COPING WITH RACISM: AN ANALYSIS OF DEFENCE MECHANISMS EMPLOYED BY LUBINDA IN DOMINIC MULAISHO'S *THE TONGUE OF THE DUMB*

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Abstract

Sensitive as racism may be, it has continued to be a problematic reality, a thematic issue and a subject of scholarly discourse. Racism negatively impacts societies and individuals. Thus, the attention and need for relentless efforts in addressing, ameliorating, combating, eradicating and mitigating it. This paper concerns itself with representations and experiences of Racism in Dominic Mulaisho's *The Tongue of the Dumb*. Using the Defence Mechanism Theory of Psychoanalysis, it investigates the defence mechanisms employed by a prominent character, Lubinda, to cope with racism. Further, the study explores the role and significance of defence mechanisms in coping with racism. The research was qualitative. Data was collected by textual analysis of the selected novel and analysed thematically. The findings of the study show that affiliation, humour, identification with the aggressor, sublimation, passive aggression and sublimation were utilised by the character. The usefulness and protectiveness of defence mechanisms is observable and it is rendered prudent to be acquainted with these mechanisms as stressful situations and unpleasant experiences are inevitable.

Key words: *Racism, defence mechanism's, coping, stress*

INTRODUCTION

Novelists deal with a wide range of topics in a bid to mirror society, express their thoughts, and address problematic issues. One of the recurring themes in literary works is racism, which various novelists have portrayed in diverse ways. Racism refers to beliefs, attitudes, institutional arrangements and acts that tend to denigrate individuals or groups because of phenotype characteristics or ethnic group affiliation (Clark, Underson and William 1999, p. 805). It may take the form of stereotyping, name calling or insults, negative commentary, derogatory speeches, racist graffiti, property damage or racial abuse. Further, racism is experienced or perpetuated through subtle covert behaviours which are ingrained through the various systems of socialisation and the continuity of social engineering.

It is important to note that racialism, which is a belief in the superiority of a particular race, preceded the term racism and was widely used. Words like racial stereotypes and prejudice have also been equated with racism yet they are different as they are more of racist behaviours. Racism in itself is the assumption that psycho-cultural traits and capacities are determined by biological race and that races differ decisively from one another, which is usually coupled with a belief in the inherent superiority of a particular race and its right to dominate other races (Zuckerman,

1990). Put differently, racism is the prejudice, discrimination or antagonism against someone of a different race based on the belief that one's own race is supeior**.**

Van Dijk (1993), elaborates that a racist is someone who believes that a biological explanation can be given for characteristics of superiority or inferiority, supposedly possessed by people of a given physical stock, thus they marginalise, subjugate and mistreat others. In the same vein, Ridley (1995), posits that racism is specifically defined in behaviour rather than by attitudes or beliefs. While others avoid and overcome racism, others do not and one way individuals cope with racial tension is by being actively racist, this is coined as characterological racism (Aldefer, 1994). Racism can also include a wide range of behaviours from subtle jokes to murder; it can involve individuals or a collective system that unknowingly may encourage the suppression of other races. It is common for racism to involve negative stereotyping of the victim in much the same way as male chauvinists, for example, stereotype women or how western writers stereotyped African characters (Achebe, 2003; Ngugi, 2009; Chilala, 2013, 2016, 2017).

The most discussed forms or types of racism include scientific, symbolic, individual and institutional racism. Scientific racism is the act of attempting to identify biologically that the dominant culture possesses superior attributes, continues to exist for both intentional and unintentional reasons whereas symbolic racism, which is unintentional and covert, is the most insidious because this is where the people are often unaware of the harmful outcomes of their behaviours.

On the other hand, individual racism is the type that works at an individual level based on personal prejudice, while institutional racism or systemic racism is the intentional or unintentional manipulation and toleration of institutional policies that unfairly restrict the opportunities of particular groups of people. It also refers to the procedures and regulations that may not initially have a racist intent but that are discriminatory in their impact and reinforce racial inequality (Watts and Carter, 1991). In view of the above, it can be pointed out that Racism is a global issue, it has negative ramifications, and its nature gives rise to widespread reflection in novels and studies.

