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# **Particip'Action**

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01BP 4317 Lomé – Togo

Tél. : 00228 90 25 70 00/99 47 14 14

E-mail : [participaction1@gmail.com](mailto:participaction1@gmail.com)

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## **LIGNE EDITORIALE DE PARTICIP'ACTION**

**Particip'Action** est une revue scientifique. Les textes que nous acceptons en français, anglais, allemand ou en espagnol sont sélectionnés par le comité scientifique et de lecture en raison de leur originalité, des intérêts qu'ils présentent aux plans africain et international et de leur rigueur scientifique. Les articles que notre revue publie doivent respecter les normes éditoriales suivantes :

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Un titre qui indique clairement le sujet de l'article, n'excédant pas 25 mots.

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Le prénom et le nom de ou des auteurs (es)

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Une courte présentation en note de bas de page des auteurs (es) ne devant pas dépasser 100 mots par auteur. On doit y retrouver obligatoirement le nom de l'auteur, le nom de l'institution d'origine, le statut professionnel et l'organisation dont il relève, et enfin, les adresses de courrier électronique du ou des auteurs. L'auteur peut aussi énumérer ses principaux champs de recherche et ses principales publications. La revue ne s'engage toutefois pas à diffuser tous ces éléments.

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Un résumé de l'article ne doit pas dépasser 160 mots. Le résumé doit être à la fois en français et en anglais (police Times new roman, taille 12, interligne 1,15).

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Une liste de cinq mots clés maximum décrivant l'objet de l'article.

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-La structure d'un article, doit être conforme aux règles de rédaction scientifique, selon que l'article est une contribution théorique ou résulte d'une recherche de terrain.

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Introduction (justification du sujet, problématique, hypothèses/objectifs scientifiques, approche), Développement articulé, Conclusion, Bibliographie.

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Titre,

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Résumé en français. Mots-clés, Abstract, Keywords,

Introduction, Méthodologie, Résultats et Discussion, Conclusion, Bibliographie.

Par exemple : Les articles conformes aux normes de présentation, doivent contenir les rubriques suivantes : introduction, problématique de l'étude, méthodologie adoptée, résultats de la recherche, perspectives pour recherche, conclusions, références bibliographiques.

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- A l'exception de l'introduction, de la conclusion, de la bibliographie, les articulations d'un article doivent être titrées, et numérotées par des chiffres (**exemples : 1. ; 1.1.; 1.2; 2. ; 2.2. ; 2.2.1 ; 2.2.2. ; 3. ; etc.**).

Les passages cités sont présentés en romain et entre guillemets. Lorsque la phrase citant et la citation dépassent trois lignes, il faut aller à la ligne, pour présenter la citation (interligne 1) en romain et en retrait, en diminuant la taille de police d'un point. Insérer la pagination et ne pas insérer d'information autre que le numéro de page dans l'en-tête et éviter les pieds de page.

Les figures et les tableaux doivent être intégrés au texte et présentés avec des marges d'au moins six centimètres à droite et à gauche. Les caractères dans ces figures et tableaux doivent aussi être en Times 12. Figures et tableaux doivent avoir chacun(e) un titre.

Les citations dans le corps du texte doivent être indiquées par un retrait avec tabulation 1 cm et le texte mis en taille 11.

Les références de citations sont intégrées au texte citant, selon les cas, de la façon suivante :

- (Initiale (s) du Prénom ou des Prénoms de l'auteur. Nom de l'Auteur, année de publication, pages citées) ; - Initiale (s) du Prénom ou des Prénoms de l'auteur. Nom de l'Auteur (année de publication, pages citées). Exemples :

- En effet, le but poursuivi par **M. Ascher (1998, p. 223)**, est « d'élargir l'histoire des mathématiques de telle sorte qu'elle acquière une perspective multiculturelle et globale (...), d'accroître le domaine des mathématiques : alors qu'elle s'est pour l'essentiel occupée du groupe professionnel occidental que l'on appelle les mathématiciens (...) ».

