

RACE AND SOCIAL CLASS IN PETER HENRY ABRAHAMS' *MINE BOY*.

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Abstract: The present article deals with Race and Social Class in Peter Henry Abrahams' Mine Boy. It gives different definitions of race, racism, social class and critical theory explores several types of discrimination, such as racial discrimination, psychological discrimination, physical discrimination, cultural discrimination, emotional discrimination, etc.

This article pays special attention to a main character who is a miner who struggles to discover the significance of his life. It also to analyze how people are treated badly because of their skin color, and how do race and class affect their lives.

The results of this research have revealed that race determines one's social class, one's fate and class position. So, all these social issues concern not only the characters' life in the novel, but also our today's communities and real-life situations.

Keywords: Race, racism, social class, theory and community.

Résumé : Le présent article traite de la race et de la classe sociale dans Mine Boy de Peter Henry Abrahams. Il donne différentes définitions de la race, du racisme, de la classe sociale et de la théorie critique et explore plusieurs types de discrimination, tels que la discrimination raciale, la discrimination psychologique, la discrimination physique, la discrimination culturelle, la discrimination émotionnelle, etc.

Cet article accorde une attention particulière au personnage principal, un mineur qui s'efforce de découvrir le sens de sa vie. Il analyse également la façon dont les gens sont maltraités en raison de la couleur de leur peau, et comment la race et la classe sociale affectent leur vie.

Les résultats de cette recherche ont révélé que la race détermine la classe sociale, le destin et la position de la classe. Ainsi, toutes ces questions sociales concernent non seulement la vie des

personnages du roman, mais aussi nos communautés d'aujourd'hui et les situations de la vie réelle.

Mots-clés : Race, racisme, classe sociale, théorie et communauté.

INTRODUCTION: Problems of humanity in different societies have many aspects in people's daily life. Yet, every person needs to live a positive life, free from any threats that may hinder people's moral, social and financial development. Vargas and Stainback (2016) assert that racial-based experiences are shaped not only by racial classifications of the individual but also by external racial attributions placed on the individuals by others. Arena in Race and Hegemony argues that contemporary elite regimes rely on authoritarian and ideological forms to control other races.

These discriminations have led to important contributions from people like W.E.B. Dubois and African American writers like Amé Césaire, Frantz Fanon, Chinua Achebe and André Brink. In terms of race and social class, focus will be on how the locations of the colored people are racially based, the nature of work done by the white and black people, how blacks are maltreated by the whites, ownership of land and businesses, laws specially made for the black man and the perception that the black man needs to be conquered and ruled.

Therefore, have been touched by the way blacks were discriminated in South Africa, through the way the narrator in "Mine Boy" portrays some characters of human experience showing that human life is in problem. We can see this in some societies, for example, they put a limit in love because of segregation.

Race

Race is a social construct that artificially divides people into distinct groups based on certain characteristics such as physical appearance, ancestral heritage, cultural affiliation, cultural history, and ethnic classification.

Race is also a concept used to categorize humans into groups, called races or racial groups, and with distinct characteristics they are defined by the common genetic or biological characteristics and identity, which binds its members to each other on common grounds. Race is also recognized by others as a distinct group with common cultural, linguistic and religious foundations,

behavioral characteristics, ethnicity or race is what distinguishes individuals in a particular geographical area.

There are many interpretations made by several linguists and anthropologists and biologists to define the word race and to know its origin. They argue that racial categories correlate with biological traits.

So, race is known as a group of individuals, share one or several certain genetic markers and features that distinguish them from other groups of the same species.

As we may note, this definition is flexible, as it does not specify which features are reliable to classify a particular species into ethnic groups. In addition, these features are not completely fixed, and vary from one individual to another, making the distinction between races a complex and unsafe subject.

Mr. Kincannon began by describing the history of race classification as a lesson in American history. He explained that from the beginning, the census implicitly recognized three race categories: white, black, and Indian. It was only following the passage of the 14th Amendment (requiring the counting of “the whole number of persons” rather than “free persons”) that the census became a true count of every person (Kincannon 2006: 12). Starting in the late nineteenth century and continuing through the twentieth century, race classification evolved to include Filipinos, Aleuts, and Hawaiians, among other categories. In 1970, a separate question on Hispanic origin was introduced as part of the long form sample (an extended census questionnaire obtained from approximately one in every six households). Since that time, this question has been used as part of the census short form (the census questions answered by every household). Another change that has been in place since 1970 is the reliance on self-identification, meaning that the indicated race reflects what individuals have chosen, rather than third party observations, as with earlier censuses.

