AUTHORITY, AUTHENTICITY AND THE BLACK WRITER: DEPICTIONS OF POLITICS AND COMMUNITY IN SELECTED FICTIONAL BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS TEXTS

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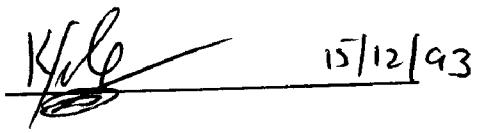
DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation is my own, unaided work. It is being submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any other university.

(signed:)  15/12/93

KELWYN ELLIS SOLE

ABSTRACT

This dissertation studies the emergence of Black Consciousness ideological and literary practices in South Africa during the period 1968 – 1983; a time when this philosophy was easily the most predominant mode of thought used by black anti-apartheid writers and intellectuals in the country. The first two chapters comprise an historical overview of the main precepts informing Black Consciousness thought and practice, as well as an overview of the most important aspects of cultural production during the time under scrutiny. The socio-cultural formulations articulated by writers and performers subscribing to Black Consciousness beliefs are detailed, as are the contexts of publishing, readership and language usage from which this literature emerged. In particular, black writers' attempts to commit themselves to a new role in society and their racial community, and the manner in which they wished to authenticate and authorise their work by attempting to write from and about a common 'black experience', by modelling themselves on the moral and social example of traditional oral literature, and by searching for a common motivating black aesthetic, will be analysed.

Subsequent examination and criticism made about the above assumptions and practices is premised on a belief that claims which stress that these writers were organically part of, and spoke on behalf of, a black community

beg further and more detailed examination of the differing techniques and representations writers used.

The ideologically-based and representationally fractured depictions of communal and political life which can be discerned in the emergent literature are examined in this light. The final three chapters utilise notions and critiques developed in the general discussion to demonstrate how ideological fractures, silences and social biases permeate five prose works published in the period 1979 – 82; by the authors Matshoba, Mzamane, Sepamla, Serote and Tlali. This analysis focusses on the manner in which their depictions of gender and class relationships in black society, their choice of English language expression, their deployment of narrator positioning and focalisation and their imaginative appropriations of historical events and political activity represent community opinion and the experience of township life in a manner which is influenced by their own ideological preoccupations and social positioning.

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INTRODUCTION

The Black Consciousness upsurge was the first significant form of black anti-State resistance to apartheid to emerge after the bannings and imprisonments of the early 1960s. Partly as a result of the new ambience of optimism and self-respect engendered in its wake amongst its converts, partly as a result of the emphasis its philosophy placed on the creative potential of culture, Black Consciousness played a considerable role in reconstituting a vital and autonomous black literature in South Africa.[1]

In its formative years Black Consciousness acted as a spur for creative writers wishing to explore aspects of their identity and livelihood in a racially repressive country. By the early years of the 1970s, a number of black writers had begun to write or perform a literature aimed at having meaningful political insight and effects. They saw the need for a more partisan, less artistically distanced stance for themselves and their artistic production. Many of them committed themselves as participants, rather than observers, in the struggle for black emancipation, and sought a role in black society as spokespeople, recording and assisting this liberation. They had some success in these goals, prompting more than one critic to subsequently praise them as 'the articulate spokespersons of the struggle of the South African people to free themselves of racism and injustice' (C. Abrahams 1988: 32).

As one critic has observed, the question of partisanship in literature is bound up to some extent with the problem of how works of literature relate to the real world (Eagleton 1976: 48). In this regard, it is necessary to understand that this literature concerned itself with ethical and political, as well as literary, authority. Its adherents saw Black Consciousness as a counter-discourse to the discourses of white domination, and rarely perceived what they did as limited to the printed page or performance podium. Literature was regarded as a transformative practice, stirring its practitioners and readership to fresh insights and values. Their belief in their authority to speak for themselves and other blacks prompted these writers almost uniformly to perceive literature as a form of activity which could, through various textual and performance strategies, spread knowledge and truth to its putative black audience. Some took up the challenge of political activism: a hazardous course in a situation where any active expression of discontent at apartheid's iniquities could result in detention or even death.[2] Others spread messages of social and political relevance to black people in artistic and literary form: and in a scenario where the expression of anti-apartheid sentiments was quickly seen as subversive by the State, many of these were also harassed by police, detained or banned.

The immediacy and relevance of their condemnation of racism found an enthusiastic reception inside, and increasingly outside, Black Consciousness circles. Their strivings to reach other black people with their

Black Consciousness beliefs went some way towards closing the gap that existed between these intellectuals and artists and their audiences. In its drive towards the formulation of more committed and authoritative stances in line with what was conceived as a more authentic 'blackness', the writers emerged with a number of their own priorities and explanatory terms as regards the function of literature in society. Writers, especially writers of fiction, strove to understand and depict the totality of what came to be known as the 'black experience' in the country; making assertions about character, consciousness and community to enable its audience to recognise the oppressive reality of living under apartheid, and the feelings of social and psychological inferiority this had engendered among blacks. It was implied that such a re-evaluation should allow readers to act, politically and socially, consequent on the feelings of anger and vindication such recognition allowed.[3]

Part of the struggle Black Consciousness exemplified was a struggle by black people to be allowed to represent their own viewpoints, experiences and assessments of the South African situation. White analysts of the history and politics of the country had much greater access to different forms of media and education, and their black equivalents (generally speaking) were either ignored or denigrated. In a situation where official versions of black attitudes and expectations were biased in favour of maintaining the status quo, Black Consciousness undertook a decisive break with received forms of opinion and knowledge. It is in this context that

assertions and counter-assertions of 'truth' became a battleground for writers.

Due to the emphasis black writers of the period placed on their commitment and authority as mouthpieces of authentic black aspirations, this study will first and foremost focus a great deal of attention on the writers' versions of their own representativity. It will outline Black Consciousness philosophy's basic precepts; in particular those that pertained to culture, consciousness and self-expression. A number of literary figures active in Black Consciousness circles will be studied and used to express their understanding of their desired social and artistic role and position as writers in black society.

As Weimann has trenchantly observed, a study of who or what is representing informs, and is informed by, the authority and legitimacy of what is represented (Weimann 1990: 99). The notions of 'commitment' to which these writers subscribed, led them to depict their social reality in more apposite, 'black' terms. Thus, in order to undertake an analysis of Black Consciousness literary history and its effects more adequately, this study will also scrutinise the social milieu these writers claimed to be representing, and how they chose to portray it. Their representations of politics, society and (in particular) their racial community will be examined.

Literature and performance emerge from social surroundings and are a creation of meaning by the writer or performer concerned. It will perforce, in how it makes sense of and attempts to deal with and

communicate its world (either symbolically or realistically), say something about the author's social concerns and perceptions. Thus, it is never sufficient for the critic to accept literature on the level at which it itself operates. Critics can never afford to take people's ideas and ideals relating to themselves at face value, if their remarks are to be more than simply expressions of praise or condemnation. 'Commitment' and 'authority' have become prescriptive and unwieldy terms in South African literary criticism, focussing as they do on questions related to attitude and moral rectitude. To analyse political literature exclusively in its own terms of reference – taking on all the assumptions of the moral and socio-political universe it puts forward – is to miss nearly all the constituents of the making and effectivity of such literature.

Moreover, assumptions of expressive 'authenticity' are ideologically laden, and presume the discovery of, or return to, a 'true' social essence. On the contrary, literary representations can never be fully truthful or accurate. As a form of ideology, literature – even realist literature – can never 'stand in some reflective, symmetrical, one-to-one relation with its object' (Eagleton 1976: 51). It is clear that the search for an 'authentic' African consciousness and creativity among these writers actually relates to the forging of fresh values, using selected elements of the African past and its myriad cultures.

Authority and narrative point of view are constant, undeniable presences in all literature; they are the principal means whereby authors

attempt to manage and control the consciousness of the reader. This thesis attempts to contextualise and historicise the emergence of Black Consciousness' literary activism, as well as to lay bare how writers who subscribed to its doctrines actualised their new-found sense of authority. The manner in which these politically committed writers mobilised the artistic media available to them, and the manner in which they chose to depict the reality they desired to change, are crucial points of focus of this study.

It is finally necessary to scrutinise, not only how this literature was produced, but also how it was moulded for certain types of dissemination. As Culler observes, literature:

> ... offers an example of the creation of meaning, but that is only half of its function.... As fiction it stands in a peculiar relation to the world; its signs must be completed, reordered, brought into the realm of experience by the reader.
>
> (Culler 1975: 264)

An attempt is made to show how these writers sought to delineate a new black readership for themselves, and how these attempts were subject to an ambivalence in attitude as to precisely who their audience was, and what language was most effective in reaching this audience.

Struggles over the meaning of history, over cultural symbols, over the ideological identifications of individuals and groups are endemic to South African society today. While this struggle over the political potency of cultural forms clearly could be seen in the move of Black Consciousness away from white-derived symbols and identities, it could also be seen in the

ideological emphases, silences and appropriations taking place among various classes and groups of black people.[4]

In South Africa (as elsewhere on the continent) the position of the creative writer who chooses political themes has been full of contradictions and problems. Despite their radical beliefs, in most cases the Black Consciousness writers tended to come from a relatively educated, comparatively privileged class. These writers and intellectuals formed a small but articulate stratum of the black petty-bourgeoisie, and had a powerful educative role as they worked to mould the raw stuff of ideology and culture into self-consciousness and unique works of art.

This having been said, it is not the intention here to perceive class position as some kind of category which simply allows the critic to condemn writers at will. Such repetitive, reductionist criticism serves little purpose. The urge to see texts in this way presumes literary works, and other cultural forms, to be unproblematic reflections of economic structures or class position.[5] This tends to lose any sense of human agency, of historical or biographical specificity, or of other less visible psychological and social factors in the making of the literature. Each work of literature is a unique cultural product, materially tied to the context of its own making and dissemination.[6] In writing narratives, authors do not so much present reality as re-present it: in other words, display it as filtered through their own views, assumptions and priorities. Literature is powerful precisely because it is not the same as a political pamphlet or propaganda – it

allows elements of play, of sympathy, of estrangement, of symbolic enjoyment at the same time as it reacts to the social factors which help shape and limit its vision.

Writers, caught up in historical and socio-political factors as they are, do have a degree of individual expression which is not simply reducible to the ideology common to their peers. Individual writers, playwrights and performers do not have identical relationships to the social world and its habits of thought from which they draw their material. The more closely one looks, the more individual and shifting are these relationships. For instance, the writers examined here do not have exactly the same relationships to Black Consciousness. They did not appropriate its concerns into their work at the same time or in identical ways. Strini Moodley, Mafika Gwala, Mthuli Shezi, Achmat Dangor and others mentioned below were actively involved in political and cultural organising: others were more active in culture alone. Gwala and Serote had accepted Black Consciousness by the end of the 1960s; others, such as Sepamla and Mtshali, came to their convictions a number of years later.

Neither did acceptance of the doctrine ensure identical assumptions about art. To give only one example of this, in a review of To Every Birth Its Blood Dangor criticised the novel for bestowing:

> ... a depressing sense of despair upon me. The unremitting scenes of violence and filth and cruelty, stay constantly with the reader in spite of Serote's desperate attempts to instill a heroic spirit in his characters. (Dangor 1982b: 35)

The fact that two major prose writers of this period should differ so substantially over what the register and subject matter of prose fiction should be, gives room for caution to the critic who wishes to make generalisations.

This having been said, it is nonetheless clear that Black Consciousness did forge a noticeable degree of common vision and concern amongst writers. The preoccupations of the texts discussed here – the manner in which the 'black experience' is portrayed, the manner in which linkages between individual and community are imagined and notions of collectivity constructed, are remarkably similar. What this literature does indicate is that this politicised group of writers embodied and mobilised similar patterns of experience and structures of knowledge and identity in their work.

This study shows how Black Consciousness attempted to install a new, different hegemony into black perceptions; but that its notion of an objective black 'truth' formulated through literature inevitably bore within itself its own points of closure and blindness and its own social assumptions and biases. The writers' representations sought to naturalise their perceptions and authority to speak for and on behalf of others, whilst ignoring or downplaying those issues of identity and experience, and those areas of social conflict, which might lessen such authority.

Black Consciousness authors tended to privilege race in their narratives, and many critics have followed this tendency and read their texts

predominantly – and even exclusively – in terms of race. The desire for a black unity to combat white power and prejudice led, by and large, to a romanticising of ideas of community and social harmony: downplaying class and gender tensions which might disturb this vision. This led in turn to an ideological bias noticeable in the 'completeness' or 'accuracy' of the black social collectivity represented in their literary works. As this was a literature meant to have certain effects on its readership – inspiring them to thought and even action – it follows that the literature privileged certain conceptions of political activity and society for its readership to comply with.

This thesis confines its remarks to a period when Black Consciousness can be argued to have been hegemonic among black anti-government groupings in South Africa. Beginning with the emergence of the first Black Consciousness organisation, S.A.S.O., in 1968, a period of some fifteen years up until 1983 is examined. This cut-off date, while to some extent arbitrary, is nonetheless carefully chosen. While already there were signs by the end of the 1970s that some of the tenets of Black Consciousness were beginning to be questioned by a number of its adherents, especially those tenets which demanded a racial exclusivity in political organisation, it is in this year that black oppositional politics sundered irrevocably into two separate political tendencies – the non-racial initatives of the United Democratic Front (U.D.F.) on the one hand, and the continuing Black Consciousness orientation of A.Z.A.P.O. and the National Forum on the

other.[7] It is also in 1983 that the first article of the influential critic Njabulo Ndebele appeared in the literary journal Staffrider, on his return to Southern Africa. This critic, over the next few years, was to pose the most overt and serious challenge to a great deal of the formal and ideological assumptions of Black Consciousness literature. Despite a brief attempt by writers (under the auspices of P.E.N.) to move out of their racial enclaves between 1979 and 1981, it is only following on these events that, by the mid-1980s, a number of non-racial popular writers' organisations re-emerged, such as the Writers' Forum (in 1985) and the Congress of South African Writers (C.O.S.A.W., in 1986), and the hegemony of Black Consciousness literary organisation showed the first signs of waning.[8] Nevertheless, it must be remembered that, in a study of ideological trends of this kind, it is sometimes difficult to pin down dates absolutely. Trends take a number of years to form and dissipate; and the historical references made reflect this, although dates are made absolute where possible. When quoting writers' views subsequent to the period under enquiry, quotes are generally used which refer back to this period, or which reveal attitudes and beliefs which have not (in my assessment) altered in the intervening years.

Neither does this study attempt to be a definitive examination of the literature (even prose literature) and culture which arose under the auspices of Black Consciousness during the period in question. It rather contains critical comments about some of the common assumptions used by

black writers who have followed the philosophy of Black Consciousness and used this ideology in their writing.

While the socio-political history of Black Consciousness has prompted a number of subsequent analytical studies and historical overviews, its cultural face has been less subjected to examination. The studies which have emerged have either concentrated on the cultural expressions, or the political and organisational history, of Black Consciousness. Such studies as have been undertaken have neither explicated nor critically examined the range of assumptions which informed the ideology's cultural practices. Attempts made to integrate ideological and historical study, or to examine more thoroughly literary texts – not only in terms of their contexts of production and dissemination, but also simultaneously in terms of questions of narrative focalisation and literary representation – have been slow in forthcoming.

Chapter One undertakes an historical account of the formation of Black Consciousness organisations at the end of the 1960s and early 1970s. Some of the basic convictions of its philosophy are revealed: in particular, the need perceived for black people to unify and organise separately, as a homogeneous group, in order to achieve political, cultural and psychological liberation. The strong effect Black Consciousness had on cultural and literary issues is examined; as is its urge to use cultural means to search for remnants of pre-colonial socio-cultural values, to re-evaluate black history, and to mould critical criteria to assist in the evaluation of its own literature.

The choice of language medium, use made of publishing institutions and attempts to court a black readership are also investigated. Finally, the chapter elaborates on organisational attempts to mobilise and conscientise a following in the black townships, and ends with an short summary of the literary activity Black Consciousness writers, performers and cultural activists undertook during the period under purview: highlighting issues and events pertinent to the rest of the study.

Continuing on from the previous chapter, Chapter Two focusses more closely on some of the concepts Black Consciousness literati frequently used to justify their social position and authorise their connection to their wider community. The writers' stance of 'commitment', as well as their assumption of an authority to bear witness to an authentic 'black experience' in apartheid society, are explained. Their desire to give a more 'authentic' depiction of black life under apartheid is discussed in terms of its two main trends – an appropriation of social 'reality' and assumption of the mimetic function of literature, plus a quest for images and myths which might resonate powerfully with black aspirations and identities. While (like the previous chapter) up to this point basing its analysis on the words and conceptualisations of the writers and artists concerned, the final half of this chapter moves into a critique of the manner in which a number of the issues discussed so far were used by Black Consciousness followers. In particular, the problems and paradoxes that occur when writers simultaneously try to learn from and teach their readers are examined; as is

the manner in which the totality of social experiences and aspirations claimed by its writers blurs its marked preference for social attitudes which generally speaking were male, urban and relatively socially privileged in composition. These writers' formulation of notions of 'commitment', 'authority', 'experience' and 'authenticity' are thus brought into question; as is the usefulness of such concepts for literary analysis itself.

The first two chapters serve as a springboard for the rest of the thesis, which tries to demonstrate the pertinence of some of the general conclusions reached so far in relation to a study of selected fictional texts. Matshoba's Call Me Not a Man provides a striking example of the use made of a narrator figure, and narrative focalisation, to explicate the message of Black Consciousness in imaginative literature. Through forays of a predominantly first-person narrator into South African life, Matshoba's narrator-protagonist learns to understand, and enact, the insights of Black Consciousness. Through these means, these stories become vehicles to persuade their putative readership to accept their author's doctrine. In addition, the experience of being black and the representations of social community in the stories are focussed on. These representations are explored, as are the formal means whereby Matshoba seeks to open up pertinent political issues for reader consideration.

While Chapter Four maintains an interest in narrative point of view, it deals with four novels which seek to portray an actual historical event – the Soweto uprising of 1976. The framework of this event as it is fictionally

recreated by each novelist is traced, as are their textual constructions of the Soweto community and its 'others'. Absences in this depicted community (especially relating to the position allotted to women and working-class blacks) are highlighted; and an analysis of the historical terms of reference and accountability of the novels attempted. The relationship of these fictional recreations of an historical event are measured against historical accounts of the period, and a general discussion of the similarities (and differences) fictional appropriations of history bear to these historical accounts pursued.

The final chapter adds another element to the issues already examined. It selects one of the novels studied in the previous chapter for further, closer, analysis. This is because Serote's To Every Birth Its Blood contains a number of issues relevant to the thrust of this thesis which could not satisfactorily be dealt with before. Firstly, a number of disagreements between critics as how to read this difficult and complex novel are discussed, and a number of suggestions how to understand its structure and narrative logic made. It is revealed that Serote attempts to meld two different forms of discourse in the novel; an attempt which gives rise to its particular difficulties, and which eventuate in a textual ideology which is then analysed. Thereafter, its attempt to take up the social problems discussed by the other texts and solve these through the trope of an effective political organisation, the 'Movement', is a central point of analysis. It is shown that, while this novel is written during a period in which

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the author changed from a Black Consciousness to an A.N.C. allegiance, many of the basic beliefs of Serote's earlier period remain intact in the text as a whole. It is noted that a number of the textual explanations and closures utilised are inadequate to their task; in particular the ubiquitous role the Movement plays in absorbing social, psychological and political tensions.

While the last three chapters have slightly different points of focus, it will be noticed that similar issues are scrutinised in all of them. Common themes emerge such as the relationship between individual and society (and the methods of characterisation used to portray this); the importance of the black family (and its dismemberment as a result of apartheid); the way in which issues of political leadership and democracy are solved, imaginatively; the manner in which political unity is presumed to be able to cement a social unity of all black people on all levels; the degree to which certain categories – such as whites and 'sell-outs' – are excluded from this racial community; the enactment of a search for a more authentic knowledge and insight into the South African situation; and the foregrounded and symbolically potent narrative position allowed the urban black petty-bourgeoisie in these processes.

The five works of fiction discussed in chapter three to five are exemplary, elucidating and demonstrating univocal interpretations of society which act as a means of proof of the basic tenets of their authors' ideology. They are teleological (suggesting a path from 'false' to 'true' consciousness)

and Manichaean in their conception of two monolithic, opposing forces in South African politics at the time. They prefigure rules of conduct and action which they seek their black readership to apply to their everyday lives – rules of action directly related to the system of values that was Black Consciousness. In all cases, they seek to merge the reader with contemporary history, often textually enacting the conduct they wish to inculcate, and postulating real and fictional worlds as the same.

In a study which remains sceptical of notions of authority, the question remains as to the understanding of the politics of critical authority which informs this thesis.

In South Africa, a number of critics in recent years have queried the ability of critics, with no 'organic' connections to the social context of the literature they are studying, to make insightful judgments as to the workings of that literature.[9] Such queries are a valuable reminder for white critics who believe they can easily make evaluations of black South African literature without scrutinising their own social position, cultural standpoint and aesthetic assumptions; and serves also as a reminder that the relative numbers of, and research facilties available for, white and black commentators of African literature in universities (both in South Africa and overseas) show a heavy preponderance in favour of the former.[10]

Indeed, as part of its programme Black Consciousness stressed the emotional ties of shared identity and culture which its intellectuals felt bound them to their racial compeers:

> Being African is not a game of pick and choose. It is something deeper, more religious and cultural than a mere utterance. It is a way of life: a ritual. Being African is an ancestral thing, without whom, one's Africanness is meaningless.
>
> (Mutloatse 1979b)

This made a great deal of sense in the critical ambience existing in South Africa when Black Consciousness literature first emerged. The stance of a white literary establishment which – instead of accepting that literature was an activity, or that writers were part of a socio-political context and thus the bearers of the weight of its beliefs, conformities and rebellions – focussed on literature merely as it was expressed on the printed page, without further examination of it social determinants and functions, exacerbated the distance black writers felt from the commentary accorded them. In the late 1970s one critic was led to comment on this phenomenon:

> ... the unaware South African literary critic is white, is middle-class. Unaware of its own parochialism, it must create South African literature in its own image. South African literary criticism is in a state of original ignorance. This manifests itself in at least three ways: the ignoring of the field, the paucity of in-depth research, the narrowness of vision.
>
> (Couzens 1977: 29)

The naive sensuous empiricism of such critical practice protected itself by legerdemain (the references to 'universality') from any acceptance that it was only one among many possible forms of critical discourse. It nurtured a split between 'high' and 'low' art – the black literature being produced being seen as an example of the latter, and thus unworthy of serious attention. Literary work based on different premises was not analysed in

concrete terms but was dismissed with reference to 'extra-literary considerations'.[11]

This manner of avoiding social concerns usually resulted in an implicit affirmation of the status quo. It kept faith with universality only by straining to remain uncontaminated by any sort of ideology – despite the fact that all literary theories, and literature itself, issue forth from that expressive contestation of ideas which constitutes the ideological. Instead, a sterilised criticism was put forward, wherein the critic avoided recognition of the limitations and determinants of his or her own point of view. A concern for immanent textual meaning, empty of historical and social perspective, blurred any self-awareness of the subjectivity of the critic's response. Objections made by black writers to the culture-bound judgments of some of these critics were therefore justified.

However, all too often criticism from African critics appears to follow the formal and subjective techniques of the selfsame Western critics they wish to dismiss.[12] There is a large volume of criticism from white and black critics existant which adopts a superficially radical tone but still follows liberal, text-bound critical norms emanating initially from Europe. This criticism veers between absolutes of formalism on the one hand and the sociological on the other (for discussion, see Iyasere 1974: 216; Ihekaibeya 1981: 51). References to social and historical circumstances sometimes amount to little more than gesture, and certainly do not approach social analysis. This impasse reflects something of the ideological

training many African intellectuals receive even today at universities in Africa and overseas.[13] Well-worn and inappropriate norms of judgment are still often adhered to. Landeg White comments on this phenomenon:

> It is astonishing that, as we enter the 1980s, there is so little that can be regarded as essential reading, so little that matches the intellectual vigour of debates in related subjects.... Forced by the very nature of the literature to look a little further, critics have been content to take their image of Africa from the literature itself and then praise the literature for its 'truth', operating within such simple concepts as the 'traditional African way of life', 'the clash between African and Western culture', and the 'corruption following independence' – concepts which must seem strangely innocent to the historian or to the social or political scientist.
>
> (White 1980: 539)

In such a scenario, to relegate criticism to an expression of one of two opposing poles – 'Western' or 'African' – is not satisfactory. Neither is the moralistic discourse exhibited by those critics who perceive literary expression from Africa as either authentically 'African' and 'popular'; or soiled by extra-continental influences and models, and therefore having an 'identity problem'.[14] Such a simple polarity between European and African criticism ignores the fact that black critics do not necessarily in all cases produce better criticism about African literature than others (Iyasere 1975: 21).

A subsumption of the politics of criticism into an inflexible binary opposition based on race and culture will therefore not suffice. The argument that only 'Africans' can appreciate and criticise black literature (in South Africa as elsewhere) through appeals to 'culture' and 'experience',[15] results in:

> ... the birth of a certain belligerent criticism with an artificial conflict between African and Western critics. ... each laying claim to a monopoly of intelligent hermeneutics ... The quarrel gravitated around the vague question of whether to use "Western" or "African" aesthetic criteria. There are of course no such criteria, for aesthetic values and criteria are the products and instruments of specific groups and classes in specific societies.
>
> (Amuta 1989: 3)

In criticism of this ilk, attempts to forge appropriate critical tools for the analysis of black South African literature are threatened by the facile, reflexive relationship that is presumed to exist between black writers and their subject matter and audience.[16] The intricacies of the actual social relationships which exist between performer or writer and audience are not questioned; it is not realised that the themes employed and the way reality is depicted are neither completely 'authentic' nor mistaken, but are connected to the ideology of the writer and, through him or her, the ideologies of wider social groupings.

Analysis as to how writers fit in with, and respond to, social life, both politically – as active agents of history – and ideologically – through the themes and representations of their creative writing – cannot be understood from such simplistic pronouncements. Inquiry into the ideological proclivities of writers, and socio-historical terrain in which they operate, is necessary in specifically examined cases, before wider generalisations can begin to be made.

The search for standards of judgment of art, based on a black aesthetic and sensitive to the distinctive voice of African culture, is a response to the way in which European notions of truth and beauty have

tended to downplay African achievements. But such an aesthetic could not be universally applicable to all blacks, nor could it have a 'deep spiritual connection to all of the African soil' (C. Abrahams 1979: 9).

