PLOT SUMMARY OF “A WALK IN THE NIGHT”

One.

The story begins with Michael Adonis, known as Mikey, who has been fired from his job at a sheet-metal factory. Mikey walks home through his impoverished neighbourhood, seething with resentment over what has happened. The neighbourhood is filled with gang activity and prostitution. He goes to the Portuguese Restaurant where he meets his friend Willie Boy at the café and tells him about being fired for swearing at a white foreman who accused him of being lazy when he requested to use the washroom (piss-house). Willieboy brags that he never wishes to work for whites. Mikey refers to the foreman as “White sonofabitch” and promises to revenge by saying “that sonavabitch, that bloody white sonavabitch, I’ll get him”. (p.5)

Willieboy’s gang led by Foxy enters the café to look for Sockies, a gang member who is supposed to assist them with a burglary that night. The gang teases Mikey for being a “good boy”, because he refuses to join them. They ask Mikey to tell Sockies that they are looking for him in case he meets him and they leave. Mikey pays the bills for the food he has eaten and leaves the café.

Two

Mikey goes for a walk through the neighbourhood to shake off his anger. During the course of his walk, he meets a homeless boy named Joe and in their talk Joe informs Mikey that he has heard that the City Council is planning to make the beaches so that only white people can go there. Mikey gives him the money for food and he goes away. Mikey turns towards the pub but is stopped and searched by police who suspect him of possessing dagga (marijuana) but they find him with the money and cigarettes only. Discovering that he has nothing they leave him.

Three

Mikey goes to a pub where his mind reminds him of the incidents of the police and the loss of his job. Foxy and other gang members come to ask him if he has seen Sockies yet. He talks to his friends; a taxi-driver and Mr Greene about racial injustice in South Africa and the way the Negros were also killed in America. The taxi-driver narrates a crime in their neighbourhood, where a man named Flippy wanted to stab Cully- the butcher man for messing around with his girl and Cully brings a butcher knife and stabs him in the stomach to the point that his guts almost come out but he tries to hold them back. The ambulance comes and takes Flippy to hospital while Cully is taken to jail. He continues drinking while the driver leaves and later he too leaves.

Four

He finally heads home to his tenement where he lived. At the foot of the staircases he meets a girl named Hazel; who is going out. After a brief chat the two depart. Mikey climbs upstairs and meets his neighbour, an alcoholic and diabetic Irish old man named Uncle Doughty, who invites him over for a drink. We are told the old man had been an actor, in Great Britain, South Africa and Australia and had served in two wars but is now hopeless as he is deserted and abandoned waiting for death. Mikey supports him to his room. He tells Mikey that his wife was a coloured lady. He laments how he used to be something but now he has nobody to look after him and he started crying.

Still angry at the injustice he had suffered that day, Mikey says “what the hell you crying about. You old white bastard, you got nothing to worry about.” (p.25). He taunts Uncle Doughty by withholding his bottle of cheap wine. Uncle Doughty unintentionally insults a drunken Mikey, who mixes his words with those of the foreman who fired him. In a rage, Mikey strikes Doughty in the head (sprouting skull) and kills him.

Five

After sobering up and realizing what he had done, he says “God, I didn’t mean it. I didn’t mean to kill the blerry old man” (p.27). He flees back to his own apartment and quickly shuts the door, because he says “the law don’t like white people being finished off.” (p.28). He makes sure that nobody sees him.

Six

Police Constable called Raalt in a patrol van is thinking about his stubborn wife and says “Well her mother warned me she was a no-good bitch, but I was silly enough to think nothing of it” (p.29). His wife had been good looking before they had married but now she had gone to seed and that irritated him. The driver of the patrol wagon suggests “I think we ought to resume our patrol. Don’t you think we’ve been parked long enough?” (p.29) Then, they leave and continue with the patrol.

Seven

Willieboy thinks of going to borrow money from Mikey and on the way he meets the gang (Foxy and the other two guys). They ask him whether he has seen Sockies but he says nay. They ask him to tell him to meet them at the club. He leaves them and on his way he comes across a couple making love in the darkened doorway of the tenement between a fruit shop and a shoe store. He goes to Mikey’s room and tried to open it but it was locked. When Mikey does not answer the door, Willieboy goes to ask Doughty for money instead. When he knocks no one replies. As he opens the door he sees the old man’s corpse.

