

# Racism in Novels



Racism in Novels:  
A Comparative Study of Brazilian  
and South African Cultural History

By

Elaine Rocha

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P U B L I S H I N G

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by Elaine Rocha

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*To my father, Francisco Pedro Rocha, who  
always believed in me.*

*To my children, Caio, Luan and Leila, thank  
you for your trust and love at all times.*

*To Anthony for all the support in this unlimited  
partnership.*

One of the most remarkable skills of the enlightened intellect is its ability to withdraw without disengaging and vice versa. The intellect feels constrained to pause and contemplate, to encompass disparate elements of experience, to analyze and synthesize, to assert its own organic view of life; the intellect becomes even more sharply aware of its own nature in the context of history that shapes it and is shaped by it. More than this, it intuits the pervasive and all-encompassing process of the human spirit we call civilization even while it serves as the latter's agent.

—Es'kia Mphahlele

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This book is the result of a research project which started in Pretoria, South Africa in 2003 as part of my own pondering about that society, as I observed its struggle to overcome Apartheid's legacy and rebuild itself into a democratic nation; and at the same time, my questioning of the invisibility in my fatherland of our African descended population, a society that is proudly identified with racial tolerance. Two years in South Africa gave me as much as some people will get in their entire life in terms of experience and learning. From there I went for a short stay in Maputo, Mozambique, and between 2005 and 2007 I lived in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, while researching and writing this book. These parts of Africa are present in these pages, as well as Brazil, which I carry in my soul.

Racial differences are not defensible, since they are the constructs of hierarchies based on physical features which are purely abstract and artificial, even though they are so real, that one can feel them anywhere. The colonization of our senses in relation to pseudo racial differences has been so intense that even those who are victimized by stigmas believe all the lies created by racism. Today the South African Apartheid regime is over and Brazil walks firmly toward a solution for its racial inequalities, still this enemy keeps winning, and we can find it in every corner at any time. As Walter Benjamin says, we need to keep on with the fight.

The publication of this book is more than an accomplishment. It is part of my commitment against racism and any other form of discrimination. Much more could be written to complement the analysis that the following pages contain, however, I decided to leave it as it was presented for the first time, as part of my own history.

Many people have assisted me during my masters studies and in my work on this thesis, and many others helped transform the thesis into a book. The last steps would not have been possible without the patient assistance of Andy Taitt, who worked for weeks helping with the editing and other last minute details.

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# INTRODUCTION

This is a comparative study of Brazilian and South African racial policies and concepts during the first half of the twentieth century, and how they are reflected in the literature of both countries, particularly in the novels of Alan Paton, Jorge Amado, Lima Barreto and Peter Abrahams.

As Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre proposed, “history is a daughter of its own time.” This means that history is tightly connected to the historians and the time during which they are writing. Not only the exact moment when the act of writing is done, but also the personal history of the historian interferes with his or her choice of subject, theoretical analysis and sources.<sup>1</sup>

For more than fifty years, the ideas of Bloch have influenced the way history has been read, written and taught. Abandoning positivist tendencies and linearity, he defended an approach in *close up*, considering human activity, in *the making of history*, the interdisciplinary approach and the use of multiple sources of documents. In 1931, Bloch wrote a book about French medieval history using literature as the main source to understand the daily lives of ordinary people in the country. By doing this, he proposed an analysis of the society mindset and the purposes that motivated the actions in the past, along with justifications, reason and causes. It was the beginning of the *history of mentalities*.

In the journal *Annales*, he defines history as a science of the present. The historian’s job, as he contends, starts when he/she faces what remains of the past. The remains can be documents, but documents do not speak for themselves; the historian must know how to interpret them. That means that every research result in history is a version of the past, depending on the researcher’s own history, the remains that he or she faced, the choices that were made when selecting the documents and, most of all, what questions were asked to these documents.

As such it is important to emphasize that this work is written by a Brazilian historian who could be classified during the apartheid era in South Africa as a “colored woman” and in Brazil as a “morena”<sup>2</sup>. In both cases it means that the author has both black and white ancestors.

The research project was conceived at the University of Pretoria, South Africa, during the academic year 2004-5, and developed during the

following years until 2007. The process of investigation included efforts to understand South African history and culture, and a re-evaluation of Brazilian cultural history.

The first thing that attracts the attention (and curiosity) of a Brazilian visiting or living in South Africa is the issue of race, and how this is predominant in South African daily life. In the same way, a newcomer to Brazil will notice that Brazilians rarely talk about issues linked to racism. Over the years, the image of Brazil as a place without racial conflicts has attracted tourists and scholars, many of whom found that the image was just an illusion and that racism is also an important issue in Brazilian society.

Brazilian society has its own way of coping with racial issues on its own terms, which can be misunderstood by tourists or a less attentive researcher. Race is in fact a big problem in Brazil, and has been since colonial times, and it also contributes to social, political and economic exclusion. According to the 2004 census, about 46 per cent of Brazil's population of 180 million were of African descent<sup>3</sup>. Yet Afro-Brazilians are under-represented in all sectors of society as a result of systematic racial discrimination – associated with poverty and lack of access to education – in contrast with the well-publicized myth of Brazil as a racial democracy.

