

Black Consciousness and the Politics of Writing the Nation in South Africa

by

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PHILOSOPHY**

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Abstract

Since the transition from apartheid, there has been much discussion of the possibilities for the emergence of a truly 'national' literature in South Africa. This thesis joins the debate by arguing that Black Consciousness, a movement that began in the late 1960s, provided the intellectual framework both for understanding how a national culture would develop and for recognising it when it emerged. Black Consciousness posited a South Africa where formerly competing cultures sat comfortably together. This thesis explores whether such cultural equality has been achieved. Does contemporary literature harmoniously deploy different cultural idioms simultaneously? By analysing Black writing, mainly poetry, from the 1970s through to the present, the study traces the stages of development preceding the emergence of a possible 'national' literature and argues that the dominant art versus politics binary needs to be reconsidered. Emphasising the long-term influences of education and language policy, and of publishing, the thesis documents the continuous dialogue of art and politics in South Africa, and in the process unpicks the paradox of South Africa's (un)national literature.

Dedicated, with the greatest love and thanks,
to the memory of my Grandpa, Philip Holmes.

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List of Abbreviations

ANC	African National Congress
AZAPO	Azanian Peoples' Organisation
BCM	Black Consciousness Movement
BMS	Berlin Mission Schools
BPC	Black Peoples' Convention
CNE	Christian National Education
COSAS	Congress of South African Students
COSATU	Congress of South African Trade Unions
COSAW	Congress of South African Writers
DACST	Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology
DRC	Dutch Reformed Church
FOSATU	Federation of South African Trade Unions
GEAR	Growth, Employment and Redistribution
IFP	Inkatha Freedom Party
MoI	Medium of Instruction
NAC	National Arts Council
NCS	National Curriculum Statement
NUSAS	National Union of South African Students
OBE	Outcomes Based Education
OUP	Oxford University Press
PAC	Pan Africanist Congress
PET	Peoples' Experimental Theatre
SADTU	South African Democratic Teachers' Union
SASM	South African Students' Movement
SASO	South African Students' Organisation
SPRO-CAS	Study Project of Christianity in South African Society
TUCSA	Trade Union Council of South Africa
UCM	University Christian Movement
UDF	United Democratic Front
UKZN	University of Kwa-Zulu Natal
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
ZAR	South African Rand

Introduction

This thesis is motivated by two different thoughts that may seem unrelated. First, the author was struck by the apparent paradox within Black Consciousness. Why was an Africanist movement dedicated towards pride in and reclamation of African identity and culture writing in English? Second, David Attwell and Derek Attridge in their introduction to *The Cambridge History of South African Literature* (2012) write of a felt need to respond to claims that the idea of a national literature is in question.

The question of a linguistic paradox specific to Black Consciousness has not received much in-depth criticism. Indeed the answer is all too obvious. English was the common language bridging the different oppressed groups Black Consciousness united as Black. Additionally, English was the language of the intellectual arena the movement was founded in and a tool that allowed international communication. Moreover, the apparent paradox becomes less of one given Chinua Achebe's famous adage that rose to prominence on Twitter following the Nigerian author's recent passing: "Let no one be fooled by the fact that we may write in English, for we intend to do unheard of things with it" (Teju Cole qtd. in "Chinua" 2012: n.pag). Thus Achebe conceives of African agency within the English language and suggests an ability to inscribe African cultures and languages into the chosen medium. There is potential for hybridity. This message of Black Consciousness, that a theoretical paradox does not surface in practice, is endorsed by Stephen Gray (1989) as the means to create a national literature in a country divided by eleven official languages and cultures.

This thesis therefore explores cultural exchange. But the problem remains of how language and literature can be brought into a single frame of reference. Literary critics and linguists have long asserted their right to be considered as actors in profoundly different disciplines. Literary critic Elias Schwartz, writing in 1970 on a different subject but

nonetheless testifying to the tensions between the two fields, fiercely insisted that “linguistic analysis is not, and cannot be, literary criticism” (qtd. Fish 1980: 99). Equally, Attwell and Attridge’s introduction warns of the problems of grounding claims of a national literature in language (2012: 3-5). Yet literature does not necessarily rest above language, as becomes clear if one follows Stanley Fish in challenging the distinction between ordinary language and literary language, therefore asserting “literature is language” (1980: 108). His is an argument on two fronts:

[First the distinction] impoverishes both the norm [ordinary language] and its (supposed) deviation [literary language], and second [Fish denies] that literature, as a class of utterances, is identified by formal properties (1980: 97).

Fish continues to make a compelling and interesting case in both instances, raising two particularly important points in the process. Concerning literature he states,

Literature, I argue, is the product of a way of reading, of a community agreement about what will count as literature, which leads the members of the community to pay a certain kind of attention and *thereby* to create literature (1980: 97. Original emphasis).

Implicit in this opinion is the suggestion that differing communities can create different ‘types’ of literature. If agreement is reached within a group about what form or language counts and over the purpose it needs to serve, then this must be considered literature even if it differs from other, more established interpretations. Consequently, this thesis is insistent that

the texts analysed in Chapters 4, 5 and 6 are credible literature and must be treated as such. They represent a form agreed upon by segments of the African population in response to the prevailing needs of the community. This treatment is in sharp contrast to the dismissive labels, including 'anti-poetics' and 'dirty aesthetics', which were applied all too frequently at the inception of these works and in some subsequent critical discussions.

Fish's argument also confirms there is no such thing as ordinary, at least in the derogatory sense the term is often used. Indeed, his usage reflects a certain positivity.

Ordinary language is extraordinary because at its heart is precisely that realm of values, intentions and purposes which is often assumed to be the exclusive property of literature (Fish 1980: 108).

It is the ordinary's extraordinariness that is integral to the discussion offered in Chapter 6. The definition of 'ordinary' offered here, in line with the meaning Njabulo Ndebele (1986) ascribes to it, necessitates a celebration of the quotidian, which itself is used to suggest that everyday happenings and feelings, and daily events that are seemingly unremarkable for not having extreme consequences are not unimportant or unworthy of attention. The term ordinary, therefore, is thus not used in this study to suggest an impoverished or limited style -- rather the exact opposite.

These two considerations need to be kept in mind during the following pages. Fish's observations suggest that discussions of language and literature might proceed alongside each other and in places merge. Indeed, given their shared properties, it becomes apparent that language can be used as a rehearsal space of sorts for a literary quest. If Black Consciousness's medium of choice confirms a notion of syncretism between English and

African languages, can this be extended to literature? Can the necessary syncretism behind a national literature be achieved, and if so has it been achieved in South Africa?

A Starting Place in History

Attempts to write a national history of South African literature are by no means new. Michael Chapman's *Southern African Literatures: An Introduction* (1996) was one of the first noteworthy publications following the transition from apartheid to offer an inclusive narrative. Meanwhile, in recent years *The Columbia Guide to Southern African Literature in English since 1945* (2010) and *The Cambridge History of South African Literature* (2012) have been published -- offerings compared by Margaret Lenta (2012), whose succinct review illustrates their respective merits and shortcomings, which this study seeks to redress.

Primarily, concern can be expressed over the inclusive approach and the classification processes used in each. Gareth Cornwell's introduction to *The Columbia Guide* correctly argues that inclusivity is necessary to avoid "missing a sense of the general picture" (2010: 1). However, it also raises possible objections to any exclusion that does take place (Lenta 2012). Secondly, both collectives embrace groupings that respond to history and political events. *The Cambridge History* sees literature written from different demographics and subject positions grouped together in response to common historical variables, including early modernity, empire and apartheid, which are treated unequally. This approach reverts back to a style of political periodization, something akin to the colonial/postcolonial lens, which *The Columbia Guide* termed an "unsatisfactory option" (Cornwell 2010: 5). Although the main body of *The Columbia Guide* "intermingles authors in the apartheid and post-apartheid eras" (Lenta 2012: 111), the introduction remains constrained by such troublesome political groupings. Generic

overviews are presented on “White Writing” and “Writing Black” in each of the periods between 1948-1973 and 1974-1990.

These constructions reflect a common tendency to group together and simplify periods and populations that themselves include distinctive shifts in form, authorship and purpose. Such internal differences are expected in any of the four groupings. Thus the aim to describe a national literature is undermined at its conception. Linkages between broadly defined narratives are difficult at best to establish when each discrete grouping is in reality too multifaceted to be simply considered as one narrative. Any claim to have completely eliminated these pitfalls would be fallacious, although this thesis does attempt to mitigate them. Here, and although potentially criticised for its exclusivity, the fourth category considered in *The Columbia Guide*, “Black Writing, 1974-1990”, is broadly adopted. This approach, by treating one group discretely, reveals the series of discontinuities and changes that exist within supposed ‘singular’ narratives despite the common recurrence of familiar names and concerns. Moreover, the grouping chosen represents perhaps the most fitting in any search for a national literature. The broadly Black Consciousness nature of the writing considered allows for a subtle but necessary reinterpretation of what constitutes national literature.

The Columbia Guide defines a national literature as “a coherent body of writings to which all its citizens have access and with whose representations they can all identify” (Cornwell 2010: 2) -- “a cultural reservoir containing a reasonably coherent reflection and embodiment of the history, character and aspirations of a unitary nation state” (2010: 6). On this basis Cornwell is correct to suggest, “South Africa does not have – has never had, may well never have [a national literature]” (2010: 2). Similarly, *The Cambridge History* quotes Andries Oliphant’s (2004) belief that there is no national literature because there is no

national culture, defined as a single nationalist narrative to which all have contributed over time. Given the profound scars in South Africa's past and continuing felt marginalisation (see Chapters 6 and 7) this single nationalist narrative is showing few signs of realisation.

To prevent a pervading sense of futility at the outset then, this study constructs a contrasting notion of national literature based on ongoing processes of syncretism. To adapt Stephen Gray's (1979) metaphor of different islands in an archipelago that will remain different but exhibit some interaction, a national literature would be the realisation of the situation demanded by Black Consciousness. Steve Biko spoke repeatedly of a state where previously competing cultures are established alongside and are able to mutually inform each other. However, as with Black Consciousness, this is not a form of assimilation or the formation of one sole narrative. Like Biko hoped this should be a completely new situation -- a continuing commentary on the present. Both *The Columbia Guide* and *The Cambridge History*, meanwhile, consider a national literature to be, in part, a reflection of a history to which all relate and contribute.

The argument pursued here rests on a redefinition. At this point therefore it is perhaps wise to more clearly define other terminology deployed in the following pages. As in Black Consciousness, the term Black is a collective representation of all the oppressed groups in South Africa. However, such generic classification is avoided where possible and substituted by appreciation of difference between African and more specific ethnic identities. The respective usage rests on the nature of the discussion and the need, in certain instances, to recognise the various cultural practices of different ethnic groups. Furthermore, there is hesitancy in referring to cultural 'traditions' because these connote historicized, immobilized and generalised concepts. 'Tradition' is therefore replaced with 'idiom', which is preferred because it allows the evolutionary nature of culture and the differences between these

alternate modes to be recognised. Finally, in reference to culture there is often a tendency to compare African cultures with a monolithic Western counterpart. This again reflects a generic assumption made by Black Consciousness that positioned African culture against an Anglo-Boer colonial force (Biko 1971). Admittedly Afrikaans culture is frequently argued to be itself a uniquely African concept but it must similarly be recognised as a competing, potentially oppressive force alongside European and American -- thus Western -- cultural imports.

The Stages to Realisation

The alternatively defined national literature mirrors the new South African state advocated by Black Consciousness that will likewise not be achieved instantly. Biko recognised the new state would be a “glittering prize on the horizon” (1973: 98), which would take some time to be realised. A national literature, too, is not inevitable and, if it is to develop, will only do so incrementally. This insight allows for differences, which are often ignored in narratives that treat Black writing uniformly. Recognising the nature of process across four decades, this study moves beyond commentaries that deal specifically with writing produced during one phase, for example Michael Chapman’s *Soweto Poetry* (2007) whose restricted focus occludes some of the longer-term facets of the literature. The following chapters are based around these stages of progression, thereby sketching the nuanced picture within a single narrative in order to show whether the syncretism and cultural relationships demanded by a national literature are achievable.

Chapters 1 and 2 are not directly concerned with the process of literary development but with the political history needed to understand the rise of Black Consciousness. Chapter 1

tackles the initial formation of the Nationalist state and argues for the importance of culture behind Afrikaner ideology. Moreover, through an in-depth exploration of Bantu Education, the chapter asserts the prominence of language in apartheid's implementation. This case study is directly relevant to literary concerns. The divisions caused by Bantu Education's insistence on mother-tongue instruction speak in part to the liberation movement's adoption of English as *lingua franca*, as reflected in literature.¹ Secondly, the syllabus introduced goes some way to explaining the literary forms and the nature of syncretism and appropriation used by African writers during the period. Thirdly, this case study follows the approach Alan Brooks and Jeremy Brickhill (1980) apply to the Soweto Uprisings and stresses the central importance of Bantu Education to Black Consciousness.

The dissatisfaction created in the African population by these educational changes mobilised a new intellectual movement. Chapter 2 explains in full how this led to the creation of Black Consciousness ideology and what the movement's influences and aims were. This account's central motif rests on a revisionist approach towards ideas of difference. Long formulated as a political organisation situated on the opposite extreme to white racist rule, Steve Biko's assertion that Black Consciousness was the antithesis to white rule has generally been upheld in commentaries (1973: 90). However, Chapter 2 illustrates an ideology based not on a simple binary and recognises a far more nuanced relationship between black and white. Furthermore, the dichotomised politics/culture framework is reassessed. The chapter looks directly at whether Black Consciousness was a political movement or a cultural body. These are questions that are frequently ignored or answered all too uncritically in much of the

¹ The use of mother-tongue as a generic label is now very problematic (see Chapter 8). It is, though, relevant to the history discussed here and preferred over the term 'vernacular', which often characterised official apartheid discourse and, as Ngugi wa Thiong'o notes, has several false connotations attached to it (n.d: 7).

historical literature. One reason for this oversight perhaps lies in the approach these accounts take towards the formation of the movement. Many begin with Black Consciousness born as if from itself because little historical background is presented. Others trace the influence of past Africanist groups (Gerhart 1978). In opposition to these accounts, and drawing on the close integration between politics and culture in hegemonic discourse analysed in the preceding chapter, Black Consciousness is formulated as an essentially cultural movement. This is done insofar as a clear division between politics and culture can be drawn. Indeed, the suitability of this very division is implicitly challenged in this thesis as a whole.

Black Consciousness as literary development can legitimately be discussed alongside the development of Black Consciousness as an ideological outlook. Chapter 2 makes the stages explicit by tracing the varying influences behind Black Consciousness. These include *The Wretched of the Earth* (1965) where Frantz Fanon outlines his thoughts on literary development. The final aspect of the historical narrative comprises the eventual decline of Black Consciousness. Nonetheless, the presentation attests to the ideology's continued presence within South Africa. This distinction is fundamental to the ability to deal with each different period in one account whilst also offering another departure from similar studies. Literature produced after 1976 from poets and writers not easily identified with the Soweto movement is rarely discussed within a Black Consciousness context. Indeed, while explicit links are hard to make, it is necessary to show potential reasons for doing so. A movement that inspired a generation, Black Consciousness's lingering presence in much post-Soweto cultural work cannot be discounted as readily as the historiography suggests.

Chapter 3 bridges the gap between the historical and political narratives offered in the opening two chapters and the stricter literary criticism that comprises the bulk of this study. Focusing on literary journals the chapter stresses the essential mediatory role they performed

between literary and political developments. Moreover, this relationship is revealed as a flexible two-way dialogue and at times a problematic one. The analysis concerns *The Classic*, *Staffrider* and the *Medu Arts Ensemble Newsletter*. Respectively this sees discussion of a journal originally conceived before Black Consciousness, the mouthpiece of Black Consciousness, and latterly one formed in exile after Soweto but adoptive home of many of *Staffrider*'s contributors. These three examples offer a similar guide towards the processes behind literary development outlined in Chapter 2 and reveal the changing nature of content and syncretism that marked each stage. Perhaps most importantly, despite these changes, the journals create one continuous line of development. Successive journals both build on and respond to the critical debates of its predecessors.

The Classic and *Staffrider* had highly divergent policies and were arguably separated by a period of relative silence, though this is disputed (Couzens 1982: 9-10). However, both journals remain united through the work of the Soweto Poets who are the focus of Chapter 4. The emphasis here is threefold: to underline how Soweto Poetry reflected *Staffrider* in affording purpose, urgency and agency to the African population; to establish an appreciation of their poetry as literature and thus dispute the connotations behind the 'anti-poetics' label; to move beyond simple formulations that see Soweto Poetry as purely a response to Black Consciousness ideology (Ngwenya 2012). Instead, the argument reverses this relationship and demonstrates the essential role Soweto Poetry had in contributing directly to the movement. By uniting these three aims the chapter is able to show the linguistic and cultural syncretism used by the Soweto Poets. One example is foregrounded: their unique ability to comment on history through an obsession with the present.

The newfound confidence exhibited over the present, like other literary developments traced in Chapter 4, was built upon by cultural workers in succeeding years. Chapter 5 begins

with discussion of trade union activities and poetry in the 1980s. This is gradually broadened to embrace general poetic developments during the period and then to include other cultural events, particularly theatre. This approach unites poetry and theatre as sites of performance and underlines their similarities. Moreover, it further collapses the dichotomy between politics and culture by considering certain political developments as fundamentally theatrical events. Chapter 5 shows how the present is physically appropriated because the performance spaces themselves temporarily demonstrate reassertions of past histories and rehearsals of future, needless to say liberated, conditions. Consequently, the necessary syncretism of African and Western cultures both past and present displayed in literature from the 1970s and 1980s is translated into the wider environment. The literary imaginary provisionally becomes actual physical reality.

The final chapters represent what theoretically should be the final stage of literary progression and ascertain whether these temporary rehearsals were fully realised. Briefly offering an overview of the changing demands placed upon writers in the years immediately before and after transition, Chapter 6 turns to a group of poets who, though not specifically aligned with Black Consciousness, do suggest aspects of its ideology. The analysis reveals how this collective seeks to build on past developments whilst navigating the heated terrain that is contemporary literary politics. This is done through new methods of syncretism and appropriation. Similarly, new avenues of communication are opened. International dialogue is combined with renewed interest in other internal influences. The latter of these conversations and the need for them to be explored in more detail elsewhere is briefly mentioned in Chapter 7 by way of a concluding comment. It is argued that a similar style of analysis would be beneficial in considering not only the texts of different literary traditions but also the validity of Biko's cultural theory. More effort is not taken in this regard here because of reservations

and difficulties in offering complete literary analysis on translated material. Reliance on translations would unduly complicate the approach this thesis takes towards questions of language. Moreover, to use J. M. Coetzee's definition,

The task, which faces the translator at every turn, is one of carrying across from one language not so much as the words as the systems of assumptions behind those words (1992: 182).

With such assumptions largely culturally determined, an over-reliance on translation would jeopardize the ability to judge accurately the very processes of cultural syncretism that are integral to this project.

This brief summary gestures towards the numerous similarities that are evident across different language literatures and literary forms and the possibility of a national literature. However, drawing upon the deep-seated ambivalence and concern with aspects of the new hegemony explored in Chapter 6, this concluding chapter ends by discussing whether South Africa has just experienced a false dawn. This observation is the central preoccupation of the conclusion. The study ends by bringing together the literary, historical and political concerns raised in previous pages and offers an answer to questions about South Africa's national literature. Is there sufficient syncretism between equally valued cultures?

The conclusion also gestures towards the implicit focus on reimagining difference. In each of the chapters outlined above attempts are made to move beyond simple binary constructions. These have long been the principal theoretical constructions behind scholarly discussions in most disciplines that concern South Africa. This is unsurprising given the historical visibility of racial difference and the profound constitutional difference in

governance experienced in the country's recent past. Indeed even where racial divisions have been abandoned this is done through reliance on the apartheid/post-apartheid binary framework. This study chooses instead to provide a historical narrative that emphasises continuity and development over abrupt change and its consequent 'either/or' nature. It is argued that difference exists not only between but also within apparently homogenous categories. Similarly, stress is placed on the middle ground and syncretism. Where there is syncretism, this is not to be understood as a complete overlay but as things apart with a mutual tendency to influence. To again cite Gray's metaphor, the single groupings being compared are prominent peaks simultaneously different but with the potential to have internal and underlying connections. Aside from providing an alternative definition of national literature it is hoped that this approach will reconstitute the long dominant debates between art-for-art's sake and art-for-politics' sake.

As the above guide illustrates, this reconsideration of the art versus politics dichotomy can be seen through the order the chapters are presented. Chapters 1 and 2 tackle politics, Chapters 4, 5 and 6, meanwhile, offer literary criticism. Chapter 3 both in content and position occupies a middle ground. The emphasis is on an exploration of the interactions and crossovers between art and politics, what one may call literary politics. Therefore literature is not considered as something fundamentally apart or as having a manifestly political role. Literature is different, but this is an apartness mitigated through the political sphere -- something not to be mistaken with having an explicitly political means. As will become clear, this study shows the relationship between art and politics to be the key to the possible realisation of a genuinely inclusive South African literature. But it is a relationship continually in motion. Much as the following chapters sketch a continuous narrative from early-apartheid through to the present day, this is a narrative that has not reached an end.

Instead the conclusion represents a turn to the future. Gaps and boundaries mean different things to different people and potentially obscure truth; the task of the historian is surely to reduce their ubiquity.

Chapter 1

The Language and the Tribe: Afrikaans, Apartheid and Culture

Apartheid in South Africa was in one sense rule from, through and for language. Recent histories have highlighted the apparent lack of a single grand plan behind apartheid's formation (Posel 1997; Welsh 2009); John Lazar writes of a "complex, changing, and often contradictory mix of both short-term pragmatism and general ideological thrust" (1993: 362). Such revision is undoubtedly correct given the 'urban crisis' of 1940 and 1950 (Posel 1997; Lazar 1993), the needs of business for different types of black labour (Legassick 1974; 1976), and the resulting partial stabilisation of the urban African workforce (Mabin 1992), which together make apartheid a more reactive and less systematic set of policies than its critics have sometimes believed. Afrikaner nationalists nonetheless described their policies in terms long familiar to their constituency. At their heart lay the Nationalist principle, language and a "love for everything that is our own" (Giliomee 2003: 468). The following chapter will briefly examine the obsession with language and how this contributed to a system of government that placed language at the heart of several policies in order to ensure the survival of the *volk* and *volksei*.

1.1 – Apartheid from Language

Dunbar Moodie's influential work *The Rise of Afrikanerdom* (1975) traced the prominence of the Afrikaner Civil Religion, with the second chapter discussing the Calvinist origins of Nationalist ideology. Indeed Calvinist theology, based on a fundamental understanding of the Bible and not the "failed" (Hutmacher 1980: 181) interpretations of other religions, is

routinely cited as a main motivation behind Afrikaner Nationalism. This, though, has been fiercely disputed. Andre du Toit, for example, argues “its prominence is simply assumed” (1983: 921) and unable to “stand up to rigorous critical scrutiny” (1985: 209). Whatever Calvinism’s malleability as a religious doctrine -- only in 1957 was the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) able to agree on an ‘apartheid bible’ despite Biblical justifications for racial exclusivism having been articulated decades earlier -- this indicates Calvinism’s uses as a framework for thinking about government that Saul Dubow observes demanded “a self-referential discourse, coded vocabulary of imperatives and shibboleths which could be, and were, constantly reinterpreted in light of political realities” (1992: 217).¹ Briefly sketched, Calvinism stressed the importance of national pluriformity and of a “God willed [...] diversity of People” (Stoker 1941: 250) with one supreme, predestined and unconditionally elected *volk*.² Such assertions depended on the literal interpretation of several biblical passages including Deuteronomy 14:2, Acts 17: 26 and Genesis 10 and 11. Genesis in particular spoke of national and linguistic divisions ordained by God.

German Romanticism shares similar thought. Although neo-Calvinist belief in God’s ultimate sovereignty does not rest easily with the Romantic primacy of the *volk* (Dubow 1992: 220), both philosophies stressed national diversity and unity in diversity. Certain congruence could be, and was, manufactured by German Romanticism’s appeal to an idealized mythological past and open distrust of Enlightenment expectations of grand truth. And it was the notion of each “volk [having] an immutably fixed character and identity” (Orman 2009:

¹ The World Alliance of Reformed Churches declared Biblical justifications for apartheid a heresy in 1982. Earlier many individuals also attempted to denounce the DRC’s beliefs but these were in Rev. Pierre Dill’s words, “lonely voices crying in the wilderness” (1968: 47. See Moodie 2009: 19 and Giliomee 2003: 463).

² Afrikaners’ unconditional election was exemplified by their survival of the Great Trek and Boer War.

85) that came to permeate the thinking of Afrikaner Nationalists exposed to Romanticism in their formative years. Notably, D. F. Malan was influenced by Immanuel Kant's early Romantic philosophies while studying abroad at Utrecht University in the early 1900s (Giliomee 2003: 365-6). Parallel claims have also been made about Hendrik Verwoerd, although Roberta Miller's (1993) study has recently shed doubt on them.

Language was posited as the essential defining characteristic of the nation and *volk*. For Friedrich Schleiermacher and others, including Wilhelm von Humboldt and Johann Gottfried Herder, "the idea of a *volk* without a language of its own was treated as a logical absurdity or *Unding* [literally 'non-thing']" (Orman 2009: 32-3. Also see May 2007). Earlier Enlightenment thinkers had underrated the importance of language, leaving leading Romantics intent on rethinking previous philosophy to advocate an organic linguistic nationalism. Such ideas attempted to show "that language was inseparable from thought and that each language constituted the unique expression of a particular culture" (Seyhan 2009: 8).

Romantic philosophy when slightly reconfigured arguably bears resemblance to Structuralist literary theory. To précis Ferdinand de Saussure, the leading Structuralist proponent, the relationship between words and what they represent is broken down to a three-part system of signifier/signified/sign. De Saussure claimed it was not true that words stood for pre-existing concepts and, consequently, there were "no exact equivalents in meaning from one language to the next" (2004: 67). Words and language represent differing things dependent on the cultural context. In turn, the text of a culture is affected by that culture's language. This relationship has also been partly observed by Claude Levi-Strauss in 'Incest and Myth' (1972) and Roman Jakobson (1971) who, when conducting tests at the Moscow Psychological Institute in 1915, reported that German and Russian participants depicted words differently depending on their linguistic gender. Interestingly, Jakobson was a central

figure in Russian Formalism, a theoretical school that posited differences between literary and ordinary language and advocated the need for literature to defamiliarise. These two contestations provide important touchstones throughout the following pages. Black Consciousness poetry from the Soweto generation collapsed this language hierarchy and believed in the need to make familiar (Chapman 2007a: 23), though current Black Consciousness aligned poetry now writes to defamiliarise (Horn 1996). Moreover, evidence of Structuralist belief can be discerned in Steve Biko's argument against charges that Black Consciousness language incited violence. Biko challenged apartheid by invoking a theory of language remarkably similar to that which constituted a founding principle of the apartheid state.

These streams of thought drew lines between language, culture, and national identity in a manner similar to how Calvinist theology drew lines between the saved and the damned. Unsurprisingly then these ideas found favour with Afrikaner Nationalists, where language acted as a core value of the Afrikaner people. Such core values are defined as being "the heartland of the ideological system and [acting] as identifying values which are symbolic of the group" (Smolicz 1981: 75). Their preservation is integral to the pride and unity of that group. History demonstrates this as so in relation to the Afrikaner struggle. The Afrikaans language had become the main method for Afrikaners to confirm their own unique, and not just poor or degenerate identity, separate from the Dutch. Moreover, Afrikaans served as a major unifying factor in the Boer struggle against the English and became their greatest tie to the land. These struggles have been widely documented in different contexts by Isabel Hofmeyr (1987), Hermann Giliomee (1991; 2001), Bettina Migge (2007) and Jon Orman (2009). In all accounts the role of literature is notable.

1.2 – The Rise of Afrikaans Literature

The deliberative growth of Afrikaans literature was an essential element to each of the three struggles outlined above. Despite achieving status as an official language in 1925 through an amendment to Section 137 of the South Africa Act, Afrikaans was still tinged with connotations of poverty. As Hofmeyr (1987) sketches, producing Afrikaans literature was seen as the route to vindication. Concerted efforts to do so were repeatedly made. Gustav Preller and C. J. Langenhoven were both instrumental figures. Langenhoven in particular was notable for speaking of the close unity between the language and the land, which made Afrikaners a distinct people. This relationship, which echoes the sentiments of Nationalists who speak of Afrikaners as South Africa's first settlers and rightful occupiers, came to be shaped in a very real sense by many Afrikaans authors through their use of the Farm Novel genre (Coetzee 1988; Devarenne 2009).

The advance of English, both educationally and economically, had also seen Afrikaans dismissed as a possible language of success. This perception was again countered by literature. The *Pêrelspan* group under S. J. du Toit's leadership was arguably the first organized body that attempted to give Afrikaans institutional support. This was achieved through the promotion of Afrikaans publications including the *Patriot* newspaper and the children's book *Eerste Afrikaanse prentjies boekie vir soet kinders* -- the first Afrikaans picture book for good children (A. Coetzee 1990: 326). The *Patriot* was a valuable tool in the struggle against the English. With a readership largely found in the rural districts of the Cape Colony, the *Patriot* was exploited by Afrikaner sheep farmers who wished to participate in the wider cohesion of the Afrikaner population and express the threat the British posed to their livelihoods through the 1894 Scab Act. This act, which introduced the compulsory

dipping of all sheep in efforts to eradicate the prevalent scab disease threatening the wool industry, represented the superiority of English speaking farmers' faith in scientific study over long-held Afrikaner local knowledge and farming practices (Tamarkin 2009).

Two further instances of British political threat dominate Afrikaner history. Both the Jameson Raid 1895 and Boer War 1899-1902 led to widespread indignation and suffering amongst the Afrikaans population. Home language literature was consequently embraced as a form of "cathartic renewal [that] helped restore dignity and purpose to [Afrikaners]" (Moodie 1975: 41). Moodie highlights Jan Celliers's *Die Vlakte* collection and Totius's *By die Monument*. The latter example explored the pain and suffering of individual Afrikaners whilst allowing those "who had not been directly affected to partake in the national grief" (Moodie 1975: 42). Such collectivity remained a thematic mainstay of Afrikaans literature until the 1960s (O'Meara 1997: 126). Unity was achieved through language and literature.

Literature was a key feature of the battles to preserve Afrikaans language. Moreover, for Nicolaas Petrus van Wyk Louw, perhaps one of the most articulate thinkers and finest writers of Afrikaner descent, literature justified "the existence of the *volk* [...] as a separate language group" (Sanders 2003: 77). Moodie summarises Van Wyk Louw's thought on art:

The [writer's] end is to convey with integrity, movingly and powerfully, insight into the depths of the human condition in all its grandeur and its grubbiness, its horror, its glory and its pettiness – whether in crisis or in mundane everyday activity. That is the artist's vocation [...] Only through such creative work can a People claim a right to exist (2009: 4).

Van Wyk Louw ascribes supreme importance to literature because it exists to create a right to

exist and make people feel things anew. To a leading Nationalist thinker, literary language is something above ordinary language. Consequently this thesis's decision to adopt Fish's approach in collapsing this hierarchy becomes increasingly more pertinent and an ideal method for assessing literature situated firmly against minority Afrikaner rule. However, Van Wyk Louw also posits literature as indispensable to the nation. For several Nationalist writers this facilitated a means to explore the abiding essence and truth of the *volk*. Meanwhile, for Van Wyk Louw, identity and cultural idioms were continually shifting with no abiding essence. He thus entered into conflict with more mainstream nationalism. This tension, which occupies Moodie (2009), Rich (1993) and Sanders (2003) to varying degrees, is additionally evident in their respective views on liberalism, the force that shaped segregationist and, subsequently, apartheid thought.

1.3 – Liberalism

The “protection and advancement of the Afrikaans language was perhaps *the* most important *raison d'être* for the NP's [Nationalist Party's] existence” (O'Meara 1997: 125. Original emphasis) and an issue of high importance for the whole Afrikaner population. Following on from German Romanticism, Afrikaans was key to their national identity. J. C. Steyn, a prominent Afrikaner writer and academic, once proclaimed, “my existence, my identity, my core, my everything is locked up in Afrikaans. An existence in another language will be second-hand for me” (1980: 460). And, apartheid apologists argued, this existence was essential for others too.

Later transformed into a policy of vertical racial division, apartheid was born from a policy of horizontal separation resting on liberal foundations. Indeed, the leading liberal

theorist of the time, Alfred Hoernle, a man not overly racist and once cast as the “champion of the oppressed” (qtd. Kros 2002: 64), was cited by Jack Simons as the man responsible for “inventing the actual idea of apartheid” (Rich 1993: 65). The reaction to the decline of classic liberalism in Victorian Britain had seen an embracing of the collective community rather than the individual. In South Africa this change coincided with civilizing missions that sought to bring progress to other civilizations in a way that became largely synonymous to liberal intellectuals with a policy of ‘cultural differentiation’ (Dubow 1987: 80). From this perspective, Hoernle argued, a policy of total separation was preferable. Different languages and cultures needed separating for their own progress and survival. The alternative, domination, was ethically unacceptable. Van Wyk Louw phrased this liberal ambition as Survival in Justice. The bare survival of a separate *volk* was the “last temptation” (qtd. Moodie 2009: 5) and was instead only important if done in a way that allowed just relations, not harming or discriminating against other ethnic groups. And, although this belief was at odds with the Calvinistic sense of inherent existence, he remained “deeply committed” and a “devoted nationalist” (Moodie 2009: 7). Arguably, Van Wyk Louw represents the arrogance and hypocrisy of liberalism:

[Louw’s] rationality conceals, however, the violent cognitive remapping of the polity in post-war Afrikaner-nationalist thinking, which prescribed its sense of ‘cultural identity’ – the *volkseie* [what is unique to the volk] – as the universal: Afrikaners constitute a volk – an entity bound by ties of race, ethnicity, language, culture, history, religion, and so forth – so all other groups must be *volkere* too. Louw’s jargon of nationality disguises a discursive formation of *volkere*, of ‘other’ national groups, in the image of ‘the Afrikaner’ (Sanders 2003: 70-1).

Liberal trends across Europe exhibited similar hypocrisy. South African policy correlated with the League of Nations' emphasis on collective rights and self-determination, something often conducted on a linguistic premise. In increasing similarity to South African thinking, and underlining further hypocrisies of liberalism, Mark Mazower (1998; 2009) notes how modern liberals within the League and in Eastern European states were attempting to create national communities through state action. This required the state to be the most powerful actor at the risk of overriding opponents, even if these were ethnic communities within its borders. If the League had continued to think this way and become a success, South Africa would possibly not have constituted an international anomaly. However, the League's various failings and the subsequent events of World War Two saw a realignment in thought. Advocated a decade earlier by Edgar Brookes, there was renewed respect for individual human rights, something enshrined by the United Nations Charter. Consequently, South Africa's course was taken alone despite the leading role played by its prime minister Jan Smuts during the UN's foundation. Changing international experiences of liberalism had helped define South Africa's route to apartheid but had eventually seen it left isolated. This route was not portrayed as one of discrimination but represented a just respect for different cultures and languages.

1.4 – Apartheid through Language

Apartheid was born in part from a misconceived philosophy of language which posited different language groups having fundamentally different cultures that could only survive when apart. Such beliefs might seem viable, with apartheid racism seemingly owing more to

manipulation driven by short-term political calculations. However, such an apology is belied by Afrikaner attitudes toward the ‘Coloured’ population.³ Creolist theorists believe Afrikaans to originate from Dutch settler interaction with slaves and indigenous Khoikhoi, therefore making it the true language of South Africa’s Coloured population.⁴ Yet, despite sharing the same language, Coloureds had “borne much of the brunt of apartheid oppression” (Omond 1980: 15). White minority rule ignored the complication of a shared language and maintained a “remarkably ambiguous” (Giliomee 2010: 14) attitude towards the Coloured population. This was until settling on a ideological reworking of the *volk* whose “purpose was to preserve the purity of the all-white nation” (Goldin 1987: 167).

Nonetheless, language featured prominently in apartheid discourse and was used as a major political means of identifying and separating the *volk*. Segregation was conducted through ethno-linguistic terms. Bantustan policy created homelands designated to serve different language communities, though failing to appreciate the diverse linguistic backgrounds of urban Africans and the wide-ranging overlap in language and culture between these groups. This linguistic division was shown repeatedly in apartheid policy. Nationalist control of the airwaves is perhaps the starkest example (Orlik 1974). The most damaging, however, was arguably undertaken through education. Unsurprisingly given the role of the Broederbond, a body where “educators have always comprised the largest single occupational group” (O’Meara 1997: 45), in Nationalist policy formation, education was promoted as the best means of aligning individuals with their ethnic community. Cultural promotion in

³ Mohamed Adhikari (2006) provides an illuminating biography of the Coloured population in *Not White Enough, Not Black Enough*.

⁴ The two communities also largely shared a common homeland -- the rural Western Cape -- while Coloured and Afrikaner intellectuals had worked extremely closely over Cape politics and in the language Bond. Such commonality is perhaps why J. H. H. de Waal, who wrote the first Afrikaans novel, argued for Coloured and Afrikaner unity while Hertzog also argued for unity as a pre-cursor to solving the Native problem (Goldin 1987).

education would best be achieved through mother-tongue instruction. Therefore a radical overhaul of the education system occurred that culminated in the passing of the Bantu Education Act in 1953. The new policy came into full effect two years later and is discussed below. In order to appreciate the scale of change it is first necessary to provide a brief synopsis of education history in South Africa.

1.5 – The Failings of Mission Education

Though education can be traced back to before the arrival of European settlers (Raum 1966: 89; Troup 1976: 8), only an appreciation of schooling from the mid-1850s on is necessary here. Since their arrival in the country in 1806, the British had promoted the education of the ‘uncivilised’ and ‘illiterate’ -- both African and Dutch -- through the European style and the English language. Concerning specifically white education, the following expansion of schooling into the interior throughout the nineteenth century was in the first instance conceived as an attempt to alleviate the growing ‘poor white’ problem (Duff 2011). After the Boer War it was reinvigorated by the British High Commissioner Alfred Milner and the Acting Director of Education, E. B. Sargent, who aimed to redraw the curriculum to promote the “greatness of the English Imperial idea” (Hexham 1981: 19-20). These attempts were beset by tensions over medium of instruction. Hermann Giliomee (2003) documents the Afrikaner Nationalist battle to preserve their language in the wake of British Imperialism. These struggles ultimately concluded in the 1910 Union Constitution where English and Dutch both became official languages and all government schools, either unilingual or

bilingual, were obliged to teach both languages as subjects.⁵ The correspondence courses set up to reach the remote, sick or too young to walk were also conducted in dual medium (Malherbe 1939). Despite this policy, T. J. Haarhoff briefly notes the continuing hostility to bilingual education that saw a pendulum swing towards Government schools becoming “more and more separate” (1946: 6).

These contestations in the arena of white schooling are admittedly not directly relevant to the changing policies towards African education. However, they are worthy of note because the debates they raised over language in education policy, expressed in government debates during 1944 and studies by E. G. Malherbe, largely foreshadowed concerns with apartheid education. One leading problem was the lack of teachers who met the minimum requirements to conduct bilingual teaching, including correctness on paper and in speech and fluency with accent and idiom (Malherbe 1946a: 22). Secondly, Malherbe’s studies suggested a higher attainment of knowledge in bilingual institutions and revealed that the “handicap” of being taught in the wrong medium (i.e. not the mother-tongue) “is not permanent” (1946a: 57). Elsewhere, for example in the armed services before 1948, bilingual education was found to increase tolerance for, and unity amongst, English, Afrikaners and even Africans (Malherbe 1946b: 13). These findings, though suggesting the benefits of bilingual education, also suggest why a Nationalist government would be so intent on advocating unilingual education in the future.

Throughout this period there was a widespread concern that African students in mission schools were receiving a better education than many white students. Government schools were suffering from the changing whims of government policy and the difficulties in

⁵ Unilingual schools saw primary instruction through the home language and second language medium was only introduced in higher grades. Bilingual schools had to make provision for simultaneous education through parallel classes or teachers using both media to one group.

increasing attendance throughout rural areas (Duff 2011: 234). In reality these suggestions are easily disproved given the problems in attendance and funding that beset mission schools. Reports often spoke positively of improvements and increasing attendance but when taken comparatively these rises, if present, are always modest. Many Africans continued to receive education in their local communities, owing from custom and mission distrust to practical concerns over finance and difficulties of access. Just over two percent of the African population enrolled in 1905 and none at a post-primary level (Troup 1976: 14).

The other irresolvable trouble lay in funding. State sponsorship for mission schools generally occurred when the mission's work was deemed to be synonymous with the government's wider political programme. Meghan Healy talks of annual state grants of £100 being given to the American Inanda mission to support the operating costs associated with five 'kraal schools' in the early 1880s (2011: 249). Their work in educating and converting non-Christian girls in Natal was perceived as a possible source of social order because it linked into colonial officials' wider policies of discouraging polygamy. Moreover, despite the passing of the Natal Code, which ensured village patriarchal dominance over their dependants and thus placated African fathers who often wanted their daughters to stay home, the state encouraged Inanda mission education by finding

promise in schoolgirls' education in Western domesticity [which they believed] would stabilise new sorts of African homes and therefore mediate the political threats posed by *amakholwa* [educated African Christian men] (Healy 2011: 248).

Conversely, funding was denied to mission schools that provided expensive curricula or too heavily promoted substantial training in industrial skills. This may have allowed Africans to

compete economically and challenge general trade, which is to say white artisan trade.

Even after Union, funding remained a problem. There was a slight increase when the Native Development Fund allocated £340 000 annually along with one fifth of tax revenues but this did not support the seventy-five percent increase in pupil numbers that occurred during the same period (Troup 1976: 15). Worsening as the Great Depression began to be felt, school buildings fell into disrepair and schools were hit by a shortage of textbooks and teaching materials that left “disgruntled teachers’ [...] grievances mount[ing]” (Kros 2002: 54). Certain other fundamental problems remained after the Depression and subsequent outbreak of World War Two. General Hertzog was forced to postpone efforts to centralise mission administration and funding. Such moves may possibly have improved efficient schooling by regulating the density of schools, class size and student progression (Fleisch 2002). The failure to introduce these changes left schools suffering through inter-mission hostility and the complex relationship between central state, Provincial Administrators and missionary societies that was beginning to show signs of internal division (Horrell 1968; Hyslop 1993).

Problems also lay in the curricula. Mission schools aimed to provide English style education. Peter Kallaway notes, in addition to the use of English medium,

The dominant tradition of missionary education stressed the need to ensure that schools for the indigenous peoples offered the same curriculum and education of the same quality [...] as schools for the colonists (2002: 8).

Africans became versed in the respectability of ‘true’ European society and history, the English language, and an evangelised Christian religion. Indeed, in most respects the

curriculum “deviated but little from that applying in European schools” (Ross 1966: 5).

Oxford University Press (OUP) identified “the main area for [the company’s] expansion in Southern Africa [...] as the provision of books for the [...] ‘Native Education’ programmes” (Davis 2011: 81).⁶

The literature provided in class was that of an accepted European canon. Classic texts were studied along with selections of Enlightenment and Romantic poetry. Notably, the largest disturbances against mission education occurred at Lovedale between 1945 and 1947 with Robert Shepherd, the school’s principal, seeing fit to blame a misunderstanding of *Oliver Twist*, the senior form’s set text. Combined with the students’ knowledge of Enlightenment philosophy and Romantic poetry, Lovedale appeared as a “manifestation of the oppressive *ancien regime*” (Kros 2002: 62).⁷ This example highlights the frustration of African students schooled in an assimilation they were thereafter very largely denied. Parallel educational trends can be traced across the African continent. French colonial education promoted “the rhetoric of assimilation”.⁸ Education was designed to assess individuals’ ability to absorb Western culture and thus their entitlement to the privileges of citizenship. And in all instances African literature bears witness to this problem. Consider for example the work of the Negritude writers or elsewhere Tayeb Salih’s *Season of Migration to the North* (2003) and Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s *Weep Not, Child* (1988). Clearly, mission education had a profound impact on African literature: it schooled writers in the English classics and Western aesthetic but also absorbed them. Subsequent output was the representation, by an elite, of an attained culture (Ndebele 1984). The written word delayed the promotion of an evolving African

⁶ Davis goes on to highlight how expansion was difficult for OUP because of a lack of funding and the central coordination of education policy.

⁷ Baruch Hirson provides full details on mission education and the Lovedale Riots (1979: 20-30). He also includes detailed figures on Bantu Education (1979: 44-6).

⁸ My thanks to Kate Skinner for this suggested phrasing.

popular culture and is presented as from and for the Western hegemony.

1.6 – The Introduction of Bantu Education

The mission traditions in South Africa and the continent were not uniform. Similarities between mission education policies can be traced but there are also contrasts, for example the mission tradition in British West Africa. Here, as with the Bremen Mission in Togo, education was designed to further the creation of a native elite.⁹ The majority were educated in local languages and practical skills; academic education in English was reserved for a select elite. This alternative approach began to gain support in South Africa. The Native Schools Inspector Robert Plant wrote in 1889:

It will be better to lay a broad foundation [...] What I think ought to be aimed at is a general low average of excellence, rather than the distinction of a few. What should the scope of our educational work be? I would define it as being able to qualify the Native youth for the effective discharge of their probable duties in life (qtd. Healy 2011: 260).

Such statements bear all the hallmarks of Verwoerd's speeches on education policy sixty-five years later. Bantu Education attempted to rectify the problems of centralisation and student frustration discussed above whilst also creating students with renewed appreciation for their own society and their true place in it. Crain Soudien and Fhulu Nekhwevha's (2002) article 'Education Post-1948' describes numerous instances of mission education disconnecting

⁹ German mission societies with similar policies were common across South Africa.

students from historical cultural practices. Bantu Education sought to provide a reconnect, albeit cynically, to essentialised versions of ethnic African cultures. Language remained central.

The Bantu Education Act was conceived in the Department of Native Affairs, headed by Dr Verwoerd between 1950 and 1958, as a direct response to the Eiselen Commission Report on Native Education (1949) and education principles formulated in the state-sponsored *Journal of Racial Affairs*. Highlighting the failings of mission education, the Eiselen Report placed emphasis on the need to provide an “education for Natives as an independent race [and] prepare Natives more effectively for their future occupations” (qtd. Horrell 1968: 4). This recommendation represented a nod towards the Nationalists’ apartheid policies and at all levels the Commission favoured closer integration of education policy with central state governance. Centralised governance would see education “integrated organically with all other state efforts to raise the level of Bantu life” (Horrell 1968: 8). School control was placed in the hands of the Department of Native Affairs through the creation of a Division of Bantu Education; mission schools were either denied funding or coerced into moving under Department of Education supervision; teacher training was conducted by state training institutions alone and teachers trained in private institutions would “not necessarily [be] employ[ed]” (Verwoerd 1964).

Teacher provision underlined Nationalist ideology. A paper presented to the One-Day Conference on ‘The Bantu Education Act’ on 6 July 1962 firmly advocated the use of female teachers. Two leading reasons were provided. First, society benefited by providing unmarried women a “respected place in the community” (Schiff 1962). Second, the move was beneficial to children because of supposed female nurturing instincts. This gendered approach ties in with the wider Afrikaner discourse of the *volksmoeder*, further enhanced in Bantu Education

with the provision of mother-tongue instruction. Marijke du Toit (2003) has recently examined the role women played in constructing Afrikaner Nationalist discourse while Hofmeyr (1987) notes that women were still largely consumers of Afrikaner culture. Both readings correlate with the provision of female teachers. Bantu Education aimed at constructing new ethnic nationalisms amongst Africans whilst making them consume a pre-determined version of their own culture. Given this basis, the Black Consciousness construction of masculinity during the liberation struggle takes on additional importance.