Eight.

In the room down the corridor, a stevedore –Franky Lorenzo, wearing a singlet and corduroy is lying facing the ceiling. He was so tired because of hard work and the fact that his wife had earlier told him that she was once more pregnant. His four children (two boys and two girls) share one bed and a one thread-bare, worn, sweaty blanket in the same room. Grace, Franky’s wife is breast-feeding the fifth baby. He believes that children are riches for poor people even when they don’t have food in the house to feed them.

He wonders why rich people have enough money to feed up to twenty children but they only get one or two. Franky shouts at his wife to control her births by drinking the pills and she gets offended and cries. Franky apologises sincerely and asks for some tea. His wife goes to take the water in the latrine tap while he holds the baby.

Nine

Willieboy is frightened and runs away down the stairs after seeing the dead body. A woman sees him running from Uncle Doughty’s room and goes to inspect, only to find that Doughty is dead.

Meanwhile, Constable Raalt is thinking of killing his wife but then decides against it because it is a sin to kill. The driver wishes to be separated from Raalt because he is shaming the white race and ruining their superiority. Then Raalt goes to Jolly Boys Social club. When he enters the room all people inside show various reactions. He strikes a man called Chips until blood forms in a pool in the corner of his mouth. Chips takes out the money and gives him five pounds and he leaves.

Ten.

Mikey is still in his room when he hears the door-knob rattle. He wonders who the hell could that be and says “Why the hell don’t they go away”. He says that he didn’t mean to kill the Oldman but he doesn’t seem sympathetic as he declares “To hell with all of them and that old man too. What for did he want to go on living for anyway?” He utters many abusive words in his mind and thought of getting a wife. A woman screamed outside and people gathered to witness the murder of the old Irishman. One woman is heard saying “old man. I saw who done it. I saw who done it”. Afterwards, the crowd go away Mikey opens his door and moves downstairs. Foxy and his friends still looking for Sockies, see him disappearing into the darkness.

Eleven

Willieboy is walking in street called District Six trying to hide his identity in the shadows. He thinks of whether they would suspect him for the murder but he assures himself that he has nothing to do with it. He goes to Miss Gipsy place and asks for wine but the woman seems reluctant claiming that he has to pay first. She gives him cheap wine and tells him to go away after finishing because she is expecting some customers.

Finally the customers; Red, George, Ray Ybarra plus three African girls arrived and have a drink. In his drunken state Willieboy accuses Gipsy for allowing them to mess with African girls. They become angry and start a serous fight. He takes a knife and George throws a bottle and missed Willieboy by a yard. As Willieboy advances forward with a knife he falls down and Gipsy hits him behind the ear. They drug him and place him out on the stoep. When he regains his senses he goes down the street.

Twelve

Constable Raalt sees the crowd and goes to ask them what is happening. They tell him there is a dead body upstairs. One man in the crowd called John Abrahams says he knows who did it and others look at him angrily. He explains how Willieboy gave him a match to light his cigarette when he was going upstairs and he came downstairs running then a woman screamed. When he went upstairs with the others they found the Oldman dead. So he believes Willieboy did it.

Franky Lorenzo alerted him to stop narrating but Raalt threatened him saying “Do you want to be arrested for intimidating a witness and defending the ends of justice?” Then, Abrahams continued to say the boy he saw was wearing a yellow shirt. Constable Raalt determines to get him even if he had to gather all black bastards wearing a yellow shirt.

Thirteen.

Mikey goes to the Indian café where he meets Joe at the table eating. He had bought the food with the money Mikey gave him.  As they talk Joe discovers that Mikey is not alright. Mikey admits that he had troubles disturbing him. And his trouble was “He felt as if he was the only man who had ever killed another and thought himself a curiosity at which people should wonder. He longed to be questioned about it, about the way he had felt when he had done it, about the impulse that had caused him to take the life of another. But the difficulty was that to reveal his secret was dangerous, so he had to carry it with him for all time or accept the consequence.” (62)

Foxy and the two youths come again looking for Sockies. They ask Mikey to join them in their mission. Mikey feels good about the idea but doesn’t respond immediately, so they give him time to make up his mind and meet them at the club. When they leave Joe warns Mikey not to join them. Joe narrates how he was separated from his family that was living in Prince Lane a long time ago. That his father left one morning and never came back.