If social attitudes, class attributes and class and gender biases are to be found in black literature and performance, to my mind they are most easily discernible in the styles and genres used by the writers and performers themselves, and in the preoccupations and silences within the texts produced. Yet Jameson's observation that 'the effectively ideological is also, at the same time, necessarily Utopian' needs to be borne in mind (Jameson 1981: 286). While overall a critique of Black Consciousness appropriations and inventions of history and society, this study recognises the heroic and enormous break this philosophy and its writers sought to make with white attitudes and with social and literary conventions – with few prior literary models, and in the face of the overwhelming ideological and repressive power of the South African State. Black Consciousness did certainly contain within itself a Utopian impulse towards a better, less conflictual South African society; even if, as will be demonstrated, its urge foundered on a lack of examination of a number of pertinent socio-political and cultural issues.

An examination of black literature may have relevance for further studies of social differentiation among black people, and the ways in which social allegiances and tensions have been subjectively perceived within sectors of the black community. Such an inquiry may also have a great deal

to tell us about vexed questions of identity and consciousness, which are still being hotly debated in South Africa at present.

A Note on Referencing

Page references are supplied for all quotations used, excepting those which originally appeared in newspaper articles of less than one page in length. When articles and books are referred to without page references being supplied, the matter being referred to is then always the general discussion and tenor of the source, rather than a particular section of it. Anonymous articles are referenced by the first two (or, if necessary for differentiation, the first three) words of the title.

Notes to Introduction

1. When discussing Black Consciousness ideology, this thesis will use the term 'ideology' as signifying a form of representation which gives people an understanding of their own 'subject-ness' in society: in other words, it denotes how people make sense of the world around them, and of their place in it, as human subjects. In the course of their lives, individuals imbricate a number of beliefs, rationalisations and received items of knowledge which make complete sense to them as an explanatory whole, despite the fact that such ideologies will be perceived by anyone outside their pull of attraction as partial and fragmentary. Thus, 'Ideology ... notes the nexus of concepts by which individuals represent to themselves their situation in the social world' (Foley 1986: 87). Although the individual's ideas will not necessarily reflect or mimic the ideologies of the social groups – of class, race, gender, region and the like – to which he or she belongs on a one-to-one basis, individual ideologies are socially constituted and reinforced by the larger social groups and identifications which form and divide society. Ideologies are powerfully constituted by language and discourse (see the discussion in Eagleton 1991: 193 – 220): literature therefore is a significant way in which ideology may be expressed, actualised and questioned. In relation to the Black Consciousness texts studied in this thesis – all of which appropriate ideologically a South Africa existing beyond the margins of the text:

> ... the fictional work reconcretizes actual processes and structures in the historical world ... (attempting) to persuade the reader of the legitimacy of the author's specific conception of those processes and structures. The relations described among the analogized persons and occurrences are not evaluatively neutral ... but inherently interpretive, judgmental, and ideological. The process of generalization is a process of abstraction, and abstraction necessarily involves orders and hierarchies, elevations and demotions, all emanating from the authorial subject's conception of the nature of the totality ....
>
> (Foley 1986: 85)

It must be stressed that ideologies cannot simply be regarded as apologia for group biases; nor can they glibly be dismissed as forms of 'false consciousness'.

It is the interpretative and explanatory nature of ideology which allows me to refer to such a self-conscious ideology as Black Consciousness interchangeably as an 'ideology' and a 'philosophy'.

2. An example is Mthuli Shezi, an active member of the People's Experimental Theatre and author of the play Shanti, who was elected Vice-President of the Black People's Convention at its first conference in July 1972. After quarrelling in the same year with a number of white Railway officials on Germiston station over their treatment of female black commuters, on 12 December he was spotted on the station by one of these officials and pushed in front of an oncoming train. He died five days later (Kavanagh 1981: 64).

3. While re-formulated in terms of Black Consciousness, a number of the relevant points in this discussion are taken from Eagleton 1976: 37 – 48 and Gikandi 1987: 112 – 4; 126 – 7.

4. As an example, the tendency (which will be discussed) for Black Consciousness activists to assert the intrinsically communalistic nature of pre-colonial African societies was subject to countervailing assertions in 1984 (by the 'Homeland' leader of the Ciskei, Lennox Sebe) that such societies were intrinsically capitalist (see 'Ciskei opts ...').

5. Gikandi notes that the vulgar Marxism here described believes that:

> ... art can be reduced to specific political and philosophical forms of consciousness: hence ideology tends to be taken as dogma, a set of definite laws which function as reductive agents that bring art to the level of the socio-economic structure.
>
> (Gikandi 1987: 113 – 4)

An example from South Africa in the period under study is theatre critic Keyan Tomaselli's perception that Matsemela Manaka's play Egoli represents 'the black man in terms of his actual conditions of existence, that of economic exploitation' (Tomaselli 1981: 54). While to some extent accurate,

this statement ignores the ideological discourses and perceptions which suffuse all literature, in favour of an assertion of the work's essential mimetic quality. Moreover, it presumes a sameness in the material conditions of all blacks in South Africa which merely echoes the formulations of the play's Black Consciousness-inspired author.

6. Macherey notes: 'Ideology is not, prior to the work, like a system which can be reproduced: it is resumed, elaborated by the work' (Macherey 1978: 232). Although literary ideologies are always mediated by the ideologies articulated outside literature's confines by various social groups and classes, the uneven relationship of art to the social and economic infrastructures assures that aesthetic and biographical considerations must play their role. The individual, thoughout his or her life, is the bearer of an accumulation of ideological nodes and fissures, not all of which relate to class. It is thus impossible for a literary work to reproduce the totality of any ideology (Laclau 1977: 163).

7. See Fatton 1986: 134; 'A new ...'; 'Battle hots ...'.

8. For further information, see Ndebele 1989c: 418 – 9.

9. Vaughan questions his own position in Vaughan 1982a: 62 – 3; remarks subsequently approvingly quoted by Ndebele in Ndebele 1984: 43.

10. This is discussed in Ndebele 1984: 43 and (with reference to the wider context of African literature) in Jeyifo 1990: 39 – 40.

11. The phrase is Charles Malan's, which I have translated from the Afrikaans. Further examples of the propaganda of this position were common in the 1970s in South Africa. Literature based on political imperatives was dismissed as 'indoctrination' (Ullyatt) or with reference to 'the simplicity of the left and the right' (Lionel Abrahams). These were weighed against such supposedly self-explanatory concepts as 'the old concept of universality' (Ricci); 'intrinsic poetic merits' (Ullyatt); 'literariness', 'reading experience' and 'the ongoing sharpening of norms' (Botha). Criticism was regarded as being there 'to serve the literature' (Smuts). Quotes taken from Contrast 44, 1977 and Standpunte 133, 1977.

Fredric Jameson observes:

> Such thinking is characterised by a turning away of the eyes. A preference for segments and isolated objects as a means to avoid observation of those larger wholes and fatalities which if they had to be seen would force the mind ... into uncomfortable social and political conclusions.
>
> (Jameson 1972: 24)

In an atmosphere of increased repression and bannings after the 1976 uprising, the Afrikaans critic H. C. T. Muller's desire to keep literature 'free' from political prescription testifies to the accuracy of this statement (Rapport 6 August 1978).

12. Vide Abiola Irele's statement that the critic has only the choice available between judging 'the aesthetic value of the finished product' or becoming involved in 'legislation for the writer about his raw materials' (Irele 1970: 390).

13. This issue is discussed at length in Attwell 1984.

14. For examples of these latter forms of argument, see Greenfield 1982: 94 and Watts 1989: 7 – 105.

15. These two terms are used as justification for such a stance not only in South Africa (as demonstrated in this thesis) but in the rest of the continent as well, as Biodun Jeyifo observes (Jeyifo 1990: 38).

16. By those critics who assert that black writers in South Africa are 'at one' with their community; and who thereafter regard such assertions as items of faith, rather than further study. Thus:

> ... the black writer in South Africa does not, unlike in other countries, belong to a bourgeois class of detached elites, that can come to observe the masses and return to the tranquility of their refined suburbia to write. They live their violent experiences day and night.
>
> (Moyana 1976: 93)

CHAPTER ONE: AN HISTORICAL AND IDEOLOGICAL OVERVIEW

The Legacy of the 1960s

After the Sharpeville massacre and the banning of black political organisations such as the A.N.C. and P.A.C. in 1960, many of the black writers of the previous decade were jailed or fled into exile, along with other activists and sympathisers of the anti-Government cause. In the wake of the arrest of the main leadership of the A.N.C. at Rivonia in 1963, political resistance to the South African Government collapsed within the borders of the country. A political 'vacuum' was thus left inside South Africa. Those young men and women who grew up in the black townships during the 1960s experienced a period of relative quietude and disorganisation as the grip of apartheid laws and institutions tightened.[1]

Not only black politicians and political figures but also artists, performers, writers and others active in the creative arts found themselves increasingly pressurised by the new era of strict apartheid control. Stricter censorship was enforced with the promulgation of the Publications and Entertainment Act of 1963; an act which was further tightened in 1974. All but a few of the city venues were barred to black performers and audiences. This effectively curtailed the productions of multi-racial musicals

and plays which had been emerging, in embryonic form, towards the end of the 1950s. Black musicians found themselves removed by law from white hotels and nightspots, an important source of their revenue. Although by the mid-1960s some multi-racial theatre still existed on the peripheries of white culture, black dramatists, musicians and directors found themselves in a position where they were forced to play in township halls whether they wished to or not. Thus the political vacuum left by the bannings, detentions and exiling of major figures in the 1960s was matched by a destruction of the flowering of black literature and art which had emerged during the 1950s. A whole generation of black writers' work was obliterated in South Africa, as many of them were detained or fled into exile; and their books were banned inside the country. Only a few journalists and writers, such as Richard Rive, Casey Motsisi and Stan Motjuwadi, remained in South Africa.[2]

For a while after the silencing within the country of most of the writers implicated in the development of an English-language black writing during the preceding decade, most visible cultural efforts on the page within South Africa were the product of white writers. This occurred at the same time as, in one historian's words, the defeat of the existing black anti-State organisations 'provoked the ascendancy of a small class of white liberals bent on defending what it perceived to be the interests of a defenceless African population' (Fatton 1978: 63). Even at its most political, this writing tended towards individualised forms of literary expression which sought

(through predominantly realistic modes) to expose the iniquities of apartheid in South Africa. The individualism of the protagonists in these books and plays was generally stressed as a necessary bulwark against the creeping conformity and lack of empathy engendered by the South African regime. Publication was regarded as the epitome of a young writer's success. The tendency of the time was, if anything, towards the further academicisation of literature, and the literary and academic cliques who 'knew their literature' had a powerful effect on the establishment and propagation of aesthetic norms. This sharp division between a small group of the 'artistically knowledgeable' and others was adhered to by both the white literati and the few black writers who remained inside South Africa.[3]

Until well into the 1970s the liberal establishment active on the literary scene defended itself against black cultural activities by using assumptions which stressed the primacy of European views and models of literature, hidden under references to a 'universal' human nature and literary qualities. Mzamane details the hidden pressure of liberalism on the consciousness of young black writers in this period succinctly:

> My country insisted that, even though those of my colour are actually in the majority, I was a minority writer, having no connection with the civilised culture; that I historically and actually had to settle not so much for the second-rate, but was supposed to accept my master's version of my experience and write it down and give it back to him and, thus, I would enter the mainstream. I would still be a minority writer, of course, but at least I would have a civilised point of view.
> (Mzamane 1988: 103)

In theatre, black playwrights who managed to adapt to the more stringent apartheid controls of the 1960s – such as Gibson Kente and

Cornie Mabaso – evolved a successful new dramatic form which enjoyed a great deal of commercial success playing for black audiences. Travelling around the townships in kombis with impromptu sets, they performed a melodramatic and spectacular form of theatre which highlighted accessible oral forms such as music, singing and dancing. Episodes in everyday township life were introduced, and a number of stereotyped characters (such as the cuckolded husband, the venal priest and the stupid policeman) introduced for audience recognition and amusement. Some characters in these plays spoke in the flytaal patois endemic to township life. According to an unsympathetic critic of the time, Kente's success was because he knew:

> ... what the people want. He knows they want an escape. A simple story with lots of sadness and laughter. The central character must be someone everyone can identify and feel for.... He knows also, and this by now is largely his fault, that the audience doesn't want to be taxed, made to think, listen too hard and, above all, self-criticise. All the hardships (and these must be heavy) must be blamed on someone else. And there must be a ray of hope – that all will be well one day, without our having to do anything about it.
>
> (Mshengu 1974/5b: 24)

Thus, while reflecting accurately many of the hopes and frustrations of township life, this theatre tended to remain politically quiescent.

The Rise of Black Consciousness

In the late 1960s and early 1970s cracks started to appear in this political and cultural edifice. For a period after the Bantu Education Act of 1953 and the closure of 'open' (mainly white) English-speaking universities to black students in 1959, the South African Government's policies had successfully curtailed the growth of an anti-Government educated stratum of blacks. While the number of black school pupils rose in absolute terms under Bantu Education, the number of those successfully completing secondary school and attending university was temporarily restricted. However, by 1969 the figures of African pupils attending secondary and tertiary education institutions had returned to the 1955 level, in terms of the proportion of these students vis-a-vis the total number enrolled at all schools; and by 1975 this number had risen four-fold. The rapid development of higher education for blacks was facilitated by the expansion to four in number of the racially-segregated black universities. Facilities, however, were hardly increased or upgraded to handle this influx at all: no new equipment, classrooms, or further training of teachers was undertaken (Hirson 1981: 233). Consequently by the late 1960s these segregated tertiary institutions were marked by a rapid increase in disaffection among their students; a disaffection that paralleled the emergence of similar attitudes and feelings among secondary school pupils. The obvious pro-apartheid and pro-Government bias of the staff, the practice of rote learning generally

employed by teachers, the inferior nature and quality of Bantu Education and the restriction on any avenues of formal political protest or expression led to a heightening of tension among a growing circle of students (Hirson 1979: 62 – 4).

By the late 1960s the policy of apartheid had seen to it that the only African organisations with nation-wide membership were sports and religious bodies (Hirson 1979: 76). Nonetheless, from this period onwards the discernible political tension among students resulted in the upsurge of a new, challenging, politically combative ideology among black university students, intellectuals and theologians: the ideology of Black Consciousness. The end of the 1960s marks the beginnings of new forms of direction and organisation among black intellectuals inside the country. In the vacuum created by the bannings of the major black political organisations and the exile and imprisonment of their leadership, the students on the segregated campuses and schools set up a number of new organisations to act as rallying points for the dissemination of the world view of Black Consciousness.

Black Consciousness was launched by those 'outside of the focus of the means of production and distribution, the students' (Mattera: 1982).[4] The ideology initially took hold among a relatively small group of urban youth and students who were, in the beginning, nearly entirely drawn from a relatively educated, petty-bourgeois stratum of students and intellectuals (Alexander 1991: 246 – 7; Vaughan 1984a: 209).[5] It was the relatively

privileged position in society of this group which, in the words of one activist, 'gave us the space to play this important role' (Ramphele 1991a: 215). Black Consciousness consequently began as an ideology generated by a group which, generally speaking, had been historically most susceptible to the influence and pull of white culture and consequently most attracted to a self-conscious rediscovery of its African roots.[6] Because of its distance from the means of production, it has also tended to rely heavily on ideology for its identity in the world.[7] Black Consciousness provided precisely this type of attraction for the young, post-Sharpeville generation of black students in the country. In other words, a reversal of the trend of accepting European norms and standards of behaviour and belief was initiated among that group of people least in contact with their cultural roots – the urban stratum of students, intellectuals and political activists who felt their alienation most keenly. In the face of apartheid's hostility to any form of cultural assimilation or interplay between racial cultures, and in the face of the continuing oppression of blacks within the country, the urge by better educated blacks to return to and identify with their own people was keenly felt. In this regard the novelist Miriam Tlali, speaking of her experiences as a clerk dealing with black hire-purchase customers in a furniture store, commented:

> I was actually between two fires ... clashes with the whites on the one side because of the type of work I do, and on the other side with my own people because they mistook me for someone who is prepared to try and get as much money as possible out of them.[8]

Furthermore, the ideology arose among a younger generation, less conditioned to servitude than its elders, who regarded the means of combatting segregation and apartheid used by black organisations in the past – protest, civil disobedience, token strikes, upliftment of the individual by education, and so on – as suspect and ineffective; and who were thus groping for new forms of organisation and action (Horn 1978: 7 – 8; Kane-Berman 1978: 106).

The Formation of Black Consciousness Organisations

The immediate cause for the formation of the first Black Consciousness organisation, the South African Students' Organisation (S.A.S.O.), was a burgeoning aversion among black students to their membership of the existing national student body N.U.S.A.S. While this latter body was one of the few anti-Government political organisations still in existence, and while black students had formed a significant pressure group within this organisation (and inside the University Christian Movement, founded in 1966) there was a growing feeling by the end of the 1960s that the predominance of a white leadership with liberal views inside this organisation necessitated the formation of a separate organisation for black students.[9]

This feeling became manifest during the N.U.S.A.S. Congress of July 1968 and a subsequent U.C.M. meeting in Stutterheim the same year, where black student leaders openly canvassed for a separate black student organisation. As a result S.A.S.O. was formed in December of that year, organising its inaugural conference at the University of the North in July 1969 and its first General Students' Council at the University of Natal the following year. The same year it withdrew its formal recognition of N.U.S.A.S. as a body purporting to represent all students (Gerhart 1978: 260 – 2; S. Buthelezi 1991: 124). It started to spread to, and gain a following on, black campuses around the country (Gerhart 1978: 269 – 70). This new organisation's growth was faciliated by the appearance of a competent, politically assertive, black student leadership, striving to break down the isolation which bedevilled student organisation and solidarity between different campuses (S. Buthelezi 1991: 112). In 1970 S.A.S.O. rejected white liberal multi-racialism and, in 1971, adopted a policy manifesto which clearly outlined its rupture with the status quo of liberal opposition to the Government.[10]

The Definition of Black Consciousness

Basing itself to an extent on the example of the Black Power movement current in the United States in the 1960s,[11] Black

Consciousness constructed its appeal to blacks on a rejection of assimilation, pride in an African cultural heritage and a determination to emancipate blacks on a number of levels. In distinction to previous forms of black resistance in South Africa, it increasingly emerged as a counter-ideology expressly aimed at de-legitimising the existing South African State, which was seen as inextricably intertwined with the ideology of apartheid.[12]

It is important to note that adherents of this philosophy displayed a variety of political preoccupations and convictions during the 1970s. There were a number of contradictory tendencies discernible within the Black Consciousness movement, from reformist to revolutionary.[13] Its appeal to the everyday experiences of racism black people in South Africa had, and its diffuse ideological nature, proved in many ways to be a strength rather than a weakness for its social diffusion. It allowed many people as individuals to acknowledge and come to grips with the feeling of inferiority engendered in them by apartheid:

> ... by stressing the need for the individual to personally commit himself to the concept of freedom, black consciousness was able to achieve a more intense commitment and broaden its influence. A person's relevance to the struggle for freedom did not require him to be an active member of one of the groups, or even to accept in its entirety the black consciousness ideology.
>
> (Soni 1980: 12)

Nevertheless, certain explanatory concepts were developed about the state of South African society among those who considered themselves Black Consciousness proponents. There emerged 'common themes,

attitudes and ideas which were, in varying degree, shared by all those who identified themselves with black consciousness' (Nolutshungu 1983: 151).

Crucially, Black Consciousness divided South Africans into two sharply distinguished groups: the white 'haves', and black 'have-nots' (Biko 1988: 64).[14] Black people in South Africa were discerned as suffering from an endemic inferiority complex when faced with white political and cultural assertion. White domination had served to denigrate past and present African civlisation, and had stereotyped blacks as backward, morally reprehensible and passive. As a result by the 1970s many blacks demonstrated a 'mutilated consciousness' which was both a consequence of apartheid and a condition for its maintenance (Watts 1989: 25).[15] The need for blacks to foster a sense of self-reliance and self-determination was encouraged; and, as many early Black Consciousness thinkers were student theologians at black seminaries around the country, a re-awakening of black people on a spiritual and ethical level was also seen as a pressing issue. Highlighting the contrast between the ideals of Christian faith and the realities of the supposed 'Christian' Government in South Africa, black theologians who were exponents of the philosophy sought to relate God and Christ to the daily problems and needs, both spiritual and secular, of black people.[16]

Suffering from three hundred years of colonial incursion and white domination, blacks had become 'two-faced', pretending a respect for whites they did not feel – a respect in actual fact generated by fear and hatred.

As a result blacks would, even in a future society free of apartheid, remain 'useless co-architects of a normal society where man is nothing else but man for his own sake' (Biko 1988: 35; see also 90 – 2). The philosophy therefore stressed that black people generally must be weaned away from their dependence on whites: black liberation was the burden of black people themselves, and blacks must learn to articulate their own grievances rather than allow these to be expressed by liberal whites (Kane-Berman 1978: 104; Biko 1988: 151).

These liberals, in their attempts to speak on behalf of black suffering, had distorted the manner and the degree to which blacks experienced oppression under a viciously authoritarian regime. Black Consciousness members disliked liberal writers like Alan Paton because their work 'gave a distorted image of the black man' (Matlou 1987: 48). In its 1971 Policy Manifesto S.A.S.O. thus saw it as a prerogative of black people to be 'self-defined' rather than defined by others. Blacks had an obligation to draw on their own experiences and traditions in order to scrutinise critically all white doctrines and explanations, whether they appeared to be sympathetic to the black cause or not (Gerhart 1978: 272; Lodge 1983: 323), as a means of becoming self-aware. Therefore S.A.S.O. sought to evolve forms of struggle within the horizons of its own historical context and experience (S. Buthelezi 1991: 120).

An urgency was felt for black people to build up their own organisations and act according to 'whatever they conceive they must do as

if whites did not exist at all' (Khoapa 1972: 62). Existing white political parties which espoused multi-racialism or were sympathetic to black suffering, and whites who espoused a liberal philosophy, were regarded with as much suspicion as agents and supporters of Government policy. White liberals were, in fact, accused throughout the decade by many Black Consciousness exponents as being duplicitous: the liberals and their political parties often regarded as more damaging to black initiatives than die-hard racists.[17]

Influential leaders such as Biko believed that whites in South Africa could be regarded as a homogeneous political group, and that black people must consequently organise collectively and separately rather than belong as individuals to white organisations (Biko 1988: 33; 91 – 2). White political organisations of necessity made their own racial interests the touchstone of their policies, and played on and consolidated racial antagonisms and whites' sense of superiority: multi-racial anti-Government organisations such as N.U.S.A.S. in the 1960s had thus necessarily led to white domination. Moreover, Black Consciousness thinkers believed that these organisations concerned themselves overmuch with the whittling away of existing democratic rights, while black people were historically denied even the most elementary of such rights (Budlender 1991: 228; Hirson 1979: 69; Pityana 1972: 83). Liberal organisations counselled constitutional protest and patience, and had proved increasingly ineffectual against a Government that had little respect or regard for human rights and protest politics.[18]

Liberals appealed to individualism at a time when Black Consciousness saw the need for united group action against Government policies. Furthermore, liberal values were underpinned by a belief in a gradualist integration of blacks into existing South African society; and were based on 'exploitative values' expounding a free market capitalism which many of the more radical black activists regarded with suspicion (Biko 1988: 106 – 7; Budlender 1991: 230). As a result liberals were targeted as a particular source of confusion and debilitation of the black cause – perceived as 'the greatest stumbling block to our unity' – as the integration they preached disguised a notion of assimilation where the white was 'a perpetual teacher and the black a perpetual pupil' (Biko 1988: 38; 106).

Black Consciousness maintained a view of the future of South African society based (in Biko's words) on dialectical principles.[19] The thesis of white racism could only be met by its antithesis of black unified action. Blacks needed to reject their negative identity as people who fell short of a 'white' norm and make 'white' itself a negative concept to describe those not prepared to realise fully their human solidarity with the majority of inhabitants of the country. Blacks must not fall into the trap of using the linguistic or social categories and evaluative mechanisms of the oppressor, as this would mean doing battle with weapons of the enemy's devising (Nolutshungu 1983: 151 – 2).

However, Black Consciousness was conceived of by many of its ideologues as a transient strategy which would eventually allow (due to its

understanding of the common humanity and eventual destiny of all South Africans) the different racial groups in the country to meet at a point of 'mutual respect'; whereafter a 'true and meaningful' integration could be attempted (Biko 1988: 35).

Black literary figures also pointed out that Black Consciousness arose as a reaction to white racism and the degradation of black culture, and would consequently disappear once it had served its purpose. For instance, the psychologist and academic Chabani Manganyi called Black Consciousness 'a medium for positive, creative and defensive racialism which is opposed to the traditional negative racialism practised by whites' (Manganyi 1973: 33); while poet and activist Mafika Gwala stressed on many occasions that it was a necessity occasioned by political circumstances rather than a transcending philosophy applicable to a non-racial and democratic South Africa, labelling it a 'Back to the People Movement' rather than a counter-racism aimed at whites (Gwala 1975: 29; 32; see also 1974: 112).

The demand for political and psychological liberation and self-reliance among black people went hand in hand with a concern for what were conceived as positive black values – such as a humanistic and communalistic approach to life – and a preoccupation with the rediscovery of black history and culture, so long denigrated by dominant white ideologies. The importation of capitalism to South Africa by white settlers had brought with it an inhuman system which, Black Consciousness noted,

tried to convince blacks that it was – paradoxically – they who were 'uncivilised'. Consequently urges towards the acquisition of material possessions were regarded as foreign to black culture and an import of Western capitalism. Rejecting the white world and its values as consumerist, alienated, superficial, and obsessed with technology and status (Biko 1988: 85; Ndebele 1972: 18 – 9), Black Consciousness proselytised against self-serving trends and lifestyles among black people; trends which were seen as leading away from the communalistic ethos of traditional black values and the solidarity required for unified action in the present.[20]

The creation of a black 'humanism' to challenge the anti-human impulses with which South African society was fraught was thus an expressed goal. Significance was placed on a distinct African personality, humane and democratic, as the antithesis of the exploitative relationships brought to Africa by the West. There was a belief in some quarters that the special contribution of Africa to the world would be in the field of human interaction and relationships.[21] Black Consciousness was put forward as a search for a humanism which could embrace whites once liberation has been achieved: a wider human consciousness would follow from black people rediscovering their identity and African roots ('Fuba speaks ...'). According to playwright Benjy Francis, reiterating these views at the end of the 1970s:

> BLACKNESS is a collective term for people that are fighting the shackles of oppression and searching their right to create their own terms through self-definition. We are talking here in universal terms – a global movement involving mainly what is popularly known as the

> Third World. Black Theatre being totally committed to Black Consciousness is a search for HUMANISM – a movement away from soul-destroying and oppressive colonial culture towards a civilisation that is real, affirmative and HUMANE.... The essence of the dream is an alternative life style, a search for that is HUMAN and HUMANE – to change what exists. All revolution constitutes a turning back to a source contact which has been weakened or lost.... Therefore the task is to subject the past to constant reassessment. Let us delve into the mythology and legends of the AFRICAN EXPERIENCE and draw sustenance from them.
>
> (Francis 1979: 10)

The Need for Black Unity

Drawing on such precepts, Black Consciousness stressed the need for black unity in the face of apartheid. Biko, for one, saw stratification among black people as a ploy of colonialism which must be combatted if liberation were to be achieved; ethnic identity among blacks was a factor deliberately 'frozen' into static categories and identities, and used by whites to divide blacks from each other (Biko 1988: 66; 76; Pityana 1972: 181).[22] All black people were victimised, to varying degrees, by the same system. As a consequence, Black Consciousness activists agitated for the unity, under the rubric of 'blackness', of all those people oppressed in South Africa because of the colour of their skin. In this understanding, 'black' as a term encompassed a unity forged of Africans, 'coloureds' and Indians. In short:

> We are oppressed not as individuals, not as Zulus, Xhosas, Vendas or Indians. We are oppressed because we are black. We must use that very concept to unite ourselves and to respond as a cohesive group.