Although some studies have been conducted on Dominic Mulaisho's *The Tongue of the Dumb*, this article argues that little attention has been given to analysing representations of racism and the mechanisms employed to cope with it in the text. Set in 1949 around the valley of Kaunga river-south eastern Zambia and east of Lusaka, *The Tongue of the Dumb* highlights power struggles, patriarchal issues, the clash between Christian missionary ideologies and the indigenous culture. It is through the interracial encounters, clashes and conflict that racism surfaces. Focusing on one of the prominent characters, Lubinda, the article seeks to identify and analyse the defence mechanisms employed to cope with racism amidst racial discrimination, antagonism and encounters in *The Tongue of the Dumb*.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This paper utilises the theory of defence mechanisms, which is used to identify and explain the kind of defence mechanisms that one of the main characters, Lubimda, employs to cope with racism and the significance of these defence mechanisms. Thereafter, the differences and similarities in the defence mechanisms employed by the characters in the two novels are analysed.

The theory of defence mechanisms has a long history in the field of Psychology, it is a common and significant component of the Psychoanalytical theory. Psychoanalysis, a branch of literary criticism, was built on the principles of a remarkable Austrian physician and psychologist called Sigmund Freud. According to Guerin (2005), this theory is said to have been used as early as the fourth century by Aristotle in setting forth his classic definition of tragedy as combining the emotions of pity and terror to catharsis. Other scholars who were believed to be psychologising literature include Sir Philip Sidney, Coleridge, Wordsworth and Shelley. The poets and writers around the turn of the sixteenth century already explored the unconscious processes of the mind though the unconscious was not of scientific interest until Freud began to study it around the twentieth century. For this reason, the psychological theory came to be associated with the theories of German scholar Sigmund Freud, and all those who were influenced by his work (Guerin, 2005).

The psychoanalytical theory is essential and has been utilised by people of various fields. Commenting on psychoanalysis, Zimbardo (1995) states that the aim of psychoanalysis is to explain the origins and course of personality development, the nature of the mind, the abnormal aspects of personality and the way personality development can be changed by therapy. He further states that a key tenet of Psychoanalysis is that all human thoughts and actions are motivated by desires, either conscious or unconscious; no human action is random as there is an inner working of the mind even for seemingly irrational behaviour.

One of the theories of psychoanalysis postulated by Freud is the topographic personality theory. He developed a theoretical model of the human psyche in order to better understand human behaviour (Hjelle and Ziegler 1985). This theory distinguishes three levels of awareness which include; the conscious, the preconscious and the unconscious. The conscious mind is that which is aware of its environment and self, thus it monitors thought processes and emotions. While the preconscious mind contains content like memories, things we have learnt, our explicit knowledge of the world and the kind of implicit knowledge which are not actively used but can be recalled easily. On the other hand, the unconscious mind constitutes unacceptable ideas, desires or motives that are pushed out of the conscious to alleviate the conflict between personal needs and social norms (Zambardo, 1995).

The other prominent psychoanalytical theory is the structuralism personality theory, where the human psyche is divided into three aspects: ego, superego and id. The Id is the first part of personality: it includes instinctive or rather primitive

impulses that we are born with such as anger, hunger, hatred, desire for power and sex. The id is unconscious and it depends on the pleasure principle (Hoffman, 1957). The Ego is the second part of the personality; this part is both conscious and unconscious. It does not only decide what is suitable for the individual but also which impulses or desires offered by the id can be satisfied and to what degree they can be satisfied. Hartman (1906), adds that the Ego represents the I or the reality principle and centralisation of functional control.

The last part of the personality is the Superego, it is certainly about the moral values of society in which we live or what we have been taught by our parents. The superego is partially unconscious, it issues blind commands just as the id issues blind demands and produces feelings of guilt when its commands are disobeyed (Jackson, 2000). The ego is a central part of the personality. Brenner (1984), adds that the ego plays a crucial role as it balances in satisfying the drives of the Id under the constraints of the Superego. In analysing and elaborating on the compromise in the conflict among the Id, ego and Superego, Freud introduced the revolutionary idea of defence mechanisms which he dubbed mediators in the compromise of these parts of personality.

The defence mechanism theory was first proposed by Sigmund Freud in a paper titled "The Neuro-psychoses of defence mechanisms". Just like the topographic personality theory, it was developed to better understand human behaviour (Hjelle and Ziegler, 1985). Initially, Freud defined defence mechanisms as the unconscious mental operations that keep painful thoughts and emotions from awareness with emphasis on repression but later expanded his concept of defence mechanisms to describe a wide array of defence processes. He argued that defence mechanisms arose from the conflict between the Ego and the Id. While the Id is impulsive, the Ego seeks to bar the expression of unacceptable impulses by using defence mechanisms (Hoffman, 2006). Though Freud's early writings dealt with terms like mechanisms of defence and repression, his later writings outlined other individual defences, which included: denial, displacement, dissociation, fantasy, hypochondriasis, isolation, projection, reaction formation, regression, splitting, sublimation, turning against self and undoing (Perri and Ianni, 1998).