His father had been jobless and life was getting tough that they had no food but they had to beg from door to door. They also failed to pay the house rent so the landlord evicted them. His mother sold the furniture and the family returned to the country but Joe refused to go and ended up in the streets. Mikey leaves but Joe warns him again not to join the gangsters.

Fourteen.

Willieboy walks in the streets feeling muzzy and his head aching. He feels angry and humiliated by the manhandling he had received at Gipsy’s shebeen. He promises to revenge. He thinks of how he had wished to have some sort of power driven to wherever he wanted, giving orders for the execution of enemies.

He meets Mr Greene in the streets and beats him asking him for money. Mr. Greene says that he has got nothing and when Willieboy searches him and finds he has nothing he leaves him to go home. As Willieboy reaches the end of the street he sees a police van.

Fifteen

As Mikey walks in the street he meets Joe who appreciates for the money he gave him for food. Joe advises Mikey to stay away from Foxy’s gang because they would land him in trouble. “But they’ll get you in trouble, Mikey. They break into places and steal, and I heard they stabbed a couple of other johns” (p.71) Mikey was angry and told him to go to hell. Mikey goes to the Club where he meets Foxy and the other guys. They propose the deal they are going to do and ask him to take the part of Sockies and he agrees.

They smoke marijuana and give it to Mikey as well who feels happy after smoking. They wake up Toyer the driver and tell him to prepare for the business ahead. They hear the sound of a gun shot from outside and Foxy goes out to investigate.

Sixteen

Constable Raalt and the driver are in their patrol and the driver is not happy by the way Cons. Raalt keeps on talking about his troubles with his wife. He is also not happy by the way Raalt keeps on bullying Africans and he suspects they may one day turn on him. He remembers how he once loved a girl and was writing occasional letters to her when he is interrupted by Raalt’s harsh voice.

Raalt had seen a Black boy with a yellow shirt and suspected it is Willieboy. They start chasing him ordering him to stop running. The driver tries to stop Raalt from shooting the boy. Willieboy hides somewhere while Raalt is searching for him. People start gathering after hearing the sounds of the shot but he threatens them to get back. In his hideout Willieboy wonders why they are chasing him.

He remembers when he was 7 years old his mother slapped him for buying fish with the money he got as a commission from the sub-agent of the newspapers he was selling. He also remembers how his father used to come back home drunk and beat him and his mother.

Finally, Willieboy decides to run from his hideout and Raalt fires his gun after seeing him. Willieboy searches for his knife after seeing Raalt, but Raalt fires again and Willieboy falls down.

Seventeen

The crowd of people is confused and they wonder why the whites keep on shooting them. The driver blames Raalt for shooting Willieboy while they were about to catch him. He proposes that they should call the ambulance and rush him to the hospital but Raalt protests and says they should take him to the police station. They load him in the back of the van to take him to the station.

Eighteen

Willieboy is inside the van and the thoughts are flashing through his mind. Raalt wants to smoke and discovers that he has no cigarette left. He asks the driver to drive to the Portuguese Restaurant, but the driver warns him that they should first rush the boy to the station. Raalt insists and goes to the restaurant and starts chatting with the Portuguese proprietor. The driver comes in to tell him that the boy has to be rushed to the station because he had screamed for help. Willieboy slowly starts losing the feelings of sensation and finally he dies.

Nineteen

Foxy and his gang are getting ready to go for the robbery. Uncle Doughty’s body has been removed and the police have locked his room. John Abrahams is lying in his room wondering why he has betrayed his people. “He thought dully, What’s it help you, turning on your own people?” (p.91). Joe makes his way back to the sea walking alone through the starlight darkness. Frank Lorenzo is sleeping peacefully while his wife Grace is awake in the dark.

INTRODUCTION

A Walk in the Night and other stories is a novella by South African author and anti-apartheid activist, Alex La Guma. The book was published in 1968 and contains seven short stories that detail the injustices arising from South Africa’s system of racial apartheid. The title piece, “A Walk in the Night”, tells the story of an impoverished black South African man who is tempted to join a gang after being unjustly fired from his job. The rest of the events in the plot of the story take place in the same night as the title suggests.

The novella “A walk in the night” revolves around the themes of racism, social inequity, poverty, crime, and injustice. The story examines the lives of various marginalized people in apartheid era South Africa, and the things that they have in common, as well as what divides them. They also depict the dehumanization of black and poor people during apartheid and condemn the widespread social injustices of this chapter in the nation’s history.