To make comparisons is a difficult task and can also be very unfortunate, since on the one hand the subjects in question would never be pleased with the judgment of an outsider, considering it obtuse, or on the other with the judgment of their peers, considering it as treason. Despite honest efforts made to obtain a basic understanding of South African history, there could be no comparison with the experience of having been born in Brazil and having studied its history for more than twenty years. Therefore, I am far from accomplishing a balanced knowledge of the history and historiography of both countries.

Coetzee is suspicious about outsiders studying apartheid in South Africa, particularly historians who, he declares, cannot expand their work beyond comparisons between different countries and racial policies.<sup>4</sup> The author believes that to understand what it was like to live under the regime of racial segregation, one must have lived there. Similarly, to understand the disguises and masks of Brazilian racism, it helps to have been raised in Brazil and it helps even more to be part of the population discriminated against. I am considering the racial issue as something very sensitive for both societies – a minefield, one might say, or a holy land, for those who prefer the biblical approach.<sup>5</sup>

Debates and informal discussions comparing Brazil and South Africa can lead to discussions about racial segregation in the African country, in comparison to the relative tolerance of mixed relations and marriages among Brazilians and the absence of segregation laws. However, the numbers show that more black South Africans have access to university than Brazilians<sup>6</sup>. During the twentieth century South African literature included a larger number of black authors in literature and in academia, even during the apartheid regime, while Brazil cannot point to more than half a dozen.

Laws and statistics have a limited capacity to explain a topic so involved in feelings and perceptions. That is why, in this particular work, the similarities of and differences between the South African and Brazilian answers to the racial questions are analyzed through the literature of a particular time in the history of both countries.

As it focuses on comparing racism in South Africa and Brazil by analyzing eight novels written between 1909 and 1953 that discuss racism, the aim is to examine the phenomenon in these two societies and the way it was reflected in the novels of two white authors – Alan Paton and Jorge Amado – and two black authors: Afonso Henrique Lima Barreto and Peter Henry Abrahams.

Paton's novels *Cry, the beloved country* (1948)<sup>7</sup> and *Too late, the Phalarope* (1953)<sup>8</sup> use the theme of racial segregation in South Africa and its consequences of social, economic and political exclusion as a basis for their stories, while the selected novels of Amado – *Seara Vermelha* (1946)<sup>9</sup> and *Jubiabá* (1934-35)<sup>10</sup> – explore social, political and economic segregation in Brazil during the authoritarian reign of Getúlio Vargas.

On the other hand, the works of Lima Barreto, particularly *Recordações do Escrivão Isaías Caminha* (1909)<sup>11</sup> and *Clara dos Anjos* (1922),<sup>12</sup> approach racism via the Brazilian mentality and examine how this contributes to social and economic exclusion.<sup>13</sup> He is a lonely voice in a society that denies discrimination and segregation, at a time when no other black or colored novelists in Brazil were presenting their views of this problem.

This was certainly not a problem for Peter Abrahams, who was not alone when denouncing social and economic exclusion based on racial discrimination in South Africa. His novels achieved considerable success inside and outside Africa, all of them addressing this problem, although this study selected only two: *Mine Boy* (1946)<sup>14</sup> and *The Path of Thunder* (1948)<sup>15</sup>.

The fact that Barreto's writings are from the beginning of the century is useful to understanding racial thoughts in Brazil and the daily life of

black and colored people in Rio de Janeiro during the first two decades of the century, a period when the debate on racial policies and scientific racism was still very heated in Brazil. The theories presented during this time provided the framework in which to understand concepts and policies adopted by the Brazilian government and society after the 1930s.

It is true that comparative analyses between Brazil and South Africa have become more popular in recent years, following the strengthening of diplomatic and commercial relations between the two countries, the impact that anti-apartheid policies in South Africa have had overseas, and the intensified struggle for affirmative action against social exclusion in Brazil.

Despite the fact that Brazil and South Africa share many common historical aspects, like colonization, imperialism, slavery and totalitarian regimes, there is still a vast area in comparative history to be researched. A start was made by Gay Seidman, comparing the role of labour organizations and the movement for democratization in South Africa and Brazil.<sup>16</sup> Another important contribution came from a Brazilian researcher, Fernando Rosa Ribeiro, who analyzed and compared racism and nationalism in Brazil and South Africa. His work opened the doors for a new perspective on Brazilian racism, helping to break down the myth of “racial democracy”.<sup>17</sup>

In part, this absence is associated with the problem of the difference in languages and the way both academic communities are connected with European and North American theories and authors. Even though Africanism or Afrocentrism introduced a new methodology and theory of history after the 1950s, this movement did not affect Brazilian academics in the same way it did those in the United States, for example.

Until recently, strong diplomatic relation between Brazil and South Africa were nearly nonexistent, which affected the development of scholarship in Brazil about South Africa and vice-versa. Prejudice also plays a role, since most Brazilians have a stereotypical idea about Africa, thinking of it as “the dark continent”, and associating with poverty, exploitation, civil war, misery, underdevelopment and a mainly illiterate black population, none of these perceptions has attracted many researchers.

As Chris Lorenz indicates, “next to the method of historical comparison is the politics of comparison, which is hidden in the choice of parameters”.<sup>18</sup> In this case, the present political challenge to overcome racial exclusion in both countries inspired the choice of the subjects. Nowadays, the interest in race as a topic of study has grown among Brazilian historians, especially after the defeat of the apartheid regime in South Africa.