- Pour dire plus amplement ce qu'est cette capacité de la société civile, qui dans son déploiement effectif, atteste qu'elle peut porter le développement et l'histoire, S. B. Diagne (1991, p. 2) écrit :

Qu'on ne s'y trompe pas : de toute manière, les populations ont toujours su opposer à la philosophie de l'encadrement et à son volontarisme leurs propres stratégies de contournements. Celles-là, par exemple, sont lisibles dans le dynamisme, ou à tout le moins, dans la créativité dont sait preuve ce que l'on désigne sous le nom de secteur informel et à qui il faudra donner l'appellation positive d'économie populaire.

- Le philosophe ivoirien a raison, dans une certaine mesure, de lire, dans ce choc déstabilisateur, le processus du sous-développement. Ainsi qu'il le dit :

le processus du sous-développement résultant de ce choc est vécu concrètement par les populations concernées comme une crise globale : crise socio-économique (exploitation brutale, chômage permanent, exode accéléré et douloureux), mais aussi crise socio-culturelle et de civilisation traduisant une impréparation sociohistorique et une inadaptation des cultures et des comportements humains aux formes de vie imposées par les technologies étrangères. (S. Diakité, 1985, p. 105).

Pour les articles de deux ou trois auteurs, noter les initiales des prénoms, les noms et suivis de l'année (J. Batee et D. Maate, 2004 ou K. Moote, A. Pooul et E. Polim, 2000). Pour les articles ou ouvrages collectifs de plus de trois auteurs noter les initiales des prénoms, le nom du premier auteur et la mention "et al" (F. Loom et al, 2003). Lorsque plusieurs références sont utilisées pour la même information, celles-ci doivent être mises en ordre chronologique (R. Gool, 1998 et M. Goti, 2006).

**Les sources historiques, les références** d'informations orales et les notes explicatives sont numérotées en série continue et présentées en bas de page.

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Dans la zone titre, le titre d'un article est présenté en romain et entre guillemets, celui d'un ouvrage, d'un mémoire ou d'une thèse, d'un rapport, d'une revue ou d'un journal est présenté en italique. Dans la zone Editeur, on indique la Maison d'édition (pour un ouvrage), le Nom et le numéro/volume de la revue (pour un article). Au cas où un ouvrage est une traduction et/ou une réédition, il faut préciser après le titre le nom du traducteur et/ou l'édition (ex : 2<sup>nd</sup>e éd.).

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AMIN Samir, 1996, Les défis de la mondialisation, Paris, Le Harmattan.

AUDARD Cathérine, 2009, Qu'est-ce que le libéralisme ? Ethique, politique, société, Paris, Gallimard.

BERGER Gaston, 1967, L'homme moderne et son éducation, Paris, PUF.

DIAGNE Souleymane Bachir, 2003, « Islam et philosophie. Leçons d'une rencontre », Diogène, 202, p. 145-151.

DIAKITE Sidiki, 1985, Violence technologique et développement. La question africaine du développement, Paris, L'Harmattan.

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NB2 : La quête philosophique centrale de la revue **Particip'Action** reste: **Fluidité identitaire et construction du changement: approches pluri-et/ou transdisciplinaires.**

Les auteurs qui souhaitent se faire publier dans nos colonnes sont priés d'avoir cette philosophie comme fil directeur de leur réflexion.

La Rédaction

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## REVISITING RACIAL LEXIS IN PETER ABRAHAMS' *TELL FREEDOM*

Fougnigué Madou YEO\*

### Abstract

This article intends to show how the racial discourse has exacerbated tension in an already hostile environment in South Africa. It proceeds from the assumption that language is a very important communication tool in human society because of its double potentiality to build or destroy social cohesion. Human beings have made use of it in different contexts, either rightly or wrongly. Unfortunately, it is often used to intensify crises, throwing society in disarray. A literary exploration of Peter Abrahams' autobiographical novel, *Tell Freedom* may be very enlightening. The autobiography is permeated with words that unveil a pejorative connotation. White people use words to belittle black people. Thus, through its use, language contributes to exacerbating antagonism in society. If individuals controls what they say, there could be understanding in society. Through a psychoanalytical approach, the analysis brings to light the racial lexicon that reveals the clear desire for Western supremacy.