> We must cling to each other with a tenacity that will shock the perpetrators of evil.
>
> (Biko 1988: 113)[23]

This postulated unity was to encompass all black concerns, political and otherwise, leaving outside only those blacks irretrievably locked into the apartheid system (Nolutshungu 1983: 153): 'Homeland' leaders and functionaries, township councillors, individualistic and acquisitive businessmen, and others effectively lending their support and allegiance to Government structures or policy. This explains, after the early vacillation mentioned above, the extreme dislike 'authentic' black people felt for State-initiated and controlled Urban Bantu Councils, the Coloured People's Representative Council, the South African Indian Council, and other black organisations set up by or sympathetic to the State. This dislike is reiterated in the creative literature.[24] Agents of the State or self-centred members of the middle-class identified in this manner were scathingly referred to as 'non-whites', and were frequently portrayed as deficient in human values, sycophantic and brutal (Vaughan 1985: 214 – 5; see also Gwala 1975: 26). Indeed, such blacks were effectively 'lost to their people' (Pityana 1972: 183).

Thus it must be noted that, while Black Consciousness seemed to appeal to existing qualities and values among blacks, it nonetheless contained a strong ethical and normative component.

'Blackness', in its Black Consciousness usage, was a <u>political</u> term that defined a specific mental attitude – 'an attitude of mind and a way of

life'.[25] It required a communal quest for knowledge, identity and liberation, and a new ethos based on a formulation and usage of black values. According to Biko, by identifying oneself as black, a person started on the road towards emancipation, in both physical and psychological terms (1988: 62). Identifying itself with the 'life-thread' of a black culture which had managed to remain as a living tradition, despite the forced tribalism of South Africa under segregation, adherents of the ideology were determined to build a new value-orientation in order to 'articulate the priorities and needs of the Black people and act in terms of these needs' (Pityana 1972: 181). The past was seen as important in the attainment of the goals of future liberation; Black Consciousness was, from one perspective, an ideology of hope which prophesied a future free from exploitation (Fatton 1986: 41; 60). The philosophy therefore appealed to every black individual to act positively for group liberation. Each person or group of people became defined and identifiable as 'part of the solution or part of the problem' (S. Buthelezi 1991: 123):

> A philosophy of liberation requires a re-appraisal of the policies and institutions of the Black Community. We must re-evaluate everything we are doing or saying.... We must rise now to the level of black hegemony, the idea that blacks must establish moral and cultural authority over the whole. A philosophy of liberation requires transformation. It says that everything must be made anew.... Being black is not enough. One must be black and ready together.
>
> (Khoapa 1972: 66 – 7)

In order to achieve these aims, the Black Consciousness leadership envisaged a process of conscientisation of the wider community of black people in the townships. A political strategy of mobilisation devised around

popularising the doctrine and working with their wider society through welfare and self-help projects, community work, discussion and propaganda was established.[26] The manner in which such conscientisation was perceived by one of its leading initiators was as follows:

> You are speaking about what that man knows; you are moving from there to talk about ways you go from here. You are giving him some kind of home within a group called the Black People's Convention.... You stand squarely on the side of the black man, we understand the problems to be these. And they know the problem ... they can express their problem stronger than you can but now you move from there to create some kind of hope, some kind of opportunity ... you are giving them some kind of psychotherapy to move away from being a defeated society to being a hopeful society.... When you are speaking of black solidarity all you are talking about really is just that feeling that you are speaking for the majority of blacks.
>
> (Biko 1988: 155 – 6; sic.)[27]

Through stances such as this, Black Consciousness beckoned individuals towards a wider, more communal sense of identity and purpose that promised subjective and group power in a racially alienating environment. It attempted, in other words, to forge a new concept of subjectivity among individuals, who could thereupon begin to identify and join together with those other blacks who perceived the need for similar solutions to the problems caused by apartheid. This linking of the self with an emancipatory cause and a wider community was, to exaggerate only slightly, conceived of as a psychological, individual programme of emancipation that would logically lead to physical liberation.[28] In the interim this process would, through an 'inward-looking' process – a 'pulling out of the innards' as Gwala expressed it (Gwala 1984: 39; see also Pityana

1972: 180), inculcate positive black characteristics such as pride, confidence, and self-affirmation (Mzamane 1991: 185; Sibisi 1991: 133).

The effects of this process of self-examination and self-transformation initiated by Black Consciousness in the 1970s cannot be overstated. While there was an emphasis on group power and solidarity (in literal terms, the need for a regroupment on the part of the oppressed (Khoapa 1972: 64)), the philosophy allowed many disenchanted, politically-inclined individuals to find a means of identification and a political touchstone in a hostile and divisive environment. It was the vehicle for politicising and mobilising a whole new generation of activists. Thus, in a 1975 speech the poet and cultural activist Sipho Sepamla, as a member of a slightly older generation, expressed his regret that the social circumstances of his own youth had denied him a coherent ideology as a point of departure for his thinking and understanding (Sepamla 1976: 24); while the younger academic and prose writer Mbulelo Mzamane believed that the advent of Black Consciousness (and in particular the events of Soweto 1976) were an important personal watershed, giving him a clear ideological framework and stance towards literary issues which allowed him to embrace the totality of 'our experience ... and reflect the reality of our situation, without idealization or romanticization' (Mzamane 1984b: 302).

Early Attempts to Conscientise the Community

Black Consciousness ideology had by the middle of the decade begun to spread outward from its student base. From early on in its existence, attempts were made by the black intellectuals, theologians and students among whom Black Consciousness first evolved to link up with the black community; who were seen as crucial, in their support, for its continued existence.[29] The philosophy especially called on the black intellectual to:

> ... feel he is one of his common Black people (sic.) – neither floating above nor cringing under their collective will ... (fighting) ignorance and illiteracy amongst our people, in an effort to effectively weed out traditional prejudices and those installed by white domination ...
> (Gwala 1975: 30 – 1)

At least some of the students directing S.A.S.O. were aware of the vacuum in black political organisation caused by the bannings of the 1960s, seeing campus politics as only part of a broader fight for black political emancipation in South Africa (Hirson 1979: 69 – 70; Fatton 1986: 68). After students, its next most important constituency emerged as parents' and community groups, theological associations, and various writers' and journalists' organisations (Kane-Berman 1978: 106). Attempts were made to forge community links. The Black People's Convention (B.P.C.) was founded in 1972 to 'conscientize the masses', and by 1973 had 41 branches throughout South Africa with some four thousand members (Fatton 1986: 102). In 1973 the Black Community Programmes (B.C.P.) was founded, and a number of rural development, literacy, bulk-buying, home industry, health,

leadership and other self-help projects initiated around the country to allow the black community to 'become aware of its identity ... create a sense of its own power ... organise itself, analyse its needs and problems and ... mobilise its resources'.[30]

The relationship of many sectors of the black middle-class in South Africa in the 1970s towards Black Consciousness was ambivalent: while business people, doctors, and the State-employed petty-bourgeoisie resisted its call, others – such as clergymen, artists, journalists, teachers and nurses – were highly responsive (Nolutshungu 1983: 192). Black Consciousness also found a receptive audience among the more politicised, urban youth; it influenced a plethora of regional and provincial youth organisations set up in the townships in the early 1970s – which had united by 1973 to become the National Youth Organisation (N.A.Y.O.) – and retained strong but informal links with the South African Students' Movement (S.A.S.M.), a national body which set up projects and campaigned amongst black school students.[31]

A number of trade union and worker organisations were constituted. A Black Workers' Project was set up in 1971, and shortly thereafter Drake Koka, an official of the Sales and Allied Workers' Association, established the Black and Allied Workers' Union (B.A.W.U.), which had close links with S.A.S.O. This proto-union was banned by the South African Government in 1973.[32] In addition, a Black Women's Federation was

instituted in 1975 (Ramphele 1991a: 216), to accommodate numbers of women who were attracted to the message of Black Consciousness.

At its most nuanced, Black Consciousness believed that its leadership of the liberation struggle would only be temporary, until such time as the rest of the black community learned to 'take their destiny into their own hands' (Phaahla 1982: 36). As evinced in many of the programmes of its organisations, however, Black Consciousness perceived no important disjunctures or contradictions in the relationship between black student leaders and their community. The gap that existed was a creation of the apartheid system and could easily be nullified by more privileged black people committing themselves to unity and liberation in the name of a shared blackness.[33] S.A.S.O. and the B.P.C., as examples, maintained limited contact with workers; and, although workers were seen as an important target group to mobilise, had no clear strategy before 1976 to enable such mobilisation to take place (Nolutshungu 1983: 187).[34] Despite some organising initiatives among bus drivers, the B.W.P. and B.A.W.U. had limited success. The latter showed little evidence of socialist ideas or connection to the working class. Koka had previously been a moderate member of the Liberal Party (Hirson 1979: 109); and B.A.W.U.'s aims were correspondingly moderate.[35] In its turn, the issues addressed by the B.P.C. depended on the spontaneous reaction of black people and communities to their various experiences of oppression (such as the Durban dock workers' strike of 1973 and the bus strikes in Johannesburg and Durban the same

year); and their subsequent 'action' amounted to little more than the issuing of condemnatory statements (Hirson 1979: 84).[36]

Moreover, despite the formation of the B.W.F., an awareness of problems of gender domination was practically non-existent in Black Consciousness thought up until the early 1980s. The language of Black Consciousness was phallologocentric: issues of oppression were interpreted according to male issues and in male discourse.[37] In the debates about the direction of Black Consciousness taking place in the late 1960s, for example, gender was not raised as a political issue at all (Ramphele 1991a: 215): instead, the crippling of the manhood of black men by apartheid laws was a frequently voiced complaint (see, as examples, Biko 1988: 42; 82; 90; Manganyi 1973: 10 – 1).[38] Black Consciousness was nevertheless experienced by many of its female adherents as a liberating doctrine, allowing them more psychological and intellectual stimulation (Ramphele 1991a: 217). A few women gained positions of influence; in political circles, the first female to head a Black Consciousness organisation was Motlalepula Kgware, elected President of the B.P.C. in 1973 (S. Buthelezi 1991: 126). Women who entered Black Consciousness organisations were at first generally urban, professional or intellectual individuals; becoming involved in community and self-help projects or as 'significant others' (Ramphele 1991a: 215 – 6). Generally, women who were taken seriously in such circles adopted, in the words of Mamphela Ramphele, 'honorary male' status, and the spheres of socio-political operation defined for women

by Black Consciousness remained essentially domestic and nurturing. The B.W.F. limited the scope of issues to be dealt with by and for women to those aimed at propagating Black Consciousness doctrines to a future generation, because of their structural role in child socialisation.[39] While the generation of women emerging during 1976 showed, generally speaking, greater assertiveness (Driver 1990: 250), this limited focus as to what constituted the liberation of women did not alter significantly in the period under scrutiny.

Despite these problems, however, and in stark comparison to the end of the previous decade, the 1970s proved turbulent and eventful. In the period between January 1973 and June 1974, despite stringent prohibitions on illegal striking and a lack of anti-Government worker organisations, some three hundred strikes took place in South Africa, involving up to eighty thousand workers (Hirson 1979: 88). The guerrilla wars in neighbouring Zimbabwe, Angola and Mozambique affected the sense of security of white South Africans, especially after the withdrawal of Portugal from its two colonies neighbouring South Africa in 1974 (Kane-Berman 1978: 106). In the light of this, the South African Government quickly altered its initial view that the Black Consciousness philosophy was amenable to apartheid's grand vision of segregation. From 1973 onwards its political figures were subject to continual police harassment. A number of its leaders were banned in 1973, and members of the radical Durban branch of the B.C.P. arrested (and then jailed for nine years) for a rally

held in support of F.R.E.L.I.M.O. in 1974. The mobilisation drive of Black Consciousness organisations was made even more difficult by the bannings of their leaders and publications, by barriers to their organisation in the Government-created 'Homelands', and by a growing number of political trials of their members by the mid-1970s. S.A.S.O. was in addition banned from all black campuses except the University of Zululand in 1975 (see S. Buthelezi 1991: 127; Hirson 1979: 72 – 3; 108 – 9; 160 – 4).

While the number of Black Consciousness followers in the early 1970s remained, in national terms, relatively small (Hirson, for example, doubts that the combined membership of S.A.S.O. and the B.P.C. ever exceeded seven thousand members, and the membership of these two organisations overlapped considerably), their philosophy can nonetheless be seen in retrospect to have constituted the major source of anti-Government activity and feeling during the decade.[40] Black Consciousness was able to 'impinge episodically on the day-to-day struggles of black workers in certain parts of the country' (Alexander 1991: 247), while its student converts (due to the influence many were to have subsequently as school teachers, priests, journalists and artists) were a profound source of propagation of its ideas to their classes, congregations and audiences.[41] It spread most successfully and effectively, therefore, as 'a mood ... which could not fail to stir new thinking in the minds of many ordinary people' (Gerhart 1978: 295).[42]

Moreover, as the decade progressed a radical socialist tinge to Black Consciousness activity became apparent. The revolt of 1976, sparked off in

Soweto and thereafter spreading to many areas of the country outside of Natal, was especially important in this process of radicalisation, as well as the further mobilisation of an increasingly disaffected black sector. The security crackdowns, detentions and climate of burgeoning repression in the late 1970s forced many black people to reassess their positions; very few were unaffected by the political events taking place, especially in the urban areas. The influence of ideals of non-violence, under debate and discussion for some time in Black Consciousness organisations, waned appreciably after 1976; as more and more black people saw the need for some kind of violent resistance to the intensifying pressure of State repression (Fatton 1986: 37).

Politics and Culture

Black Consciousness' highlighting of identity and experience naturally lent itself to expression in creative cultural forms. Cultural revival was on the agenda of Black Consciousness from the start, so it is not surprising that literature – in particular – was continuously seen as an important medium for use by many Black Consciousness followers. Black Consciousness stressed the importance of transforming black attitudes and world views; and literature, by its very nature, focusses on human experiences, identities and consciousness. It is small wonder therefore that a

cultural and literary re-awakening emerged in the 1970s which can largely be ascribed to the growth of Black Consciousness and which, in its turn, helped to foster the philosophy.[43] Thus when in the early part of the decade Mongane Serote perceived himself as needing 'to search for black interests and a black position in the world', a quest such as his 'all spelt one thing: consciousness', according to Gwala (Serote in Chapman 1982b: 113; Gwala 1984: 40). Increasingly this cultural emphasis acted as the motor for a literary upsurge in South Africa: black writers, performers and magazines provided an important mouthpiece for feelings of cultural rediscovery and racial identification. The writer Achmat Dangor, for instance, believes that it was the black writers who saved Black Consciousness 'from being a raw, racist ideology' and moulded it into a more sophisticated system of thought (August 1981).

As part of its desire to trace the source of black culture back to African value systems and traditional beliefs, Black Consciousness also lent itself to a strong 'back to Africa' cultural impetus. 'The stress on black art', Gwala noted in a 1973 article, 'is the re-instatement of indigenous culture – with its modern complexities and the stripping of its inferiority labels'. He went on to stress the need for the history of this culture, both pre- and post-colonial, to be 'given a place among the people' so that black culture could be put into a perspective that showed up the common historical and social links binding urban and rural blacks into a common cultural identity (Gwala 1973: 132 – 3).

With only the few exceptions of those lucky enough to receive their education outside of South Africa's borders (such as Mzamane and Njabulo Ndebele, who completed their school education in Swaziland)[44] the younger generation of writers and performers who emerged in the Black Consciousness era suffered as a result of the lack of access to books, especially the books of the previous generation of black South African writers,[45] and from the poor schooling and instruction in English they received through Bantu Education. Thus, as they professed a lack of knowledge of their elders' work and the aesthetic principles which informed it, the black writers of the 1970s built a literary tradition to suit themselves through their own experiments with content and form (Rive 1977: 48).[46] In the words of playwright Matsemela Manaka, they thus found themselves 'fighting from a rootless base, while white people are fighting from inside a dominant culture' (Steadman 1984a: 14). In addition to the lack of a literary tradition, writers underwent many other hardships. In a society which regarded the presence of blacks in urban areas in a favourable light only if they were (in line with Verwoerdian principles) 'gainfully employed', writers suffered from a lack of space, leisure time, facilities, and encouragement to practise and learn their craft (Mzamane 1977b: 27).[47]

Critical of the relative lack of assertiveness or radical understanding of society of at least some of their forbears, the writers, in line with the general thrust of the philosophy to which they gave allegiance, saw the need to articulate black viewpoints and opinions through their work, rather than

allowing a dominant, minority white culture and its norms to continue determining black viewpoints and expression.[48] Given the relative voicelessness of blacks in a world neither made nor defined by themselves, blacks were urged by Black Consciousness literature to become, in terms of their experience of the world and in the light of their own culture, 'speaking subjects'.[49] As a result of the 'existence of a great vacuum in our literary and newspaper world.... (where) So many things are said ... to us, about us and for us but very seldom by us', as Biko noted,[50] black writers saw the need to discover appropriate literary forms which would allow them to be the channels through which expressions of the experience of 'blackness' could occur. In a situation where black hopelessness 'has continually been perpetuated by white moral ethics' (Gwala 1973: 133), the writers saw themselves as helping to break down the symbolic order associated with white hegemony and cultural norms: consequently, a black ethos as challenger instead of challenged came into being. In 1971 Gwala commented, in a letter to a fellow black writer:

> Nat (Nakasa) put too much trust in the liberal academics.... What he failed to understand was that no change has ever come through the conceptual 'solution' of negotiation. True equality does not come out of seeking fraternity or being sought for it. It comes out of the basic realisation of the other's right.
>
> (Gwala 1971: 178)[51]

The popular township theatre of Kente and others was slammed for its lack of political message and content.[52] At the same time, Black Consciousness took on a combative position vis-a-vis other forms of theatre about or for black people. White-directed shows which emphasised ethnicity

such as Ipi-Tombi and KwaZulu were regarded as anathema because of their frequent Government sponsorship, their distortion of traditional rural life and their tendency to portray blacks as uncomplicated, smiling children.[53] Even political theatre by blacks which included the influence or help of more radical whites was derided by extreme exponents of Black Consciousness: Serote's slanging of the blacks in the theatre group Workshop '71 as 'non-whites, schizophrenics, guinea-pigs' is a famous example of this (quoted in Tshabangu 1973: 45).[54]

The black literature and performance which developed from the early 1970s onwards was predominantly and deliberately political.[55] In contrast to the dominant white establishment view that 'literature' was a separate category of expression to 'politics',[56] the literature which emerged generally fulfilled an immediate political function and contained strong political messages. Black writers like Serote made a seemingly simple but transfiguring discovery:

> ... there was what is known as a book, which was in turn made by real people. Up until then these things were mysterious to me. A poet was mysterious because we hadn't seen a poet in our lives. We'd read Shakespeare, Wordsworth and the others, and all these people were dead. We also read 'vernacular poetry' by bo-Raditladi and so on ... these things were distant. They did not contain any actual feeling which touched and directed your life on the spot.
>
> (Seroke 1981a: 30)[57]

It was realised that literature could be made immediately applicable to the everyday lives and concerns of black South Africans. This rehabilitation and re-structuring of an African-directed creative impulse – in short, a cultural reaffirmation – manifested itself in a situation where the

dominant white culture was rejected as inappropriate to black concerns and desires.

Art and politics were seen as inseparable by black writers because politics, in the form of everyday racial oppression, pervaded all aspects of black people's lives (Mzamane 1978: 42). Literature and culture were mooted to play major roles in political liberation due to the extremely limited nature of normal political expression and agitation allowed in other areas (Vaughan 1984a: 211). In such circumstances literature could be a powerful handmaiden to the cause of political and social liberation. Mothobi Mutloatse, a leading Black Consciousness editor, prose writer and publisher, was to note later that this literature was:

> ... an aspect of this liberation struggle. The mind of the people has been asleep for too long. We want to help liberate the mind first, and then we get to the body.
>
> (Welz 1987: 48)

Finally – and this is a point often forgotten by critics – the literature of Black Consciousness allowed the expressions of frustration and anger of individual black writers to appear in a form which could be communicated and shared.[58] Telling whites what one thought of them in plain terms was 'an act of self-emancipation' (D. Kunene 1986: 46). When heard by blacks, such forms of self-assertion assisted a solidarity based on audiences recognising that the psychological trauma they suffered under apartheid was widely spread, and had political causes. The anger and frustration felt by people could therefore be directed, through literature, towards the ideological and political goals of ending apartheid.

Thus, despair and re-affirmation were interwoven in the literature. As far as poetry was concerned, a type of 'anti-poetry' (Watson 1982: 15)[59] was created by many poets, who used it to express the anger and despair they felt living in a racist society, and to demonstrate the degradation of life in the townships and the violence symptomatic of the South African social order. The literature – especially the performed literature – was thus often apocalyptic in tone, as artistic creation was calculated as an insurrectionary endeavour to unmake the world before recovering and re-ordering what was of permanent value (Nolutshungu 1983: 155).

Basing itself on the absolute divide drawn by Black Consciousness between the worlds of the white oppressor and black oppressed, culture was seen as either belonging to the oppressor or the oppressed. Like the rest of their Black Consciousness comrades-in-arms, the writers considered themselves as part of the problem or part of the solution, joining the cause of black liberation to help construct 'an alternative context to the apartheid context' (Gwala 1979: 55).[60] Those who did not were socially culpable, as inaction was a form of abetting the status quo: prevaricating writers were 'literary quislings' (Mzamane 1984b: 304).

Connecting the individual to the wider black society, the political literature of the Black Consciousness movement increasingly became defined as a literature dedicated to the overthrow of apartheid structures, mobilising and inspiring the black masses in their search for freedom (Mzamane 1978: 50): in short, a literature in service to the liberation of

black people (Chris van Wyk, in Chapman 1982a: 132). Literature was a means of emphasising the common racial link binding black people into a common culture, and establishing a common cause between them. It was, moreover, conceived of in the early formulations of the 1970s as a temporary medium of racially-defined art, that would at some time in the future be broadened and directed towards a 'truly national literature' in the country. Rather than a dominated, ideologically weak force, the cultural expressions of the majority of South Africans should be recognised for what they were – the major constituents of any future national culture. An 'authentic national culture in South Africa can now only be hoisted by black involvement'. Black Consciousness, seen from this perspective, was not only a rejection of white racism, self-realisation of black humanity and an assertion of identity: it was a force which eventually would unite 'man at a universal level, free of racial or colour prejudices' (quotes from Gwala 1979: 57; 1973: 132; E. Patel 1982: 127).

Thus, in the 1970s Black Consciousness focussed on using cultural means to liberate black people from their submissive perceptions of self and society:

> Against the spate of repression unleashed by the state, its accomplishments were truly remarkable, in creating the possibility of a black identity which ignored the apartheid definition of blacks and kept alive the spirit of resistance. Black Consciousness was counter-hegemonic in its thrust and set itself the task of counteracting the cultural imperialism that had sapped the spirit and being of the racially oppressed. Its tool was culture itself ... (and) operated from an instinctive knowledge that culture is both adaptive, offering ways of coping and making sense, and strategic, capable of being mobilised for

> political, economic and social ends. Black Consciousness understood that just as culture can be oppressive, it can also be liberating.
>
> (Mzamane 1991: 193)

The Search for a Black Aesthetic

Because literature was deemed to have an urgent political function, it was used as a means of expressing social discontent. The artistic value of the utterance was seen by some writers as temporary. Literature was primarily appraised for its function in spreading ideas rather than in terms of artistic value. Nevertheless, the search for critical tools with which to assess black literature (and indeed all literature) in South Africa drew the attention of not only radical white, but also black literati. Some pointed out that the critical tools that had been developed in South Africa could not satisfactorily come to grips with the specifics of African literature and culture – specifics which included issues pertaining to the less rarified way art was socially produced and received in many African societies; the important heritage and living presence of oral literature; the significant interaction between oral and written forms that existed; the connection of a great deal of early African writing to polemics, journalism and didactic pursuits; and the problems involved in using European genre definitions for African forms.[61]

In a situation where critics of literature were overwhelmingly white, black intellectuals saw an urgent compulsion to turn the concept of 'white superiority' on its head and assert the importance of black culture and initiative. White critics were generally unfamiliar with the experiences, judgments and assumptions of black people in the townships, and their critical evaluations and categorisations therefore tended to ignore the 'popular context' (Gwala 1973: 133). Given their ideological predilections, many white critics also downplayed or denigrated the essentially political thrust of black literature.[62] Throughout the period under scrutiny, such critics were seen as being enslaved by 'Western' notions of art, which denied the socio-political determinants and consequences of artistic praxis.[63]

Inappropriate responses to their literature from many white critics attracted the ire of black writers. In order to struggle and experiment towards a new, vital literature, black writers needed to ignore, in Tlali's terms, the 'intellectual polemics' of professors: especially those of the English language (Tlali 1984a: 24). Critic-writers such as Mutloatse suggested that a great deal of previous, white-dominated, assumptions about literature needed to be overlooked if black writers were to be able to enjoy anything approaching non-biased, non-Eurocentric criticism of their work:

> We will have to donder conventional literature: old-fashioned critic and reader alike. We are going to pee, spit and shit on literary convention before we are through; we are going to experiment and probe and not give a damn what the critics have to say.... We are not going to be told

> how to re-live our feelings, pains and aspirations by anybody who speaks from the platform of his own rickety culture.
>
> (Mutloatse 1980: 5)

Consequently, the struggle against white ideological domination and the need for cultural unity required the development of analytical tools by blacks, to deal with black literature in a meaningful way. Calls were made for black practitioners to come forward to adjust a prevailing imbalance in the production of literary evaluations in the country, whereby a 'division of labour' between black writer on the one hand and white critic on the other occurred ('Critics wanted': 58).