Such centralisation saw the construction of a new nationalist hegemonic discourse (Hyslop 1993: 399), though a large degree of emphasis was placed on the local community. In keeping with Verwoerd's previous academic beliefs outlined in a 1936 research proposal where he viewed social welfare as best maintained through bottom-up schemes with the emphasis on informed local bodies (Miller 1993: 656), Bantu Education saw the creation of local Bantu Authorities and 'Bantu' run school boards and committees. Between 1964 and 1966 over fifty thousand parents were actively involved in school affairs with five thousand serving on school boards. These boards allocated and controlled equipment distribution and investigated complaints. School commissions, meanwhile, maintained school grounds and advised on teacher appointments (Horrell 1968: 25; Kgware 1966: 57). Pupils were charged with the care and general up-keep of school. Funding was also the community's responsibility and the biggest burden. Though ZAR 13, 000, 000 was provided annually from the government's general Revenue Account and some monies were provided by the sale of school land or buildings, the rest -- an estimated ZAR 5, 000, 000 in 1954 -- came from African taxes (Horrell 1968: 29). These taxes were later raised. Within the classroom all but primary core readers had to be self-provided and, along with possessing adequate stationery, were pre-requisites to admittance (Pelzer 1966: 73). Muriel Horrell suggests the cost was ZAR 17.25,

ZAR 28 and ZAR 48 for pupils in lower primary, higher primary, and secondary classes respectively (1968: 50).¹⁰

By not straining government finances, Bantu Education did allow a previously unseen growth in the scale of African education. Education was never made compulsory for Africans as it was for Indians and Coloureds, yet M. C. Botha, the Minister of Bantu Education, claimed by 1966 there had been “a tremendous *quantitative* growth, of very nearly 250%, at all levels of enrolment up to Standard VIII in the Secondary School” (1966: xii. Original emphasis). W. M. Kgware asserts attendance reached 83% by 1963 with roughly 1, 770, 000 pupils enrolled (1966: 58). These figures are generally proven by Horrell’s research. Appealing to parents, many of whom who had not received even a basic education, and by removing a mass of youth from the streets, a growing concern in terms of crime, Bantu Education was an “astounding success” (Hyslop 1993: 395) when speaking solely of enrolment figures. Yet undoubted problems persisted. A widespread primary school bottleneck existed because of limited secondary school expansion. Meanwhile, the Cingo Commission report into education in the Transkei criticised the policy of ‘hot desking’. The school day was shortened to only three hours for early-grades pupils therefore allowing teachers access to two groups daily. Furthermore, Freda Troup angrily proclaims, “the schools are grossly overcrowded [...] Children double up at desks, try to write on their laps, or sit on the floor using their benches as desks” (1976: 28).

These grievances were only minor compared to the clamour of anger directed towards syllabus changes that again brought culture and language into focus. Verwoerd’s often-cited speech on Bantu Education given in 1954 reads,

¹⁰ Using the conversion rates listed on www.measuringworth.com these figures can be equated to roughly £302.60, £491.50, and £842.40 in today’s money.

The Bantu must be guided to serve his own community in all respects. There is no place for him in the European community above the level of certain forms of labour [...] For that reason it is of no avail for him to receive a training which has as its aim absorption in the European community while he cannot and will not be absorbed there (Pelzer 1966: 83).

The primary syllabus, which Verwoerd boasts “enjoyed a good reception in all directions” (Pelzer 1966: 90), consisted of basic instruction in reading, writing, arithmetic and religion. Otherwise the syllabus was orientated to vocation rather than academia and included lessons on handicraft, hygiene, singing, gardening, and environmental studies (Scott 1953: 16).¹¹ Moreover, along with a stress on “initiative and self-confidence” (Fleisch 2002: 41), the Eiselen Commission recommended the syllabus fostered “punctuality, a sense of duty, persistence, sociability, mannerliness, neatness, and reliability”. Such characteristics are typical of semi-skilled labourers needed to meet the industrialising economy’s needs (Hyslop 1993). This was not an education that met the needs of education but rather was a means to political ends.

Predetermined and essentialised cultural concerns were also firmly entrenched. The Institute of Race Relations felt “there was too much emphasis on the needs of rural children in the tribal environment” (Horrell 1968: 58) as Bantu Education sought to foster Christian

¹¹ In state supported schools, religious instruction was focused on the Bible and Christianity. Environmental studies was a mix of history, geography, nature studies, and natural science.

National Education (CNE) and the Afrikaner Nationalist principle.¹² The influence can be traced to the ideological influences of Afrikaner Nationalism sketched above and advocated by the 1947 Sauer Commission. However, there are two other sources. W. W. M. Eiselen, chair of the commission that bore his name and previously the Transvaal's Chief Inspector of Native Education, was a trained anthropologist. During his academic studies he became respectful of Pedi and African cultures and mixed these views with the beliefs of the Berlin Missionary Society (BMS) that he was exposed to during childhood. The BMS argued African cultures had the dynamism to progress but were being forced into decline because of their contact with white society. Eiselen was convinced African culture would only survive amongst its own kind, as he somewhat poetically summarised in his reformulation of the ugly duckling fairytale (Kros 2002: 65). Meanwhile, Caroline Suransky (1998) and Linda Chisholm (2002) have explored the international influence behind Bantu Education. In particular Dutch educational practices can be traced. Both systems promoted vocational education. The Dutch advocated hierarchical education although this was based on academic achievement and not race. Only the top secondary schools allowed entry to university while "the other types of secondary schools provide other, less esteemed opportunities for follow-up education or jobs" (Vrooman 1986: 71). CNE also crossed the Dutch/Afrikaner divide through DRC mission schools and gained a foothold in Afrikaner Nationalist thought through the fight against the English.

¹² The Institute for Christian National Education's manifesto insists education is "grounded in the life- and world-view of the Whites, more especially of the Boer nation" (1948: Article 14).

1.7 – Mother-Tongue Instruction and Opposition

The ultimate marker of culture became the ultimate marker of educational change. Bantu Education introduced the mother-tongue as medium of instruction for all subjects on the primary syllabus through to Grade Eight. Contrary to previous policy, English and Afrikaans were regarded as foreign language subjects. This decision also increased the status of Afrikaans whilst simultaneously reducing the influence of English (Kamwangamalu 1997: 6). However, both the official languages were introduced in Grade One so children were quickly learning three languages. A similar policy was intended for secondary schools but was deemed unfeasible until 1959. The three-year delay in introduction allowed all secondary starters to progress through the full primary course taught through the mother-tongue. It was from the same year that examinations could only be written in African languages and not in the pupil's chosen language.

This legislation left African parents “incensed by the bare-faced policy of discrimination” (Troup 1976: 22), though mother-tongue instruction itself proceeds from a sound theoretical base. Results under the previous language in education system were, in Verwoerd's view, “disappointing” (Pelzer 1966: 76) and in 1953 UNESCO's publication *The Use of Vernacular Languages in Education* had stressed “the important value of mother-tongue education” (Mesthrie 2008: 321). Subsequent research presented by UNESCO (1968), Neville Alexander (2004; 2009; 2011) and at a language colloquium at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (Chikoko 2009; Mashiya 2009) have all reaffirmed its value to learning. Being the language “in which we first meet the world, form concepts, learn to expand and deepen thinking, feeling and imagining” (Alexander 2009: n.pag), the mother-tongue is the natural instrument for early and maximum communication. Chikoko and Mashiya's

contributions at the UKZN colloquium reported that mother-tongue instruction aided child confidence, better grasping of subject material and new concepts, rejection of rote memorisation in favour of dialogical learning, and increased capacity to learn second languages if these are phased in appropriately. In class, students generally expressed themselves freely and contributed to lively discussion. Such enrichment and lively discussion, often involving all students and not just those proficient in a language or subject, characterise a healthy learning environment. Even J. C. M. Mbata (1962), one of apartheid and Bantu Education's fiercest critics, recognised the sound theoretical principles of the policy change.¹³

Mbata's criticisms rested on the unique South African situation into which mother-tongue instruction was being introduced. For many African children, he argued, the mother-tongue was not the language most encountered and used in their immediate environment:

[The white educationalist] finds it difficult to concede the word 'eight', for example, is more real to the six-year old growing up in Orlando, Johannesburg, or at Chesterville in Durban, than the Zulu equivalent 'isishiyagalombili' (1962: 1).

Citing the 1936 Interdepartmental Committee on Native Education, he further argued that mother-tongue instruction was against parents' wishes. Africans needed knowledge of the official languages to access the economy and civil service. As Nkonko Kamwangamalu summarises,

¹³ Mbata was a founding member of the ANC Youth League and labelled apartheid a "twisted theology" in an open letter to the Minister of the DRC published in *SA Outlook* 95.1 in November 1965. He later received a banning order under Section 10 of the Suppression of Communism Act.

[The] mother-tongue [was] a dead end, a barrier to more advanced learning and a lure to self-destruction. Also, they [Africans] saw such an education as a trap designed by the apartheid government to ensure that the black pupils did not acquire sufficient command of the high-status languages [English and Afrikaans] (2004: 136).

The official languages were of course offered but, for the Institute of Race Relations, their introduction was too early. Development of both the mother-tongue and the additional languages is hindered if a second language instructional competence level is not first reached through mother-tongue instruction (Chikoko 2009). Standards of English, for example, slipped with Bantu Education. Teaching was left in the hands of Africans who often had poor qualifications, if any, in teaching the language. Consequently, mistakes in grammar and usage were often passed on and “patterns of ‘African English’ – aberrant non-standard English – had evolved and were being perpetuated” (Horrell 1968: 62).

Mbata’s other criticisms lay in the practicalities of teaching. He wrote, “progress in the publication of suitable textbooks in the vernacular does not seem to be impressive” and most pupils would complete primary school “without any experience of direct study from textbooks” (1962: 2). In support, the Revised Booklist for Primary Schools published in 1962 reveals only five texts in both Xhosa and Zulu across all primary standards and subjects, excluding languages.¹⁴ For teacher reference there were five in South Sotho, three in Xhosa, two each in Zulu and Venda and one in Tswana. However, Caroline Davis’s research into OUP in South Africa suggests that mother-tongue textbook publication was the publisher’s

¹⁴ These figures exclude the nine series of arithmetic textbooks published in mother-tongues because the six languages covered are unspecified. Their inclusion would still not greatly improve the figures’ appearance.

greatest, and a growing, market. Bantu Education stimulated a

fast growing market [...] almost overnight, for vernacular literary productions.

There is no reference to these OUP publications in the archive files, but eighteen literary texts in Zulu, Sotho, and Xhosa published by OUP Cape Town from 1957 to 1963 are deposited in the British Library. These were mainly poetry, drama and fiction in Xhosa, with two Zulu texts and one of Sotho poetry (Davis 2011: 85).

Furthermore, and as discussed in Chapter 8, criticism of current day African language publishing laments the diminishing market for school textbook publication. Historically this was the only profitable area because of Bantu Education.

Regardless of mother-tongue textbook provision, but exacerbated if Mbata is believed, teachers were forced to translate material published in Afrikaans or English into mother-tongues. This process was not straightforward with some contemporary critics blaming African languages' "reduced communicative power and symbolic purchase" (May 2007: 144) as insufficient to express the modern, scientific world. OUP did draw up plans to publish "language courses, dictionaries and mathematics courses, which involved translating and revising existing texts" (Davis 2011: 92) whilst the Department of Bantu Education established a series of language committees that were tasked with developing corpus planning techniques (Cingo 1966: 149). However, these achieved limited success. Alexander maintains these bodies were systematically underfunded and reflected the official line on Bantu development (2004: 117).

Such scepticism can perhaps be questioned. A memorandum in connection with a proposed Bantu Language Institute drafted in May 1960 notes concerted efforts to assure

sufficient financial backing from a variety of African, non-African and *ad hoc* funds that would enable initial one-off meetings leading to a full-time body with funds available on a permanent basis. To prevent government interference and allow for maximum success the body “should not be large [...] It would seem wise not to exceed twenty”. Members would be chosen mainly on their qualifications, though pre-determined availability was also a factor. They would have “first, a knowledge of a Bantu language which is, or which is equivalent to, mother-tongue knowledge; and secondly linguistic training”. It was hoped the Institute, though having “a modest name and modest claims”, would independently improve the orthography and vocabulary of Bantu Languages and perhaps lead to the creation of a Bantu Authors’ Society. These efforts, even if successful, would have no immediate effect in the classroom. Teacher morale, though low in mission schools before the introduction of Bantu Education, arguably fell further. Though some teachers believed “it was better, much better” (qtd. Soudien 2002: 221), Crain Soudien summarises how many teachers decided to abandon the profession in protest at the “racial and cultural stereotypes [Bantu Education] crafted” (2002: 222). Soudien also interviewed a teacher from Langa who continued to teach in English. Such resistance was common. The Cape Africans Teachers’ Association provides one example of the hostile reception Bantu Education received, although admittedly this union itself fragmented. The newly formed Cape African Teachers’ Union was more welcoming.

Outside of the classroom the vitriol was at its starkest. I. B. Tabata and the Non-European Unity Movement led the criticism in the fiercest and most prolonged attacks although, ironically, Neville Alexander, a supporter of mother-tongue instruction, originated politically from this movement. Elsewhere The Education League (1959) felt Bantu Education was unchristian and indoctrination based on a gross reinterpretation of CNE. A

publication by the South African Congress of Democrats, aptly entitled *Education for Ignorance*, described the policy as providing an “emasculated curriculum” in “austerity schools” (n.d: 3). Furthermore, it contained a column by Trevor Huddleston that branded Bantu Education as “racialism at its darkest and most damnable. [A] vicious and most horrible attack on human freedom” (n.d: 1). One passage made comparison to Nazi Germany and implies a speech by Hitler could easily be attributed to Verwoerd.

1.8 – Culture at the Forefront

The history of Afrikaner Nationalism from its ideological foundations, through its formation as a political platform, to its zenith during apartheid has been one obsessed with culture and language. Indeed Dan O’Meara writes,

‘Cultural’ issues had always stood at the very heart of Afrikaner Nationalism [...] The Broederbond too had come into being in the realm of what nationalists called *kultuurpolitiek* [...] and still vigilantly patrolled its borders (1996: 125).

Culture was at the forefront of South Africa’s politics and through acts such as Bantu Education that promoted tribalism, essentialised cultural traditions and discrete language groupings, was the primary means of apartheid’s ‘divide-and-rule’. Yet to use the words of Caribbean poet Kamau Brathwaite speaking in another context and to speak of culture not just language:

It was in language that the slave was perhaps most successfully imprisoned by his

masters; and it was in his (mis-) use of it that he perhaps most effectively rebelled (1970: 17).

As the following chapters explore, Bantu Education's introduction was the first of two major educational changes that gave rise to Black Consciousness and a new struggle politics based on culture. However, its misuse of mother-tongues and culture may also have helped prevent the goals Black Consciousness strove desperately for.

Chapter 2

Redefining Black and White: The Changing Nature of Politics and Culture

The Bantu Education Act did not represent the culmination of Verwoerdian education policies. Continuing the unashamed rhetoric of separate development, Verwoerd tackled what he perceived as a problem in higher education when he announced:

It will also become evident that the different Bantu national communities will only obtain this real value of universities and university-trained persons if these institutions, lecturers and students emanate from their midst, if the institutions are built and the students study in their own communities and hence areas, and if they stand among their own people to serve them (qtd. Pelzer 1966: 250).

The Holloway Commission¹ had previously announced academic segregation impractical while both the University of Cape Town and University of the Witwatersrand had criticised the idea in the 1957 publication entitled *The Open Universities of South Africa*.² However, such pressure failed to prevent the introduction of the 1959 Extension of University Education Act. This act, although true to its name given the following sharp rise in numbers of Africans receiving tertiary education, bolstered separate development by making it illegal for non-

¹ Dr J. Holloway chaired the Commission of Enquiry on Separate Training Facilities for Non-Europeans at Universities in 1953-4.

² Their opposition focused on the pursuit of truth, which, they argued, was a university's ultimate mission. This search could only be conducted within autonomous institutions that synthesised ideas from persons of different belief systems and cultures. Government interference would "impair the machinery of the mind" (Forster 1940: 7). Moreover, they argued the quest of truth must be conducted within the light of reason. Interestingly, N. P. van Wyk Louw had earlier suggested in a different context that "reasonableness" (Moodie 2009: 7) was suggested by the presence of two or more different parties and beliefs.

white students to attend white universities. Replacing social segregation at universities, where non-white students were prevented from sharing accommodation or participating in sports and social pastimes alongside white colleagues, South Africa's four 'open' universities -- Cape Town, Natal, Rhodes, and Witwatersrand -- were to be largely prohibited from admitting non-white students. The government sought to create separate college institutions for African students in line with their ethnicity -- Zulu, Xhosa, Sotho, Coloured, or Indian. If these 'bush colleges', as Mervyn Shear (1996) notes these new universities were derogatorily termed given their remote location, offered a specific course or the University of South Africa provided a correspondence equivalent, the Open institutions could not admit non-white students without written ministerial permission. Despite numerous attempts, such permission was an extremely rare occurrence. There were only four instances in 1960 (Horrell 1968: 115). Furthermore, the Act saw the government gain control of the University of Fort Hare, a past breeding ground of prominent African politicians.

Belying the rhetoric of 'separate but equal', student life was more regulated than at the white or Open universities with increasing restrictions on the choice of societies and freedom of speech. Moreover, the government directed considerably less money to these African universities. Mamphela Ramphele's (1996) autobiography is just one account that documents the resulting comparative shortfall in equipment, facilities and general standards. Ramphele would have been particularly aware of such inequality because she studied medicine, the course where activist and academic Z. K. Matthews observed the "venom of the Bill seems to be particularly concentrated" (1957: 42). Indeed, even prior to 1959, medical students were increasingly being refused admittance to their clinical years and suffered the rough end of unofficial admissions quotas. After the Extension of University Education Act, students were banned from examining white patients or corpses while the previous relationship between the

Medical Schools at Fort Hare and Natal and the open universities was “wrenched apart” (Tabata 1959: 7).

Such changes were met with fierce resistance. Much of this was centred on the Fort Hare Campus. There were several demonstrations. Eleven students and fifteen members of academic staff, both white and non-white, were consequently excluded. At the Open Universities demonstrators asserted the validity of predictions their representatives made some years previously, when they wrote exclusion “would come as a severe shock to the morale of such [African] people by adding to their feelings of insecurity and frustration and thereby increasing their sense of inferiority” (1957: 28). Such language became commonplace in subsequent years. And these continued hardships felt across campuses evolved a decade later into a new African politics, Black Consciousness, based at Fort Hare under the leadership of medical student Steve Biko.

2.1 – The Rise of Black Consciousness

The rise of Black Consciousness has been much discussed. Gail Gerhart’s *Black Power in South Africa* (1978) and more recently *The Law and The Prophets* (2010) by Daniel Magaziner are just two studies that provide detailed accounts of the movement’s formation and thinking. Here, a brief synopsis is offered in order to establish how Black Consciousness as a movement and ideology underpinned the literary production discussed in the following chapters.

The results of the Extension of University Education Act and the continuing restrictions on campus life further added to the intense frustration and anger felt by Africans towards South Africa’s oppressive regime. Yet during the 1960s there was no suitable vehicle

through which to vent these emotions. Following the Sharpeville massacre in March 1960 and the subsequent imposition of a temporary State of Emergency, the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) and African National Congress (ANC), the two leading parties of African political expression and actors during the protests, were quietened. With these organisations banned their leaders were arrested or forced into exile. Only a few cells of active resistance remained within South Africa. Meanwhile, on campus there was a similar lack of representation for African students in political student groups. The main centre of allegiance had traditionally been the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS), formed as a non-racial, national body to advance the interests of all students regardless of race. And, indeed, following Sharpeville there was a sharp increase in the number of African members, aided by the then president Jonty Driver calling for a more radical tone and a move to action over politics and rhetoric (Gerhart 1978: 258). However, by 1967 the leadership was still predominantly white and concentrated at the four Open Universities. Thus they largely spoke of white academic concerns. This was much to the anguish of the African student body who, dismayed by their failure to speak on the African experience, felt the need for NUSAS to maintain a wider political platform. Magaziner (2010) notes a similar concern was being raised within a second student body, the University Christian Movement (UCM), which shared a large degree of leadership crossover with NUSAS.

The potential for rupture was emerging. During the annual NUSAS conference at Rhodes in 1967 the split became more divisive. African members were told they had to use segregated social facilities. It is from this point that a new Black politics emerged within NUSAS that would fundamentally divide the organisation. No longer seeing NUSAS as representative or respectful of their situation, talks began between African NUSAS members along with colleagues from the Turfloop campus branch of the PAC. Gerhart (1978) traces the

first discussions back to July 1968 and a year later at the July 1969 general conference in Turfloop, this group officially splintered and founded the South African Students' Organisation (SASO). Steve Biko was appointed president. SASO was careful to first position itself as a body willing to work alongside NUSAS and promote what Colin Collins, the General Secretary of the UCM, called "race relations, not race separations" (qtd. Magaziner 2010: 28). SASO initially wanted contact with NUSAS and upheld it as the National Union. However, this apologetic stance profoundly changed during SASO's first year. Leaders began to speak of self-reliance. This message was combined with hostile criticisms of NUSAS and liberalism, which were derided as worse than the Nationalist Party for their pretensions of moral superiority when they had proven unwilling to work for the African cause.

Liberal moral corruption was a hallmark of SASO rhetoric and a frequent topic in Biko's *I Write What I Like* essays penned under the pseudonym Frank Talk. Liberals' lived experience meant they were unable to relate fully to the African experience and could not "represent, however 'beautiful' [their] words, the concerns of Blacks" (Sanders 2003: 205). This irresolvable paradox has been discussed by Jane Poyner (2009) in reference to J. M. Coetzee's writings, an author who does note the limitations of his art, though numerous other liberally minded actors arguably still attempted such representations through politics and literature. Indeed, Biko suggested, by remaining confined within the white experience, liberals all too often fell back on white privilege and spoke within the roles of established discourse. Africans were accepted as workers supporting white ascendancy and liberal concerns failed to move beyond this notion. Viewed cynically, they just argued for improved conditions for African workers: "the black person is still a thing, only the thing must be given more oil to function with better efficiency" (Ndebele 1972: 20). Another criticism focused on the liberal ideology's notion of black assimilation into an already established white society.

Most famously Biko wrote; “integration is a one way course, with the whites doing all the talking and the blacks doing all the listening” (1970: 16). “Blacks don’t need a go-between” (1970: 20). Secondly, Biko criticised liberal politics for dictating how the oppressed should feel and respond to their oppression. It must be recognised that Africans have the “right and duty to respond to the kick *in the way he sees fit*” (Biko 1972b: 195. Original emphasis).

SASO’s distance from liberalism saw it based on principles similar to racial separatism. Such was its stance that the organisation received criticism from both sides of the racial divide for falling in with Nationalist policy and continuing to promote racism. Indeed, similar criticisms were perhaps unavoidable given Sanders’s work on complicity. He writes, “when opposition takes the form of a demarcation *from* something, it cannot, it follows, be untouched by that to which it opposes itself” (2003: 9. Original emphasis). The Nationalist Party itself felt the degree in overlap in their policies meant Black Consciousness was not initially considered a threat and was briefly encouraged (O’Meara 1996: 170). Perhaps interpreted as a back-handed compliment, Jimmy Kruger, the Minister of Justice and Police, even suggested Black Consciousness must have been a white invention. The African population were not capable of such ideas. However, Biko defended his ideology from such charges. He claimed racism was based on the desire to subjugate, which his demographic was incapable of because of their situation. SASO member Bennie Khoapa offered a comprehensive reanalysis of the situation in *Black Viewpoint*, a Black Consciousness affiliated journal. He wrote that what is defined as separatism is actually the process of “regroupment” necessary because of “the paradox of integration”. He stated,

The fact that blacks must sing *black and black together* before they can sing *black and white together* [...] the fact that blacks must unite before they can separate

and must separate before they can unite [...] History has charged us with the cruel responsibility of going to the very gate of racism in order to destroy racism – to the gate not further (1972a: 64. Original emphasis).

Most commentaries now attest to Black Consciousness's non-racist stance. Yet many are all too quick to present the history above in a simplistic binary. Magaziner's is a notable exception as is the highly critical account by Baruch Hirson (1979). Yes, SASO and Black Consciousness were based on a degree of separation between white and black; however, this neglects both the associations that did exist between them during the 1970s and the conflicts rising within these two discrete categories. For a thesis that observes the interactions, appropriations and syncretism between the two literary cultures that represent these prevailing demographics and ideologies during this period and forward, such political nuances must be recognised.

2.2 – Exploring the Binary of Black Consciousness

Michael Lobban (1996) is careful to note that the many responses towards Black Consciousness and black activism more generally during the 1970s tended to judge these rising phenomena against a 'white' view of society and culture. This view presupposes a unity within the white demographic that "simply did not exist" (Lobban 1996: 18). Since the late 1950s there had been growing tensions within the Afrikaner population between those with *verligte* and *verkrampte* tendencies. These debates over liberal constitutional reform were played out within the Nationalist Party and the public sphere but were at their most intensive

in the Broederbond.³ Three particular tensions increased in profile during the 1970s. Firstly, the Nationalist Party became increasingly divided on the primacy of race over culture. A longstanding issue, Verwoerd's more careful formulations during his premiership and earlier academic career repeatedly spoke of the centrality of culture and of differences in experience (Pelzer 1966; Miller 1993). However, Goldin (1987) notes the apartheid state re-constructed the *volk* as purely all-white. This led to the exclusion of the Coloured population from the hegemony. The majority of white Afrikaners viewed them as culturally Coloured despite Moodie's insistence that in a great many ways they were "culturally Afrikaner" (2009: 10). Indeed, their oppression saw apartheid divert from its foundations and has led to a resentment towards the Afrikaner establishment that still permeates Coloured literature today (Chapter 7). The stress on race over culture also saw the Nationalist Party pursue allegiances with the English speaking constituency. This alliance meant the oppressor could be portrayed as a white Western bloc, not just as an Afrikaans population, that could be written against in literature through appropriation of a singular European literary tradition. However, Sanders argues this imagined unity was also fractured by Biko. Black Consciousness rallied against the Afrikaner and white liberals "to a different range of affect [...] The Afrikaner represents dominion over the body; the Liberal, control of the mind" (2003: 192). A different form of freedom needed to be won from each.

The final, increasingly urgent, division centred around the emergence of an ultra-conservative group, represented by A. P. Treurnicht, within the Broederbond. Treurnicht's

³ The Broederbond can be juxtaposed against SASO and Black Consciousness. Both were largely founded on religious and educational principles and saw themselves as cultural bodies dedicated to re-imposing their respective histories and traditions. Sadly, there is little comparative work on their different strategies and the different emphases they placed on language and culture. Their insistence on the links between culture and politics has seen commentaries concentrate largely on the political implications of their actions.

dismissal of Black nationalism in the period, claiming it could not exist because there was no shared culture between the different ethnic groups, was a misreading of Black Consciousness thought. But it does provide an interesting point of departure for discussions of a group that did seek to re-invoke African history and culturally reset the table “in true African style” (Biko 1972b: 69). Treurnicht’s recourse to cultural differences here is questionable since race was his main differential. He was opposed by Johan Degenaar, a professor at Stellenbosch University, who questioned what the acceptance of English speakers meant. “If they were to be accepted because of their common European culture, what of educated urban blacks who had grown up in Christian Western traditions?” (Moodie 2009: 21).

Clear divisions, centring around liberal tendencies, existed within the Afrikaner establishment. However, in the wake of SASO’s rise, the liberal group itself was not homogenous. Gerhart notes the break that occurred within NUSAS and the Liberal Party. Some members welcomed SASO’s formation with others left to wonder what their role in the struggle was now. Could they still make a meaningful contribution? Alan Paton’s private correspondence in 1973 reveals his fears that Africans would never again feel whites capable of telling the truth. On the other hand Neville Curtis, the NUSAS President in 1972, acknowledged and accepted the reasons behind SASO’s formation. He heralded the need for a fundamental restructuring and reassessment of the union. Curtis argued liberals must finally recognise that they were “inextricably part of what they had rejected” and take a “realistic and more radical” attitude with a “shift from talk to action” (1972: 119-20). Such was this stand that the government-initiated Schlebusch Commission into Certain Organisations accused NUSAS of promoting Black Consciousness. Hirson notes the lack of evidence for these findings but there is still much credence to his overall claim that the NUSAS/SASO break was “more organisational than ideological” (1979: 114). Indeed, it is largely impossible to see

a complete division between the SASO leadership and some white liberals, despite their continual statements of non-collaboration. Biko in particular maintained links with NUSAS figures while he entered into constant communication with Donald Woods, editor of the liberal *Daily Dispatch* (Woods 1978; 1980). Though Woods strongly condemned Black Consciousness when founded, his initial respect for Biko grew into friendship. Woods acted beyond the usual journalistic concern for his informants when protecting Biko as a source whilst his and his family's friendship with Biko saw them frequently placed against the law and suffer threats of violence (Hutmacher 1980). Moreover, the activities of SASO and the Black Peoples' Convention (BPC), the community wing of Black Consciousness, reflected much work done by NUSAS. There were large similarities in the educational and clinical programmes the organisations undertook. The Black Consciousness Home Education campaign for example, hoping to provide home students with tuition manuals, worked closely with TURRET, the correspondence arm of the white liberal scheme SACHED. Such was the intimacy that the Minutes of the SASO Executive Council Meeting on 2 January 1973 reveal the deep dissatisfaction some members felt over the scheme. SASO's leadership was forced to announce that the links "must not be considered as official co-operation with TURRET and that all finances be directed to SASO".

These documents hint at yet another division caused by Black Consciousness. SASO's rhetoric and policy caused friction within not only the organisation but the wider African community. Despite the use of Black to include all oppressed peoples regardless of ethnicity, the label did not reflect a harmonious homogeneity. Magaziner quotes the *World* journalist Percy Qoboza who argued SASO needed to stop discriminating between "relevant black men and irrelevant black men" (2010: 145), categories reflecting those proposed by Gerhart who speaks of African Nationalism in terms of "rebels" and "realists" (1978: 39). Black

Consciousness represented the younger intellectual rebel movement that argued vehemently against the realist African politicians who chose to work within the apartheid state's Bantustan policies and arguably thus became complicit actors in the status quo. Black Consciousness's cynicism towards the white establishment's concessionary political offerings saw them dismiss realists -- those who chose to use the opportunities offered as a platform for change -- as irrelevant in Black Consciousness's battle for liberation. This is despite such realism giving the African population a degree of expression during the silence of the 1960s and Hirson's contention that their aspirations "were not dissimilar" (1979: 304) to Black Consciousness. SASO rhetoric instead painted realism as an abandoning of a people and viewed these 'sell outs' with more distaste than the white oppressors themselves.

Such criticism borders on ironic given another split in the African population, briefly mentioned above, that saw Black Consciousness charged as a racist belief itself furthering apartheid's aims. Proponents of non-racialism, ANC communists and Trotskyists outside the Congress personified by Hirson's critical tone in *Year of Fire, Year of Ash*, frequently united in dismissing Black Consciousness and adopted sceptical and occasionally confrontational attitudes towards it (Gibson 2004: 1). In contrast, Sipho Buthelezi's commentary on Black Consciousness argues the ANC gave the new movement its "most enthusiastic support" (1987: 31). Leading ANC figures, for example Nelson Mandela (1997) and Thabo Mbeki (2007), have also praised and offered eulogies to Biko and Black Consciousness, although their words must be treated in the context of the anniversaries they celebrate. Tensions between these organisations have arguably never completely ceased and have had a profound impact on current South African literature and national culture as later chapters demonstrate.

Mbeki's piece is particularly interesting in raising one of two other questions of relevancy raised by SASO. He writes, "naturally the BCM [Black Consciousness Movement]

could not exercise any significant sway over the ordinary black working people of our country” (2007: 25). Black Consciousness did not dismiss working class people as irrelevant but regarded their struggle as irrelevant. In a similar manner the gendered dimension of the struggle was largely irrelevant too. Ramphela has recounted her struggles to advance the female cause within Black Consciousness. The movement was very much founded on conceptions of manhood (Magaziner 2010: 33-6). Feminism was a struggle that had to remain secondary to the racial struggle. Female Africans were Black first and women second. This tension and the gendered constructs of Black Consciousness thought are illustrated, and sometimes redefined, within the poetry of the period (Chapter 4) while current poet Lesego Rampolokeng’s sexual imagery also arguably relates back to this theme (Chapter 6). A cultural analysis also lends itself to exploration of the (ir)relevancy of the class struggle, again dismissed as secondary to the racial one. Although by 1976 SASO President Diliza Mji, giving the Presidential address during SASO’s 8th General Student Council, had accepted the need to “start interpreting our situation from an economic and class point of view” (Mji 1977) it was very much missing from earlier literature or treated as an afterthought. Alan Brooks and Jeremy Brickhill note the economy is often the last thing to be mentioned in Steve Biko’s essays (1980: 77). Yet how did a movement, largely formulated by students and within a petty-bourgeois framework, which hoped to unite all oppressed people and gain a membership of over one million people, relate to the urban everyday and appeal to the concerns of the working class?⁴ Was Buthelezi correct in claiming these “university students became alienated from their own people” (1987: 24)?

⁴ The hope of attracting a membership exceeding one million was expressed during the first conference of the Black Peoples’ Convention in 1972.

SASO and Black Consciousness divided the population it sought to unite in several ways. It also mobilised a student demographic that newly questioned the role of their forebears and the history of the struggle. Mandla Seleane's view is common: "I reasoned that if my parents had done a little more towards its realisation it [liberation] might not be quite so distant, and the vision might be a little clearer" (2007: 73). In so doing a radically new way forward in the liberation struggle was proposed. Yet this direction cannot be seen as simply white versus black. The relationships within each group and across the race divide are far more nuanced. This complexity has raised questions that still permeate contemporary debates, nearly twenty years after South Africa's transition to democracy. And these questions found expression within cultural production that sought to explore the space between the commonly accepted racial and cultural binaries. But why culture?

2.3 – Culture, Politics, Psychology?

Black Consciousness not only redefined the relationship between groups but also sought to redefine the very terms on which the struggle was conducted. Expanding on a declaration uttered by Biko in *I Write What I Like* Magazine had suggested in reference to the political battles between the Nationalists and white liberal progressives, "blacks are tired of standing on the touchlines to witness a game they should be playing'. They would rather ignore the game altogether" (2010: 30). However, it is felt here that Biko was not just advocating ignoring the ideological debates within the white population but rather expressing an ambivalence to politics generally. Frustrated by the lack of speaking opportunities, Black Consciousness instead concentrated not on the struggle for political liberation but adopted a psychological and cultural standpoint.

The histories of Black Consciousness all gesture towards the ideology's psychological quest to assert a new identity and pride. Surrounded by oppressive discourse, Africans had come to accept its truth and required liberating not just from the white oppressor but from themselves. Biko announced the need to address the oppressed's felt inferiority and "pump life back into his empty shell" (n.d: 29). Black Consciousness linked the individual to the community through ideas of respect. Both need pride in their own and are placed in mutual relationship. The primary individual and internal process, Cynthia Kros (1999) and others correctly argue, led into a wider political project that would help create a new South African society with racial equality. For Derek Hook (2004) this psychological struggle is thus best termed 'psychopolitical'. However, this future, continually referred to by historians who seek to analyse cause and effect, was rarely articulated by Black Consciousness leaders themselves. This political end was so distant on the horizon that it was largely incomprehensible, thus helping to explain the poor articulation of guidelines on how it would be achieved. "Until [the] goal [of individual mental liberation] was achieved, the future was unthinkable" (Magaziner 2010: 51).

Hirson's criticisms of Black Consciousness centre on the lack of this clear future and the movement being, in his view, "superficial", sounding "like a course in group psychotherapy", and "apolitical" (1979: 297). Indeed, Black Consciousness was carefully positioned as apolitical in the immediate timeframe. The movement's initial membership included ANC and PAC activists, discouraged violence and was sceptical of marches, rallies and other typical tools of political expression.⁵ Muting its political thrust, Black Consciousness was not

⁵ According to Hilda Bernstein, Biko was "always a spokesman for non-violent ways" (1978: 16). This attitude found favour with liberals and again provides another bridge across the divide. It could be tentatively suggested that his distaste of violence is attributable to his past

about protesting against the situation but thinking through and presenting a challenging alternative. Thus the movement “publicly emphasized its more cultural and intellectual side” (Gerhart 1978: 291). In 1972 the 2nd SASO Conference was focused on ‘Black Creativity and Development’; a year later Black Community Programmes led the National Arts week at Turfloop. Yet this gesture towards culture represents a common endpoint of analysis. Historians all too frequently return to the political and fail to provide a revised history that favours cause and process. It is Black Consciousness’s apparent apolitical nature that needs to be respected for bringing an all-encompassing dimension to the struggle. A cultural fight allowed the struggle to be conducted on the very same grounds that were initially so important to the rise of Afrikanerdom, although cognate issues of Afrikaner capital have also been debated principally by Posel (1997) and O’Meara (1996). Moreover, a cultural discussion represents an analysis that stays true to the philosophy.

Culture was the means through which the psychological battle would be fought. Explained at length in Biko’s 1971 paper ‘Some African Cultural Concepts’ first given at the Ecumenical Lay Training Centre in Natal, culture was integral to the oppressed actively fashioning their own identity. Refusing to simply acknowledge a pre-Van Riebeeck culture that had been distorted and judged inferior to imposed colonial cultures, Biko also spoke of the fundamental aspects of African culture that continued to be expressed. These he termed “modern African culture” (1971: 41). Colonial and apartheid rule, Biko argued, had posited the notion of a traditional time bound African culture and set up a binary between inferior and superior cultures. Africans had been made to compare, resulting in a bastardized African sub-culture and seeing “African people in the urban complexes [...] mimicking the white man

experiences, including the violence that accompanied his brother’s arrest in 1963 for being a suspected Poqo activist.

rather unashamedly” (1971: 46). Biko’s thought collapsed this binary and instead recognised modern African culture where Africa still speaks.

I am not here making a case for separation on the basis of cultural differences. I am sufficiently proud to believe that under a normal situation, Africans can comfortably stay with people of other cultures and be able to contribute to the joint cultures of the communities they have joined (Biko 1971: 45).

The coming pages explore Biko’s view to see if literary works of the time, broadly defined as Black Consciousness works, succeeded in collapsing the either/or binary and were able to bring through the modern African culture within and alongside the Western cultures established as dominant. Could literature witness a cultural duality that asserted African culture alongside the revolt of modernity against the past?⁶ Furthermore, the analysis will continue to the present day and compare the different approaches and whether such methods of appropriation and syncretism were able to establish respect for African culture. Was Biko’s dream of a “culture that accepts the humanity of the Black man, a culture sufficiently accommodative of African concepts to pass as an African culture” (1976: 56) realised? And was this a completely new state that neither aped imported cultures or simply reproduced indigenous cultures?

Black Consciousness recognised the role language had played in oppression and in the development of inferiority. Consequently, language was adopted as a weapon. And, despite their initially relaxed approach to Black Consciousness, the Nationalists themselves, perhaps

⁶ Richard Greenough (1966) announces this duality as one of African nationalism’s continuing tropes.

unsurprisingly given the stages of their own history, similarly recognised power's cultural foundations and quickly become concerned with this new rhetorical and cultural threat. In 1975-6 the state moved to undermine the ideology and placed culture on trial. Becoming concerned with Black Consciousness's militant language, the state tried nine SASO members under the Terrorism Act in what became known as State vs. Cooper.⁷ Comprehensively discussed by Lobban, this became a "trial of ideas and culture" (1996: 45). The third charge, he notes, rested exclusively on cultural matters by citing five literary works; three plays, one song and one poem, which, for the state, sought

'to denigrate the whites and represent them as inhuman oppressors.' [Moreover] Cooper, Myeza and the last six [defendants] were charged with writing anti-white material and staging provocative plays and poetry readings (1996: 49).

Aside from attesting to Black Consciousness as a cultural rather than specifically political force and highlighting the importance of culture to apartheid power relations, this charge raised a third consideration. It formed part of the first indictment that was quashed and replaced during June 1976. The subsequent indictment saw the removal of explicit cultural matters that "henceforth [...] were to be anchored to the hard facts of rallies" (Lobban 1996: 50). Thus culture was discussed within a political framework. The distinction between the categories was removed. Given the tendency to criticize literary output during this period for abandoning aesthetic standards in favour of the political, this step, made by the state, provides an important benchmark rendering the debate of reduced importance. Indeed, even a greater

⁷ Saths Cooper was the first name on the charge sheet. The others were Strini Moodley, Aubrey Mokoape, Mosiuoa Lekota, Nkenkwe Nkomo, Zithulele Cindi, Muntu Myeza, Pandelani Nefolovhodwe and Kaborane Sedibe.

attention to aesthetics would arguably have done little to minimize the literature's political thrust such was the content. Mongane Serote's poetry is just one example. Either way, culture was accepted by both sides as being deeply embedded within South African politics.

In an attempt to devalue and destabilise the power of Black Consciousness rhetoric and cultural action the trial conversely provided the movement with an opportunity to examine, explore and perform culture. During the one hundred and thirty-six day court hearing Black Consciousness culture was consistently performed inside and outside the courtroom. The crowds that gathered to witness proceedings frequently sang freedom songs, recited verse and gave the Black Power salute, the raised clenched fist, adopted by Black Consciousness. Furthermore, literature's function in the liberation battle was discussed and ultimately embraced. The trial explicitly questioned art's nature and function. It was definitively discussed during an exchange between expert witness, Gessler Nkondo, and the prosecution. Lobban cites the following exchange:

REES: Isn't the poem merely a setting forth of ideas?

NKONDO: No.

REES: What is the poem then? The function of a poem and poetry? (1996: 63).

The very language of this literature, be it poetry or manifesto, faced the most scrutiny. Steve Biko's testimony provides ample evidence. The case rested on proving the intensity and implicit violence of language in SASO and Black Consciousness publications. Faced with the prosecution's assertion that certain lexical choices and passages increased hostility towards the state and threatened the maintenance of law and order, Biko argued that the language used was commonplace in the townships and suggested true African feeling. The claims were also

flawed by the prosecution being “merely interested in the language” whilst Biko insisted “you have got to take it in context” (1976: 158). The crux lay in language choice. Biko defiantly argued, with such passion that he at times appeared to be the interrogator, that mis-readings could occur because English, the language of the texts, looked analytically at word choice and often “doesn’t accommodate a very honest expression sometimes of basic feeling” (1976: 104). Meanwhile, African languages see “the emotion behind the word” (1976: 194). They have a different idiom. Consequently, some words do not appear as strong as they do in English. This hints towards a problem of translation where the idiom cannot be reconfigured accurately, which Biko does accept. However, he maintained SASO English’s language choice was not a problem. Both speaker and audience were African and therefore similarly understood the context and meaning, ultimately different to that provided by an ‘English’ analysis.

Use of the English language was cited as a necessity of the situation and, arguably, was established by social conditions beyond their control. English had already established economic and intellectual capital; Black Consciousness was attempting to communicate between numerous different ethnic and linguistic groups and needed a common language. But within this commonality lay two very real problems of usage implied by Biko despite his repeated assertion that he was “not complaining against the language” (1976: 24). First, and quoting the defence lawyer, Mr Soggot, is the ability of English to make Africans feel “a little bit of a foreigner in the linguistic field” (1976: 24). Unable to fully understand English and anxious about their ability to effectively communicate a reply, language thus sees Africans define themselves as inferior. This action is in comparison to native speakers who adopt an enhanced image of intelligence by articulating a response. Africans do not reply because their lack of comprehension makes them “feel things rather than say them” (Biko 1976: 23).

Contrary to English's use by SASO, the English language thus becomes a tool helping to cause inferiority.

A second apparent contradiction speaks to the heart of Black Consciousness ideology. Sociolinguist Bernard Spolsky writes, "most ethnic groups believe their language is the best medium for preserving and expressing their traditions" (1998: 57). Such an assertion when referenced in an African context begins to speak to Ngugi wa Thiong'o's idea of the "colonial bomb" (1986: 3). Claiming an effect similar to that Black Consciousness recognises in South Africa's African population, this bomb sees a colonised people devalue their history and culture in light of the colonial presence. Reclamation can only take place and the idiom of African culture be restored, Ngugi argues, through use of "our [African] language" (1986: 108). Furthermore, from a personal perspective, Ngugi turned his back on English in favour of his mother-tongue in order to communicate directly with the proletarian masses of his community. Such a choice arguably should appeal to a Black Consciousness movement that initially failed to reach the wider African franchise and spread away from university campuses and intellectual circles (Hirson 1979; Lobban 1996).

Why then did the Black Consciousness movement, which aimed to promote pride in African culture, not embrace African languages and instead favour the use of English? Black Consciousness accepted, unlike the Afrikaner Nationalists, that language, though important, was not the only cultural marker, least of all the ultimate marker. Moreover, there was a desire to reach the international community and achieve the very real need of commonality. Support can be found in Anderson's argument, summarised by Stephen May:

It is always a mistake to treat languages in a way that certain nationalist ideologues treat them [...] Much the more important aspect of language is 'its

capacity for generating imagined communities, building in effect *particular solidarities*' (2008: 131. Original emphasis).

Though romantic idealism was superseded by practicality, this apparent paradox provides room for analytic departure. It is contended that, as Chinua Achebe decreed was necessary, the English language when used must carry the weight of the African experience and provide a new English suited to its new African surroundings. Did English in South Africa remain in "full communion with its ancestral home" (Achebe 1965: 28)? And can it be suggested that this resolution may have hindered South Africa's future, Biko's ideal society and its national literature?

2.4 – The Location of Black Consciousness Thought

The language debate between Achebe and Ngugi cannot be exactly overlaid on the South African situation. As Jon Orman warns, "one cannot readily make universal generalisations from the analysis of specific cases" (2009: 29). In both contexts, as Ngugi protests, English had served as a colonial language while the reasons that Achebe uses to affirm its importance, that English was a common language and the one of international and intellectual debate, remain valid. However, apartheid does not read as a simple form of colonialism. The Nationalists' language policies complicate the debate because English became seen as the only possible language of ethnic reconciliation. Mother-tongues had been used to enshrine division. Meanwhile, Black Consciousness belief in the inadequacy of the liberal voice increased the necessity for English to be used by Africans. Africans themselves needed to appeal directly to the white voice in the absence of a sufficient white liberal counterpart.

Despite its shortcomings though, it is beneficial to use the Achebe-Ngugi language debate as an introduction to the Black Consciousness language paradox because it illustrates the movement's wider approach to the academic system. Biko, Barney Pityana and others drew widely on existing intellectual thought before expanding and manipulating it to form their own ideology. In a manner reminiscent of the cultural synthesis they wished to achieve, Black Consciousness thought celebrates the intellectual tradition associated with Africa and the Diaspora and combines these with Western intellectual thinking. Gerhart writes,

[SASO's literature] incorporated thought from independent Africa and America where political struggles had been won but were still, especially America, trying to define and shape their cultural goals [...] Never had such a deliberative and thoroughgoing effort been made to borrow and selectively adapt foreign ideas (1978: 273).

Her assertions are unquestionable. Yet Black Consciousness looked further and there is evidence of thought prevalent in Latin America, the Caribbean and Europe.

The largest influence on Black Consciousness heralded from Martinique and the French colonial experience in the form of Frantz Fanon. Indeed Biko's most famous essay 'Black Souls in White Skins?' is a direct allusion to Fanon's polemic *Black Skin, White Masks* (1968). Fanon's thought is present in the recognition of the psychological battle, the need for polarization in the race struggle as a means of change, and the mistrust of bourgeois blacks who are determined to work within and alongside the oppressor. Moreover, Fanon's four stage identification of literary development -- colonial, national, fighting, postcolonial --

contained within *The Wretched of the Earth* (1965) provides a useful tool of analysis for the literature discussed in the forthcoming chapters.

Colonial literature disregards the vitality of native culture, is shaped by the European tradition, and “corresponds point by point with [that by] metropolitan counterparts” (Fanon 1965: 158-9). The second national stage continues to reflect the borrowed European aesthetic but writers remember their own past by depicting old legends “steeped in humour and allegory, at other times in anguish, malaise, death, and even nausea” (1965: 159). However, writers simply recall events and fail to establish an active presence within the story set amongst their own people. This stage progresses into the fighting stage. Writers transcend the lament and offer a call for revolt. They awaken and unite their people by expressing their true feelings and becoming “the spokesperson of a new reality in action” (1965: 179). The fighting stage is also characterised by an art emerging from those who had never previously considered writing but now wish to join the struggle, shape and open the soon liberated nation. Finally, emerges a postcolonial literature that announces the death of the colonial man and offers a total change. Writing shows “none of that tiresome cultural indecisiveness [and] depends on exceptionally inventive cultural manifestations for its very existence” (1965: 171). There is a return of colour and the imagination.⁸ Furthermore, this literature does not suppress difference or look uncritically at the indigenous culture, traditions or modernity. Rather it builds a completely new context with an emphasis on the individual and decentralization away from the elites, the petty-bourgeoisie and their anti-national culture (Gibson 2003).