**Keywords:** lexis-context-crisis-belittle-antagonism

### Résumé

Le présent article se propose de montrer comment le discours racial a exacerbé les tensions dans un environnement déjà hostile en Afrique du Sud. Il part de l'hypothèse que la langue est, de par sa double potentialité à construire ou à détruire la cohésion sociale, un outil de communication très important dans la société humaine. Les hommes l'ont utilisé dans différents contextes, soit en bien ou mal. Malheureusement, elle est souvent utilisée pour intensifier les crises, jetant la société dans le désarroi. L'exploration littéraire de l'œuvre autobiographique *Tell Freedom* de Peter Abrahams nous en donne une édifiante illustration. L'autobiographie est inondée de mots ayant une connotation péjorative. Les blancs emploient des vocables pour rabaisser les noirs. Ainsi, par son usage le langage contribue-t-il à exacerber les antagonismes dans la société. Si les individus contrôlent leurs propos, il pourrait y avoir une entente dans la société. A travers l'approche

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\*Université Alassane Ouattara (Côte d'Ivoire) ; E-mail : ymadou@gmail.com

psychanalytique, l'analyse met en lumière les mots du racisme qui traduisent la suprématie de l'occident.

**Mots-clés :** lexique-contexte-crise-rabaisser-antagonisme

### **Introduction**

Particular contexts have generated a type of words that have been integrated in everyday language given their steady usage. It is the case of the racial context which engenders some words that white people use to talk to black people. These words bear meanings that tend to belittle an individual or a whole community because they are offending. In return, black people have theirs that may not possess the same load in terms of emotion. In the colonial context, westerners have also used words to mark the difference with colonized people. Black activists like Frantz Fanon have denounced in their writings the idea that blacks are not as mature as westerners. He has protested against Western discourse in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1986) that tends to denigrate oppressed people. In the same perspective, Chinua Achebe in *There Was a Country* (2012) lays stress on the language used by Nigerians to stigmatize Igbos. The language is visibly offending and the use of it results in a conflict.

In *Tell Freedom*, Peter Abrahams exposes words that pervade Westerners and discriminated people's languages. These words reveal the racial environment that prevails in the country. They clearly highlight the antagonism between culturally different communities. The existence of these words in daily language seems to be intentional. The analysis of racial lexical items points out that words may increase tension in a society in crisis. What words do Westerners use to frustrate the people living in the margin of society? Why do oppressed individuals not retaliate when faced with the words? What is the purpose for Westerners to integrate these vocabulary items in their language?

This article purports to analyse Abrahams' Tell Freedom with the intention of exploring the different lexical items from both sides and point out to what extent language can exacerbate tensions. If people make use of certain words in language, they can cause great frustration that may turn into conflicts. The Freudian psychoanalysis approach is relevant to conduct this investigation in that it helps to reveal the hidden agenda of the oppressor in the conflicting context. Next, it accounts for the reaction of the person being discriminated against in the context of a trauma. Westerners want to articulate their alleged supremacy over black people and keep them in a perpetual subordinate position. The examination of the lexical items is a two part development. The first part intends to unfold the significance of the racial words used either by the Westerner and the oppressed person. The second part of the analysis focuses on the articulation of a certain intention through the use of these particular words.

### **1. The significant semantics of the racial words.**

Tell Freedom underlines words in relation to the racism which permeates the Western language so that one can clearly perceive the Westerner's intention. The metaphorical language sheds light on the objective that the white people want to reach at all cost. In contrast, the language of the black individuals is visibly very poor certainly on account of their weak position in the whole context. It reveals too much respect toward the oppressor. It is then the opposition of two languages compelled to share the same spatial indication.