It must also be noted that while Sigmund Freud originated the idea of defence mechanisms, various scholars have elaborated on this concept over the years because it is believed that defence mechanisms are common phenomena in everyday life. According to Fehr (2000), defence mechanisms are subconscious efforts for adaptation and coping: these efforts are made to protect the self, avoid any damage to the ego or to decrease anxiety and tension. Defence mechanisms, which are also known as ego defence mechanisms, are also defined as psychological strategies employed by a person to reduce or avoid negative states such as conflicts, frustration, trauma, anxiety and stress (Corsini, 1994). Further, Hilgard (1962) states that defense mechanisms are the immediate reactions to frustrations or challenges thus they are employed to solve problems.

Contemporary theorists and researchers suggest that defense mechanisms have been expanded and play a role in protecting individuals from internal and external threats, unconscious thoughts that might produce overwhelming anxiety if they became conscious. They also play a role in managing relationships with others, managing external stressors, promoting overall good psychological adaptation and maintaining well being, self esteem, or self-concept (Cooper, 1998)

The generic and commonly discussed defence mechanisms emanating from the explanations of Sigmund Freud, the documentation of defence mechanisms by Olson (2008) and Gokgad (2015) include: Acting out, displacement, dissociation, fantasy, grandiosity, humour, identification with the aggressor, intellectualisation, denial, passive aggression, projection, rationalisation, reaction formation, regression, repression, sublimation and undoing.

In view of the above, it may be argued that defence mechanisms can be employed to defend people from anxiety, anguish, fear, loss of self-esteem, negative effects, jealousy, bereavement, hostility, socially unacceptable drives, sexuality, the superego's drives and forbidden impulses. Conceptualising racism as a stressor and seeing that the effects of racism included the aforementioned issues, the defensive mechanism theory is appropriate and can be used to identify and analyse the mechanisms used by selected characters in coping with racism. Folkman (2010), also notes that overcoming stress, anxiety or tension involves the behaviour and thoughts of individuals to manage the results of stressful events, thus it can be deduced that when one experiences racism, they will automatically employ defense mechanisms to cope with it.

LUBINDA'S DEFENCE MECHANISMS AGAINST RACISM

One of the main characters in Dominic Mulaisho's *The Tongue of the Dumb* is Lubinda, a councillor and medicine man, who covets the Chief's position in Mpona Village. He endeavours to turn people against the chief in a bid to attain power. Despite his evil agenda, schemes and unholy ambition Lubinda may be considered to be a defender and preserver of culture. He is one of the brave locals who fight against racism as he opposes the ideologies of the white men and the missionaries that frequent Mpona Village. Various defence mechanisms are employed by Lubinda to cope with the negative conditions, feelings and experiences that arise from racial prejudice and abuse. This article highlights five of them, namely: displacement, passive aggression, affiliation, humour, and identification with the aggressor.

Displacement

By definition, displacement is the channelling of anger, anxiety or frustration to a less threatening object or person (Andri and Dewi, 2007). It also refers to the redirecting of thoughts, feelings and impulses directed at one person or object but taken out on another person or object (Plante. 2010).

Chief Mpona is the main victim of Lubinda's anger and frustrations. Lubinda thinks that the Chief is less threatening compared to the whites that oppress, subjugate and undermine the people of Mpona village. When the white man learns that the school is closed, he rushes to Mpona village so as to order the Chief to reopen the school. Father Oliver looks down on the natives; he regards them as pagans and unrefined people that he could easily control. The narrator states: 'To him the work was clear. It did not consist simply in baptising people, but also in curing them, curing them of their bodily diseases as well as the ills of their minds' (Mulaisho, 2007, p. 40). Such thoughts, beliefs and attitudes are a sign of racial stereotyping and prejudice. Father Oliver's arrival frightens the chief and the other men in the village. After expressing sympathy regarding the funeral that the people of Mpona village have, Father Oliver tells Mpona that the school must open and he threatens to inform the District Commissioner if the school is not reopened. This discussion is tense and as the white man orders Mpona to open the school, Lubinda is very upset but does not directly express his anger to Father Oliver. Instead he expresses his anger by telling Mpona whom he considers less threatening to disagree with the white man: 'The school will not open. Tell him that. We have all agreed already that it will not open' (2007, p. 43).