Fanon’s model does have its limitations as M. N. Al-Abbood (2012) and others have observed. Homi K. Bhabha (1994) has dismissed the prospect of complete assimilation that

⁸ Edouard Glissant has announced this as a return to a point of “entanglement” (qtd. Parry 1994: 22).

Fanon describes and it is indeed hard to assert that South African literature ever fully entered the colonial phase. There was a wide range of African language literature created by elites and the wider African population that does not imitate colonial literature. Furthermore, some English language literature remains fiercely ambivalent to European culture. Certain interestingly parallels can, however, be drawn between the subsequent stages and South African writing. Black Consciousness poetry in the 1970s exhibits hallmarks of national writing while aspects of Fanon's fighting and postcolonial literatures are easily recognisable in 1980s and post-transition literature respectively (see Chapters 4, 5 and 6).

Despite some borrowings, Black Consciousness remains fundamentally at odds with Fanon. Black Consciousness ideology was at best psycho-cultural and not psycho-political because the emphasis was placed at all times on patience and identity. The notion of self-inspection was not used, unlike Fanon, to trigger a single mass eruption of violence that would cause liberation. And, unlike Fanon, liberation was evidently not beginning in the stirrings of the proletariat, whose unique situation was initially ignored. Rather the intellectuals represented the start of the ideology, the very same "products of the universities" Fanon viewed with "suspicion" (Hirson 1979: 112).

Magaziner also observes the apparent incompatibilities between Fanon and Negritude that Black Consciousness readily used together. Admittedly Black Consciousness's Africanist approach can be seen as a direct response to Negritude, a movement that originated in France during the 1930s and features the Senegalese poet Leopold Senghor and Aime Césaire from Martinique as its main protagonists. Both philosophies were dedicated to the affirmation of African values and culture; to Africans identifying their position in society and beginning to proclaim their Blackness. Meanwhile, Biko "employed dialectics remarkably similar to Sartre's [and Negritude]" (Magaziner 2010: 42) when attempting to posit Black

Consciousness as the antithesis to white supremacy. This was a tendency Fanon frequently bemoaned.⁹ However, there do appear to be differences to the movements' approaches. Blackness for Black Consciousness was a state of mind while for Negritude it "connoted the pigmentation of one's skin" (Snail 2008: 55). Snail continues to observe that Negritude aimed to the complete revival of indigenous culture and the assimilation of Africans into the norms of white society. Such statements are in stark contrast to Black Consciousness that, as aforementioned, aimed at the creation of a new society. Senghor's interpretation of Negritude though, as opposed to Césaire's, may actually question these perceived contrasts. Equally to Biko, though not as centrally, Senghor spoke of the primacy of culture and of real freedom being "freedom of minds" (1965: 77). Fundamentally, Senghor's Negritude was also committed to a new non-racial society. His essay 'Association and Assimilation' dismisses claims of absorption, integration and one-way assimilation in favour of a process of duality with "each one having at the same time to adapt himself to the nature and habits of the associate" (1965: 52). Assimilation in this sense does afford equal respect for black and white values, much like Biko's joint culture.

Biko's desire for modern African culture to occupy a position alongside Western European cultures in the future is also reminiscent of thought originating from elsewhere on the continent. Amílcar Cabral's view of national culture significantly spoke against the blind acceptance of the indigenous culture. He argued only the relevant and positive aspects of

⁹ Fanon's scepticism is similar to that of Es'kia Mphahlele (Nkosi 1981; Reed 1965). However, Mphahlele's second edition of *The African Image* (1974) along with his correspondence with N. Chabani Manganyi (2010) suggests a possible sympathy towards Black Consciousness's stance. Arguably, "ripples of Black Consciousness's explosive vocabulary were reaching him" and he was adjusting to "them [college-boy theorists] selectively" (Attwell 2005: 127-8). He perhaps also felt that mileage was left in their work when compared to the accelerated growth of non-racialism that, by the late 1970s, was superseding Black Consciousness.

African culture be invoked and this must be done “without underestimating the importance of positive contributions from the oppressor’s culture and other cultures” (Cabral 1980: 43). As long as these influences do not perpetuate inequality, Cabral, later echoed by Biko, believed a successful future national culture would have foundations in both African and other cultures.¹⁰ These beliefs were also remarkably similar to those of Zambian president Kenneth Kaunda. Magaziner observes Biko’s view, not just reminiscent of Cabral, also hints towards Kaunda’s rejection of the either/or model of dominant discourses (2010: 46). And such an opinion hints towards the thinking and criticism that Black Consciousness suggested was central to its processes. As will be shown through literary analysis, there was no blind acceptance. All situations, including the more utopian post-transition experience, have been criticised and had ‘grey’ areas explored by Black Consciousness affiliated authors.

The African Diaspora was also a central component. Black Consciousness was in many ways modelled on the Black Power phenomenon that swept America a decade earlier. Gerhart’s *Black Power in South Africa* (1978) prevents the need for a wide discussion of these linkages. Suffice to say writings by influential African-Americans including Eldridge Cleaver, Malcolm X, James Cone and Stokely Carmichael all appear intertextually in Black Consciousness literature. This is notwithstanding the influence of music. Brian Willan’s (1982) portrayal of Sol Plaatje’s early life depicts the importance of music to the African petty bourgeoisie and notes how performance was based on the Western model yet forged a unique identity out of European, African and American styles. In Kimberley especially, the American influence was heightened by the presence of Will P. Thompson from the Coloured

¹⁰ Black Consciousness itself fulfilled one of Cabral’s prophecy. He had spoken of the need for black intellectuals to undergo a “spiritual reconversion [or] *re-Africanization*” (1980: 45. Original emphasis). Black Consciousness, established in the universities, was reconfirming African identity in black intellectuals.

Jubilee Singers group.¹¹ This musical linkage has since been reinforced by the prominence of African-American jazz, which became incorporated as a continual backing to the everyday urban township environment and remained an important touchstone in South Africa literature from the *Drum* generation forward. Much of this literature is interestingly illuminated when read against work produced during the Harlem Renaissance. However, Black Power's biggest influence was in the form of language and symbolism. Black Consciousness directly borrowed the clenched fist Black Power salute, one of the lingering symbols of resistance since Soweto. The salute was used as an integral form of non-verbal communication. Mthuli Shezi, the Black Peoples' Convention vice-president, who scripted the play *Shanti*, left no doubt to his political opinions and the context of his plays because he decreed a black fist to be carved on his headstone.

The biggest import was slogan and language. Apartheid and the white power structure were newly referred to as 'the system' while Gerhart writes of the proliferation of terms such as "relevance and power structure" (1978: 277). These terms, abounding in Black Power rhetoric, had not previously appeared in the South African struggle. Also sloganeering including 'Black is Beautiful' was borrowed. So was the word that came to define the generation. 'Black', used as an alternative to Negro in America, replaced terms such as African and Bantu in South African discourse and, defined as "status-more-than-colour" (Gerhart 1978: 277), was employed to unite all oppressed peoples -- African, Indian or Coloured -- regardless of their ethnicity. Initially, the terminology was resisted and SASO was forced to remain 'non-white' until 1970 when the constitution finally officially recognised 'Black'. The SASO newsletter in the previous September had already defined the

¹¹ In reference to the above Achebe-Ngugi language debate, Willan's piece is also notable for its observation that the African petty bourgeoisie embraced English for practical reasons that overshadowed any political concerns.

movement's view of the term; but Black became increasingly favoured as Black Consciousness extended its appeal to the Indian and Coloured populations who originally resisted the grouping. The Afrikaner Nationalist Party even showed increasing acceptance of Black over their original term Bantu. Black allowed a positivity to be attached to identity. The oppressed were no longer being defined in the white image. And, such was the attraction of this authoritative step, Black retained a place in the liberation discourse even away from the SASO mainstream. For example, *The Star* on 20 December 1974 reported the Black Renaissance Convention meeting in Hammanskraal earlier that month had decided on a move away from SASO/BPC although Blackness remained central to its message.

The term caused friction with Biko's aims. Writings on the issue suggest a conflict in thought whilst it also complicated the resetting of South African culture in a more African way. Strinivasa Moodly, a member of the Natal Indian Congress, wrote in the SASO newsletter, Blackness was used to unite on a basis of oppression and not "superficial cultural differences" (qtd. Buthelezi 1987: 27). Not only undermining the primacy of culture in Black Consciousness ideology, Moodly's view seems incompatible with Pityana's suggestion in SASO publications that Blackness was "much more fundamental" (qtd. Buthelezi 1987: 27) than colour, but history and associated pasts, of which cultural practices are integral. Moodly was clearly aware that culture remained an irreconcilable feature of difference between the groups united as Black. A singular Black culture could not be brought about. To speak of African culture thus neglected other marginalised demographics in respect to the central message of Black Consciousness.

Black unity was a political tool whilst Black Consciousness as a cultural organisation remained fundamentally an Africanist movement, that speaking of "our culture" or "Black Culture" implied "African culture". However, a certain leeway could be granted. Biko wrote,

“Black culture above all implies freedom on our part to innovate without recourse to white values” (1973: 96). He speaks of a culture defined outside the norms of colonial discourse, which Ngugi (2012) argues was the reason behind the notion of competing ethnicities. Although different, their equality suggests a relative commonality. The new South Africa would see sharing, a situation where writers and artists could include aspects of all cultures where none were given prominence. The apparent incompatibility of African and Black culture spoke to process. However, the result would not similarly sideline other oppressed cultures. The message spoke to all: discover and respect your culture; assert your culture; embrace culture’s fluidity, its present and future.

Black Consciousness also incorporated the liberation struggles occurring in the other Americas. Although not as prominent at its founding, interesting relationships occurred between South Africa and the Caribbean. Poetic and musical exchanges surged to prominence in the mid-1970s with the rise of Dub Poetry in the Caribbean and these have been returned in much recent South African cultural output. Meanwhile, developments in revolutionary struggles in Grenada during 1979 reconfigured the language debate in South Africa. Ideas expressed by Chris Searle about language being “itself [...] at war” (1984: 20) and “imprisoned and chained” (1984: 107), along with the notion of a new revolutionary language being necessary in the battle for liberation, featured in conversations and debates in the 1980s when activists began to look forward to the end of apartheid. Moreover, both these struggles were faced with how to use language to mobilise ordinary people. Searle speaks of success in Grenada but SASO was forever beset with difficulties in extending their voice off campus. Many of the literacy projects established within local communities faced problems in training volunteers, establishing attendance and increasing membership (Lobban 1996: 25). Such

literacy programmes were crucial to the process of raising consciousness. They also reflect yet another instance of ideological borrowing.

The Brazilian educationalist Paulo Freire promoted literacy education that foregrounded a sense of community within the education system. Jon Reyhner describes his method of

‘culture circles’ where teachers would become ‘dialogue coordinators’ and students ‘small group participants’. [Freire’s] egalitarian idea was to promote "the work of 'man with man' and not 'for man'" (2012: n.pag).

Literacy was based not only on learning to read but on students exploring their own reality and discussing it critically with others. Similarly, the Black Consciousness Home Education Scheme discussed in 1973 at SASO’s Executive Council Meeting removed the idea of individual education in favour of a community aspect where the student body and teachers would work together and listen to one another. The emphasis was on achieving a joint social utility and an environment where students were “not to be made aware but [made] oneself aware” (Magaziner 2010: 129). Education was about facilitation. A student’s own knowledge and culture would be respected which, when compared to Bantu Education, was a very necessary method. However, again, the parallel between Black Consciousness and the original idea was not straightforward. C. A. Bowers has written of Freire’s tendency to use Western education assumptions “that undermine indigenous knowledge systems” while his ideas in practice suggest the “colonizing nature of the cultural assumptions underlying his pedagogy” (2005: vii). These were the very education practices Black Consciousness was reacting to. Furthermore, Freire argued for independent thinkers while, for Magaziner, Black

Consciousness literacy attempted to push individuals in a certain direction -- to acceptance of the conclusion already realized by Biko. As phrased in the Bible: "Go ye unto the world and speak to the people, teach them everything that I have taught you" (Matthew 28: 18-20 qtd. Magaziner 2010: 133).

Quoting the Bible, Magaziner suggests another prominent influence on Black Consciousness thought: Western religious and intellectual beliefs. Black Consciousness leaders were all schooled in Christianity. Pityana later became an Anglican priest. Their ideology was grounded on a reinterpretation of Christianity in the form of Black Theology. Believing in the fundamental truth of Christianity, Biko (1973) advocated a re-examination. The oppressed would be given an active role in their own salvation and beliefs in transcendence would be reconsidered. Such was the centrality of religion that SASO newsletters became a bible to activists and Biko frequently aligned himself with Jesus. Bokwe Mafuna, anything but critically, notes "one of Biko's favourite verses was from Luke 4:18-9" (2007: 84), which reads "He hath sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised". Continuing this theme, a Christian religious motif constantly features in poetry from the period. Chapter 5 will see the discussion turn briefly to the realization of Black Theology in the successful theatre production *Woza Albert!*.

A second link can also be made to the Western establishment. Black Consciousness was based on entering into critical debates on present and past ideas, creating a synthesis and appreciating how competing ideologies work together to give rise to subtlety and nuance in intellectual discourse. Then how these thoughts could be used to realize a future were suggested. Magaziner feels the method "of individuals critiquing, shifting, and thinking forward into the future" was "very much a product of the Western academic tradition" (2010:

41). His continued analysis reveals corruption of this Western method because Black Consciousness did not work with the complete thought but only selected passages. Ideas were borrowed unashamedly throughout their own literature. Thus by “not exactly respecting copyright [they] violated modernist [and importantly enshrined Western] notions of intellectual property” (2010: 48-9).

Black Consciousness thought was a collection, possibly even a corruption, of a vast depository of material. Literature from across Africa, the Diaspora, liberation struggles and even the West were rephrased and reconsidered in the creation of a composite ideology. The creation of Black Consciousness is also the aim: the ability to discuss and place together, with equality, ideas from a wide range of intellectual cultures. And the links across the globe established by this intellectual syncretism and appropriation are all maintained in the cultural output born from it.

2.5 – Soweto: A Black Consciousness Finale?

The events of 16 June 1976 in Soweto need little attention having been presented at length elsewhere (Hirson 1979; Brooks 1980). The march of several thousand high school students towards Orlando Stadium was met with police aggression and live ammunition.¹² Police Minister Jimmy Kruger aimed to make Africans “tame to the gun” (qtd. O’Meara 1996: 193). Violence escalated and triggered a widespread revolt that spread throughout the country and has been widely cited as marking the beginning of the end for apartheid and awakening the international community to the situation within South Africa. Additionally, Soweto

¹² Figures range from between 1500 to closer to 20 000 depending on the source. More authoritative texts seem loathe to offer exact figures. Brooks and Brickhill observe “thousands of pupils [marching in] over a dozen columns” (1980: 8).

announced the end of Black Consciousness as a movement, reconfigured splits in the liberation struggle, and further complicated the role of language.

Soweto “stemmed from language” (Magaziner 2010: 156). The immediate cause has been recognised officially by both the Cillié Commission into the Uprising and the judgment of State vs. Twala and Others¹³ as language in education policy. The march was foremost a march against the recent fifty-fifty ruling that saw the compulsory use of Afrikaans as medium of instruction in mathematics, social science, history and geography alongside English that was used in science and practical subjects. Contemporary reasoning centred on a fifty-fifty language split being the only way to satisfy English and Afrikaans speakers, the demographics that largely funded Bantu Education. However, the policy had been formulating for several years from differing perspectives and lay in the necessity of Africans taking their place as workers in South African industry. As early as 1949 there is evidence of such thinking. Brother Patrick True, the then Principal of Modderpoort School wrote in a memorandum submitted to the Commission on Native Education,

I should think apart from the territories it is very rare that the pure vernacular is ever heard [...] Africans must take their place in society, a multi-racial society. Often his well being depends upon his ability to understand his interlocutor. He must therefore learn both English and Afrikaans [...] I am convinced that fifty-fifty education [...] has no bad effect on the students.

¹³ This refers to the trial of eleven members of the Soweto Students’ Representative Council. They were charged with sedition offences and the Council was said to help organise demonstrations and speak for Soweto’s population (Lobban 1996: 219).

Just under twenty years later the same reasoning appeared in a secret Broederbond communication that suggested Afrikaans as a student's second language:

Most right-thinking Afrikaans speakers today address the Bantu in Afrikaans whenever they meet [...] As the national economy requires Bantu to be in contact with white employers and co-workers, instruction in one of the two official languages must take place (a) through contact with whites and (b) through instruction at school from the first school year.¹⁴

Brooks and Brickhill take the reasoning further and argue Afrikaans' imposition was an imperative reaction to Black Consciousness and the growing self assertiveness of African youths who were beginning to challenge the cultural hegemony (1980: 46). Regardless of reason, the fifty-fifty ruling was greeted with anger by students and staff alike. Students were faced with the difficulties of learning core skills in a foreign language that they had not encountered in the teaching context before while staff were left to teach in a language they themselves had limited command of.¹⁵ Subsequently a march was planned across Soweto to present these grievances to the Department of Bantu Education. In protest students displayed banners including 'Down with Afrikaans' and 'Blacks are not Dustbins – Afrikaans Stinks!'.¹⁶

Criticism by the select historians who foreground the language question have interpreted these banners and the reaction to fifty-fifty education too literally. They simply claim Soweto was an uprising against Afrikaans. This view misses the nuances of the

¹⁴ A copy of this circular entitled 'Afrikaans as Second Language for the Bantu' can be seen on display at the Hector Pieterse Museum in Soweto.

¹⁵ Schools could ask for exemption if they felt their staff were under-qualified. However, while the appeals were considered schools had to continue in dual-medium. There is little evidence of any successful appeals.

situation. The revolt cannot be portrayed as one against a language *per se* but rather its imposition, an idea supported by Jacob Dlamini's recent revisionist work *Native Nostalgia* (2009). The urban African population had embraced Afrikaans as part of the linguistic environment and it was practised everyday in slang derivatives such as *tsotsitaal*. Similarly, the coloured population for whom Afrikaans was their language did participate in the uprising and their espousal of Black Consciousness ideology, cited by Hirson as "strange" (1979: 297) in light of Afrikaans' role in Soweto, is perfectly reasonable given the revisionist interpretation. Furthermore, examples including the case of the Meadowlands Tswana School Board can be cited, as Brooks and Brickhill do. In this instance the school board suggested they were not opposed to fifty-fifty based medium of instruction but its imposed implementation that specified which subjects would be taught in Afrikaans (Brooks 1980: 49). Explorations of language's role in South African must be careful of writing against Afrikaans. Although connotations associated with the language are inescapable, Afrikaans remained, both during apartheid and after, a valuable means of expression among Africans and Coloureds and should not be used to criticise their words. Indeed, perhaps its use becomes even more poignant and purposeful for the very fact that it can represent criticisms of a system that invested so much in Afrikaans as a marker of separation. A language that was abused in a "God like decision" is arguably the best means of writing against those very same "God like decisions [...] The old dictum that whites know what is best for blacks", as a *World* article in response to the fifty-fifty ruling put it on 25 February 1976.

Language imposition alone fails to explain Soweto and the sheer scale of the violence and protest that erupted not just in the immediate aftermath but in the ensuing months. The uprising tapped into longstanding resentment, the sources of which have led questions to be asked about just how instrumental Black Consciousness was in the events of 1976. The South

African Education Trust's *The Road to Democracy in South Africa* (2006) illustrates the competing claims that have been made over Soweto's history. Central to these different interpretations are the reach of Black Consciousness beyond the confines of the university campus. Brooks and Brickhill's account gives credence to Black Consciousness's integral role by situating the revolt as a reaction to growing student discontentment with Bantu Education and the associated overcrowding, high wastage rates, racist content, poor facilities and standards, and high costs. These fundamental concerns with education were shared by students and staff who formed a generational alliance that had rarely been seen before in the liberation struggle. Thus the uprising had a broader base of support and fresh impetus because teachers and parents were able to introduce wider political grievances into the debates.

The presence of both teachers and students makes it harder to ignore the presence of Black Consciousness ideology. As Tom Lodge (1983) asserts, Black Consciousness was shaped by Bantu Education. Meanwhile, the first edition of *Black Review* asserts, "the struggle is the education struggle" (Khoapa 1972b: 22). Education drove the formation of an ideology formulated by those with a petty-bourgeois outlook and many of these founding thinkers found their way into teaching. Aside from participating directly in the uprisings, teachers disseminated the Black Consciousness ideology to their students. Perhaps Onkgopotse Tiro is the most famous example. A history teacher, Tiro frequently shared his political outlook at Morris Isaacson High School, Soweto. He preached against the racist views encountered in the syllabus and arguably was instrumental in turning his school into what was dubbed the 'cradle of resistance'. Tiro's subsequent expulsion has been cited as a leading factor in the founding of the South African Students' Movement (SASM) that attracted many of its leaders from Morris Isaacson and, despite being officially autonomous, maintained links with Black Consciousness (*SA History*). SASM itself became the key

organisation in student mobilisation and coordinated the march that led to the uprising.¹⁶ And during this march the starkest symbol of Black Consciousness involvement was the Black Power salute adopted by the students. However, the gesture of the upraised fist was interestingly used by the authorities to widen the net of blame. They argued it implicated the Communist Party. Vorster is noted as saying: “Why do they walk with upraised fists? Surely this is a sign of the Communist Party?” (Brooks 1980: 27).

Alternative accounts dispute the uprising’s Black Consciousness motivations and draw on the very tactic of marching. They argue, as previously noted, that such resistance was not generally accepted by the leadership. It was instead the ANC who repeatedly called for the struggle to be taken onto the streets. The SASM leaders had become disaffected with the Black Consciousness movement in the period between 1972 and 1976. Consequently, links were explored between SASM and the ANC underground, facilitated by the release of prominent ANC members from Robben Island. Such interaction, in Oliver Tambo’s words, saw “that they [the underground] were able to make an input [and] see that the seeds he [the ANC] had planted among the youth in Soweto 1976 [...] were bearing fruit” (1987: 129). From this basis the ANC was able to become more overtly involved and help conduct some of the protest activity in the coming months. For example, several student stay-at-homes were called in the ANC’s name during August and September.

For Hirson, in particular, the ANC presence is unmistakable. It was only the need to maintain secrecy that delayed any overt activity, thus explaining the slow release of ANC leaflets until several days after 16 June. He cites Winnie Mandela’s assertion that Soweto “cannot be attributed to Black Consciousness as such” (1979: 196) and declares Black

¹⁶ Somewhat bizarrely the Hector Pieterse Museum claims SASM conducted a planning meeting at an Orlando swimming pool dressed in bikinis and bathing costumes to avoid detection.

Consciousness's lead role an unproven myth. Hirson traces the origins back to the turn of the decade. Abortive military action in Angola had shown a weakness in the South African regime that the liberation movement felt could be exploited. Meanwhile, strike action in Namibia during 1971 had been seen as a success for South African workers who adopted similar tactics throughout the 1970s. The Cape Town strikes in 1972 were a success for the workers and those in Durban in the run up to 1976 saw Sowetan students recognise the possibility of strike action as a valid means of resistance. An atmosphere of revolt was therefore created that "affected a far wider section of the population than [...] SASO-BPC" (Hirson 1979: 156). Black Consciousness did largely fail to recognise class interests and was unable to explicitly infiltrate working class movements. Therefore it seems implicit that Black Consciousness could not have directly contributed to strike action. However, despite a limited physical presence, the ideology was cited by L. Douwes Dekker, Assistant General Secretary of the Trade Union Council of South Africa (TUCSA), as perhaps being a reason for the idea of collective action and turn towards independent Black organisations so vital for successful strike action. Hirson does mention Dekker's view but it perhaps requires more attention than a simple caveat (1979: 128).

The precise attribution of the uprisings will remain difficult to corroborate, though the influence of Black Consciousness cannot be dismissed as myth. The movement may have struggled to establish a physical presence off campus but the ideology itself could not have failed to seep and spread into the consciousness of the wider African population. The analysis of causes may depend on where historians place their focus: the mental or military battle. Either way the tensions that surfaced between Black Consciousness and ANC supporters during 1976 have had a profound effect. Relations remain acrimonious. As this author was told by an anonymous Black Consciousness activist in interview about Soweto, "where the

fuck were they [the ANC]?”. Chapter 6 shows how literature has become the haven for many of these lingering disputes to be expressed. In a bid to win symbolic political capital and continually re-legitimise their rule, the ANC are criticised for attempting to ‘claim’ struggle history and erase the presence of other liberation groups. The reasons behind the Soweto Uprising may remain too complex for simple explanation but the aftermath profoundly affected the style of future resistance and saw the end of Black Consciousness as a cohesive group.

2.6 – The End of Black Consciousness

The Soweto Uprising was met with a fierce response from the authorities. Within eighteen months the Black Consciousness Movement had been banned, Steve Biko had been killed in detention, numerous other SASO leaders had fled into exile. Yet a newly energised and determined youth emerged across the country. Julian Brown has warned against Soweto representing a clear break in protest against apartheid, viewing it instead as a “catalyst, not a new start” (2009: 343). Either way the liberation struggle experienced a fundamental change with a more violent and active phase of resistance set to begin. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Report when referring to Soweto suggested that after Hector Pieterse’s death, the first casualty of the Uprising, there was a complete transformation of protest from “peaceful march into a violent confrontation” (1998: 559). The same can be said of the struggle across South Africa with the youth adopting “whatever means might be at hand – including notably violent means” (Brown 2009: 343). Deprived of their original leadership, new activists imbued with Black Consciousness ideology and Black Theology, which had “wedded suffering and death to hope and victory” (Magaziner 2010: 126), did not share the

same reticence towards violence. In many instances they could be accused of actively courting it. Poems contained in the SASO archives at the University of the Witwatersrand provide clear examples of language that had matured into one of unquestionable confrontation:

Time to grab arms

And aim them at

The blue-eyed enemy

Lurking in the bushes

God up above

[...]

has also decreed

that we must now KILL (l. 24-35).

And the faith in death Magaziner alludes to is similarly expressed. Consider the following lines from Glenn Masokoane's four page draft poem 'Black Nana Avenge! Arise!' likewise found in the Witwatersrand archives:

In death you stand BLACK WOMAN

She now looked relieved. She needed...

The hour has come, death have come!

Comfort got into her, she was calm (l. 25-8).

Yet this violence and continued protest was not performed *ad hoc*. The students continued to operate within an organisational framework. But in the wake of SASO and Black Consciousness's decline where were they mobilised to conduct themselves? Under whose banner was the post-1976 cultural output and protest to lie? It is from this question that the split between the ANC and those who maintained a broadly Black Consciousness perspective occurs. Some fled into exile and others remained within South Africa.

The post-Soweto exiles largely found themselves integrated within the ANC movement, for example Barney Pityana. Many others, including Mongane Serote, chose to join Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK), the underground armed struggle. Despite the PAC in exile seemingly being the natural destination because of its similar desire to create a cultural identity for black Africans, the organisation was beset by division and ineffective organisation. According to Lodge, "the eve of Soweto found the PAC weak and once again divided" (1983: 316). Alternatively the ANC had a long established tradition of a united and relatively strong exile movement.¹⁷ Integration was not a straightforward process though. Both the ANC and the South African Communist Party questioned how to effectively integrate a former Black Consciousness membership while Black Consciousness activists themselves entered into conflict in some areas. Despite Biko's attempts some years earlier, the prospect of a workable united front was not easily envisaged (Tambo 1987; Seekings 2000). Yet it was eased to some degree by Black Consciousness's stance as a cultural and community based movement. There was a loose political ideology that could be flexibly accommodated in other organisations. The emphasis on community equality prevented a firm hierarchy. SASO's leadership was regularly rotated. Thus questions of authority, which

¹⁷ Interesting studies of the ANC in exile have been undertaken by Stephen Ellis (1992) and Hugh MacMillan (2009; 2012).

Lodge (1983) notes frequently beset exile movements, did not cause fatal problems for those forced to flee South Africa after Soweto. During this period the ANC's activities increased, most notably with a return of the sabotage campaign. Similarly, a wide ranging literary and artistic movement was established by exiles. Leading previously Black Consciousness affiliated writers merged into the ANC's cultural wing. Both of these occurrences had a profound effect on literature's future direction.

Within South Africa the political fate of Soweto's actors was more complex. In April 1978 the Azanian People's Organisation (AZAPO) was founded. This was perceived as the natural home for Black Consciousness because it continued the Africanist message and became popular in the 'home' of Black Consciousness, the University of the North in Turfloop. It also appealed to the young township population when its message was promoted by the *Post* and the *Sowetan* (Lodge 1991: 25). The most notable member was Saths Cooper, a central figure through the past decade. Cooper's political move when compared to fellow Black Consciousness leader Pityana, who joined the ANC abroad, clearly exemplifies Black Consciousness's flexibility. AZAPO recognised a narrowness in Black Consciousness thought and shifted the ideology from the community and the primacy of racial unity towards a socialist outlook that recognised class analysis. This was a necessary move in the 1980s when trade unionism and the working class struggle became the focal point of resistance within South Africa. But AZAPO was weakened by its failure to achieve popular appeal with the working classes. Lodge writes, "[AZAPO] does not appear to have developed any formal connections with significant labour organisations" (1983: 345) and had a limited basis for cooperation.

AZAPO's socialist stance frequently brought it into conflict with the other political body to rise after Soweto. Described comprehensively by Jeremy Seekings (2000), the United

Democratic Front (UDF) was formed from the study groups established by student leaders in the aftermath of Soweto in order to discuss the way forward. Exploited and often led by the ANC and prisoners returned from Robben Island, these study groups continued to work within Black Consciousness structures, feature prominent Black Consciousness figures, and share their language.¹⁸ Study groups were located in Cape Town and Durban¹⁹ but primarily concentrated in Johannesburg. And another location in the East Rand became integral to the UDF. Modder B Prison contained many students and SASO members imprisoned during the uprising. There were frequent heated debates about how Black Consciousness should move forward with some prisoners continuing a ‘go it alone’ approach while others advocated closer work with the ANC and Charterism. Curtis Nkondo was one of the latter and a figure Seekings describes as central to the UDF. The conversations within these study groups and Modder B prison attest to Black Consciousness’s flexibility. Although the UDF came to adopt a non-racial doctrine in line with the ANC and drew on ANC symbolism, imagery, discourse and tradition (Seekings 2000: 23), it also exhibited an “ideologically ambiguous” (Lodge 1991: 35) language and sought to be all encompassing. Black Consciousness had a central place. Most of the national and regional secretaries had originated from Black Consciousness and it shared an emphasis on community and infusion from below. Indeed, the local was so prominent that the UDF was criticised for its lack of national coordination and, as such, many local individuals and groups were able to maintain their autonomy and primary concerns. For example, individuals could continue a more explicitly Black Consciousness styled approach

¹⁸ Seekings suggests that some of those who worked within Black Consciousness organisations, for example Pope Molefe and Vincent Mogane, were there clandestinely (2000: 31-3).

¹⁹ Durban’s study groups were important in establishing an Indian membership within the UDF. This demographic was integral to the struggle especially after Nationalist attempts to increase their inclusion in the political system after the creation of the Tricameral Parliament.

because the UDF was used for mainly for support and resources: “[Its] unity was fragile and limited at best” (Seekings 2000: 22).

The UDF promoted beliefs that corresponded with Black Consciousness and later AZAPO, despite not sharing the centrality of Africanism. The UDF was popular and, introducing schemes that reached out to ordinary people, placed community at the centre of the ideology. Moreover, students continued to exert great influence and, like AZAPO, “a class-consciousness was the essential motivating force among a large number of its rank-and-file” (Lodge 1991: 29). Several trade unions joined the UDF and, although the Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU) did not officially join the Front, there was cooperation and several related discussions described as “very thought provoking” (Seekings 2000: 64). However, the UDF’s attempts to embrace all aspects of the struggle saw association with whites. An interesting example is provided by the Congress of South African Students (COSAS). COSAS helped form the student groups that populated the UDF and promoted the younger generation. However, COSAS also brought African and white students together again. The student voice returned to the multi-racial stance SASO had struggled a decade earlier to remove. Additionally, the UDF had apparent links to the middle classes and capitalism, which led to confrontation with AZAPO. The visit of Edward Kennedy sparked a violent clash between the two and saw the entrenching of divisions within the African population. Although there was a degree of reconciliation between Black Consciousness and the ANC, splits were emerging between those in exile and those not, while in South Africa journalist Nomavenda Mathiane commented in *The World* (1989):

It is not like 1976. [Now] the main conflict is between people who used to be friends and allies. In 1976 nearly all the activists were Black Consciousness, but

now some [...] are with AZAPO and others [are] UDF. The fight between the two is wreaking more devastation than the fight with the System.

The UDF provides a convenient bridge through which to trace the influence of Black Consciousness ideology in liberation struggle culture. The Front was integral to the techniques of mobilisation discussed in Chapter 5, played a crucial role in the success of street theatre and had links to the trade union movement, which lay at the centre of the new struggle poetry. Although the individual writers discussed may not have direct links to Black Consciousness the very nature of the ideology suggests there would be an inescapable awareness that comes through in their written works. Furthermore, both movements speculated on the creation of a national literature. Biko had asserted his views in ‘Some African Cultural Concepts’ and the UDF, through its role as facilitator and all-encompassing nature, was central to the 1980s. This decade was “the time when ethnic politics - ‘black politics,’ ‘white politics,’ ‘Coloured politics,’ ‘Indian politics’ – became simply ‘South African politics’” (Mufson 1991: 3). Is the same applicable to literature? How, in Biko’s words, is African culture given a place at the table?

Chapter 3

Speaking and Signalling in Turbulent Silence: *The Classic*, *Staffrider* and *Medu Arts*

Ensemble¹

The emergence of Black Consciousness further complicated the relationship between politics and culture in South Africa. As such, a prerequisite of any literary analysis for the period demands attention to the very act of publishing that as Nicholas Evans and Monica Seeber (2000) explore is an essential intermediary between the act of writing and the prevailing political climate. In particular, and taking increased prominence in South Africa, the literary journal is the published medium that according to Andries Oliphant is best able to “reproduce, oppose, resist, and transform” (2001: 91) the political environment. Moreover, enhancing their value to this thesis’s concerns, Oliphant continues to define journals as “important sites of cultural production [that] provide forums for new developments [and] mediate and shape the direction in which a national literature develops” (2001: 91). Yet, despite their importance, relatively few comparative studies have been conducted owing in part to their high mortality rate within South Africa (Gray 1980; Finn 1994). This chapter attempts to address this imbalance by focusing on three journals -- *The Classic*, *Staffrider* and the *Medu Arts Ensemble Newsletter* -- whilst also briefly gesturing towards the methods of oppression used to limit their public exposure. This trio has been selected chiefly because their respective editorial policies best illustrate the changing prominence of African culture in South African literature.

¹ I am indebted to Keith Shear and Judy Seidman for kindly lending me their collections of *Staffrider* and *Medu Arts Ensemble Newsletters*.

Ndebele (1989b) has examined the close allegiance between literary journals and writing movements. For white South Africans there is a longstanding history of such movements, for example the circle around William Plomer in the 1920s, the *Dertigers* in the following decade, and the *Sestigers* in the 1960s. For Black South African artists a similar tradition is harder to trace. There had been attempts from as early as the mid-1940s to establish African writers' movements but it was not until 1947 that an African Academy for Arts was proposed. The Academy sought to reclaim aspects of African heritage in artistic form and encourage mutually beneficial dialogue among individual writers. Despite struggling to get off the ground, this initial grouping provoked more insistent attempts at establishing writers' movements. Ndebele (1989b) notes the occurrence of six different bodies at varying points into the 1980s, although, much like literary journals, these all struggled to achieve longevity.

The first journal of repute was based around such a writers' collective. Featuring work from authors including Todd Matshikiza, Can Temba, William Bloke Modisane and numerous other leading South African voices, *Drum* magazine was founded in 1951. Becoming besotted with the urban and the people of the street, *Drum's* celebration of modernity and popular culture was not announced in its first issues. Ntongela Masilela notes the importance of Lionel Abrahams, Henry Nxumalo and Matshikiza in "persuading *Drum* magazine to switch from celebrating 'tradition' in its earliest copies to emphasising 'modernity'" (2012: 334). Their writings consequently helped make the syncretism of modernity with working class popularism the hegemonic form of African literature in the 1950s. This literary style was showcased in both reportage and fiction that evoked the Sophiatown Renaissance, a content that responded to the vibrant admixture of urban life experiences. For example, African-American jazz influences were placed alongside uniquely

African shebeens and shebeen queens. Meanwhile, a focus on sex, crime and gangs saw *tsotsitaal* feature as the medium of many pieces and helped establish it as the language of the urban underworld, connotations it has struggled to rid itself of (see Chapter 6).

As alluded to above, the Drum Boys, as the group became affectionately known, were hesitant in fully embracing the African past or African languages. Concerned by the rising Negritude movement in francophone Africa, linguistic and cultural syncretism was as far as the *Drum* authors were prepared to go. Such a move largely resulted from the journal's subconscious desire to aim their writings at the white reader and rouse their consciousness to the Africans' situation (Nkosi 1965: 141). Translated into a literary style, this political outlook led to the "imitation of white writing [and] Western conceptions of literature" (Zander 1999: 13). The Drum Boys did not appeal to the African population but to a white audience. They could not conjure African pasts and cultural idioms that may have proved exclusionary but only hint towards debates around culture, appropriation, syncretism and audience that became increasingly important in ensuing years.

3.1 – The Three Phases of *The Classic*

Drum created a popular space for literary journals in South African society. Nat Nakasa, a writer who had featured in *Drum*, soon established his own journal *The Classic*. First appearing in 1953, this publication published some early work by the writers discussed in the forthcoming chapters although it pre-dates the Black Consciousness ideology that is the central motif to this commentary. However, its inclusion is doubly necessary. Firstly, *The Classic* raised previously neglected literary questions; secondly, it laid key foundations for future literary journals.

Even before the first issue was published, questions surfaced over the direction *The Classic* should take. Many saw an opportunity to break from white readership. Richard Rive, who remained steadfast in his opposition to all forms of race division in cultural circles, quickly warned against this new direction and wrote privately to Nat Nakasa on 11 April 1963, “if it is going to be another Blacks only magazine it is doomed to failure at its inception. In the cultural field we cannot tolerate any form of discrimination”.² He continued, warning Nakasa on literary quality, “Where possible [content] must be a reflection of merit and suitability and not depend on mere surface manifestations such as skin colour. This is the philosophical death-knell of any artistic endeavour”. Although no evidence can be found of a direct reply, Nakasa’s editorial policy largely agreed with Rive. Nakasa wrote, also in April 1963, in a letter to James Matthews that *The Classic* would be a literary journal not a political mouthpiece and would maintain a line neither African nor non-white. It hoped to publish those who had previously struggled to find publication. Such aspirations are credible and, though *The Classic* published mainly African written literature, it must be remembered that the majority of writers seeking publication in these journals at the time were Africans overlooked by white edited magazines. In itself that created a secondary problem and saw *The Classic* become the focus of more vehement criticism by Rive in an early review. It was, he wrote in the September 1963 issue of *Information South Africa and Analysis*, too South African, a “serious limitation [resulting in] much that is mediocre and plain bad”.³ Rive thus appears to support the general critical consensus of the period that claimed South African

² This and all letters referenced here can be found in the Nathaniel Nakasa collection in Historical Papers at the University of the Witwatersrand (see bibliography).

³ Bloke Modisane’s letter to Nakasa on 10 October 1963 issues a humorous riposte. He claims the review “swollen-headed” and labels Rive “a pain”. This was added to criticism of Rive’s view of South Africa’s political situation. For Modisane, Rive’s idealised hope of artistic integration being a means to solve South Africa’s problems was an “infirmity of a ‘friend’”.

writers abandoned aesthetics for political polemics at the slightest provocation. A remedy, he suggested, was more content from creative authors across the wider continent. Rive himself repeatedly attempted similar projects, culminating in the *Modern African Prose* anthology published in 1967. His criticisms again focused on concerns already acknowledged by Nakasa and other leading contributors. Nakasa's correspondence reveals his often fruitless attempts at attracting literature from across Africa. Specifically, it was the lesser nations they targeted. *The Classic* offered to translate into English all work from the Congo, Cameroon and elsewhere. Here, *The Classic* reveals a firm commitment to English over both African languages and urban dialects of which little, if any, were included.

Nakasa was committed to *The Classic*'s quality. Determined to promote it as a literary journal he offered considerable editorial feedback that attempted to inspire aesthetic achievement. He wrote on 6 November 1963 to Dennis Kiley,

I agree with you about our contributors tending to fill the paper with their miseries. They will have to regard themselves as writers first and black underdogs later.

To some extent *The Classic* remained a testament to his efforts. Writers of great repute, including Lewis Nkosi, Casey Motsitsi and Es'kia Mphahlele, were frequent contributors even when based abroad. Much quality can be observed. The themes remained similar to those of *Drum* despite a decrease in the amount of reportage. Although there was limited use of *tsotsitaal*, the *tsotsi* figure himself was present, though only selectively. For Modisane, *tsotsis* helped increase aesthetic quality. His letter to Nakasa on 10 October 1963 explains,

[They are a] gift to fiction because their zest for living gives a dynamic energy that the writer can easily embrace so long as [the *tsotsi*], in particular his violence, remains a background figure and not the central motif.

Alongside these contemporary and uniquely South African characters, contemporary Western influences were also given prominence. The first issue contained a critical piece by jazz musician Julian Beinart while Arthur Maimane, who often appropriated the jazz image in the mould of township life, was a frequent contributor. Such syncretism and appropriation received much criticism throughout the 1950s and 1960s. Publicising these Western influences, critics argued, rendered the African complicit in neo-colonialism. As Maimane somewhat wryly observed about his own work in a letter to Nakasa dated 23 September 1963: “I’m a traitor to the race, you see; corrupted by the neo-colonialists and all that jazz, diggez-vous?” Ngugi wa Thiong’o was one such critic. In an article entitled ‘Language and Literature’, which appeared in *The Classic* 2.1, Ngugi objects to those who write insistently in colonial languages and give too much attention to Western cultural images. Written in 1966, Ngugi appeals for a renewed embrace of African languages. The ultimate carriers of culture, their preservation and assertion was integral to the African experience under apartheid (Ngugi 1966: 43). Ngugi went on to make similar interventions in other journals, perhaps best exemplified in his two part essay ‘Education for a National Culture’ in the *Medu Arts Ensemble Newsletter* Volume 4. The language debate became inescapable in South African literary circles over the following decades and evidently *The Classic*, being English medium but largely African written, was one of the first to formulate the grounds for discussion and contribute to it.

Aside from featuring fiction, *The Classic* was extremely important for formulating questions that would influence South African cultural debate for a generation. Mphahlele's contributions are another example. In an issue that tackled children's literature and the same one that featured Ngugi's 'Language and Literature' article, Mphahlele reflects about the role of women. There is no doubting the prominence this debate gained in *Staffrider* and the Black Consciousness period. Moreover, a volume later (*The Classic* 3.1), Mphahlele critically tackled literature's role in society. He advocated the political passion and defiance of contemporary poetry but only when secondary to "perspective" -- a force that gives energy to words, crucially "power and beauty" (1967: 16). This essay also emphasised African cultural heritage and its place in literature. Both, he argued, work as a means of self-knowledge. But importantly for Mphahlele, heritage must serve a function. Its role is to continually "redefine the African" (1967: 15) and, like Western influences, should not be presented as a static phenomenon or part of a binary. Mphahlele gives room for both African and Western influences at the table of culture, to use the metaphor Biko adopted four years later. His explanation cites Sol Plaatje's presentation of Christianity when practiced by Africans. Here, it has a more hybrid nature and is not purely synonymous with Western civilisation as European literature suggests. Briefly summarised, Mphahlele's article argues that literature must appreciate the relationship between these two supposedly competing influences and cultures and recognise their mutual tendencies to inform. Art must pay testimony to their dynamic nature through syncretism and appropriation. Later in the same issue Chinua Achebe advocated a similar necessity. Again the writer needs to reach into the past so as to allow a complete knowing of oneself and confirm identity. Yet this appreciation of heritage must not act "like a millstone around your neck [rather] something you can hold dialogue with" (1967: 24).

The Classic under Nat Nakasa was carefully positioned as a literary journal that stressed aesthetic quality over African assertion and political polemics. It was also careful to appeal to and encourage contributions from across the continent and the races. It embraced a variety of experiences and raised pressing cultural issues that gathered momentum through the 1970s and the rise of Black Consciousness. Bennie Bunsee rightly claimed on 4 October 1963 in correspondence with Nakasa, “*Classic* is a classic”. However, like *Drum*, it suffered from increasing state repression and the forced exile of many of its contributors. Nat Nakasa was one of these forced to leave South Africa and, after fleeing to America in 1964, committed suicide. He edited only the first three issues of *The Classic*. Without his leadership, the magazine adopted a different style and its appeal waned. This did not represent the end. Sipho Sepamla resuscitated *The Classic* under the title *The New Classic* in 1975 while later in the 1980s it again reappeared under its original title in cooperation with the African Writers’ Association.⁴

Interestingly, this series of rises and falls largely coincides with the fluctuations of Africanist politics in South Africa. Although Nakasa stressed the literary, *The Classic* in its different guises has continually explored the differing relationships between the African population and “traditional and emergent nationalist cultural forces” (Oliphant 2001: 101). In the few publications that appeared, or were proposed, during the 1980s the tone became characterised by a foregrounding of African traditional practices and a rejection of Western influences, in line with the direction of other journals during that period. This will be shown below in reference to the *Medu Arts Ensemble Newsletter*. Before this period *The New Classic*

⁴ There is disagreement over when the first issue of the *New Classic* was published. Oliphant (2001) claims it was resuscitated in 1976, however there are archived copies of the *New Classic* in the Witwatersrand Historical Papers, referred to below, dated 1975.

in the 1970s entered into dialogue with Black Consciousness and earlier still, at its founding, the Negritude movement.

An article in *The New Classic* published in 1975 exemplifies this conversation with Africanist politics. Here, Richard Rive addresses Leopold Senghor's thought. Identifying the differences between the Negritude movement's protagonists, Rive's antagonism surfaces. He interrogates the validity of a unified Black experience and cultural tradition. Of particular importance to questions of cultural borrowing is Rive's view on language. For critics, as suggested in Chapter 2, writing in the colonial language is the ultimate contradiction. However, defendants argue colonial languages can be justified by the nature of their use. Indeed, artists can examine the secret traces of whiteness in blackness and blackness in whiteness. But, for Rive, neither position can easily be reconciled with Negritude's emphasis on a communal past African culture. The artist "changes the connotations to suit himself" and these attempts to change "flavour" (Rive 1975: 73-4) can only be done individually within the context of the artist's own poetic imagination. Therefore these stylistic attempts at a black language prevent the formation of a national art and a unified black culture.

Rive's second area for concern revolves around the assertion of past traditions. His conclusion criticizes Negritude's tendency "to wallow in its past" (1975: 76). Alternatively he quotes Fanon,

The man of today, and particularly the black man must not appeal to culture for the right to live. A culture is required in the present not with the past. No extinct culture can serve as the basis of a new culture (1975: 76).

The stress needs to lie on culture's dynamic nature, idiom, and its continual evolution in light of current cultural borrowings. Interestingly, this can be examined through Rive's portrayal of Negritude as constantly facing Europe. This image can be juxtaposed alongside Walter Benjamin's Angel of History. Adopting a position of reference to the white world suggests the legacy of lost past African cultural practices that keep "piling wreckage upon wreckage" at their feet. However, it is not possible to remain and "make whole what has been smashed" (Benjamin 1955: VII). Like the Angel of History, 'traditions' keep blowing forward and progressing. It is not possible to reinstate the past. Rather Africans should notice the present in order to prevent a growing pile of wrecked cultural practices. Their loss would only be lamented in the future.