#### **1.1. The white man's language of frustration**

The exploration of Tell Freedom unveils words which make reference to the 'other'. The oppressor has enriched his language with words which have a strong relation with the particular context. These words have intentionally been created to mark the difference between the

Westerner and the black person. That is why both individuals cannot team up or go to the same venues. The divide can be perceived in Abrahams' literary work (130) in the following sentence: "RESERVED FOR EUROPEANS ONLY". It is conspicuous that an African can never be equal to a European. As a matter of fact, the white people have never considered blacks as human beings. The racial discourse takes root in the assumption that African societies are deprived of any societal organization.

Moreover, the oppressors strongly believe that they are the only people who have civilization and culture. Therefore, the so-called uncivilized communities' members are looked down upon and regarded as savage people. These "uncivilized people" are denied human qualities, as evidenced by Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1898). Conrad's book perfectly illustrates the Westerner's discourse of non-Europeans' lack of humanism. Non-Europeans in general, and particularly Blacks are compared to animals. Some troubling resemblances of wild animals in the 'Other's physical appearance are depicted by Europeans. It is not rare to see the oppressor calling the oppressed one a monkey. The expansion and current use of the word even drive other Blacks to fall into prejudices and stereotypes against their own race. Black Caribbeans have called Africans 'monkey chaser' to certainly put stress on the so-called savage nature of black Africans. In *Tell Freedom* (30), the narrator learns his comparison with animal from a white boy in the unfriendly conversation that follows:

‘You’re a liard !’I screamed it.  
The foremost boy pointed at me  
‘An ugly black baboon.’

From this dialogue, it follows that the black person's image is associated with animal attributes. Detractors of the black race believe that Blacks do not have any conscience that may enable them to tell good from evil. This conception of black people looking like animals still prevails in modern society. Africans living and working in the Western world are victims of

mockeries in relation to their racial origin. Football players of African origins sometimes complain about deeds and words that denote discrimination. The American society is a case in point in the sense that African-Americans undergo inhuman treatment in relation to their racial origin

In addition to words that portray all black individuals, irrespective of their origins in terms of national belonging and social class, there exist other more offending words that permeate the Westerner's language. As the word 'negro' or 'nigger' is used for all Blacks, the South African context reveals many words which belittle black South Africans. The white oppressor always regards all black people as little boys and girls. The black person cannot be taken for an adult regardless of his/her age or education. For the Westerner, a black individual is born a child and remains one. In his conception, an African always exhibits a childish behaviour. Therefore, he is not mature and responsible enough to manage his own life and therefore recalls the Freudian theory on new-born babies.

H. Bertens (2001, p. 158) states: "Everything radiates from the centre, that is the baby itself, and is geared toward fulfilling its boundless desires (for breastfeeding for instance.)"

The discriminated individual is obviously compared to the baby who needs assistance. This is substantiated by Peter Abrahams in *Tell Freedom* (142). In this connection, one can read on the fake 'pass' delivered to Jim the following childish qualification. It reads: "PLEASE PASS NATIVE BOY JIM WHO IS MY EMPLOY." In the Western understanding, an African never grows up and becomes an adult later on like his Western counterpart. Thus, it is the long-standing inferiority of non-whites which the writer underlines through the use of the substantive 'boy'. The rationale behind the western conception of the word goes against the natural laws of biology and unfolds the incongruity of the racial discourse. Unfortunately, the developed prejudices still exist nowadays. In fact, one can view the strong connection

Africa has with the Western world regarding African issues. African leaders keep on perceiving the Western world as the centre. That is why writers and intellectuals never cease to question that continual assistance known as neo-colonialism.

In the autobiographical novel, the word 'Kaffir' exists in the racial discourse as well. It is a commonly used word by white people in the South African racial context. It implies that the racial discourse intends to denigrate and deprive the 'Other' of all humanism. In the white South African's language, one can put emphasis on the word 'Kaffir' which refers to the religious status of an individual. Indeed, in Arab countries the word is used to designate somebody who does not believe in God. Therefore, it draws a line between a believer (the Westerner) and a pagan (The black man). The lexical item indisputably makes reference to individuals belonging to the discriminated community. The narrator sheds light on the word in the autobiography. In the context of racism in his country, Abrahams (40) reports the following conversation:

'He looks like a kaffir'

'Don't you call my brother a kaffir!' Maggie snapped

Clearly, the word has a negative connotation in that it offends the black person, hence the strong reaction that the character expresses. The white people, however, are not the only component of the population that integrate racial words in their language. Blacks also have their own that they use whenever they think appropriate.