This had an impact on writers' attitude to white publishers and editors as well, whether or not these were well-meaning. Radical poets such as Gwala preferred to have their work unpublished by 'white paternalists', and searched for a connection with those in their immediate environment, because, he believed, 'the real critics of Black poetry will not be heard – in the conventional manner'. It was more important how a local black readership evaluated this literature (Gwala 1974: 111).[64]

Such reactions resulted in a consciously angry turning away from European images of Africa to a more authentic, more 'African', image. In their rejection of white leadership and white expertise, the Black Consciousness writers and performers not only brought Eurocentric literary criteria into the firing line, but also the notion that literature was the domain of only the privileged few. In their emphasis on communal and relevant art, and their forceful and direct utterance, these writers managed

to – at least partly – displace the hegemony of liberal, individualistic notions of literature and presuppositions about its relation to society.

The Search for Traditional Identity

Despite the fact that many Black Consciousness adherents lived in urban areas, the philosophy stressed that:

> ... in spite of the shifting African images, in spite of the cultural genocide and the spread of ambivalence in the literate sectors of African life, there remains a core of stability and continuity that infuses itself into the urban siege culture.
>
> (Manganyi 1980: 18)

In an environment where many blacks had lost respect both for their elders and for their culture, and where the threads of continuity and dynamic evolution in the racial and ethnic histories and cultures of black people had been frozen by the South African Government into the static, monolithic categories of tribalism (Ndebele 1972: 26; see also Biko 1988: 84 – 5), a 'true' black history was sought for reclamation from the ravages of decades of white ideological domination. The continuity of black historical processes and, especially, resistance to foreign intrusion was seen as needing re-discovery.[65] Followers of Black Consciousness perceived literature as a form of self-expression which was simultaneously a conscious remoulding and making of history in tune with black aspirations (Seroke

1981a: 32): a reconstruction of the history denied black people under apartheid (see Mutloatse 1981a: 5; Tlali 1984a: 26).

It is not surprising in such circumstances that pre-colonial oral literature served as an important model for these writers and performers. The urban-based literature produced in Soweto and elsewhere from the early 1970s strove to revive the values of African societies existing before the colonial onslaught; it laid stress on a rediscovery of African, non-exploitative relationships. Traditional culture was supposed to help in a forging of fresh values. According to educationist P.C. Mokgokgong:

> Black Consciousness ... is the awakening of the oft-neglected values of the culture of the blacks, a movement that sets out to defend, present and glorify folk-culture.
>
> ('Black writers ...')

A widespread admiration for the supposedly communal and anti-individualistic role of the traditional poet was reiterated by many; this role was then put forward as an example of how modern writers and performers should behave. The exiled writer Daniel Kunene, for instance, who identified himself strongly with Black Consciousness[66] observed that in oral traditions 'the artists and the audience are at one as far as the social ideal is concerned, as far as the effect of the performance of a story is concerned. In an oral performance, there is a special relationship between people' ('Panel on contemporary ...': 6); Es'kia Mphahlele commented that traditional poets 'composed or recited what they had inherited from previous generations' (Mphahlele 1979a: 57); and Mzamane stressed a belief that black writers worked within two traditions: a written, Western

tradition and a traditional one handed down from the past (Mzamane 1984a: 147).

Crucially in this regard, exiled writer Mazisi Kunene gave voice to a commonly held belief when he claimed that 'specialization of literature for a certain class or group is alien to oral literature' (M. Kunene 1976: 28). The democratic role of traditional poet as medium between chief and people – appealing to a common identity and sense of political and ideological purpose – was seen as exemplary. Much was made of the democratic nature of traditional poetry, in which the poet had interpreted the ruler to the people and vice versa. Thus Gwala, interpreting a poem by Mandlenkosi (later Mandla) Langa, noted its resemblance to traditional izibongo, where the imbongi 'can freely go to town on the shortcomings of the king and not face punishment. For he shall be speaking the truth of which the king's subjects shall be aware' (Gwala 1979: 58).[67] Several writers implied, or claimed, their right to take over this traditional mantle of oral poet or story-teller in the altered circumstances of modern society: the writer being 'still expected to articulate the people's problems and complaints, and to project their collective aspirations' (Mzamane 1984a: 148).[68] Assertions were made to the effect that modern black writers derived their sense of the committed, educating and socially functional nature of literature from the model of the traditional oral poet, who also embodied the social values and 'collective conscience' of the society as a whole. Some of these claims were extreme, likening their roles as writers in

the modern world to the 'traditional' even when using literary forms foreign to traditional African literature. Thus Mzamane described his role as author of the novel The Children of Soweto as that of a 'traditional griot, who is the custodian of his people's oral tradition, their verse and songs, their history and culture of resistance', simply on the basis of his attempts to make the community as a whole the hero of this work (Mzamane 1984b: 304).

In certain cases the mythic and ritualistic elements of oral literature were also highlighted as a model for poetic behaviour. The Durban poet Eugene Skeef, for instance, described an experience travelling with the Mobile Writers' Workshop in 1979 as follows:

> The meeting of souls at night fulfills primary depths if the communion is creative. On our last night together we made a fire outside a military camp on the outskirts of Bloemfontein. Having girded ourselves against the conspiracy of the slow dawn, we liberated our souls into the open darkness. Spontaneously we improvised on songs of release.... As we chanted and danced around the fierce fire, its leaping flames seemed to forge our faces into sacred masks. The scene had become a ritual ceremony.
>
> (Skeef 1979: 43)

This preoccupation with black cultural values and historical revival went hand in hand with the construction of an identity and personality which would put black people in touch with Africa. Traditional sources and examples were used as a counteractive measure against those beliefs serving to debase black people and their history, by dint of a return to values and customs which were seen as more essentially African. Ingoapele

Madingoane's important poem 'black trial' (extremely popular at township readings at the end of the 1970s) demonstrated this preoccupation clearly:

> (Its) central tension ... involves a contrast between the memories of a vital past ... and a disrupted present in which the African has been cast into images of non- being.... Against such images Madingoane evokes a new "African definition" – a call to change things, to find inspiration in a heritage, and to resist until justice is done.
>
> (Msimang 1982: 211)

In this rediscovery of identity, heroes of the past, traditional rites and ancestral spirits were invoked again and again. In many cases, the potent nature of symbols redolent with meaning for black people – symbols referring back to a traditional culture or to the history of African resistance to colonial encroachment – were used. A move can be discerned to negate historical events and symbols which denigrated blacks (such as Blood River and the oxwagon), and to glean symbols, value systems and historical events from a proud past which could resonate with meaning for black people generally – Shaka, Isandhlwana, the baobab, the black mother, the black child, the assegai, the heroic warrior, the calabash, and so on. An emphasis on 'renaming' also occurred: a change of one's European name for a more authentically African one.

However, Black Consciousness cannot be characterised as simply a backward-looking revivalist movement, even if some of its adherents became enamoured of the 'cultural' aspect of its doctrines. 'I would not', said Barney Pityana, 'like to exalt the past at the expense of the present and the future' (Pityana 1972: 181); while Manganyi voiced the opinion that:

> There is an urgent need for serious reflection on how best we can redirect our age-old attitudes in respect of our black beautiful bodies; our community responsibilities; our attitudes towards the material culture; and our relationship with time.... Black Consciousness and solidarity must mean something more than mere nostalgia. In their present and future thrusts, they must mean the birth of a new creativity.
>
> (Manganyi 1973: 33)

While some commentators have criticised the ideology for having a romantic view of the African past (Hirson 1979: 111), others believe that the emphasis in Black Consciousnesss thought on traditional values was in fact in anticipation of a future society in which people's energies and priorities would be re-directed towards Africa rather than Europe (Gerhart 1978: 271 – 2): a modern culture, in Biko's words, of 'defiance, self-assertion and group pride and solidarity' (Biko 1988: 60; see also Gwala 1979: 56 – 7). The retrieval of past values should be projected into the future, to underscore a new definition and understanding of black identity and consciousness.[69] Thus by the middle of the 1970s, according to Gwala, 'the ghetto theme had become more realistic than the Muse's ventures into Swahili, Egyptian and Yoruba aphorisms' (Gwala 1984: 44). Criticisms levelled at idealistic or romantic notions as to what constituted traditional culture became discernible: for instance, theologian Manas Buthelezi warned against romanticising what he called an 'ethnographically reconstructed historical past' at the expense of an awareness of the dynamic nature of all culture, including contemporary black culture (M. Buthelezi 1974: 32); while later, in 1980, Lefifi Tladi (an important cultural activist in

the early 1970s) came under heavy attack for sculpting African images of a 'curio' type at an exhibition after he had gone into exile.[70]

Although traditional pre-colonial Africa was used as an exemplar, the dislike these radical urban black artists felt for the white Government's separatist policies was reflected at the time by a suspicion, among many of them, that the use of traditional culture and African languages would be too amenable to the narrow ethnicity of apartheid. Instead, it was stressed that the values of previous African cultures would have to be sifted through, so that what was thought valuable to the demands of the present could be selected and used (M. Langa 1979: 25).

The Quest for a Black Readership

In their search for a more authentic, more essentially African identity and aesthetic, writers were also aware that their literature could only act as a viable conscientising force if it addressed itself to, and was consumed by, the right type of audience. Mike Kirkwood, director of Ravan Press from the mid-1970s, remarked on the shift in reading patterns which took place in South African literature:

> It was an awareness that the black writers I was now beginning to meet were not figures on the margins of a white culture who were writing chiefly for a white readership, they were really the advance guard of a whole cultural movement that was addressing a new readership – an African readership.
>
> ('Ravan: letting ...')

In line with the doctrines of black awareness, the focus of concern for black writers and performers began to shift towards a black audience. Debates took place about the relative merits and demerits of addressing different racial groups through literature. For instance, in a debate in the magazine S'ketsh' in 1975, prose writer Mango Tshabangu countered Sepamla's suggestion that dramatic works should be performed in front of whites 'if for no other reason at least to show our resilience' by saying:

> It is not the duty of Black Theatre to conscientise the whiteman (sic.).... For them the purpose will be to pander to the other man's taste in an idiom foreign to us but one he can understand.... And that will be the end of legitimate Black Theatre.
>
> (Tshabangu 1974/5a: 19; see also Sepamla 1974/5a: 19)

It was frequently stressed that black writers were no longer writing literature as a form of protest aimed at whites readers,[71] but were instead intent on addressing positive messages to their fellow blacks. The prose writer Miriam Tlali proclaimed:

> To the Philistines, the banners of books, the critics.... We black South African writers (who are faced with the task of conscientizing ourselves and our people) are writing for those whom we know are the relevant audience. We are not going to write in order to qualify or fit into your definition of what you describe as 'true art.' Our main objective is not to receive ballyhoo comments. Our duty is to write for our people and about them ...
>
> (Tlali 1984a: 26)[72]

The implementation of apartheid had meant, by the 1970s, a striking ignorance by blacks and whites of each other's lives and experiences, prohibitive of the forging of a common South African culture (ibid.: 22).

The task of turning towards black experiences and a black readership was therefore also practically more viable.

White readers were stereotyped by Black Consciousness activists as being complacent, escapist, and not really interested in the issues black writers wanted to write about (Mutloatse 1980: 3 – 4). One reviewer claimed that whites were drawn to black theatre (and other forms of literary utterance) in order to witness the exotic nature of its message and presentation. This could reinforce unfortunate images and stereotypes of blacks among whites, unless such utterance was accompanied by 'an assertion of black pride' (Mshengu 1974/5a: 15).[73] Some writers of a Black Consciousness persuasion took extreme stands on the issue of whites receiving their work. For example, a number of writers withdrew from the 'Black Thoughts' reading at the University of the Witwatersrand in 1974 because of the presence of whites in the audience.[74]

The present generation of writers, Tlali believed, must instead:

> ... never forget our main task of being engaged in a psychological battle for the minds of the people.... If we write for ourselves that won't help. We shouldn't be trapped like the 1950s generation of writers who had their books read by a few at the top of the masses.
>
> (Tlali in Seroke 1981b: 43)

Bringing published literature to relatively impoverished black readers was nevertheless, structurally speaking, a difficult task – given the price of books and the lack of a widespread reading culture in the townships.[75] In a difficult situation for individuals of artistic bent, where 'nothing back home ... says you must be a writer', in Serote's words (Seroke 1981a: 31), it

became a matter of pride in the community that black people were writing. Serote spoke about this response in an interview:

> I must confess some sort of pride. As soon as one paints a picture or writes a book the immediate reaction from the black community is to claim you. You become a daughter or son of the people.
> (Seroke 1981a: 31; see also Mnyele 1980: 42)

By the early years of the 1970s there were signs that black writers' work was being bought by 'ordinary black people in the segregated townships' (Gordimer 1973: 51); indicating an enlargement in the size of the audience receptive to fairly complex political ideas, and also demonstrating how the rhetoric of Black Consciousness had begun to infuse black culture with a fresh mood of assertiveness (Lodge 1983: 324; see also Cronin 1985b: 1).

In a scenario of burgeoning resistance, black writers, remembering Sekou Toure's dictum that the task of the writer was not only to write revolutionary songs but fashion the revolution with the people,[76] constantly reiterated a desire to close the gap between writer and reader in a meaningful manner. In a politically charged atmosphere even book covers with symbolic significance – like the silhouetted black fist on the cover of the local edition of Tlali's novel Amandla – could come to have political resonance (Manaka, quoted in Alvarez-Pereyre 1988: 116). Readers and audiences at performances were urged to become collaborators (rather than just spectators) in rituals of cultural identity and solidarity. Thus the trend towards seeking, and finding, a black audience continued. After 1976, for

instance, Mzamane spoke of the 'vast following' poets found in some of the townships of the Transvaal (Mzamane 1978: 55).

Rejecting white expertise and values as potentially corruptive, the young black artists who adopted Black Consciousness insisted on consciously directing their work to black audiences and a black readership: intent, as Rive was later to put it, at 'looking at blacks and hitting hard, especially at the professional black' (Welz 1987: 13). The writer's task was to bring to readers the requisite knowledge to allow them to act (Watts 1989: 52). At least some of the positive response among black consumers of this literature appears to have been because the writers and performers were giving voice and flesh to aspirations which included all blacks and which are unavailable in more directly political form.

The Publishing Industry

Prior to the 1970s, South African-based English-language publishers had concentrated overwhelmingly on school books for the local market, Africana, travel, cooking and gardening titles.[77] Creative writers in the country had tended to publish their works in small literary magazines and journals or, if better known, with metropolitan publishers (Randall 1986: 12; see also Donker 1983: 31). In the early stages of Black Consciousness in the late 1960s and early 1970s, liberal journals such as Contrast, The Classic

and Purple Renoster, as well as black-edited publications such as S.A.S.O. Newsletter, gave some space to black creative literature; although it was only The Classic – up until its demise in 1971 – which gave most of its pages over to this new writing.[78] The 1960s, however, a time (in Kantey's trenchant phrase) of 'economic sunshine and political drought' in South Africa (Kantey n.d.: 4), when Afrikaner and white liberal opinion flourished at the same time as black viewpoints were stifled, proved a time when publishers began to look more closely at the economic possibilities of enlarging their South African readership.

It had always been difficult for black writers to get published in South Africa, due to the dearth of local publishing houses and the perception of the mission presses (who had prior to the 1960s published a great deal of the black writing to emerge) that their publication of black writing should be guided by their Christian ideology and intentions. The discovery by publishers that there was a South African market available for, inter alia, South African literature, radical history and literary criticism,[79] resulted in the rise of a new type of local publisher, aware at the same time of social and commercial responsibilities (Donker 1983: 34; Randall 1986: 13 – 4).

The change in the direction of reading patterns taking place as a result of the rise of Black Consciousness was assisted by the emergence of indigenous publishing houses of an 'alternative' nature, such as Ravan Press and David Philip (both founded in 1971) and Ad Donker (in 1973). These new publishers provided an important outlet for black writers as the decade

progressed. Moreover, by the end of the 1970s a number of other publishers (both local publishers such as Jonathan Ball and Don Nelson and overseas multinationals) had begun to take a greater interest in South African black writing (Donker 1983: 33).

Earlier in the decade, the first smattering of anthologies dedicated to the new black literature also emerged, most notably the poetry anthologies Black Voices Shout! and To Whom It May Concern and a few individual collections.[80] A number of literary journals arose prepared to give more space to black writing, such as Izwi, Bolt, Donga and Ophir;[81] but such publications remained small in scale until the advent of Staffrider magazine in 1978.

Initiatives by publishers towards disseminating black literature during the decade of the 1970s were timeous. There was a noticeable expansion of black literature and performance from the early 1970s onwards, and particularly after 1976. As the 1970s progressed a greater emphasis on prose writing became discernible, most strikingly showcased in Staffrider – although theatre and participatory poetry did not lag behind. Staffrider, which was set up by Ravan Press, reflected in its pages some of the excitement and popularity of literature in this period.[82] Although after 1976 some younger writers gave voice to a belief that all who published their writing – rather than partake in oral performance in front of a live audience – were elitist and suspect (Emmett 1979: 79),[83] the publication of black literature increased markedly throughout the decade.

In this process Ravan Press and Staffrider were central players. While fictional and imaginative genres from black writers and literary groups still predominated, the pages of this magazine in addition showed a desire to articulate the experiences and voices of lower class people in the townships – shown in the interviews with people who did not have the literary skills to place their own experiences on paper (the 'Soweto Speaking', 'Voices from the Ghetto' and 'Staffworker' columns) and in the photographs and visual images focussing on the predicaments of commuters, hostel-dwellers, squatters and others.

Nevertheless, even these 'alternative' publishers came under fire from proponents of Black Consciousness who wished to see a greater black presence and directing influence in the commercial side of black literature. It was pointed out by some writers that black writers were still at the mercy of white editors and publishers, as they had always been (Rive 1977: 47; Emmett 1979: 73). Gwala, for one, expressed a dislike for the limitations of books and saw the problem of control as not only one of white expertise, but also 'methods of operation that are based on white expertise' (Gwala 1975: 29). Some writers complained of their work being refused or changed, especially in the early 1970s and in magazines such as Contrast, for not being in 'good taste' (Khoapa 1973: 208); while Tlali noted that friends found it difficult to find her book in bookshops, suspecting that her books were insufficiently displayed and therefore undermined by booksellers (Tlali 1989a: 84).

Thus, attempts were made throughout the decade by black writers to set up their own publishing houses. The journal The Classic was revived as New Classic in 1975 under the editorship of Sipho Sepamla, who also took over the editorship of the theatrical magazine S'ketsh' from Rob Kavanagh and Mango Tshabangu in 1975 (Sepamla 1980b: 81 – 2). B.L.A.C. Press in Cape Town, under the aegis of poet James Matthews, published titles intermittently from 1974 onwards, while S.A.B.L.E. Books in Johannesburg – set up by young writers Fhazel Johennesse and Chris van Wyk – began to publish the magazine Wietie in 1980 (Mzamane 1991: 181 – 3; see also 'New outlet ...'). By far the most successful and enduring of such black efforts at publishing, however, was Skotaville Publishers, set up in 1982 by the newly formed African Writers Association (A.W.A.) and staffed by ex-employees of Ravan.[84]

Both co-directors of Ravan Press (Kirkwood and Mutloatse) stressed on many occasions in the period after 1976 that their publication of black literature was merely playing a facilitating role, responding to the burgeoning of literary activity and writers' groups after 1976. Literary standards were regarded with deep suspicion, as a white or academic construct; and Staffrider emphasised that its literary standards were not set by its editors, but by the writers' groups and workshops who sifted through their own material, criticised their own participants' work and selected material for submission to the magazine.[85] The magazine emphasised a reflexive, organic relationship of publishing house to black writer, and of

black writers to their racial community in turn. The publisher's role was seen, to a large extent, as that of fixing suitably low prices and thus widening the distribution of books so that the black reader could always have literature available 'on his doorstep or near his elbow in the train or on the bus' (Mutloatse 1980: 6).[86]

However the publishing houses, while indeed responding to increased demand, must be seen to some degree as having played a normative role – especially politically – in proselytising certain attitudes to assumptions about literature; a tendency Mutloatse appeared to carry with him to Skotaville Press and which was most immediately discernible in their publishing motto 'To Build a Nation'.[87] Some of these assumptions which can be discerned were those which stressed the now familiar Black Consciousness relationship between writer and community/reader, emphasising the existence of a unified culture of resistance in the townships.[88]

The ease with which publishers claimed a new black readership in the years of Black Consciousness can be questioned. Some of the claims made at the time seem, in retrospect, overstated. As publishers and writers entered the new decade of the 1980s the pace of expansion of black literature slowed: thus, Kirkwood's optimistic statement in 1981 that there was an 'incredibly rich writing practice in South Africa at the moment with all kinds of different elements in it' had been transformed, by 1984, to Skotaville-based Jaki wa Seroke's more sombre comment that 'the morale

in the arts at present is at a low ebb. People are more concerned with survival than with creativity. But there has been progress – more people are taking their writing seriously' (quotes from 'Ravan: letting ...' and H. Wilson 1984 respectively).

The Choice of Language

Significantly, an overwhelming number of writers who decided to support Black Consciousness chose English as their medium of communication. There were a number of reasons for this. The vernacular languages in this period were regarded as bearers of the taint of ethnic identity and tribal separatism. Usage of them would therefore play into the hands of the Government's policy of apartheid.[89] Any liberatory potential these languages had had been stifled, according to Gwala, by their association with the S.A.B.C. 'Radio Bantu' services, the school textbooks of Bantu Education and politically 'tame' newspapers such as Ilanga and Imvo Zabantsundu.[90] Thus English must be used and its traditional linguistic biases and prejudices subverted (as in the slogan 'Black is beautiful' that Black Consciousness borrowed from the Black Power movement in the U.S.A.).[91] According to Tlali, she wrote and continues to write in English because:

> ... I'm trying to reach as many people as possible. Sotho is the one language I can command very well. But I'm aware that if you write in

> an language (sic.) that can be understood only by one racial group, you are likely to fall into the trap of the government, the system of divide and rule.
>
> (Ludman 1989)

Use of English therefore gained symbolical weight as a rejection of tribalism, and as an international medium with a communicative potential much wider than those languages which the parochialism of apartheid tried to limit black people to:

> Somewhere along the line I decided I had to write in English because it is an international language. No doubt many other folks like me came to the same conclusion perhaps for the same reason. Much as it may be consistent with its principles, Black consciousness cannot in my opinion embrace our tribal setup. In other words Xhosa, Zulu, Pedi or Sotho are okay for communication at the moment but they cannot hope to go far as such instruments. By the time the Black man dictates his destiny technology would have advanced such a language as English to an extent that our languages would be mere regional dialects.
>
> (Sepamla 1974/5a: 18)[92]

English in South Africa, as in other Anglophone colonies on the continent, had historically been adopted by African nationalists as a language of communication and unification transcending ethnic and regional boundaries. English had been the language of organised political opposition in South Africa since the defeat of the independent African chiefdoms in the nineteenth century, and was (under the mission education system ended by the Government in 1955) the medium of instruction for Africans from the intermediate years of secondary school onwards.[93] Mastery of English had thus historically been held in high regard, despite some ambivalence on the part of nationalist movements and writers about its colonial heritage.[94]

Black Consciousness writers, however, differed significantly from their predecessors. They were suspicious of critical demands for the use of 'good English'; describing these as a 'myth of the first order' (Gwala 1984: 49). Writers such as Sepamla were willing to use what he described as 'broken' or 'murdered' English if the occasion required, an 'English toyed with as is done in our world' (Sepamla 1974/5b: 27); while Mzamane attempted to 'transliterate' indigenous words for which he could not find English equivalents (Handan/Myesgin 1984: 41). These writers therefore attempted to use an English which was similar to the melange of English, Afrikaans and vernacular languages used on the streets of the townships: a patois referred to as flytaal or tsotsitaal.[95] A shifting away from standard English in creative literature towards an apperception of the nuances of language as spoken in the townships and thus outside of the experience of white literati and academics became discernible; as was a concern for miming the language and rhythms of everyday speech (Mzamane 1977b: 30 – 2; Ngoepe quoted in Joubert 1978). Initially utilised in the poetry and drama of the early 1970s, the mobilisation of flytaal was an attempt to transform English into a language expressing the culture and aspirations of black people, so that it could act as a medium of communication for all (Cronin 1985a: 26; Madingoane in Welz 1987: 52 – 3; Alvarez-Pereyre 1984: 261 – 4).

By the end of the 1970s, however, some writers had begun seeing their way clear to make a greater use of African languages. A debate over

the advantages and disadvantages of writing and performing in English (as against African languages) re-emerged with vigour, and attempts were made by organisations such as A.W.A. to use African languages to 'get back to the people' (see j'Mathonsi 1981a: 91; 1981b: 30; Bikitsha 1978; Mzamane in Handan/Myesgin 1984: 41). Whether or not some writers returned to using these languages to conceal meaning and avoid censorship, as Tlali claims, is a moot point (see Tlali 1989b: 79). What is certain, however, is that at the end of the decade work appearing in Staffrider by poets such as Madingoane, and literary groups such as Guyo Book Club and the Kwanza Creative Society in the Transvaal and Mpumalanga Arts in Natal, were making use of vernacular languages in a manner far removed, in purpose and effect, from the previous use of these languages to enhance ethnic identities.[96]

Black Consciousness Literary Activity in the 1970s and Early 1980s

Throughout the 1970s and into the 1980s, literature was used as a means of political and cultural communication and conscientisation by artists determined to inform all sections of black society of their position as blacks in South Africa – to give them encouragement and awaken, unify and mobilise them under the rubric of their black identity.[97] Significantly, the literary forms prominent in this new cultural movement were initially

drama and poetry, especially a poetry to be actualised in public performance. The fact that drama and performance-poetry are, by their very nature, the literary forms most amenable to the goal of immediate audience participation was the reason they were the genres most commonly used in Black Consciousness cultural expression until the late 1970s.

Some black poets published their works – the success of Oswald Mtshali's first volume Sounds of a Cowhide Drum, published in 1971, among (it was alleged) a largely white readership[98] caused a minor sensation – but the emphasis started to turn more and more self-consciously towards performance media. Performance came to be seen as a way to have immediate political effect on a black audience in a manner which, due to its ephemerality, could at the same time evade the stringent limitations placed on political utterance. The compression of language involved in oral utterance allowed it to be a hiding place for meanings more accessible to the audience than the censors as well.[99] Throughout the 1970s and particularly after 1976, poetry was performed in front of large audiences in church halls and on black campuses: at political rallies, at funerals and other public events charged with political significance (Cronin 1985a: 25). In its turn, theatre was the medium most conducive to the direct presentation of situations, episodes and sequences which together approached an approximation of lived group experience. Some plays frequently did not exist in written form at all, but were improvised in workshops and altered as the situation and audience demanded; others

were presented with a minimal text. Few were published until the late 1970s. These poetry workshops and readings point to the fact that Black Consciousness cultural activists were now concerned to use literature as a means of direct communication. Performance in front of an audience could attest to the 'authenticity' of the poet's or dramatist's experience, and encouraged audience participation in rituals of identity and assertiveness.