Rive's piece is typical of *The Classic*, which throughout its three phases contributed to Africanist discussions on the appropriation of language and idiom in contemporary culture and literature. Like Mphahlele in earlier issues, Rive again makes reference towards culture's dynamism and the need to embrace all of society's prevailing influences. These debates surfaced continually throughout the 1970s and 1980s when literary journals took an increasingly prominent position in the liberation struggle.

3.2 – Ravan Press, *Staffrider* and the Urgency of Now

Sanders observes the loss of the African voice during apartheid. He writes, "apartheid seldom allowed Africans to speak, and it ventriloquized ad lib: 'Bantu says...'" (2003: 203). The demise of *Drum* and latterly *The Classic* brought this silence into sharp focus and the troubles of literary publication gained renewed attention with the rise of Black Consciousness and its associated cultural viewpoint. Steve Biko lamented liberal politics and writing that saw "so

many things said so often to us, about us and for us *but very seldom by us*" (1972a: 7. Original emphasis). Moreover, he argued there are "very few publications that are directed at, manned by and produced by black people" (1972a: 7). To rectify this the Black Consciousness influence shifted attention towards journals that were in all aspects African.

The first moves occurred with the production of the *SASO Newsletters* and the reports of the Study Project of Christianity in South African Society (SPRO-CAS), which were affiliated to Black Theological thought. In 1972 two more Black Consciousness influenced publications were published. *Black Viewpoint* increased attention on ideology and featured essays from the movement's prominent thinkers who explained and defended the Black Consciousness position. Secondly, *Black Review* published news of the liberation struggle and summarised developments affecting Black life. Though *Black Review* always included a section on arts and entertainment, neither publication was dedicated in the main to the arts. They instead favoured an academic audience. SPRO-CAS, though, did eventually introduce a 'Pop' section in an attempt to attract a new readership interested in contemporary popular culture. Moreover, literature's power to explain politics and awaken the population saw it quickly become embraced as a leading dimension in the struggle. A dedicated literary outlet was required and the facilities for these early periodicals, established by SPRO-CAS, became central to the creation of Ravan Press.

Originally providing the printing services for SPRO-CAS, Ravan was officially confirmed as a publishing company in 1972. This was at a similar time to the emergence of other alternative publishers, including Ad Donker and David Philip, who were similarly committed against apartheid and survived on private funding. Ravan survived as an independent publisher until 1994 when it was acquired by Hodder & Stoughton and during this time it remained a company driven by "intense idealism" (Randall 1998: 2). Instead of

coveting commercial success, Ravan was primarily dedicated to educating and probing every aspect of the South African experience. Consequently, Ravan positioned itself on the boundaries and became a radical publisher dedicated to increasing the power of new or previously marginalised voices and signalling new paths for the country's culture. In many ways it became the necessary voice of South African opposition through its determination to publish hostile work critical of the hegemony and the period's dominant discourses. This radical energy was also facilitated by the comparatively young age of its editorial board. Most had experience of current youth ideologies and student politics. Danie van Zyl, for example, created links between Ravan and NUSAS and had helped SPRO-CAS get publications accepted by producing eye catching cover designs.

Glenn Moss delivers the warmest praise for its antagonistic nature when he succinctly captures the spirit of opposition within Ravan Press:

Thankfully, in its twenty-five years of existence, Ravan Press has provoked the fiercest of criticism, the strongest of loyalties, the greatest of conflicts. Its authors, directors and staff members have been banned, its books impounded, its offices fire-bombed. Education authorities, supported by fundamentalist religions, have withdrawn Ravan books from the classrooms. It has published books which have broken new ground, challenged the old order, irritated new elites, won prestigious awards – and embarrassed supporters, trustees and staff alike! (1998: 13).

However, literary quality was rarely compromised despite its ideology. Historical and journalistic works admittedly found their way to publication through Ravan but these were not the only categories. Its editors sponsored imagination. Indeed, half of the best South

African authors voted for in a 1997 *Mail and Guardian* survey found their way as contributors to Ravan (Moss 1998: 14). Such a statistic is testament to its great success and dedication to quality.

Ravan's greatest contribution to South African literary studies and the liberation struggle was through *Staffrider*. A notorious cultural forum during the liberation struggle, *Staffrider* achieved a print run of over ten thousand at its height. The first issue found its way to press in 1978 following on from the decline of the journal *Bolt* that Mike Kirkwood, the first editor of *Staffrider*, had previously edited. It was carefully positioned as non-racial and politically unaligned; like *The Classic* dedicated not to politics but publishing voices that were not being heard (Manaka 1982; Oliphant 2001). Indeed, *Staffrider* published numerous works from white authors as well as black. There was even a "marked trend towards equalization" (Finn 1994: 55) in the race of authors during the last five years of *Staffrider*. Nadine Gordimer and J. M. Coetzee are the white writers of greatest repute who saw some of their lesser-known works appear in the magazine. The lack of a clear political stance, however, did itself make a political statement towards liberation. Geoffrey Haresnape's comments on the white journal *Contrast* can similarly be applied to *Staffrider*. He writes, the no-policy on political content "really meant a policy of freedom with the widest possible scope" (1985: 33). Yet it is hard to deny the Black Consciousness influence that lay behind the rhetoric. Kirkwood felt *Staffrider's* "first leaps were premised on the volatile, unstable assumptions about the legacy of 1976 [the Soweto Uprising]" (1988: 3) and the influence of student activism on the situation. Meanwhile, the journal's original self-editing format arguably reflected the message of self-reliance integral to Black Consciousness ideology (Vladislavic 1988: ii). These influences raised debates over racial exclusivity that had

hindered past writers' movements and journals. Indeed, they threatened to fatally destabilise Ravan Press when many writers left and moved to Skotaville, rival all-black publishers.

Arguably *Staffrider* exhibited a content that could divorce the journal from the white population. Albeit featuring white-authored texts, these were in the minority and the literature featured was based exclusively in the contemporary African experience. Oliphant (2001) traces this decision to Kirkwood's criticism of white liberal journals such as *Contrast*, which existed solely within the white liberal population to the exclusion of many Black writers. Kirkwood (1976) dismisses *Contrast's* claim that its stance upheld aesthetic standards. He instead argues this commitment tantamount to complicity with the racial arrogance of colonialism. Therefore this further justified a radical black aesthetics, especially given the ironic and rather dubious status of liberal commentators.

Insist[ing] on artistic freedom, [liberal commentators] elect to attack writers committed to political and socio-cultural change as well as freedom for all [...]
Blinded by the desire to retain the cultural high ground, their refusal to participate in the struggle for social change is directly related to a disabling and narrow view of freedom (Oliphant 2001: 97).

Thus *Staffrider's* focus and aesthetics implicitly removed aspects of the journal from the liberal aesthetic tradition. This stressed that art, having a privileged status, was a production through freedom in order to provide pleasure. Free from outside pressures and vested interest, art was judged by the individual before appealing to others and assuming universality (Guyer 1996; Schaeffer 2000). *Staffrider* jettisoned these ideas. Content saw writers "make less of their individuality. They emphasise their identity as that of a school, a collective [and] give

[literature] a more ‘popular’ character” (Vaughan 1982: 134). *Staffrider* was firmly based in the local community. Its distribution rested on networks created by local groups who released issues privately throughout the townships because Mike Kirkwood desired to avoid the racialised dissemination system that saw all booksellers located in white residential areas. Moreover, until Volume 3 Issue 3, local communities determined content. Community art groups gathered work and then selected and put forward a few pieces to the national body. This can be evinced in the sub-headings operating in each issue. Apart from selection, these groups also provided a workshop environment that was central to township theatre and script production at that time, excerpts of which were frequently published in the journal. This spirit of community was unique to *Staffrider*. Writers wrote not only to provide art and make political comment but also to help other writers and identify themselves as members of a specific literary group. The lack of strict editorial policy was founded to some degree on the informal assistance and mentorship provided by other writers and contributors. Meanwhile, Rive notes his own preference, in a comment applicable to other established names:

Although there are far glossier magazines in South Africa, I find myself writing more and more for *Staffrider* [...] Fairly well-established writers are deliberately trying to identify themselves with other writers who are not quite as fortunate or as widely published (1979: 337).

Representing a subtle shift in the position he had previously adopted towards *The Classic*, Rive was perhaps enticed by *Staffrider*’s more obvious non-racial character and its perceived higher standards. It must be remembered that *Staffrider* was arguably able to appeal to established names more quickly than *The Classic*. Black Consciousness’s impact meant

Staffrider emerged on the back of an upsurge of creativity within South Africa. *The Classic*, meanwhile, was born from a period of silence and exile.

The emphasis on community also worked to dismiss the influence of Western capitalism, which Kirkwood had consciously gestured towards through his original stance on distribution. *Staffrider* was made for the collective good rather than aiming to prove a commercial success and line the pockets of its board. Similarly, Ben Khoapa, writing an undated draft article entitled ‘White Values – an Assessment of these in Relation to African Values’ intended for inclusion in the proposed *Journal of Social Change* to be edited by Peter Randall, postulated a traditional African approach that saw “all action [as] joint community orientated action rather than individualistic”. Such individualism is characteristic of a capitalist approach to society, he writes -- one thus rejected by *Staffrider*.

Content was of and for the community. Poetry featured in the journal clearly sought to address the collective but this theme was equally evident in other literary forms displayed. Michael Vaughan analysing the short stories reveals, “Mtutuzeli Matshoba’s short stories [...] are very focused on the popular experience and leave behind individual interiority” (1988: 312). Two other means were also employed to emphasise community spirit. These have thus far not received much critical commentary. *Staffrider* widened the literary sphere to include other media. The oral and visual image featured prominently alongside the written. The earliest editions included Miriam Tlali’s ‘Soweto Speaking’, which provided interviews with local citizens. Tlali thus created a patchwork of the ordinary. She pressed for uniquely personal accounts of life in Soweto. These reflected not just the wider political situation and the struggle against apartheid but also the everyday individual struggles of township life. Tlali’s contribution consequently foreshadowed Ndebele’s (1986b) assertions that the more radical methods of resistance were those that depicted individual African experience and

agency rather than portrayals of apartheid's mass dehumanising power. The series revealed the personal histories that made up the community and evoked them with sadness, humour, and energy. 'Soweto Speaking' spoke of a community spirit and underlined not only the horrors and hardships of apartheid life but also the continual dynamism of township life, the evolving appropriation of influences that made it so unique.

Staffrider introduced visual journalism to the cultural struggle through the inclusion of photography. This exposed all aspects of the struggle and, when juxtaposed with the written literature, served almost as documentary evidence testifying to the reality and supporting the images of oppression evoked by authors. Photography also served as a quick translation of the written as the journal passed from hand to hand, typical of *Staffrider's* popular nature. This popularity was further evinced with photographs that often captured groups of people and images of an urban landscape that resonated with and were important to a whole community flow. Moreover, these images heightened the sense of relevancy and urgency that was paraded elsewhere in the magazine. Photographic images presented largely indisputable evidence of the injustices being perpetrated against Africans and countered the rhetoric of the Nationalist government. More widely, photography was embraced as a form that would allow the struggle to reach an international audience. This was possible because the images captured were largely politically innocuous and simple images of the quotidian. They were selected for their specific impact and were not images of explicit political comment *per se* that risked banning. Interestingly, however, photography was not free of debates over aesthetic quality. Joyce Ozyński (1988) notes another instance of appropriation. Such journalism drew heavily on an already well-established tradition of documentary photography in America. Although providing legitimacy to this method of commentary it burdened artists with the dilemma of

raising social consciousness alongside meeting the growing demands of the photographic aesthetic.

The inclusion of photography and ‘Soweto Speaking’ began a “game with labels started by the magazine, which aimed at showing the close affiliation of ‘documentary’ and ‘imaginative’” (Zander 1999: 20). When juxtaposed against liberal aesthetics this game raises two interesting points. *Staffrider* combined these newer literary forms with more accepted ones. This move was, at the time, often interpreted as an attack on liberal thought, which posits a distinct hierarchy in aesthetic practice with poetry at the summit. Such a view is arguably too simplistic a formulation. Both the photographs and Tlali’s interviews depicted scenes of individual African agency that therefore coincided with more humanist aesthetic perspectives. However, McClintock was still prepared to assert that *Staffrider*’s content and its very essence was a “fierce rebuttal of white poetic standards [and] paraded an aesthetics of defiance” (1987: 599). Unlike liberal aesthetics, *Staffrider* was wholly uncommitted to arts-for-art’s sake. It refused to prescribe aesthetic standards in editorial policy and instead felt society’s ever-changing nature rendered such standards forever in flux. *Staffrider* published literature that was born from vested interest and designed specifically to meet a political purpose: to re-energise the liberation struggle by awakening the African population and fostering a sense of defiant unity. Stephen Finn, though, has doubted the truth behind such claims. His analysis of *Staffrider*’s later editions reveals a decrease in socio-political themes.

[This] gives lie to the often-asserted view that the only theme black writers deal with is their socio-political lot, and that when the situation changes they will stale and their creativity will be stymied. On the contrary, this augurs well for the future (1994: 62).

Earlier editions were significantly more political. Thus these at least complied more readily with what Gugelberger argues were the terms of artistic production established historically in African society. This view suggests art was designed for a function and to communicate -- “it was not something to be merely admired” (Gugelberger 1985: 2) as liberal ideas would suggest necessary.⁵ Yet this dismissal of Western literary tradition in favour of its African relation was not characteristic of *Staffrider* at large. The literature included, reflecting the Critical Realist approach of many contributors, was not one that rejected Western influence in order to assert or retreat into a romantic African past. Little can be seen that draws comprehensively on myths of African pasts and, alternatively, not much room is dedicated to envisioning a future.

Mphahlele criticised *Staffrider* for its lack of myth and for having no “sense of there being a tomorrow: it captured the agony of the moment, but ‘[it] has no resonance because there is no past either’” (Manus 2011: 167). The journal was dedicated to the urgency of the now, often unconcerned if the past, future and its quality slipped past. Indeed, it followed *Drum* in fostering an ideology “that the future was *now* and created a style to match” (Couzens 1982: 7. Original emphasis). This intention was typified by the magazine’s title. *Staffrider* is born from township slang and refers to the youth who illegally avoided the overcrowded city commuter trains that remained racially segregated. Instead Staffriders leap onto the moving train and hang dangerously onto the door’s handrail or perch on the roof. Such a reference, especially when incorporated alongside the cover picture of the first issue that reveals hundreds of African youths streaming across the tracks at a railway station,

⁵ Henry Louis Gates Jr. has dismissed criticism that treats all black writing as merely functional and transparent as an “anthropological fallacy” (1984: 5).

dramatises the energy, unceasing motion and hurriedness of the population. This was the fast changing situation to which the magazine attempted to contribute.

Aside from reacting to the contemporary reality, the *Staffrider* figure also portrays another instance of appropriation. The train had come to accrue a dense set of social meanings in the colonial world and specifically in South Africa where, amongst other connotations, it was “clearly a tool of oppression, indispensable to the maintenance of residential segregation and to the exploitation of labour” (Barnard 2007: 7). *Staffriders* take this image of their oppression and pervert its power. Their position is a dangerous one, characteristic of the community they represent, but they are able to reassert their own individual authority. Symbolically they are positioned above and are physically crossing barriers that were constructed to prevent their progress and to confirm their marginalisation in society. Their actions suggest the possibility of social movement outside official routes. Publicising this image, *Staffrider* took a Western symbol, adapted it to the contemporary urban environment, and used it to raise consciousness. The image became a vehicle for their own political agenda within the liberation effort.

Analysis of *Staffrider* reveals a journal firmly of the present. Including some literature of high standard and some questionable, it arguably aimed towards quantity rather than quality. However, *Staffrider* throughout its lifetime remained the focus of South Africa’s cultural struggle by both mobilising and informing its largely urban African readership. It was of the people and included literature very much rooted in the quotidian. Thus relevant, it helped provide the strong community bonds that were so required in the face of a Nationalist government intent on perpetuating divisions. Running for just over ten years there was one ultimate goal: to bring about the end of apartheid oppression as soon as possible. This urgency overshadowed all other concerns. Officially apolitical, *Staffrider* included white

authors alongside black united in their condemnation of apartheid. Symbols, styles and literary traditions were used, or rejected, from both sides of the divide. Western influences can be traced in *Staffrider* as easily as African ones whilst a large degree of syncretism was also involved. Concerned not so much about their cultural attribution, *Staffrider's* contributors used these influences dependent on their possible appropriation. The same can be said of language.

A rough study of the *Staffrider* collection reveals over ninety percent is written in English, although it is possible to find instances of urban dialects and African vernaculars. Vicki Briault Manus wrote of the suggested language paradox in that it “apparently never figured” (2011: 162). Later chapters dispute this in relation to individual poets who did often struggle with the English language and sought to imbue it with an African flavour; however, her claim holds for *Staffrider*. The urgency of the struggle and the need to deliver a message meant writers were forced to embrace a language that could resonate with the masses. Writers used the language they felt most capable of writing in, of producing a truth and doing so quickly. Ndebele, for example, felt he did not have the time to perfect his craft and go through another apprenticeship in his mother-tongue (Ndebele 1986: 237). Serote observed, the battle for liberation demanded writers “wield the weapon they best know how to use” (1988: 1606). For many this proved to be English. *Staffrider* would certainly suggest it was the weapon that proved most effective.

Staffrider was, however, not just a literary journal. Mike Kirkwood, after becoming Ravan's director, embarked on a second flagship project when he launched a low-cost paperback series between 1979-86 under the same name. Central to this scheme was a trio of anthologies edited by Mthobisi Mutloahle, previously a key member of the *Staffrider* journal. “Dedicated to archiving black cultural history” (McDonald 2012: 813), *Reconstruction* was

published in 1980, followed by *Forced Landing* a year later, before culminating in 1987 with the production of *Umhlaba Wethu: An Historical Indictment*. Following on from his aim in re-establishing *The Classic*, Mutloatse used the series to trace continuities across the various periods of African literature. This reclamation of African heritage and experience, evinced through continual references to Azania within the anthologies, came with the rejection of Western literary formulations and its prescribed categorisation of literature. Introducing the collection with a manifesto, Mutloatse introduced the concept of 'proemdra'; prose, poem and drama in portmanteau form. He extended this rejection of Western literary tradition to the English language itself, claiming in *Forced Landing*,

[African writers would] pee, spit, and shit on literary convention before we are through; we are going to kick and pull and push literature into the form we prefer. We are going to experiment and probe and not give a damn (1981: 5).

The collection was billed as one that would evince a high degree of literary appropriation and foreground African idioms. Indeed, it did help reclaim African oral tradition. Geoffrey Davis (2003) suggests the collection is the work of an oral historian. Moreover, *Forced Landing* and the other two anthologies succeeded in combining African literature from different periods and placing them in dialogue with one another.⁶ But, aside from this, *Forced Landing* does not suggest the violent appropriation and syncretism it claimed. Horst Zander (1999) argues there is no evidence of proemdra and the term only entered literary debates as a label

⁶ Paulo Fernando de Moraes Farias (2012) has spoken of the centrality of dialogue in the oral historian's role. They are not recorders of contemporary and past events; instead they are active thinkers who interpret histories in light of recent happenings, subsequently influencing the oral history passed down.

subsequently applied to older works. Manus also says the calls for radical language are not evident except for “some stylistic indigenization” (2011: 169). The subsequent detailed linguistic analysis provided is highly illuminating and concentrates primarily on ‘Forced Landing’ by Mathatha Tsedu and Achmat Dangor’s ‘Waiting for Leila’. Tsedu offers a satirical representation of the South African situation and makes no concessions to a non-African language speaking audience. Puns, anagrams and irony based in the African languages are notable features. Dangor, meanwhile, embraces the Cape Malay population and represents their Creole with extensive code switching between Malay, English, Afrikaans and Arabic. Additionally the unique African context is reinforced by haunting cultural images and the high use of ancestral tradition that, in Manus’s words, maps “the entire history of a people” (2011: 173). Aside from these two main instances, though, and the occasional use of African language, nominally Zulu or in reference to Swahili praises, the collection is largely written in Standard English. Translations are even provided for African cultural or linguistic references.

Forced Landing did provide morale-boosting entertainment and establish itself very much within African identity, the liberation struggle and its associated anger and urgency. Thus it was true to the Staffrider genre. Yet the collection was unable to meet the new expectations of language and literary convention Mutloatse so passionately introduced to the cultural struggle. Coincidentally, it also failed in introducing women into the struggle. Although the introduction made this call, the stories in the anthology mostly “ignore[d] or denigrate[d] women” (Manus 2011: 178). Similarly, Finn notes *Staffrider* exhibited “an increase in male domination”. This was surprising given “the growing strength of the women’s movement and of women writers” (1994: 57), although does testify to the sense of patriarchy that dominated Black Consciousness ideology. *Forced Landing* and the Staffrider

series sought to reclaim the unique African literary heritage. Its content succeeded in capturing the African experience but its form was unable to reassert specifically African aesthetics over its Western counterparts. Ironically it even managed to incorporate these attempts even more into the literary mainstream. *Forced Landing* was copyrighted and translated into German, French and Dutch. Ravan also sold the film rights for the short story 'A Glimpse of Slavery' to a Western company. Peter McDonald (2012) defends this as the beginnings of People's Culture and democratic innovation but it does show the rising influence of Western commercial culture over African literature and society at large.

These shortcomings should not detract from the legitimacy of Mutloatse's manifesto. Some aspects have been adopted as necessary criteria for the liberation struggle and can be witnessed in countless works from the period. Mongane Serote, Sipho Sepamla and other Soweto Poets show cultural and linguistic appropriation. Proemdra can also be evinced. Matshoba's play *Seeds of War* is particularly notable. Here, the theatre script exhibits a prose style narrative used to provide history and characterisation. This is combined with poetry seen in the use of Freedom Songs. Language and form were being used for experimentation as Ndebele's influential piece 'The English Language and Social Change in South Africa' (1986a) argued was necessary. In this, Ndebele postulated that English had to have more than a purely functional quality if it could be used in the South African context. To encourage self-respect and self-recognition on the part of African speakers it had to be open to the influence of vernaculars. This possibility can be realised and *Forced Landing's* introduction is evidence (Sanders 2002: 129).

3.3 – Raised Voices and the Threat of Censorship

Staffrider arguably filled a space that had been recently left vacant. Although Tim Couzens and Essop Patel in their introduction to *The Return of the Amasi Bird* (1982) suggest that the sixties saw a growth in poetry within South Africa, writers were frequently met with problems disseminating their work as the decade progressed. *The Classic* had suffered an early demise with Nat Nakasa's death in New York. He, like most contributors of the *Drum* generation had been forced into exile and the performance or dissemination of their poetry and records made illegal. South Africa was plunged into a period of sustained silence. Serote, Sepamla, and Gwala may have been writing at this time but it was not being widely heard. Not until the 1970s was much of the poetry written during the preceding decade published (Couzens 1982: 10). Then *Staffrider* and Ravan Press began to exploit the voices of the Soweto Poets and turn silence into a roar. However, this literature's unashamedly critical nature saw South Africa threatened with the possibility of silence once again in the wake of the growing spectre of censorship.

The first issue of *Staffrider* was banned and the next five successive issues appeared in front of the censorship committee. This culminated in the banning of *Staffrider* Volume 2 Issue 1 in 1979. Meanwhile, *Forced Landing* was banned for five months. Throughout this period the censor's threat was omnipresent. Numerous contributions came under the censor's critical gaze but this did not lead to submission. Providing a certain notoriety, some authors actively courted censorship and exposed the system's hypocrisy. Gordimer documented the strange fate of her novel *Burger's Daughter* in *What Happened to Burger's Daughter or How South African Censorship Works* (see Manus 2011: 165-6). Meanwhile the first South African edition of the *Oxford History of South Africa* published blank pages in place of a banned

article (de Baets 2002: 550). Banning and censorship, to use J. M. Coetzee's words, were the ultimate "badge of honour" (qtd. McDonald 2000: 14).

The series of bannings related to Ravan Press publications was coming at a time of apparent relaxation in censorship laws. Forms of censorship had been in existence for several years and were initially used to prevent undesirable cultural imports that might propagate views different to prevailing race, class or sex relations within South Africa. First affecting film, censorship spread to music, hitting popular records and Todd Matshikiza's jazz, before finally becoming present in literature (Gottchalk 1972: n.pag). Publication control was introduced in 1963 and made more stringent eleven years later, although in 1979 the appointment of Judge Van Rooyen to the publications board saw immediate attempts to soften the criteria. Under Van Rooyen books were judged as a whole and not just on the basis of any one 'offensive' part. Secondly, a distinction was made between general readers and the likely reader. This is evinced by the banning of *Staffrider* 2.1. Africans were recognised as the likely readership and, thus, certain aspects were not deemed to be offensive. Additionally, the Publications Directive letter that appeared in the subsequent issue argued that the Board recognised *Staffrider's* literary merit, a criterion that often justified a publication passing the censorship board (McDonald 2000). Unfortunately, however, these exceptions were not enough. There was other material in *Staffrider* 2.1, the Publications Directive letter informed, that was "unfair, one-sided and offensive [...] calculated to evoke hatred or contempt". One poem in particular, 'Tribute to Maptha', accused the state of murder, glorified subversive deeds, and lauded Communist victories. *Staffrider's* editors issued a defence and claimed the evocations of police brutality were justified as "a sad fact of reality that can't be washed away" (*Staffrider* 2.1: 2). Other portrayals, they argued, were just perceptions of reality that encouraging the reader to make up their own mind.

Given the blurred distinction between journalism and writing that characterised much of *Staffrider's* content any defence having recourse to literary quality was likely to struggle. Arguably, however, publishing this exchange of letters was intended to serve a greater cause than merely discuss one specific banning. *Staffrider* was dedicated to making the invisible aspects of oppression visible. Creating a space for this debate brought censorship into the open, a phenomenon itself shielded from view. Censorship was itself a censored term. 'Publication control' was the preferred official term (Coetzee 1996: 34). Moreover, the very implementation of censorship is an admittance of weakness because it recognises a force that is robbing the hegemony of power and needs controlling. *Staffrider* gave the African population the initiative by illustrating government weaknesses. Simultaneously, the magazine attracted increased attention to the true reality of South Africa, those parts that have been censored. Indeed, censorship sees "truth [become] the real obscenity" (Brink 1983: 247).

Debates surrounding censorship also feed into another major concern of literary journals: the barrier between the individual and community. Given the change in policy under Van Rooyen the censor's mission changed:

It is clear by now that, to Van Rooyen, 'is X offensive?' translated as 'Does the likely reader of X find X offensive?'. The censor's task, as he sees it, is to identify the likely reader, read X *as if* it were being read by its likely reader, and then introduce the result of this inquiry (Coetzee 1996: 190. Original emphasis).

In summary, the individual few specify a certain community within the larger population and then speak on their behalf. Simultaneously, they must maintain their status as elites capable of making such judgements. Censorship created a three-tiered community sharply juxtaposed to

Staffrider that dismantled hierarchy and positioned itself within wider demographics. *Forced Landing*'s banning and its subsequent lifting can also be seen as undermining censorship system and helping advance the interests of the very publication the system sought to prevent. Mutloatse aimed at removing African literature from the confines of the white literary establishment and to some degree this was facilitated by censorship. Brink notes that between 1979 and 1980 the appeals board overturned the decisions that banned three leading novels by white South Africans -- Etienne Leroux's *Magersfontein, o Magersfontein*, Nadine Gordimer's *Burger's Daughter* and Brink's *Dry White Season* (1983: 241). However, they initially refused to do the same for *Forced Landing*. Brink attributes this decision to the aesthetic reputation, and not solely the race, of these authors in the literary mainstream in South Africa and abroad. Thus the decision confirmed the aesthetic split between Western and African literatures that Mutloatse was keen to evoke.

Coetzee (1996), Brink (1983) and, latterly, McDonald (2009) have observed many other peculiarities of the censorship system within South Africa. Despite its presence, writers did not stop writing nor did journals stop publishing. Actually the system aided the establishment of other spaces exploited during the cultural struggle. In order to pre-empt bannings there was a notable increase in poetry readings and performances. There was also a succession of improvised, whistle-stop theatre productions. Progressing into the 1980s these styles became major ways of mobilisation. Censorship did little to stop cultural production and only made the struggle more urgent. African writers remained true to the artist's mission:

While there is still time, in this turbulent silence preceding the final storm, the writer has no choice but to expose and proclaim the truth wherever he can and wheresoever he perceives it. If he is no longer allowed to shout, he must learn to

speak in another tone of voice. If that is denied him, he must begin to whisper.

And if he is no longer allowed even to whisper he must, in Artuad's memorable phrase, continue to signal through the flames (Brink 1983: 153).

3.4 – Art and Literature in the *Medu Arts Ensemble Newsletter*

Signalling through the flames is perhaps an apt image with which to begin discussion of the Medu Arts Ensemble. As South Africa entered the 1980s, the country was becoming increasingly violent. A politically agitated, Black Consciousness inspired and largely fearless African youth was met with Nationalist force and the declarations of two States of Emergency. Within this situation a political split was occurring as Chapter 2 explained. Cultural circles were similarly affected. Some Black Consciousness inspired writers remained in South Africa and joined UDF structures. They mobilised the grassroots population with energetic performance poetry and street theatre. Others, harassed by the security forces or desiring to join the armed struggle, fled abroad and became consumed into the ANC exile community.

The Medu Arts Ensemble is the group that showcases this merger into the ANC. In 1977 a group of township artists, not all Black Consciousness affiliated, were forced into exile. Fleeing to Gaborone, Botswana they were joined a year later by the visual and graphic artist Thami Mnyele. A collaborative non-racial cultural movement, the Medu Arts Ensemble, was subsequently formed. In the following years this group, named after the Sepedi word for 'root', grew to include leading male and female South African writers, musicians and artists. ANC poets such as Keorapetse Kgositse began to work alongside laureates who had previously produced a more Black Consciousness infused poetry, for example Mongane

Serote and Mandla Langa. Additionally Medu attracted members from across the globe. At one point nearly fifty countries were represented. Jokingly termed ‘*Staffrider* in exile’, Medu was praised by Mnyele, perhaps its most notable member, as an extraordinary group that profoundly affected his own individual work and inspired him “to a point of bafflement” (1980: 39). Indeed, Medu helped shape the future direction of South African culture en-masse and even provided some of the foundations for democracy. Much of the talent that took a role in the ANC’s Department of Arts and Culture, founded in 1983, was originally drawn from this collective. Perhaps hinting towards the continued crossover in politics and culture, Chapter 6 will explore in more detail the literary tensions sparked by this move.

Medu’s influences and direction were vastly different to *Staffrider*’s, despite some crossover.⁷ *Staffrider* officially exhibited an apolitical stance but evinced a large degree of Black Consciousness ideology. Medu, meanwhile, adopted a much more non-racial tone and, operating as the ANC’s autonomous cultural front, signalled Serote and other writers’ shift in political allegiance. This role followed debates between its founders over whether or not Medu should provide a cover for the ANC’s military wing Umkhonto we Sizwe that operated out of Botswana.⁸ The decision not to pursue this course and instead remain autonomous was arguably influenced by pressure from the host government who were keen to avoid association with an organisation banned within South Africa for sponsoring armed struggle. Indeed, although posters depicting violence and armed struggle were evident in Botswana, Medu never signed these. Sergio-Albio Gonzalez (2009) notes the military and cultural

⁷ Both *Staffrider* and Medu featured the same authors and sometimes published the same pieces. Mnyele also designed several *Staffrider* cover pages.

⁸ Some commentators today disagree as to whether Medu did actually achieve autonomy or remained a front. Either way, it represented the ANC’s decision to recognise the importance of culture. Though little is known, cultural life was an integral element in MK camps. Gunner (2001: 41-9) speculates that there were literary competitions, dramatic productions and the performance of songs and skits.

activities were never explicitly joined, nor in conflict, as Medu acquiesced to the position of Botswana's government.

Botswana's government also urged Medu to include other countries. Such inclusivity profoundly shaped the organisation's direction. Medu became keen to encourage Pan Africanist debates and explore the liberation experiences from Latin America. These channels of influence can still be seen in South Africa's current literature and were evinced at the time in the group's newsletters. The *Medu Arts Ensemble Newsletter* became the home of important dialogue between these differing cultural practices and idioms. This subject has generally been ignored in commentaries. Clive Kellner's (2009) edited study and Judy Seidman's *Red on Black* (2007) are two examples that tend to focus solely on Mnyele's visual art and the formation of South Africa's poster movement. Graphic art was admittedly at the forefront of the cultural project but Medu was actively split into other sectors. Theatre, film, music, photography and literature were all represented while a research and publications department was responsible for producing the newsletters.

Medu actively defined culture and art as political instruments. The artists themselves were termed cultural workers or cultural soldiers. Thus they were rooted firmly within the larger population and not as isolated elites. This view is made explicit on the cover page of *Newsletter 5.2*, which depicts two weary mine workers facing forward and placed in dialogue with the readers. They look upon the audience not just themselves. Mnyele firmly believed in the necessity of the artist's rootedness within the majority. He wrote, the community represents "the river that feeds and nourishes the work of art" (2007: 26). Moreover, Medu had a specific role in the liberation struggle as suggested by the group's chosen definition of culture. Simply mapped, cultural, economic and political activity were seen as products of society. In turn, society was the result of struggles between men and between man and nature.

These struggles produced historical change and progress. Culture is therefore fundamentally linked to wider struggles and becomes “vital to maintaining *or* changing [society’s existing systems of governance]” (Medu 1982a. My emphasis). This view again parallels interpretations that suggest African art’s value lies in its purpose and not in the process of merely creating ‘pictures’. Few newsletters can be read without reference to culture’s role as a weapon or force for change. Consequently, two debates are raised that remained central to Medu’s philosophy: How should discussions over aesthetic quality be formulated? How should art respond to African heritage and culture given alternative influences?

Much of the artistic quality displayed in Medu newsletters lay in Mnyele’s visual images. These images exhibited a rich simplicity that combined to provide uniquely powerful messages. Such was their focus, many critics disapproved of his later artwork in particular for its recourse to clichés and propaganda. However, aesthetic quality is unmistakable. Clive Kellner has praised their “artistic merit” (2009: 10) while Judy Seidman, who worked alongside Mnyele at Medu and is herself a visual artist, is justified in suggesting his work shows a personal integrity and honesty that remains fundamental to aesthetic creation. Furthermore, Mnyele’s political statements were not consistently obvious. There is limited reliance on the realist and formulistic styles that characterised much struggle art. A range of images were embraced and, although “repelled by the international art market and fashions” (Wylie 2009: 17), Mnyele was similarly fascinated by them. He frequently exhibited distortion and embraced the unreal provided the message was not compromised. Testament to these images lasting artistic quality came with the popularity of the retrospective that took place just over five years ago in Johannesburg. Unfortunately, however, much of Mnyele’s portfolio is missing following the SADF raid on Gaborone that ultimately cost Mnyele his life. Nonetheless, Medu’s aesthetic quality can also be evinced in other art forms. As

mentioned, the movement featured renowned poets Serote, Langa, and Kgosisile while it also had links to theatre groups and musicians who had toured successfully in Europe both independently and later as part of the ANC Amandla! tour that visited London in the 1980s.

This debate over aesthetic quality is necessitated to prevent a disservice being done to the artists within Medu. Western academic circles often ignore or dismiss the work of ‘cultural workers’ without due consideration. However, for Medu members themselves the debate was largely irrelevant. They did not desire to reach the prescribed standards of ‘professional quality’. This was a criterion to “throw on the rubbish heap” (Seidman 1981: 22). Quality focused the discussion away from meaning and, Seidman goes on to argue, professional standards are set by the powerful, apply to an exclusive artistic elite, and are in service of preserving the status quo. Medu, at its foundation, positioned itself against all three of these considerations. It was dedicated to teaching and not professionalism. Although, paradoxically, the emphasis on education does itself show commitment to artistic quality. Composed of both amateur artists and well-known professionals, Medu encouraged dialogue between its members and the literary genres in a bid to create an atmosphere suitable for creativity. This became a formal effort in 1983 with the creation of the Naledi Writers Workshop, based on the previous research department. Dedicated to publishing and improving Medu’s products, this group also began seminars that read the work of progressive new voices. Amateurs and professionals met together in a mutually enriching environment. As Serote, a leading member of Naledi, summarised:

Most members of the professional section run workshops for the amateur section on the basis of encouraging discussion on experiences of their environment,

country, continent and world as a whole, and how that material can be used in the creation of a poem, play, novel or short story (1983a: n.pag).

By 1983 Medu had established similar training programmes across all departments. Additionally, education was embraced on a much wider scale and, like culture, identified as a crucial component of the liberation struggle. Medu contributed to the 1980 Lusaka seminar on Education and Culture for Liberation that involved liberation movements from across Africa. Ways were discussed of recognising the unique ethnic cultures represented at the seminar and how these varying influences could be used together without undermining their separate positive values. Education was defined as the only way of maintaining these African cultural identities. Their learning and assertion would become a mark of liberation and thus result in new possibilities for the extension of culture.

This definition reflects one Ngugi outlined in his paper 'Education for a National Culture' (n.d). He argued education and culture were inseparable concepts that run into each other. Education was the means of introducing people to all aspects of a national culture, be they economic, political, historical, literary or geographic. Thus liberation rests on education because it is impossible to achieve freedom without the ability to expose people to their specific culture.⁹ Ngugi moved on to criticise neo-colonialism and the petit-bourgeoisie who were beginning to rule some newly independent African countries yet "refuses to negate its roots in Western education and culture" (n.d: 27). Reflecting Fanon's (1965) desire for the liberated to invent and discover anew and for themselves, Ngugi suggested education systems needed to be adopted that transmitted a culture "geared towards the home coming of the new

⁹ This forms a very brief synopsis of a paper delivered at the Culture and Resistance Symposium in 1982 entitled 'The Role of Culture in the Process of Liberation'.

Africa” (n.d: 30). Medu’s newsletters are important for not only exhibiting a ‘fighting’ literature but for understanding how the group established a cultural education that reconciled the homecoming of idioms and heritage alongside new influences.

A 1982 Festival edition of *Medu Arts Ensemble Newsletter* sees the inclusion of a poster entitled ‘Fragments’. Depicted are two bare-footed children working off the board in a rundown classroom whilst sitting cross-legged on the floor. The image is simple with no adornments taking away from the representations of learner, teacher and blackboard. The caption reads “inferior education and extremely poor school facilities [...] These are the roots of student revolts of the 70s ... roots of death and exile!”. This image follows one depicting a rifle crossed by a hand holding a book. Clearly, the juxtaposition taking place within each image and between the two together marks the crucial role education must play in the struggle. The Nationalist government’s Bantu Education policy is marked as a fundamental cause of the current struggle. Medu’s writings identified it as a policy that, in order to maintain domination, sought to transmit a government selected and perverted African ‘tradition’. Histories were appropriated to enforce a sense of inferiority and cultural practices were represented as lacking in the wake of supreme European one. Little means was provided for their advancement. For example, a Medu Research and Publication department authored document suggests, “the once great [African] cultures [were] reduced to folklore and caricature” (1982b: 6). Moreover, Thele Moema (1979), writing on cultural imperialism in one of the first Ensemble newsletters, highlighted what Medu perceived as the starting point of the struggle. He insisted that South African art had for too long, and was still, exhibiting a tendency to prove itself against Western culture. Including some protest works in a charge that can be laid against much of the *Drum* generation, they were often divorced from reality

and became too safe: “works would rather be accepted by those American apostles rather than banned for being revolutionary” (Moema 1979: 41).

Consequently, Medu set about building a revolutionary culture founded upon a rich alternative history that re-engaged with ‘truer’ African idioms. This effort clearly developed throughout the newsletter series and is best highlighted by the contents of the Festival Edition newsletter. The Festival Edition brought together all aspects of the Ensemble and every contribution explicitly referenced their ideology. The final pages contain a brief summary by Bachana Mokwena on South African art and Mnyele’s life specifically. He attacks the hegemony’s cultural policies for promoting that which is “submissive, ignorant and unbelievably apolitical” (1982: 33) whilst he advocates committed art in all its forms. Dismissing art-for-art’s sake and artists who paint “tempting world dreams, fantasy, hallucinations, religious themes, witchcraft etc, and capture it with mesmerizing detail” he continues, “an exceptionally talented man this, but [one whom] suffers deep down to the narrow of his bones, a dangerous shock and fear” (1982: 33).

The committed artist is not the only form of commitment that comes through in this edition. A short story by Mandla Langa, ‘There will be no Songs this Year’, comes close to advocating armed struggle and violence. The protagonist notes of his brother, who when returning from exile and a stay in the training camps shot two policemen: “I called him brother [...] I am still, now, proud of him” (1982: 20). Medu and *Staffrider*, influenced by their dominant political ideologies, never explicitly condoned violent struggle but there was a growing amount of suggestion as the years passed. Much of Langa’s earlier work, before maturing into a more concise poetic voice, shows a similar militant current. Historical Papers at the University of the Witwatersrand contain an untitled and undated handwritten poem penned by Langa that fiercely asserts, “we black folks say/ten deaths for one or our dead” (l.

12-3) and ends on an image of mass slaughter. It is written “we must now KILL” (l. 35), the white man “MUST DIE!!” (l. 8. Original emphasis).¹⁰

Returning to the Festival Edition, the struggle’s increasingly violent nature is captured in one of Medu’s most famous, perhaps infamous, visual images entitled ‘writing on the wall’. Featuring one of the few instances of colour in the newsletters, a disturbingly simple image presents a wall with three bullet holes joined by a patch of vivid red blood. There is little escaping the violence and anger escalating in South Africa. And Serote contributes, ‘The Breezing Day of a New Dawn’, which contains the line “we give them the full fury of our wrath” (1982: 6). This reference is included in a passage that completely rejects the cultural and political influence of the Western world. Echoed later in the edition by Mafika Gwala who, in his typical satirical style, attacks the township life and those who have bought into the tricks of Western influence and thus forgotten their African roots, Serote asserts that the result of this dominating presence is that “we have lost too many things” (1982: 5). This poem also provides one of the clearest examples of Medu’s desire to reclaim African cultural practices from across the continent and in all their variations: “and our best ally is our clarity about who we are / where we come from” (1982: 4). Striking a tone of defiance and gesturing towards a national culture and liberated state it ends “talking about a land of many colours and sounds / we sing here, for we can still sing, about a national life” (1982: 4-5).

Serote’s views reached maturity in his leading essay on politics and culture that was published in Volume 5 Issue 2 of the Newsletter. He decreed culture should be treated as a partisan force: “[it] must be of the oppressed or of the oppressor, nothing else” (1983b: 28). However, by implying culture consists of a binary, Serote is in danger of undermining much

¹⁰ Given the reference to the recent death of Tiro Ongopotse (Langa’s spelling) this poem was arguably written during 1974.

of Medu's work and his own thought. He evokes a real and static African tradition that is positioned against any Western influence that always speaks of imperialism. Thus can Western influence play a role in contributing to new African cultures? This would seem a necessity given the situation particularly within urban South Africa where, as Serote rightly admits, African 'tradition' does not represent the 'real' one to the population. This apparent paradox played itself out in much of Medu's work and saw concerted efforts to speak of the power of appropriation. Indeed, it would seem that this was the direction Serote's essay advocated. He quotes Eduardo Mondlane:

Some of the carvings of the Makonde people express a deep-seated hostility to the alien culture. In that area, Catholic missionaries have been very active, and under their influences many carvers have made Madonnas and crucifixes, imitating European methods. Unlike Makonde work on traditional themes, these Christian images are often rigid stereotypes and lifeless. But sometimes one of them departs from the stereotype, and when it does, this is nearly always because of an element of doubt or defiance has been worked into it. [For example] a Madonna is given a daemon to hold instead of a Christ child (1983b: 27).

Serote appears to be clear that culture must be based firmly on a uniquely African heritage and that Western influences can only be seen through appropriation and the light of defiance. The African spirit must always come through. Would this idea lead to the new national culture?

3.5 – A Changing Direction

Medu reached its height in July 1982 when it ran the five-day Culture and Resistance Symposium. Exhibiting all the arts that comprised the Ensemble and featuring artists from across the African continent and the liberation movements in South America, this was a non-academic event that showcased cultural production and its use within the ongoing struggle. Taking over two years to organise, the symposium displayed Medu's appeal to the community. It was hugely popular. Moreover, it brought the African spirit to the fore. African music and dance continually occurred spontaneously in the breaks between performances and sometimes during. Unfortunately, though, the symposium's success contributed to the Ensemble's decline. Although held in Gaborone, its prominence within South Africa combined with the history of many of its members saw the South African government become increasingly aware of Medu's activities. Just under three years later Medu was effectively targeted by a South African Defence Force raid on the night of 14 June 1985 that resulted in the death of Mnyele and eleven others. Much cultural work was lost.

Despite its fall, all three key aspects of Medu's philosophy maintained prominence in cultural debates throughout the 1980s. Medu had conceived of art as a weapon of struggle. Second, it rooted its production within the working people, not as an elitist form that often had an abstract quality to the African masses. Finally, it aimed to reclaim African heritage and divorce itself from Western influence. And, although Medu represented ANC ideology, Chapter 5 argues that the trade union and UDF inspired poetry and theatre within South Africa during the 1980s foregrounded these very same issues. Even based in exile, Medu shows how journals and writing collectives are forums for new cultural developments and lead the way in cultural debates. Thus it performed a similar function as *Staffrider* and *The*

Classic. Despite setting different trends and displaying different styles and foci, these three fora had a certain degree of overlap in the contributors and each built on the work of its forebears.

Staffrider was a populist phenomenon that reshaped the boundaries of literature and accepted new forms into its canon. However, *Staffrider's* major success was in adding a sense of urgency to the cultural struggle that arguably had not previously existed in South Africa. Potentially resulting in the neglect of African language and heritage, without this foundation it would have been largely inconceivable to imagine culture as a weapon in the liberation struggle. But still this may have proved impossible without *The Classic*. Nakasa's magazine was fundamental to the directions of both *Staffrider* and the *Medu Arts Ensemble Newsletters*. Literature published in both *The Classic* and later *The New Classic*, along with the dialogue operating within editorial circles, began to raise awareness of a uniquely African audience. How should the content cater to African heritage and culture? Should these journals solely address one demographic? These questions and the other debates touched upon changed attitudes towards appropriation and the possible success of a liberated national culture.

Chapter 4

The Local is the Nation: Black Consciousness and the Soweto Poets

Despite the differences between the three journals mentioned in the previous chapter, one group of poets unites them. Appearing in *The Classic* and the *Medu Arts Ensemble Newsletters*, the Soweto Poets, as Michael Chapman (2007a) has so famously termed them, were the literary focal point of *Staffrider* and the Black Consciousness generation. The subject of an almost endless list of commentaries very few collectives, if any, have responded in their poetry so fiercely to both a specific time and place.¹ Thengani Ngwenya rightly asserts, “it cannot be gainsaid that Black Consciousness as a philosophy and a political ideology inspired – in direct and indirect ways – the work of the [Soweto] poets” (2012: 502). The social and cultural environment created during the 1970s by Black Consciousness’s defiant message of self-assertion and racial pride was perhaps the main influence behind this poetry. It was also a major beneficiary. Moreover, this was a poetry that was rooted, as Chapman’s title would suggest, in the experience of the newly urbanised African present. Just as Sophiatown had defined the *Drum* generation two decades earlier, so too Soweto defined the work of Mongane Serote, Sipho Sepamla and others.