As the features of South African politics and policies of exclusion emerged with new colours for the world – given the testimonies, and new analyses publicized in the past fifteen years – Brazil was been pushed to face the problem of racial and social exclusion, unmasking its image as a “racial paradise”. At this point, comparative analysis of racial issues through their cultural history would help to understand differences and similarities between the two societies, which are still fighting racism and its consequences.

The period chosen for this investigation – 1900-1953 – witnessed the advance of capitalism, which for underdeveloped countries and colonies meant the exploitation of mineral reserves, the construction of roads, railways and ports; accompanied by rapid urbanization and industrial development; and all their social consequences. The rise of Nazi regimes in the thirties, with distinct racial ideas and social policies revived old theories about racial differences. After the World War II, the fight for democracy influenced the debate on racial discrimination and segregation worldwide, bringing a new wave of scientific explanations and a political and social demand for ending colonization on the African continent and racial segregation in the United States.

Although 1945 marked the beginning of a democratic period that ended nine years later in Brazil, the South African post-war period was marked by the institutionalization of the apartheid policy after the ascendancy of the Nationalist Party to power in 1948.

Since this work focuses on the idea of race and racism, books published before the 1950s will be used as primary sources<sup>19</sup>, while those written from the 1980s onward will be taken as a basic bibliography. Although not a strict categorization, since some seminal works written in the 1950s still have strong claims to current validity, this distinction seeks to separate what was once thought about race and influenced political arguments at the time the novels studied here were written and published, from what are considered today as new concepts in social history, sociology and anthropology.

This study is also concerned with the use of literature as a source for social and cultural history. The selected novels are used as primary sources, supported by historiography and other secondary sources. The most important questions raised are: “How are the racial issues manifested in the works of Paton, Abrahams, Lima Barreto and Amado novels?” and “How are those novels connected with Brazilian, South African and world history?”

## About the novels

The selection of the novels was made by considering their relevance in the national and international literature, their contents and links with Brazilian and South African history, and their authors' political views. For better understanding, a summary of each novel follows.

### *Seara Vermelha* (Red Harvest)<sup>20</sup>

This novel was chosen for this study because it explores social, political and economic problems in rural Brazil during the 1930s. It shows the inequality between the black and white populations, and also between southern and northern Brazil. The racial problem is carefully exposed in small details in the scenes and dialogues, yet, it is clear from the beginning to the end of the novel that poverty is brown and black.

*Seara Vermelha* is among the first novels of Jorge Amado, what critics consider his "early novels", because his production extends until the 1980s. Published in 1946, the same year in which the Communist Party of Brazil was recognized by the government, and the peasants movement was starting in central and northeastern Brazil.

It tells the story of Jerônimo, a peasant and his family in northeastern Brazil, who lived in a big farm with other families, all very poor. The farm belongs to a rich man, and it is a type of structure that remained from the time of slavery, reproducing the dominance of the rich/white man over poor/black people. The peasants are completely dependent on the farm and exploited by a system that keeps them in debt to the landlord and prevent them from saving money for themselves.

At the beginning of the novel, the farmer dies and his property goes to his son, a politician with no interest in rural life. He sells the farm and all the workers are forced to leave the place within a week. Some families decided to travel south, to São Paulo, where they believe there is no poverty, drought or misery as in the northeast. Entire families travel by foot for many days with little food crossing the parched lands until they reach a town at the river's edge; then they travel by boat to another town, where they hope to get a ticket for the train to São Paulo. Death, hunger and disease accompany them all the way.

Those who survive arrive in the town and have to submit to a medical examination in order to get their passes for the train and employment. Jerônimo, who is very sick, is diagnosed with TB and refused a ticket. However, his daughter Marta, a young woman of 18 years, decides to exchange her virginity for a pass for her father from the local doctor. The



family finally travels south – but is now very diminished. Of the three children, one dies from tetanus, another from food poisoning; a couple of young cousins (Jerônimo's youngest son and his brother's daughter) give up the journey and become peasants at a farm, an old aunt disappears, and another aunt dies from hunger. Marta must stay in the town by the river, because she is now a prostitute. Three other men who do not take the trip, had left the family before. They are also Jerônimo's sons: one became a *cangaceiro*, a type of bandit who attacks villages and farms in the region; another became a policeman in the same region. Without knowing it, the two brothers became involved in a fight between the police and bandits and the *cangaceiro* kills his own brother. The third brother became a soldier in the army and later left to join the Communist Party.

The trajectory of Jerônimo's family and friends provides the author with a plot, to explore the inequalities and injustices in Brazil, and to criticize the system that preserved the structure of slavery, under other names. At the end, the old man dies on a farm in São Paulo, without having bought the land he dreamed of owning his entire life. His communist son is in jail, after rebelling against the dictatorship, and his grandson, Tonho, is the only hope for a new future. As an adult, Tonho goes back to the dry lands, to teach about a new way of life that could be possible with communism.

### *Jubiabá*<sup>21</sup>

Jorge Amado published this novel in 1935, during the first years of the Vargas dictatorship, in a period when Brazilian intellectuals were still discussing race as part of the nationalist movement that characterized the Vargas government. The early 1930s also marks the engagement of the author with the Communist Party and the Party's commitment to the lower classes and the movement of Brazilian intellectuals valuing the popular culture as opposed to the European.