STYLE

The author of the novella has used several techniques in presenting the intended message.

¨    Narrative technique. The dominant style is a narrative technique in which the author takes the role of the narrator and tells what is happening.

¨    Dialogue. There are several dialogues in the plot of the story bringing the characters and events to life. They help to reveal the personality traits of some characters like Constable Raalt and Andries: (p.57)

“Looks like he was hit on the head”.

“It’s a job of the detectives” the driver said….

“What’s your hurry man? Constable Raalt asked. “this is our patrol, isn’t it?”

¨    Point of view. The dominant point of view is Omniscient third Person point of view where most of the events are viewed from the narrator’s eye. There are also some cases of first person point of view in which some characters like Mikey narrate their personal experience.

¨    The use of Songs. To enrich his style he has used a song in page 5

When mah baby lef’ me,

She gimme a mule to rahd

When mah baby lef’ me,

She gimme a mule to rahd

PLOT.

The plot of the story is largely straightforward narration employing chronological plot in succession of nineteen chapters. However there are some cases of flashback in the plot of the story.

¨    Willieboy’s story. When he is chased by the police, he remembers as a child the way his mother used to shout at him “You been naughty again?” and the way his father used to beat him and his mother. (p.79-80)

¨    Joe’s background. Joe narrates how his family was poor that they failed to pay the house rent and the landlord evicted them. They sold the furniture and went back to the country but he refused to go with them and ended up in the streets.

SETTING

The setting of the novella is typically urban. The time is during the era of apartheid and racial injustice in South Africa. There are several events and places that prove the authenticity of an urban setting some of which are the sub-settings of the major setting.

¨    Presence of Restaurants, bars and cafés and night Clubs are common in towns (cities).

¨    People living in rented tenements, is common in town.

¨    Presence of factories.

¨    Night police patrols.

¨    Crimes and gang activities like robbery, drug addiction, prostitution etc. are common in town.

LANGUAGE USE

The language used is simple to understand though there is frequent use of non-standard English and dialectal words that might pose a difficulty in understanding for readers who are not conversant with this dialect.

“Howzit”, “Hoit pally” (p.3) Other words include dagga for marijuana,

Waar loop jy rond, jong?” (p.10)

Also abusive language has been used to a large extent not only to show the Africans’ resentment towards the whole situation of racial injustice but also to portray the picture of moral decay because such language is used even by the Whites like Constable Raalt.

 “You bastards, you want t get shot too” (p 84)

“That sonofabitch, that bloody sonavabich”, (p.5)

Figures of Speech.

Simile

¨    Cracked voice like the twang of a flat guitar string. (p.5)

¨    Drops of blood like lipstick marks on his pink forehead. (p.8)

¨    He just seemed to have happened, appearing in the District like a cockroach emerging through a floorboard. (p.8)

¨    They had hard, frozen faces as if carved out of pink ice….(p.19)

¨    The voice was hard and flat as the snap of a steel string…(p.10)

¨    Under the cap he had a wily, grinning face and eyes as brown and alert as cockroaches. (p15)

¨    …his head swinging gently back to normal like a merry-go-round slowing down and finally stopping. (p.19)

¨    His shirt was out dangling around him like a night-gown. (p.22)

¨    He made his way slowly along the wall, like a great crab, breathing stertorously. (p.22)

¨    The room was as hot and airless as a newly-opened tomb…(p.24)

¨    …the flow of Hanover Street was like the opening of a cave.(p.28)

Metaphor

¨    (The pub) It was a forum, a parliament, a fountain of wisdom and a cesspool of nonsense…(p.12)

¨    Money’s all the trouble in the world. (p.23)

¨    …her eyes were dark wells of sadness mixed with joy. (p.34)

Personification

¨    …at his legs and buttocks, the pain jumping through him. (p.88)

¨    …but the stars remained bright, flickering and shimmering so that the sky was alive with them. (p.90)

Oxymoron

¨    Michael Adonis held it out of his reach, grinning and feeling pleasantly malicious. (p26)

¨    …because he was tired and irritable and happy and worried all at the same time. (p33)

¨    …she had a young-old face….(p.36)

Symbolism

Goose – woman (p.18)

Exaggeration.