From the forgoing observations, it ensues that the white South African's language is permeated with words that obviously mean to belittle the discriminated individual. In Abrahams' work, the metaphors used by the oppressor deprive the black person of human qualities by associating his/her image with that of animals or objects. Remarkably, Black man does not retaliate by integrating frustrating words to refer to the white person. On the contrary, he uses words marking much respect for the oppressor. The

surprising passive attitude of the discriminated people legitimately gives the impression that they use a language of resignation.

### **1.2. The discriminated individual's language of resignation**

Abrahams' autobiographical novel gives an insight into the discriminated individual's language. The language used by the black person in daily interactions with the Westerner proves not to be loaded with negative connotation. It is a very inoffensive language that he uses in case there is social exchange. Automatically, the words inscribe the individual in the racial context and mark the difference between two communities fighting for survival. From this antagonism, it appears that these words highlight the position of the writer's community in the particular context.

In *Tell Freedom*, the most significant and expanded word is undoubtedly 'baas' that black people use when they talk to Whites. In conversations, black males and females generally refer to or call white males 'baas'. The term originates from Afrikaans, a European language spoken in South Africa. To be more explicit, it is the oppressor's language which has been imposed upon the oppressed communities and indigenous people of South Africa. Its expansion may be due to the fact that males are in the spotlight in the racial context. In fact, men whether black or white are the most perceptible genre on the racial ground. They are compelled to interact on account of certainly social realities that require men to bring sustenance home. So, they have to meet for a reason or another, hence creating new relationships. One can contend that the word draws its origin from these particular relationships that they weave in the context of survival. Modern times demand that man works to integrate society. There exists a particular relationship between the work provider (the employer) and the one applying for the work or worker (the employee). The employer

is called the 'boss' to unfold the difference with the worker and recalls the relationship between the master and the slave.

Abrahams' literary work mentions the white man as the employer providing employment to the black individual. The latter obviously stands as the worker. This relationship is clearly perceptible in Abrahams' fiction entitled *Mine Boy*. Xuma, the native, works for the white employer in the mine. Thus, 'boss' is a word used by employees to designate a person who monitors their work and even grant them an income. The literary work reveals a very powerful individual who gets not only the means to insure his fellow men's survival, but can also sever them from sustenance, throwing people in despair. It is the manifestation of the oedipal complex where the Westerner stands as the father and the black man as the boy who wants to avoid castration (P. Barry, 2002). That is why, the boss is granted a very paramount importance in the world of labour. Inevitably, the word 'baas' in the autobiography seems to be a metamorphosis of the word 'boss'.

In addition to that particular relationship based on unfairness that Marxists denounce, it is a whole mode of life which the context reveals. It marks the great gap that exists between the two opposed entities sharing the same spatial indication. The current use of the word 'baas' bespeaks black people's living on the margins of the South African society. In Abrahams' autobiographical novel, the word is so expanded that it goes beyond the only use made by discriminated adult males. Its use is also extended to black children. The writer underlines this extension when he refers to his own experience within the racial context. In the following conversation, the narrator (29-30) accounts:

'Well?' the man repeated coldly.  
'Please baas,' I said  
'What d'you want?'  
'Sixpence crackling, please'  
'What?'  
Andries dug me in the ribs.



‘Sixpence crackling, please baas.’  
‘What?’  
‘Sixpence crackling, please baas.’  
‘You new here?’  
‘Yes, bass.’

It is conspicuous that there is no exception to the rule. Even children originating from the marginalized community are compelled to pronounce the word when they interact with white people. Despite the word ‘please’ that already denotes politeness, the oppressor expects much more respect from the kid by obliging him to utter the word ‘baas’. Its writing (in italics and small letters) in the autobiography clearly bespeaks its insignificance and absurdity at the same time.