In *Jubiabá*, the author depicts the lives of black people in Salvador, the capital of Bahia State. The racial theme is clearer in this novel, especially because it explores the love of a black man for a white woman. In each part of the book, Amado makes an effort to demolish racial stereotypes that were very common in the 1930s and 1940s. Its black characters are strong men, popular heroes and leaders. It was also the beginning of a tradition in Amado's novels: the use of love scenes depicting black bodies in a sensual manner.

This novel traces the trajectory of Antônio Balduino. Starting from his life as a boy in Salvador's slum, Amado points out how different the lives

of black and white people are in 1930s Bahia. Balduino lives with his aunt, until she goes crazy and has to be committed to an asylum for the rest of her life. A neighbour takes the boy to a rich white man's house, where he works and lives. As time passes Balduino gets closer to Lindinalva, the daughter of his master. He is also an easy target for the racist governess, who does not want to see a black boy in a better position. Accused of lusting for Lindinalva Balduino is severely punished and decides to run away. In the second part of the novel, he is a homeless teenager, surviving off petty crime and living among other homeless boys on the streets of Salvador. As a young man, he is "discovered" by a boxing manager, who transforms him into a champion. Balduino becomes famous as the black man who defeated the German boxer, but he leaves the fights and makes his living selling music for white musicians and radio producers. He also has a very busy sexual life.

Disappointed with his life and still in love with Lindinalva, Balduino goes to the countryside to work on a farm. There he encounters more misery and human exploitation, and so decides to return to Salvador. Just when he finds a job as a stevedore in the port, the workers go on strike for better salaries. The hero starts to follow the ideas of communism and becomes the strike leader and an example for other workers. At the same time, Lindinalva, who was abandoned by her fiancé, works as a prostitute to provide for her child.

At the end of the novel, Balduino meets her again and decides to pay her for sex, but he finds that she is dying. She asks for his forgiveness and to take care of her son. Balduino finally acknowledges his love for Lindinalva and decides to be a foster parent for the boy.

### *Cry, the Beloved Country*<sup>22</sup>

Alan Paton's famous novel is also one of South Africa's internationally best known literary works. Published in 1946, two years before the rise of the Nationalist Party, it became the voice against apartheid outside Africa, for more than three decades. The novel tells the story of two men, a black priest and a white farmer, close neighbours who never really knew each other until a tragedy united them.

Father Kumalo is a Christian priest of Zulu origins who lives in the countryside. One day he is called to Johannesburg – the big city to which every African goes and disappears – to get his sister back. It is an opportunity to find out about his brother and son, who also left the village years before and never came back. In his journey, the priest comes across many problems that affect the black population: the poverty of the

countryside, the poverty of the cities, alcoholism, prostitution, crime, corruption, and the struggle for services and rights.

James, the farmer, also has a son who lives in Johannesburg, but his son has different ideas about how the social policies in South Africa should deal with black people. James could never understand his son, until he was killed during a robbery. The killer is Kumalo's son, and as a result the young man is condemned to death.

In the novel, aspects of life in South Africa in the 1950s are presented: the illegal sale of liquor in black neighbourhoods, juvenile criminality among the urban African population, the deficiency of transportation for black people in Johannesburg, rural exodus, poverty, and broken families.

The novel describes many aspects of apartheid, intending to give the views from white and black perspectives. Using segregation and educational policies as a means to control the African population is discussed in the chapters. However, the most important message is that apartheid brings loss to black and white people. Two men lose their only sons because of apartheid's inequality and exclusion. Although limited by his own position in this society, Paton's novel criticizes the government's policies of segregation and proposes another way: blacks and whites coming closer and working together for a better South Africa.

### *Too late, the phalarope*<sup>23</sup>

This is another novel by Paton, although not as well known as the previous one. It was published in 1953, during the first years of the apartheid regime, taken by the author as a tragic moment for South Africa.

The central theme is the forbidden relationship between an Afrikaner man and a colored woman. Pieter is a policeman in a small town dominated by racial classifications and the norms of segregation imposed by law and sustained by culture. Married to an Afrikaner woman and with two children, he had the perfect family. Yet, he is not sexually happy and nurtures a strong attraction for Stephanie, a colored young woman – who in the novel is called “girl”.

The author explores the cultural universe of the Afrikaner society and family, depicting the religiosity, the sense of community and the aversion to miscegenation that characterized this social group in the 1950s. The novel tells the story from the point of view of Aunt Sophie, an Afrikaner woman, subordinated by her brother's will, whose views reflect her culture and her love for her family.

Pieter is divided by his duties as a citizen, husband, son, Christian, and policeman and his uncontrollable lust for Stephanie, who does not present

any resistance to him. His authoritarian father is totally against any miscegenation, including Afrikaner/English, based on his interpretation of the Bible. Also his friends and colleagues are always trying to avoid closer contact with black and colored people. But Pieter does not feel that way, and at a very young age he understands that, because of this, there is something wrong in his soul or mind.

The story is about a man struggling against his feelings and trying to fit into his own culture. In the first chapter, he caught a young man chasing Stephanie and, instead of taking him to jail, gives him advice, explaining how disgraceful it would be for the youth to be in a situation where everybody would condemn him and what could happen to his mother and his friends.