¨    Michael Adonis said, but took the stick-thin arm …..(p.23)

¨    He waggled the bottle in front of the decayed ancient face with its purple veins… (p.26)

¨    A flood of thoughts bubbled through his mind. (p.27)

¨    …a pool of blood was forming under him spreading on the asphalt. (p.83)

CHARACTERS

Michael Adonis (Mikey)

¨    He is a murderer. He kills the Old Irishman by striking him with a bottle of wine. (p.27)

¨    He is abusive. He is so abusive and uses abusive words when he is angry. Eg “that sonavabitch, that bloody white sonavabitch, I’ll get him”. (p.5)

¨    He is revengeful. He plans to revenge against the injustice done to him by whites. “That bloody white sonavabitch, I’ll get him”. (p.5) That is the reason why he hits Uncle Doughty, and joins the gang.

¨    He is a drunkard and a heavy smoker. He smokes cigarettes every time and later he smokes dagga. He also drinks wine heavily.

¨    He is hot-tempered. Joe advices him politely not to join the gang but he answers Joe harhly. “Go to hell. Leave me alone” (p.71)

¨    He is a bad decision maker. When he is fired he becomes moody and promises to revenge, he kills the old Irishman just over a minor misunderstanding and finally joins the gang of robbers.

¨    He hates white people. After killing Uncle Doughty he does not feel guilty of the same but he feels superior.

¨    He has a changing behaviour. In other words he has no firm stand. He was a nice man that even Foxy’s gang acknowledged that he cannot accept to join them but later he joins them.

¨    He is a victim of racism. He is fired from his job by a white foreman just because he asked to go to the piss-house (toilet).

¨    He is poor. He is among the poor people who live in the tenements and work for whites to earn a living. When he is fired from his job he joins the gang of robbers.

Willieboy

¨    He is a victim of racial injustice. He is killed by Constable Raalt just by being suspected as a murderer.

¨    He is a heavy drunkard and a smoker. Just like other guys in the society he smokes cigarettes and drinks wine.

¨    He is poor. He goes to borrow money from Mikey then Uncle Doughty and discovers the murder. He also goes to ask for cheap wine from Miss Gipsy.

¨    He is quarrelsome/troublesome. He quarrels with Miss Gipsy and his customers just after provoking them interfering their relationships.

¨    He is a robber. He arrests Mr. Greene, beats and searches him looking for money only to discover that he had no money. (p.69) Also when he promises to pay Miss Gipsy for the wine she says “Soon as you get money? You mean soon as you rob somebody again?” (p.48)

¨    He is a hypocrite. He walks around wearing a crucifix and mentions words like Jesus save me! but he has no any religious devotion. The author says “He wore a sportscoat over a yellow T-shirt and a crucifix around his neck, more as a flamboyant decoration than as an act of religious devotion” (p.3)

Joe.

¨    He is a homeless poor street boy. He comes from a poor family that was forced to move to the country leaving him alone in the city.

¨    He is a good advisor. He advises Mikey not to join the gang because they will land him in trouble but Mikey ignores him.

¨    He is a victim of racial injustice. His family is evicted from the house after failing to pay the house rent because his father is jobless.

Constable Raalt

¨    He is a murderer and a hypocrite. He is always thinking of killing his wife but decides against it, because it is sin. However he ends up killing the innocent Willieboy as if it is not a sin to kill an African.

¨    He is a cruel and a merciless police constable. He is so violent to Africans as he beats them mercilessly. Also when he shoots Willieboy, the diver suggests calling the Ambulance but he refuses and suggests taking the boy to the police station instead.

¨    He is a heavy smoker. He smokes cigarettes to the point that Mr Andries is annoyed. He even ignores to take Willieboy to the station and goes to look for a cigarette.

¨    He has no true love to his wife. He always has trouble with his wife and sometimes thinks of killing her.

¨    He is a racist. He hates Africans and mistreats them.

Uncle Doughty.

¨    He is an ex-actor. He says “I used to be an actor. God bless my soul.” (p.25)

¨    He is a deserted old man. The author says “Now he was a deserted, abandoned ruin, destroyed by alcohol…” (p.23)

¨    He is a war veteran. He served in two wars. (p.23)

¨    He is a smoker, alcoholic, and diabetic. After being deserted he becomes alcoholic and a smoker waiting for death. “This old man, who was an Irishman and who was dying of alcoholism, diabetes and old age, had once been an actor” (p.23)

¨    He is muredered by Mikey. Mikey strikes his head with  a bottle of wine and kills him.