Performances took place in group contexts which highlighted some degree of participation by the audience, and reinforced a common emotional experience between audience and performers. An improvised literature of public statement – didactic and ritualistic in effect – was the prevalent result of such situations (Khoapa 1973: 204; Mutloatse 1981a: 6). In theatre, 'a new form of theatrical presentation where playwright, director, actor and AUDIENCE will be full participants in a cultural community act' (Macu 1983; see also Vaughan 1982a: 43) was striven for.

Black control of self-expression in the arts was a major focus of concern. Groups of students and intellectuals promoted black literature and art through a variety of cultural and student groups. Some of the more active of these in the pre-1976 period were the Theatre Council of Natal (T.E.C.O.N., which was formed in 1966 but became increasingly radical in the 1970s); the Cultural Committee of S.A.S.O.; the South African Black Theatre Union (S.A.B.T.U.) and the Music, Drama, Arts and Literature Institute (M.D.A.L.I. or, more commonly, 'Mdali') – all formed in 1972; the People's Experimental Theatre (P.E.T.), and the drama component of

Mdali, the Mihloti Black Theatre Group.[100] This emphasis on new organisations and techniques was coupled with a growing awareness of the control exercised by white liberal and overseas elements in most of the institutions and businesses connected with artistic output – publishing houses, the record industry, art galleries and so on.

To spread their influence, Black Consciousness groups presented festivals of drama and poetry, poetry readings, and cultural events. S.A.B.T.U. and Mdali held art festivals. P.E.T. and the cultural group Shiqomo collaborated on a programme of poetry readings and music called 'An Evening of Black Thoughts' in 1973, as well as producing a play, 'Shanti'. Lefifi Tladi's music group Dashiki performed a reading of West Indian Aime Cesaire's epic Return to My Native Land in 1973, dramatised and with musical accompaniment, and the T.E.C.O.N./Dashiki show 'Black Images' toured Natal the same year. Poets gave public readings at venues such as the University of the North. At these festivals and readings, poetry and drama by local artists rubbed shoulders with the performance of speeches by overseas black figures such as Baldwin and Fanon, poetry by Senghor, Baraka and Diop, and drama by Ed Bullins and the white Marxist Peter Weiss.[101]

Written language was increasingly considered as only part of the expressive vocabulary of performers. Not only students but also older black artists and writers began to be attracted to Black Consciousness platforms, as well as those who had skills important to performance art, such as the

musician-cum-poets Tladi and Molefe Pheto. These literary performers made striking use of music, a powerful tool of township expression. Music groups such as Dashiki, Malombo Jazzmen and Harare flourished, and theatre – varying from the commercial and popular work of Kente and Mhangwane to the more serious and politically conscious work of Mihloti and others (Coplan 1979: 210) – combined dance, drama and music. Theatre, pop and jazz festivals were staged. During the 1970s multi-media shows and urban oral poetry reached a high quality of performance: after 1976 the performances of groups such as Medupe Writers' Association and the Allahpoets were further visible manifestations of this trend. This shift from a reading to a listening audience meant that much influential work heard at the time remained relatively unknown outside of its environment: for instance, Pheto's and Tladi's influence (both exiled by the middle of the decade), is still ignored by commentators; although others experimenting with oral means in the early 1970s – such as Serote and Madingoane – have become better known (Sepamla 1980a: 29).

It can be seen in retrospect that throughout the 1970s, and especially after 1976, a sharpening of political tone and broadening and deepening of literary themes and preoccupations occurred in black South African literature.[102] At the same time, it can be argued, there were signs of a radicalisation in S.A.S.O. in the two years prior to its banning in 1977. However, the single event which spread the seeds of political fervour further than all previous efforts was the uprising which began among

Soweto schoolchildren in June 1976 and quickly spread to other urban townships throughout the country. In this process of direct and dangerous confrontation with the State when, in the words of one critic, 'ideology became praxis' in black resistance to apartheid (Watts 1989: 5), cultural means were used and emphasised. During and immediately after the Soweto revolt an unprecedented degree of interest in literature and art in the black townships occurred. A filtering through of cultural activity to a rather wider spectrum of people was noticeable: new forms of cultural activity and new groups burgeoned across the country (McClintock 1987: 598). Audiences at poetry readings, art exhibitions and plays within the townships soared, with school students and younger people well to the fore.

In the period after 1976 new black writing groups mushroomed throughout South Africa. Groups such as Mpumalanga Arts in Natal, P.E.Y.A.R.T.A. in the Cape and Guyo Book Club, Bayajula, Khauleza and the Creative Youth Organisation (C.Y.A., later known as the Allahpoets) in the Transvaal created literature on the page and in performance, as well as plastic and other forms of art. Various of these groups were to be found in the heavily populated rural slums of the 'Bantustans' (such as Guyo Book Club in Sibasa, Venda).[103]

The period of the late 1970s witnessed a desire by increased numbers of black people to participate in literary production. Medupe, a writers' organization started in Soweto in early 1977 with twenty members,[104] had within six months incorporated over two hundred active writers and

performers, and played an important role disseminating 'read-poetry' to live audiences (young poet and Medupe member Dumakude ka Ndlovu observed: 'Read-poetry is for the People. It gives them a message to take home. It is simpler than written poetry, so that even the layman can understand it' (Ndlovu 1977: 6)). Oral techniques became increasingly sophisticated. The use of drums, flutes and other musical instruments became almost obligatory in the reading of poetry. Mime, gesture and variants in voicing were used in flamboyant and effective ways by dashiki-clad poets and musicians who performed at funerals, commemoration services and cultural evenings to support and give voice to the mood of the times, in amongst the speeches and the singing of freedom songs. Poetry, music and drama were often welded together into cultural spectacles lasting for several hours, both in the townships and in city venues (after a number of such venues had become available to black performers at places such as The Market in Johannesburg and The Space in Cape Town from the middle of the decade). Despite experiments by some radical poets with quieter, more reflective styles of presentation, a mode of performance which stressed rituals of group solidarity and heroism in the face of adversity predominated.

Subsequent to the banning of at least two organisations which had a direct bearing on black writers (Medupe and the Union of Black Journalists) and a black newspaper, World, in October 1977, however, more writers returned to publishing literary work rather than relying solely on

oral means. Oral communication had limitations of scale, and it was believed that published literature could 'extend the word' further. There was a realisation that literature could be extended as a form of communication and conscientisation into the vacuum left by the banned Black Consciousness organisations in 1977.

Moreover, by the mid-1970s a change was discernible in Black Consciousness activists' attitudes to ethnic cultures. What had begun as dismissal turned into an admiration and desire to emulate.[105] Social divisions among those racially oppressed began to be highlighted in some quarters; while a more critical tone was noticeable in some literature.[106] This sharpening of directly political and historical focus accelerated parallel to the deepening political and economic crisis South Africa was experiencing by the late 1970s, and appeared to draw its sustenance from the revival of guerrilla activity by previously exiled organisations within South Africa itself.[107]

In general, it can be said that the Black Consciousness literary expression of the latter part of the decade and the early 1980s exhibited an increase in militancy and turning away from all forms of gradualism on the part of more radical black writers. By 1983 poet Essop Patel would comment:

> Throughout the course of history there has been as intense Black struggle: resistance, protest, defiance, national consciousness and recently the escalation of the revolutionary thrust. It is against this background that the black poets are writing.
>
> (E. Patel 1983: 1)

The role of the cultural activist became one of exposing 'ruling class motives' and giving 'shape and direction for the future' (Rive 1982b: 5 – 6). The task of writers and performers assumed, if anything, more onerous proportions as they attempted to spread and give expression to this militant mood. The concern that literature should seek to deal with issues of significance to the great mass of black people in the country was intensified.

At the turn of the decade playwrights again played a major role in this intensification: theatre became, for a while, the form in which issues pertaining to working-class and rural people was most readily available to the wider black community. Some playwrights – such as Manaka and Maishe Maponya – made a point of presenting their plays in squatter camps, churches, hospitals, at weddings and so on – and concentrated on the lives of working-class people.[108] Theatre's potential for displaying and dealing with areas affecting less privileged blacks was apparent in the pronouncements of Manaka and Maponya. They both voiced a preference for a non-commercial, critical theatre of 'ordinary context' (Maponya 1980; Manaka 1980b: 29; Matsix 1981: 34; 'In an abnormal ...'). The improvisatory nature of this theatre was noticeable: critics have commented on the use of songs and Brechtian techniques, as well as the fact that (for example) on at least one occasion dramatic scenes involving prostitutes were interrupted by the nearby screaming of real prostitutes at a venue (Steadman 1981: 7 – 9, 1984b: 227 – 8). This gave the theatre of the late 1970s a sense of commitment and a popular face. In Manaka's words:

> Through our eyes we have seen the sufferings of the people. We have seen them being moved from fertile lands to barren areas, we have seen them starve in squatter camps. Through our eyes we have seen the life of our people assume various shapes of humiliation and suffering. Thus the continual struggle to create ... we felt committed to focus our creative thoughts on the plight of the workers.
>
> (Manaka 1980a: back cover)

Despite these cultural gains, the Black Consciousness cultural initiative took place under difficult circumstances. Writers were not exempt from the pressures of a political climate where most forms of dissent were seen as inimical by a State structure which had started off the 1970s in an aura of confidence, but thereafter became increasingly brittle, fractured and repressive. Literary developments were paralleled by an increasing rationalisation and extension of censorship control to cover wider areas of concern. Oral performance proved only partly exempt from censorship – from 1973 onwards the State simply started to ban performers instead of their literary productions. In a situation where the Government equated 'black articulateness ... (with) subversion' (Gordimer 1976: 116), State interventions and bannings were common: for instance, among the activities for which Black Consciousness leaders were tried and jailed in 1975 were their theatrical activities (Kavanagh 1981: xv), and poems were read out as evidence at political trials.[109] Removal or refusal of passports, harassment, bannings, exile and imprisonment were part of the life of writers during this time. T.E.C.O.N. members Saths Cooper and Strini Moodley were banned in 1973, as were poets Achmat Dangor, Farouk Asvat, Don Mattera and Mathe Diseko (Khoapa 1973: 202); Cooper and

Moodley and Variava and Ismael of P.E.T. were jailed in 1975; Pheto and Tladi were detained and later fled the country; P.E.T. was listed as a subversive organization in 1975; Mqayisa was banned and even Gibson Kente detained and harassed for a period after 1974 when his plays became more political.[110]

This process intensified after 1976. In 1977, Medupe was among the groups banned in the crackdown on Black Consciousness organisations (Mzamane 1978: 54).[111] Literary magazines such as Staffrider had some individual issues banned, while the multi-lingual Donga was declared a prohibited publication in 1978. Despite the fact that black writers were, according to the censors, allowed a greater 'pain threshold' than their white counterparts, and while grudging concessions were made to individuals works' 'literary merit' and status as 'protest literature', it was often difficult to see what criteria of judgement were actually used in these bannings.[112] These bannings certainly affected the writers: even though Manaka noted that a 'banned book belongs to the people' (quoted in Alvarez-Pereyre 1988: 122), Tlali admitted that the banning of her books amounted to a 'wall between yourself and your own people, the people you are trying to reach' (Lockett 1989a: 77). The final effects of the aftermath of the Soweto revolt and the bannings and detentions were extremely damaging overall, while the flight of many young and promising poets and playwrights into exile[113] and the prolonged detention of others, caused literary expression to be a continuously hazardous operation.

Nevertheless, despite the continuing State harassment of writers and performers, cultural and literary activity by black artists continued. The destruction of literary production was not as final as that caused by the crackdowns of the early 1960s. This can of course partly be explained by the fact that the bannings of artists and writers was less all-embracing than in the earlier period; but it also points to a possibility that techniques not wholly dependent on the printed page had allowed the habit of literary activity to sink deeper roots into black townships than before, with a possible filtering of the uses of literature to less educated and even working-class elements not previously involved in literature. As an example, in the late 1970s the poet Madingoane's epic poem 'black trial' was so popular that some younger poets could perform it from memory. Madingoane and other Soweto poets traveled the country, performing and inspiring.

Other new developments took place as well. A P.E.N. branch was formed on the Witwatersrand in September 1979, far more widely representantive than the P.E.N. organisation in South Africa had hitherto been, and publishers and literary journals began to give far more prominence to a broadly South African rather than a simply white-inspired literature. However, after a flurry of early activity, this P.E.N. branch failed in 1981 (ostensibly over the issue of the wavering of support for P.E.N. writers within the black community);[114] and some of the black writers, especially those with stronger Black Consciousness affiliations, broke away

from the organisation and from Staffrider in the same year to found their own organisation (A.W.A.), publishing house (Skotaville Publishers) and magazine (The Classic).

Thus black writers of political inclination seemed, by the beginning of the 1980s, increasingly to divide themselves into two camps in South Africa. On the one hand, some remained firmly wedded to the preconceptions of Black Consciousness via its new organisations such as A.W.A., the political organisation the Azanian People's Organisation (A.Z.A.P.O.) its student organisation A.Z.A.S.O. (instituted in 1978 and 1979 respectively (Kane-Berman 1978: 108; Phaahla 1982: 40)) and the umbrella Black Consciousness alliance the National Forum, founded in 1983. On the other, some were attracted to revitalised non-racial organisations such as the United Democratic Front (U.D.F.), founded the same year as the National Forum. Both tendencies, moreover, adopted a class (or elements of a class) analysis.[115] Both camps in addition came to profess an admiration for socialism.

Notes to Chapter One

1. This period has been called 'the decade of black silence' (S. Johnson 1985: 20); a time which generated a 'cultural vacuum' for black writers (Gwala 1971: 178). For discussion of this period, and of why the major part of the 1960s was a period of political 'tranquility' in South Africa, see Fatton 1986: 63 – 4; Gerhart 1978: 51 – 6; 250 – 9; and Lodge 1983: 321 – 2.

2. For discussion of this obliteration and the cultural vacuum it caused, see Gwala 1982: 97; Gordimer 1973: 51; Mzamane 1977b: 23; 1991: 179 – 80; Seroke 1981a: 30; Sole 1979: 164 – 5; Watts 1989: 3.

3. The critical belief that liberal writing was entirely 'realist' in orientation is subject to a nuanced, at times sceptical discussion in Hagena 1990. For further remarks about the orientations of liberal literary thought and criticism, see Hofmeyr 1979: 42 – 4 and the general comments in Visser 1984 and Vaughan 1984b.

4. A Black Consciousness ideologue of some importance at the end of the 1970s, Quorish Patel, saw this in a positive light: 'Their (i.e. the students) resulting militant consciousness which filled the political vacuum after the Sharpeville watershed could not be conditioned or influenced by the stifling influence of the productive/consumptive relationship' (quoted in Phaahla 1982: 38). Elsewhere it was claimed that the black working-class was under-politicised when compared to students in these early days (see Mattera 1982).

5. While, as I shall argue, the social position of the Black Consciousness leadership influenced the imperatives and vision of society which emerged in its ideology, it is often the case that a small core-group of intellectuals has been a significant spark in the formulation and dispersion of a new ideology, which then gains wider social acceptance. For further discussion, see Fatton 1986: 57 – 8.

6. For a discussion of the cultural alienation of this petty-bourgeois stratum in a wider African context, see Cabral 1972: 17 – 8.

7. For further general discussion of this point, see Laclau 1979: 114.

8. Miriam Tlali interview, Arts & Africa No. 267, B.B.C. African Service transcript.

9. Black Consciousness questioned the artificiality of N.U.S.A.S.'s espoused non-racialism, because of this racial predominance of leader- and membership. For a fuller discussion of the ambivalent nature of this organisation, and black disaffection within its ranks, see Fatton 1986: 64 – 6.

10. The initial acceptance by its membership of the racial emphases of Black Consciousness was more wary, and subject to more discussion and debate, than is now realised. For discussion, see S. Buthelezi 1991: 116 – 7.

11. The degree to which Black Consciousness was thus influenced is open to dispute. Some critics have stressed this connection (see Gordimer 1973: 54; Gerhart 1978: 272 – 7; Horn 1978: 7), while others – among them several Black Consciousness activists of the time – have downplayed its influence (Gwala 1979: 58; K. Moodley 1991: 147). Alexander points out that many of the ideas of Black Consciousness were, in fact, drawn directly from A.N.C., P.A.C. and N.E.U.M. sources (Alexander 1991: 239).

12. Although a number of commentators have stressed that Black Consciousness was a variant and continuation of earlier black struggles (see, for example, Gwala 1984: 41; Hirson 1979: 308 – 26), in the opinion of other commentators it formed a distinct break from the past, setting its institutions up as alternatives to the status quo (Fatton 1986: 39 – 41; Ndebele 1986c: 9).

13. This point is inter alia made by Alexander 1991: 246; Nolutshungu 1983: 172 – 3; 183; Steadman 1990: 221 – thus refuting the insistence by other critics such as Fatton (who bases his argument on one article by Steve Biko) that Black Consciousness was, monolithically, a revolutionary doctrine irreconcilable with existing capitalist structures (Fatton 1986: 67; 76; 115 – 6). The furore resulting from a speech by Themba Sono (S.A.S.O. President at the time) in 1972 in favour of a conciliatory position towards the 'Bantustans', and his subsequent expulsion from the conference, is an indicator of this initial diversity (Gerhart 1978: 288 – 90) (for a discussion of the vacillation in early Black Consciousness circles over the issue of the 'Homelands', see Hirson 1979: 114)). So was the tension between radical students and those with, in the words of Gwala, the 'flippant middle-class orientated separatist line' evinced at the Black Renaissance Convention at Hammanskraal in 1974 (see Gwala 1981: 232 – 3; 1984: 43 – 4). In 1971, after the relative success of its initial recruiting drive, there is some evidence of an impetus amongst its leadership towards greater unity and a common political identity (S. Buthelezi 1991: 118); moreover, after the Sono affair Black Consciousness activists adopted a more formal, conspiratorial style of organisation (Nolutshungu 1983: 172). It can also be noted that the attitude and allegiances of Black Consciousness adherents to previous black political organisations such as the A.N.C. and P.A.C. also varied. Indeed, there is no complete agreement on the extent to which such organisations were inspirational or influential in Black Consciousness circles (for discussion, see S. Buthelezi 1991: 119; Fatton 1986: 135 – 7 and Gwala 1981: 235 – 6; 1988a: 90).

14. This distinction is at times employed in the literature, for instance in a short story published by Mutloatse in the early 1980s, 'Mama Ndiyalila', where a thinly fictionalised South Africa is inhabited by the 'Havenotians' and the 'non-Havenotians'. See Mutloatse 1982: 2.

15. The sense of inferiority, habits of self-censure, dependency mentality and neurotic identification with the oppressor caused by apartheid are commented on by many Black Consciousness thinkers, as well as historians. See, for example, Gerhart 1978: 287; Horn 1978: 10; Kane-Berman 1978: 103 – 4; Lodge 1983: 323; Pityana 1972: 175; Sibisi 1991: 133.

16. It is not the intention of this thesis to set forth a fuller description and analysis of this issue, although the effect of radical liberation theology in the evolution of Black Consciousness thought was profound. The influence of Christian thought can be seen, for example, in the literary discourse employed by short story writer Mtutuzeli Matshoba, to be scrutinised later. For further discussion of black theology, see Biko 1988: 110; Fatton 1986: 56; Gerhart 1978: 261; Hirson 1979: 78 – 82; Nolutshungu 1983: 156 – 7.

17. This belief in the duplicity of white liberals, expressed in the early works of Black Consciousness thinkers, was reiterated (for instance) by a number of the younger poets interviewed by a researcher in the mid-1970s (see Emmett 1979: 79), and was still being voiced by the writer Richard Rive in the 1980s (see Welz 1987: 16).

18.

> Liberals not only exercised no political power; they also did not appear to have any strategy for gaining power ... liberalism is fundamentally a philosophy about the limitation and regulation of political power, rather than an analysis of means of attaining political power.
>
> (Budlender 1991: 229)

For further comments on Black Consciousness' reaction to, and antipathy towards, liberalism see Fatton 1986: 84 – 6.

19. For an overt discussion of this, see Biko's invocation of the 'Hegelian theory of dialectical materialism' (Biko 1988: 65).

20. See, for instance, Bonganjalo Goba's and Manas Buthelezi's statements quoted in Fatton 1986: 86 – 7.

21. Notice the similarity of this to ideas expressed in other parts of Africa at the advent of Independence: ideas which stressed, for instance, that:

> One of the positive contributions which the African personality can make to mankind is to point the way to a strategy and technique of development ... without the people ever being brutalized and destroyed in order that they should, like the mythical phoenix, arise fresh from their own ashes.
>
> (W. Abraham 1962: 160)

Micah Tsomondo remarks: 'Human exploitation has been so closely identified with the colonial regime that it was automatically assumed that a victory against the latter was synonymous with that against exploitation of man by man' (Tsomondo 1975: 42). For instance, Mphahlele's brand of African humanism (on his return to South Africa) consistently articulates this type of understanding (see Mphahlele 1982: 73 and his statements made in 1979b, 1979c).

22. These views are similar to those developed by Amilcar Cabral in his writings dealing with the liberation war against Portuguese colonialism in Guinea-Bissau during the 1960s and early 1970s. See Cabral 1972: 21; 1973: 43.

23. 'A philosophy of liberation requires unity. Black unity in turn requires black organisation' (Khoapa 1972: 67).

24. This is dealt with more fully in Fatton 1986: 32; 52 – 9; 92 – 4. An examination of the way in which such 'outsiders' were represented in the literature of the period is of concern in Chapters Three to Five of this study.

25. Biko 1988: 108. See also the S.A.S.O. Policy Manifesto of 1971 (quoted in Gerhart 1978: 272) and, a decade later, Molobi's view that '... the concept Black does not refer to skin colour as such. Black is a political term that defines a particular mental attitude ... .' (Molobi 1981: 2). For further examples of Biko's views on 'non-whites' see Biko 1988: 62 – 3; 92.

26. This is further discussed in Fatton 1986: 95 – 7; Nolutshungu 1983: 151 – 2.

27. These words, spoken by Biko, were given as evidence for the defence at a trial of Black Consciousness members in May 1976.

28. The fact that Black Consciousness saw itself a dual form of emancipation in these terms is stated in Biko 1988: 63 and S. Buthelezi 1991: 123. Molobi noted that Black Consciousness adherents felt propelled towards action: 'B/C (sic.) therefore transcends awareness in that it combines mental perception with action' (Molobi 1981: 2).

The connection between individual and political liberation is best articulated in S. Buthelezi 1991: 123, and in my opinion renders over-hasty Vaughan's assertion that individual characters, interactions and predicaments in Black Consciousness literature were always regarded as less important than those belonging to the group (see Vaughan 1984a: 197). This issue will form part of the later examination of literary texts in this thesis.

29. The goals of the B.C.P. were clear in this regard. See Hirson 1979: 85 for details.

30. Gwala 1974: 165. For a summary of the details, strengths and weaknesses of these projects, see Ramphele 1991b.

31. See Nolutshungu 1983: 169 – 70 and Hirson 1979: 102 – 5. S.A.S.M. was formed in 1967 as the African Students' Movement. Assertions that it was subordinate to the promptings of S.A.S.O. have been disputed; it held a number of diverse and even contradictory views, and it was not until 1972 that S.A.S.M. members generally came to espouse Black Consciousness (Nozipho Diseko 1991: 41 – 2; 56). For a fuller discussion of the formation of N.A.Y.O., see Hirson 1979: 101 – 2.

32. The short-lived alliance between B.A.W.U. and S.A.S.O. was not without its problems. See Nolutshungu 1983: 188 – 9.

33. This is evident from Biko's trial testimony already quoted. See footnote 27 above.

34. For further discussion of these problems, including the problems Black Consciousness adherents had convincing workers and rural people of the value of abstractions related to 'consciousness' and 'value systems' rather than the amelioration of tangible issues such as housing, pass laws and the like, see Gerhart 1978: 291 – 2. The distance of Black Consciousness organisations from the working-class during this period is reiterated in Fatton 1986: 123.

35. These were, for instance, to 'earn the respect and de facto recognition by both employers and government' and improve workers' knowledge through 'general and specialised (occupational) educational programmes' (Khoapa 1973: 123).

36. The same commentator maintains that the only two campaigns ascribable to the B.P.C. were the 'May Revolt' on campuses on 1972 and the 'Viva Frelimo' rallies of 1974 (see Hirson 1979: 84 – 91).

37. Given the fact that, in the 1970s, gender-sensitive language was not yet the issue it is today, this point will not be laboured. One can point, for examples of this phenomenon, to Biko's discourse in his 1971 paper 'The Definition of Black Consciousness' (Biko 1988: 62 – 7) and the title of Matshoba's short story collection Call Me Not a Man.

38. Neither can it be said that such discursive emphasis on the 'black man' becomes less prevalent later during the 1970s. See, for instance, the last Vice-President of S.A.S.O., Nkosazana Dlamini, quoted in Fatton 1986: 98.

39. Ramphele 1991a: 218 – 20; Driver 1990: 235. Driver uses the scope of operation proposed for the Women's Division of the B.C.P., set up in 1974, as well as the B.W.F., in support of her analysis. As an example of the manner in which women were seen as important only in terms of their 'support' for black men, see Debs Matshoba's statement in a 1973 S.A.S.O. Newsletter that black women should support 'our brothers, children, fathers and leaders' in their struggle (D. Matshoba 1973: 5).

For a general discussion of Black Consciousness and women's issues, see Driver 1990: 233 – 7.

40. Nolutshungu, for one, regards Black Consciousness as the single most important development in black politics between 1967 – 1976 (Nolutshungu 1983: 147).

41. This point is astutely made by Lodge:

> Merely because its exponents and identifiable followers were relatively socially privileged and hence unrepresentative of the black community as a whole did not mean they were not popularly influential.... (Black Consciousness') basic themes were taken up in the popular press, in township cultural events ...
>
> (Lodge 1983: 324)

42. A similar point is made in Nolutshungu 1983: 148 – 9.

43. Thus Gwala speaks, at a Writers' Conference in Johannesburg during April 1976, of a new 'literature in English written by blacks ... (which) definitely carries a world outlook' (Gwala 1979: 58). See also Mzamane 1978: 42 on the connection between this new literature and Black Consciousness. While the views of individual artists who took on the mantle of the philosophy did to some extent differ – as did the attitudes of those accepting its precepts – a general change in the direction, attitudes and themes of black literature is noticeable, as Gwala attests.

44. Mzamane speaks of the advantages (with regard to access to banned South African black literature and writers) he enjoyed due to this (Mzamane 1980a: ix).