Stephanie lives with an old colored lady and her son, providing for them by selling *kaffir* beer, the illicit liquor. For this she often goes to jail and is known among the policemen of the town. Pieter resents the fact that his wife does not know how to make him happy and shows little interest in sex. One night he goes again to meet Stephanie and has sex with her in the shadow of a tree. But he is seen, although he does not know this, by his colleague from the police station who keeps quiet until the right time to present proof of Pieter's crime.

Aunt Sophie senses the danger when she notices the way Stephanie looks at Pieter and tries to send the colored woman away, with her son, using the existing rules of segregation for that. However, before she can succeed, Stephanie is again caught by the police for selling liquor, and to avoid losing her child and going to jail for a long time, she agrees to denounce Pieter under the Immorality Act.

Disgrace comes to Pieter's family. His father erases his name from the family book and dies a few days later from a heart attack. His sister breaks her engagement with the minister, her mother loses her job, and he goes to jail. The final words of Aunt Sophie speak against the apartheid and the "iron laws" that sacrifice the entire society.

This novel is used to analyze the South African perspective on interracial relationships and miscegenation, in contrast to Brazilian culture. It shows how emotional this issue was, and how culture and laws regulated marriage and sexual intercourse.

### ***The Path of Thunder*<sup>24</sup>**

*The Path of Thunder*, from Peter Abrahams is another version of interracial love in South Africa. It was published in 1948, in the United

States and tells the story of a forbidden love between Lane, a colored man and Sarie, an Afrikaner woman.

The story starts when Lane, a teacher who had attended college and worked as a teacher in the Cape, comes back home intending to start a school for colored children in his village. From the beginning he experiences racism and violence. The Afrikaner men dislike his clothes and attitude, which are quite contrary to the submissive, dependent and illiterate colored people that live in the area.

Although the central theme is the love between Lane and Sarie, the context explores the roots of miscegenation, how coloreds and Afrikaners were related in the past and present. Lane is actually the son of the old Villier master, conceived when his mother used to work in the big house of the Villiers. Sarie is not a real Villier, yet she is part of the family, since her father was a foundling raised by the old Villier. Mad Sam is another colored who was violently beaten up by Gert Villier the new master, because of his love affair with his wife, the other Sarie, (dead in the novel) in the past, as a result, Sam developed mental problems. He protects the young Sarie, even though he does not know why, since he can't remember the past. Fieta is the colored woman with a liberal sexual life. She loves Sam and takes care of him.

Mabel, Lane's sister wants the same things that white girls have: nice clothes, light work, leisure and education. She falls in love with Tony, a non-racist English anthropologist, but he only wants her friendship. Hopeless, she runs away to the Cape, where coloreds have a better life.

Racial hierarchy is shown in the novel as Lane makes friends with Mako, the African teacher in the native community. The colored priest dislikes the idea of a colored coming closer to a black, considered racially inferior.

At the end of the novel, Lane and Sarie decide to run away to live in Mozambique, where a colored man can freely marry a white woman. Their affair is discovered and a group of Afrikaner men come to teach Lane a lesson, as they did with Sam in the past. Sam recovers his memory and comes to help the couple. Lane, Gert, Sam and Sarie die in the conflict.

Abrahams clearly exposes the insanity of a society and government that decide to rule over love affairs. The Afrikaner rejection of miscegenation is, also in this novel, treated as an emotional rather than a rational question. It is also exposed as a hypocritical position, since colored people have existed in South Africa for centuries, as a result of sexual relations between Europeans and Africans.

***Mine Boy***<sup>25</sup>

Peter Abrahams published this novel in 1946, the same year in which about 70,000 African workers challenged the system and almost paralyzed the economy through a strike that was violently suppressed by the Smuts government at the cost of many lives. As in *Red Harvest*, racism is exposed together with the question of class.

Xuma is a young man who comes from his tribal village to Johannesburg searching for a job to help out his family (mother and siblings). Like many other men in the same situation, he finds a job in the mines and a place to live in the township. All the social and economic problems of the township are explored in this novel, but not quite in the same way as Paton does in *Cry, the Beloved Country*. Abrahams' view of the lives of poor people is from the inside. There is no moral questioning as the author narrates the difficulties of life in Johannesburg and how poor people have to bend the law to survive.

Two universes co-exist and relate to each other in the novel: the township and the mine. In the first one, Xuma finds love with Elisa – the black teacher who struggles to accept the differences between her life and the lives of white women – the friendship of Leah, the liquor seller and Johannes, a miner who helps him to find a job. He also gets to know a black doctor, and admires the fact that the doctor has a nice house, furniture and an “almost white” wife. In the township Xuma finds colored people and black people living side by side, sometimes married to each other; workers, policemen and criminals. In the mines he meets other black miners living in the same poverty, and white miners commanding the black ones, sometimes abusing them. But he also gets to know the meaning of fellowship, and through Paddy – “the Red” – he is introduced to the ideas of communism and anti-racism.

From his first night in the township, Leah takes Xuma under her protection, teaching him how to survive and introducing him to friends like Johannes. On the other hand, he helps her in the beer business, watching out for the police and keeping troublesome people out of Leah's place.

In the mines, the work is divided into groups of black men who work under the supervision of a white man. Xuma is employed as a leader of the black miners in Paddy's group. His responsibility is to make sure that everybody is working and that the ground is safe for the group to excavate the walls. Johannes does the same for another group, but he drinks too much, and Xuma tries to help him.