From all these, one can contend that the subordinate people’s language is permeated with very few words which do not purport to denigrate the oppressor. On the contrary, it is a way to show him great esteem, be it a male or female. As a matter of fact, the white South Africans want to force black people to show them respect, regardless of age. A white person remains different from a black man despite his level of education if ever he got any. Respect seems to be very significant to the oppressor in that it grants him the illusion to be superior to the oppressed individual. The insistence through the use of the question word ‘what’ is very significant to understand the white South African man’s will to be respected.

Furthermore, one can perceive that the word ‘baas’ that every oppressed individual has to say in conversations with adult white South African is extended to take into account white children. If the slave praises the master, he should do the same for his offspring. Black people have to show respect for the Westerner’s kid in using the same word if they want to escape castration. Respect for children is illustrated by the narrator (33) in the following sentence: ‘Tell the baas and young basies how sorry you are, Lee’. The discriminated individual also owes respect to the white man’s child. Thus, the offspring learns from parents’ language his difference from

black people. The alleged distinction is culturally- based in the white South African.

A. Alessandrini (1999, p. 61) is right when he says: “Fanon theorizes that language is a crucial component of culture; it structures cultures and mediates social intercourse. The acquisition of such and such language represents the acquisition of such and such culture.”

Tell Freedom also underscores white South African women as also being concerned with black people’ respect. To show respect for these women, Abrahams’ people have to demonstrate it through uttering specific words as they do for western children and adults. In this connection, the individual living in the margin must always use the word ‘missus’ to refer to the white woman.

Certainly, the word ‘missus’ is the informal usage of the English word ‘misses’. It makes reference to the marital status of a woman in Western law. The autodiegetic narrator (114) learns it from his school mistress when she corrects him in the following sentence: “Miss, not missus. You only say missus to a married woman.” The correction clearly points out the misuse of the word in the racial context and its inexistence in Abrahams’ culture. Moreover, not only is the word just used to please the white South African’s wife, but it also displays the user’s ignorance and illiteracy. It appears as a token of great respect for the woman as well. In other words, it intends to praise the Westerner’s wife. The racial context compels the subordinate individual to use the word ‘missus’, regardless of the Western woman’s status. The fact of voluntarily or not omitting the word is considered a ‘crime.’ It is perceived as a willingness to contest the white South African’s supremacy.

Through all these linguistic distortions and informal English in the autobiography, the author intends to underline the high level of his people’s illiteracy. For hegemonic reasons, the white people have prevented black people from taking advantage of education that stands as a prerequisite for

social integration in modern society. In fact, they purport to keep on dominating in all sectors of social life. Uttering the aforementioned words seem to be very significant to the marginalized man. It denotes his subordination in the racial environment. Like the boy in the Freudian theory, the black man is afraid of castration. Therefore, their currently used words prove not to be offending like the white people's. Beyond the communities' use of these words lies a hidden agenda of the language.

## **2. Articulating an ideology<sup>3</sup> through language item**

In *Tell Freedom*, the lexical items imposed by the white South Africans upon the writer's community in the racial context are unquestionably intentional. They have a hidden agenda. The white man intends to reach an objective which is to recall discriminated people his supremacy. Thus, it is a whole discourse or ideology that hides behind these words. In fact, in a society permeated by discrimination, people endowed with an alleged superiority make reference to others by using a language that most the time belittles. They build stereotypes and prejudices on the 'other' so as to substantiate that alleged superiority. Likewise, black people voice their subordination that keeps them on the margins of society.