This is a manifestation of the employment of displacement by Lubinda who considers Mpona less threatening than the white missionary who makes orders. It may be argued that Lubinda is aware of his powerlessness before the powerful white man but knows that he can afford to speak bravely to the chief so as to appear brave in the eyes of the other villagers.

Passive aggression

The next defence mechanism that Lubinda uses is passive aggression. Exhibiting resistance to requests or demands is another sign of passive aggression (Chery, 2019). Afraid that the village would be destroyed if the people of Mpona village accept the ways of the white man who clearly lacks respect for the traditions of the natives, Lubinda responds to the white man's demand that the school be opened: 'You despise us and do not respect our customs. This village will be destroyed by the spirits of our ancestors if we agree to this' (Mulaisho. 2007, p. 44).

This quotation shows that Lubinda resists the white man's demand as a way of expressing his dislike and anger regarding the opening of the school and the manipulation of the indigenous people. Unlike Chief Mpona and the other elderly men who fear to speak, Lubinda has the audacity to do so and thus demonstrates the use of passive aggression. It must also be noted that the people of Mpona village are socialised to learn skills and attitudes through traditional education, they have initiation ceremonies and knowledge is passed on from one generation to another. Thus, Lubinda's resistance is justified.

Lubinda also uses passive aggression when he has another conflict with father Oliver. This time around, Father Oliver demands that Mwape, the dumb boy, goes with him to the mission. This request is against the will of the people, thus Lubinda

is unhappy and he expresses his anger by strongly disapproving of the white man's statement (Mulaisho, 2007). The priest has a negative attitude towards the natives, he always tries to exercise his power and manipulate them based on race. This can be seen when he says that his words are final and expects the people to be obedient as he considers himself superior to the Africans. Nevertheless, when Lubinda challenges him, he becomes furious and even starts pointing at him.

According to Cherry (2019), people respond in a less aggressive way when they are in a situation where displays of aggression are not socially acceptable. Though Lubinda is furious, he does not reach the extent of fighting the white man as this is socially unacceptable and could land him into serious problems with the District Commissioner at the Boma. Therefore, he ends at pointing and shouting at the priest who in turn makes racist remarks towards Lubinda.

It might be argued that Lubinda knows how to pick his fights; he knows who to oppose, when and in what form. Further, it could be argued that he decides which anti-racism defence mechanism is most appropriate for a given situation.

Affiliation

The other defence mechanism Lubinda uses is affiliation which involves turning to others for support or requesting other people's help. When one employs this mechanism, they seek to collaborate with others. For instance, when one is a victim of rape, they can seek the support of others and collaborate with anti-rape groups in a bid to minimise and cope with the trauma.

In the case of Lubinda, he experiences stress because of the commands of the white men and the oppression of the villagers through tax, banishing their lepers and forcing them to dig pit latrines. Aldefar (1994), points out that racism can involve individuals or a collective system that may subjugate, oppress and suppress other races. Cultural prejudice is manifest when it came to the issue of latrines; they forced them to dig latrines. However, the people of Mpona are not socialised to use latrines thus they do not embrace this command. Lubinda takes advantage of this opportunity and speaks out:

> 'It is impossible for us to agree to this.' Lubinda was holding forth. The white man cursed us…..now the white bwana comes and we must dig latrines. How far must we go in obeying these people? The time has come for us to call them to kill us, if that is what they want'. There was a murmur of approval (Mulaisho, 2007, p. 40).

In this part of the story, Lubinda seeks support from others as he tries to encourage them to disobey the white people, and to his delight his words are met with a murmur of approval. It is for this reason that Lubinda continues to speak and argues that it is against their tradition to defecate in the same hole as their mothers-in-law. Therefore, Lubinda succeeds in coping with racial and cultural prejudice using the defence mechanism of affiliation by seeking the support of the villagers in protesting against the idea of building latrines. The readers later learn that the villages did not

build the real latrines; they did not dig more than a foot deep, thus the small huts they built made them look like latrines.

Humour

Lubinda employs humour as a way of minimising the tension and anger that he feels. Humour as a defence mechanism can be defined as revealing the funny or comical side of a situation, making light of or emphasising the amusing or ironic aspects of a situation. If one fails to see the funny side, irony or to make light of every unpleasant situation, it can be despiriting thus humour is an essential defence mechanism (Swaminath, 2006).