45. There was a paucity of books in township libraries, and a shortage of libraries themselves; and blacks who wished to consult books in some important city libraries – such as the Johannesburg Public Library – had to fill in forms to do so. The few 'open' libraries with good stock (such as those at the liberal universities) therefore played an important role for writers, until the opening of such as the Johannesburg Public Library to blacks in the late 1970s (see Tlali 1980b; Tlali in Seroke 1981a: 30; Tlali in Lockett 1989a: 83; Sepamla 1980a: 25; 26; Sepamla quoted in 'Writers and ...' 1984: 28 – 9).

    The 1955 Provincial Library Service Ordinance required that separate facilities be provided for whites and 'non-whites' – although it appears that this policy was not uniformly implemented throughout South Africa. By 1981 reference to racial separation was removed from this Ordinance (information obtained from R. Epstein, deputy librarian, Cape Town City Library, and Mary Nassimbeni, of the University of Cape Town School of Librarianship). For an overall, if politically disingenuous, account of black access to libraries in this period see Frylinck 1980.

46. This point is also discussed in Chapman 1984: 197 – 8.

47. For further details of the problems writers, as blacks, faced in apartheid South Africa at this time, see Mzamane 1977b 26 – 7; 1978: 42.

48. Nadine Gordimer's remarks in this regard are pertinent:

> The deracination of their predecessors of the 1950s does not attract them; ... (their) work reflects an affirmation of black identity aimed at raising black consciousness rather than rousing white consciousness to the black man's plight. Blacks have seen white culture, naked, for what it has proved to be, for blacks: long-posited as an absolute value, and eternally withheld from them.
>
> (Gordimer 1976: 146)

49. For an insightful discussion of this, based on the paradigms of Kristeva, see Cronin 1985a, especially 30 – 43.

50. Quoted in Alvarez-Pereyre 1984: 185. For a similar viewpoint to Biko's, see Ndebele 1972: 14.

51. For Serote's similar views on the 1950s writer Nakasa's ideological failings, see Serote 1973a: 16 – 21. Gwala, however, praises another 1950s writer, Can Themba, for his 'initiative' (Gwala 1979: 55). At the same time, Black Consciousness writers tended to view earlier proponents of black writing such as Themba and Nakasa as their 'spiritual heirs' (see Mzamane 1991: 181).

52. There is a noticeable tension in the comments of Black Consciousness playwrights in the early and mid-1970s between the impatience displayed by them at this theatre for its lack of commitment, and the envy implicit at the audiences this theatre managed to attract (see, as an example of this, 'Focus on ...': 7 – 10).

53. See, as an example, the review of the play Mboni, staged in 1973 under the direction of Lyn Hooker ('Mboni ...': 23).

54. Workshop '71 Experimental Theatre, formed in 1971 by a group of anti-Government 'progressive' dramatists, operated under the auspices of the South African Institute of Race Relations (Colligan 1981: 71).

55. I am not here trying to suggest that black literature before this time did not manifest any political impetus. As Alvarez-Pereyre points out, committed, socially engaged black writers can be found in the history of South African literature long before 1970 (Alvarez-Pereyre 1984: 130 – 69). However, it is only in the period under discussion that black literature gave such a predominant voice to political disaffection and the search for alternatives (both political and aesthetic) outside of white cultural hegemony. On assertions of the political nature of this literature, see Mzamane 1978: 56; Maseko 1981: 18; Mogale 1981: 31; and the general remarks in Seroke 1982.

56. 'There has been a definite trend among white liberal art galleries, theatres, individuals and government officials to promote the 'chair is a chair' art form within the black community and the divorcement (sic.) of these artists from the base of their society' (Mogale 1981: 31; see also Gwala 1984: 42).

57. Serote is speaking here of a period in the late 1960s, when he has failed matric at high school in Soweto and was attempting to complete his studies via correspondence courses.

58. > ... the poetry reveals an unexpected side to the Black Consciousness movement. Whereas the dominant impression ... was one of assertion - of the confident achievement of dignity through the liberation of the black psyche and of a return to black cultural roots - the poetry shows the devastatingly honest self-inspection of vulnerabiliy and wounding by oppression.... If Black Consciousness was about cultural assertion, here we understand ... the sheer psychological agony that was ... woven into that assertion.
>
> (Clingman 1990a: 156 – 7)

59. The term, also used by the critic Michael Chapman in Chapman 1984, itself originally stems from the European critic Michael Hamburger, who applies it in a very different context (see Hamburger 1982: 220).

60. The subversive, counter-hegemonic nature of black literary discourse in and after the Black Consciousness era in South Africa is noted in Trump 1988: 38; 1990a: 161.

61. Discussion of this problem occurs in Calder 1973: 205 – 6; Emmett 1979: 75 – 6; Maughan-Brown 1982: 49 – 55.

62. Thus a black critic, reviewing a performance of the Allahpoets in Johannesburg in 1980: noted that '...the Revolution will not be reviewed in the Star Tonight!' (Malefane 1980: 40).

63. In short, the overtly functional nature of this political art. Playwright Zakes Mda thus dismissed aesthetic concepts 'cherished' by the Western world as presuming 'artistic creation is an end in itself, independent of political and social requirements' (Mda 1983: 15). See also the discussion in E. Patel 1983: 4; Maughan-Brown 1982: 51).

64. 'We want to determine our future concerning what is happening here. Not what America or others are saying about our books. It's a new language we're creating' (Mutloatse in Seroke 1981b: 43).

65. A discovery especially by black historians and writers. The Black Research Programme, set up in 1981 for the research and propagation of black history, believed that 'only Black people are close enough to the Black situation to be able to comment on it authoritatively' (quoted in The Voice 10 – 16 June 1981).

66. See, for example, the viewpoints expressed in D. Kunene 1986.

67. That this point has some accuracy is confirmed in Jordan 1973: 59 – 63. Jordan pointed out that nineteenth-century chiefs such as Dingane, Luhadi and Ngangelizwe were criticised by poets for their harsh policies. Izibongo and imbongi are the Zulu and Xhosa words for praise poetry and praise poet respectively.

68. Thus, at 'every conceivable occasion organised by advocates of Black Consciousness poetry was performed in the manner of izibongo' (Mzamane 1991: 184). For further claims of this nature, see Mogale 1981: 31; Mzamane 1984a: 152 – 9; 1991: 189 – 90; Vaughan 1982a: 47. For, specifically, the critical claim that Serote had some relationship in his poetry with the traditional praise poet – with regard to his building up of solidarity and propagation of an heroic ideology – see Chapman 1984: 195.

69. This theme became increasingly predominant in black literature after the turn of the decade (see Trump 1990b: 38; Kirkwood 1987: 658). The impetus towards a future projection in literary works such as Serote's To Every Birth Its Blood will emerge in chapter five of this study.

70. See Sethunya 1980: 5.

71. Although the ramifications of the notion of 'protest literature' used by critics and writers in South African literary history cannot be exhaustively examined here, it is worth noting the hesitation and multiplicity of meanings with which this term is used. Critics disagree over the exact period when black literature turns from 'protest' to a more assertive, self-directed form. Mzamane defines the 'protest' period in black literature as that stretching from the defeat of the independent African kingdoms in the nineteenth century onwards, while Rive perceives it as being the period in black literature between 1940 – 60. Both claim that this period ends with the advent of Black Consciousness (see Mzamane 1982b: 31 – 43; Mzamane in Handan/Myesgin 1984: 39 – 40; Rive 1977: 47; 1983: 21). Ndebele, more recently, has criticised the Black Consciousness writers themselves for being part of a rhetorical form of 'protest', aimed at merely identifying and moralising about the conditions blacks have suffered in South Africa (Ndebele 1984a: 44 – 6; 1988: 208 – 9). For a fuller explication of the term 'protest' and its meanings, see Hagena 1990, especially 82 – 5; 88.

72. For similar statements, see Gwala 1974: 112; Mutloatse 1980:2; Mzamane 1991: 183; Rive 1982a: 14; Seroke 1981a: 30; and the claims made in newspapers by Johennesse/Williams 1979.

73. This statement occurs in a review of Welcome Msomi's play uMabatha. It should be noted, however, that 'Mshengu' is the nom-de-plume of white critic Robert Kavanagh. In this regard, see also Serote's frustration about reading poems to white audiences at a time when blacks in South Africa are being daily affected by horrors such as the murder of student leader Onkgopotse Tiro (Serote 1982: 110 – 1).

74. This stance is discussed in retrospect by Mutloatse, Tlali and Sepamla in Seroke 1981b: 41.

75. Sepamla noted that Mtshali's first poetry collection, published in 1971, was mainly read by white liberals because blacks had not yet found it necessary to spend time on literature; and Mzamane scathingly referred to the prohibitive price of books in terms of any possibility of reading for lower income black people in a 1977 article. Referring to an anthology in which a story of his had appeared, he noted the 'exorbitant' price (R3,25), and stated that he was 'willing to bet' that hardly a tenth of the copies sold would find their way to black townships (Mzamane 1977a: 1; 8). For further discussion of Mtshali, see footnote 98 of this chapter.

76. After being quoted by Biko in an article in the early 1970s (Biko 1988: 46), this concept proved immensely popular among black artists and was often quoted subsequently; as was Fanon's dictum that writers should become 'awakeners of the people'. See, as examples, Mnyele 1980: 42 and Sepamla 1980a: 28.

77. For a discussion of aspects of, and problems with, attracting a sufficient scale of readership for books in South Africa, see Machet 1988: 93 – 8.

78. For brief histories of Contrast and Purple Renoster, see J. Cope 1980 and L. Abrahams 1980 respectively. For The Classic, see Simon 1980.

79. Kirkwood, for example, speaks of the 'two modes of writing – popular literature and radical discourse' which constituted the 'creative tension' sustaining Ravan Press's publishing programme (Kirkwood 1981: 35; see also Randall 1986: 13 – 4).

80. To Whom It May Concern, edited by Robert Royston, emerged from Ad Donker in 1973; and Black Voices Shout!, edited by James Matthews, was published by B.L.A.C. Publishers in 1974. Among the earliest individual collections of black poets to appear were Mtshali's volume (see footnote 98), James Matthews' and Gladys Thomas' Cry Rage! (1972) and Serote's Yakhal'inkomo (1972) and Tsetlo (1974).

81. Izwi appeared in twenty issues between October 1971 and December 1974; Donga in eight issues from 1976 until its banning in 1978; Bolt in eleven issues between 1970 and 1974, and Ophir between 1967 and 1976. For the influence of Ophir, see Gwala 1984: 41; for the importance of Donga, see Odendaal 1980. Mzamane gives an overview of these non-Black Consciousness journals black writers could use in the 1970s in Mzamane 1991: 182 – 3.

82. After the second edition of Staffrider, its circulation rose to over 3,000 per edition for a period. An even wider readership was assumed by Ravan Press, as each copy had the potential to have several readers. Ravan estimated in the late 1970s that 90% of its readership was black, and that half of the

copies were sold in the Reef/Pretoria area (Kirkwood, interviewed in Visser 1980: 26 – 7).

83. This echoes an earlier comment that the 'importance of books ... must not be placed above ability to communicate effectively with our fellow Blacks, in a language they are able to understand' (Gwala 1975: 29).

84. The pre-eminent of whom were Mutloatse, Manaka, Jaki Seroke and artist Mpi Figlan.

85. A later editor of the magazine has however commented that, in actual fact, a process of editorial selection of material for the magazine did at times occur during this period (see Oliphant in Nyatsumba 1989: 31 – 2).

86. See also the remarks by Kirkwood in Visser 1980: 28 – 9 and Kirkwood 1981: 35; the remarks of Mutloatse and Kirkwood in Mtshali 1980; and the editorial to Staffrider 1, 1 1978. That the problem of cost affected the scope of black readership is without doubt. For further information, see footnote 75 of this chapter.

87. Although made in a period shortly after that under scrutiny in this thesis, a comment of Mutloatse's is indicative in this regard:

> Our books are read by people living in mine compounds, the students and the police. It proves wrong the myth that books are read by a certain section of the community. We are concerned with giving information and making some people literates (sic.). The onus is on us as a black publishing company.
>
> (Ngwenya 1985: 51)

It must be noted that this statement is somewhat at variance with his colleague Seroke's opinion, made the year before, that many black people weren't reading books because 'they don't have time and they don't take books as something that builds you as a person' (Kitchener 1984: 32).

88. Kirkwood also believed that: 'Racial exploitation ... has led to a unified culture of resistance in black townships' (quoted in Sboros 1980). For further proof of such attitudes, see the editorial to Staffrider 1,1 1978; Mutloatse 1980: 3 – 4; Kirkwood 1980.

89. Which was, in my opinion, an assessment with a great deal of weight at the time: for, according to the concept of grand apartheid, 'Africans who speak different languages must live in separate quarters... .' (quoted in Alexander 1989: 21). The policy of Bantu Education was directed at stifling the aspirations and cosmopolitanism of the urban intermediate classes (Brown 1987: 21). Thus, Manganyi (while noting in a 1980 speech that writing in the vernacular languages remained 'the most direct link that we have towards cultural continuity') accused vernacular black writers of 'the greatest prostitution of the creative impulse' (Manganyi 1980: 19).

90. Gwala 1984: 44; 1988b: 17. According to Rebecca Matlou, the group of writers who used vernacular languages in the 1970s and 1980s deliberately orientated their work to shaping the consciousness of black children under Bantu Education; producing work that was generally 'racist, commercial and inferior in outlook' (Matlou 1987: 67). See similar remarks in Chapman 1984: 183; Gordimer 1980: 49; Mzamane 1978: 43; 1991: 179; Tlali 1989b: 78.

91. Slogans such as this were, in the words of one critic, 'directed against the semantics of a language which expresses white bias, which make "black" seem ugly and degrading' (Horn 1978: 11). See also a general discussion of the racial bias of English, and the attempts of Black Consciousness literature to subvert this, in Cronin 1985a.

92. See his similar statements in Sepamla 1980a: 26. Mtshali, whose allegiance to Black Consciousness in the 1970s is a matter of some debate (see Mashabela 1980), was faced with the same problem but chose to evaluate it differently: 'I write in English for my present state of reality or unreality and I write in Zulu to establish my identity which will be translated by posterity' (Mtshali 1976: 124; see also his remarks in Barnett 1973: 33 – 4).

    A point not frequently made but pertinent to any consideration of language and readership in South Africa is the fact that the Black Consciousness writers grew up in an atmosphere in which most books published in the country were in English. In 1988, still, the number of English and Afrikaans publications far outstripped those in Zulu, the indigenous language with the highest number of publications (see Kantey n.d.: 12).

93. Some of these points are discussed in Brown 1987: 23; B. Langa 1990: 63 – 4.

94. Thus Tlali:

> The use of English unites us. Except for a few self-centred opportunists, we do not want to toe the line of our common enemy. Because of the deteriorating quality of education for Africans, fewer and fewer people are able to master that language well enough. In this respect, therefore, Bantu Education is yet another form of censorship.
>
> (Tlali 1984b: 24)

    This is reminiscent of the attitude among some black South Africans where proficiency in English is equated with good education; an attitude later to be criticised by Ndebele (see Ndebele 1986c: 14).

95. This parallels the altered use made of English world-wide by people in its ex-colonies, where an English emerged to fit new concerns and identities, a process which up until this point had been considerably stunted in South Africa. For discussion, see Kachru 1983: 325; Lanham 1976: 28. For an explication of the ingredients of flytaal, see Chapman 1984: 216; and the general discussion in Mfenyana 1981.

96. Examples of this trend in Staffrider can be seen in poems in Zulu, Venda and Sotho published from 1978 onwards by Ernest and Nkathazo Mnyayiza of Mpumalanga; j'Mathonsi of Kwanza; Tuwani, Maiwashe and Phalanndwa of Guyo; and Madingoane.

97. There is little evidence to support Lodge's (unsubstantiated) assertion that the black poetry that emerged in the early 1970s was at first philosophical and introspective (Lodge 1983: 322).

98. It is claimed that Mtshali's first volume Sounds of a Cowhide Drum sold 16,000 copies in 1971, its first year of publication; an unprecedented number for a black South African poet (Alvarez-Pereyre 1984: 185; Barnett gives the figure as 13,000 for its first six editions in Barnett 1973: 30). For further discussion of this volume and the white readership it was claimed to attract, see Seroke 1981a: 30; 1981b: 41; Chapman 1984: 185; Gwala 1974: 111; Mtshali 1973: 2 – 3.

99. There is no doubt that this was done consciously by the black writers of the time. Mzamane, for one, observed that the microphone was difficult to censor (Mzamane 1977b: 31; see also Gordimer 1973: 52; 1976: 146; Rive 1977: 48; 1980: 63) and that the subtlety of tone and conciseness of expression of poetry 'often goes miles above minds of our white overlords (sic.)' (Mzamane 1977a: 1). Cronin notes, however, that this type of explanation becomes less plausible as the decade progresses and poetry becomes more politically explicit (Cronin 1985a: 26). Rive, in an argument counter to his own above, states elsewhere that the reason this poetry became so popular was due to the straightforwardness of its political messages; an opinion agreed with by Alvarez-Pereyre, who stresses the functional, communicative urgency of this poetry (Rive 1980: 63; Alvarez-Pereyre 1984: 185).

100. For the formation of S.A.B.T.U., Mdali and the 'Culcom' of S.A.S.O. see Kavanagh 1985: 56 – 7; 149; Khoapa 1973: 204 – 10; Coplan 1985: 222 – 3; for P.E.T., see Steadman 1984c: 143; Coplan 1985: 223; for Mihloti, see Serote 1989c: 64. See also the entries for these organisations in Handbook of Black Organisations 1973: 7; 10 – 2.

101. For further information on these festivals, see Khoapa 1973: 204 – 7; Gwala 1974: 104, 108 – 9; Steadman 1984b: 221.

102. Horn, writing shortly after the event, regarded the 1976 revolt as demonstrating a radical rejection of – and alienation from – prevalent political norms in South Africa, so that increasingly it was 'the society's basis of legitimacy and authority' which was targeted (Horn 1978: 11).

103. For a short examination of these groups, see Ndebele 1989c: 413 – 5. For a discussion of the problems (such as lack of dedication by members, police harassment and unemployment) faced by one of these groups – Malimu in Bloemfontein – see Motshumi 1980: 43 – 4.

104. For information on the forming of this organisation, see 'Medupe': 1.

105. For this observation I am indebted to a personal communication from Johnny Clegg. Manaka, for instance, started to learn the Chopi piano in the late 1970s.

106. The intricacies of this process, along with examples from drama, poetry and prose, are explicated more fully in Sole 1987: 48 – 70.

107. For a full discussion of this crisis, see Saul/Gelb 1981.

108. See Steadman 1984b: 224 – 8.

109. Such as P.E.T. activist Jebe Masokoane's poem 'Black Nana Avenge! Arise!', first published in the S.A.S.O. Bulletin of March/April 1973, which was used by the State as evidence in the trial of the S.A.S.O. Nine in 1975 – 6 (see Gerhart 1978: 298 – 9). This trial, one of the most important of the decade, is discussed in L. Wilson 1991: 53.

110. Among other black writers subjected to various forms of detention, interrogation and imprisonment during these two decades were Serote, Gwala, Matthews, Sepamla, Ndlovu, Vuyisile Mdleleni, Mandlenkosi Langa and Khaya Mqayisa.

111. For a fuller description of these bannings, see S. Buthelezi 1991: 128 – 9.

112. See Publications Directorate letter published in Staffrider 2, 2 1979: 2. On the subject of small magazines and censorship, see 'Is It Now Pointless ...'. For further discussions on State censorship, see especially Gordimer 1988: 58 – 67; 243 – 60; Marcus 1984: 14 – 21; Moyana 1976: 87 – 9; 93 – 6; Watts 1989: 14 – 21; Visser 1992: 489 – 92; the general discussion in Gordon 1975 and the articles in Coggin 1983.

113. Such as the musician/writers Pheto and Tladi already mentioned, the music groups Dashiki and Jabula, and the members of the theatrical show Ipi-Tombi who refused to return to South African after their overseas tour, initiating instead another show called Sounds of Soweto.

114. For comment on this break-up from diverse political positions, see M. Matshoba 1981b: 45; 'PEN to disband ...'; Cullinan 1980: 3 – 7; Kirkwood 1985b: 142 – 8; and the debate between Abrahams and and Kirkwood in L. Abrahams 1983/4: 5 – 19. For discussion of this P.E.N. initiative generally, see Ndebele 1989c: 415 – 6 and 'Pen Conference ...'. Ndebele incorrectly gives the dates for the formation and dissolution of P.E.N. as 1978 and 1982 respectively.

115. For further information on these organisations, see Fatton 1986: 134 and K. Moodley 1991: 150.

CHAPTER TWO: COMMITMENT, AUTHORITY AND AUTHENTICITY

The Commitment and Social Role of Black Consciousness Writers

Black Consciousness literary figures, from their student and intellectual base, saw their primary task as the conscientisation of their community. The concept most frequently formulated in Black Consciousness circles to connect writer to community was the notion of 'commitment'. As developed by theorists such as Sartre and Eagleton, writers who believe themselves 'committed' tend first and foremost to question their priviliged positions as talented individuals. Thus, in South Africa, according to poet James Matthews:

> The black poet does not write from an ivory tower for an elitist minority. He regards himself as a poet of the people, from the people, and uses words understandable by all.
>
> (Matthews 1982: 1)

Committed writers choose to take sides and participate in the social struggles of the day, placing their art at the service of social change. Consequently, the Black Consciousness-inspired Tlali noted that her decision to write was part of a larger decision to take part in a process of change (Seroke 1981b: 43);[1] while Gwala remarked:

> ... Art for art's sake? Or art of commitment? We know what to choose. Aloofness does not establish harmony between the process of history

> and the individual. And we shall choose, yeah. Art for art's sake remains a liberal concept.
>
> (Gwala 1971: 178)

Taking on the burden of 'commitment' required writers to take sides in social, economic and political struggles. By reference to this term, writers identified themselves as taking on the burden of the oppressed in all facets of their writing.[2]

'Committed' writers also wish, generally speaking, to transform passive consumers of art into active collaborators through reconstituting the artistic forms at their disposal into more viable media of communication and instruction. Thus, for Mutloatse:

> Participatory Literature of Liberation does not condone or allow spectators because it has made no provision for passersby or cowards; it demands active participants, because our literature is one based on the African communal experience where there's virtually no difference between artists and audience.
>
> (Mutloatse 1981a: 6)[3]

It can be seen that Black Consciousness writers strove to fulfill all these criteria: they expressed their commitment in various but similar ways. They urged each other to draw their understanding of black society from their daily participation in the events which shaped this society's viewpoint and interests; to align themselves with the forces of authentic political change emanating from within the society; and to use their writing as a weapon of transformation.[4]

Like their black South African literary forbears, many of whom combined literary pursuits with other types of occupation in the service of black advancement, Black Consciousness inspired writers to be 'jacks of all

trades', in Mutloatse's words, who could function in the community as historians, psychologists, nurses, teachers, fathers, visionaries and so on (Mutloatse 1980: 1).[5] Such perceptions of literature tended to go together with a belief that all art must be politically relevant in orientation and purpose. By 1980, for instance, the radical poet Serote was insisting that the direction of the black poet in the forthcoming decade should be synonymous with the direction of the 'liberation struggle'; while a year later poet and fine artist Dikobe wa Mogale was exhorting each and every artist 'to be a creator in the struggle' (Chapman 1982b: 115; Mogale 1981: 31; see also Mzamane 1978: 55).

Writers and critics showed impatience with any art that was not immediately useful to political liberation. As a result writers and artists who were perceived as not amenable to such intentions were castigated for not demonstrating truthfully the oppressive nature of township life.[6] Extravaganzas like Ipi-Tombi were attacked, as well as any form of literary art which showed blacks as passive bearers of suffering, such as the theatre of Athol Fugard (Mda 1983: 14). Literature was to function positively, as a weapon of political struggle: the 'committed' writer must embody both commitment and affirmation (E. Patel 1983: 4).

Black writers saw themselves as participants in the political and cultural struggles of their communities. The relationship between writer and community was perceived as one of dynamic interaction. The black writer must learn to listen as well as speak. According to Sepamla:

> We have to go to the people.... It is the man in the street – how he understands BC – that I feel we must listen to.
>
> (Sepamla, in Seroke 1981b: 43)

Black Consciousness performers and writers consistently saw themselves as the spokespeople, or conscience, of all black people, with their task that of exposing the miseries of life in black society and contributing towards finding solutions: delving to lay bare and analyse the 'root causes of the black man's suffering' rather than remaining content with the superficialities of liberal-inspired protest (Matlou 1987: 65 – 6).

Attempts were made to reach, mobilise and learn from ordinary blacks. Such a goal implied a wish to make literature itself an activity open for use by everyone in the community. In line with such dictates, as an example, Medupe took its poetry to schools and community audiences during 1976 – 7 ('Medupe': 1).

Writers saw themselves as both learning from and teaching fellow blacks in a constant, interactive process. Consequently, black writers needed to challenge a black audience to read, by relating to this audience's world in their writing. In the first, 1978, editorial of the literary magazine Staffrider this was made clear:

> A feature of much of the new writing is its 'direct line' to the community in which the writer lives. This is a two-way line. The writer is attempting to voice the community's experience ("This is how it is") and his immediate audience is the community ("Am I right?")."
>
> ('Editorial': 1)

The writer attempted to write and act as a conflict-seasoned, experiencing, single representative of a black community writ large. Black writers should

'take our contributions to our rich black heritage back to the people, who've loaned it to us spiritually' (sic.), according to Mutloatse (Mutloatse 1980: 6). Even in literature which had a 'self-confessional' aspect to it, the individual self was generally put forward as representative of other black 'selves' struggling to survive in the apartheid context (Daymond; quoted in Lockett 1989b: 278).

There were assumptions implied in this reflexive relationship between writer and larger society which were, it must be said, strongly didactic. The writer, possessing the insight and truth of Black Consciousness, must needs change the perceptions of an underpoliticised community in order for them to realise their true, authentic identity and eventual political liberation. A number of writers voiced, or implied, a belief that the source of all wisdom, experience and knowledge was the very society they simultaneously saw as sorely in need of instruction via the medium of literature.[7] Such an attitude was fraught with paradox, and gave rise to utterances such as the following:

> It is hard to educate or be educated if you are afraid of experience, if you are afraid to examine precisely what the writer must examine. In short, what the writer has to do is to take upon himself the responsibility for trying to tell the truth to people who know it. There's no way for them not to know it, but they are determined to avoid it.
>
> (Mzamane 1988: 103)

> I regard the raising of the level of consciousness of blacks as my prime responsibility. I am personally committed to doing this.... I must go deeper into them, their feelings, try to make them understand their hopes, desires and aspirations as a people.
>
> (Tlali in Lockett 1989b: 277)[8]

The Black Experience

The artist, as the spokesperson or conscience of black people, was positioned to play the vital function of witness to the experiences of black people generally. It was crucial for the writer to be part of, and participatory in, the experience of what it was like to be black in white South Africa: 'there is', Gwala remarked, 'a vast difference between knowing something as a fact, as truth, in the alley of one's mind, and (then) living through the experience'. The black artist needed to identify 'with the black reality as he sees it all round him' (Gwala 1971: 178; 1973: 131). Thus, in discussing her novel on the 1976 Soweto revolt, Amandla, Tlali emphasised that people like herself were very much involved in the experience of the time, as victims who had to search for relatives and loved ones in mortuaries and hospitals (Lockett 1989a: 78).