A simple reading of this poetry against either influence seriously denies their poetic complexity and aesthetic quality. These poets’ ability to find publication in the three journals discussed previously, despite their divergent styles and editorial policies, highlights the intricate politics navigated by the Soweto Poets. Secondly the diverse nature of the “distinct Sowetan culture”, which married the “Sophiatown people [and] their American-influenced

¹ Thengani Ngwenya (2012) attempts to fully document this comprehensive coverage. The leading three works are Jacques Alvarez-Pereyre’s *The Poetry of Commitment in South Africa* (1984), Ursula Barnett’s *A Vision of Order* (1983) and Chapman’s *The Soweto Poets* (2007).

culture [with] Pimville and Orlando communities, who had maintained their African ethos” (Mathiane 1989: 29) attests to the multifarious influences that this group responded to so successfully. Chapman is not alone in correctly hailing their work’s “volume, power and originality” (1988: 23)

Soweto’s dynamic environment, the confluence of both Western styles and a wide range of diverse African cultural idioms, seems to suggest a microcosm of the ‘national’ state advocated by Black Consciousness. The oppressive controls of the apartheid government, though, and the education imposed on the African population sought to limit its realisation. Indeed, denied an active role, the African experience more closely reflected the image conjured by Fanon’s postulations on national literature. Their life is trapped in Western modes and Africans are forced to only remember and live generalised, stagnant formulations of their culture. They may protest with anger but they cannot achieve an energetic presence because the authorities control them at all times. In ways this can be shown through Soweto Poetry. However, being part of the *Staffrider* generation, Soweto poetry also sought to capture the spirit of the now alongside the positive aspects of African heritage and history so necessary to achieve self-respect. Urgency was drawn the unceasing movement of everyday life in Soweto and from articulations of protest and anger formed to remind whites that the situation “could explode at any time” (Ngwenya 2012: 514). And this urgency also gave the poems an energy that rendered the African more than Fanon’s inactive presence. Soweto Poetry therefore came to constitute a step away from Fanon’s portrayal of a national literature towards Black Consciousness’s definition of a national culture.

African agency, depicted in Soweto Poetry, was aided by the ways in which the poets looked upon their past. These poets actively attempted to rewrite history and thus became active within their people. For Ngwenya, they “challenge what they see as the deliberate

distortion or outright erasure of particular events from the collective memory of South Africa” (2012: 504). This process, though, simultaneously challenged the Western literary modes they frequently appeared to embrace in their verse. Ngwenya continues to explain that attempting to be both literary and historical text they eschew “the formalist conception of poetry” and move from relative ease between discourses, seeking to “textualise history while simultaneously historicising poetry” (2012: 505). This chapter demonstrates how Soweto Poetry negotiated this paradox, stayed true to the African past and present, and placed Western and African cultures in equal dialogue with each other. Beginning with the work of Mongane Serote, a select group of poets is dealt with separately. All were responding to different pressures and situations and, although attempting similar goals, simplifications too easily pervade critical commentary.

4.1 – Mongane ‘Wally’ Serote

Mongane Serote is arguably the poet laureate of the Black Consciousness generation (Mzamane 1984: 152). Born in Sophiatown in May 1944, his poetry continually exhibited loyalty to his upbringing in Johannesburg and his education, mostly received at Morris Isaacson High School. Through an intensely urban oeuvre and continually exploring tensions between African history and the English language forced upon him, his poetry marked him as the ‘son of the people’ who was firmly wed to the Black Consciousness ideology (Patel 1990). Like many of his contemporaries much of Serote’s poetry was written off as lacking quality and consumed in “sheer *protest*” (Couzens 1982: 10. Original emphasis). However, it was more than simple protestations that depicted the despairing atmosphere of African life. To use the words he himself applied to a host of post-Sharpeville poets, Serote’s became a

voice that “refused to accept living in a vacuum” (1988: 1601) and actively advocated change and a renewed Black assertiveness.

This change in tone is not to deny the elements of mere protest that did emanate from his verse. Ngwenya notes Serote’s ‘Burning Cigarette’ directly recalls ‘The Negro Youth’. The latter was written by Peter Abraham “in typical protest mode and first published on 5 December 1936” (Ngwenya 2012: 510). Numerous other direct connections can also be made throughout Serote’s collections that hark back to the protest poetry of the 1930s and the *Drum* generation that emerged two decades later. Chief amongst these is Serote’s use of the lyric form. Commonplace in his earlier collections, this form parallels that used by several *Drum* poets. This is despite Serote himself being a product of the Bantu Education system that removed much classic English literature from the syllabus, for example Wordsworth, Coleridge and other Romantics. Meanwhile, the *Drum* poets’ contributions had apparently fallen through the trap door of black literature (Gordimer 1976: 132). This banished form is best exemplified in Serote’s first collection *Yakhal’inkomo* in which he “focused his vision through what one could almost call a ‘Wordsworthian’ lens” (Livingstone 1976: 158).² Serote’s poetry takes the form of “overheard utterance” (Attwell 2005: 144) and observes the township community from its midst, capturing and contemplating what is said and done and at times attempting to recover what is lost. The notion of overheard utterance, Attwell notes, is supported by the collection’s title that is not the sound of “cattle being slaughtered but of cattle *watching* [...] vocalising empathy and suffering” (2005: 146. Original emphasis). This idea again links back to the notion of protest that still remains in Serote’s poetry.

Furthermore, watching is suggested by the image of the eye that is continually represented

² All poems attributed to Serote were first published in *Yakhal’inkomo* (1974) unless otherwise stated.

alongside representations of the Ofaywatcher, referring to “a black person who has set himself or herself up as the watchdog of the community” (Mzamane 1984b: 155). Romantic poetry often took a similar stance, although important departures in Serote’s content can be found. Notably, the emphasis on the urban over the pastoral and rural is in sharp contradiction to any Romantic forebears.

The use of overheard utterance does itself reference the rural past because of its relation to the role of *izimbongi* common in most African oral cultures. A form continually adapting to changing contexts, *izimbongi* consistently remain members of the community and are not set apart from it. They owe their position to public acclaim, chronicle what is said or felt among the general population, and do not “flatter epithets [but] deal primarily with the happenings in and around the tribe” (Jordan 1973: 59). They act as spokesmen, watchers and watchdogs of the people. Interestingly, two lyrics that feature the Ofaywatcher showcase this relationship between the individual and the community. In these instances, Serote deals with the relationship metaphorically through depictions of rivers and seas. ‘Ofaywatcher-Blackwoman-Eternity’ shows the merger of the individual into the collective with the line “tears flow like a river” (l. 4). The metaphor is continued across the collection. In ‘During Thoughts After OfayWatching’ the river comes to symbolise the inexhaustible spirit of the African people carrying their histories that, despite violent episodes and continual ebbs and flows, will survive and one day be heard.³ Indeed, water’s elemental presence continually represents modernity’s ineffectual challenge against tradition. Serote’s later epic attempt *No Baby Must Weep* (1975) takes this metaphor further. Jane Wilkinson explains how the sea

³ Soweto Poetry frequently discussed different ethnic histories as one united South African history. Though admitting to the different ethnic groupings in South African literature (Mtshali 1976: 26), writers tried to lift themselves above the government’s Bantustan policy through this approach (Kunene 1976: 12).

again becomes a comment on modernity (1994: 95). Used to describe the city, modernity and the environment are rendered in constant flux and thus the poem refers back to the tension between urban and rural that lies at the heart of much Soweto Poetry.

The collapse of the individual into the community is not only shown through choices of imagery and the skilful deployment of references to *izibongo* and praise poems. The use of the ‘collective I’ in the majority of Serote’s verse also announces the poet’s role in the current political climate. It works, from within, to break down the Western literary tendency towards the individual while simultaneously deconstructing the literary form’s elitist nature. The poet thus enacts his “mission [...] duty [...] ultimate responsibility” (Kgositsile 1982: n.pag) of articulating the collective Black experience. To paraphrase Richard Rive (1982), the poet’s *raison d’être* lay amongst the people. His unique skills of articulation were only the individual’s special function through which he must realise his contribution to the community’s cause.

References to *izibongo* are more widespread than this sole instance. Mzamane (1984b: 153) cites deference and celebration as two of the most notable aspects of *izibongo* and, unsurprisingly given the Black Consciousness desire to articulate the positive aspects of African history, these are common features of Serote’s work. ‘Hell, Well, Heaven’ is a definite celebration of his people’s coming success as shown repeatedly by the declarative “I know I’m coming”. Moreover, it exhibits his pride in those who “still walk and work and still smile” (l. 30). ‘City Johannesburg’ also begins with the deferential “this way I salute you” (l. 1). A love poem to the urban metropolis, ‘City Johannesburg’ admits an often-turbulent relationship that often forces Serote to move beyond the constructions of common praise. As Wilkinson summarises,

[The city] appears as a viscous, mobile, octopus like monster drawing the surrounding territory into its omnipotent and all-devouring net and recalling the mythological swallowing monsters of South African orature. But, despite this link with the heroic poetry of his people, the poet is aware that to ‘salute’ Johannesburg the traditional praise-poem formulae are inadequate (1994: 91).

She continues to suggest that the images of “black and white roboted roads” (l. 19) “reproduce the motions of B. W. Vilakazi’s earlier but equally deadly ‘Monster of Steel’” (1994: 91). This is arguably typical of Serote who maintains a style frequently similar to Vilakazi’s 1930s poems, which sought to imbue traditional African styles with the qualities of modern aesthetics. Serote, to use Attwell’s phrase, sought to “modernise tradition” (2005: 87). Serote’s use of the lyrical form alongside other reference to Western literatures match Vilakazi’s ‘tempering process’, explained as the “use of Western stanza forms and metrical systems [...] only as vehicles or receptacles for our poetic images” (qtd. Attwell 2005: 90). This ability to temper his heritage is aided by Serote’s refusal to evoke a romanticised past. Never longing for what has gone nor refusing to acknowledge its flaws, Serote places his past into an evolving dialogue with the present. Thus he provides Western forms and influences with the seal of his own African culture and is therefore able to reconcile competing cultures and modernity with tradition.

Such as praises to the chief were frequently an enunciation of loyalty to the whole tribe, Serote also casts Johannesburg in ‘City Johannesburg’ and other poems of the city as the physical embodiment of the whole Africa experience. Personification is a trait of the oral tradition. Zulu *izimbongi* and Xhosa *iimbongi* tended to “view everything, even animals and inanimate objects, in anthropogenic terms” (Mzamane 1984b: 153) while Groenewald and

Makgopa observe, “not all siSwati [oral] performance is conservative. Ntuli notes that ‘buses are so much part of the community that they seem to be perceived as ‘human beings’ who should be praised in the traditional way” (2012: 98). The city, so centrally important to Serote, reflects these different and evolving African cultural norms so abundant in the urban environment and deserves the values attached to its personification. Perhaps ‘Alexandra’ is the best example and exemplifies Serote’s distaste for a romanticised past. He acknowledges a love for Alexandra’s past, present and future. This is unlike Salthiel Billy M. Lengwati’s poem of the same title published in *Staffrider* 1.3 that solely mourned the past’s passing. In Serote’s ‘Alexandra’ the township is depicted as a mother figure. Despite the hardships and limited opportunities she brings to the narrator’s life -- she is “bloody cruel” (l. 27) and able to “frighten me” (l. 25) -- he cannot help but return her love unconditionally. Not the best, Alexandra remains forever his mother. Serote can identify “as one of its sons” (Barnett 1983: 56). Consequently, he hopes towards solidarity and community through depictions of experiences shared by so many.

Serote’s personification here is unsurprising given his belief that “every person is very close to his mother” (Seroke 1981b: 31). Though seemingly an obvious statement, perhaps contemporary social conditions demanded its demonstration. In the same interview with Jaki Seroke, Serote continued to state his belief that children had been made to “grow up in the world without our parents beside us [...] Social conditions take parents away from us” (Seroke 1981b: 32). Faced with migrancy and the constant threat of arrest and removal, apartheid society took the parental role of control and discipline. This is shown by the maternal personification of the state controlled urban landscape. Moreover, these depictions contribute to contemporary debates over the perceived place of women in Black Consciousness discourse. Black Consciousness was a male dominated construction and

gendered discourse proliferated. “‘Manhood’ was perhaps the most basic element” (Magaziner 2010: 32). The lack of power caused by apartheid was frequently represented by castration and male activists often sought to reaffirm their power through relations with black women. Soweto Poetry and wider fiction from the period explores this debate. Manus has criticised much of the literature for the attitudes it adopts towards women (2012: 178). However, in Soweto Poetry women are portrayed more actively. They “are shown to be key participants in the resilient and complex township structure” (Ngwenya 2012: 517) and the personification of local areas of resistance, for example Serote’s ‘Beerhall Queen’. But more readily in Serote is the importance the female plays as the mother of the liberated nation when juxtaposed against the masculine language that depicts the apartheid state. Not only representing the modern African cultures of the urban environment as in ‘Alexandra’, the female figure also stands for a historical past that needs to be remembered and continually reworked. In ‘Street-Lights and Houses’ Serote hankers for grandmamma to “tell me stories” (l. 5) and begs her to explain the current situation. This links to the female folk tales so prominent in the Northern Sotho languages that traditionally served an educative purpose whilst also “affording women the opportunity to protest” (Groenewald 2012: 96). Serote similarly protests implicitly in this instance. Secondly, grandmamma’s knowledge hints at ideas of generational wisdom and the very necessary place history must have in the present.

Serote speaks across the gender and generational divides brought into sharp focus during the rise of Black Consciousness. Similarly, his collections speak across the racial and aesthetic ones that also appeared to widen during the 1970s. *Yakhal’inkomo* sought primarily to create a dialogue amongst the races. Echoing the general response to Black Consciousness, the confrontational tone of much of Serote’s poetry may have seemed to prevent constructive dialogue. ‘What’s in this Black Shit?’ reads thus:

So I said, hard and with all my might, 'Shit!'
I felt a little better
But what's good, is, I said it to his face,
A thing my father wouldn't dare to do (l. 29-32).

The only dialogue is the one-sided anger of the newly militant youth. However, the actual act of communication is arguably only secondary to the process preceding it. The poem's message lies in the newfound confidence that is now realised, something previous generations with their sense of inferiority would have been unable to do. The true dialogue of the collection lies perhaps in 'Actual Dialogue'.

[The poem] aptly reminds us, one of the key concerns of the Black Consciousness movement was to initiate a 'dialogue' between the two modes of being (blackness and whiteness), which could help in eliminating distrust, fear and insecurity (Ngwenya 2012: 513).

Chapman (1988) reminds us that much Soweto Poetry remained confined to a predominantly white readership. Perhaps this is not unintentional. Additionally, it must be remembered that most of the first published Soweto Poets' collections were published by white publishers. *Yakhal'inkomo* is one such example and, interestingly, the publishers decided that the cover page should be dominated by the word 'poetry' and not the title. *Yakhal'inkomo* was printed in a smaller typeface (Seroke 1981b: 31). Initially meeting with resistance from Serote, the

publisher's decision was perhaps made so as to not subconsciously alienate the white audience who would not be familiar with the historical African allusion being referenced.

The very notion of poetry needed to be reconsidered in wake of Soweto Poetry. Debates centred on the place of politics in art have been widely discussed and were concisely presented on the Panel on Literature and Commitment at the 1976 Symposium on Contemporary African Literature (Kgositsile 1976).⁴ Serote's verse contributes to these. Returning briefly to the deployment of the profanity in 'What's in this Black Shit?' Chapman notes, "with powerful anti-poetic resonance the word 'shit' became a weapon with which to undermine middle-class conceptions of poetic register" (1988: 24). Meant to demarcate this new verse from accepted Western literary conventions, the term 'anti-poetic' is too problematic. Literally it suggests that it is against poetry and directed more towards politics. Even Serote himself has retrospectively appeared to agree by writing, "the anger, bitterness and at times, cynicism and frustration [and] expletives [of Black Consciousness poetry] had a degenerative influence on cultural expression" (1988: 1604). However, the very presence of poetic in the label should be enough to confirm this form as poetry, though one that reacted against what was commonly deemed quality. For Horst Zander (1999), the anti-poetics of Black Consciousness literature marked a return to a traditional model by reducing the gap between discourses and by displaying enhanced social and political capital. Serote displays the 'anti-poetic' but not to the detriment of the aesthetic. His verse is marked by a "double commitment" (Patel 1990: 192) to his Black Consciousness influenced socio-political outlook and to literature. These were not the same thread but two strands plaited.

Imagery is the leading example of such interweaving. Praised by Lewis Nkosi for being "an 'imagist' [with] an unusually fertile imagination for producing the freshest image"

⁴ The interviews in *Africa Talks Back* (Lindfors 2002) discuss this issue in-depth.

(1981: 168), Serote's imagery displays not just his aesthetic qualities but also his social commitment and, indeed, the reduced discursive gap of anti-poetics. Initial reviews, including Abrahams (1970) and Livingstone (1976), criticised the limited scope of his verse for all too frequently representing dongas, sweat, tears and blood. Such images are to be expected given the social project being undertaken because Serote looked to verbalise the anger and the suffering of the African population. However, his voice matured and his range increased. Natural images of flora and fauna were frequently juxtaposed against the township and scenes of modernity, thus reflecting on the pronounced divide between the urban and rural and perhaps the impossibility to completely reconnect with the past. The poetic images mirror the migrant workers' ability through song and poetry to transpose "a new world of experience which bridges the gap between past and present, town and country" (Groenewald 2012: 95-6). Furthermore, there is a pronounced reliance on "metaphors drawn from the flesh and the senses" (Levumo 1979: 70). These were presented with such potency that the "words leap out of the page with intensity" (Klaaste 1979: 75). Such sensual images are best exemplified in 'On Growing'. Consider for example:

This is not dying when the trees
Leave their twigs
To grow blindly long into windows like fingers into eyes
[...]
Twigs thrusting into windows and leaves falling on the sills,
Are like thoughts uncontrolled and stuffing the heart (l. 1-9).

The poem speaks to the three-stage psychological battle identified by Black Consciousness -- first consciousness, second words, finally action -- and works through heightened synaesthesia. The gap between the senses is narrowed. Although synaesthesia speaks to modernity, the multi-sensual dimension means the written word has to be considered simultaneously on several layers much like the traditional oral poem's performance (Barber 2005; Finnegan 2012). Meanwhile, the images' intensity also speaks to Western Formalist criticism that marks quality as the ability to make the reader feel anew (Shklovsky 2004).

Serote's use of rhythm and rhyme also speaks to the clash of modernity against the African oral form. Soweto Poetry forged the traditional oral forms with the speech and music proliferating within the township. Following in the footsteps of Dollar Brand, whose work was largely drawn from the imported African-American music scene, Anne McClintock notes this "new poetry poached liberally on jazz and jive rhythms" (1987: 615). Serote was no exception. He did, though, not afford these forms the same prominence as they received elsewhere. Mzamane writes, "there is little use of the 'jazz beat' [and] the blues idiom" (1984a: 66-7). The oral rhythm is more prominent. Serote employs the breadth-bar and the familiar African rhythm that alternates stressed and unstressed syllables in fixed patterns (Senghor 1965: 87). Additionally, rhythm is created by the use of repetition and parallelism, much like an *izimbongi* would (Buthelezi 2012: 84). 'Hell, Well, Heaven' includes the chant like refrain

But brother

I know I'm coming

I do not know where I've been.

Parallel phrasing is evinced in 'Street-Lights and Houses' with "why, when I walk, there are noises / why, when I come, the shadows move" (l. 17-8). Triplets can also be noted. 'City Johannesburg' provides a good example, "in my flesh, in my mind, in my blood" (l. 32) and again reinforces the struggle's all encompassing nature, both physical and mental.

The rhythm created is urgent. It emerged from the pace, patterns, and sounds of everyday life in the township. Indeed, this all consuming speed is an undoubted factor behind much of anti-poetics displayed during the period. It broke the rules poets did not have the time to master. Moreover, the people's urgency demanded a reworking of language. A simple, easily understood language was required. English was necessitated despite the problems it created. Serote admitted to Mzamane, "I had problems writing in English. Who are you writing for when you write in English?" (1984a: 352). 'Black Bells' dramatises his concern with the limitations of his medium:

WORDS

Trying to get out

Words. Words. By Whitey.

No. No. No. By Whitey.

I know I'm trapped.

Helpless

Hopeless

You've trapped me whitey!... (l. 19-26).

Trapped by a system that did not allow the poet to talk, he was then trapped by a language that was not his own. This extract epitomises Jeremy Cronin's claims that Soweto Poets

“began almost paradoxically by voicing noiselessness, they struggle with words, they’re stumbling, explosive, grinding, stuttering” (qtd. Barnard 2001: 166). The poets were forced to find a new direction. For many critics this involved a turn against poetry and a supposed reduction in quality that has hindered South African culture. Serote has attracted such criticism in his attempts at escaping the limitations of Western language and forms. Yet he has also been attacked from the other side for focusing too much on Western influences. Christopher Hope’s review of *Yakhal’inkomo* dismissed the collection as “seldom poetry” (1972: 72). He relied too much on overseas literature and influences that did not “carry quite the same punch out here [in South Africa]” (Hope 1972: 73).

With obstacles in each direction, Serote’s poetry trod a middle path and became “assimilationist” (Mzamane 1984a: 68). His collections evince the successful bringing together of the urban with the rural, black with white, modernity with tradition, African cultures and literatures with Western. Throughout, he maintained a fierce allegiance to the Black Consciousness message. He foregrounded Africans, the community, and the possibility of Africans reasserting their identity; he simultaneously attested to the horrors of the apartheid system. Trapped in physical pain and emotional turmoil Serote achieved an “almost inarticulate beauty” (Ngwenya 2012: 519).

4.2 – Sipho Sepamla

Twelve years Serote’s senior, Sepamla’s relationship with the Black Consciousness ideology represented in Soweto Poetry is somewhat problematic. His first collections were before the Black Consciousness literary vogue became mainstream and he himself fiercely resisted the label. Sepamla stressed his individuality and refused to be drawn into wider political

movements. As Mzamane notes, this stance was best exemplified when he described himself as an African, not the collective Black, at a Writer's Seminar in Johannesburg in May 1975 (1984a: 200). He rejected both white and Black nationalist ideologies and, instead, advocated the constant recognition of the other racial category. However, it is still fruitful to place his work in the context of Soweto Poetry. He launched and edited the *New Classic*, which, as previously demonstrated, became a Black Consciousness literary mouthpiece whilst after the 1976 Soweto Uprising he published his leading collection *The Soweto I Love*. This collection, originally banned, found an easy home alongside the period's prevailing cultural output.

Sepamla encapsulates the period. The urgency that fuelled the anger of Soweto Poetry and the style of *Staffrider* is perhaps at its most explicit. The title of his collection *Hurry Up to It!* leaves no doubt that Sepamla feels "it is time things *really* changed" (Alvarez-Pereyre 1979: 216. Original emphasis). Time remains a constant theme. 'Go Slow', 'A Pause' and 'Talk, Talk, Talk' are all noted by Alvarez-Pereyre as attacking the hesitant approach to the struggle that had taken hold for too long. Published in 1975, this series of poems could be read as a comment on the Black Consciousness movement that had been the dominant struggle ideology for several years. Biko's way had previously been attacked for its endless philosophising (Hirson 1979). This view that Sepamla attacks Black Consciousness does, however, ignore the similarities that exist between the two. Notably, Sepamla illustrates the new-found confidence within the African population. 'Darkness' shows the African walking tall and addressing the white man as an equal, challenging him to not fear the darkness:

yes sir i have arrived

walk the night if you dare

[...]

i walk erect in the night
you crouch in retreat (l. 1-6).

This extract also reveals one instance of Sepamla's ambivalence to linguistic convention. Refusing to capitalise the 'i', it should not be read as diminished confidence. Rather, in a similar vein to its use in Serote's verse, the 'i' represents its new-found use as a marker of the collective community. Furthermore, the African's inferiority complex is challenged by the use of direct address in 'The Applicant'. The ironic parallelisms beginning each stanza, "Ja Meneer I qualify", "Ja Meneer I admit", "Ja Meneer I agree", "Ja Meneer I submit", "Ja Meneer I confess", use the vocative to illustrate the Africans' confidence to speak to the hegemony. Although the verb choice seemingly suggests an increasing power difference between oppressors and oppressed, the irony involved disputes such deteriorating relations. Africans are instead gaining strength. The riposte is conducted on their terms.

Humour is the hallmark of Sepamla's poetry. Mzamane confirms him as "one of the most celebrated satirists" (1984a: 207). Reminiscent of Mafika Gwala's attacks on the African middle classes, Sepamla concentrates his anger through wit, irony and innuendo. 'To Whom it May Concern', the opening poem of his first collection begins:

Bearer
Bare of everything but particulars
Is a Bantu (l. 1-3).

Here, the word play on the English language demonstrates the hardships Africans have in carrying forward the rights and histories apartheid continually attempted to deny them.

Indeed, history's mistreatment was an important concern for Sepamla. Ngwenya exemplifies this point through 'History-books, Amen!' noting, "the final stanza [...] explains the responsibilities of the Black Poet, who is not only a creator of aesthetic beauty but also an astute student of history" (2012: 505). Sepamla exhibited a deep and "underlying understanding of the problems" (Gwala 1979: 57) facing the African population and this included history's misuse. It is irony that reinforces his knowledge of the situation. Interestingly, this technique also provides an interesting comment on cultural influences and appropriation. Sepamla brings to the fore a common characteristic of Zulu *izibongo* whilst also reflecting the witticisms he so frequently encountered when studying Shakespeare at school.⁵

Word play is not possible without a firm appreciation of language. And Sepamla's language is notable for two other reasons. Firstly, his work is characterised by hybrid language and the *tsotsitaal* dialect of the streets. Writing of "everyday on the street" (qtd. Mutloatse 1977: 81), Sepamla embraces *tsotsitaal* and speaks directly to the township populace. More than "a fugitive attempt to evade censorship" (Chapman 2007a: 19), Sepamla is reacting to the imposition of Afrikaans, the necessity of using English, and the concerns of working Africans whose comprehension of the official languages was limited. He once spoke of his concern when hearing "*khulumani isiZulu* – speak Zulu!" (Sole 1987: 258) at the performance of township theatre. Sepamla therefore appears to launch a three-pronged attack. Criticising the African bourgeois "obscurity of high seriousness" (Ndebele 1985: 217) that stressed Standard and grandiose English, implicitly attacking Black Consciousness that

⁵ Sepamla observes, "I was brought up on Shakespeare, Dickens, Lawrence, Keats and other English greats [...] I received a rich sustenance from these me. But for my body to be healthy, for my eyes to have kept me on the right course I would have liked to have been fed on Mphahlele, La Guma, Themba, Nkosi [and] the 'unrewarding rage' of [...] Afro-American writers" (1976a: 116).

frequently neglected the working classes, Sepamla also writes against apartheid's stress on linguistic purity and clearly defined language categories. Indeed, the Nationalists' (mis)use of language and the role it played in the implementation of apartheid is directly attacked in 'Words, Words, Words', published in *The Soweto I Love*. In typical tongue-in-cheek fashion Sepamla concludes:

we mean words
that spell out our lives
words, words, words
for there's a kind of poetic licence
doing the rounds in these parts (l. 27-31).

The Blues Is You in Me is perhaps the collection that showcases this use of *tsotsitaal* more than any other. And the poem that gave this collection its name is also remarkable for the parallels it draws with blues music. Addressing the typical theme of blues music, Sepamla incorporates "vocabulary borrowed from America (cop, jitterbug, jive)" (Alvarez-Pereyre 1979: 224). However, despite exploring South Africa's cultural and linguistic relationships with the West, he never leaves his locale. Alvarez-Pereyre reaffirms that the conclusion of 'The Blues Is You in Me' is the conclusion of Black Consciousness: "the Blackman offloading the yoke" (1979: 224). This poem is the narrative of Black Consciousness just as the lexis when considered across the whole collection is the movement's cultural goal -- Western culture incorporated alongside that which is a pronounced marker of modern African culture.

Chapman writes of Sepamla's earlier collections:

[He avoided] direct statement as assertion of resistance [by] combin[ing] his commitment to the destruction of apartheid with innovative shifts of language register, image and rhythm ranging from contemplative verse to wicked irony, from global reference to tsostitaal (2007b: n.pag).

This method of resistance arguably underwent change after the Soweto Uprisings. Still feeling profound pride in the rebellion and the younger generation involved -- “he pays them homage unequivocally, with lyricism and eloquence” (Alvarez-Pereyre 1979: 225) -- Sepamla abandons his experiments with humour and satire.⁶ As he writes in ‘On Judgement Day’, “laughing has become agonizing” (l. 14). His verse begins to articulate his anger as he begins to confront the very language and form he uses. The verse was much more prosaic than his previous collections and represented a sharp departure from poetic convention. Said to represent “the chopped-up prose sort” (Toerien 1976: 80), Sepamla plays deftly with syntax and structure.

Mphahlele had previously warned against the approach when writing,

No-one can ever think it healthy [...] to keep hacking at social structure in over-charged language. Language that burns and brands, scorches and scalds.
Language as a matchet with a double edge – the one sharp, the other blunt, the one cutting, the other breaking (1974: 82).

⁶ Sepamla has attributed his use of satire to a need to maintain a pragmatic distance from events. Interestingly, he still attempted to achieve this with *The Soweto I Love* by delaying publication until 1977. He spent the intervening period in Swaziland in order to reflect critically on Soweto and his response to it.

And indeed a Vinnie February review of *The Soweto I Love* appeared to justify Mphahlele's caution by dismissing the "inverted sentence structure [as creating] the impression of awkwardness with the English language" (1979: 82). But these problems can be avoided as Mphahlele himself admitted through his admiration for American Black Power activist Nikki Giovanni. Likewise, Sepamla successfully goes beyond them. His style achieved a far more rewarding effect. 'The Land' exhibits unusual syntax in light of the pronoun choice, for example "I am this land that is mine". Here, the pattern of the line creates a diagrammatic effect. To use the analogy of an elastic band stretched from the middle, it traces the pulling away of the land but then an almost elastic retraction. This illustrates the land's unpreventable return to its original state of possession. Here, and elsewhere, the syntactical constructions create a jarring effect and necessitate a re-reading that reinforce the politics on display.

'Bullets' and 'At the Dawn of Another Day' are two further examples of Sepamla's approach to prose. The second poem in particular is fragmented:

take away
your teachings
take away
your promises
take away
your hope
take away
your language
give

me

this

day

myself... (l. 6-18).

The fragmentation, along with the startlingly simple language, reinforces the horror and violence of past events but simultaneously provides a cold assurance. This control creates an assertive, declarative tone that chronicles the reasons for the uprising and the Africans' new sense of purpose in controlling his own present. Furthermore, the poem's visual imagery deserves mention. Consider for example "gunners sweating smoke swaying drunkenly" (l. 57) or the description of cruelty "that makes me cry without tears" (l. 80). Such a poem is remarkable not just for its sense of purpose but for its aesthetic beauty. Line 57 conjures the smoke's movement and impermanence through sibilance. Line 80 has a poignant precision with the language that is so often a marker of quality.

It stands to reason that reproducing a fragmented reality would see language itself become fragmented and disintegrate (Nkosi 1985: 31-2). Sepamla himself had once observed, "if a situation requires broken or 'murdered' English, then for God's sake one must do that" (1976a: 117). His form thus observes the prevailing situation in South Africa whilst simultaneously exploring the language debate, and frustration with English, within Black Consciousness. However, his poetry depicts more than darkness. Coupled with aesthetic skill, there is a lightness of touch, vitality and humour that encapsulates the everyday urban environment in its fullest and celebrates the African population's anger, culture and potential.

4.3 – James Matthews

The fiercest articulations of anger arguably came in a co-authored collection of poetry published in 1972 by James Matthews and Gladys Thomas. Born in the Cape Flats in 1929 to a working class family, Matthews first wrote reports and short stories for *Drum*. The pressures of writing in an environment far from conducive, however, saw him experience a sense of disillusionment with prose. A period of silence followed until Matthews turned to poetry in the early 1970s. Poetry, he felt, was a form more suitable for rapid and accessible declarations.⁷ Fuelled by the emotionally charged climate of Black Consciousness South Africa, Matthews released a body of work, *Cry Rage*, which was “plumb with passion” (Gordimer 1976: 147). This was the first book of poetry to be banned in South Africa and Matthews admits of the Black Poetry he contributed to that he was unable to “decide whether it had aesthetic value or [was] a work of anarchy” (1982: n.pag). Gordimer hints towards the latter by suggesting Matthews’s passion “was not always matched with skill” (1976: 147) and elsewhere that his work was simply “a public address system for the declarations of a muzzled prose writer” (1973b: 663). In many ways Matthews did not aspire to anything else. He distanced himself vehemently from the label of a poet, suggesting it would be “self-deluding” and his work was merely “utterings” (1972: 70).

These utterings are notable for the numerous ways in which they correspond with Black Consciousness. *Cry Rage!* is embedded in the urban experience and dramatises the toil of daily township life, resettlement policies, migrant labour, and the systems of racial classification and legislation against mixed-race relationships that undermined fundamental

⁷ Mphahlele argued poetry worked in flashes, as the novel was similarly able to do: “just a flash here and there will illuminate the truth” (1976: 15).

human values. Fundamental to the collection is Matthews's need to expose this horror to an international audience. As Black Consciousness incorporated the global Black experience in its philosophy, so too *Cry Rage!* exemplifies a desire for international Black unity. Matthews sought "to bring together Black people from Harlem, Notting Hill, Soweto and Manenberg" (Mzamane 1984a: 298). There is evidence of direct borrowing from the African-American liberation struggle. Matthews references James Baldwin's *Fire Next Time* in the last line of his utterings. Jazz is also included though, perhaps, more explicitly than other poets who attempted to incorporate its rhythmical influence. In work that breaks down rhythms, structure and traditional poetic features, there is limited room for such allusion. Instead Matthews repeatedly makes direct mention of musicians. Nina Simone is one example. Much like Black Consciousness, Matthews also evokes the Christian religion in order to undermine its justification for apartheid oppression. This is clearly the case in Uttering 63 (Matthews 1972: 63), where the poem also conjures images of castration that proliferated in Black Consciousness discourse. Matthews writes the "white pharaoh [...] turn us into eunuchs and not men" (l. 6-10).

The second notable feature of Matthews's poetry is his complex relationship with the white establishment. Chapter 2 has already discussed the often cordial relationships and mutual understanding between Black Consciousness and liberal leaders despite the decisive rupture in their politics. This complex linkage is discussed by Alvarez-Pereyre who observes that Matthews's work is "far from being the Manichean kind of work in which the whites are simplistically categorized as the oppressors and the blacks as victims" (1979: 207). Matthews appears to exhibit an irrefutable hostility towards the international liberal community and campaigners who neglect "the rib-thin / children of Dimbaza" (Matthews 1972: 6). Concentrating their protestations on the plight of suffering children elsewhere in the world,

Matthews dramatises liberal hypocrisy. Moreover, he disputes the rhetoric that they use as a façade to cover their lack of meaningful action. Matthew dismisses it purely as ‘Liberal Student Crap’ (1972: 33). Alongside these vehement criticisms, though, Matthews found it suitable to praise the liberal movement. *Cry Rage!* includes an uttering that, evoking the violent clashes that occurred at a Cape Town rally, reveres the liberal student body’s selfless dedication to the anti-apartheid cause. Matthews thus creates a distinction “between true and ‘false’ white liberals” (Alvarez-Pereyre 1979: 214).

Message was key to Matthews. Expressing an uncontrollable rage saw him lean towards a linear poetry of facts, slogans, simple similes and metaphors. These were prioritised over deep symbolism and other poetic techniques. Furthermore, simple declarations, often repeated from poem to poem, copy and invert those of the Nationalist government. This technique does not see images overdone but alternatively strengthens the argument by allowing linkage and a re-deployment of the same grievance in relation to the contextual change provided by each poem’s differing situation. Despite Ursula Barnett (1983) conceding Matthews did achieve aesthetic quality, citing *Pass Me a Meatball, Jones*, his poetry was primarily “words of pain and rage” (Matthews 1972: 1). Perhaps he more than anyone else personifies the anti-poetics of the period.

4.4 – Njabulo Ndebele

On the opposite extreme to Matthews’s poetry lies that of Njabulo Ndebele. Born in 1948 and the youngest of the poets discussed here, he was arguably the most literary conscious. At the heart of his concerns lay the language of his poetry. English seemed the obvious choice given his education. Through English medium he had studied English Literature at Masters level in

Lesotho and for a brief period in Cambridge. Moreover, after failing to finish a novel in 1977, he felt it necessary to refine his writing style and embarked on a creative writing course in Denver under Mphahlele. In America, he lost contact with Zulu and his confidence to find adequate expression in it. However, he consistently maintained an allegiance to his mother-tongue and expressed concerns that English language literature was insufficient to transmit his own individual identity and the cultural vibrancy of his heritage. He wrote privately that there was the very real possibility of “an anaemic English literary culture” (qtd. Mzamane 1984a: 315). Consequently, he studiously undertook a translation course while in America and experimented with applying Western literary advancements, including stream of consciousness, to Zulu and the African literary tradition he described as “remarkably backward” (1994: 86). He remained unsuccessful and was left, in his own words,

Experiencing an internal clash between what I politically recognized as being *ultimately* desirable on the one hand, and on the other, what was feasible [...] I had to come to terms with the practicality of writing in English, as opposed to the political desirability of writing in Zulu (1986: 233-4. Original emphasis).

The reasoning he expressed later in the same interview with Bernth Lindfors is a particularly erudite comment on the period. The *Staffrider* generation of literature to which Ndebele contributed was consumed with the urgency of the struggle and this urgency was a motivational factor behind Ndebele’s continuing use of English. He replied,

I had arrived at conclusions similar to Ngugi [to write in the vernacular].

[However] I am still going through the period when it is crucial for me to write in

a language that is readily available to me, NOW. I am eager to communicate NOW. I can't afford the time nor the energy to go through another period of apprenticeship (1986: 236-7. Original emphasis).

Ndebele's dedication to his craft and desire to produce work of literary quality, alongside his will to contribute to the struggle, was reflected in his language choice. Ndebele personifies Black Consciousness as a whole in his sacrifice of language. Indeed, he was a leading exponent of the ideology and David Attwell suggests his writing "would not have been possible without the Black Consciousness movement" (2005: 180). Yet, undoubtedly motivated by the same issues as poets of the same political persuasion, Njabulo remained continually hostile to the anti-poetics and political slogans of much Soweto Poetry. He feared such pamphleteering would lead to "conviction without knowledge" (Ndebele 1994: 138). Conversely, Barnett rightly describes his work as "most beautiful" and reaching "lyrical heights" (1983: 73). He maintained a commitment to the recovery of the self and celebrating Blackness but this was achieved through a literary and intellectual refinement. Gordimer for example highlights the role sexual imagery and love play in his poetry (1973a: 60).

Ndebele's collection of essays published in *South African Literature and Culture* (1994) address his grievances with the apparent anti-poetics of Black Consciousness and the post-Soweto period. Among them are 'Turkish Tales' (1984) and the 'Rediscovery of the Ordinary' (1986), which, briefly summarised, advocate the need to embrace the traditions of a community storytelling heritage and focus writing on the quotidian as the best way to challenge oppression respectively. These two themes had already been showcased in his early poetry and both continue to show his commitment to Black Consciousness's cultural outlook. A respect for communal storytelling in contemporary literature will allow African cultures to

be remade anew and adapt to the prevailing socio-political environmental. This comes through in Ndebele's poetry. There is a continual use of myth, superstition, and moral proverb. Proverb is best exemplified in 'The Revolution of the Aged'. Aside from riddles and maxims including "if you cannot master the wind / flow with it" (l. 10-1), the poem relays the fable of a flute. Commenting directly on the contemporary political situation, the flute shaped as a gun, is borrowed by a stranger and subsequently unreturned. The stranger is cast as the oppressor and can find no tune. In his hands the flute only "hisses death" (l. 50). Mzamane has construed this as yielding two lessons:

The ultimate irony in the position of the oppressors lies in the fact that the more ruthless their actions become the less firmly entrenched their future prospects are likely to be. Their triumphs have turned sour on them and their victories hollow. By contrast, their victims are gathering strength all the time for the final onslaught against White privilege [and] victory for the forces of liberation [...] The youth must [also] learn that if they continue to act without proper indebtedness to their past, they risk putting off the final outcome of the struggle by repeating the mistakes of the past (1984a: 317).

This interpretation affirms Black Consciousness's project and follows the route mapped by Biko. There is limited direct disturbance of the status quo. Both the oppressor and oppressed are left to continue their own internal projects until an ultimate point is reached. When the oppressed have won their mental fight and gained strength they are ready to launch the final push for liberation. Conversely, however, the second lesson doubts the ignorant ire of the contemporary youth. Black Consciousness inspired students frequently criticised the

contributions made by their forebears to the struggle (Chapter 2). Ndebele warns against this and advocates a respect for the action and knowledge of the previous generation.

This concern with generational conflict is a frequent feature of Ndebele's poetry and, later, his prose. 'The Revolution of the Aged' attacks the modern and urban African youth who, fit only for the sewers,

Burned with scorn

Loaded with revolutionary maxims

Hot for quick results (l. 20-2).

In contrast elders are presented who, as alluded to above, are loaded with proverbs and wisdom. Thus, although their actions may be slower, they hold a more revolutionary power. Not only equated with ignorance, youth is similarly equated with innocence. References to nature describe the young boy's activities in 'Little Dudu' while, in a second example, a child's worries over the tiger depicted in 'A Child's Delirium' are expressed through the statement-and-response format of traditional oral childhood rhymes (Mzamane 1984a: 314). This second example also mirrors Serote's criticisms of the apartheid state's ability to destroy the family unit, often a result of migrancy laws. The father is absent and the mother is unable to provide adequate reassurance to calm the child's unease.

A final example can be provided that highlights how this generational conflict is continually layered onto tensions between the urban and the rural. The imagery in 'I Hid My Love in a Sewage' contains a distinct earthiness that comments on generational wisdom and the migrant experience. Lying amongst nature, "the plains and the greens" (l. 4), the poet speaks of knowledge and understanding:

I knew the secrets of the world,
I knew the secret pleasures,
The better pleasures (l. 28-30).

The comparative form in line 30 presupposes the difficulties of the urban experience. Pastoral imagery eventually gives way to urban structure and the poet laments their lost identity and possibly faith.

God, I knew I had lost:
O who am I? Who am I?
I am the hoof that once
Grazed in silence upon the grass
But now rings like a bell on tarred streets (l. 49-53).

Attwell's opinion of Ndebele's fiction finds resonance in this extract. Theories of the self are explored in order to comment upon and "stage an epistemological recovery" (Attwell 2005: 180). Attwell continues to suggest this is an implicit critique of Bantu Education and this link does find support through the relationships constructed in Ndebele's poetry between knowledge loss, migrancy and the (dis)associations between country and city. Bantu Education was substantially motivated by the large and growing urban population and the subsequent social disharmony (Hyslop 1993). Moreover, by focusing on childhood and knowledge, Ndebele constructs an invisible link and unity between the past, present and future in his poetry. This is ultimately addressed to the new generation "for whom his vision

of a unified community is of the greatest relevance” (Trump 1990: 169). Ndebele’s poetry identifies the youth and the processes of mental recovery they must undergo as the root of change. Yet it also charges them with the responsibility of restoring African culture and giving it a place at the table.

4.5 – Turning the Page: The Soweto Poets, the Longer Form and the Future

Soweto Poetry could perhaps be labelled a poetry of response. A retaliation against the Nationalist hegemony and the enforced silence that had beset Black writers, this oeuvre was also written in reaction to the rise of Black Consciousness. Embracing Biko’s message of selfhood and identity, Serote, Sepamla, Matthews, Ndebele, and others each reaffirmed the positive Black experience and celebrated their present successes. Largely writing of the urban environment and producing a poetry that stressed the urgency of the struggle, Soweto Poetry also looked to the past. It reasserted histories the apartheid state had erased or prejudiced and showed a firm commitment to African cultural practices. These forms, coupled with reference to previous generations of African writers and the themes, such as migrancy, they had so frequently explored, were fused with dominant contemporary urban and Western cultural practices. The result was a poetry as dynamic as the Soweto that conceived it. In this way it hints towards the realisation of Black Consciousness’s primary cultural goal. And these suggestions of the national are also enhanced by the nuanced racial relationships presented. Soweto Poetry was not simply white hatred. Its dedication to African identity and experience was rarely coupled with complete attacks on the white minority, nor did it exclude a white readership. This social and political comment was, in the main, combined with an aesthetic range and skill that must not simply be dismissed as anti-poetics. Indeed, Chapman has

seemed fit to praise Soweto Poetry “as the most important socio-literary phenomenon in the seventies in South Africa” (2007: 11). He is undoubtedly justified but his time frame limited.

The story did not end in the 1970s. Literature continued to flow. Admittedly, however, Ndebele and Serote both turned to the longer form. These moves reflected the Black Consciousness split post-Soweto. Ndebele continued to promote Black Consciousness and theories of the self. Serote fleeing to Botswana became absorbed in the ANC, choosing to write epic poetry and his debut novel. *To Every Birth its Blood* (1981) showcased his ideological change from resistance to revolution. Part One was steeped in Black Consciousness. The urgency of the everyday is coupled with a desperate search for identity. An “alienated and disorientated individual” (Wilkinson 1994: 96) is depicted roaming the buzzing streets of weekdays Johannesburg and, at the weekend, Alexandra’s streets that “roar and rumble like a troubled stomach” (Serote 1981: 21). Part Two sees the “chaos and disorder [give way] to the ordered, purposive and controlled world of ‘the Movement’” (Clingman 1990: 54). The individual is replaced by the collective ‘we’; the sharp race divides of Black Consciousness overturned by ANC non-racialism. Interestingly, Clingman continues to describe the change as one “from the symbolic to the ‘real’” (1990: 54), representing the philosophical and mental nature of Black Consciousness compared to the physical and political approach of the ANC and the armed underground.

Patel observes, “[Serote] was mindful that Black Consciousness was merely a transitory point on the long road to emancipation” (1990: 189). The demands on culture changed with the phases of the struggle. Serote’s own changes in literary production reflect this view. His turn to the novel reflected his opinion that poetry, though successful, had had its time:

Perhaps black power poetry, like soap has washed away the shame of the those who were black and ashamed of that fact. Like soap, that poetry is finished, it has done its job. Screaming poetry has rendered its poets hoarse (Serote 1988: 1065).

Ndebele and Serote himself, though their earliest verse was much more than screaming poetry, were possible proof to this claim. However, poetry was far from finished. Especially within South Africa it continued. A Soweto inspired generation led by Christopher van Wyk and Fhazel Johennesse emerged and continued the Black Consciousness message. Several years later the 1980s saw a resurgence of trade union poetry. The energy and message of Soweto Poetry had found a receptive population and given something back to the situation it originally depicted. New voices were heard with a new focus and a new form.

Chapter 5

The Changing Space of Performance in the 1980s: Culture as Mobilisation and Militarised Culture

The rise of Black Consciousness during the 1970s established culture as a site of resistance. Used primarily for internal processes, to raise solidarity and African self-awareness, the literature arguably had little external effect. It little altered Nationalist rule. Indeed, Jacques Alvarez-Pereyre evaluates poetry up until the late 1970s thus:

One has to be frank: South African committed poetry has no more effect on the life or death of the South African government than pinpricks on a hippopotamus's hide (1984: 264).

This perception profoundly changed during the following decade. Patel (1990) notes that Serote turned from resistance to revolution. Typical of many writers who fled South Africa in the aftermath of Soweto, this literary evolution is exemplified in the *Medu Arts Ensemble Newsletter*. However, the change was arguably at its most marked within South Africa. Enhanced by new forms of poetry and theatre, both explicitly used in violence and the struggle, revolution took hold. The 1980s quickly became the bloodiest and most confrontational decade of apartheid. Isolated by international sanctions, threatened by a militant youth and forced to declare two States of Emergency after 1985, the Afrikaner Nationalists maintained control of the state but the state was increasingly losing its grip on the country.

Lodge cites a Study Commission Report on United States Policy Toward Southern Africa during the 1980s that warned of expanding black labour, revolutionary violence, the return of the ANC and growing black unity (1991: 29). These factors combined to see a new popular culture emerge that arguably fits Fanon's fighting stage. Both the UDF, a complex mix of Black Consciousness and ANC affiliates, and rising trade unions inspired a local culture produced from all demographics. Their slogan: 'Freedom or Death'. No longer the educated and skilled who wrote, so too did the unskilled and illiterate. To quote from *Black Mamba Rising's* introduction, the leading collection of worker poetry, these new voices through expressions of anger and hope, hatred and love began "to build a new world [where] for every black worker who picks up the pencil and forgets about the bottle, there's a victory" (Sitas 1986: 6).

