Hence, indicating the social lives of many black people living in the country at the time of apartheid. Due to the injustice that exists in the socio-economic environment of the apartheid South Africa, people resort to socially violent lives in order to survive in the world of oppression such as that of apartheid South Africa.

What is more, for the narrator to say that: 'you could reach out in front of your face grab a handful of heat, fling it at the wall and it would stick' (p.81) is something that cannot be overlooked. This buttresses the objectification of 'heat'. Readers are given the indication that the condition which the prisoners are going through is absurd. The visual imagery in this clause highlights the inhumane environment that the prisoners live in. They are packed into the prison cells like sardines hence the excessive heat produced. Yet, the question still remains; are they all really criminals?

Furthermore, the world of the non-whites in the country is shrouded in violence and this is evidenced in the passage below:

Guards and prisons, everybody, were the enforced inhabitants of another country, another world. This was a world without beauty; a lunar barrenness of stone and steel and locked doors. In this world no trees grew, and the only shade was found in the shadow of its cliffs of walls, the only perfume it knew came from night-soil buckets and drains. In the summer it broiled, and it chattered in the winter, and the only music the regulations allowed was composed out of the slap-slap of the bare feet, the grinding of boots, counterpointed by shouted orders, the slam of doors and the tintinnabulation of heavy keys. Anything else smacked of rebellion. (p.18)

Metaphorically, South Africa under apartheid is a prison and this is the kind of world that the natives in the country live in – a world of dejection where there is no place to find solace. This world is absolutely lifeless as stated in the passage, 'a world without beauty; a lunar barrenness of stone and steel and locked doors. In this world no trees grew'. Scientifically,

it is known that trees provide the human race with oxygen which is very essential as regards respiration in humans. The carbon dioxide that is a by-product of human respiration is used by plants for the production of food. This same food produced by the plants is consumed by humans. This cycle therefore becomes very necessary for human life and so the absence of trees connotes lifelessness – the atmosphere is choked with carbon dioxide and food as a basic need will not be realized. Here, one is made aware of the hopelessness that has engulfed the people. The word ‘barrenness’ brings to the fore the emptiness and the lifelessness of the people in the country who are all classified in one way or the other as prisoners. The sense of smell is also affected in that ‘the only perfume it knew came from night-soil buckets and drains.’ This is indicative of the fact that the environment in which the people live is engulfed by filth and stench, the stench emanating from their own faeces and sweat.

More so, music as we know is the food for the soul and is usually soothing but the music heard by the prisoners within the prison walls is mere noise, a cacophony of ugly sounds. The irony here reveals the disturbances that the auditory nerves of the prisoners go through. Their sense of hearing is perturbed with noises from ‘the slap-slap of the bare feet, the grinding of boots, counterpointed by shouted orders, the slam of doors and the tintinnabulation of heavy keys.’ Therefore, the prisoners resort to singing hymnals in the absence of the guards to feed their hungry souls and relax their disturbed auditory nerves. The last sentence of the passage above: ‘Anything else smacked of rebellion’ is an exact conclusion for the paragraph in the sense that one has to admit that it is only through a rebellious attitude that one can survive in such a world of ‘barrenness’. This is an instance of dehumanization in its worst form.

This again has been exemplified by Oswald Mtshali in his “Nightfall in Soweto”. He describes the devastating conditions that the black native finds himself in. The persona bemoans about his conditions. He refers to himself as ‘victim’ and ‘prey’. The violent nature of the oppressor makes him refer to him (oppressor) as ‘beast’. He further captures the oppressor’s eagerness to cause harm: “I tremble at his crunching footsteps,/I quake at his deafening knock at the door./“Open up!” he barks like a rabin dog thirsty for my blood.” This is no different from what pertains in this *The Stone Country*.

Given then the complex situation of violence in its different effects in South African society, Alex La Guma as a writer, finds appropriate ways to express the harsh realities and the exactness of the situation. His readers enjoy not only his language but also the import of his message.

## Conclusion

With short and snappy descriptions and picturesque portrayals, La Guma has enlightened readers on the various forms of violence which denigrate the non-white South African. In this novel as in all his other novels, he achieves the same fine touch of skillful use of his style to protest against apartheid. *The Stone Country* portrays this kind of destructive image of violence. He shows exactly how South African society is in his works. There is no subtle description of flowers, romance, and enjoyment. He does not portray any relaxed atmosphere because there is none. He faces the business of telling the world what obtained in South Africa just like some other South African writers did – Peter Abrahams, Bessie Head, Dennis Brutus, Arthur Nortje, to mention but a few. From the discussion, this paper has been able to unravel the dark side of the apartheid regime which is characterized predominately by violent actions in the political and social lives of the non-whites. Readers are therefore made aware of the very nature of violent actions that existed during the apartheid era. This paper again establishes that violence is the only means that oppressed society or people can use to

react to violent oppression hence the only language spoken by both the Oppressor and the Oppressed. It is therefore recommended that as most writers including La Guma have done, writers of today can use their skill of writing to react against any oppressive system that seeks to swallow one's or a society's freedom.

**Funding:** The author has received no funding (internal or external) in support of this paper.

**Conflicts of interest:** The author declares no conflicts of interest.

**Disclaimer Statement:** This research work is one that was conducted by the author and apart from the references cited, all other parts of the content remains the author's own research input.

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