Given an historical situation where the experiences and viewpoints of blacks had often been silenced or filtered through white spokespeople of various kinds, the 'committed' black South African writer's task was 'to reflect the day-to-day experiences of the individual' (Tlali 1988a: 199). Standpoints such as these attest that, through the medium of literature, black writers sought a validation of their experiences and a more hospitable experience of self and society in an overwhelmingly negative environment.[9]

The notion that the individual black writer partook in a 'black experience' and black 'collective consciousness' was widely promulgated.

Black writers were seen to participate in a collective validation of previously ignored black experiences. Thus playwright and critic Benjy Francis observed that:

> Slowly over the years, generation after generation, we became ... a 'colonized' people i.e. acquiring a new collective consciousness. This process of conditioning, slow and deathly, blinded us to much in our lives. We see then the conflict of this acquired collective consciousness and the inherited collective consciousness (that of the great traditions of the African past) creating a duality which is debilitating.... Latterly, the preoccupation has been ... a desire of the committed artist to resist imposition and to seek a vital assertion of the inherent collective consciousness.
>
> (Francis n.d.: 24 – 5),

while Mzamane spoke of his 'attempts to create a new collective consciousness, for which Black Consciousness in South Africa stands' (Mzamane 1984a: 159).

The emphasis on experience in Black Consciousness thought was therefore not coincidental.[10] Writers felt compelled to examine this experience in all its facets, in order to ascertain and subsequently understand the true, repressive reality of the apartheid situation. The viewpoint was constantly reiterated that black writers wrote out of this 'black experience'. Such an experience was sharply differentiated from the experience of whites in South Africa – 'no serious black writer', Gwala commented, 'can allow white values and expressions to override his black experience' (Gwala 1979: 56); nor was it deemed possible for anyone to authentically portray the 'black condition' without suffering it – an impossibility for white writers in South Africa (van Wyk, in Dangor 1982a: 133; see also Gordimer 1976: 118; Madingoane in Welz 1987: 50).

Black writers affirmed that they wrote out of and about this experience of oppression and exploitation. The commonality of racial oppression in South Africa was constantly highlighted:

> We as black people are all oppressed, landless and at the mercy of the government. So how can we as black people be different from one another?.. It is called Black Experience, not just black literature. It is not the same thing as white literature, which is of privilege, unlike that of the black writer, which is of the underdog.
>
> (Mutloatse, in Mtshali 1980; sic.)

> We in Mdali don't believe there is any black man, rich or poor, who is free. And we also don't believe that there are whites who are oppressed. That is why we don't want to mix with them in order to preserve our principles in purity.
>
> (Mofokeng 1980)

In South Africa, it was argued, the racial structuring of oppression and exploitation meant that black people had a degree of interaction and common cause transcending class lines. The fact that blacks of different classes, income levels and status were crammed together in close proximity in townships like Soweto gave black intellectuals and writers an immediate source of identification with and access to their lower class brethren. In addition, common racial harassment gave black intellectuals a degree of social compassion and a depth of anger and militancy which went well beyond their immediate class interests.[11] Gwala remarked:

> Black writers do have a Black Experience. Black writers did not choose to grow up in ghettos like Mkhumbane (Cato Manor), Sophiatown, Clermont, Alexandra or Duncan Village. Neither do they choose to be pushed into so-called townships and into bundustans (sic.). This is a sociological factor that black writers cannot avoid. Inevitably they have the human right to claim a sociological imagination that challenges the sociological locale. There is no third choice: swim out of the muddy and polluted waters of apartheid society or drown.
>
> (Gwala 1979: 56

The Search for Authenticity[12]

As a result of being the bearers of the 'black experience', the onus fell on black writers, it was believed, to offer a more accurate account of black life under apartheid than whites. It behoved the writer to give as authentic and truthful a picture of black life in the townships as possible: for, as Mutloatse noted, he or she:

> ... is deeply rooted there – and his authenticity is there or not there for one to see, hear and feel. Otherwise, he would be faking it, condoning all the lies broadcast by the outsiders.
>
> (Mutloatse 1980: 2)

The true test of a work's authenticity, it followed, was its acceptance as accurate by other people in the townships (idem.; see also Sepamla in Ozynski 1980: 46).

The emphasis placed on the writer's task of reflecting the authenticity of black people's lives in South Africa appears to have had two inter-related corollaries. The first was the assumption that writing should, to a degree, come out of personal experience – as in the case of Tlali's first novel Muriel at Metropolitan, written during the late 1960s, which was informed by her experience as a clerk in a furniture shop owned by whites ('Muriel Tlali ...').[13] The second was the belief that a literature created by the 'authentic' black voice could reveal the truth of what it is like to be black – the truth behind the 'white lies' on which blacks had been fed, which had fed a form of 'false consciousness' among blacks who had grown to accept their political and moral debasement.

Authors who accepted notions of 'commitment' and 'authenticity' took on the responsibility, in prose fiction at least, to depict powerfully and realistically the social determinants and surroundings of character and story. In South Africa, as elsewhere, 'authenticity' thus implied a portrayal of 'how things went, on a general and personal level' (Schipper 1985: 564). Literature thus came to be viewed as a transparent or reflective medium, by use of which social reality could be depicted and understood. That such a viewpoint was commonplace among writers and critics alike during this period is everywhere apparent. Mutloatse, for instance, noted that blacks 'need a writing that records exactly the situation we live in'; while Tlali – rebutting a criticism that her prose was merely a form of journalism[14] – suggested that black writers would not succeed unless they reflected 'the true position of what is taking place and try to carry the reader along with us' (both quoted in Seroke 1981b: 42). Gwala, in turn, insisted that black art forms should be 'an expression of the time and . . . objective situation. Within the given context' rather than 'a fashion' (Gwala 1973: 133); while Sepamla wanted black theatre to represent 'truthfully the environmental and universal dictates of today's Black world' (Sepamla 1974/5a: 19).

It can consequently be seen that an impetus to create a literature accurately reflecting conditions under apartheid was widely held by black writers during the 1970s. Serote, for one, believed that writers acted as a 'mirror' of society, while Matshoba voiced the opinion that his writing was a 'window' into the black way of life (quoted in Kuhn 1974: 41; Vlessing

1986: 1930 respectively). Imaginative literature, as a form of discourse which avoided political cowardice or expediency and allowed the writer to write honestly and from the heart was, it was contended, the perfect vehicle for expressions of 'authenticity' and truth.[15]

While a mimetic depiction of things 'as they are' was a cornerstone of Black Consciousness art, it was not the whole picture. On closer examination this demand that reality be reflected in the literature co-existed with a view that the purpose of literature was to give insight into, and suggest ways out of, the socio-political predicament blacks found themselves in. By cementing the relationship between audience and artist, it was hoped that an imaginative restructuring of a painful reality would be, ideologically and politically, a first step towards changing that reality. In a scenario where the social deprivation of blacks was common, focussing on this experience was seen as the first step towards changing it, by transforming the consciousness of black readers or audiences; who might thereupon begin to resist apartheid outside the text as well (Gwala 1973: 131 – 2; 1984: 47).

The writer's role in society was therefore not only to reveal the iniquities of apartheid in full, but also to mould the perceptions of a black readership. In order to do this writers should attempt to formulate and disseminate 'sustaining fictions', embodying ideals of community participation and myths of heroic possibility deemed latent in the energies of the 'people' (Chapman 1984: 183). To this end, hand in hand with the

depiction of the black experience, a mobilisation of the symbolic and mythic dimensions of literature was discernible.

Speaking generally, myths are imaginative constructions which seek to bind communities into a common unity and identity by emotional and conceptual means; blending the factual and the imaginary into compelling narratives of causation and association.[16] As literature is the medium for the construction of myths par excellence,[17] it is not surprising that such constructions in Black Consciousness centrally involved writers. Mutloatse, for one, believed that South African black writers had an important task to educate their readers and 'create myths for ourselves' (Mutloatse 1980: 3); while others spoke of themselves as 'myth-creators'.[18]

In this context, appropriate myths were designed to set up a system of related symbols and metaphors which would remember the past, explain and sustain black identity and trace out future paths for black aspirations – the 'old and potential experiences', in Manganyi's words, which secured a temporal chain of black creativity (Manganyi 1979: 31). Consequently, 'authenticity on black reality can only be achieved through the calling back of the past and the forging of the future' (Gwala 1973: 133, sic.).

Writers sought to propagate a value system to unite black writers and readers, and to act at psychologically deeper levels of consciousness and identity. Such tropes were to be found, in embryonic form, in the everyday life and culture of the black community, if only the writer could perceive

and represent these properly. If not, the writer's duty was to invent them. Thus, speaking in the late 1970s, Manoko Nchwe expressed an opinion that:

> A woman is very fortunate if she can write about daily life in her surroundings.... A myth can always be found in her writings or if it is not there she must bring it in.
>
> (Boitumelo 1979: 60)

The search, in actual fact, was for an authenticity which displayed, not things as they were, but the reality which would exist when black people had discovered their communal 'true consciousness', and acted accordingly to liberate themselves from physical and mental domination. 'Inauthentic' expressions of black creativity such as Ipi-Tombi were thus criticised for being a poor imitation of 'the real cultural dance and music patterns within black society' (Mbanjwa 1975: 212; emphasis mine). Not only black writers, but also black publishers, wedded themselves to a programme of the creative formation and elaboration of a culture of resistance emanating from the popular masses, even if these masses were in some instances unaware of their potential for generating such a culture.[19]

As Sirianni notes, the 'symbolic productions of the human species ... have an irreducable core of social truth that points to the 'good life' beyond the existing forms of domination' (Sirianni 1982: 246). It is not therefore accidental that many black writers, fuelled by the teleological impulses in Black Consciousness, wished to try and 'envision the future ... tackle the problems of the future' (Mutloatse, in Welz 1987: 47). In this manner the Utopian, political nature of symbolic language was conceived of and used as a form of emotional communication with black audiences in the struggle

against apartheid, aimed at creating a more positive world for blacks in times to come.

The Ambivalence of Black Consciousness Thought

Black Consciousness political programmes in the period under review retained a strong petty-bourgeois and intellectual bias, despite the attempts at forging community and worker links. It had continuous problems in finding a grassroots base. Although this can partly be attributed to state repression – such as the incessant bannings of individuals and, eventually, of organisations in 1977 – the tendency of many Black Consciousness ideologues to reject class analysis, and instead presume on an easily constructed racial unity, also played its part (Hirson 1979: 298 – 301).

The growth of the black petty-bourgeoisie in South Africa since the late 1960s was noteworthy. It is difficult to make generalisations about this class because it was and is extremely heterogeneous; fragments of it exhibited a range of fluctuating positions and attitudes to the political situation as a whole in the period under review, although the racism of the State served as a unifying factor. In the face of continual harassment of its attempts at political organisation and economic self-betterment, it had not presented a unified position historically, neither in a political nor ideological sense. Some segments collaborated with the South African State in taking

up positions of power in 'Bantustans' and local authorities, while others remained militantly anti-apartheid.

Even the politically militant sections of this class, however, expressed their grievances and programmes for the future in a number of ways, from the desire for the removal of specific obstructions to their economic betterment, to radical socialist demands. Crucially, while this class tends to oscillate in its support between the working-class and the bourgeoisie, in South Africa the racial barrier to its social and economic betterment has often led it to align itself with, and seek the support of, lower-class black people; leading it to emphasise a racial commonality of black people irrespective of class. This explains the ambivalence some of this class felt towards Black Consciousness during the period, which 'threatened the immediate material interests of the black middle class even while it engaged their psychological needs' (Driver 1990: 226).

There were thus ideological ambiguities at the very heart of Black Consciousness thought.[20] Black Consciousness was at its most effective as an anti-racist and anti-exploitative doctrine demanding radical change and calling on all blacks to unite and resist apartheid laws. However, it was shot through with a mixture of nationalist and socialist rhetoric, often undifferentiated. While these goals were to some extent compatible in South Africa at the time, as they both wished an end to white minority rule, there was in the long term a potential divergence between them:

> It is ... useful to make a distinction between social revolutions and national revolutions. Social revolutions are those in which the primary

> issue is change in the social structure and the redistribution of wealth. National revolutions are primarily popular insurrections against foreign rule, and they are characterised by a people's desire to reassert its dignity as a people and as a nation.
>
> (Nzongola 1970: 523)

The amorphous nature of Black Consciousness, and its emphasis on black unity – a strength, as suggested earlier, with regard to its potency as a rallying point among black people – led to a vagueness in the definition of its programmes and goals in some areas.[21] Racial definitions and a supposed cultural unity were used to mobilise a wide spectrum of black people towards supporting Black Consciousness. It allowed blacks with different class interests to congregate under its banner. This undifferentiated, populist aspect meant that it summoned people with differing political and economic goals. Cultural identities belonging to 'the people' – in this instance to blacks – were transformed into symbols for use in its struggle.[22]

During the 1970s Black Consciousness evinced little connection to black workers' strike actions.[23] Among some activists, the emphasis on questions of mental attitudes, dignity and existential liberation loomed large;[24] while for others, an initial emphasis on cultural and racial issues gave way to an explanation of political oppression in South Africa which rested on an understanding of class conflict and economic domination (Fatton 1986: 82; Gwala 1988a: 91 – 2; K. Moodley 1991: 149).[25] Some activists wished reform within existing economic realities; others desired a radical transformation of South Africa's socio-economic structures. There

was an incipient conflict between those who wished to replace white capitalist domination with a form of black capitalism,[26] those who believed that it was possible to achieve a local variant of 'African socialism' which avoided the social antagonisms of capitalism as these had evolved in Europe,[27] and those wedded to a more socialist programme of action and goals. As an example of this, Gwala, aligned to a more radical Natal section of the movement in the 1970s,[28] criticised those supporters of the ideology who still demonstrated an 'inverted idealism in hankering after bourgeois securities', or who considered Black Consciousness merely an outlet for 'cultural activism' and 'armchair politics' (Gwala 1979: 55; 1975: 25; 32; see also 1984: 50); and later dwelt on the implicit differences in goals shown at the Black Renaissance Convention at Hammanskraal in 1974, where younger, more radical delegates found 'we had little in common in our African identity alone' with more conservative, pro-capitalist delegates (Gwala 1984: 43 – 4). By the mid-1970s, there was evidence that socialist rhetoric and analysis had begun to permeate the thinking of a number of S.A.S.O. members,[29] although the flight of many politically-committed young people from South Africa after the Soweto uprising, the banning of Black Consciousness organisations in October 1977 and the resultant upheavals and discontinuity appeared – temporarily at least – to slow down this trend.

Despite these struggles, the emotional identification among many tendencies of Black Consciousness thought with lower-class black people

was apt to transform itself swiftly into a social ventriloquism, where the identifications and experiences shared between the individual and all members of his or her racial community were presumed to be so insistent as to be without difference. As a consequence, social differences between its leadership and members and other strata of the racially oppressed were characteristically fudged.[30] Trump's summation as regards black writers is to the point:

> The history of oppression in Southern Africa has had a number of effects on the region's writing. The unfolding of exploitation, while attempting to divide the oppressed and often succeeding, has at the same time served as a force to unite oppressed groupings. Yet.... By far the most common tendency in resistance writing has been to emphasize the unity of the oppressed. What one therefore sees is an almost overwhelming ... identification of petit-bourgeois writers with the oppressed. ... Yet the oppressed class is itself made up of several class fractions.... And ... contains opposing political allegiances. Forms of identification the writers make with the oppressed therefore frequently conflate a set of discordant positions.
>
> (Trump 1990b: 39)

This fudging can nowhere be seen more acutely than when considering the class divisions and differences between the black working-class and those better educated groups who had initially generated Black Consciousness. While programmes to empower black people economically tended to speak, in the early period, of the need for 'black co-operative enterprise' (Nolutshungu 1983: 171; see also ibid.: 192; Biko 1988: 85 – 6; 113; Hirson 1979: 83), this term itself had several possible interpretations. When S.A.S.O. and the B.P.C. initiated worker organisations in 1972, for example, they put forward programs which stressed leadership and recreational programs, black dignity and the 'role and obligation' of black

workers towards 'black development' (Khoapa 1973: 27; 123) rather than class antagonisms and politics. In cultural circles, only a few activists, such as Gwala, spoke of the danger of class differences within the black community itself (see Gwala 1975: 25 – 8). Although some cultural activity aimed at incorporating black workers occurred – a night of poetry recited to music and drums presented by Mdali in conjunction with B.A.W.U. in Soweto in 1973 was a case to point – literary expression tended to highlight unity rather than the existence of class and other divisions within black society. A tendency to collapse the terms 'black' and 'worker' into each other could be discerned in many quarters: 'worker' became a metaphor for racial oppression, and all blacks were deemed workers.[31] In this way class struggle was reduced to a reflection of racial conflict and polarisation.

Such a conception was reflected in the literature, such as in this description of a political funeral by Mutloatse:

> The whole church shook at the chanting, whose volume had increased tremendously. Even the whole island of Azania could feel the anger of the youth. Its inhabitants, approximately 20 million, were divided into two camps: the natives and the settlers. The Azanians and the Europeans. The poor and the rich. The vanquished and the conqueror. The pacifists and the soldiers. The voteless and voters. The peacemakers and the gunsmiths. The socialists and capitalists.
>
> (Mutloatse 1981b: 7 – 8)[32]

In such formulations it became easy to presume that ending white rule would put an end to exploitation per se: all blacks were equal, and therefore blacks could not exploit blacks (or if they did, they were 'traitors' or 'non-whites').[33] If class differences were acknowledged at all, it was popularly conceived that a shedding of redundant 'petty-bourgeois' attitudes

could alter one's socio-political position vis-a-vis the community (see, for example, Gwala 1988a: 92). Class was therefore either seen as an attitude of mind or a factor of loyalty; a determinant which could be changed easily by an individual's conscious political commitment and willpower.[34] Class positions tended, among some commentators, to be measured with regard to an individual's relation to State structures only. In other instances, racial identities were conceived of as being determinant on the political level, while class identities and capitalism were seen as significant on the level of the economy only (see for instance Mabasa 1983: 57). Moral and ethical concerns were therefore superimposed on economic determinations,[35] and class divisions seen as implying a fall from original 'blackness' into pseudo-whiteness – a status of oppressed object rather than human agent. In such a conceptualisation, it was easy for some writers coterminously to demonstrate their 'class suicide'[36] and show commitment to the ideal of free enterprise in a future South Africa. This is the case with regard to the approving comment made in the same year by the 'socialist' Mutloatse quoted above, whilst extrapolating on the economic future of Zimbabwe after independence:

> What is most likely to happen is that, monopolies held by big companies controlled from Johannesburg, Paris, London, Berlin and New York, may be gradually curtailed, and finally broken up so that free enterprise emerges from myth to reality.
>
> (Mutloatse 1981c)[37]

Such statements condoning a national capitalism sit uneasily with statements by other Black Consciousness followers which placed more weight on class determinants and anti-capitalist goals.[38]

If one chooses to designate the literature of Black Consciousness during the period under discussion as representing most readily the ideology and attitudes of a radical petty-bourgeois stratum, this must be done however with a degree of care. While some members of this class certainly did use the ideology and join the movement to re-establish their positions within the existing structures of the economy (see Fatton 1986: 71 – 2), Black Consciousness was scarely simply a self-seeking doctrine. The Black Consciousness movement stressed populist and 'black' concerns in the face of a racially exclusive white government. If it gave rise to a petty-bourgeois literature, this literature was produced by a petty-bourgeoisie which did have a degree of racial and political solidarity with other blacks, and was not antagonistic to the interests and wishes of other black people at the time of its greatest effectivity.[39] Furthermore, the occupations and life experiences of the writers active during this time were diverse, and some of them did grow up in deprived circumstances. Class position, it must furthermore be noted, is not something that is simply given by circumstances of birth or parents' occupations, and thus fixed for all time. Class positions can and do change, even within individual lifetimes (Marks/ Rathbone 1982: 2). It must be remembered that many of the students who formed the core of Black Consciousness had managed to acquire a

university education despite deprived circumstances, and a few had some experience of factory and mine labour; with a concomitant closer experience of, and sympathy for, working-class issues.[40]

Race and Class in Black Consciousness

The historical way in which capitalism came to South Africa helped maintain a feeling of racial identity among black people. Racist laws, the maintenance of a semblance of pre-colonial economy and society in the 'Bantustans' and segregation in the towns facilitated the continuity of racial awareness, even as proletarianisation was taking place. In addition, many apartheid townships did (and still do) not have an easily discernible 'geography of class', with neighbourhoods either mainly working- or middle-class in constitution. Identities of 'race' and class' are difficult to separate in such a context. The experience of racial oppression in South Africa did, and does, have a material reality, while the relative continuity of popular traditions and resistance has ensured that racial identities have played an immediate role in how people have come to terms with the socio-economic and political struggles of which they were part. Black workers have been aware of being oppressed as workers and as blacks; other classes, such as the petty-bourgeoisie, have shared a similar experience of racial oppression,

even though their class position modified and alleviated part of this experience:

> ... the nation-community embodies an identity, linguistic and cultural, that is not simply an 'effect' of class, however closely its evolution may be interwoven with the shifting patterns of class relations and struggles.... The class/nation dilemma is not to be overcome either by wishing one of its terms out of existence ... or by decreeing a rigid temporal priority for the solution of one rather that the other.
> (Ryerson 1975: 224 – 6)[41]

Experiences and attitudes belonging to different classes therefore have merged to some extent in black communal cultural identity.[42] Neither has black literature, in the way it describes and extrapolates from the experience of everyday life, desired, nor been able, to ignore the racial component of oppression and the significance of nationalist and populist identities in the quest for liberation.[43] Black Consciousness literature in particular consistently put forward an anti-elitist stance, seeking to forge a popular, communicative expression with political consequences. As a populist ideology it sought to provide a frame of reference for very diverse interests and levels of social awareness (Vaughan 1984a: 210).

Yet in South Africa the extent of black proletarianisation and urbanisation is so widespread and advanced that it is impossible to talk of the mass of people as having been unaffected by State structures. Cultural complexity and social divisions are evident both in urban areas and the 'Homelands'. Cultural assimilation and transformation has been the order of the day, despite the attempts of the State to reconstruct a synthetic ethnic traditionalism through apartheid. Furthermore, due to the increasing

control exercised by the Government over the techniques and technology available to cultural 'industries' such as advertising and the media, the dominant groups have attempted both to use culture as a profitable enterprise for themselves and as a divisive and controlling factor (see, for example, Coplan 1979: 208).

Moreover, on closer scrutiny some South African townships do appear to exhibit elements of a 'class' geography. For instance, most townships in the Vaal Triangle exist primarily to serve neighbouring factories and are almost entirely working-class; in Soweto the employment patterns are more varied and concentrated on commerce and services. The petty-bourgeoisie in the latter are comparatively more numerous. In addition other socio-political divisions exist: such as those between tenants and landlords, between hostel dwellers and permanent residents, and so on. Despite the intermingling that has taken place in black townships, government Administration Boards' attempts to serve apartheid's desire for static identities by placing people into largely ethnically-defined neighbourhoods, caused traces of ethnic identity to remain – for example, parts of Zola are known as 'Deep Zulu' by Sowetans; while Chiawelo is inhabited mainly by people of Tsonga origin.[44] This has increased points of community fracture. It is exactly such points of community fracture that Black Consciousness writers sought to overcome. One character in Tlali's novel Amandla, for instance, avers: "Who bothers who anyone's great or great-great-grandfather was in a heterogeneous cosmopolitan town like

Johannesburg or Soweto?".[45] In this manner, the urban intellectuals who predominated in Black Consciousness organisations placed relatively little focus on problems generated by differences between urban and rural people in black society, or by ethnic diversity in the townships.[46]

Class and other divisions permeate South African society. Different classes appropriate history and culture in ways so that certain salient features are accentuated and others blurred over; while cultures interact and transform themselves as people struggle to shape and make meaning of their lives. In a situation where a 'national' consciousness unifying all blacks was stressed by Black Consciousness writers to the detriment of a simultaneous awareness of division and difference, the danger existed that a '(pan-class) coalition of resistance might tend to over-privilege nationalist assertions at the expense of socialist ones' (Saul/Gelb 1981: 136). Moves towards State restructuring by the South African government (such as the removal of certain controls and limitations on black business in 1976, the proposals of the Wiehahn and Riekert Commissions submitted in 1979, the institution of the TriCameral Parliament in 1984 (as far as non-African blacks were concerned) and the proposed extension of privileges to certain classes of blacks (such as those who fell under Section 10) were aimed precisely at eroding the basis of this class alliance. In such a context sections of the black petty-bourgeoisie began to adopt a less implacable stance towards the state by the early 1980s.[47]

It is therefore facile to conceive of black unity in the face of apartheid in South Africa in simple, uncontradictory terms. The emphasis on a black communal experience and solidarity has often resulted in class divisions within black society being conjured away. If it is not comprehended that social and class struggles over access to economic and political power are the major dynamic of social change, that these struggles are not ultimately and completely synonymous with racial struggles, and that black artists and intellectuals are not necessarily at one with a vaguely-defined 'people', resulting conceptualisations will lend themselves most easily to appropriation by, and the political agendas of, an aspirant black bourgeoisie, which may seek power and wealth for itself at the expense of the racial community it claims to represent.