5.1 – The Rise of Trade Union Politics

Chapter 2 sketched the rise of the UDF, the primary receptacle of Black Consciousness inspired youth and the leading cultural force post-Soweto. However, it neglected to discuss trade union politics, the second focal point of 1980's revolutionary culture. Although there is evidence of mutual influence, support and discussions between Black Consciousness and the trade unions, the working class were frequently unrecognised in Black Consciousness's lexicon. Despite early warnings in an article entitled 'Black Development' where a young Njabulo Ndebele advised against the Africans' concentration on the race struggle to the detriment of the economic one (1972: 20), few writers, Mafika Gwala being a notable exception, had written class and economic conflict into struggle literature. The unions

inverted this construction. They stressed the need for workers to unite over and above other differences, including racial ones (FOSATU 1985: 67).

The rise in union activity arguably began in 1979 when the Wiehahn Commission Report called for their legalisation. Although making unions register with the state, thus providing increased accountability and enhanced state control over workers, many unions and Black business leaders largely welcomed the Report. Swayed by rhetoric of increased political rights and participation, the eventual introduction of the Industrial Relations Act did not meet an overtly hostile reception. The most notable result was the foundation at its inaugural meeting, over the 14-15 April 1979 in Hammanskraal, of the Federation for South African Trade Unions (FOSATU) (Sithole 2007: 230).¹ Politically independent and non-racial, FOSATU attempted to create a powerful representative body based in the workers on the factory floor. At its peak FOSATU achieved a national membership of some seventy-five thousand workers (Sitas 2000). This figure has been disputed elsewhere.² Many members had a reputation for militancy and argued “workplace interests are inseparable from community interests” (Lodge 1991: 39). This link brought the wider anti-apartheid struggle onto the factory floor. In so doing it also brought the associated tools of resistance, one of which was an appreciation of culture. FOSATU was one of the first unions to embrace the urban workforce’s cultural production, previously heralded by Ndebele as showing “great initiative and creativity [...] the mainspring of a true cultural identity” (1972: 23).

FOSATU’s official recognition is not to say that culture, in particular song, had not been an important aspect of worker life before. For decades, migrant urban workers had

¹ The politics leading to FOSATU’s creation and its subsequent history have been thoroughly documented. Michelle Friedman (2011) offers a leading account.

² Phillip Bonner (1983) has provided a much lower estimate and correctly notes many members were not fully paid up. This explains the difficulty in establishing exact figures.

embraced poetry and songs as forms of defiance and a means of reminiscing on home. Nhlanhla Maake (2012) has spoken of the role *difela* played in the journeys of seSotho speakers while *maskanda* songs, of which *izibongo* were a centrepiece, were central to Zulu migrants and used to express “disconnection from, and longing for, the landscapes and people back home” (Buthelezi 2012: 87). Jeremy Marre’s documentary ‘Rhythms of Resistance’ aired by the BBC in 1978 reveals the widespread phenomena of Zulu workers jointly singing songs based on *maskanda* and other forms in the work place. Sung in Zulu, these escaped their supervisors’ comprehension. Additionally, Marre notes the weekly occurrence of hostel song contests. Saturday night was dedicated to the performance of numerous lullabies, gospel songs and hymns. These allowed workers to perform their traditional forms and display pride in their heritage. The winner received a goat. Judged in the filmed instance by a recently released prisoner chosen largely for his white skin that marked him as ignorant of African customs and thus impartial, this prize is perhaps a clearest signal of a cultural reconnect. Something fundamentally important to the rural way of life, instead of a monetary or luxury item, is offered as the prize, an item symbolically desired and valued. *Isicathamiya* competitions continue today in Durban and the prizes remain the same, either a cow or goat, although the judges are now provided by the South African Traditional Musicians’ Association (Shales n.d).

Only the emergence of trade unions saw such cultural production explicitly harnessed for political ends. Culture was identified as having a “crucial role to play” (FOSATU 1985: 67). FOSATU produced and disseminated a newspaper in Sotho and Zulu, *FOSATU Worker News*, and a series of other booklets that comprised local cultural work. In the first instance *FOSATU Worker News* was primarily an information provider. Coupled with workshops such as the FOSATU Labour Studies course run between 1980-82 at the University of the

Witwatersrand, these schemes allowed those on the factory floor to hear and understand the policies that affected them.³ This foundation was exploited with the belief that “culture went hand in hand with education workshops” (Friedman 2011: 99). In following years, FOSATU, other unions affiliated to the UDF after its formation in August 1983, and the Congress of South Africa Trade Unions (COSATU) launched two years later, embraced culture through choirs, dance-teams, plays, poetry and theatre. Culture became an active force and the chief means of mobilisation and strengthening unity.⁴ This period has been described as a “beautiful phase” of cultural production and “an enormous platform for cultural expression everywhere” that was both vibrant and uncontrollable by Nise Malange (2002: 119) and Ari Sitas (2002: 95) respectively, both worker poets.⁵

5.2 - Trade Union Poetry and the Hurt of Migrancy

Following FOSATU’s establishment, worker culture became increasingly integral to union politics and the way of life both internally on the factory floor and externally. Spreading to other unions, the launches of the UDF and COSATU illustrate the key role poetry in

³ To the outrage of academics and FOSATU, the Labour Studies course, which was not open to other unions, was cancelled by the university for breaching principles of academic freedom (Friedman 2011: 98).

⁴ Throughout the early 1980s FOSATU came under increased scrutiny for its political independence while the union movement as a whole was beset by division. These differences led to calls for renewed unity that culminated in June 1985 when a wide-ranging group of unions, including FOSATU, met in Ipeleng, Soweto. They agreed to the formation of a single representative federation, COSATU, into which they would all be absorbed. Consequently COSATU was born and became the dominant force in union politics by the end of the 1980s. According to Sitas (2000), the union had a membership of 12 000 in Natal alone. Higher figures could justifiably be cited because COSATU’s membership grew from 971 000 to some 1 155 000 nationally between 1989 and the end of 1990 (‘Congress’ n.d).

⁵ Gerhart and Glaser’s *From Protest to Challenge Volume 6* (2010) offers a comprehensive analysis of the rise of these union movements and their place in the 1980’s wider political and cultural environment.

particular played. Regarded as a chief political mobilising technique, poetry was, to quote the worker poet Mi S'dumo Hlatshwayo, a method of “popularising our worker politics” (qtd. Friedman 2011: 100). The UDF’s inaugural meeting on 20 August 1983 was opened and interspersed with music, poetry and dance. Meanwhile, COSATU’s launch on 30 November 1985 in a Durban sports centre was marked by poetry from Alfred Qabula and Hlatshwayo. Together they performed ‘Tears of a Creator’. Peter Horn notes, “the event of the launch was also the event of the poem” (2012: 531) because of these two *izimbongi*’s rousing performances. Interestingly, by performing praise poems, the launch witnessed the marriage of African cultural forms and idioms with a new cultural identity influenced intensely by the urban setting and factory floor.

Qabula became the leading exponent of worker poetry and the first to receive widespread attention for his skill at adapting and modifying the oral art form to the pressures of an unionised workforce.⁶ Born in Flagstaff in 1942 his life was shaped by migrancy. Sitas notes, “seventy percent of able-bodied men in [Qabula’s] area subsist through migrancy” (1986: 2). This figure included his grandfather, father, uncles and, from 1964, Qabula himself. After passing through several jobs he eventually became established in Durban, the home of trade union poetry. In 1974 he gained work as a forklift driver at the Dunlop Factory and joined the Metal and Allied Workers’ Union and later FOSATU. During his time on the factory floor, and to distract him from his tedious employment, Qabula composed songs in his head that stayed true to the culture and rural forms he had left behind. Fiercely loyal to his family, “the natural sounds and landscapes [of his family’s rural lives were] his sources of inspiration but also a source of resistance” (Sitas 1986: 3). His songs and poems mirrored

⁶ There is a long history of workers who have used similar art forms but not received the same critical attention (Wanwright 1979; Kistner 1990).

those rural forms he had left behind, which are comprehensively summarised by Jeff Opland (1983; 1984).

In his later career Qabula embraced narrative poetry as the form best suited to representing the broader political struggle and not just the union's fight. In this form he still maintained links to the oral traditions in which folktale features so prominently. Ruth Finnegan (1977) and Elizabeth Tonkin (1989) have commented on the intrinsic links between the folktale, folksong and oral poetry with all relying heavily on musicality, melody and rhythm. Yet Qabula is most famous for his earlier poetry that was rooted within the union movement and re-announced the continuing role of praises. As a form that can continually be renegotiated, Liz Gunner (1989) claims *izibongo* represent an ideal form for the unionised environment. FOSATU acted as protector to its members just as the King does to his people; both are used to inspire; both necessitate the assertion of individual identity within a larger collective and against external forces. Traditional forms defined the ruler and, by extension, his people who reflected his image. Moreover, these forms examined the kingdom's relationship to external pressures. Similarly, Qabula discussed the relationship between individual workers and what they expected from the union whilst simultaneously establishing FOSATU's identity against external management, the police and state legislation. Yet this continuity is not "simple and straightforward" (Gunner 1989: 49). Not a literary form that can be self-sufficient, *izibongo* had to be adapted.

Qabula's ability to marry the praise poem with the unionised urban environment is done most explicitly through 'Praise Poem to FOSATU'. The use of direct salutation, "You're great FOASTU" (l. 189), and praises about leadership and knowledge, "teach us FOSATU about the past organisations" (l. 155), suggest *izibongo* and *izithakazelo* as Qabula shifts from praising individuals and the larger collective. Chapman, however, focuses his

discussion on these established techniques' juxtaposition with the fiercely quotidian. He notes everyday references including the "dramatic, colloquial interchange, in which workers argue with bosses". Alternatively, Chapman writes of Qabula's praise to FOSATU

[It] begins in the [traditional] mode of apostrophe with FOSATU personified in several praise names: the moving forests of Africa, the hen that protects the chickens, the lion that roars in Pretoria (1999: 37).

Most notable about the differing instances of personification is the range of scale. Qabula links the continent to the local to the national. This scale is expressed elsewhere in his work through two other dominant themes. First, perhaps unsurprisingly, Qabula explores migrancy. Indeed, Sitas labelled him "the singer of the hurt of migrancy" (1986: 5). Secondly, and dealt with more subtly, is the struggle he and other trade union poets faced in exploring the tensions between the local and the national, of embracing specific and differing African idioms in the wake of Nationalist policy that sought to impose an assumed tribalism through apartheid policy (Tambo 1985).

The hurt of migrancy is touched upon through the range of imagery. The countryside is frequently depicted in romanticized terms over an urban environment represented by the "city and factory that are hell" (Sitas 2000: 98). Contributing to an emerging debate in all facets of African literature, this discussion of migrancy and the comparative qualities of the rural and urban environments are best exemplified in 'Africa'.⁷ This poem announces:

⁷ Other worker poets have exploited this binary as an opportunity to write in gendered divisions and create male and female responses to each location (Sitas 2000: 98).

Africa – you are beautiful

Your hills, mountains, rivers and streams

- your fitting ornaments

Announce your beauty to our eyes (l. 37-40).

This undulation gives way to criticism of the urban environment. In the most emotive language, Qabula condemns the practice of mining and exploitation of Africa's resources. He attacks,

The highways, the buildings, and factories

The structures...

[...]

The trains, the motor cars, machinery (l. 120-24).

Making "such a NOISE!" (l. 129), the country's cherished natural beauty and stillness is destroyed.

Interestingly, however, 'Migrants' Lament – A Song', which contains the most obvious example of the hurt of migrancy, actually contains an ambivalent depiction of nature. The need to journey to the urban areas is seen as an unavoidable necessity because of the hardships hindering rural life, "all my cattle were dead / my goats and sheep were dead" (l. 2-3). Yet the necessity of attempting to find a job to support his family economically does not lessen the resulting emotional turmoil. Being torn from his family is portrayed as a spiritual wrong through the repetition at the start of each stanza of "If I have wronged you Lord / Forgive me". Interestingly, the repetition of a single subject or theme in this way is a

common feature of many African texts. This has been described by James Snead (1984) as the 'cut' or 'break' technique, which, although appearing formulaic, allows the poet to return to a central topic before elaborating on a related point. The poet's guilt in Qabula's lament is then compounded by migrancy's fickle nature. The inability to find employment leads to explicit criticism of the apartheid system. And this criticism is made increasingly powerful by Qabula's structural skill and ironic turn of phrase:

Yes, as my children were happy
And as I was working
The blackjacks arrived to arrest me
So again I lost my job (l. 42-5).

Furthermore, beginning with images of rural famine, the penultimate stanza recounts the need to "buy him beer, meat and brandy / for him to 'learn' to read my piece of paper" (l. 57-8). The bribe increases the migrant's poverty but is necessitated in order to remain in the city. The lament moves full circle and his hardships are "realized so far for nothing" (l. 62).

'A Migrants Lament – A Song' has also been discussed by Duncan Brown (1996: 136) as a poem based on the Christian hymn structure. Qabula includes lyrics that argue social improvement will only come with political action. He thus explodes the myth of divine intervention. Used in this instance to undermine Western belief systems, Christianity is a common motif in Qabula's work. In both 'Tears of a Creator' and 'Praise Poem to FOSATU' this is done alongside imagery that evokes witchcraft. 'Praise Poem to FOSATU' sees recourse to the image of the *sangoma*, which Qabula suggests sanctioned the union. This image sees the union rooted in the African community's belief systems while suggesting the

faith workers placed in the unions to help ‘heal’ their situation and improve social harmony in the workplace. However, the union is further enhanced as a saviour through Christian lexis and is described as “our Moses” through whom they “shall reach our Canaan” (l. 167-8). The juxtaposition of these two systems reflects the religious interchange that was characterised in the urban environment. Indeed, it became central to Hlatshwayo’s poetry. Typifying the new group of writers who realised an education was not necessary, Hlatshwayo was self-educated and learnt poetry at St. John’s Apostolic Church, an independent church serving the African poor. Noted by Sitas as “famous for its ritual healings” (1986: 4), the religious sermons poignantly integrated the Nguni *imbongi* tradition with more orthodox Christian oration. This syncretism of religious systems can, like discussions of migrancy and depictions of the city and country, be related to Qabula’s range of scale. These are, at least officially, the beliefs of the local against the state. However, this tension is explored more fully in other ways. In efforts to traverse the problems of embracing specific African idioms whilst simultaneously writing against Nationalist sponsored singly discrete ethnic groups, Qabula makes an appeal to the extremes.

Across his whole collection Qabula exploits Durban’s local ethnic homogeneity and uses it to raise awareness of what could almost be termed the hyper-local. *Black Mamba Rising*, to which Qabula contributed, was written in the Nguni languages, Zulu and Xhosa, apart from Nise Malange’s poems. This reflected the linguistic nature of Durban itself, an atypical urban environment that was majority Zulu. Qabula thus moved beyond the state’s generalised definitions of ethnic groups and used the Zulu hegemony among the union workers to facilitate a comprehensive exploration of local and contemporary contestations including urban/rural, royalist/democrat and Inkatha/ANC. This contributed to the dynamism

of his poetry and a legitimate analysis of the differences between differing interpretations of “Zulu and Zuluness” (Sitas 2000: 104).

On the other hand, Qabula moves beyond the local by widening the discussion to the African experience across the whole continent. This inclusivity is exemplified in ‘Africa’. An expression of love towards the whole land, Qabula goes so far as to suggest other nations wish to be united within it in order to enjoy its rewards and beauty:

Nations from far away
Are crying for you Africa
Africa of different nations
And many populations
Wishing that they were yours
Or that you were theirs (l. 55-60).

As suggested by the final line of this stanza, the poem also implicates the Western powers’ colonial policies. It implies the removal of the Western oppressor who has ruthlessly exploited the land and ultimately insisted upon a forced separation of its people. Appealing to the continent and the hyper-local are the two ways Qabula reacts against these apartheid and colonial policies. Consequently, Qabula suggests the realisation of a liberated national culture. He draws separate idioms together by not only stressing the bonds that unite them but also embracing the positive differences between and within them. Neville Alexander has written of these differences he rightly asserts as *real* (original emphasis):

These differences are neither permanent nor necessarily divisive if they are restructured and redirected for the purpose of national liberation and thus in order to build the nation (1985: 52-3).

This was in many ways Qabula's aim and that of the trade union poets as a collective. Hlatshwayo once summarised his desire to "woo our multicultural South African into one single society" (qtd. Freidman 2011: 101).

Qabula's whole collection was poetry of redirection. He embraced the continual mobility of the oral form and recognised his history as a "usable past" (Chapman 1999: 35). He continually referenced *izibongo* through the composition, delivery and the content of his work. Like *izimbongi* who construct their praises from a multitude of events and various differing observations, Qabula similarly visited several individual local union meetings before composing a single narrative incorporating all those discussions (Gunner 1986). In delivery the common use of rhythm, direct address, and emphasis on intonation are all evident to present compositions that use many familiar images and epithets. A sense of struggle, the hunt, generational conflict, and heroism loom large and are often created with recourse to symbols of nature and animals. But these similarities are laced with a new dynamic. The urban environment, modernity, and a paramount concern for workers' interests all come through. Qabula finds and uses history. And his concern for history shows another deviation from past *izimbongi*. Usually improvised performance, Qabula instead insisted on the written word and composed and scripted all his praises.⁸ He desired to himself contribute to history.

⁸ Duncan Brown (1996) notes this style is not a complete departure from Zulu *izibomgi* because it reflects the common practice of memorisation.

Landeg White's (1989) contribution to the University of Birmingham's one-day conference on orality in Africa saw him criticise scholarship's failure to explore the full range of oral literary expression in separate African societies and offer comparative guides across these cultures. The necessity of such work becomes increasingly evident in the wake of Qabula's poetry and trade union literary culture. Such work, as explored here, drew on a wide range of these different oral forms and shows their ability to not only interact horizontally across cultures but also evolve over time and thus contribute to a more national future.

5.3 – Honest, Hectic and Hopeful: The People's Poet

Outside the trade union environment a different form of poetry was being produced that exhibited a similar concern with history. Setting out to "reflect [African] peoples' historical consciousness of their struggle over the decades [...] record and preserve the history of the people" (Mkhatshwa 1989: 7), Mzwakhe Mbuli was becoming the poet of a people. Qabula and the trade union poets had sought to focus the larger political struggle through a unionist framework. Mbuli, meanwhile, unceasingly captured the decade's wider political antagonism. Although heavily involved in COSATU's cultural activities, he primarily worked within national political organisations and not unions. Most notably, Mbuli spearheaded the Transvaal Interim Cultural Desk when established in 1987.⁹ The Desk championed art's political nature and the worker's cultural project by situating itself as a bottom-up mobilising

⁹ The Desk was affiliated to the UDF and comprised numerous cultural groups. These included the Film and Allied Workers' Organization, the Congress of South African Writers, the Photographers' Workshop, several union bodies, and leading student and women's groups (Grundy 1996).

tool inspiring and communicating with the African masses. Such was his commitment to mobilisation and politics, Mbuli noted his poetry was a refusal to “sing or say empty words” (2001: 67). In the introduction to Mbuli’s collection *Before Dawn*, Smangaliso Mkhathshwa labelled it “hectic, dangerous but hopeful [...] Honest to the point of defiance” (1989: 6).

The injection of hope into an oeuvre that frequently depicts oppression is highlighted by the progression of time in his poetry. A very dynamic poetry, movement is a central element yet with a different effect than the one it achieved in Soweto Poetry. The previous decade was very much rooted in the urgency of the present. Mbuli’s present, though, is merely a staging point for the future. This impatient attitude finds definition in ‘Now is the Time’. With the formulaic framing of each stanza with “now is the time” at the beginning and end, Mbuli’s declarations insist the present must be embraced as the time for action before it is too late:

Now is the time;
To give me roses;
Not to keep them;
For my grave to come;
Give them to me;
While my heart beats;
Give them today;
While my heart yearns for jubilee;
Now is the time (l. 20-8).

Here, as throughout the poem, the use of the semi-colon suggests simple patterns of progression but ones that progress rapidly and thus remove the hesitancy that may occur with too long a pause. The last stanza provides the clearest expression:

Now is the time;

To violate the eleventh commandment;

For today's pain is tomorrow's imminent comfort;

Now is the time;

Yes it is the time (l. 45-9).

The allusion to the eleventh commandment, colloquially understood as “thou shalt not get caught”, suggests the legitimacy of wrong doing for the change it will bring. Again impatience finds utterance in the choice of “imminent”. This choice collapses the length of the present for a quickly found tomorrow, echoed by the rhetorical final positive assertion of “Yes it is the time”. There is no time for doubt, if anything should be doubted.

Mbuli's desire for change is unsurprisingly born from his anger at the current situation and this is explored through an excavation of history. ‘Many Years Ago’ depicts the horrors and injustices of colonialism on an international scale. Incidents in Biafra and Katanga are compared to the crimes of the Holocaust and the violence seen at Hiroshima. Interestingly, these incidents are depicted in a very physical sense, with reference to phrases such as “paralyzing laughter” (l. 18). Yet these are also compared against almost spiritual rhetoric that encapsulates Africans' inner determination to survive and persevere. This epitomises the collection's hope.

Invaders killed man;
But the soul failed to die;
Usurpers tormented man;
But the spirit failed to surrender (l. 23-6).

‘Many Years Ago’ also tellingly mentions “the incorrigible planners of perjury” (l. 44). This links to a second major site of resistance in Mbuli’s poetry. Not only reasserting his and his people’s own history, Mbuli presents alternative patterns of knowledge. One of the more interesting examples comes in ‘Triple “M”’. Criticising the apartheid regime’s actions against history and Africa, the poem explores notions of truth -- “Triple “M” why know the truth? / Triple “M” why distort the truth?” (l. 20-1). Mbuli also writes, “Therefore I am not what you think I am” (l. 7). This can be read as an inversion of Descartes proverb, “I think therefore I am”. Commonly accepted as the foundation of all knowledge, Mbuli’s reconfiguration undermines the hegemonic truth in favour of a liberated alternative and a reassertion of his own African agency. This assertion of independent agency is central to Mbuli’s message of change as he witnesses a time “when South Africa is standing on the threshold of a precarious new era” (Mkhatshwa 1989: 6). Never forgetting the ominous presence of history, whether pre-apartheid or through the scars of current oppression -- “but Apartheid never retires” (l. 21) -- his poetry testifies to his desire to continue honest defiance and speak of a new future. This he does regardless, but fully aware, of the threats he will be subject to: “bars or no bars the struggle of the voiceless continues” (‘Behind the Bars’ l. 24).

5.4 – Poetry, Performance and Space

Mkhatshwa announces Mbuli as a rebel who did not “[pander] to the whims and moods of the princes” (1989: 6). This platform of rebellion tapped into the political fervour of the wider African population and saw him subject to four assassination attempts and six short spells in detention before he was finally arrested in 1988. Moreover, he began a style of poetry, greatly exploited in recent years, which did not tap into notions of praise but were centred on antagonism. Arguably, though, the threat did not lie so much in his words as in their reception. The closing down of performance spaces was a greater occurrence than the banning of specific art pieces during the 1980s.

Mbuli, like Qabula, was a performance poet who fully embraced oral idioms. These forms permeate his work stylistically through the use of familiar patterns of repetition, parallelism, proverbs, wordplay and the like. However, Mbuli’s poetry also embraced musicality. Sole notes, “the use of drums, flutes and other musical instruments became almost obligatory in the reading of poetry” (1987: 257). This perhaps owes much to his upbringing. Mbuli’s father had been a practicing *mbube*, a harmonic singer, and Mbuli’s works show the combination of this form along with *mbaqanga* township music and the *isichatamiya* style that proliferated in migrant workers’ hostels, and which has a prehistory that highlights the vibrant admixture and the “nuanced picture of urban-rural dynamics” (Erlmann 1996: 56) characterising the South African cultural scene at large. Moreover, these musical influences were frequently syncretised with rap. This combination saw Mbuli labelled a dub poet in the style of successful British and American artists. And the very notion of performance was key to the connection Mbuli established with his audience and also to how he responded to

history. Indeed, Mafeje once observed oral literary traditions “govern the *poet* more so than the *poem*” (qtd. White 1989: 36. My emphasis).

Harold Scheub (1975) and Elizabeth Tonkin (1989) have both discussed the relationship between verbal narrative and song, bodily movement, gesture and facial expression in oral cultures. These factors, along with costume, are all crucial to understanding Mbuli’s performance. Symbolically illustrating reclamation of history, and in contrast to Qabula who dressed as a union member, Mbuli dressed in traditional African garb and, occasionally, skins for the majority of his performances. Meanwhile, body language was central to the message. Brown observes, “facial expressions enact a ‘sense’ of the poem, and hand gestures punctuate climatic or dramatic movements” (1996: 141). Although hampered by the presence of a microphone, Mbuli’s body language, expressions and movement helped to express the poem’s rhythm whilst conveying the political meaning symbolically and more forcefully than words alone. The poems spoke not just to the ears but also the body. In Sole’s words,

Language was increasingly considered as only part of the expressive vocabulary
[...] Other visual devices were stressed in various attempts at popularization and
to evoke a more immediate display of emotion (1987: 257).

Chapman has elaborated on a similar theme and observed “you don’t hear the words after a while, just the resonances” (1988: 26). And these resonances, through a change in tone or voice tremors, were frequently at odds with the words themselves.

More than just words, the enhanced notion of performance collapsed boundaries between performer and audience. The introduction to *Before Dawn* describes Mbuli’s poetry

as one creating “dialectics between iconoclasm and the creation of a human cosmos” (Mkhatshwa 1989: 7). His performance is testament to the fact. For example, Mbuli’s work frequently relied on group humming and this chorus of humming that accompanied his readings spread to the audience. The ‘comrade’ movement and youth choirs then often appropriated these hummed tunes outside during marches and rallies (Sitas 1992: 635). Subsequently gaining wider political purchase, the removal of barriers between performer and audience was central to the period. Poetic techniques had to resonate with and were then appropriated by the masses. Sitas’s 1992 article on the Comrades Movement describes the collapse of similar boundaries by describing the synergy between personal militarization and public ritual -- the essence of mobilization. Aside from determining whether a youngster could belong to the Movement, the sense of unity created by sharing songs and dances played a leading role in the removal of fear. Anthea Jeffrey suggested the youngsters “feel something akin to intoxication” (2009: 64). Such anesthetising explains the prominence of revolutionary songs, often drawn from traditional resistance songs, and the *toyi-toyi* at marches where there would undoubtedly be violence and death.¹⁰

Performance allowed culture to gain spatial power. Evident geographically, metaphorically and linguistically the performance of poetry, song and dance allowed a reworking of spatial politics. Jeremy Cronin (1988) and Rita Barnard (2001) both observe the consequent creation of liberated zones. Cronin claimed poetry performance in rural locations, townships, and urban industrial ghettos saw the transgression of state restrictions on mobility. Thus the African population were able to perform their own cultural identity in spaces previously denied them or in those where they were usually the subjects of white

¹⁰ The substantial number of interviews undertaken by Franziska Ruedi into the Vaal Uprising speak to the importance these rituals played as motivation and anaesthetic.

management. Furthermore, the emotionally charged atmosphere during performance rendered these locations unsafe for the state to enter and reassert control. These temporarily liberated zones were subject to African agency and self-expression and have been suggested as the foundations of a democratic South Africa (Kirkwood 1987; Horn 2012). However, these foundations were undermined by the very same localised nature that made them possible. The UDF, responsible for much of this activity, embraced the importance of grassroots activism and localised resistance yet was unable to coordinate these activities effectively on a national basis. With the ANC's subsequent return a new national structure was imposed that largely neglected local activism. Local organisations and their associated cultural work were lost because they were unrepresentative of, or unable to appeal to, the varying conditions within the national struggle.

Space was also reworked figuratively inside the texts themselves. Most poetry responded to the unique conditions of its area. Speaking of his own, but undoubtedly applicable to his peers, Sitas asserted, "a sense of place was unavoidable [...] I was learning from something very tactile, very 'scratchy-scratchy'" (1995: 64). Numerous poets wrote in response to the latest violence or developments in their own union, factory or local area. The poems were specifically relevant to the local community's concerns, thus one reason behind their effectiveness as a mobilising tool. This trend is expressed by the apparent surprise that can be read into David Maughan Brown's commentary on the 'Echo' poems that appeared in the *Natal Witness* newspaper during the period of intense political violence in the Natal Midlands between 1987 and 1989. An anomaly to the local and current themes of most poetry in the period, less than ten percent responded to the ongoing local conflict (D. M. Brown 2001: 48).

Space was also dealt with implicitly. Sitas frequently experimented with musical forms that were prevalent within Durban when he started writing. The very language used was, for Cronin (n.d), a linguistic liberation that opened space for an alternative literary politics and rehearsal for wider political liberation. Both Qabula and Mbuli were notable for their language. Among politically unacceptable vocabulary and imagery was the common occurrence of wordplay that helped undermine formal linguistic convention. The nature of oral performance, meanwhile, allowed the high incidence of what Cronin has termed “poetic language thickening”. He explains:

[Harsh consonants and lengthened final syllables] give the English a pronounced, indeed an exaggerated African texture [and] carries a playfulness as well as implications of appropriation and nationalism (1988: 14).¹¹

Performance poetry during the 1980s not only opened spaces. It frequently collapsed them. Corrine Sandwith’s (2011) paper on the Non-European Unity Movement noted how worker poetry and theatre appropriated two literary forms usually reserved for high culture. Workers thus collapsed the space that demarcated class and cultural practice. Actively asserting their own identity and status, they undermined apartheid ideologies that defined them as uncivilised and culturally backward. Mahlini Okantanzi, for example, was a renowned performance poet but also illiterate. Even the un- or under-educated could successfully practice ‘high’ culture. Secondly, and perhaps most importantly for this thesis, was the contribution these performance poets made to blurring distinctions between art and

¹¹ These aspects of linguistic performance are evident in a number of documentaries about Mbuli. One example is *Songololo*.

politics. Central to mobilisation, this poetry had to be rooted firmly within the political environment. Cronin (1988) and Chapman (1988) have both decreed the impossibility of reading 1980s poetry without recourse to the political context. Chapman's analysis arguably goes so far as to suggest that it is the context more so than the text that matters. This reading contains an element of truth and contains interesting parallels with Peter Thuynsma's claims about Xhosa *ntsomi*, if literary endurance is said to be a result of artistic quality. Thuynsma wrote, "*the moment of making* is perhaps more significant and satisfying than its endurance" (1990: 152. Original emphasis).

Such readings are reductionist. These texts were continually reworked and reformulated to suit a variety of different genres and media, including "songs, chants, funeral orations, political speeches, sermons" (Cronin 1988: 12). Consequently, each poem must be read in relation to the changing political purpose at each performance while the poem itself must allow such adaptability. This is ultimately a question of composition and suggests an unavoidable relationship between the aesthetic and the political. Furthermore, Chapman's view tends towards anti-poetics and the dismissal of literary quality. Such a view is fallacious. 1980s poetry continues to demand appreciation as an art form possessing unique literary qualities. Here, a contradiction can be read in Thuynsma's argument because he does announce the aesthetic quality of politically based orature: "what the traditional artist borrows is of far less significance than what he or she actually does with what they have borrowed" (1990: 147). Similar to Xhosa folk *ntsomi* or Zulu *izibongo*, worker poetry "intrinsically [combined] political and aesthetic appeal" (Gunner 1986: 33). Although reacting to the political climate, Qabula, Mbuli and others like them went beyond politics. Kgositsile's defence of political art holds true:

Literature is not a mirror reflection of life. Mirrors are passive. There is a dialectical relationship between literary art and life. And a poem is neither a condensed form or, nor an excuse for, anything else [...] A poem is not a guerrilla warfare manual either [...] For literary art to be, and remain, relevant it must capture and, in moving images, render some gesture, some movement of life; the gesture beneath the fact; the spirit, if you will, that informs fact, that imbues it with meaning or pertinent question (n.d).¹²

1980s Performance poetry in all its variations must receive criticism that detracts neither from the aesthetic nor political. The poetry successfully explored pressing dilemmas and apprehensions, probed and synthesised modernity and tradition, appealed to local youth sub-culture and became a means of mass mobilisation. This was done through a combination of aesthetic techniques. Cosmo Pieterse's praise is justified:

It is a variety of weaves of sound that is subtle and also direct, of words that are simple *and* complex, open, clear, direct *and* allusive, immediate *and* resonant, personal, individual (but not individualistic) and simultaneously overtly political, public and communal. This poetry uses tradition and innovation, vernacular and vehicular languages, standard and colloquial diction and idiom [featuring] playful irony [alongside] philosophic probing and synthesis (1989: 113. Original emphasis).

¹² This quote is taken from a draft article, 'Culture as a Site of Struggle', in Judy Seidman's private collection. Later appearing in a *Medu Arts Ensemble Newsletter*, the article was arguably written prior to June 1985.

5.5 - The Historical Changes in Black Theatre

Trade union poetry was a performance genre that rendered poetry as about more than just the poem. It must be evaluated as a theatrical event, thus undermining the dominant and reductive tendency of academia to categorise poetry as solely textual and deem the performance or reading of it as unnecessary. Consequently, 1980s poetry must be considered alongside developments in theatre during the same decade. It was during this period that theatre moved into urban streets and factories and departed from previous dominant South African theatrical forms.

Perhaps the natural crossover between oral literary cultures and written textual ones, drama and performance are deeply rooted in African culture. However, a litany of problems, educational, linguistic and those of preservation, have meant little truly African theatre gained formal purchase in South Africa (Hauptfleisch 1984: 3-5). It was not until the early twentieth century when African theatre, largely under the auspices of missionary schools, gained wider prominence. The Lucky Stars gained fame during the 1920s for their satirical and musical sketches whilst the Bantu Dramatic Society was founded in 1933 and featured H. I. E Dhlomo. Concerned with understanding both European and African theatre, the Bantu Dramatic Society has been heralded by Temple Hauptfleisch and Ian Steadman as providing the first performance of black theatre. *The Girl Who Killed to Save: Nonqause the Liberator* sought to explore national histories and values and how these relate to modern urban environments (Hauptfleisch 1984: 142). Black theatre became an entrenched expression of the contemporary African experience over the following decades, including the 1959 production *King Kong*. Continuing to thrive in the 1970s, and anticipating post-Soweto radicalism, this form of theatre crystallized into an expression of Black Consciousness. Thus it constitutes

what Robert Kavanagh (1981) refers to as Black Consciousness theatre, terminology preferred here following an important distinction People's Experimental Theatre (PET) made in the early 1970s between black theatre and theatre made by blacks.

Black Consciousness theatre constituted one aspect of a three-way split Kavanagh (1981) proposes existed in South African theatre across the 1960s and 1970s. The other forms were town theatre and township theatre, which for purposes of simplification can be combined as representing what PET termed theatre made by blacks. Although there were commercial and, to a lesser extent, political differences between town and township theatre, these forms both rested on inter-racial collaboration. Both were produced by mixed companies and frequently played to mixed audiences in private venues.¹³ Thus, regardless of content, they represented an explicit challenge to the state's policies of racial separation, such as the Group Areas Act, and also the Cultural Boycott. This was a challenge geographically conducted from within.

Three specific examples can be used to illustrate such theatre. Work-shopped and experimental plays were epitomised in Johannesburg by the Phoenix Players and Workshop '71 while Athol Fugard formed the Serpent Players in Cape Town. These groups' productions were highly minimalist with little scripting and few props. Arguably, the sparsely furnished sets were representative of the sparse material possessions and limited lifestyle of the African audience whilst the nature of improvisation allowed a uniquely South African flavour. Breaking established aesthetic boundaries, urban dialects and musical forms including jazz were considered alongside oral narrative often lengthy, potentially tangential, and metonymical that featured the quick shifts of focus and tempo typical of oral folktales. Moreover, the audience was often embraced as an active cast member. Ian Steadman notes

¹³ All performances, excluding secretive one-night performances in township community halls and churches, were restricted to white-designated areas. This was enforced by law and the complete absence of theatres in black areas.

improvised unison speaking and chanted responses by the audience that made the theatrical experience “far richer” than those “captured in textual form” (1990: 225). Hauptfleisch recognises the limitations of print and is correct to announce, “the root of this theatricalism is the *image* [...] Unrestricted by notions of literariness, [this theatre] resorts time and again to the image as the central theatrical device” (1984: 147. Original emphasis). Like the poetry that flourished a decade later, resistance was occurring through physical space and action. No longer was the written word sufficient.

On a similar theme, Junction Avenue’s 1986 production *Sophiatown* epitomises the political messages offered in theatre made by blacks. As Yvonne Banning explores, *Sophiatown* was rooted in prevailing language debates.

The dramatic action is predominantly linguistic action. Words are weapons against other words [and] have to oppose the physical force with which official (written) decrees are executed. Spoken [English] words are the only defence against ‘these Boers’ [...] If, as Jakes [leading character] claims, “English is the language that unifies us” [...] the price of unity appears to be hegemonic absorption and submission to the ideological imperatives of English and thus (white) Western domination (1998: 409).

Her view holds weight. The desire to overcome the connotations of Afrikaans led to the use of English. This choice arguably constrained true African cultural expression and was tantamount to accepting English language ideologies. However, Jakes’s stress on the oral nature of language fundamentally undermines Western ideologies. Challenging the West’s

written nature of governance through spoken words, *Sophiatown* creates a space beyond, and thus liberation from, text and the systems it represents.

The most popular examples of collaborative theatre made by blacks exists through Gibson Kente's work. Kente, the leading exponent of commercial musicals, was frequently criticised for his apolitical tone although his later plays *How Long?* (1974) and *Too Late!* (1975) were increasingly influenced by Black Consciousness. Moreover, Kente continually exhibited nationalist loyalties and "presented clear alternatives to the status quo" (Hauptfleisch 1984: 143). These political undertones were done implicitly and through improvisation. Kente previously had plays banned for their political comment and sometimes left work completely unscripted in order to evade the censor. Considered together, Kente's collections constituted the emergence of popular theatre that responded to African histories and idioms but fused these with the dynamism of urban life. There was a vibrant mix of English, Xhosa and urban slangs. Loren Kruger notes his "expertise and flair for combining jazz, melodrama, and *ingoma*" (2012: 569). Meanwhile, their unscripted nature speaks simultaneously to familiar African patterns of orality and the very improvised nature of township survival. And, though Kente himself successfully spoke to African culture, some theatre made by blacks abused these themes. Their evocation instead provided hegemonic capital. One such example is *Ipi Ntombi*, penned by Bertha Godfrey and Gail Lakie. With an abundance of Zulu dance and music, Bhekizizwe Peterson argues the play only succeeded in the titillation of Eurocentric minds through representations of the African as noble savage (1990a: 234-5). A review in the *Black Review* assessed it as a play widely praised by the white press but dismissed by blacks for being "a cheap commercialization and a poor imitation of the real cultural dance and musical patterns within black society" (Mbanjwa 1975: 212).

This review was written at time of growing dissatisfaction with theatre made by blacks. Dismissed for failing to tap in sufficiently to the contemporary Black experience and political realities, PET after joining forces with Shiqomo between 1969 and 1971 produced ‘An Evening of Black Thoughts’ in Lenasia. Subsequently, they proposed a refashioned black theatre that embraced Black Consciousness and broke from white theatre and white audiences. This style would not indulge an artistic phobia towards politics but, to use the explanation provided in *Black Review 1972* edited by Bennie Khoapa, “hinged round a proper enunciation of the feelings, emotions, and hopes of ghetto dwellers through the medium of drama” (1972: 46). PET’s constitutional preamble dismissed white dominated theatrical groups as irrelevant and outlined a desire to foster an interchange in ideas to encourage a development of the blacks arts (Moodley n.d: 1-3). The wording of these aims is highly suggestive of that found in SASO’s constitution while it evinces a similar concern with education and grassroots community art development programmes.

These aims were expanded by Saths Cooper in a series of draft articles entitled ‘What is Black Theatre?’ eventually finding publication in the *PET Newsletter*. Here, the Black Consciousness message continues to shine. Suggestive criticism of previous generations’ actions and a certain religious motif, drawing on Black Theology, permeates the discussion. Cooper notably traces the roots of black theatre to African civilisations as opposed to theatre made by blacks, which looked to “the Greeks only” (Cooper n.d[a]: 1). He asserts a uniquely African ownership of the form both now and then. Moreover, this alternative history allows a distinction to be made in artistic function. Black theatre represents art where the message becomes the medium, one of defiance, pride and reclamation (Cooper n.d[a]: 1). In contrast white, Western influenced theatre is “mere entertainment” (Cooper n.d[b]: 2). New black theatre embraced theatre as a weapon of the struggle and refused to compromise with

established drama aesthetics. It therefore became a successful vehicle of mobilisation that appealed to a large demographic.

A core of energised young playwrights emerged. Fourteen official productions were performed in the first six months of 1974, notwithstanding the hundreds of improvised and hastily assembled plays also seen. The first edition of the *PET Newsletter* features reviews of two productions: *Shanti* and *Requiem for Brother X*. *Shanti* has been discussed by Kavanagh (1981). *Requiem for Brother X (Requiem)* is an interesting inclusion given its American roots. Directed by the African-American W. W. Mackway, set in Harlem and south side Chicago, it is a eulogy on the silent and angry voices of the black population. It traces the widespread similarities in situation and thought confronting the black populations in America and South Africa respectively. A review of *Requiem* neatly encapsulates black theatre and its purpose: a “high-powered, beautifully, ugly drama [...] you will either hate this play violently or love it passionately” (Moodley n.d: 8). The oxymoron in particular captures the radical departure from accepted aesthetic norms -- uglifying the beauty -- which occurred in African cultural production during the 1970s and 1980s.

The 1980s provides two leading examples of black theatre. *Woza Albert!* is Percy Mtwa, Mbongeni Ngema and Barney Simon’s twenty-six scene portrayal of Christ’s Second Coming in South Africa. Written in 1981 it has been performed in America, England and continually in South Africa, recently enjoying another successful residence at Johannesburg’s Market Theatre in 2012. A product of an increasingly volatile society, *Woza Albert!* offers a comprehensive, though consistently humorous, damnation of every facet of apartheid society. Unsurprisingly given the plot, a sense of Black Theology is omnipresent. The play similarly subverts accepted Christian doctrine and undermines fundamentalist interpretations of Christianity including Calvinism (Chapter 1). Francis Ngaboh-Smart explains the

incorporation and subsequent mocking of the Christian motif as a method of “re-deploying the tools of the system in ways that would transform them into instruments of change and resistance” (1999: 179). The play also syncretises Western belief systems with cornerstones of African belief. The Second Coming gives agency to the deceased, something with which they are imbued in African mythology. It also portrays a heroic martyr who died for a greater cause and is now used as an inspiration. This parallels the praising and repeated mention of African liberation heroes common to struggle poetry.

A second example is Maishe Maponya’s *The Hungry Earth* first performed in May 1979. Maponya’s theatre was a direct result of Soweto. He lived in Diepkloof, first wrote in 1975 in the heat of burgeoning revolt, and his theatre shows the energy and complex influences of urban life. *The Hungry Earth* draws interestingly on Brechtian theatre through “lecture-demonstration” (Hauptfleisch 1984: 147) whilst presenting African life through a variety of styles. Directly linked to Black Consciousness, the dialogue begins with a stated desire to make the African population understand and accept the pain of their situation as a first step to liberation. It is repeated, “if we could really feel” only then will “all learn what love is” (Maponya 1984: 151). The Black Consciousness message is continued throughout. In Scene One, Maponya plays on the unavoidable reality of apartheid. Usiviko is having a nightmare about *umlungu*, the white man. Not only explicit criticism expressed through the nightmare’s subject, the fact this dream is at dawn suggests an ominous foreboding for the coming day. The morning will not constitute a new start. Additionally, adding to the fact the threat affects his whole body, the play on night and day shows danger is found in light, not hidden, and is inescapable. Elsewhere, Maponya writes of the complete lack of agency afforded to the African population -- “unfortunately Blacks can never be spectators of white creations, only victims” (1988: 158). In the following scene, Jannie, the master of the mine

asserts, “I did not ask your opinion” (1984: 160), though of course Beshwana, a worker, is proved correct and his co-worker saves Jannie as the mine collapses.

Motifs that also occur in 1970s and 1980s poetry are present in *The Hungry Earth*. In a bid to overcome apartheid divisions -- *umlungu* in Usikivo’s nightmare is said to have “divided me against myself” (Maponya 1984: 153) -- the play appeals to a romanticised, collective continent and speaks of one generalised, specifically African history. This is done through frequent calls to Mother Africa. This gendered depiction of the nation is congruent with those found in other writings from the period. Furthermore, the play resonates with both Mbuli’s verse and worker poetry. The white man is criticised for his exploitation of the land and Africans as workers. Each scene finds suffering in different employment situations while the white man is attacked for having taken “gold and silver and all precious stones” (Maponya 1984: 153). These themes find combined expression in the chant that ends Scene One:

MOTHER AFRICA WAKE UP
AND ARM YOURSELF
WIPE THE TEARS OF YOUR BRAVE
MOTHER AFRICA WAKE UP
LEST UMLUNGU RAPES YOU
LEST UMLUNGU RAPES YOU (1984: 155).

5.6 – The Symbolic Theatre of Violence and Mourning

The Hungry Earth finds expression through song, dance, mime, and direct audience communication. Theatre took the politics and methods of expression from outside and

brought them onto the stage. However, theatre itself became a feature of life external to the performance hall. Performance poetry, the gumboot dance and *toyi-toyi* all became theatrical acts with a coordinated, rehearsed aspect where the body was rendered as a physical site of communication. Indeed, the actual act of violence became a theatrical event. Franziska Ruedi's extensive doctoral research summarises the notion of audience during moments of violence. She suggests fire played a role in boundary formation by explicitly marking out outsiders and warning against collaboration. Therefore this can be interpreted in a similar way to theatrical performance. Smoke creates a clearly visible and located boundary between the actors in the violence and the audience. Additionally, it serves as a tool of political communication and method of altering behaviour. To those on stage -- those who have had their house bombed -- attempts are made to chase them away, whilst the audience -- nearby residents -- are simultaneously warned about the dangers of collaboration.

A further aspect of fire's theatrical nature can be seen in a brief anecdote offered by the celebrated poet Mzi Mahola. Discussing his training with the ANC in Lesotho he reveals his experiments with petrol bombs where he attempted to give an aesthetic beauty, fitting of the theatre, to violence:

I used to get some strange inflammable liquids so that the flame would give a bright red colour or blue colour and if it hit the bus – hey! – it made a beautiful scene (1994: 49).

Becoming dramatic spectacle, Mahola's violent act elevates fire beyond the normalised status it was prescribed during apartheid. Instead, used as theatre, fire gains an almost absurd characteristic to match that of South Africa's repressive regime.

Belinda Bozzoli (2004) has described a second type of symbolic performance. She discusses mass funerals and night vigils as political theatre. Funerals were frequently manipulated from private mourning into political performance designed to meet previously defined goals. Improvised performance was mixed with scripted parts, scheduled direction and fusions of poetry and music. Moreover, props and costumes drawn from the liberation struggle were used to temporarily reinforce an African identity on township streets (Bozzoli 2004: 211-3). These performances also included the prologue and epilogue of theatre. Funerals were preceded by mass marches. Funeral cars travelled the streets with megaphones to announce the funeral and call people to attend (Bozzoli 2004: 216). Night vigils concluded events. These were occasionally held in stadia or churches, thus reinforcing theatricality, and political rhetoric was informed by local culture. Religion remained present but was not afforded the same prominence. Christian prayer and hymn were consistently given at ‘ordinary’ urban funerals.

Many involved justified the politicisation of these funerals as true acts of resistance. These funerals celebrated life and symbolised the people’s irrepressible desire to struggle on despite the costs. More personal considerations cannot be ignored. It is undeniable that such funerals quite remorselessly hijacked deeply emotional and private occasions for public political gain. Many families even decided against holding vigils so as not to provoke confrontation with police or ‘comrades’. Consequently, relatives were often left unsettled because of the importance placed on the correct procedures of mourning to “allow the living to get on with living” (Hay 2011: 298). Just as a good life was desired, so too was a good death. Was such hijacking really necessary for making statements of resistance? Michelle Hay (2011) notes how funeral practice in urban areas symbolically syncretised African and Christian belief systems whilst also creating a sense of unity that removed the differences

pervading every other aspect of apartheid life. Most members of the community offered condolences at the deceased's home and joined in silent procession to the cemetery. And, perhaps most importantly, 'ordinary' funerals themselves signified a silent defiance to continue and cherish life. They showed the personal cannot be corrupted from above like so much public history. Hay arguably describes one of the most profound but unspectacular incidences of African agency: "[funerals] seek to capture a lost life or a lost world, to hold it dear, to understand the role that person played in life and perhaps to add meaning to it" (2011: 299).