Foxy and his gang.

¨    They are drug addicts (drunkards and heavy smokers of dagga – marijuana.

¨    They are murderers. Joe warns Mikey “They break into places and steal, and I heard they stabbed a couple of other johns” (p.71) he adds “They’ll murder somebody and get hanged, Mikey”

¨    They are robbers. They plan and carry out robbery missions in the city.

¨    They are bad advisors. They advise Mikey to stop being a good guy and join their gang. They even influence him to smoke dagga.

Gipsy

¨    She is a very tough and strong woman. The author says “She was strong and she held onto him while Willieboy struggled”. (p.52)

¨    She is a petty business woman. She owns a café where she earns money to support her life.

¨    She humiliates Willieboy. After giving him a bottle of cheap wine she tells him to leave after finishing because she is expecting some respectable customers (p.48)

Franky Lorenzo

¨    He is apologetic. When he shouts at his wife and offends her, he then apologises “Awright. It’s awright. I’m sorry I shouted” (p.35)

¨    He is poor. He shares a room with his four children two boys and two girls who share a bed and a worn out blanket.

¨    He works as a stevedore. This is a person whose job is moving goods on and off ships. The author describes him this way “He was a stevedore and worked like hell in the docks and he felt angry with himself” (p.35)

John Abrahams

¨    He is a betrayer and cannot keep secrets. He betrays his fellow Africans by giving witness to the police although he was not right.

¨    He is a smoker. Willieboy gives him a matchbox to light his cigarette but later be gives false witness against him.

¨    He suffers intrapersonal conflict. After betraying Willieboy he asks himself. “What’s it help you, turning on your own people?” (p.91).

Andries

¨    He is a policeman and a driver of the police patrol van.

¨    He is nervous. He fears the racial tension might one day result into something terrible.

¨    He is kind-hearted and sympathetic. He hates the way Cons. Raalt mistreats Africans. He wonders why he shot Willieboy while they could just get hold of him. He also suggests calling the ambulance to rush him to the hospital to save his life.

THEMATIC ANALYSIS

RACISM AND APARTHEID POLICY.

The author shows the extent to which racism was tremendous in South Africa during the time of Apartheid policy. Africans were marginalised in all spheres of existence.  The following cases illustrate the injustice, oppression and humiliation that was done to Africans on the basis of colour bar.

¨    Racism in workplaces. Africans are fired from their jobs just for minor reasons. Michael Adonis is a case in point.

¨    Racism in settlement areas. Africans live in dirty streets in rented tenements. Mikey, Franky Lorenzo, Abrahams and others are living in one apartment. Even Andries wonders why Uncle Doughty – white man – was living with the blacks. “What would a white man be doing living in a place like this?” (p.57)

¨    Racism in social gathering. Joe and Mikey discuss about how the City council plans to make the beaches to be special for whites only. Joe says “I hear they are going to make the beaches so only white people can go there?” (p.9).

¨    Racism in relationship. It is shown that apart from South Africa, even in America people are treated on the basis of colour bar. Mr Greene reports “I read how they hanged up a negro in the street in America. Whites done it.” and then he adds “Some whites took a negro out in the street and hanged him up. They said he did not look properly at some woman.”(p.15) This was the time of Jim Crow laws in America.

POVERTY

Poverty has spread all over the African location to the point that many Africans have lost hopes and engage in illegal crimes due to poor life. The following are cases in point.

¨    Mikey is poor and works for the whites in a factory to earn a living. When he is fired, he becomes hopeless and decides to join a gang of robbers.

¨    Joe is a poor boy whose family went back to live in the country after failing to pay the house rent and life was becoming tough for them in town. Talking of his father Joe says “He didn’t have no job. He was out of job for a long time and we didn’t get things to eat often. Me and my brother Matty used to go out mornings and ask from door to door for pieces of stale bread. (p.66)

¨    Franky Lorenzo lives a poor life with his five children and his wife Grace. Four of their children share one bed and a worn out blanket. The author says “Four of their children lay sleeping in the narrow single bed against the wall on the other side of the room. They slept under the one thread-bare, worn, sweaty blanket…” (p.33)

¨    Willieboy is poor. That’s why he goes to borrow the money from Mikey and discovers Uncle Doughty’s dead body. He also goes to ask for cheap wine from Miss Gipsy promising to pay when he gets money. He beats and searches Mr Greene in the street expecting to get money from him.