Paddy's words of equality and workers uniting for their rights are strange to Xuma at the beginning. He regrets that inequality is what makes Elisa reject him, because she cannot accept herself as a black woman and conform to the life of black people; she wants the same life as the white women. Paddy and his girlfriend explain to Xuma that everybody has the right to a better life. But Xuma cannot understand Paddy's words, because inequality made Leah go to jail for selling liquor in the township, while white people could enjoy drinking liquor in their bars or pubs.

The meaning of Paddy's words only comes to him when a group of miners dies in an underground accident, Johannes among them, and the company wants to force the others back to work. Together, Xuma and Paddy lead a strike and challenge the authorities. At the end of the story, Paddy and Xuma go to jail, but Xuma feels like a real man – no longer a “boy” – equal to anyone else, as he decides to stand up and fight for a better life.

### *Clara dos Anjos*<sup>26</sup>

Alphonsus Lima Barreto wrote *Clara dos Anjos* in 1912, but he could publish it only in 1922. It tells the story of a young colored woman, Clara dos Anjos, who dreams of her first love and is seduced and abandoned by a white man. The author's choice of a surname for Clara – “dos Anjos” – is a way to clarify that she is poor and comes from a colored family. Surnames like “dos Anjos”, “de Jesus”, and “da Conceição” recall the past, when the absence of a family name was overcome by a religious denomination<sup>27</sup>. The name Clara dos Anjos – in English, Clara of the Angels – gives the idea of innocence, which is very convenient for the purpose of this novel.

Clara lives with her parents, who try to protect their only child from the world, fearing that somebody would take advantage of her innocence, as so often happens with poor colored women. Although the concept of township is not applicable in this case, Clara lives in the outskirts of Rio de Janeiro, in a working-class neighbourhood.

Cassy is the villain of the story. He is white, with blond hair and blue eyes – the prototype of the “charming prince” or “an angel”. However, he is the opposite: selfish, lazy, and uneducated. He enjoys seducing women and then abandoning them right away. At the beginning of the century, when chastity was the norm for a non-married woman, Cassy's victims are left to prostitution or loneliness. Their families were disgraced forever.

Cassy goes to Clara's home as a musician, during a celebration for her seventeenth birthday. As friends of Clara's family try to alert her father to

the danger of having Cassy close, her father prohibits him from visiting. The villain pays the alcoholic dentist to arrange secret meetings and kills Clara's godfather, as a revenge for his standing up against him.

Alas, it is too late. Clara is already in love, and refuses to see the bad in her lover. Everything falls apart when she finds herself pregnant, and Cassy, runs away with his mother's help, abandoning her.

Racism is clearly exposed when Cassy's mother refuses to accept Clara's right to "reparation" – which is marriage, according to the customs of the time – because she is a "nigger"; and when the police releases Cassy but charges his colored partner in the slaughter of the godfather.

By depicting the character and features of Cassy, Lima Barreto denounces in this novel the stereotypes of good/white – bad/colored. Moreover, he condemns the overprotection of women and pleads for their education, as he asserts that they are the only ones who can defend themselves.

Despite the fact that this novel was written at the beginning of the twentieth century, its relevance consists in being one of the few samples of literary works produced by colored men in Brazil. It is useful in this study to provide insight into the racial problem.

### ***Recordações do escrivo Isaiás Caminha (Recollections of the clerk Isaiás Caminha)***<sup>28</sup>

In the same way, in *Recollections of the clerk Isaiás Caminha*, Lima Barreto connects class and racial discrimination. The novel was published in 1909 and is considered an autobiographical work. Isaiás is a young man, a bastard, born from the union of a white priest and his black servant.

Despite the shame that his father nourishes for his "sin",<sup>29</sup> which kept him distant from his son, he provided a good education for his son, until the point when Isaiás wanted to attend law school. At this time, his father is dead and his poor mother and her siblings cannot afford to support the young man's dreams. The solution is to find somebody who has political influence, so he can nominate Isaiás for a government job in the capital, where he can live and attend the university.

Isaiás leaves his village with a letter from the rich farmer of the region and the hopes of his entire family. However, the letter does not help him in Rio de Janeiro. He cannot find a job, and his scarce savings dwindle away, as the politician who was supposed to help him, lets him down. As he looks for other jobs, in spite of his education and intelligence, racial prejudice keeps him unemployed. Even a simple job in a bakery is unavailable to him because of his features.



Finally, with the help of a friend that he made in the hostel, he finds a job at a newspaper as a clerk. Isaías' function is to help everybody, taking papers in and out, delivering messages, and other simple tasks. Nobody expects him to write or asks his opinion about any matters.

After a time, Isaías starts to learn about corruption in politics and at the personal level. Alcoholism, immorality, and mediocrity surround him at work. Nevertheless, he maintains his integrity, refusing to engage in parties with prostitutes and drink alcohol with the others.

When one of the journalists dies, he is the one who must give the news to his boss. He finds him in a whorehouse, in embarrassing circumstances: in the middle of a party with other men and women, naked and being ridden by a woman, who was spanking him. Ashamed of the situation and fearing the comments about the event, the boss gives Isaías a promotion and he gets the opportunity to write articles for the newspaper.

