

BOOK REVIEW

Alex La Guma. *Culture and Liberation Exile Writings, 1966–1985*, edited by Christopher J. Lee. London: Seagull Books, 2022. 581 pp. Bibliography. Index. Cloth. \$45.00. ISBN: 978-0857427892.

Apart from the foreword, introduction, and afterword, this volume consists of five huge parts. Each of these parts contains several chapters of great significance to the life and times of La Guma, and to his way of thinking about the world.

The first part of the book is the most comprehensive and has the title “Political World.” In this section, the author deals with the global political order of the time, his exile career as a political activist and freedom fighter, the peculiarities of the Cold War, the entanglement of the great powers in Africa, the apartheid government of South Africa and its international partners, the struggle of the various races of South Africa against apartheid, and the varied responses of the international community to the racial minority rule in South Africa.

In the second part, which deals with “cultural scenes and debates,” La Guma delves deeply into the various issues of culture, especially in apartheid South Africa, and the essential role of culture in the liberation movement. The author’s observation of the world from a literary point of view is the subject of the third part, entitled “Literary Criticism and the Writing Life.” The influence of his literary works, the stimulus he received from the “communist world,” the ups and downs of his literary career, his international experiences, his relationship with other writers of his class and beyond, comments and criticisms of the suppression of literary tradition in South Africa, and his autobiographical literary career are some of the issues elucidated in this section.

The fourth part of the book deals with “Five Stories and a Play.” It deals mainly with the author’s experience in exile and contribution to the literature of Africa and the rest of the world. La Guma’s multifaceted career as a journalist and prolific writer, the nature of his life at home in South Africa and abroad, and the wide ranges of themes of his literary engagement are well covered. The last section of the book, “Interview and Memoir,” sheds light on La Guma’s conversations with various individuals, groups, and organizations, and his ongoing struggle for humanity is analyzed remarkably.

Generally the volume is part of the broader literatures of that time which explore issues of liberation and freedom. As such, the book in one way or another is the voice of the emancipation struggle of the oppressed masses of South Africa, the African continent, and the world. Although he started his struggle for the realization of equality, dignity, brotherhood, and so on among the different races of South Africans, La Guma eventually became one of the few influential

personalities in the galvanization of the struggle against all forms of colonialism, racism, and imperialism worldwide. The author in this sense was not only limited to the South African context, but he also appeared as an advocate of global citizenship and internationalism, for which he made incredible sacrifices almost throughout his adult life.

Of the many struggles, La Guma mostly, if not exclusively, attacked the South African apartheid government for inflicting great suffering on South Africans. So much of his thoughtful work is devoted to the situation in South Africa, where La Guma also relates the experience to the world's racist governments of the century. For the circumstances in South Africa, he also had to deal with the trickery of the great powers. For example, in one of his interviews La Guma argues that “we can say that the whole world agrees that the ideological concept of racism—of apartheid—should be denounced. Imperialist countries such as the United States have publicly denounced racism and apartheid. ... but, when we look at what it does, we see that the words are hollow” (199–200).

La Guma's struggle as an apolitical activist and member of the African National Congress (ANC) influenced the world. In doing so, in those times of the Cold War, he was most inclined to the Communist bloc and the Non-Aligned Movement for the intersection of interests and promises.

Culture and Liberation informs the reader about the career of La Guma, and the Cold War era—its nature, its characteristics, and the reaction of the Third World, of which Africa is a part. As such, the book offers one of the finest lived experiences of those formative periods that were bearing some fruit especially in South Africa, the fruits of which La Guma did realize in his lifetime. The book is, therefore, provocative in that it arouses the interest of students of all sorts, researchers, and general readers in the fields of social studies, art, journalism, literature, political science, and the like, who have an interest in the African continent, and even the rest of the world. Above all, *Culture and Liberation* is a fascinating work and a fundamental assessment of the political culture and literary struggle of Africa in the period uncovered and beyond.

Ebrahim Damtew 

University of Gondar

Gondar, Ethiopia

damtewebrahim@gmail.com

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