CLASSES/SOCIAL INEQUALITY

¨    There are two major classes in this society. On one hand there is a high class comprising of rich white people who own the major means of production like land, factories, tenements and have political power controlling the government organs like the police who work in the favour of whites.

¨    On the other hand there is a low class comprising of poor Africans who just work for the whites in factories and live in rented tenements owned by Whites. These ones live miserably and are marginalised by the whites in many spheres.

CONFLICTS

Intrapersonal conflict.

¨    Mikey suffers intrapersonal conflict after killing Uncle Doughty. He is thinking “What’s the law for? To kick us poor brown bastards around. You think they are going to listen to your story; Jesus, and he was a white man, too. …well I didn’t mean to finish him” (p.41)

¨    John Abrahams suffers intrapersonal conflict after betraying Willieboy and he gets killed for the crime he did not commit. He regrets “What’s it help you, turning on your own people?” (p.91).

Personal conflicts.

¨    There is a conflict between Mikey and the white foreman. It occurs when Mikey asks to use the lavatory. It causes Mikey to lose his job. Mikey promises to revenge.

¨    There is a conflict between Cully the butcher-shop man and Flippy. This resulted from the rumours that Cully was messing around with his goose (woman). Cully stabs Flippy with a butcher knife.

¨    There is a conflict between Willieboy and Miss Gipsy. This occurs when Willieboy asks her why she lets the foreigners to mess with African girls. Protecting her customers Gipsy hits him expertly behind the ear.

Social conflict.

¨    There is a general social conflict between the white population and the black population in South Africa. The former is mistreating the later just because of the colour bar.

Family conflict.

¨    There are three major family conflicts recorded in the story.

o Constable Raalt is in conflict with his wife to the point that he thinks of killing her. “It’s enough to make a man commit murder, constable Raalt told himself, sitting in the driving cabin of the patrol van. I’d wring her bloody neck but it’s a sin to kill your wife.” (p.36)

o Frank Lorenzo is in conflict with his wife over the question of childbirth. F. Lorenzo accuses his wife for not controlling her birth by drinking the pills. She too accuses him for not controlling his pleasures.

o Willieboy reports how his father used to beat him with his mother and the mother revenged by beating Willieboy. The author says “His mother beat him at the slightest provocation and he knew that she was wreaking vengeance upon him for the beatings she received from his father. His father came home drunk most nights and beat his mother and him with a heavy leather belt” (p.80)

MORAL DECAY (IMMORALITY).

The author shows how decayed and rotten this society is. There are many cases that show moral decay in the society. The following are a few of them.

¨    Alcoholism/drunkenness. Many people are alcoholic and heavy drunkards. Willieboy, Mikey, Foxy and his gang, Mr Green, and many other Africans meet in the bars or clubs to drink alcohol while others like Uncle Doughty take it to their rooms.

¨    Crimes such as robbery. There is a state of insecurity due to robbery. Foxy and his gang commit crimes in the city by breaking into houses and stealing or murdering people. Joe says “They break into places and steal, and I heard they stabbed a couple of other johns” (p.71)

¨    Manslaughter. This is a crime of killing somebody illegally but not deliberately. Mikey kills Uncle Doughty unintentionally but he doesn’t feel sympathetic about it. He says “Well, what’s he want to come and live here among us browns for? To hell with him. Well, I didn’t mean to finish him. Awright, man, he’s dead and you’re alive. Stay alive.” (p.41). constable Raalt shoots Willieboy but he does not feel any responsibility for what he has done or rush him for medical care he lingers until the boy dies.

¨    Drug addiction (smoking dagga). Many people are addicted either to alcoholism or to smoking cigarette and dagga (marijuana).