In *The Tongue of the Dumb*, Mulaisho puts the people of Mpona village in various difficult situations which makes them angry and anxious. An example is the command that they should build latrines. The white settlers endeavour to show their superiority of the natives by imposing practices that are contrary to the African ways thus the natives are unhappy. As regards getting the latrines dug and using them, Lubinda comments:

> 'How can we go to the same hole as our mothers-in-law when we cannot even eat in each other's sight. Are we *mfungo*?' They all laughed but uneasily, because the greater the objections the more worried they become at the thought of obeying the white man (Mulaisho, 2007, p. 90).

From this excerpt, we can see that the people of Mpona are worried and unhappy about obeying the commands of the white settlers. It can also be noted that Lubinda employs humour at this point; his comment minimises the anger that everyone feels thus the people are able to laugh as he makes a comparison with animals that have no shame and freely move naked. This also temporarily calms Lubinda as defence mechanisms do not always take away the anger that people feel but can help them suppress the negative feelings that they experience at a given time.

Identification With the Aggressor

Identification with the aggressor involves the emulation of characteristics, qualities or attitudes. It is a defence mechanism by which a person deals with emotional conflict or stress by taking on the same characteristics of the object or person causing the anxiety. Cramer (1987), asserts that identification with the aggressor can serve the purpose of developing and maintaining one's self esteem, happiness and identity.

The anxiety and anger that Lubinda faces is caused by the white men who have a very bad, negative and unfavourable attitude towards the people of Mpona Village. For instance, when the District Commissioner visits Mpona village, he exhibits intimidating and hostile behaviour towards the locals. Other than that, he writes demeaning things about the natives in his tour report book: 'Treated to a primitive and uncivilised pagan dance called Dedeule - a culturally barren dance in which the

indolent native revels. The stench exuding from the unwashed bodies of the dancers is enough to knock out even an Italian'(Mulaisho, 2007, p. 94).

These negative and derogatory comments regarding people of another race are indicators of cultural racism. The natives are not pleased with how they are treated by the whites; they are labelled and called all sorts of demeaning and derogatory names. In emulating the antagonistic attitude of the whites, Lubinda calls the District Commissioner a pig when the messenger is not within earshot.

It can be observed that Lubinda also assumes the unsympathetic attitude of Father Oliver. When Chief Mpona comes back from the mission, after following up Mwape's case, he indicates that they bear bad news as a white man had died when they were at the mission. Lubinda reacts without sympathy which is the same way that Father Chiphwanya reacts when he meets black people going to bury their fellow black man who is just from dying: 'A pagan yelled the priest, "why didn't you call me to baptise him?" Satan! Satan! (Mulaisho, 2007, p. 41). By not caring about what people of other races are going through like Father Oliver, Lubinda manifests the attributes of identification with the aggressor as he portrays and takes up a similar attitude to that of Father Oliver.

CONCLUSION

This article aimed at exploring racism, identifying and analysing the defence mechanisms employed to cope with racism in Dominic Mulaisho's *The Tongue of The Dumb* with special attention on one of the main characters, Lubinda. It is evident from the discourse that racism is manifest in Dominic Mulaisho's *The Tongue of The Dumb* and that Lubinda employs defence mechanisms to cope with it. The defence mechanisms employed by Lubinda to cope with racial prejudice, oppression, discrimination, abuse and antagonism are; affiliation, identification with the aggressor, sublimation, humour and passive aggression.

Lubinda's interactions, encounters and racial experiences with the white missionaries, the district commissioner and other white settlers ignite anger, anxiety and stress. Thus, the defence mechanisms he employs enable him to cope and find relief. Further, it may be argued that defence mechanisms employed by Lubinda are significant as they help him to contribute towards the fight against racism, develop into a resilient character, and temporarily minimise the negative effects of racial experiences.

It is significant that Lubinda does not depend on a single defence mechanism but employs a variety of them. He decides which one to use depending on the circumstances he is faced with. It may be postulated that Lubinda would not have coped with the racial challenges if he had only employed a single strategy. Although he is not a loveable character due to his evil schemes, Lubinda is an example of how to effectively apply defence mechanisms against racist treatment. It must also be noted that this article highlighted the applicability of defence mechanisms in coping with racism, hence reflecting the plausibility of using such mechanisms to cop[e with various negative attitudes and issues.

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