Despite the high quality of his work, as acknowledged by one of the older journalists – a Russian, with communist ideas – most of his other colleagues treat Isaías with hostility. Feeling the pressure at work and knowing that he only got the position because of the secret, Isaías considers himself corrupt for accepting the promotion. Self-conscious, he cannot enjoy his own success. After a time he takes a job in a government office away from the big cities, moves from Rio de Janeiro and marries a local colored woman, convinced that his plans of being a lawyer or journalist, will never be possible for a poor colored man like himself.

## **General organization of this study**

The first chapter discusses the methodological approach and theoretical bases to analyze history and racism using literature. It is not the aim of this study to analyze the literature from the viewpoint of a historian, but rather to identify the histories of Brazil and South Africa inside their respective literatures, like a plot in a novel, that influences the design of characters and their tragedies. The best way to do this is to understand the social histories of both countries and the way European ideas on racism influenced local governments and the viewpoints of intellectuals.

More on Brazilian and South African social history is present in the second chapter, which explores the trajectories of these countries and the way colonialism and slavery have influenced their social fabrics and concepts of racial superiority. Each country had its own views on miscegenation, nationalism, and modernity, which influenced the policy of

racial segregation in South Africa and the strategy of “whitening” in Brazil.

The third chapter explores the authors’ environments and their relationship with the racial policies of their countries. The influence of being raised in a particular class or racial group has determined their approach to social themes just as much as their political commitment.

The fourth chapter examines the importance of economic constraints imposed on the black and colored populations in Brazil and South Africa and how they are reflected in these novels, as they examine themes such as land ownership and labour exploitation. The author’s political ideologies and concerns about economics serve as a backdrop to these writings. The influence of communist ideas in Abrahams and Amado is particularly strong in their proposed solutions for social and racial exclusion.

In the fifth chapter, I analyze the fear of sexual miscegenation in South Africa and the complexity of the Brazilian perspective regarding miscegenation – which tolerates sexual intercourse between white men and black women, but denies the sexual interests of white women in black men. Gender roles in romantic and sexual relations and the social pressures exerted on interracial couples, and how they are presented in the novels are also part of this chapter.

For a better understanding, quotations from the novels are presented between inverted commas, since they are the “voices” of the authors – used as primary documents. These “voices” will dialogue with the historiography and theories from sociology, economics and political science.

Finally, it is important to state that it is not the intention of this study to fill all the gaps embodied in the historiography on racism in both cultures, but rather to propose a diverse view of the topic, amplifying the possibilities of analysis and approach to the social history.

## CHAPTER ONE

### COMPARING BRAZIL AND SOUTH AFRICA THROUGH CULTURAL HISTORY

Comparative history is always a high-risk job. And if we add to this the chore of discussing the racial issue in countries such as Brazil and South Africa it can be even more dangerous.

The best way to illustrate the difficulties of this task is to start by identifying and analyzing very common signs found in Brazilian and South African daily life. In Brazil these signs appear in many restaurants and cafes: “Visite nossa Cozinha” (visit our kitchen); in South Africa there is a warning, at the entrance of most businesses: “Right of Admission Reserved”. What do these signs mean?

Well, if a foreigner decides to take the Brazilian invitation seriously and mention to a local the intention of going inside the restaurant kitchen, he or she will be discouraged from doing so. The sign is an invitation on which no one is expected to act. Why? Because it would be unpleasant to face how the food is being prepared and served. Consequently, to avoid disappointment and frustration, the Brazilian host will prevent the naïve guest from accepting the “cordial invitation”. Cordiality is one of the characteristics that Brazilians are most proud of, despite the high levels of violence in this society.

On the other hand, the South African sign very clearly advises you that the owner or manager of the business or office (sometimes governmental) can ask you to leave the premises. Being a foreigner in South Africa ten years after the end of the apartheid regime, the warning implicit in the message troubled me, bringing me to ask a local gentleman about it. The answer, somehow reminded me of the “Brazilian way”<sup>1</sup>: “Don’t worry, these days, you can go wherever you want to”. In both cases, the visitor could ask what these signs are for.

So, here is the first comparison between the two countries: Brazilian cordiality does not presume your attendance, and the South African warning does not prevent you from getting into shops and public buildings. In both cases, what is written must be interpreted in the terms of

the local culture, since the meaning of the words goes beyond the dictionary definitions.

The second phenomenon that brings South Africans and Brazilians closer is the definition or classification of races. In Brazil, where miscegenation is predominant, the racial hierarchy is built in such a way that “one drop” of white blood can take an individual closer to being white, instead of being classified as black, like in the United States. The impossibility of applying the dichotomy “black – white” is explained by a wide gradation and significance of skin colour and other characteristics that define race in Brazil. The question in Brazilian studies, policies and surveys is to determine “who is black”. On the other hand, in South African society the white minority of the population is outnumbered by black Africans<sup>2</sup>, who have distinct backgrounds and are also influenced by miscegenation. The South African racial state needed to classify its population into European, colored or native, a task that proved from the beginning to be very challenging. Because the idea was to safeguard the white population’s privileges, the South African answer to the question was to determine “who was not European”<sup>3</sup>. The racial classifications in both countries were subjective to personal preferences or tendencies, and the building of a racial hierarchy based on biological features was interwoven with class and social components.