5.7 - Performing Space

In addition to these spectacles of symbolic theatre, formal performance also became reinterpreted on the street. Discussed as a 1980s phenomenon, a Black Consciousness activist spoke in interview, of street theatre's beginnings in the mid-1970s. A highly community based project, these developments were influenced by similar activities amongst New York street groups. Theatrical performances were staged in township church halls, parks, or any open space. This even included the backs of trucks.¹⁴ Increasingly frequent, such theatre became one of the leading methods of uniting the student body immediately before Soweto. Productions preached a political message and successfully mobilised the township population who wished and were allowed to actively participate in the drama, dance and song subject to the performer's control. Recalled in interview,

¹⁴ The groups had been banned from school halls in 1975 and community centres in June 1976. Only in the early 1990s did public facilities again become a possibility.

When people wanted to join in [...] they were welcomed on ‘stage’, allowed a line or two and politely escorted off. Now and then the police would come along and actually ask if what we were doing was ‘legal’. “Ha, ha, of course” I said, “Yes”. The point is that at the time they were not aware how subversive art could be.

Submitting to police requests to move on when asked, despite some protest, street theatre groups largely stayed within the law. Drawing on help from the New York group director and politically uncommitted experts in the initial stages the groups quickly became self-dependent and able to facilitate performance themselves.

Doreen Massey has written on the high possibility of spatial appropriation. An unstable and insecure concept she writes, “a discourse of closure it [space] ain’t” (1997: 222). Street theatre supports this assertion and temporarily allowed an assertion of agency and resistance. Moreover, street theatre’s effect on space challenged apartheid authority in several other ways. These can be traced by using Henri Lefebvre’s (1991) three-part division: spatial practice, representations of space and representational space. Spatial practice is the physical practice of movement from a to b, however, under apartheid such practice was denied and impractical to the African majority. This very inscription of authority onto streets renders them simultaneously as representations of space, defined by Lefebvre as locations that reinforce cultural power. Street theatre and theatrical protest marches challenged these perceptions. They opened new avenues of spatial practice and closed others. The white minority were largely excluded from or ignored in areas previously controlled by them. Secondly, theatre acted as a temporary overlay to these physical spaces, making symbolic use

of their objects in acts of resistance. This typifies representational space and sees Lefebvre's three elements combined into one by the process of theatre.

Additionally, street theatre made space a home to the uncanny. The content of such productions, recreating African heritage and injecting power into the African self, appeals to a Freudian sense of the uncanny. There is recognition of something long repressed returning violently from the past to disturb the white status quo. Beyond this the very practice of theatre in these areas suggests Ken Gelder and Jane Jacobs's discussion of the uncanny in relation to Australian theatre. Their definition cites a place

at once 'ours' and 'theirs' [...] so that one can never be completely in possession of place: one is always (dis)possessed, in the sense that neither possession nor dispossession is a fully recognisable category (1998: 138).

The South African white population are excluded from possessing what it at least officially theirs to control. The African masses, meanwhile, are able to display temporary possession of streets previously denied them. Consequently, referring back to Cronin's views of trade union poetry, theatrical performance created spaces that act as physical rehearsal spaces for liberation. Indeed, "every society produces a space, its own space ... its own – appropriated – space" (Lefebvre 1991: 31).

5.8 – Theatre Inside the Factory

Much as developments in poetry were taken from the outside and reworked by workers, so too changes in theatre and spatial appropriation were reconsidered inside urban factories.

Migrant workers had long challenged authority in external spaces through performance. For example the *ngoma* dance, which was often performed down Durban's streets at weekends, saw Zulu workers clad in tribal wear and carrying spears. Concurrently, they mimicked the regimental march and bass drum of British colonial forces at the turn of the twentieth century. Incorporated into a musical march, African workers turned old colonial symbols into a signal of defiance against a new white enemy (Marre 1978). Throughout the 1980s something similar was done inside factories. Worker theatre took hold along with union politics and had two roles. Certain performances acted as simple educational tools giving workers information on factory and wider political developments. A second branch acted out plays dominated by labour and social themes (Friedman 2011). Both types of performance were rooted in the African experience. Rehearsals were *ad hoc* events dictated by shift patterns and the time demands placed upon workers. Also the performance space was the constant changing and in demand factory floor and not a set stage within a theatre venue. This collapsed the Western notion of 'theatre space' (the building) and 'theatrical space' (the staged fiction) whilst also removing the venue as a frame for that which is performed on stage (Tompkins 2006). The Western notion of the stage set off as something apart, different, and usually higher, which can interact with the wider world in a multitude of ways is falsified.

Worker theatre stayed rooted within the present African experience whilst simultaneously challenging it. The *Dunlop Play* exemplifies this fact. This was the earliest occurrence of such theatre and was created by members of the Metal and Allied Workers' Union who performed at a Durban tyre plant between shifts (Coplan 1986). Workers mimed their jobs and improvised their own parts while directly addressing the audience of fellow workers. Coplan observes the "techniques of mimesis and re-enactment drawn from traditional storytelling. [These] provided both expressive resources and a sense of cultural

familiarity” (1986: 173-4). This familiarity was aided by the employment of call and response delivery that, a feature of most worker plays, occurred between actors and with the audience. Audience participation saw workers define themselves as an active force while either performing or watching. They were no longer the watched subjects created by their position as employees.

Bheki Peterson has also shown how worker theatre glanced towards the African past and future. He cites both *The Sun Shall Rise for Workers* and *The Long March*. The first “starts and ends with a song accompanied by slow shuffle dance steps and mime gestures indebted to traditional performance orature” (1990b: 324-5). It evokes traditional practice and the past. *The Long March*, meanwhile, incorporating established practice by featuring a song of mobilisation, concludes with a reminder of the workers continuing strike. “This comment”, Peterson writes, “leaves the audience with the realisation that although the play is finished, the conflict continues” (1990b: 328).

5.9 - Towards a National Culture

The increasingly violent challenges to Nationalist rule during the 1980s did not see the end of conflict. Liberation was still a distance away but perhaps more imaginable. Culture continued to play a central role and maintained the narrative from the 1970s. Both theatre and poetry relentlessly promoted self-identity and African agency. Moreover, the form continued to juxtapose and explore the relationship between African and Western modes. Still expressing aesthetic quality, the determined political content was not inhibited by convention. Indeed, the CASA conference heralded “slogans as the purest form of poetry” (Divendal 1989: 221). Despite these similarities, both theatre and poetry underwent a profound shift between the

decades and can see the 1980s posited as a discrete period of cultural importance. Unlike the 1970s when culture was a weapon to challenge a dominant culture, the 1980s saw culture become a weapon to challenge a dominant politics. Originating from a UDF platform that focused attention on grassroots activism, culture was simultaneously created by and addressed to the working class and the nation. Mobilising a previously unheard and under-considered demographic, literary culture, as Fanon suggested, helped inspire a revolution from below. The urgency and drive of the present typical of the *Staffrider* generation was overshadowed by a renewed concern for the past and discussions of its role in the composite urban identity and the future liberated nation.

The UDF inspired a national South African politics. Its associated culture suggested the same. Peter Larlham (1991) declared 1980s theatre could encourage a non-racial society and national cultural diversity. His reasons expand to all cultural production for the period that similarly centred on performance. The embrace of the worker struggle, everyday and music could become a means of answering modern literary concerns; the tradition of collaboration and improvisation could mix diverse cultures; the importance of the body reduced linguistic tensions; the move away from Eurocentric responses to ones that presented alternate knowledge emphasised (South)Africanization. Performance culture through its many facets acted as a tool of political communication and, to quote Kavanagh's view on music, "was able to fuse an audience of separate divided black individuals in an experience of intense national identity" (1981: 87).

Ndebele (1989a) had asserted literature's new challenge to be one of creating a new national potential and national identity. He may elsewhere have dismissed 1980s black literature as too "naïve, crude [...] and ultimately incapable of defining a literary culture" (1992: 24) but had it actually provided the foundations? The following chapter will show if

these foundations were exploited when the ANC's exiled leadership returned to South Africa and replaced the UDF's local focus with a national top-down body. Mongane Serote's 'Martha, Martha What's Your Boys Name?' unfortunately offers an ominous prediction: "The struggle has brought many people together / There is still something which makes us different".

Chapter 6

The New Black Poets: The Ignored Voices of South Africa's Bleak Transition

As Larlham's (1991) article referenced above illustrates, cultural criticism in the late 1980s was increasingly turning towards the prospect of liberation. Apartheid rule was becoming increasingly destabilised and transition imminent. During this period of uncertainty two important cultural interventions were made by Njabulo Ndebele (1986) and Albie Sachs (1989; 1991) who both announced the start of a necessary discussion surrounding the place of politics in art.

6.1 – The Continued Merging of Literature and Politics

Ndebele's 'The Rediscovery of the Ordinary', first presented at the New Writing in Africa conference in 1986 and later serialised in Ndebele's collection of essays *South African Literature and Culture* (1994), called for writers to abandon the style of spectacle and reportage. Though acclaiming spectacle's artistic merit and justifying political journalism for reporting what was already "absurd" (1986: 144) in a situation where "everything in South Africa, anyway, is political" (1986: 148), Ndebele felt the new South Africa demanded a return to the ordinary and everyday. Continued pamphleteering would run the risk of reducing complexity to "simple formulations such that understanding is prevented, or at best, clouded" (Ndebele 1994: 138). Additionally, textual production needed to become a force for liberation not oppression. This arguably could occur through a change in direction that has been interpreted as helping "form a narrative counter to the dominant modes of Western realism" (Clingman 2012: 640). New explorations of the imagination and quotidian would facilitate

new styles, continue to raise consciousness and show the struggle involves real people with their own agency, not simply abstractions.

Sachs's intervention three years later re-emphasised Ndebele's argument. His controversial article 'Preparing Ourselves for Freedom' (1991) dismissed the continued use of culture as a weapon of the struggle. Sachs wrote,

[Currently] the more fists and spears and guns, the better. The range of themes is narrowed down so much that all that is funny or curious or genuinely tragic in the world is extruded. Ambiguity and contradiction are completely shut out, and the only conflict permitted is that between the old and the new, as if there were only bad in the past and only good in the future [...] but never acknowledging that there is bad in the good, and, even more difficult, that there can be elements of good in the bad (1991: 187-8).

Saying little noticeably different to Ndebele's early formulations, Sachs ignited arguments that had proliferated during the 1980s and sparked huge controversy. Clingman observes, "to many, Sachs's pronouncements came as a breath of relief; to others – worker and community poets [...] – it felt like a betrayal" (2012: 645). Criticism came from all sides. Peter Horn felt the "intervention contributed immensely to the destruction of a very interesting cultural undertaking" (2000: 38) while Mongane Serote fiercely asserted his condemnation saying in interview, "I think that Albie Sachs didn't know what he was talking about [...] everything we did [had to be] highly politicised" (2000: 149).¹⁵

¹⁵ These debates have been thoroughly explored in S. V. Menager-Everson's "The Albie Sachs Debate" (1992) and the *Spring is Rebellious* collection (see Sachs 1990).

Much has been misplaced. Neither Sachs nor Ndebele advocated the total removal of politics from art. Interviewed by Hein Willemse a year later, Sachs defended his views. He recognised in “the lives of the people, [culture] wasn’t like that, something apart” (1992: 21) but was merely arguing culture should not be reduced to an “instrument” (1992: 15) only important when related to the wider struggle. South Africa needed to embrace more than “one kind of cuisine” (1992: 18). Undoubtedly valid, protest literature could and should exist alongside other forms, the imagination, and ordinary. Following on from Raymond Williams’s assertion that “culture is ordinary” (1958), historian Matthew Hilton (2011) has recently suggested politics, when withdrawn from party considerations, is also ordinary and exists everywhere amongst all. South Africa is no exception. Politics and culture occupy similar spaces and can be rethought to be mutually informing. French philosopher Jacques Rancière (2004) has recently added weight to this perspective. Rancière extended the relationship between art and politics from Marxist and Post-Structuralism thought, which had informed earlier discussions, to instead stress the similarities between aesthetics and politics. He dismissed as a “false dichotomy” (2004: 60) the presupposed differences between art-for-art’s sake and art for political means. He writes,

There is no criterion for establishing an appropriate correlation between the politics of aesthetics and the aesthetics of politics [...] They intermix in any case; politics has its aesthetics and aesthetics has its politics. But there is no formula for an appropriate correlation (2004: 62).

Separating the two categories misrepresents both practices. They are fundamentally linked as Rancière continues to explain through discussion of the visible and invisible and the audible

and inaudible. They have just been approached in modes that are “set off” (2004: 62) from one another.

Rancière also dismisses notions of commitment, which had informed much of the Sachs debate. Believing it not a valid category for the discussion of art, it becomes impossible to talk of either a writer’s commitment to their art or their politics. Finally, his thought agrees with Sachs’s assertions about using multiple cultural forms. Artistic form is governed by the forces within any given historical period. “This does not mean that it becomes invisible with the emergence of a new regime [...] At a given point in time, several regimes coexist and intermingle in the works themselves” (Rancière 2004: 50). Ndebele and Sachs did not want a fundamental sea change, as much criticism suggests. They just advocated the necessary creation of alternative forms that could mutually inform and improve the quality of South African literature.

Sachs’s intervention questions not only the place of politics in the literary sphere but also the literary in the political sphere. The 1980s had seen the merger of artists into active political roles. Sachs himself, whilst commenting on culture, was a leading ANC figure. However, he makes it clear that the best art springs from the inside and is not a product of political prescription; culture should be used to inform government practice and not be the subject of it. Such views were supported by numerous artists who, during the transition years between 1990 and 1994, “slowly cut themselves loose from politics and the ANC’s Department of Art and Culture because they felt their principles of supporting artistic freedom just ‘reproduced old clichés of the past’” (Ernst 2002: 19).

New organisations emerged, notably including the National Arts Coalition (NAC), which were not aligned politically but had considerable influence within the newly formed (as

of 1994) Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology (DACST).¹⁶ Many NAC recommendations were included in the Arts and Culture Task Group (ACTAG) Report and “the golden era of the empowerment of the arts community” (Graan n.d: n.pag) was achieved. Sadly, as the Sachs debate lingered, “so organisations formed and disbanded” (Clingman 2012: 644). The period of artist independence marked by the NAC represented only a brief hiatus in the continued centralisation of the arts. Mike van Graan outlines how, after the NAC’s apparent success with the ACTAG Report, the momentum was lost. The NAC was disbanded and leading writers migrated back towards DACST. This was perhaps best exemplified by Serote who became the Chair for the DACST Portfolio Committee.¹⁷ Additionally, DACST’s rhetoric of ‘facilitation’ and ‘arms length’ governance increasingly became a façade for interference and tight monetary control. Several budget cuts saw funding withheld from numerous cultural projects.¹⁸

6.2 – The Politics of Publishing

Artistic independence was becoming an increasingly hazy pipe dream. Much as individual writers merged with the political hegemony, so too did the publishing industry. Independent publishers, including literary journals and newspapers, have been subject to the same centralising forces. Established mainstream papers have, since transition, widened their

¹⁶ The exchange of ideas that would occur by joining the Department of Arts and Culture with the Department of Science and Technology was heralded as a break-through tactic reinvigorating literary quality.

¹⁷ His appointment has seen him labelled as a ‘hack’ and ‘sell out’ by previous colleagues who remain critical of the ANC’s cultural project. Keorapetse Kgositsile is another figure viewed with disdain despite labelling the ANC’s cultural policies “criminally backward” (1992: 84).

¹⁸ These budget cuts need to be seen within the wider framework of government finance. Van Graan’s criticisms arguably concern the intimidation and threats levelled at critics.

spectrum to include Black politics and areas previously covered exclusively by alternatives. Guy Berger cites *The Star's* role in uncovering sinister spy rings within Johannesburg City Council (2000: 89). Consequently, alternative newspapers have had reduced space to operate in, although Achmat Dangor, writing in *South* on 16 January 1992, suggests they did themselves few favours by trying to become mainstream and abandoning the ground that had caused their popularity (Berger 2000: 90).

Funding is the biggest cause behind the reduced diversity in publishing. Many alternative publishers that existed during the 1980s were positioned as forces of opposition and flourished with the move of leading journalists away from the mainstream into the alternative arena (Berger 2000: 82). However, they were heavily reliant on foreign funding, particularly from Scandinavia. This dried up in the 1990s. Foreign countries supported the alternative press as a contribution to the liberation effort. Once liberation was achieved they felt the need no longer. This problem was also encountered by the Congress of South African Writers (COSAW) with fatal consequences and deprived new voices and grassroots literary circles the chance to flourish.¹⁹ Furthermore, journals saw increased demand to reflect the new multicultural South Africa and no longer be confined to particular demographics. De-Jager-HAUM's name change to Kagiso reveals the desire to end old associations and empower new sectors, though Maskew Miller Longman has since bought the company because of financial considerations. Empowerment has clearly not prevented monetary issues and fallen "far short of what is required" (Oliphant 2000: 123). Such mergers and the loss of great stalwarts of the anti-apartheid struggle are a common occurrence because national publishers actively seek to

¹⁹ Anonymous sources from within COSAW have blamed the mismanagement of funding. Money was lost before international support was officially withdrawn. Similar stories can be seen across the political landscape at the time, notably with the fraud controversy surrounding Pastor Allan Boesak in 1999.

acquire those with “anti-apartheid pedigrees” (Oliphant 2000: 121). Jonathan Ball was acquired by Ad Donker and later Nasionale Pers (Naspers) while Hodder & Stoughton achieved majority shares in Ravan Press in 1994. These two moves have closed the radical publishing space that first announced the challenging new voices contained within *Black Viewpoint*, *Staffrider*, *Forced Landing* and others.

6.3 – Criticism and Mediocrity

Given the crucial role independent journals and publishers have played in shaping and promoting the direction and quality of South African literature, their loss can only be lamented. It perhaps explains Lesego Rampolokeng’s assertion that South African literature is currently a “celebration of the mediocre” (2003: 142). This is not to say there are not exceptions. Zakes Mda has rightfully pointed to the necessity of mediocrity in giving meaning to excellence while Damon Galgut feels “we are not doing too badly. [There is] a gathering clamour of voices” (2006: n.pag). Unfortunately, Galgut then continues to offset his own praise by suggesting, “a lot of what gets written is just not terribly good” (2006: n.pag). Apartheid’s legacy is an undoubted reason behind declining standards because it denied “awareness of the standards set by international literary tradition” (Galgut 2006: n.pag). Moreover, the emphasis lay on solidarity criticism and quality was hindered by the minimalist editorial interventions in *Staffrider* and similar fora.²⁰ However, apartheid cannot be used to veil deficiencies in the current administration.

²⁰ Oliphant (2001) does suggest behind-the-scenes editing was practiced prior to 1981. After Chris van Wyk’s accession to editor in 1981 there were writing workshops, competitions, and a stricter editorial policy.

Current literary criticism seems caught in the most depressing state. Publically very few popular fora exist that are dedicated to criticism. A quick search for ‘poetry’ on the *Mail and Guardian Online* arts section returns ten entries in a year-long period between May 2011 and 2012. Though that figure itself may be argued as high, these reviews are generally “largely uncritical and function as free advertising for the publishing houses” (Johnson 2012: 834). Publisher, poet and critic Robert Berold supports this view, similarly suggesting there is confusion between criticism and publicity. Within academia the situation is more nuanced. *LitNet* is an example of successful online criticism available to all while David Johnson observes “a sharp increase in the number of scholarly monographs” (2012: 833). Unfortunately, many of these are based on the formulations and debates of yesteryear or prevented from reaching a large readership. Johnson identifies the key role online platforms such as *JSTOR* play in distribution and, although free, these are beset by issues that prevent large-scale access within universities and to the wider population. Keith Breckenridge’s (2012) paper at the University of Birmingham’s *Cadbury Conference* pointed towards many of these. Put simply, there remains, as Tim Couzens observed nearly twenty years ago, a need to reconfigure criticism, to be more critical and adventurous, to find new ways. This would benefit literature but also the critic. “This kind of research is, above all, fun” (Couzens 1990: n.pag).

Not only facing limited criticism, writing itself has become uncritical. Unsurprisingly given the migration of many writers into the administration they write about, they now express a pro-government stance. For Sitas this trend saw their writing go “for a walk” (2000: 91). What they still produce lacks critical punch and their previous imaginative expression. Kgositsile, one of the most original voices of the exiled poets, was cited by one interviewee as a poet whose current work is not found interesting anymore. It is perhaps unfair to offer such

specific examples but it is true that many continue to present ‘solidarity literature’ that, along with its associated criticism, is “increasingly characterised by a strategically polite professionalism” (Johnson 2012: 833). For example, Mongane Serote’s recent works *Third World Express* and *History is the Home Address*, two epic poems that have seen him lose the short lyrical expression that defined his earliest poems, have been criticised for being poetically weak. They reflect too closely the African Renaissance policy and defend Mbeki’s AIDs denials, respectively (Chapman 2009: 176). To use Rampolokeng’s poetic image, much current leading poetry just evokes the “bring-on-the-poet-to-lick-the-stage-clean-for-the-politicians thing” (2003: 138).

Interestingly and somewhat ominously, the government’s influence on the arts parallels its relationship to journalism, particularly during the Mbeki years. Lucky Mathebe’s (2001) account of Mbeki challenges the stereotyped notions of him as Machiavellian Prince but concisely illustrates the reasons that may have spawned this representation. Mathebe observes that, in a desire to promote ‘constructive’ journalism and although admitting the need for a free press to act as the conscience of the public, Mbeki felt journalists should not look for faults and enter an endless relationship of conflict with the government. Typical of the ANC’s wider attempts at constructing a sacrosanct appearance (Beresford 2012), writers should instead offer support as the best means to nation-build. This famously resulted in a *Sunday Times* rebuke on 4 September 1994:

For years he [Mbeki] was as the forefront of a fight against a grossly inequitable society; today, he has two state-owned palaces and emoluments of more that half-a-million a year. What does he expect? Hero worship?

Perhaps the same is expected of their poets? Those who do not write to conform or shower praises have in many ways been dismissed from the current South African literary canon. The contents of most current poetry collections support this hypothesis. Recent anthologies by Cambridge and Columbia publishers, along with Michael Chapman's *New Century of South African Poetry* have stayed fiercely loyal to the tried-and-tested poets. New voices, which may inject vibrancy into mediocrity, are struggling to be heard because of this new literary politics.

6.4 - Writing and Nation Building

Perhaps the most urgent problem facing these new voices, and a fundamental reason behind South Africa's literary mediocrity, are challenges in writing the new dispensation and its inherent contradictions. Citing Peter Horn, there is "no clear direction in South African literature" (2000: 43). On the one hand, prevailing misinterpretations of Sachs's argument coupled with the lack of a clearly defined political project means the political has gone missing. This is much to literature's detriment. "The opinion that poetry or literature has to abstain from politics is, of course, an opinion that is contradicted by almost all great literatures" (Horn 2000: 43). On the other hand, despite the ANC's best efforts, art as a contribution to reconciliation and nation building "did not work as an artistic form of expression" (Sitas 2000: 93).²¹ Sitas continues to discuss the cynicism with which writers view the Rainbow Nation and similar ideas have more recently been discussed by Rita

²¹ Andrew Crampton's (2003) arguments concerning the inherent tensions between nation building and artistic excellence in museum art are similarly applicable to literature.

Barnard (2012) and Hedley Twidle (2012). Fundamentally, how can literature bring together black and white?

The interstitial has been identified as the best route for success. But writing from within division and difference is not without problem. Summarising Zoe Wicomb's (2002) argument, Leon de Kock observed:

The only way to bridge the gap [...] is via the transitive zone, where literary acts cross over, trying to suture the fissures of language, culture, class, race, ethnicity and gender. But in so doing, the mark of the suture remains: a representational seam, inscribing difference in the same moment that it seeks to smooth it out, conjoin it or resolve it. This transitive-translational seam, I would agree, in its various forms has come to mark, to scar, one might say, what we talk about as 'South African' writing (2012: 744).

South African writing lays witness to this fact. While some have celebrated the healing, others have identified and suffered from the scar. Working within this new literary politics a new collective of writers has emerged who have depicted the bleakness of the transition.

6.5 – The New Black Poets

This new collective is best exemplified in Berold's edited anthology *It All Begins*, though they were also briefly included in Hirson's *The Lava of this Land*. These two anthologies were born from contributions to the journal *New Coin* since 1989. It was in this year that Berold began as editor and reopened a space for more radical writing. With a stated

commitment to taking the journal away from the traditional white liberal demographic and poetry indebted to British modernism, Berold was determined to not publish “dry, ironical, white stuff” (personal communication). Under the influence of *America, a Prophecy*, Tom Pickard, and experimental English 1970s art, *New Coin* began to look outside ‘official’ literature to more marginal, risk-taking and interesting poetry.²² Poem by poem, *New Coin* changed its appearance and, although upsetting many in the Grahamstown community, was able to briefly exploit a gap in the market created by the decline of independent publishers and journals before sadly suffering a similar fate.²³

From 1989 *New Coin* became testament to a new minority poetic movement that saw new styles, new concerns, and new conversations. Black and white writers spoke amongst and between themselves as, in Berold’s words, the “whole thing started vibrating”. Maintaining an entrenched aesthetic quality that has not been sacrificed at the altar of politics, this new movement explored the South African quotidian alongside new international literary relationships. Poets including Lesego Rampolokeng, Mxolisi Nyezwa, Angifi Dladla, and Seithlamo Motsapi have continued a tradition inherited from the Soweto and Worker Poets. They create Biko’s (1971) two-fold dream: a culture at once defiant, self assertive and national. Facing their own existential crisis they reveal the truth behind the Rainbow Nation façade and do not devote time to “the political clichés and media portrayals of new utopian success” (Sole 2003a: 227). Consequently, they have been ignored and reviled by established criticism. These New Black Poets are the lost voices of South Africa’s transition.

²² The poetry anthology *America, a Prophecy*, edited by Jerome Rothenberg and George Quasha, looked beyond official poetry to incorporate native poetry, radical religious poetry, sermons, blues and gospel music.

²³ Grahamstown in the Eastern Cape has traditionally been the home of *New Coin*. Berold and other poets mentioned in this section have links to the area and the English Department at Rhodes University.

6.6 – The Poetics of Dirty Aesthetics: Lesego Rampolokeng

Born and raised in Soweto, Lesego Rampolokeng is a performance poet and playwright. His collections reflect the violence and political anxieties of his childhood whilst also expressing a turbulent relationship with religion and language that he suggests stemmed from his upbringing. However, his emotive and at times crass poetry is best known for its difficult relationship with the current government. Rampolokeng writes to counter the myth of the new South Africa and exemplify his call to “not let people lie to you about this new South African Rainbow crap” (2010). Largely viewed as an embarrassment and reviled by many critics for his bluntly critical gaze and “dirty aesthetics” (Johnson 2003: 70) he has arguably been excluded from the literary establishment. Rampolokeng has himself suggested that he is increasingly sliding into obscurity and only his family turn up at performances. This opinion ignores his growing following in South Africa and internationally, particularly Germany, where his latest publication *Head on Fire* (2012) was first published. However, regardless of actual popularity, his view does dramatise his antagonistic relationship with the gatekeepers of South African cultural life, both white liberal and ANC, whom he simply “pisses off” (Waller n.d: n.pag). A new politically agitated and disaffected youth is instead being mobilised.

Rampolokeng continues some aspects of the poetic tradition of previous decades. Although having self-expressed difficulties in being labelled a performance poet, his poetry is a spoken one in the manner of worker poetry. And such orality also opens up similarities with Caribbean Dub Poetry, which proliferated in recent decades as a similar form of protest. In keeping with the African oral style there is the continual use of repetition, parallel phrasing and refrain. ‘For The Oral’ sees refrain in the latter half of the stanza with the repetition of “it

is” at the beginning of each line. This construction conjoined with the poem’s declarative tone insists that poetry is made up of and appeals to numerous contradictions. It cannot be simply understood apart from being itself: “it is simply poetry”. Interestingly, the intent here is highly reminiscent of Guyanese poet Martin Carter’s ‘University of Hunger’, which sees the repetition of “is they”. Although a typical Creole linguistic construction (Brown n.d.), Carter’s usage, like Rampolokeng’s, is a simple one that demonstrates the need to accept multiplicity.

‘For The Oral’ clearly defines poetry and, when read alongside ‘Talking Prose’ in Rampolokeng’s most recent collection, it becomes hard to challenge his view on the poet’s role. It is not that of the “rent-a-poet” (l. 2) enterprise advocated by the government’s cultural arm where the poet becomes a “pose with a rose” (l. 8). Such poets have washed their hands of poetry’s true function. This belief is evoked by reference to Pontius Pilate. Offering pure gratification neglects the truth behind government rhetoric and ignores the situation most South Africans face:

now poetry is a beauty pageant
jump the class fence & land in affluence
but what lies beyond the prettiness of the performance
when gangrene sets in after the applause? (l. 16-9)

‘Welcome to the New Consciousness’ is another poem that seeks to reveal the discrepancies between reality and rhetoric, expose the falsity of the new dream that represents “sham-change” (l. 35). Here, oral influenced repetitions are evident through the parallel phrasing that occurs in multiple instances. “For some the sun / for some the moon” (l. 12-3)

emphasises the clear divisions that still exist within society. The connotations of sun and moon as light and dark suggest that these are still largely felt on a racial basis although the uncertain possibility -- note the parenthesis -- exists of racial equality, “for some (perhaps the wise) / both the sun & moon rise” (l. 14-5). However, it can be noted that the adjective ‘some’ that is frequently used in creating these divisions suggests a vague, imprecise quality that doubts today’s divisions fit the clearly marked and quantifiable ones of the past. Yet these separations are inescapably present. The couplet “some sit in the power tower / some shit in a flower shower” (l. 6-7) offers a clear example. The words themselves reveal the fundamental contradictions of the new society, evoked by the rhymed ‘tower’ and ‘shower’, where some rise and others fall. Such difference belies an unconscious equality suggested in the similar structure, rhyme pattern, and repeated sibilance. Moreover, the first line gives a degree of comfort in the easy images and lexis whereas the second is shocking in its crass simplicity and baseness, thus revealing the true horrors of the other side.

The crass, violent lexis and almost hyperrealist images here are present throughout in a continual overpowering barrage that is a feature of Rampolokeng’s style. The delusional myth of South Africa is not just challenged but exploded. Perhaps the sharpest criticism comes with the use of word play,

WELCOME to the new consciousness
of derearranged senses
we utilise everyone (l. 59-61).

The new consciousness is portrayed as a reversion to the previous. The rearrangement that took place after transition has been undone and, with the temptation to read ‘deranged’ not

‘derearranged’, it is seen as a state of confusion, even insanity. Furthermore, the final line suggests a lack of independent power. The people are not actors who can actively shape their own direction but subjects to be used by a more powerful force. Additionally, the use of the first person plural can be read as Rampolokeng incriminating everyone including himself. He has previously suggested he himself accepts some responsibility for South Africa’s current situation (2003: 31). These criticisms are allowed to actively resonate with the audience through the use of satire and lexical playfulness that give the poems a certain freshness. They do not necessarily give a negative experience. There is a “subtle paradox [with] all the apparent negativity; it works the other way. There’s beauty in it and it wakes you up” (Waller n.d: 2). Amongst the tortured fragments of society there is an element of humanity and acceptance.

‘Welcome to the New Consciousness’ also makes heavy use of internal and end rhyme in order to allow the barrage of images to flow relentlessly. Allowing a musical rhythm to invade the words, this technique achieves different effects elsewhere. In ‘Lines for Vincent’, the sporadic rhyming pattern reflects the sporadic gunfire that occurred nightly in Soweto during apartheid where he and cousin Vincent grew up. This effect is also created by such techniques as the use of alliterative plosives in ‘the bomb bullet blade poison’ (l. 63) compared to the soft sibilance in the following line ‘or just silence’ (l. 64). Overall the heavy use of rhyme is another trait arguably inherited from Caribbean dub poetry and further enhances the poetry’s oral qualities suggested by the free form and staccato rhythm. This appropriation clearly reflects the diverse cultural influences that proliferate in South Africa. However, Rampolokeng himself traces his poetic style to his Sowetan childhood. He was exposed to protest poetry aired on Radio Freedom in his household whilst his neighbours simultaneously played jazz music. “The lines being read seemed to flow over the music that

was coming in through the walls” (Rampolokeng 2003: 26). Following the import of jazz, the rise of rap, through the US Black Panther political movement’s Last Poets and figures such as Gil Scott-Heron, came to have a growing influence in South Africa. Indeed, the idea of spoken word music has a particular resonance with traditional African music and praise styles where words themselves are given their own independent musicality in performance with or without musical backing. Thus the cadence of Rampolokeng’s poetry is of particular importance and helps obscure the boundary between music and the human voice, a boundary Rampolokeng himself has never demarcated.

Musicality has perhaps decreased in *Head of Fire*. The rap influence is still present through both rhythm and rhyme, particularly in the first chapter of the collection, misleadingly called ‘The Second Chapter’, and in some of the later poems, most evidently ‘Jazz Rock Rap & The Blues’. Yet much of the collection has taken on a much more fragmented appearance. Although called rants, which is the term given to the performance of dub poetry, these poems more closely resemble chopped up prose. Such “deconstructed diction” (Sosibo 2012: n.pag) mirrors the breakdown of society and takes life down to its barest forms. Rampolokeng thus discusses the ordinary and everyday in its starkest sense while still bringing through the spectacle and explicit politics of the anti-apartheid poetry. This combination is possible with the realisation “that the rot exists at every step of the ladder – at all levels of society”. The “great and glorified” political struggle simultaneously exists on an individual level in a very personal manner. It is frequently juxtaposed against the beautiful aspects of the everyday: “people in love, people kissing – I can’t wish that away” (Rampolokeng 2003: 31).

These tensions go some way to explaining Rampolokeng’s often violent sexual imagery. Sex can be interpreted as one of the most ordinary examples of love whilst

conversely being an image of the human condition at its most brutal and atavistic. Referring specifically to South Africa, sex characterises the positive legislative changes that have taken place since liberation -- consider the legalising of same-sex marriage -- but also dramatise the new dispensation's failings toward true gender and sexual equality. Rape and discrimination remain commonplace (Moffett 2006; Thoreson 2008). The following lines speak to this effect:

sexchange jesters for judas-rewards & fighters-to-order
on yr knees & open wide & cum on the heart
rather dry ink than bare arse for rim-job/anal attack before
master & baas ('Bavino Street Hymns' l. 121-4).

The most violent appearance of the sexual motif appears in reference to castration, for example:

what antidote for colonial-cock-chop-long?
self-deification eunuched at conception
sinking into a cuntal swamp
where phallus once was now a stump
retro-suture for the future wounds on the horizon ('Bavino Street Hymns' l.
144-8).

Here, an explicit link to Black Consciousness can be made where "possession of the sexual member was political shorthand" (Magaziner 2010: 33). The movement frequently

represented the denial of African agency under apartheid through the loss of manhood while images of castration were often used to refer to African collaborators. Similarly, Rampolokeng continues to draw on the Freudian metaphor through the dual images of the eunuch and phallic stump. These represent a renewed loss of power that can still be linked to the colonial experience. This loss of power is similarly traced into criticism of the current government and their tendencies towards neo-colonialism. Similarly castrating, neo-colonial policies are denying prosperity or the fertilisation of a successful future generation, further enhanced by connotations drawn from the “cuntal swamp” image. What could be a place of growth and fresh-starts is actually portrayed as an overpowering, inhospitable environment. Old methods, being made fashionable by neo-colonial politics, are being used to stitch together a future that will not solve any problems but continue to hurt.²⁴

Such sexual imagery is frequently used alongside religion. In ‘Welcome to the New Consciousness’ Rampolokeng writes,

some have ejaculations for lunch
& some count on cunt & cum
while some just read palms & psalms
for a sum of things to come (l. 27-30).

Whereas Dub Poetry and the Soweto Poets used religion in reference to Rastafarianism and Black Theology respectively, Rampolokeng’s usage achieves a startlingly different result. The use of the religious motif alongside the sexualised and grotesque body allows Rampolokeng

²⁴ Sex is a leading motif in much New Black Poetry. Vonani Bila, for example, frequently uses images of prostitution as a vehicle to attack the ANC and neo-liberalism (Sole 2005: 194).

to explore what he views as the hypocrisies of the church, to use the ‘low’ to desacrilise the ‘high’ (Veit-Wild 1997: 563). Long ambivalent to the church, Rampolokeng interprets religion as a source of violence. He believes the presence of an omnipresent God nothing more than a thinly veiled threat for people to follow the righteous path; what he has previously described as religion’s “THIS or DEATH kind of situation” (2003: 23). This Godly violence, something he experienced as a child alongside the very real violence of apartheid Soweto, can explain his poetic focus. Rampolokeng rebels against the normalised expectations of the Catholic environment he was studiously brought up in.

His poetry similarly represents a reaction against the associations his family made between the English language and sophistication. A confident user of English and a very sharp linguist the hyperbolic, colourful, and crass language of his lyrics is used to “decentre, destabilise, and carnivalise the linguistic domination of English” (Veit-Wild 1997: 562). And as a performance poet, Rampolokeng is able to include instances of wordplay invisible on the page. By inverting vowel sounds and contorting lexis with a changing thickness of accent, Rampolokeng creates ironic and comic rhymes. For example, in ‘Rap 31’, Veit-Wild notes “ship” rhymes with “sheep” and “Marx” with “ducks” (1997: 562). A key feature of all oral poetry from the continent and Diaspora, such language skills challenge prevailing ideologies and authorities. For Rampolokeng, wordplay takes on added significance for two reasons. It represents an explicit attack on the ANC, which continues to associate English with progress and is marked as out of touch with the mass population through language. Secondly, Rampolokeng’s language is the clearest example of the everyday. His poetry speaks the language of daily life and the diverse urban environment. His language exemplifies his belief that finally “English is also an African language” (1994).

6.7 – A Rewritten Script: Seithlhamo Motsapi

Many of the concerns Rampolokeng raises are similarly played out in Seithlhamo Motsapi's poetry. Widely read and erudite, he was previously a university lecturer and member of the President's Office before releasing his debut collection of poetry, *Earthstepper/The Ocean is Very Shallow*, in 1995. *Earthstepper* though an intensely written poetry, unlike Rampolokeng's, maintains a commitment to spoken language. There are numerous instances of wordplay and complicated punning while Standard English is constantly inverted through syntactical constructions and (mis)spellings that, littering his work, reflect African and African-American pronunciation. Paradoxically these inversions are at once an integral representation of the everyday whilst also a device to defamiliarise the reader. According to Horn, "[inversions] turn the lingua franca of convenience into the discourse of drug-induced and shamanic madness, which is the only way to liberate us from the everyday" (1996: 70). Motsapi evokes the necessity of looking again at the utopian dream without blindly accepting the rhetoric, which he himself used to pen when working as Mbeki's speechwriter.

The *Earthstepper* collection is an analytical progression through the pressing issues dominating society. A route is sketched in the opening poem, 'sol/o', which announces Motsapi's critical intentions by referring to war and suggesting the fading of the liberation dream, "the sun recedes [...] because the roads / have become hostile" (l. 15-22). Laura Chrisman referring to the opening sequence of poems writes,

The collection follows a careful, subtle sequence. Opening poems set up the fundamentals of Motsapi's aesthetic-political concerns (social conflict, black poverty, the values of humbleness, love, hope). Then the journey begins, starting

with an exploration of black music as a medium, privileged metaphor of contemporary black identity (1996: 35).

Music is an important factor throughout and clearly illustrates Motsapi's Pan African politics. His poems contain references not confined to the rap movement but musical traditions derived from the majority of the African Diaspora. He laments their loss in favour of artificial sound and the consumer marketplace. He writes in 'maasi dreadbeat', "the drums gather dust" (l. 31) and for "too long, way too long / the mountains haven't heard flutes" (l. 34-5). This poem is preceded by 'brotha saul' where the powerful idioms of the African continent, symbolised by "de lyaans" (l. 2), are now evoked purely for touristic gain. They are "frozen in their gloss of postcard" (l. 4). This notion of a lost and 'true' Africa is juxtaposed against the West and its associated music.

It is through musical inclusion that Motsapi enters into dialogue with Caribbean poetry. Although not performed, Motsapi's poetry, as Oku Onuora has observed of Dub Poetry, is able to absorb any black musical rhythm not just reggae (Habekost 1993). Motsapi does likewise and utilises the rhythms and language of soul, dub-rab, Motown and Michael Jackson. The main musical debate, however, concerns Motsapi's "ambivalent elegy [to Marvin Gaye], his death at his father's hands construed as parable of the ongoing antagonism [between African tradition and Western musical forms]" (Chrisman 1996: 35). Motsapi warns against the idealism portrayed in reggae and Motown when used in a South African situation that is still violent and unsure. This clash is reinforced through the recurring image of the synthesiser. Integral to the rise of much contemporary Caribbean music and poetry, and despite other parallels between these two poetic forms, Motsapi has no such reverence for the synthesiser. Motsapi uses the synthesiser to symbolise the problems of contemporary society

and capitalist culture. It becomes a recurring metaphor in criticisms of neo-liberalism. The poem 'solo/together' sees Motsapi write "my son's synthesiser / spat blue red venomous disco / dant" (l. 19-20). Sibilliance emphasises the direct link between the younger generation and the synthesiser while there is little doubt of the distaste with which the instrument, potentially poisoning society, is held. Consider the fierce sounds of "spat". Moreover, the music produces "electrick kisses / that laugh like delayed thunder" (l. 27-8). This is an ironic reference, reinforced by the portmanteau word, to the cynical all-powerful American government and large Western corporations exemplified thus, "the coca-cola cartel were the rats / dancing in the maze" (l. 11-2). Interestingly, this expression of opposition towards increasing American influence bears many of the hallmarks of the Jamaican Dub Poet, Mutabaruka.²⁵ For both poets, America is an occupant damaging local ways of life.

Despite an international element, Motsapi's main focus is the South African quotidian and how that has suffered through the ANC's neo-liberal Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) policy. This top-down macro-economic approach has come in for widespread criticism. Motsapi's poem 'earth' is just one example. Also read as revealing the follies of urban migration -- the title establishes that those who have suffered are those tied to the land -- this is evocatively reinforced by the half rhyme "herds hearts" (l. 8). Despite the promises made by the elites, there has been no decline in rural poverty. The dream is realised as unobtainable with a widening economic gap:

but now you see me

all earthscent & skewed skunk

²⁵ Mutabaruka's views are best expressed in 'United Snakes of America' and 'Famine Injection' (Wojcik 2012).

pulp in the rot to a fetter
now you see me
a bruising stagger
hammered to hell
& screwed to a grovel by capital

while their dream comes true
suited greed to highrise paradise
pulsing oil & glitter through lucre (l. 13-23).

Aside from containing the most explicit condemnations of capitalism in the collection -- note the half rhyme of “hell / capital” and the end focus on “lucre” -- these stanzas bring together two other major aspects of Motsapi’s technique. His is an intensely physical and bodily poetry. The construction of the poems allows images to flow from sense to sense. For example, the above sees the visual move from the olfactory to the tactile. For Chrisman these sensations are “constantly conflated [...] in a frenzy of synaesthesia” (1996: 33). Interestingly, synaesthesia was largely born of high-modernism that had come to represent the uncertainties of the inter-war period in Europe and was valued by theorists for its resistance to easy commodification. Furthermore, high-modernism rallied against ideas of mass culture, which were exhibiting an uncritical art that sold prescribed ideas and represented a form of domination.

This physical technique also acts as a veiled criticism of today’s consumer society that Jean Baudrillard (1994) describes as one of simulacra. The images of society the public are exposed to are accepted as truths themselves. Therefore simulacra can be said to represent a

form of dubbing where media representations have been overlaid on a reality that has become so implicit as to be obscured and lost. Motsapi's physicality, though, provides a dynamic force that exposes the falsities of these imitations. The reader can experience the actual realities of life and not the hyper-real representations abounding in society and disseminated by corrupted elites. Hyper-real portrayals of the Rainbow Nation see a facile pluralism where individuals, previously placed into discrete groups of race or culture, now interact on a common footing. Motsapi, like Rampolokeng, disputes such portrayals and alternatively creates "the 'human' [as] a space intersected by material constraints and subject to the manipulations of the powerful" (Sole 2008: 153).

The human constructed as a subject feeds into Motsapi's dialogues with spirituality and dreaming. The poetic voice is often that of a lone male acted upon by powerful consumer forces who seeks to preserve the spirituality of his own culture against the inauthentic representations that dominate the global marketplace. Authentic cultural idioms are further analysed in religious terms. Biblical lexis is frequently mixed with that of the spiritual world. Not just used to enhance the poetry's sense sensations, Motsapi offers a more considered approach and warns against what Chrisman terms the "false redemptionism of messianism" (1996: 33), which characterises prevailing attitudes towards African culture. Motsapi warns against the power of dreaming. Dreams may allow for the return of African history and idiom but there is a danger they will not keep hold of their essence. Dreams give and take. This paradox is analogous to the utopian dreams held during transition expressed in *Earthstepper's* final poem 'river robert':

i have one eye full of dreams & hintentions
the other is full of broken mirrors

& cracked churchbells

i have one eye full of rivers & welcomes

the other is full of flickers & fades (l. 14-8).

Motsapi is unable to offer a definitive route out of society's problems. Utopian South Africa remains a possibility but its realisation has retreated and become less tangible. Motsapi reminds readers that the possibility of history repeating is very much alive, as conjured by the image of the broken mirror. Broken mirrors do not stop reflecting but rather present a distorted image with cracks in new places. The most obvious new crack is economic. But rupture has also surfaced between a previously united ANC and its African constituency. Motsapi speaks of leaders and their "bleeding triggah of lies / that quiets the poor" ('soffly soffly nesta skank' l. 16-7). Moreover, wordplay announces the advent of "politshams" ('soffly soffly nesta skank' l. 14) who play "politricks" ('drum intervention' l. 23) on the poor. The latter portmanteau is direct reference to Mickey Smith's 'Me Cyaan Believe It', an expression of outrage towards the ghettos in Kingston, London. While Smith attacked a Conservative government seen at the time as naturally divided from the British poor, Motsapi's anger is directed towards the South African government who have situated themselves as naturally part of the African population and their struggle yet only succeeded in proving their self-interest.

These fissures have reopened questions of identity and Blackness. The New Black Poets show an increasing awareness of the way Blackness is discussed in contemporary society. They reflect concerns that Blackness is now used as a rhetorical and cynical device and not as positive self-affirmation. Mathebe's discussion of Mbeki suggests a presidency determined by

the historical variable of race and firmly rooted in the ANC tradition that stressed loyalty “not only to the nation in crisis [South Africa] but also to the ANC” (2001: 85). Subsequently, these factors combined have changed the deployment of Blackness in official discourse. Race is portrayed as a unifying factor, removing individuality, and suggesting all Africans struggled and lived the same. Fundamentally, Africans are all experiencing discrimination resulting from past racial prejudice. Blackness necessitates a duty of support for the government’s efforts to alleviate inequity and this should override any criticisms. Radicalised rhetoric becomes an attempt to nullify opposition and protect the government’s image. Furthermore, in efforts to quell post-apartheid expressions of “ideological and value differences [Mbeki moved] to impose [the] repetition and ritualisation [of] rituals and values which have in the past kept in check centripetal forces within the ANC” (Mathebe 2001: 86). Old discourses have again become prominent in contemporary debates. Race and racial differences are at the forefront of rhetorical attempts to push through sought changes in government and business. The ‘race card’ is increasingly used, though the frequency with which it is played may be exaggerated (Ndebele 2000).²⁶

Race arguably serves a controlling and silencing purpose both within and without the ANC government. The New Black Poets rally against this usage and seek to return Blackness to a force of inspiration, a means to *do* something not to *get* something. This reassertion is a notable trait throughout *Earthstepper* and is arguably best explored in the powerful and provocative ‘the sun used to be white’. The opening lines -- “now since blkness can be a betrayal or / a shuttling blaze of glory rending the sky” -- can be interpreted as dramatising

²⁶ Antjie Krog’s *A Change of Tongue* dramatises the passions stirred by the race card today: “The new black elites hate it when the debate turns from race to class. They will keep the race issue spinning [...] no matter how strongly they [whites] identify with Africa and all that shit, the black elite will cry race” (2003: 273).

the political divisions within the African population. Read in the context of the poem's latter lines, today's government is criticised as a betrayer contrasted against previous Africanist movements, including Black Consciousness, which sought to elevate the honour of Blackness. Interestingly, the use of "shuttling" reinforces Alistair Sparks's (1990) observation that Africanist movements occurred in a series of reincarnations and decline throughout history.