¨    Abusive language. The society is rotten and this is manifested by the way they address each other using abusive language. E.g. Raalt calls the Africans “You bastards, you want to be shot, too?” he also says “This crowd. A lot of bloody baboons” (p.84)

Mikey also says, “That sonofabitch, that bloody sonavabich”, (p.5)

¨    Prostitution and making love in the doorway of the tenement. On his way to Mikey’s room Willieboy he sees a couple making love in the doorway. The author says “In the darkened doorway of the tenement between a fruit shop and a shoe store a couple made love, their faces glued together…”(p.30-31)

POSITION OF WOMEN

¨    Women are portrayed as prostitutes and tools for pleasure.  Men use women to satisfy their sexual desires. Franky Lorenzo uses his wife as a tool for pleasure as a result he has got 5 children and his wife is pregnant. The white customers (Red, George, and Ray Ybarra) use African girls as tools for pleasure.

¨    Women are portrayed as a child bearers and caretakers. F. Lorenzo’s wife Grace has given birth to five children and takes care of them. Also Willieboy’s mother used to warn him not to be naughty.

¨    Women are portrayed as weak people. Willieboy’s father used to beat his wife but because she could not fight back she would avenge by beating Willieboy.

¨    Women are portrayed as light-hearted. Grace cries just after being told to drink the pills to control her childbirth. She also screams when she sees Uncle Doughty’s dead body and alerts others in the tenement.

Other minor themes include.

a)    Hypocrisy

¨    Willieboy is a hypocrite. He walks around wearing a crucifix and mentions words like Jesus save me! but he has no any religious devotion. The author says “He wore a sportscoat over a yellow T-shirt and a crucifix around his neck, more as a flamboyant decoration than as an act of religious devotion” (p.3)

b)   Awareness

¨    Willieboy is aware of the mistreatments done to Africans by whites that he has decided not to work for the whites. He says “Working for whites. Happens all the time, man. Me, I never work for no white john. Not even brown one. To hell with work. Work, work, work, where does it get you?” (p.4).

¨    Constable Raalt is aware of the fact that killing his wife is a sin. However he shoots and kills Willieboy and doesn’t care.

c)    Betrayal

¨    John Abrahams betrays his fellow Africans by giving false witness against them. For example he says that Willieboy killed the Old Irishman while it is not true. Later he discovers that what he has done is not fair betraying his own people. He regrets “What’s it help you, turning on your own people?” (p.91).

¨    Flippy’s woman (goose) betrays him by messing with Cully something that causes the conflict between the two. Flippy asks Cully “I hear you have been messing with my goose, hey? You been have a good time with my goose hey?” (p.16)

d)   Ignorance

¨    Poor people are ignorant of birth control methods. Franky Lorenzo summarises this situation by saying: “The rich people got money but they got one, two kids. They got enough to feed ten, twenty children and they only make one or two. We haven’t got even enough for one kid and we make eight, nine – one a year.” (p.34)

e)    Wife beating.

¨    Willieboy’s father used to beat his wife and the mother revenged by beating Willieboy. He says “His mother beat him at the slightest provocation and he knew that she was wreaking vengeance upon him for the beatings she received from his father. His father came home drunk most nights and beat his mother and him with a heavy leather belt” (p.80)

Messages

¨    Robbery, alcoholism, dagga & cigarette smoking, prostitution and other crimes should be discouraged because they are not solutions to problems. They just create more problems without settling the old ones.

¨    Spouse beating is outdated it should be discouraged. The married couples should find a way to settle their disputes peacefully without having to fight against each other.

¨     Racism and social injustice should be abolished. They create unnecessary hatred and unhealthy relationship among the members of the same community.

¨    We should work hard to alleviate poverty in our society.

¨    African Governments should create job opportunities for the citizens. This will help to reduce the number of youths engaging in criminal acts like robbery and prostitution to get money.

¨    Betrayal and hypocrisy should be discouraged in the society.

¨    Poor people should learn how to control birth. This will help them to avoid large families they cannot afford to feed.

Relevance

¨    This novella is still relevant today as it was in the days of Apartheid. Although to some extent racial tension has slowed down in South Africa, there are cases of Xenophobia (a strong feeling of dislike or fear of people from other countries) reported which were inherited from the racial injustice they suffered during the apartheid regime.

¨    Poverty among the black population in South Africa is still a problem that calls for the attention from the government.

¨    The crimes like robbery, prostitution, smoking marijuana, murder, and alcoholism are still reported everywhere in African large cities.

¨    Police injustice and torture to the citizens is still experienced today especially when they are defending the interests of those in power. They use excessive force to suppress resistances from the unarmed citizens.