## 1.1 Race, history and the inevitable comparisons

If the racial issue is a part of the daily lives of South Africans and has been a theme of several studies for more than a century, in Brazil it was for a long time part of the *kitchen*. In other words, Brazilian racial issues were long considered private problems, which few researchers wanted to visit, while the government and the mass media kept advertising “racial democracy” as the strongest feature of Brazilian culture.

It is not the purpose of this book to discuss the idea of race and racism extensively, even though previous knowledge of the matter proves helpful in understanding the problem in Brazil and South Africa and why it is part of the novels of Paton, Abrahams, Lima Barreto and Amado.

During the post-war years, the problem of race and racism started to gain more importance among academics, with the question of decolonisation in Africa and Asia. The rise of African and African-American intellectuals in Europe and the United States, and the results of the racial policies of Nazism and fascism influenced the opening of history to new subjects, approaches and sources.

The study of racial issues, at first framed by anthropology and sociological studies, advanced through other fields. In the field of history, it overcame the traditional study of social history, binding culture, politics and economy, and unfolding other aspects to be considered, such as gender and class. The result of this movement among historians is exemplified in recent works. Eric Hobsbawm, in *The Age of Imperialism – 1875-1914*<sup>4</sup> refers to racial domination in association with economic and political factors; Peter Gay, explores the idea of “the convenient other” in *The Cultivation of Hatred*<sup>5</sup>, which fits perfectly with the concept of racism and racial inferiority, civilization and modernity in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century.

Marc Ferro has incisive arguments in *The Use and Abuse of History*<sup>6</sup> as well in *Colonization: a Global History*<sup>7</sup>, in which he emphasises the problem of racial exploitation and discusses the role of historians and history in perpetuating and fighting exclusion. The author strongly supports that colonialism and racism were closely related in the processes of nation building and imperialism in the past and that understanding them was crucial in analyzing contemporary social, economic and political problems.

His point of view can be used to analyse the absence of studies on racism in Brazil, where historians and other intellectuals embraced the idea of racial democracy, or simply treated social history as racially uniform – avoiding explorations of racial inequalities and conflicts after abolition (1888).

Although many studies have been conducted on race relations in Brazil from a historical perspective, the majority have concentrated on the period of slavery. Brazilian historians, following a tendency in the seventies and eighties to use Marxist analyses, separated slavery and the labour movement in Brazil, the first being a theme for the study of race<sup>8</sup> and the second for the study of class<sup>9</sup>.

The military dictatorship that prevailed in Brazil between 1964 and 1985 once more exploited the myth of “racial democracy” as part of a policy of conflict denial. Government propaganda emphasized the peaceful character of a united and homogeneous society, and to talk or write against it could be considered subversion.

The struggle for civil rights in the United States during the sixties and seventies affected Brazilian society in a different way. On one hand, the government controlled all information reaching the public; on the other hand, it reinforced the propaganda about racial tolerance in Brazil, usually emphasizing that Brazilian society was much better than American because of the absence of segregation and racial conflicts in Brazil.

This phenomenon attracted some intellectuals, who came to visit and study the “racial paradise”. In the mid-seventies, authors such as Thomas Skidmore<sup>10</sup> and Arthur Corwin<sup>11</sup> were loudly criticized by Brazilians when they pointed to racial discrimination and segregation in the society. Skidmore, a Brazilianist, analyzed official documents and some of the most important newspapers from the beginning of the twentieth century until 1930, tracing the trajectory of the racial issue in Brazilian history. Corwin, in an article, went straight to the point, deconstructing the myth of racial democracy by exposing patterns of inequality in Brazil. Their works were well received by some intellectuals, but Brazilian society in general accused them of being outsiders, with a narrow view of Brazilian history and culture.

This problem also affected Brazilian scholars. In the 1990s Fernando Rosa Ribeiro met the same opposition when presenting part of his conclusions from a comparative study about Brazilian and South African racism during a congress.<sup>12</sup>

The concern over race among Brazilian intellectuals was highly significant during the first half of the twentieth century. The nation was defining itself right after the Republic (1889) and during what was called “*Estado Novo*” (New State), the period marking the government of the dictator Getúlio Vargas (1930-1945). Debates on the eugenics thesis, the hierarchy among races, the connection between crime and race, and other features of pseudo-scientific racism were appearing in academic journals, the discourses of politicians, and in the pages of newspapers and popular magazines. The idea of “racial democracy” grew in parallel with the theory of a racial hierarchy, as part of a strategy to prevent political and geographic separation. Brazilians saw no conflict between these two proposals; it was understood that there were racial differences, however in Brazil they could be tolerated and overcome to a certain extent.

Following this policy, Brazil saw increased intellectual production about race in the country, of which the most important title is the already mentioned masterpiece of Gilberto Freyre, preceded by other authors such as Nina Rodrigues – a medical doctor heavily influenced by Gobineau’s ideas, which reinforced the thesis of the biological inferiority of Africans<sup>13</sup>, and Oliveira Vianna – who defended the idea that Brazilian society would become white following many generations of blacks and coloreds marrying lighter partners<sup>14</sup>. These theses strongly influenced sociological and anthropological ideas from the first half of the twentieth century.

All those works, despite being written more than seven decades ago, are still very important for this research as they reflect what the fields of