When providing a brief history of the census, Professor Sharon M. Lee emphasized that the census is both a collector and disseminator of racial statistics (2006: 26). In her view, racial statistics had historically functioned to maintain a social order and policies that excluded non-white groups from civil and political rights. The civil rights era dramatically changed this, and racial statistics are now used to document racial discrimination, leading to new laws and policies

to redress systemic racial inequalities. Professor Lee stated that throughout the evolution of the collection and use of racial statistics, a constant has been that the census continues to categorize the population into distinct, separate, mutually exclusive racial groups.

Professor Lee noted that the U.S. population has changed dramatically since the first census of 1790, and that the way the census is collected has changed accordingly (2006: 27-28). She stated that almost every census for the past two hundred years has collected racial data differently than the census before it a fact that she says belies the arguments of critics who cite the importance of consistency in their arguments against changes in census racial categories.

So, racial categories are considered as socially constructed. The fact that race is socially constructed does not diminish its importance. Some persons claim that race is much more important than social class in explaining inequality. The word is used to categorize humans into large and distinct groups. So, Race has nothing to do with genetic or biological taxonomic sense. A concept related to race is ethnicity. While race has a phenotypical undertone, ethnicity has to do with cultural traits such as language, religion, customs, and so on. Thus, race is not intrinsic to human beings but rather an identity created to make meaning in a social context.

Social Class

In sociology, social class refers to people with a similar status in society. This status is determined by various factors, such as race, ethnicity, family, education, work, income, education and wealth.

Two social theories help us understand social inequality in more depth, Functional Theory and Conflict Theory. Firstly, Functional Theory, or functionalism, is a view that society is an interrelated system where all the parts contribute to a whole. This theory can be understood by visualizing each aspect of society as a cog in a machine; they all work together for the effective operation of the whole. Functional theorists will understand social inequality through the view that discrimination creates social groupings, and these social groupings support the structure of society.

Secondly, Conflict Theory is a view that society is an on-going competition; groups are all struggling for political, social, and economic power. Conflict theorists view social inequality as the result of the dominant group taking actions to maintain its control.

These two theories are different in their aims: Functionalists are seeking answers to why inequalities exist and how they work to maintain the structure of society. While Conflict theorists question whether inequality is of benefit and seek ways to decrease it or eliminate it.

Social class is a set of concepts in social sciences and political theory focusing on models of social hierarchy, in which individuals and groups are classified because of esteem and prestige, acquired mainly through economic success and accumulation of wealth.

The social construction is, in many ways, too difficult to present as similar as the constructed nature of social categories such as gender or race. So, the social construction of class is analogous, but not identical, to that of race and gender. Differences between rich and poor, which result from ways of structuring the economy, are socially constructed as innate differences among people. These differences are then used to rationalize or justify the unequal distribution of wealth and power that results from economic decisions made to perpetuate privilege (Rothenberg 2016: 9).

Class is a social and cultural formation which cannot be defined abstractly, or in isolation, but only in terms of relationships with other classes. A class is a very loosely defined body of people who share the same categories of interests, social experiences, traditions and value system. Class itself is not a thing; it is a happening (Gordon 1993: 97). He provides a philosophical definition. He wrote “class is a circumscribed way of knowing the world that they did not choose, rather they grew to live within it, they absorbed it as the space absorbed them in demanding that they comport themselves in a certain manner in order to be successful within its parameters” (Ibid: 64).

In other terms, the definitions of social classes reflect several sociological perspectives, informed by anthropology, economics, psychology and sociology. The major perspectives historically have been Marxism and structural functionalism. The common stratum model of class divides society into a simple hierarchy of working class, middle class and upper class. As it is informally recognized in many societies, there are three common social classes: Upper class, Middle class, and the Lower class.

Race and Class

There are many socioeconomic differences between Whites, Blacks, and those with mixed ancestry. Whites are five times more likely to complete college than those of mixed ancestry and nine times more likely to do so than Blacks. The variations between the three major groupings are similar in the proportion in professions and income levels, as well as the likelihood of youth or adults being detained by police. Socioeconomic data have uniformly confirmed that race is correlated with levels of educational attainment, occupations, income, poverty rates, and housing quality.

Even when Blacks have professional positions, they do not receive equal salaries. Blacks are twice as likely to be illiterate and to live in houses without running water, sanitation, and trash collection. Skin color affects life chances. The socioeconomic gap between Whites and people of color is larger than ranges within groups. Blacks exhibit higher instances of maternal mortality, tuberculosis, AIDS, leprosy, and uterine and prostate cancer, as well as lower life expectancy (Schaefer 2008: 202).

This disparity and the contrast between ethnic groups have led in some way to contrast and disparity between social classes within the same society, and this seems to be called Racism.

Racism in South African Society

In South Africa, the central to the system of Apartheid was the division and classification of the races that developed historically with the clashes and migrations of different groups of people in South Africa. These divisions became closely and often ludicrously defined with the setting up of Apartheid in the 1950s, and this legal classification presented a social hierarchy that underpinned white dominance in a mixed-race society. The four classifications separated the White, the Bantu (Africans), the Coloreds and the Asians.