The major theme of 'the sun used to be white' remains the psychological aspect of a continuing liberation struggle. Blackness is deployed as a loud violent cry, evoked through the noun phrases "razor clamour" (l. 8) and "scared holler" (l. 12). Blackness in the poem tries to reassert African history, challenge the perception that truth is an unchallengeable white product, and prevent the inferiority complex of "inner decay" (l. 8). Oppression is seen as causing a sense of "onelessness" (l. 33). Only through a change of mental attitude may this be challenged. However, there remains a physical and spiritual/religious aspect in the poem. Thus the liberation struggle is one of three dimensions. And these three facets explicitly criticise contemporary South Africa. True democracy is not achieved through appearances or through lame, clichéd rhetoric. Democracy is only achieved when it has depth, something so far lacking. Read no more than the poignant, almost despairing ending:

& though the ocean clamours into a roar

though the waters invoke the drowsy spirit

of thunder

the ocean is very shallow

a time short like loss

a mountain low like hate

the ocean is very shallow (l. 68-74).

6.8 – The Essence of Change: Angifi Dladla

A sense of depth comprises a central motif in Angifi Dladla's poetry. An East Rand poet, playwright and Zulu language teacher, Dladla believes in the healing power of literature and feels "poetry demands a search for the essence of things" (2003: 173). He offers poetry that descends into the depths of individual experience. This is particularly evident in the collection *The Girl Who Then Feared to Sleep*. The decastich 'Song of a fertility doll' that opens the collection is an expression of the innate power within all humans as individuals that remains with them throughout life's journey and drives emotions: "i'm the shadow, I won't drown [...] i'm the shadow that leads" (l. 2-4). Possibly read as an allusion to Psalm 23, the shadow acts as a reassuring, safe presence and also drives connotations of hope and life: there is only shadow where there is light. Furthermore, the unspectacular nature of this essence, its quietness, is reinforced by the sibilance in the superlative phrase "silence of silence" (l. 9) whilst the use of ellipses in ending the poem underscores its indistinguishable quality. Occurring at the start of the collection when images of fertility are conjured, Dladla returns to this essence in the collection's final utterance. When evoking the finality of death in 'Song of the Aged' the gaze is turned inward to that inexhausted light, "but a bright star i hear far, far... / within" (l. 26-7).

By discussing essence, Dladla approaches identity in a manner different to Rampolokeng and Motsapi. Although a Pan Africanist, Dladla's Pan Africanism is one in the widest possible sense that distances itself from race and instead emphasises joint humanity. Thus the unracialised body is a central motif, notwithstanding 'When I Was A Child' and

‘From Sunrise’ where race does explicitly feature. ‘When I Was A Child’ highlights the violence and injustices of white colonial rule. Not confined to the African experience of subjugation, Dladla evokes the white attitude of superiority. Clear, simple lexis makes their superiority appear as unquestionable fact; “their ways / are all superlatives” (l. 25-6). ‘From Sunrise’ similarly contrasts the sharply differing experiences of whites and Africans.

Interestingly, the only explicit mention of race is “whites” (l. 9). This inverts the invisible whiteness of much colonial literature and arguably creates blackness as the norm. However, since the contrast is presented through “shadows” (l. 21), it would seem Africans are still defined in the white image. This is reinforced through the almost mirror reflection of stanza structure where the first discusses the white experience, the second the African. Only two anomalies are present. The first stanza reads,

with glass complexes
caved into mazy bunkers
where escalators shows (l. 6-8).

The second does not have the third clause. It simply reads, “with dusty cul-de-sacs / where death shows” (l. 19-20). The reference to cul-de-sacs connotes the limited possibilities and room for expansion that hampers the African population. A second anomaly occurs in the final lines of each stanza. The second shows an extra instance of enjambment that does not exist in the first: “with their apprentices / eat and eat and eat...” (l. 12-3) compared to

with their paws
carry blood and

curses.... (l. 24-6).

Aside from the portrayal of whites, in the first stanza, as active and Africans subsequently as mere subjects burdened to carry, there is an alternative reading denoted by the choice of “curses”. It acts in one regard as a noun, the subject of an evil affliction. But, because it is offset onto a separate line, there is the possibility of it being deployed as a verb. The African population can find their voice and curse or afflict evil on another. These alternative readings differentiate between the past/present and future. Moreover, the use of the past tense throughout ‘When I Was A Child’ emphasises a degree of similarity between the races that now exists. Therefore Dladla’s practices his assertion, “I am not dealing with race – but with humanity and bodies” (2003: 181). Support can be found elsewhere. Bodies are discussed through the fundamentals of human existence and not through physical differences. Consider ‘Rotting’, ‘The Dead’ and ‘Our Bodies’ where, importantly, each is characterised by the use of the first person plural pronoun.

Dladla’s meditations on humanity are made accessible by language. The English is strikingly simple, something that also characterises his Zulu language poetry, and attests to his desire to allow the audience to associate absolutely with the content. Paradoxically, this simplicity works against the complex subject matter and Dladla’s search for the essence of humanity, which is perhaps beyond the limit of words. However, the simple language again encapsulates the New Black Poets’ intent to “show those things beneath our noses that we are perhaps afraid to see” (Dladla qtd. McGrane 2006: n.pag). Although concentrating on similarity and humanity not race and difference, Dladla deserves a place within this new genre of provocation and criticism.

In many ways this style is the most apt continuation of the political and protest genre into contemporary South African literature. Dladla's is a brave protest on a global scale that confronts many issues facing global society. 'Tomorrow' acts as a prophetic warning of global troubles in "africa, asia, europe, america / and all the islands" (l. 6-7). These are not just warnings against empty government rhetoric and violence but also concern widespread inequality in food distribution, deforestation, education, resource allocation, access to technologies and medicines, and the place of history. Dladla is powerfully suggesting fallibility and warning against the current lack of concern:

"oh gods!" i'll cry, "disarm the son of man
before his fear explodes; remind him
of who he really is" tomorrow
i'll fly out of my ... body (l. 27-30).

Although the chief concern expressed in the collection is directed at global politics, Dladla is far from blind to the local concerns expressed by other poets. Like all New Black poetry, *The Girl Who Then Feared to Sleep* voices doubts over the state of the Rainbow Nation and warns against the present ANC government revisiting the policies of history. Dladla writes simply in 'The Building, the Weapon and the Way', "the way you are, is the way he was" (l. 7). A style less confrontational and a politics more embracing, his protest is just as visible, just as ominous.

6.9 – Precise Pain: Mxolisi Nyezwa

The youngest of the New Black Poets considered here, Mxolisi Nyezwa holds the bleakest view of South Africa. He sees a country and world heading for disaster and believes “reality is a big lie” (2008: 20). Yet despite this bleakness, his protest, and the limited critical attention he has received, an enduringly stunning beauty and poignancy runs continuously through his three collections of poetry. And his skill at combining the “infinitely human [and the] justly angry” (Allen 2012: n.pag) makes it possible to draw comparisons across the Atlantic to the poetry of Cesar Vallejo, who is a clear influence.

These parallels are best explored through Nyezwa’s use of imagery. Following Vallejo’s sense of precision and innovation, Nyezwa applies a deftness of touch to the images that makes “things become intensely real [and] rendered brutally potent” (Allen 2012: n.pag). Their presentation is rarely linear and at times surrealist. In what Berold privately termed the “new aesthetic of the elusive image”, a single image is briefly presented before another is immediately conjured. This lack of progression and completeness creates an instability and uncertainty that reflects Nyezwa’s personal apprehension. The individual existence has been rendered fragmentary. In his own words, “the way things are, we are all just hanging on to pieces of meaning. We don’t see the bigger picture yet. When we see clearly we’ll all be caught off-guard” (2008: 25).

One recurring image is the sea. Informed by the coastline of the Eastern Cape where he lives in New Brighton, the sea has become a constant companion in both his life and poetry. The image works to inform a sense of man’s powerlessness and his blindness towards it. Gabea Baderoon (2009) speaks of the sea in Nyezwa’s earlier works acting as a portrayal of memory’s heavy and intimate presence within us because of the oppressive weight and force

of rolling waves that control our movements. Meanwhile, in his most recent collection *Malikhanye*, a dedication to his late infant son who died in 2007, the sea is dealt with in an increasingly existential way. In the final poem, and suggesting the unending movements of the tides, the sea is evoked in the questioning of life. Why do hardships continually permeate our lives?

i want to know how the sea flows
how the winds blow
and how love is abandoned
why things have to happen like this
oh! so over and over again (l. 12-6).

Elsewhere, the sea symbolises solitude and alienation. It is a tool to discuss the depths of the human condition and of society. In 'From a Blue Container in Motherwell', Nyezwa writes of himself as "a shadow / in a blue ship" (l. 5-6) before evoking the sea to criticise the failure of social change beyond surface appearances. Nyezwa writes with immediate and declarative certainty:

now i understand the world
i know the world is shallow
with its own fine sea
with its water and minerals
and so little has changed (l. 7-11).

Absent change is also suggested through the central image of “a burning sea” in a poem of the same title. The reality of contemporary life lies between two extremes,

there’s a world of beginnings
and a world of endings
and for everyone else
a burning sea (l. 1-4).

Arguably evoking the interregnum, Nyezwa criticises transition and the lack of change. Despite appearances, very few improvements have occurred,

suddenly everything falls into place
all my aching agonies
hurry up to nothing (l. 6-8).

Referring back to the peace negotiations that occurred between “brothers from one world to another” (l. 12), Nyezwa remains disappointed. Only “the fortunate ones are fully empowered” (l. 14). Others remain unsure.

Such a view expands the one Nyezwa expressed a decade earlier in ‘Things Change’, a lyric poem from his debut collection *Song Trials*. Here, the sense of apprehension is just as tangible. There is uncertainty about what change brings and a stark warning of renewed troubles. This prophecy is suggested by the alternating repetition that takes place between “it will be a totally new experience” and “it will be a totally new suffering”. Nonetheless, ‘Things Change’ does not see Nyezwa’s poetic beauty depart. He evokes deep pathos by

writing of the new suffering as failure but perhaps one born from love and misplaced optimism:

it will be like a song sung free
from a careless heart
(our failure will have its dignity)" (l. 20-2).

Nyezwa combines political prophecy with affection and personal emotional suffering. 'Things Change' is one of the first examples and his latest collection progresses this combination to a new intensity. *Malikhanye* is inescapably haunting: a collection of foreboding, despair, and affliction; it is similarly powerfully poignant and evocative. It combines political comment with deeply personal grief whilst featuring both introspective, ordinary values alongside the universal. Rendered with a stunning precision, these features again speak to Vallejo's influence and create a beauty that could burn the page. Such precision is emphasised by his word's duality in purpose. They simultaneously appeal to the political and spiritual; to both poles of previously accepted binaries. Therefore he liberates language from the constraints of labelling and achieves a poetic freedom so ironically juxtaposed against the confined and oppressive social reality he depicts.

6.10 – Something Apart

Breyten Breytenbach's *Dog Heart* contains a most insightful warning: "when the tree of writing is shaken all manner of things come crashing down" (1999: 9). South Africa's transition proved Breytenbach correct. As *The Cambridge History of South African Literature*

reveals, writers questioned how they could write the interregnum and how they could rewrite the nation. Should they be writing at all? The tree was truly shaken. What fell down was a new literary politics that surrounded the place of politics in art. Theoretically, politics deserved a place but one alongside other considerations, the ordinary, and the imagination. A national literature could perhaps be achieved. In practice, politics and art became increasingly centralised. A polite attitude towards authority stunted much poetic writing and its associated criticism while a decline in independent publishers arguably led merely to a mediocre standard.

The New Black Poets have been caught within this new literary politics and, giving their attention to the scar of transition and not the healing, remain excluded and ignored. Their content is not centralised with the elites and instead speaks of ordinary people. The New Black Poets show, and adapting Gordimer's words to a new context, "the poor are still there, round the corner. But they are not the Outcast ... They count" (qtd. Brink 1994: 52). Perhaps, as far as official recognition goes, this is their undoing. Not embracing the Rainbow Nation myth, their poetry shows how division and struggle remain prominent in South Africa. Moreover, they show the impossibilities of writing from different subject positions and the difficulties in achieving true national unity. However, their dedication to the quotidian is one way in which they do meet many demands faced by new writers and illustrate aspects of a national literature. Their politics is unmistakable but so are their aesthetics; they appreciate imagination and speak of the ordinary. Finally, they are not rooted in colonial style discussions of their African history and attempts to reclaim it. Undoubtedly present but less obvious they meet Biko's claims that African culture can comfortably stay with other cultures. Such is the comfort, New Black Poetry creates other international channels of influence. Therefore can it perhaps be said that Black Consciousness poetry has gone

someway to fulfilling the ideology's view of a national literature? The fruit that has fallen from the tree Breytenbach describes may not be the ripe one so optimistically imagined but that does not necessarily mean something that survives and grows cannot still be born.

Chapter 7: By Way of Conclusion

Somewhere on the Distant Horizon we can see the Glittering Prize

Speaking in 1973, Steve Biko announced a mission to bestow on South Africa a more human face from whose mouth the idioms of African and Western culture issued equally comfortably. Black Consciousness sought to collapse the either/or binary favoured by the oppressive apartheid regime. A completely new situation would be created that did not simply invert this binary by advocating the complete removal of a western presence. Black Consciousness likewise resisted the restoration of a purely African culture and argued, although neither would be idealized, both cultures would be accommodated and respected. Biko termed the realisation of this new national culture a glittering prize evident somewhere on the distant horizon. Thirty years later, has this horizon finally arrived?

7.1 - Reaching a National Culture

The glittering prize would not be achieved in an instant. However, Biko's approach had been proved plausible because his vision was contained within Black Consciousness's approach to the English language. Not a language paradox -- reasons for its use have been comprehensively explored throughout this study -- English was a valid medium provided it lived with and alongside Africa. The movement admitted a concern with the loss of African languages but equally wrote Africa into their English. Yet the question remained: could this success be continued with language and was it translatable into the wider arena of culture?

Black Consciousness's formulation of a national culture was the final step on a long road of struggle that had first required all the oppressed people of South Africa to fully

understand their situation, reclaim self-confidence, and take pride in their culture. Only then could they loudly and assertively proclaim their identity and forge the new situation. As Chapter 2 sketched, Biko's mission could therefore be broadly read alongside Fanon's stages of progression towards a national literature, especially given Black Consciousness's selective use of theory. This study's middle chapters used this matrix but similarly illustrated Fanon's limitations, due in part to the literature's deep-rooted nature within South Africa's prevailing political discourses. These perhaps offer a more intricate guide to literary development (Chapter 3).

Black Consciousness was first articulated through the voice of Soweto Poetry. This by no means should be completely overlaid onto Fanon's national stage. If read simply, the lyrical form used by Serote, highly reminiscent of Wordsworth and other Romantics, could be seen as the borrowed aesthetics Fanon spoke. Moreover Sepamla, after being schooled on Shakespeare and English laureates, perhaps produced a poetry conceived under the foreign style education Fanon claimed marked the national stage. Such assertions are, however, untenable. Cheryl-Ann Michael and Sarah Nuttall's (2000) recent edited collection has intricately explored the intimate and complex connections between Western and African cultures in South Africa. Thus suggestions of a foreign education or borrowed aesthetics rely on dichotomies that, despite attempts by the apartheid state, do not easily match the reality Soweto Poetry was rooted within.

Numerous other differences also separate this group of poets from Fanon's matrix. While the Soweto Poets were united in a return to their history and people, as Fanon writes, this was done through an active presence and urgency provoked in the *Staffrider* generation by the 1970s struggle climate. For many critics, this saw deterioration in quality and the rise of anti-poetics. Chapter 4 illustrated the opposite. Soweto Poetry, from Serote and Ndebele's

refined verse, through Sepamla's wit and ironic musings, to Matthews's anguished utterings was concerned with style and aesthetics. But the poetic form was adapted to a situation where anger and dissatisfaction were paramount. This shaped the poets' use of dominant cultural modes, as did their successful integration of a critically explored African culture and history. Neither idealized nor faultless, African cultural idioms were desired and asserted through their implicit incorporation into form, imagery, and language. Several subtle variations of approach were taken but Soweto Poetry succeeded in creating a mutual place for different cultures and continuing to give lie to apartheid sponsored binaries.

The Soweto Poets announced an anger that fuelled a younger generation's turn towards revolution. Culture remained at the forefront of this political change. Theatre and poetry were taken by the people to inspire the people. Rooted in the trade unions and the bottom-up approach the UDF adopted towards activism, culture arguably no longer focused solely on the present. In keeping with the literary culture produced outside South Africa yet brought inside through the *Medu Arts Ensemble Newsletter*, poetry and theatre continued to express a fundamental concern with African history and idioms and how these could be brought forward successfully. Displayed prominently in performance, they were explicitly married with other forms rather than the more implicit associations of a decade earlier. And the very nature of performance became a direct comment on the future. Temporarily appropriating space for assertions of African independence, ordinary working people joined in with linguistic and physical rehearsals of liberation. Fanon's third, fighting phase of liberation was clearly evinced in 1980s South Africa: culture became the mouthpiece of a new reality in action.

Broadly grouped, Black Consciousness writings from the 1970s and 1980s have shown African literature to be progressing through the stages towards a national literature.

Although the balance has changed, throughout this period the writers considered have constantly shown an ability to write between African and Western cultures and not accept either as an absolute. Liberation and national culture may therefore be seen as just one step away. However, as Chapters 2 and 5 illustrated, after the decline of Black Consciousness as a visible identity, the 1980s were beset by difficulties in finding one direction to follow. This simultaneously increased political splits that damaged the possibility of obtaining a national culture.

7.2 – Making a National Culture

It has been shown how Black Consciousness's vision of a national culture differed significantly from the postcolonial state Fanon advocated. This is despite similar routes of progression. Yet several mutual points of reference, some also shared with liberation thinkers from across the African continent, would have to be present if South Africans were to be united in a truly national state. Fanon's argument resonates with the new literary politics introduced during the transition by Ndebele and Sachs. Not completely abandoning previous styles of writing, a national literature would be marked by imagination and invention. Many forms and many styles would need to permeate the canon. Moreover, as Fanon wanted the emphasis on the individual, Ndebele advocated the quotidian and a focus on the everyday lives of ordinary citizens. National literature should move away from elitist representations, thus agreeing with Karen Press's observations that national culture be relevant: "*it is* important that people should see their own world depicted in art produced by and for them" (1990: 29. Original emphasis).

Press continues to write of a society that does not ape “an inappropriate model imported from elsewhere [while the indigenous] should not [...] find its place simply because it is indigenous” (1990: 29-30). Black Consciousness thought supports both aspects of Press’s statement. Thus this belief marks the point where comparisons with Fanon’s postcolonial literature must end. While Fanon believed in a complete retreat from Western values, Biko adopted a more confident approach that, admittedly emphasising African values, did so in order to support a belief in modern African culture’s ability to sit alongside. His was a national culture that saw differences maintained but not used for entrenching racist and ethnic divisions. Implicitly noting the natural evolution of ‘traditions’ and attesting to the intellectual nature of his movement, Biko saw that cultural variations need not always be divisive and could be claimed by all (see also Alexander 1985). Writing from the interstitial, through appropriation and syncretism, would become empowering. As Edward Said (1983) observed a decade after Biko’s remarks, “we have also to remember that hybridity and cultural borrowing are in one sense at least both a fact of intellectual life and generally an enabling condition” (qtd. Al-Abbood 2012: 129). But, despite its plausibility and benefits, “such an identity can only be forged over a long period of time” (Press 1990: 323).

Some South African writing has finally forged this identity. The New Black Poets (Chapter 6) have in large parts responded to the demands of a national culture, the new literary politics after transition, and sought to re-imbue a sense of Black Consciousness positivity into the meaning of Blackness. Their writing remains profoundly political but is politics recast in a new guise. It is often not spectacular. The voices of ordinary people, those so often unheard, are unmistakable in a poetry that highlights the daily features of life: love, death, religion, the township, and hardships of (un)employment. Moreover, political comment is made through several lenses. Mxolisi Nyezwa roots political protest through a deep

personal and emotional intensity, fuelled in his last collection by his own private grief. On the opposite extreme Angifi Dladla encapsulates South African political struggles within an international framework. These divergent lenses illustrate New Black Poetry's exploitation of sliding scales of geography, temporality, and physicality. The content is simultaneously local, for example Nyezwa's is rooted intensely within New Brighton while Rampolokeng speaks explicitly of Soweto, especially during apartheid. However, the poetic forms speak to literatures across the African Diaspora and liberation cultures from the Caribbean and Latin America. Through these locations all the poets considered speak of African history, contemporary society, and a concern with how these will be evoked and interact with imported forms in the future. Motsapi's meditations on music are a leading example, where a tension over physicality is also displayed. A very physical technique breaks through the official rhetoric Motsapi writes against but this co-exists alongside the ephemeral and a sense of dreaming. Similarly, Rampolokeng's verse is full of intense images of physical violence, often sexual. Contrastingly, Nyezwa's use of the elusive image connotes impermanence. Dreams and hopes lost just as they are realised. This sliding scale of physicality is perhaps the leading aspect of their oeuvre. It allows explicit comment on permanence as New Black Poetry attacks the façade of the Rainbow Nation. The elites conjure romantic projections of a life and history glimpsed only fleetingly. The masses suffer struggles that seem unlikely to be lifted.

7.3 – A Shared Horizon?

New Black Poetry in many ways fulfils the requirements of Black Consciousness's national culture. Writers have established a critical relationship between their art and their cultures,

histories, and literary forms. They have faced up to numerous challenges of the transition period and shifted away from explicit and clichéd political polemics to more varied forms embracing the quotidian and focusing on the internal human experience. Yet the political project has not been completely abandoned. Artists have maintained an analytical and political gaze seeking to explode the illusions of government rhetoric. With a range of themes and styles with “a refreshing absence of stereotypes” (Manus 2011: 203) some contemporary literature is still engaged with a quest for truth and, acting upon Andre Brink’s declarations, refusing “to avoid what is, by offering a substitute or palliative” (1983: 221). There is South African writing that is relevant, national, and writes what matters.

But this is not to say the distant horizon Biko spoke so passionately about has been reached. The previous pages have applied Black Consciousness ideology to a collection of poetry and theatre that can all be conceived as distinctly Black Consciousness. This focus on a singular group narrative was necessitated by a desire to show the nuances of incremental development and a reticence in applying literary analysis to translated material. Further work is needed in establishing whether Biko’s distant horizon is indeed an aspiration shared by others within South Africa. This is research that would be both fruitful and valid. The Black Consciousness theoretical framework applied here is applicable to the writings of other demographics and it can be postulated that parallels exist between demographics as their separate narratives unfold. Moreover, there also appears to be a similar desire to exhibit a range of cultures equally alongside each other. Indeed a wide range of contemporary authors express concerns and criticisms matching those of New Black Poetry.

Two bodies of literature arguably provide the most interesting sites of comparison and demand the attention studies such as this provide. Coloured Afrikaans language poetry has frequently gone unnoticed in many studies of South African literature, with the exemption of

work by Hein Willemsse (1990) in particular. Historically this oeuvre provides an interesting counterpoint to the linguistic rehearsal of national culture undertaken by Black Consciousness. Coloured writers, most notably Adam Small, reverted back to their Afrikaans mother-tongue because of the Black Consciousness influence despite their initial rejection of it in favour of English. And language tension has remained a focal point of a poetry that continues to work out how to reconcile itself to the white Afrikaans establishment whilst simultaneously harmonising this with African culture. Ronelda Kamfer's 'Noudat slapende honde' has directly attacked white South African hypocrisy for now wanting to "embrace and accept her" (Crous 2009: 207) when she was previously rejected by the old establishment despite the fact:

I speak your language

I eat your food

I live in your fatherland

I drink your wine

I sing your songs

Commentaries by Crous (2009) and Viljoen (2012) explore poetry that does express the very real possibility of reconciliation between the Coloured population and Afrikaner establishment. Diane Ferrus is seen as just one poet who dwells on the positives of the Afrikaans language being simultaneously rooted in Africa, indigenous San cultures, and wider European experiences. Clinton du Plessis occupies the other extreme. He feels the Coloured population "have no future" (2009: n.pag). They remain "the minor people in the major language" (2012: n.pag), a language to which Du Plessis appears in 'Die Taal' to have

difficulties abandoning despite his failure to be accepted by those who speak it. Interestingly, in parallel to New Black Poetry, it is possible to explore his disenchantment through publishing. He has independently published his last two collections of poetry as an act of defiance against larger publishers who preserve a white narrative and limit the output of Coloured writers.

Besides language, Coloured Afrikaans poetry has also attempted to place formerly competing cultures alongside each other through a turn to the archive and a rise of biography. These critical expressions of history show an attempt to reaffirm certain aspects of Afrikaner pride whilst simultaneously re-establishing links to Africa, particularly, the San culture, and undoing the ideological assumptions of the past Afrikaner hegemony. By writing to both preserve and dissect (Viljoen 2012), Coloured Afrikaans poetry is managing to give equal validity to different cultures, suggesting a similar realisation of Biko's distant horizon. Given their situation within but also without both the white establishment and Black Consciousness ideology at differing points in recent history, an historical analysis of Coloured literature using the methodology employed in this thesis would be insightful.

The other notable site of comparison lies with African literatures in African languages, which arguably need to be treated as distinctly separate narratives. Current literature all too frequently offers master narratives of African language literature and, although there are broad similarities in some aspects of their development, this approach fails to note the nuance and variations that do undoubtedly occur between them. Zulu literature remains one of the larger bodies of writing and is re-imagining some of the deep tensions currently affecting Zulu society (Mhlambi 2008; Mathonsi 2009). Contemporary authors are seen to be working on different strategies to celebrate the achievements of transition without ignoring the continuing imbalances and problems affecting society. In direct comparison to New Black

Poetry there is a desire by some writers to verbalise taboo and explore a “sense of political betrayal by the ANC” (Mhlambi 2008: 7), though some critics observe of the larger collective a “trend for embarrassing political correctness” (Maake 2000: 151). Moreover, a desire to offer all cultures an equal place at the table is seemingly paramount. This comes about most notably through explorations of the once dominant construction that saw praise of the traditional rural environment and lamented the corrupting influences of the urban areas. An alternative is being considered where it is now the city and townships that are home to countless vibrant cultural and economic opportunities. No longer is the city apartheid’s horrid endpoint. Instead, it is the conservative rural home that is criticised for holding back an upwardly mobile youth and preventing a necessary refashioning of dominant Zulu values.

These broad trends, albeit they undoubtedly require deeper probing, suggest why a more comprehensive analysis of these literatures using a Black Consciousness framework would be worthwhile. Current depictions of the fluid and complex cultural connections that have so long abounded in the urban environment draw on beliefs similar to those Biko had concerning modern African culture. Second, the tendency to explore ‘traditional’ concepts of ethnic nationalism, especially pertinent in Zulu literature, offers the chance to discuss contrasting approaches to African culture taken by Black Consciousness, the ANC and the IFP respectively. These have so far only received fleeting mention (Chapter 5). Such a project would also necessitate an understanding of the longstanding African language literary traditions that run parallel to the Black Consciousness narrative. Reasons why the writers considered in this thesis did not choose this alternative have been explored. But this is not to deny traditions that did exist, or construct them purely as a backdrop to English language literature. There was awareness of these literary histories by Black Consciousness writers and similar work should be done in examining them, given that the range of work would be too

great to be included in this present study. Furthermore, such histories would provide illuminating comments on the Black Consciousness narrative and ideological framework. Alternative literatures suggest similar concerns and styles are being expressed by different demographics. Understanding these routes of progression will both greatly enhance our understanding of undoubtedly nuanced histories and show the very real possibility that Black Consciousness's hope in a distant horizon is shared by others. If so, a national literature may ultimately prove possible.

7.4 – An Unassailable Paradox

The conclusion that South Africa exhibits a national culture would perhaps be the most satisfying that could be drawn from this study. It clearly has its merits. However, despite recent attempts by literary scholars to package the country's literature in this manner -- Attwell and Attridge's *The Cambridge History of South African Literature* being the most recent attempt -- this conclusion is naïve. Sadly, the story is not so simple. Leon de Kock observed a decade ago:

Introductions to South African literary culture conceived as one entity have a peculiar trademark. They apologise for attempting to do the impossible and then go ahead anyway (2001: 263).

This summary has found a similar impossibility. By revealing the marginalisation felt by contemporary writers who have paraded a quality national literature, it can be seen how the political arena has fatally undermined the literary project. This new writing is centred on an

ambivalence about both the current administration and its officially sponsored literature that does not write nationally and from within difference in the same way. Much new writing has not been accepted by the establishment or been allowed any avenues of official promotion.¹ A new division has emerged that has prevented the national literature in South Africa from being constructed as South Africa's national literature.

The paradox shows few signs of being solved. This study's final pages will briefly return to two themes encountered in the preliminary chapters, publication and education, and begin to look forward. Crucial to any literary project, they are in a condition that suggests that, unfortunately, Biko's dream remains a glittering prize somewhere on the distant horizon. While there may be a national literature, currently it is not one founded on respect or resting in comfort.

7.5 – Publishing in Crisis

Chapter 3 was premised on the integral role of publishing in shaping the future of South Africa's literary culture. In a country where art and politics have been so entwined as to be almost inseparable, the publishing industry's role as mediator has been paramount. In particular, any profound changes in the direction of a literature have come first from independent companies and radical journals. *The Classic*, *Staffrider*, and Ravan Press are all conclusive examples. Each stage of progression cited above has been led from content first appearing in these or similar publications. The final move to a national literature needs the

¹ Katie Reid (2012) has rightly observed how this problem has intensified recently with the Brett Murray Case and the new Secrecy Bill. These threaten to quieten literature and artists.

same oppositional platform that, in a South African setting, has historically and continues to be best provided by independents.

Alan Finlay wrote, “the end of apartheid heralded a surge in independent literary publishing activities in South Africa” (2010: 167). Citing *Kotaz* and *Timbila* as examples, it is indeed possible to reference about twelve independent English language publications that have credible readership.² This, though, should not hide the crisis in publishing that undoubtedly exists. Despite initial government support through the NAC and Arts and Culture Trust, seeing “political dissent effectively receive state sanction” (Finlay 2010: 168), independent publishers now struggle to survive on individual financial backing, borrowed equipment, and even subterfuge.³ Furthermore, commercial booksellers shun their publications in favour of recognised companies.

It is in the mainstream where the onus clearly lies. These companies frequently assert this situation aids literature. Admittedly, the associated processes of conglomeration are occurring worldwide, particularly in European and American markets, where there has been limited impact on quality. Indeed, it may even aid the publication of ‘risky’ literatures. As a representative of Kwela Books observed of their employer, if the work proves a commercial failure then the losses can be offset by gains made elsewhere within the larger NB Publishing community. Yet this takes place only occasionally. Commercial interests mean tried and tested literatures are favoured for publication.

Despite pledges by New Africa Books, Jacana, Umuzi, and others to encourage new voices and challenging conversations, this has not become a widespread trend. Established

² These are *Botsotso*, *Carapace*, *Chimurenga*, *Incwadi*, *Green Dragon*, *Itch*, *Jungle Jim*, *Ons Klyntji*, *New Coin*, *New Contrast* and *Donga*.

³ Mxolisi Nyezwa, the editor of *Kotaz*, describes how early production saw him “prowl like an injured animal [...] hanging around the corridors waiting for the right time to enter the labs disguised as [a] student to gain access, and use a computer” (qtd. Finlay 2009).

authors dominate the shelves and the themes are limited. Inspirational ‘self-help’ narratives, political biographies, crime, and romance novels lead the way. For example, Sapphire Press was recently founded to publish English language romance directed towards the emergent black, predominantly urban, female market. These genres do make a valuable contribution; romance in particular has been cited by Stephen Gray as an intrinsic form in establishing a new literature because, Gray suggests, it “recurs, as Lukacs says, at times of upheaval and is [...] a lively forum, especially for younger readers” (2001: 28). However, as has proved the case, the proliferation of these titles has established a few select names and entrenched a formulaic, stagnant content.

More needs to be done to increase diversity and facilitate the demands of a national literature. Nhlanhla Maahe has spoken of the need to introduce abridged and serialised works to attract new readers (2000: 153), Stephen Gray of embracing an epistolary style because it is closest to the method of African story telling (2001: 28), and J. M. Coetzee of novels that “demythologise history [and] work [themselves] out outside the terms [of conflict]” (*Weekly Mail* 1987). Furthermore, mainstream published novels appear to continually neglect the local and deny the ordinary a chance to speak. The Hillbrow genre is, admittedly, one style that has found publication and reveals the successes of literature that allows the reader to touch, smell and hear the local in all its distasteful glory. Publishers need to abandon what Gary Cummiskey, editor of the independent Dye Hard Press, has called their maintained “colonial mindset [believing] it’s local so it’s shit” (qtd. Finlay 2010: 172).

Feeding into concerns over South Africa’s current literary mediocrity raised in the early stages of Chapter 6, similar accusations can be levelled at criticism. Not only offering polite formulations there has been a marked turn to the global. Both Michael Chapman and Robert Berold, who arguably approach criticism from opposite perspectives, have relayed

concerns in interview over the continual use of overarching references to global concerns and theories. Furthermore, the language of philosophy has replaced the language of literature in literary criticism and Kelwyn Sole amongst others has been left advocating a return of aesthetics and the local to analysis. Apartheid lent itself to a self-centred literature and criticism; a national literature needs to speak from within difference. The local should not replace the global, nor is that advocated here, but criticism and literature need to appeal not only to the international or African experience but also to the uniquely South African experience.

Criticism needs to change direction. Again, Chapter 3 showed the willingness of independents and alternatives to ask these questions and advocate new paths. Yet their growth has been hindered by economic arguments and commercial viability. Similar financial concerns are also evident in the prohibitive cost of books. Nielson Bookscan SA (2010), the statistical provider used by most leading publishers, reveals that by 2009 there had been just under a thirteen percent rise in book cost since 2006, from an average price of ZAR 109.62 to ZAR 124.25. Such prices are justified by unavoidable small print runs and the need to price competitively against the large amount of internationally sourced material. Imports constitute over half of the books sold nationally (Reid 2012). Yet these prices remain out of the range of most. This speaks particularly to the racial and ethnic divisions still present in literature. Literature in Afrikaans is thriving whilst African language literature is not because of differences in their core readers' disposable income. This inequality has been enhanced through the prominence of NP Publishers, a bastion of apartheid, and currently the largest publishing conglomerate.

Cost is not necessarily the main reason behind the apparent lack of reading culture in South Africa. Justice Malala, writing in *The Times* on 7 May 2012, apportioned blame to

Bantu Education and the consequent poor levels of literacy. He wrote, “[Verwoerd] succeeded beyond his wildest dreams. That is why we have few buyers and readers of books”. A riposte was issued two days later by Goodenough Mashego in the same paper who instead pointed to a problem of values and “misplaced priorities”. Arguing books are no longer valued to the same degree as other consumer items, Mashego observed the need for reading to be given more room in contemporary discourse. Both standpoints are valid. However, many respect literature. Conscious efforts are being made to increase readership through libraries and reading centres in schools, community halls, and even prisons (Mathonsi 2009: 305). Meanwhile, literature festivals are common and frequently sell out, for example the annual Melville Poetry Festival. It is books that do not sell, not literature.⁴

The Internet has been advocated as a medium that will avoid these problems and allow new literatures to address South Africans directly. Online fiction and criticism sites are indeed successful. But writers remain fiercely committed to print. As Finlay summaries,

The choice of print, in other words, implies not only a desire to access readers and to be a part of the mainstream, but a willingness to contest the deeper historical contours and characteristics of the publishing field (2010: 175).

This all speaks to a serious publishing crisis. There is a national literature present in South Africa but it is hidden. Overlooked by mainstream publishers, the narrow-minded motivations of the ANC government and its ‘deployees’, the serious decline in independents means a

⁴ The desire for books and reading is evinced through the success of schemes such as School Aid, an English charity that provides books and libraries for township schools. Children are appreciative and one student rapped a thank you message. The video can be accessed at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tWhdIAqkGs4>.

national literature remains some way from being realised. Andries Oliphant is not wrong in stressing the necessity of the publishing industry asserting “its independence [...] to fulfil its role as the primary supplier of ideas, information and criticism” (2000: 122).

7.6 – Education in Crisis

Questions over values and reading culture relate to how they were prioritised during schooling, while the high cost of book publication, especially in African languages, has similarly been felt in education. Consequently, troubles in publishing are inextricably linked to the situation in education. Unfortunately, this is a domain experiencing a very similar crisis. To use the words of Professor Jonathan Jansen, the Vice-Chancellor at Free State University and Chairman of the Ministerial Committee on Further Education and Training, speaking at a leadership roundtable on education in May 2012 at the University of the Witwatersrand: “the train crash is coming”. Such a prediction is ominous for South Africa’s ability to establish a national culture. Chapter 1 outlined the destabilising effects educational changes had on South African society during apartheid. And these changes were fundamental to the establishment of Black Consciousness and Biko’s mission, which is to some extent continuing to be undermined by educational uncertainty. In particular, issues surrounding textbook provision and the apparent lack of respect afforded to linguistic and cultural diversity are the most urgent.

South Africa’s education system is still scarred by racial divisions. The 2011 Census revealed seventy-six percent of white children completed high school compared to just thirty-two and a half percent of Africans. This imbalance is further reflected in the curriculum. The average pass mark in English and Afrikaans lies between fifty-five and sixty-five percent.

Meanwhile, it is only thirty-five percent in African languages; a result that barely constitutes a pass.⁵ The same students and the same languages as under apartheid are again being devalued, despite contemporary education being founded on a complete rejection of Bantu Education. Perhaps an anonymous member of the British Council was correct in suggesting ANC education policy after apartheid threw the baby out with the bathwater? Hermann Giliomee (2012a; 2012b) has sought to note some of the needed reforms Verwoerd's education policy introduced. Elsewhere, Stephen Mulholland's column in *Business Day* on 10 March 2013 criticised ANC policy for failing to recognise and build on the successful aspects of apartheid education, especially those reserved for white children.⁶

The principal change is evident in language-in-education policies, which is also arguably born from a necessity for South Africa to compete in a globalised international environment. Colonial Africa has been dogged by discussions trying to reconcile UNESCO and academic insistence on mother-tongue medium of instruction with pressure, usually parental, to use the former colonial language and 'join' modernity (Brock-Utne 2001). Specific to South Africa though is the ANC's reaction to history. Much to the dismay of experts, including Neville Alexander, mother-tongue instruction has been stigmatised by its use in Bantu Education. The mother-tongues fundamentally have a "bad image" (Granville 1998: 131) and are tinged with divisive connotations (Chick 2002). English, meanwhile, has been constructed as the language of ethnic reconciliation so necessitated in the classroom and become the dominant medium. Introduced as First Additional Language in Grade 3, although

⁵ A pass or 'elementary achievement' as termed in official discourse is 33.3%. Simon Howell (2013) has called this a mediocre mark in a mediocre certificate, "a simple and complete failure".

⁶ The extent to which Bantu Education differs from today's education is the principal point of discussion in Kallaway's *Education After Apartheid* (1997).

sometimes earlier (Lafon 2009: 10), English replaces the mother-tongue, in African schools, as MoI from Grade 4 onwards.

This synopsis is accepted at most institutions although it does run contrary to some aspects of the National Curriculum Statement (NCS) as identified in a 2009 review (see Dada et al). The NCS stated English as subject should be introduced in Grade 1 and that in both intermediate and foundation phases all children should be given opportunity to speak in both their Home Language, or mother-tongue, and English. However, neither stipulation has been fully implemented because of differences in provincial policy and confusion over the policy document that only referred to three learning programmes -- assumed as Home Language, Mathematics and Life Skills -- with no specification of how language should be used in each. Moreover, proposals suggesting mother-tongue instruction should be continued until Grade 6 have been handicapped, the 2009 report notes, by the failure to provide clear guidance and the unclear status of the directive. Consequently, children entering Grade 4 have for the past decade been faced with tackling triple the number of subjects with their associated advanced terminology in a language they remain largely unfamiliar with and are unequipped to use for learning. Such concerns have recently provoked a rethink of language-in-education policy and Joe Phahla, chair of the ANC Social Transformation Sub-Committee, claimed on 20 December 2012 that the government was committed to change. The first step would be to make teaching African languages compulsory in all schools. Unfortunately, though, the language taught would “depend on the region where the school was situated” (Grobler 2012). Is a policy almost identical to apartheid education going to find workable support?

The ANC has also vowed to “leave no stone unturned” in making education and teaching an “essential service” (Marrian 2013). Advocating a change in attitude and values to allow respect for the ethical dimension of education, the ANC seeks to ban teachers from

strike action. This feeds into concerns that the South African Democratic Teachers' Union (SADTU) and their often militant stance is the chief obstacle to improving education.⁷

Unsurprisingly, the ANC's proposal was rejected outright by SADTU who remain frustrated with their profession for a multitude of reasons. Teacher training has been a longstanding problem (Dada 2009). Schools find it increasingly difficult to recruit qualified staff and are often forced to leave positions unfilled. Meanwhile, those teachers in position are not well equipped. The product of Bantu Education, many do not have the necessary skills to teach content in English where they need to act as both subject teachers and language teachers notwithstanding the numerous differences in method involved. As Mamokgethi Setati et al summarise,

Teachers need to consider two different dimensions of 'learning talk': (1) the exploratory talk which is such a necessary part of talking to learn [...] and (2) the discourse-specific talk which is part of the learners' apprenticeship into the discourse genres of subjects (2002: 130).

These skills are not taught in teacher training, which itself has suffered a drastic reduction in quality. Funding has slowly been redirected away from teacher training colleges in favour of universities where the training does not facilitate the same standard of quality teaching. This failing was admitted by Higher Education Minister Blade Nzimande in April 2012 when announcing a reinjection of funding into teacher training. ZAR 450 million was ring fenced

⁷ Addressing the National Assembly in May 2013, Democratic Alliance MP Annette Lovemore claimed SADTU "immobilises almost any attempt to re-professionalise teaching and improve education" (2013: n.pag).

for the 2012/13 – 2013/14 funding cycle and three training colleges reopened: one each in Mpumalanga, KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape.

Teacher satisfaction also declined with Curriculum 2005 and the introduction of Outcomes Based Education (OBE), derided as “some gobble-de-gook [...] which had failed everywhere it had been tried” (Mulholland 2013). Concerned with results more than resources and process, Curriculum 2005 demanded an innovative approach to teaching that incorporated peer assessment, group work, and research coursework. It also heralded an attempt to succeed in language-in-education policy by building in additive bilingualism and not presenting languages as fixed categories and straitjacketing users with “an assumption of a static social position” (Ridge 2004: 210). Curriculum 2005 used Main and Additional languages rather than First, Second and Foreign yet still failed to appreciate societal changes that “lead to a shifting Main Language or having more than one” (Ridge 2004: 210-1). Indeed, current opinion does suggest that phrases such as mother tongue should be completely removed from educational discourse (Canagarajah 2002). Furthermore, OBE was hampered by two other concerns. Teachers felt themselves employed as curriculum builders having to continually reshape their methods, which reduced their active role in the classroom. Secondly, there was a profound effect on textbook publication because textbook use was discouraged in favour of alternative methods in keeping with innovation.

OBE has been abandoned and, somewhat paradoxically, the intention is now for outcomes based results but not through outcomes based methods. Still textbooks remain a pressing issue because education continues to suffer from resource accessibility. The government has long been accused of not providing sufficient learners and exhibiting a disrespectful attitude towards the problem. Examples include the ‘Limpopo textbook crisis’ while a recent *Business Day* article highlighted the tendency for politicians to not take

decisive steps but rather trade accusations with this political football (see Pakathi 2012; 2013). Perhaps Alexander's (2005) opinion that a lack of resources is a façade for a lack of commitment remains valid?

Critics must bide their time in assessing whether government rhetoric about removing a 'dip-in-and-out' approach to textbooks and ensuring excellent textbooks, as advocated by the 2009 Task Review, are provided and successfully delivered. In the meantime, a national reading culture is being constrained and, perhaps most harmfully, African languages and their literatures further devalued. Indeed, the decreased importance of textbooks, the strongest area of African language publishing, furthers publishers' concerns over the commercial viability of African language material. With educationalists and publishers disagreeing on who needs to take the lead, a lack of African language material looks set to continue as English dominates.

South Africa's education system is undoubtedly in the midst of crisis. Mamphela Ramphele even suggested education is even worse now than under apartheid.⁸ The associated litany of problems further constrains the realisations of a national literature and culture. Most obviously there are disproportionately high dropout and failure rates, especially amongst African students. When combined with high illiteracy in all languages, serious harm is done to efforts in establishing a reading culture and developing a wider crop of writers away from the dominant and better-educated elite. Such is needed in order to give voice to a more inclusive range of experiences, which can truly write from difference. Furthermore, the *de facto* dominance of English has undermined African mother-tongues and even risks doing the same to Afrikaans. The T-Option debate at Stellenbosch University speaks directly to this concern while, as Frederik van Zyl Slabbert (2006) observed, it is unrealistic to think of

⁸ Ramphele was speaking during the Solomon Mahlangu lecture at the University of Johannesburg in 2012 and has since made education a key platform for her new political party Agang.

Afrikaans being valued if the current ANC government are not even valuing African languages.

Stanley Ridge (2004) correctly warns against blindly accepting the simple assumption that learning other official languages when they are imbued with the same status will necessarily promote national unity and cultural diversity. Yet still they cannot afford to be neglected. Promoting cultural diversity through language at an early age is integral. The National Curriculum Statement insists “indigenous knowledge systems are often accessed through language” (2.1) and the loss of these local languages will see some loss of local knowledge and culture (Mululeke 2006). A respect for African languages is crucial to the ANC achieving its African Renaissance (Wright 2004; Alexander 2005). And, though the Renaissance’s idealism and African centrality speak against the national culture’s recognition of evolving idioms and the collapse of the either/or binary, respect and knowledge of not only English but African languages, Afrikaans, and their associated cultures remains an unquestionable prerequisite. This is a process that begins with education.

7.7 – The Distant Horizon

The crises in publishing and education are complex and intertwined. There can be no quick fixes. Unfortunately, though, the longer they continue the longer a South African national literature and culture will remain a prize on a distant horizon. Working together, education and publishing are key to allowing a multitude of experiences to be written and to be read. Fundamental to any national culture is a respect for and understanding of the diversity present within it. If this is achieved, cultures and their respective idioms will be able to sit comfortably together and be mutually informing. Education policy is not promoting this

required respect. Similarly, publishing is vital in allowing the conversations across differences that characterise a national culture to take place. A decline in independents is reducing this ability. Consequently, the inefficiencies in these domains are threatening to compound in the future the difficulties in increasing the potential of South Africa's literatures.

Today there can be found literature that responds to the concerns of a national literature but, just as there is an apparent disrespect in education, there is disrespect for this literature. Born from mutual hostilities the publishing crisis is preventing this work from being heard and accepted. It is consistently marginalised because of prevailing political concerns. A national culture can only be born free from political interference (Press 1990). The successes of radio can be offered as an example. Heralded as creating a true democratic space, radio has, admittedly with some difficulty, managed to assert some political independence in recent years (Gunner 2000; 2011). Literature can do the same if given the opportunity. The potential is there and has been written.

Thus the study concludes by returning to a fatal paradox. Much contemporary commentary is correct to write of an impossibility in speaking of South Africa's national literature. But the picture presented is not straightforward. When asked if possible the answer is instead 'yes, but no'. Marginalisation and government policies in publishing and education insist that the impossibility must be recognised as political. Unfortunately, in a country where the boundary between art and politics has been so long obscured by struggle, the glittering prize is no closer to realisation. But to ignore this paradox undermines and devalues the national literature that does exist, perhaps proving fatal for the potential it exhibits.

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