### **2.1. The white South African's hegemonic pretension**

In the literary work, Abrahams clearly states the white person's hegemony in the racial context. To reach their goal, the oppressors set up an environment which proves to be frightful for the marginalized people. The autobiographical novel exposes numbers of threats that hover around the people living on the margins. Among them, one can mention corporal punishment and imprisonment for those pointing out disrespect for the

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<sup>3</sup> Marx asserts that ideology corresponds to the dominant ideas held by the leaders of a particular society. J. A Cuddon, *Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, Wiley-Blackwell: A John Wiley and Sons, 2013, p. 353

master and infringing the laws. Abrahams (34) is a case in point when he sheds light on his punishment after he beat a white boy:

“He (Uncle Tom) lifted the trap and brought it down on my back. I clenched my teeth and stared at Aunt Liza. I did not cry with the first three strokes. The thong came down on my back, again and again. I screamed and begged for mercy. I grovelled at Uncle Sam’s feet, begging him to stop, promising never to lift my hand to any white person...”

The white man standing aside and asking a black individual to endure punishment bespeaks that he does not want to get threatened by the black man. The distance observed by the oppressor unveils in some way his dominant position. Moreover, the black man achieving the white man’s wish may incur the victim’s anger and even hatred of other discriminated people. That is why black people happen to hate themselves and their peers.

In addition to the terror experienced by the marginalized individuals, the autodiegetic narrator underlines their deprivation of all sorts of joys in modern South Africa. They lack everything that can make life pleasant to them. As a matter of fact, education seems to open up employment opportunities to people in modern South Africa. Unfortunately, black people cannot get a good education in that the white people have not enabled to endow them with enough schools. If there are some, they are poorly equipped, rendering education too difficult to acquire. This is exemplified in *Tell Freedom* (117) when the autobiographical narrator affirms: “I know Sarah. Your class is three times as big as it should be; you haven’t slates or pencils for all of them; some are so big they’re ready to have babies or grow beards; you haven’t enough benches; you can’t control them.” The portrayal of a black school points out the malaise that prevails in the oppressed communities. Under these conditions, they cannot have any education to secure employment that may allow them to compete with the white South Africans. The shortages noticed in the black community are obviously shocking. They aim at keeping Abrahams’ community at the bottom of the

South African social ladder. This unfavourable social position maintains the white people at the top of the social ladder as almost all black people remain dependent on the oppressor in terms of job acquisition. Therefore, the more black people are illiterate, the more the white people can draw benefits from their hegemonic position and maintain it.

The fright that results from the interaction and the high level of illiteracy prevailing in the black community prove to be well-planned by the white South Africans. All these intentional mistreatments and deprivations purport to make black people dependent on the oppressor. The autobiographical novel (33) clearly points out that dependence of the black person on the white people through this statement: "Good....Then teach him, Sam. If you and he are to live here, you must teach him. Well....?" The oppressed individual's dependence is the most noticeable in applying for jobs. Abrahams illustrates his mother's and uncle's dependence in work place on the white master. As far as his uncle is concerned, the narrator (19) says: "It was washing day for Aunt Liza. I was to discover that everyday was washing day for Aunt Liza. And nearly all afternoons and nights were given up to ironing. ..Then I discovered it was the laundry of the white people for whom Uncle Sam worked." It is conspicuous that without the foreigner, the native cannot thrive socially and economically as the modern society encompasses a great deal of demands that only the white man can meet. The lack of education compels the oppressed individual to remain bound to the oppressor if he actually wants to go on living. Thus, Abrahams' *Tell Freedom* underscores individuals living on petty jobs which cannot them make both ends meet. Accordingly, the hard living conditions of the black man oblige him to be respectful of the master in his interaction. And the language to be used to describe these conditions are known to black South Africans.

With regard to that dependence, the black man is turned into a submitted being who does not have any choice. The use of the racial

language results in a special treatment mean to keep promoting white supremacy. The racial discourse is permeated by words that frustrate and the special treatment entails black man's isolation in the South African society.