Racism can be defined simply as any policy, belief, attitude, action or inaction, that raise the value of a certain group or category over other groups, based on people's abilities, typography or habits, and sometimes depend on the color of the skin, culture, language, or even beliefs. It subordinates individuals or groups based on their race; it is any feeling of superiority, a policy of exclusion, marginalization and discrimination between people based on color, national or ethnic origins.

Racism is commonly held to mean discrimination with the intent to harm certain kind of people, taking into consideration the social and historical perspective. Paula Rothenberg declared that: “Racism involves the subordination of people of color by white people. While individual persons of color may well discriminate against a white person or another person of color because of their race... History provides us with a long record of white people holding and using power and privilege over people of color to subordinate them, not the reverse” (2016: 108).

Another form of racism in which discrimination is directed to the individual himself, this distinction refers to the unequal treatment of the individual because he is an individual, not as group member. So, one can consider Racism as most fundamentally the assessment of individual worth because of real or imputed group characteristics. Its evil lies in the denial of people’s right to be judged as individuals rather than as group members, and in the truncation of opportunities or rights on that basis.

Racism is prejudice, discrimination, or antagonism by an individual, community, or institution against a person or people based on their membership of a particular racial or ethnic group, typically one that is a minority or marginalized.

However, the definition of racism is almost symmetric. Richard Schaefer described Racism as a set of practices that create socioeconomic status attainment disparities. It is an aversion to critiquing the ideologies that justify existing arrangements such as equality of opportunity and meritocracy (94). So, racism is used also to benefit one group at the expense of other groups, thus depriving them of their rights.

Richard Schaefer wrote: “Racism is a negative reactionary sentiment that social changes demanded by people of color have gone too far...” (2015: 616). More recently, Paula Rothenberg said: “Racism is defined as a system of advantages based on race” (2016: 100). In fact, these are consistent definitions, they point to the importance of race in discrimination among people, and this is important to understand racism.

Bulmer Martin, and John Solomos declared: “Racism is an ideology of racial domination based on beliefs that a designated racial group is either biologically or culturally inferior and the use of such beliefs to rationalize the racial group’s treatment in society” (1999: 04).

Racism here means an ideology. It can be distinguished from prejudice which is a matter of feeling, and discrimination which is a matter of behavior. So, statements and definitions vary, points of view and ideas differ but the overall concept of racism remains the oppression of people, based on racial discrimination. Hence, Racism remains what many hated the most, but it is still what they mastered.

Nelson Mandela, the great fighter for freedom in South Africa who, inflamed the world with a hard struggle, restored something of right to black South Africa, the country that symbolized the racism of the white man who was and still living on the destruction of others and their identity and robbing their wealth. Thanks to the strife, the struggle and resistance of the injustice, black racism was repulsed and the white dreams of the people of South Africa has restored in his land, wealth and freedom.

According to them, South Africa was typically portrayed in dualistic terms. This dualism was not that of race alone but also involved the contrast between the bustling society of the fast-growing towns and the surrounding countryside, these divisions and distinction between members of society, and the racism that has spread throughout South African society, has driven into decades of tragedy and suffering. That is why Peter Abrahams succeeded in portraying the South African community before the policy of Apartheid.

Racism Discrimination

Through the novel, Mine Boy, Peter Abrahams draws the images of racism that black people undergo; he presents the blacks by the character called Xuma a mine boy. The racial discrimination found in the extracts goes as follows:

For you as a black man, the mines are no good, Xuma later you coughed and then you spit blood and you became weak and die I have seen it many times today you are young and you are strong, and tomorrow you are thin and ready to die (P. 5).

At first, Leah tells Xuma about the dangers that a black worker would face, just because she knows the hardworking conditions which may lead a person to lose his health, so Leah finds herself obliged to teach him the law of black survival in the city. Leah tells Xuma the following: “A black must find for himself, a black has no hope, a black cannot afford the luxury of worrying about others because one’s own immediate responsibilities and needs are so great” (P. 6).

In addition, in the surrounding of Xuma and Joseph the brother of Leah, they faced a fight of men who were supposed to be rich, they insulted Xuma and Joseph because they were black; this is seen in the passage below:

A colored man and a very pale woman passed, Xuma and Joseph. Look at those black fools, the woman said. The man laughed, Xuma felt a pang of shame and turned to Joseph. They are the fashion makers; Joseph said; but it is foolish (P. 15).

In fact, most of the white people cannot accept blacks in their lives, they dislike them for unclear reasons. When Leah introduces Xuma to Johannes, the mine boss worker, he offers him a job in the mines where the author describes the different bad situations of the black workers. Small, thin, a black has many lines on his face, though he is not old, his cues are red, he keeps coughing; a dry cough destroys the lungs and works; (P. 17).

The following quotation highlights the idea that there are no qualified hospitals for blacks, any patient who goes there would not heal.

Go to the hospital, says Xuma to see our people lying on the floors, they lie close, you cannot step over them but it they who dig the gold for three shillings a day everybody coughs badly, and their brow is as hot fire, answers the sick miner (P. 32).

Furthermore, in his next conversation with Johannes, Xuma wonders why he does not meet any white folk in that mine and all workers he meets are black, or in fact white people only work in offices under great work conditions since they are the owners of this mines and manager engineers. This is the reason Xuma does not find any white worker, but only black workers who don't know to read and write and they work underground, as seen in the extract here below: "I've considered only black movement in the mines, do white people hate this work or something? They only use the computer and give orders" (P. 48).

Far away from the mines Xuma lives a love story with Eliza, Leah's niece, a black woman who is lost between her love Xuma and for her dream to love a white man; it is illustrated in his passage as follows: That one likes you but she's a fool it is going to school she likes you but she wants one who can read books and dress like the white folk and speak the language of the white

and wear the little bit of cloth they call a tie. Take her by force or you will be a fool too. With another laugh she went out. Xuma watched Eliza, is that so? She would not look at him. (P. 31).

Eliza's reaction is quoted here below:

I am not good, and I cannot help myself it will be right if you hate me. You should beat me. But incite there is something wrong. And it is because I want the things of the white people. I want to be like the white people and go where they go and do the things they do, and I am black person. I cannot help it. Inside I am not black, and I do not want to be a black person I want to be like they are you understand Xuma. It is not good, but I cannot help it. It is just so. And it is that makes me hurt you. Pease understand (P. 60).

So, we can assume that discrimination has always been one of the defining characteristics of humankind. Much of time some causes of discrimination are due to when people find that they are treated differently; when they find some offensive actions and reactions that people do for them. Indeed, the causes of discrimination can happen when the individuals want to manipulate others' rights. For the satisfaction of their emotions and feelings which is expressed by inequality.

Social Class and Discrimination

A Marxist view of social class is based on a subjective notion, with social classes determined by relationships and consciousness. The early Marxist categories of social class defined the social groups' relationships to the ownership of the means of production (Mey 953). This theory appears with a German theorist, ideologist, philosopher and one of the most influential thinkers of the nineteenth century, Karl Marx (1818-1883) who criticized the capitalist system of economics and tried to prove that this system is built upon injustice and oppression, since it gives the chance to the high class of people to benefit at the expense of the working class and from this perspective the Marxist theory started to argue that the Bourgeois, had successfully enslaved the working class, and his conflict appears in the society because the efforts of the lower class of people to gain power and the attempts of the upper class to keep what they already had, the conflict between those who own and those who own and those who labor (Ryan 2013: 52).

In Mine Boy, he social class discrimination is seen when Xuma arrived for the first time at Paddy's house, he saw their things he had never seen, and he drank and ate food. After his

returning, Paddy and his woman talked about Xuma and how he was. The woman of the boss thought that Xuma was yet a good person, but Paddy did not think so, this is even expressed in the following passage:

What do you think for him? he asked finally. What is there to think? he's just a mine boy! He's a grand fellow! Yes. Grand, but not a human being yet. Just a mine boy. His girl is human, and he can understand her. He can't understand her wanting the things I want and have. And another thing you're wrong about he does not dislike you, you're just not of the same world, Red: (P67). The above passage shows that, yet a black person didn't think like white persons, could not be considered as a human being like Xuma, because he still is a mine boy, he is not, he is not yet a human being.

In the same discussion of Paddy and his woman about Xuma, here is another passage of social class discrimination shown below:

It is not enough to destroy; you must build as well. Build up a stock of faith in your breast in native Xuma, mine boy, who has no social conscience, who cannot read or write and cannot understand his girl wanting what you want. I'll tell you something, me, Dear. The first day he came to the mine, Paddy told him to push a truck, and he didn't know anything about it.... (P.69).

In the above passage, the boss, Paddy did not see the effort made by Xuma, he was still considering him as an unable because he does not know to read; to write and he does not have any social conscience.

CONCLUSION

This work has examined Peter Abraham's Mine Boy against the practice of racism, social class and racial discrimination. The selection of this issue is predicated upon the idea that other critics have sufficiently explored the text as an apartheid material.

The discussion revealed that as African writer, Abrahams is committed to probing into the structures of race, racism, social class and discrimination. The main protagonist in the in the novel under study; Xuma proves that race and hegemony are based on an individual's skin color. The black man is discriminated against because of his race. The racial discrimination spans from

housing for blacks and whites, specific job descriptions for whites and blacks, separate restaurants for blacks and whites, special laws for blacks to special economic ventures for blacks.

The results of this article have revealed that race and class, social class and class discrimination in the novel relate with the discrimination that people face in real world societies.

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