## **2.2. Entrenchment of the oppressed individual**

Faced with so much moral and physical traumas, Abrahams exposes in literary work how the racial words have got an impact upon the black person. He has made up his mind to confine himself in his own environment. Though the racial policy has severed him from the white South African at the onset, the severance seems to be in favour of antagonistic communities. With regard to the writer's people, insulating themselves enables them to escape the frustrating language and treatment that results from it. Therefore, the oppressed communities have their own spatial indication which obviously distinguishes itself from the white's. In this connection, Abrahams (45-46) gives an insight into his own district: "Twenty-Second Street, the street where we lived, was strange and alien. The noise was frightening after the quiet of Elsburg. After a while I grew interested in the dark stream of life about me and ventured down to the bottom of the street." A geographical indication for the 'Other' is far different from that of the white South African. The former obviously lives under very horrendous conditions that cannot allow him to develop socially and intellectually. These difficult living standards recall the subordination of Abrahams' people to the white South Africans. Accordingly, Saussure (R. Webster, 1995, p. 35) seems to be right when he states that people are shaped or determined by language.

Besides, the individuals living on the margins develop behaviour patterns in the autobiographical novel which automatically discard them from society. These behaviours visibly tend to belittle black people as they are socially condemned and give a ground to white South Africans to

demonstrate their hegemonic position. That is why, the oppressors do not grant any consideration to black people in the racial environment as the autobiographical novel attests it. The prejudices they are victim of constitute serious argument to expel them from the social functioning. The autodiegetic narrator is a case in point when he reveals the oppressor's thought concerning all Blacks. Abrahams (82) says: 'There are no children among them. They thief before they can walk or talk properly'. The exaggeration is perceptible in the reported statement and clearly bespeaks a willingness to denigrate the writer's community. In fact, society never condones individuals who do not possess values to comply with social codes. In short, the lack of values in black people brings about their marginalization in the South African society and propels the white people at the top of social hierarchy. In fact, the oppressor always and wrongly believes that black people do not own religion to teach social values. This lack of belief accounts for the perception that the latter is the prototype of the wrong doer, and thus the former can never trust.

Moreover, *Tell Freedom* underlines black people's addiction to harmful substances that indisputably contributes to their physical and moral decline. Worse still, this addiction participates once more in their marginalization. Indeed, they are addicted to alcohol and drug certainly in order to forget for a while the particular context of their life experience. As far as alcohol is concerned, the discriminated individuals working in the mine seem to be at greater exposure to it. In this connection, Abrahams (85) states:

I pocketed the coppers and went out. About me the Saturday night crowds were thick and loud. Mine boys, money in their pocket, thronged together. They talked at the top of their voices. They laughed often and loudly. They told each other where the most potent skokiaan, a foul-smelling rot-gut home-brewed liquor, could be had.

Workers are addicted to that traditional beer which seems to be liked as much. Drinking that alcohol helps them unwind after hard work, and thus forget the racial context which crushes them.

But, this addiction may be substantiated by the Freudian theory (H. Bertens, 2001, p, 159) which states: “In later life, too, we may find that we have to repress desires because they are unacceptable,” Faced with so much hatred and punishment, the discriminated individual resorts to alcohol so as to escape reality. Being addicted to substances cannot be helpful to the individual in that it may cause his moral and financial collapse. This state of mind contributes to keep the white South African in his dominant position. The racial discourse permeated with words that frustrate compels the oppressed individuals to live in their own environment made of fifth, addiction and unemployment.

### **Conclusion**

The literary exploration of the racial lexical items in Abrahams’ autobiographical novel, *Tell Freedom* shows how language exacerbates tension between antagonistic forces in South Africa during apartheid. The racial context is permeated with by words that the white South African utters to make reference to the marginalized individual. These words aim at belittling the black man as his objectification and childlike nature is clearly established. Whatever the case, the oppressed individual has to show respect for the oppressor regardless of age and sex. In return, the man living on the margins confirms respect for the master thanks to words that obviously tend to praise in a ridiculous way. Behind the quest for forced respect lies the drive to express supremacy over the black individual. To reach his goal, the oppressor makes use of inhuman treatment and causes shortages of all sorts to keep the oppressed person in his position of dominated. Faced with so much frustration, the black people insulate themselves in their own



environment made of evils and hard living conditions, contributing to their own subordination in society. Uttering words loaded with pejorative meaning may seriously damage relationships between communities in times of crisis in society. Restraining oneself and respecting the ‘Other’ have to be guiding principles for the sake of less antagonism.

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