Moreover, while it cannot be said that the mythic, Utopian impulse and the humanist discourse found in much black literature of the period under study are incompatible with the interests of working-class black people, they tended to be overstressed to the point of obscuring the complexity of social interaction and division. By the late 1970s South Africa had become marked by growing worker militancy and action, as worker and trade union organisations proliferated.[48] In response to this, Black Consciousness increasingly sought to come to terms with class and worker issues. A struggle between Black Consciousness and non-racial, 'progressive', trade unions for the support of the black worker emerged, and the emphasis even within the remaining Black Consciousness

organisations assumed a 'class content'.[49] Black Consciousness organisations set up after the 1977 bannings, such as A.Z.A.P.O. and A.Z.A.S.O., approached the issue of the black worker, however, in what can be designated an an instrumentalist way: the black working-class was regarded as important insofar as it could assist in the achieving of national liberation. This was not the same as any understanding that an end to class exploitation of black and other workers in South Africa marks the final goal of liberation from a socialist viewpoint.[50]

In such a shifting scenario, it became increasingly important for black writers to recognise and react to class and other social differences, if their creative work was to remain comprehensible to lower-class people. As Gordimer observes:

> It is comparatively easy to create a 'people's art' – that is to say aesthetic expression of fundamentally-shared experience of all, intellectuals, workers and peasants alike, in oppression: in South Africa, the pass laws are a grim cultural unifier. It is quite another matter when the impact of experience breaks up into differing categories of class experience.
>
> (Gordimer 1981: iv)

Yet any wish to address issues of social division and determination – through an enlarging of the boundaries of the 'black experience' dealt with in the literature – remained contradictory. The attitude of political and cultural activists at the time fluctuated between extolling 'the people' and criticising them for their lack of politicisation. Sloganeering, polemics and a rather vague gesturing towards a romanticised and abstract 'Africa' dominated, at times, at the expense of any sympathetic portrayal or

dialogue around the concrete problems and attitudes of black working-class people. Capitalism and consumerism were sometimes explained away as a simple degenerative force which could be resisted with black authenticity (black women should not wear make-up, for example).[51]

Rather than working from a premise that class, gender and other forms of struggle permeate South African society, not only in the relationships between black and white but within racial cultures as well, and rather than acknowledging that all man-made institutions are an outcome of political and economic struggles for power, in Black Consciousness literature 'oppression' was too often opposed to a 'natural order', and the purpose of the artist came to be the exposing of a transcendental 'truth'. In the classless, naturalised universe of Madingoane's poetry, for example, freedom 'is the law of nature' and justice 'is rooted in the universal order of things' (L. Abrahams 1983/4: 8). Thus, the artist's struggle was morally defined: as 'a struggle to recreate a distorted reality.... A good ... dramatist is one who is not anti-man but anti-evil' (Matsix 1981: 34).[52]

Gender Politics and Women Writers

Gender was another area of social division Black Consciousness did not comprehensively explore. Given the double oppression (of race and gender)[53] suffered even by better educated, middle-class women in black

society, it is no wonder that until at least the beginning of the 1980s most black writers were male, and that the majority of 'black' viewpoints recorded in the literature were correspondingly masculine.[54] Only a small number of women were visible at readings and writers' workshops in the late 1970s and early 1980s, according to Tlali (Lockett 1989a: 79). This lack of visibility has since been ascribed to the conforming pressure on women in black society to fulfill traditional, domestic and supportive roles; the lesser emphasis placed on the book education of girls by their parents; and the fact that women found it more difficult to move freely around the townships at unusual hours to attend (for instance) writing workshops. Therefore women who wished to be writers soon came to:

> ... realize your handicaps, educationally because you are a woman, economically because you do not have the facilities required for such an occupation, and politically because you cannot divorce yourself from the aspirations of the people ... also the cultural aspect, the traditional aspect, the problems of how you are going to adjust to the ... cosmopolitan system of doing things.
>
> (Tlali 1989b: 76)

and according to novelist and critic Lauretta Ngcobo:

> When a woman writes she crosses boundaries of traditional outlook towards ideas. Women in our societies have never been entitled to initiate ideas. Women have been receptive to men's ideas ...
>
> (Ngcobo 1988: 203)

In such circumstances it is small wonder that the history of black women in South Africa was 'a history of silence' (Meer 1975: 34). Black women were viewed as mothers, wives and supporters of men rather than individuals or as a group with specific concerns and needs. They had to struggle to achieve an adequate conception of selfhood in order to sustain

the individual self-expression necessary for writing, finding their 'difference' from more conformist black women liable to render them open to suspicion and criticism.[55]

Literary expression nevertheless emerged as an important portal for self- and group discovery for black women who ventured to write. As Nchwe suggested, women used writing as a means for sharing ideas, and for making other women aware of their value to society.[56] Thus, by the late 1970s, young writers such as Nokugcina Sigwili (later known as Gcina Mhlope) were advocating the formation of women's writing groups, asserting the importance of women writing 'what they feel' – a process easier to achieve in the presence of other women (Sigwili 1980: 44).

Crucially, though, women of a Black Consciousness persuasion in this period felt an overwhelming compunction to write as part of, and for the good of, black society. They accepted an identity and responsibility determined by their blackness, seeing their freedom as inextricably bound up with the wider liberation sought by Black Consciousness.[57] Writers stressed a shared racial suffering with black men:

> As Mtutuzeli (Matshoba) says, 'For what is suffered by another man in view of my eyes is suffered also by me. The grief he knows is a grief I know. Out of the same bitter cup do we drink.'
> This is a feeling shared universally. It does not only refer to men alone but it is also shared by women.
>
> (Boitumelo 1979: 60)

and saw the black woman writer as carrying out the familiar Black Consciousness duties of tracing 'the remains of her distorted culture' and 'reinterpreting experience in the way Africans perceive it' (Boitumelo 1979:

60; Ngcobo 1986: 82). These views went hand in hand with a frequently stated denial of any commonality of experience or material circumstances between black and white women in South Africa; implying (and, in the case of Tlali, stating) that class and racial divisions in the country were fully congruent.[58]

While it was certainly true that the liberation of women could not be isolated from wider political liberation during this period, there was a tendency for these writers to smooth over the contradictions that were thrown up between issues of racial solidarity on the one hand and gender oppression within the racial enclave on the other. An inclination to elide patriarchal oppression with the oppression engendered by apartheid resulted in some writers implying that liberation from apartheid would generate a significant liberation from male domination in black society, an unprovable and almost certainly over-hasty conclusion.[59]

Critics have moreover noted an ambivalence in the loyalty black women writers felt, in Black Consciousness formulations, to a primarily male-defined notion of 'community'. A tension was discernible in many women writers' attempts to interweave racial and gender imperatives, as the need for women to fulfill a 'supportive' role in the liberation struggle was emphasised at the same time as areas of oppression particularly pertinent to women, and the structural antagonisms between sexes within the black community, were noted.[60] Driver's discussion of Kuzwayo illuminates this general point adequately:

> There is ... a sense of strain in this construction of identity, for Kuzwayo's unofficial voice sometimes breaks through the official version.... If we look at Kuzwayo's simultaneous validation of Black Consciousness and Female Consciousness we will understand something of this strain. Black Consciousness proclaims "blackness" as a positive quality rather than a negative one. Yet Black Consciousness has been Black Male Consciousness ...
>
> (Driver 1988b: 162)

This issue of 'supportiveness' of women to men remained a point of particular strain in Black Consciousness thinking, nowhere more obvious than in the literary construction of 'motherhood' by both male and female writers. The social power of the black mother was recognised by Black Consciousness: indeed, one of the aims of the B.W.F. was to 'redirect the status of motherhood towards the fulfilment of black people's social, cultural, economic and political aspirations' (Ramphele 1991a: 216). This nurturing role was, however, also obviously a limiting one, stereotyping women to supportive roles within the family and limiting them to the private, domestic sphere. The figure of the 'black mother' that subsequently emerged in black South African literature was to a degree stereotyped and romanticised: encapsulating within a single ideal figure virtues of courage, endurance, humanity, communal responsibility and strength – virtues which overlooked their concomitant aspects of silence, stasis and passivity.[61]

The figure of the 'black mother', even as put forward by female writers, embodied some of the contradictions of the role women saw for themselves, simultaneously supporting a male-directed political agenda and asserting their own issues as crucial to this agenda. Emphasising the power of the social role of mother (see, for example, Tlali 1984a: 26), they

transformed this supposedly positive evaluation into one merely supportive of men. Thus Sigwili could state that:

> We are very important to men.... The point is that we need each other, for we depend on each other's strength. Men can be physically strong, but our strength as women is our motherhood: men are always women's children.
>
> (Sigwili 1980: 44)

By the early years of the 1980s an imperative for women to write about their experiences as women and 'correct the false distorted images of the woman as portrayed by men and some white writers' (Ngcobo 1988: 151; Matlou 1987: 73) began to gather momentum. Interwoven with familiar Black Consciousness themes, the beginnings of an insistence on the relative autonomy, and importance, of women's issues became visible.

Days of Future Past – The Mobilisation of 'Tradition'

The emphasis on the need for blacks to rediscover their cultural heritage and 'roots' – a concern which is most attractive to that class which has been more culturally alienated, as Cabral notes (Cabral 1980: 145) – was frequent among Black Consciousness artists. Among the urban-based township writers among whom Black Consciousness first flourished, this search for a traditional basis underpinning a unified racial identity gestured back to a pre-colonial rural past which was often imagined in an abstract manner. Images of primordial purity and a romanticised 'Africa' recurred in

poems and plays in the early 1970s. Traditional African oral literature was linked with an idealised natural realm of existence ('mother earth') and a changeless, timeless universe. According to the T.E.C.O.N. activist Strini Moodley, for instance:

> Artistic creativity in any form, in centuries passed was always interwoven in the everyday existential experiences of the people.... Black people have always been artistic; have always been at one with Mother Earth. Their feet have pounded the soil; their nostrils have flared at the scent of the earth's aroma and their eyes have seen the mystery of the distant cosmos.
>
> (S. Moodley 1972: 20)

Traditional African societies were regarded as essentially communalist and humanistic. Biko, throughout his writings, stressed the fact that pre-colonial African societies were 'man-centred', with their special contribution to the world in the field of human relationships: he saw age and labour divisions in pre-colonial South African societies as natural rather than socially-created, thus blurring the contested nature of politics and identity even in such societies.[62] Poverty was said to be non-existent or a 'foreign concept' in these societies (Biko 1988: 56 – 8). Thus, Vusi Nkumane of the cultural group Mdali saw the greatest boon of Africa to the world as its 'ways and means of governing people harmoniously and satisfactorily. Remember we never had so-called Marxist interpreted economic wars. We couldn't for our culture was not conducive to such attitudes' (Nkumane 1981: 9).

This view of African societies as natural and spontaneous borrowed a great deal from the suppositions of colonial anthropology. It echoed,

paradoxically, assumptions of white advocates of European cultural superiority who saw African societies as cohesive totalities without internal contradictions, and who saw pre-colonial African history as static and unchanging.[63] While trying to counter the European degradation of all things African, it nevertheless maintained fictions regarding African political systems and cultural values which can ultimately only be regarded as simplistic and patronising.[64]

In opposition to the views of Black Consciousness thinkers such as Ndebele and Manas Buthelezi quoted earlier, such commentary by their colleagues precluded an awareness of the dynamic nature of African history since the earliest times. It attacked racist assumptions concerning African pre-colonial societies only to maintain some of their implicit beliefs, and tended at times to mystify social and cultural relationships for its own purposes (for further discussion see Temu/Swai 1981: 18 – 25; 61 – 6). It ignored facts most historians now take for granted – that social exploitation and stratification were a feature of much of pre-colonial African history – through control of trade, religion, markets and military power by ruling groups as part of the growth of large states, and even through age-group and sex differences in more egalitarian societies.[65] More specifically, it ignores the fact that distinct social classes of chiefs and commoners existed even in pre-Shakan Nguni society (see Peires 1981: 27 – 44).

The immediately pre-colonial period for most African societies in South Africa (the late eighteenth and early to mid-nineteenth century) was

a time of dynamic transformation and social upheaval. Before colonial conquest, a series of wars and transformations of political structure (known as the Mfecane) radically affected people's lives in much of Southern Africa. Larger, more centralised states were formed, with complex social relationships and new modes of loyalty and cultural identification. In these new political and cultural formations the ruler and ruling lineage came to play a crucial rǫle in the organisation and redistribution of surplus, in many cases controlling trade, hunting, cattle, access to land and marriage.[66] The penetration of market forces before and after colonial conquest also played its part in bringing about new forms of stratification. During this process ideological means as well as coercive methods were used to guarantee the survival of the social dispensations which evolved.[67]

Culture and ideology were used to ensure that the new social structures were maintained in a manner which was understandable to all members of the society. In particular, in many cases the ruler regulated political and religious activities and served as a symbolic focus for rituals and ceremonies. The Zulu royal house, for example, held a monopoly of ritual functions and strove to convince subordinated groups that the Zulu king's ancestors were their ancestors as well. A strong ideological link was also forged between the king and the military (Hamilton 1982: 5; Hedges 1978: 208 – 9). As part of this legitimising process, earlier lineage-based concepts of legitimation remained in force in altered and enlarged policies. The chief was seen as the 'father' of his people, who were his 'children'.[68]

Yet on closer examination it is clear that – carrying on with the use of the previous example – the structuring of the Zulu state during this period was faciliated by, not only an enhancement of chiefly authority, but also by a degree of manipulation of kinship lineages and a fabrication of ideological categories in order to bind favoured groups to a common identity in the new polity.[69]

If pre-colonial African society did not present the smooth, uncontradictory face some commentators believe it to have, neither did, or does, traditional oral literature. While it is true that this literature has a strong communal and participatory component, while it has often been anonymous in composition and transmission, and while the oral artist was and is generally less removed from his or her social surroundings than Eurocentric critics are accustomed to, a great deal of romanticising about this literature has occurred. Oral literature is not always changeless, nor is it a monolithic 'communal voice'. The historical accuracy of praise poems must always be subject to further scrutiny, as they tended to praise patrons and those in power (Schapera 1965: 25; Damane/ Sanders 1974: 59; White 1982: 14). Mazisi Kunene has shown how Nguni praise poetry changed in style, length and subject matter during the course of the Mfecane, when the propagation of more militaristic ideologies of behaviour became discernible (M.Kunene 1976: 37 – 41; see also D. Kunene 1971: 1 – 4).[70] Moreover, the roles of oral artists also change when their societies are subjected to political and social pressures.[71] Even though a great deal of continuity can

occur in oral literature – certain forms may be composed well before performance or have considerably similar content down the years[72] – recent studies have begun moving towards seeing each oral performance as a unique and individual creation.[73] Accretion, modification and change play an important part in the evolution, acceptance or discarding of oral poems; as does social relevance and notions of aesthetic beauty. While this process has speeded up in recent times, it must not be presumed that pre-colonial literature was qualitatively different. On closer examination, then, statements linking African oral literature before, during or after colonialism with a timeless universe cannot be sustained.

The types of oral literature related to 'traditional' societies in South Africa were and continue to be incredibly diverse; different types of oral literature, performer and audience tastes exist, even within the same society. Works of African oral literature truly reflect the lives and values of their relevant communities; but this does not imply an egalitarian presence in, or participation by, all members of the society in all of the literature produced. The generalisation that oral literature is a spontaneously communal product also does not hold true in many instances. While some forms like proverbs, the praises of ordinary members of society, stories and some songs are more 'democratic' – everyone uses them spontaneously, although greater proficiency will gain an oral artist larger audiences (Scheub 1975: 16) – others are not. This is especially true of the most highly regarded oral forms in Southern Africa: the praise poems of rulers,

epics, genealogies and traditions of genesis. In South Africa, no monopoly or formal training seems to have been required for praise poets. Yet a difference in status existed between people who praised themselves and the world around them, and those who specialised in composing and reciting praises of chiefs, kings and other notables. A specialisation of ability, sex (nearly always men became pre-eminent poets) and acceptance by society took place.[74] Certain oral genres are, furthermore, gender-specific: while in addition Ngcobo has pointed out that, despite the fact that women played vital roles in South African oral literature, oral traditions in these male-dominated societies often extolled self-effacing and subservient patterns of behaviour for women (Ngcobo 1986: 81).

While critics (and, following them, Black Consciousness writers) have made much of the democratic function of praise poets of rulers, stressing that they have the authority to criticise the ruler in front of the ruled, and while many praise singers do not so much glorify the present ruler as the principles of rule for which the ruler stands,[75] their function is still an ideological one, preserving the social coherence of the society by acting as mediators between ruler and ruled, and thus upholding the social values of the society.[76] Thus, as Finnegan has pointed out:

> ... certain items which critics would classify as 'folk literature' turn out to be closely identified with one particular group ... and only in a very extended sense to be a possession of 'the society' or 'the folk' at large or a spontaneous and necessarily self-interested product of the people as a whole.
>
> (Finnegan 1977: 45 – 6)

If one accepts that pre-colonial African societies were not totally egalitarian, and that concentrations of economic wealth and political power did exist, it follows that pressures on oral poets using more highly regarded forms to set forward versions of history and morality palatable to the ruling group must have been great. Ideological methods of control therefore were transmitted via oral literature, especially those forms most immediately connected to power and patronage: even though in praise poems as well as other genres, such as songs and stories, divisions within and between societies were at times expressed.[77]

Thus, although it is a truism to say that South African oral literature contains the rich customs and traditions of black people, it has never been an undifferentiated 'literature' produced by an undifferentiated 'people'. The view of oral – and especially traditional oral – literature constructed by many Black Consciousness exponents was selective, and contained a political agenda. A past, presumed to be heroic, communal and exemplary, was marshalled to oppose the present exploitative nature of white, capitalist control. This process echoes the manner in which 'folklore' was taken up by Nationalists of the Romantic Era in early nineteenth-century Europe. Here, too, an interest in oral forms such as songs and folk culture was widespread:

> The political and ideological implication of this return to 'origins' [in nineteenth-century Europe] was obvious ... the key strands in the approach to national and 'folk' literature are, first, the view of the artless spontaneity of such literature, and second the yearning for another, more organic and natural world from the analysts' own.... Hence that concept of literature among our ancestors and among

> unlettered and peasant folk generally as arising spontaneously and without conscious volition on the part of those involved.... This sort of 'folklore' seemed to mark a continuity with the longed- for, lost other world of organic and emotional unity ...
>
> (Finnegan 1977: 34)

In Africa, as elsewhere, traditional cultural symbols and values have been used to unite groups of people into common cause, especially in nationalist and anti-imperialist struggles. Most versions of 'tradition' are, however, selective: certain meanings and practices are selected for emphasis while others are excluded, depending on the political goals of those who use them (R. Williams 1977: 115). When oral traditions have been taken up by subsequent generations, their meanings are changed by different users in new contexts. The past is re-interpreted and directed towards the future (Calder 1973: 210 – 7).[78] Black Consciousness was no exception to this tendency.

There are consequences which stem from such a view of traditional life and society. When contradictions and struggles are ignored in this re-appropriation of 'traditional' South African political life and culture, a vision of society and culture which can be called 'organic' is projected onto the past.

The Organic Conception of Society and Culture

An organic vision of society is one which sees the growth of any particular social entity as analogous to that of an organically developing body, with all its parts in harmony and all disturbances impinging only from the outside. Ideas about 'traditional' Africa stemming from Black Consciousness can be regarded as organic in nature, in that they underplayed divisions, conflict and exploitation in order to stress harmonious development.

Organic notions are widespread among a number of commentators on present-day African literature, both black and white. Duerden, stressing the links between contemporary writers and traditional culture in West Africa, can serve as an example:

> Groups which may be separate kin groups, lineages living in close proximity or lineages scattered but organised in clans, are seen to establish themselves similarly to seedling trees in a forest. As they establish themselves and grow tall they draw on the nutriment from soil fertilized by the elders who have died.
>
> (Duerden 1975: 139)

Notions of 'organic culture' are politicised only insofar and if they are mobilised against a threat, political or otherwise, that is regarded as external to the defined culture (Attwell 1984: 91). Black Consciousness mobilised a uniform black culture as part of its ideological armoury against the dominant, hegemonic white power bloc in South Africa – a dominant force which was originally non-indigenous – but denied elements of fracture and struggle within black society and culture. Cultures were seen as

emerging through a simple and unproblematic accretion of values and traditions by a type of 'group mind'. Such an analysis diverted its adherents away from understanding the specific material conditions of cultural formation, contestation and change towards notions according 'to social values and ideology an immanent logic such that they appear to be both results of themselves and ultimate causes of history' (Mafeje 1976: 323).[79]

The problem of how individuals respond to their social reality is lost in such formulations. The individual and society are seen as existing in an organic, reciprocal relationship. In Black Consciousness thought, the black writer and performer was believed to understand all facets of what was sweepingly termed 'black culture'. Thus, Kunene noted that 'literature in the African context describes man first and foremost, as a social hero. Not only is he at the centre of things as an individual, he is also a representative of a social order'; while Manganyi claimed for a writer's biography an equivalence to the biography of his or her culture (M. Kunene 1980: 200; Manganyi 1980: 17). This over-emphasis on the organic, collaborative face of culture tended towards the uncritical idealisation of the past already remarked upon. An idealised communal identity, lending itself to peaceful collective existence, was then projected forward to imply the potential for a communal black experience in modern South Africa. Even when the emphasis in the writing was on racial and political conflict, this was often conceived of as due simply to colonial intrusion into an innocent, natural world: a world, moreover, which could quickly be restored by political

liberation. This romanticisation of the past transmuted easily into the rhetoric of a classless black modern community, in which equality and liberty were seen as guaranteed if it were not for white rule. The Black Consciousness writer was, in essence, remoulding traditional life to suit contemporary political and ideological goals.[80]

Organicist and monolithic conceptions of culture bedevilled the Black Consciousness movement away from Western aesthetic standards. Black writers and critics, in their efforts to conceptualise and evolve critical tools which would move beyond white bias and prejudices, saw this process as a search for a single and unified set of principles. Gwala, for example, presumed that new literary styles and evaluations were immanent in the changing relationship between Black Consciousness writer and black community; for the writer the black

> ... standard, though having to come from his articulated responsibility as an artist, is right there in the black townships.... All he has to do is throw focus on the ethic that creates his black standard.
>
> (Gwala 1973: 131)

Literary style among black writers would subsequently emerge from a black 'common identity which no-one can disown' (Gwala 1984: 45). In addition to this, Mutloatse stated that black writers were 'going to experiment.... Because we are in search of our true selves – undergoing self-discovery as a people' (emphasis mine) (Mutloatse 1980: 5). In their most extreme form, such viewpoints tended towards believing that only blacks could write successfully about blacks (and only whites about whites), and that the hallmark of good black writing was the degree of realism or authenticity

with which life among blacks in South Africa was depicted. When challenged, there was a tendency to underline the authenticity of immediate response and reject analysis which probed further into the conditions of the making of the literature.[81] While the call by black writers to have their work reviewed by their peers was, in the face of existing white hegemony over literary evaluation, extremely pertinent (see the remarks by Mutloatse in Seroke 1981b: 43), the problem was reduced by some commentators to simply one of substituting black critics for white, who were said to fall prey to 'foreign ideologies'. Seroke, the poet, observed:

> An argument has been advanced that because of the scarcity of qualified people, blacks who are well versed in the theory of literature, the standard of black criticism does not rise. Inevitably the role of midwife is played by people with foreign concepts.
>
> (Seroke 1981b: 42)[82]

The alternative became simple: there was an apparent black 'reality', unmediated by social and ideological fissures or differing discursive representations, which writers could learn to depict more or less truthfully, black critics comment on more or less effectively, and sympathetic publishing houses facilitate.[83] But as Nkosi and Msimang have pointed out, there are no absolute divisions between 'African' and 'Western' critical standards (Nkosi 1975: 96; Msimang 1982: 211). The Nigerian critic Izevbaye puts the debate into perspective when he says:

> ... the call for African critical 'concepts', 'standards' or 'criteria' is not a rejection of established modes of literary study like structuralism, neo-Aristotelianism and the like, but a rejection of certain entrenched modes of thinking which perpetuate the stock attitude to Africa.
>
> (Izevbaye 1975: 3)

Notions of 'Experience': A Sufficient Explanation?

The emphasis in Black Consciousness thought on race obfuscated other points of cleavage in society. As an ideology, it provided a justification for some petty-bourgeois individuals to close at least partially the gap between themselves and the lower-classes, and find a role for themselves in the liberation struggle. While this meant the radicalising of many black intellectuals, it also meant that more conservative elements could use their 'blackness' as a way of identifying, in a sweeping manner, with a generalised black community and culture. Thus the 'black experience' became a catch-all phrase by which more privileged sectors of black society came to wish away the differences in economic placement and socio-cultural life between themselves and (for example) factory workers, domestic servants, migrants and others. Among writers, this concept allowed what was at times a too-easily assumed identification between themselves and 'the people'. By supposing that the aspirations and viewpoints of all blacks were identical, they could thus represent a racial unity of purpose in their literary output; a purpose they believed all members of their community would be quick to understand, and respond to.

However, being an urban writer does not necessarily give special insight into aspects of experience associated with life on a factory floor, or as a migrant worker or as a rural woman, for instance; nor does it sidestep further questions as to <u>how</u> such experiences might be represented in

literature. In other words, as utilised, the concept of the 'black experience' tended to downplay the diversity of cultural expression in contemporary South Africa; instead implying the material existence of monolithic, and completely separated, racial cultures. Cultural fractures caused by class, regional, gender and other factors were thereby forgotten.

Despite segregation and apartheid there are no racially pure cultures in South Africa, each with a separate, uncontaminated history and logic (Bozzoli 1983: 22). Racial cultures in the country have influenced each other greatly, despite the stultifying effects of segregation and apartheid. Cultural choices and identifications have furthermore diversified with the spread of capitalist relations of production, and concomitant responses to this domination by subordinated groups of people. One need only look at historical examples to see this diversification at work. For instance, in the 1930s the soirees and concerts of the Bantu Men's Social Centre in Johannesburg have little cultural similarity with the lower-class marabi parties taking place in the Doornfontein slumyards, which can be ascribed to shared racial features; and, as another example, the tea parties of black mission ladies of an earlier era have a very different class focus from the derivative, but totally transformed, amatimiti of miners in the compounds (see Couzens 1976: 76 – 9; Coplan 1982: 367; Koch 1983: 158 – 64; Sole 1983: 75).

Oppression of a certain kind was and is indeed experienced by all blacks in South Africa, but not by all blacks in identical ways. Privileges

along colour lines may indeed have been and be the experience of all whites, but this does not mean that all whites have acquired an equal degree of privilege and live in a monolithic cultural universe.

What an approach which relies on notions of a uniform 'black experience' fails to notice is that the viewpoints put forward in Black Consciousness literature were predominantly the experience of being black as understood by a relatively privileged class of people. A case in point is Matlou's comment that Tlali's first novel, Muriel at Metropolitan, exposes 'the conflicting situations most blacks find themselves in' (Matlou 1987: 68); when it is palpably clear that the type of conflicting experience Tlali's chief protagonist finds herself in is that of a better educated 'middleman' between black customers and white bosses in a furniture hire rental shop.[84] In terms of gender, too, the notion of the 'black experience' constructed by Black Consciousness has ignored divisions in the social network. Thus, while on the one hand some critics and writers such as Matlou still believe that black women, by telling their experiences, simply add a further dimension to the individual-cum-group heroic saga of black South Africans,[85] others – such as Ngcobo – have noted that the experiences of many black women attest that 'society is divided at the core' (Ngcobo 1989: xix). Even staunch Black Consciousness advocates like Mutloatse have admitted (with reference to a particular story in a collection he edited) that the relationships of domination and inequality evinced between white madam and black female servant had 'also emerged in the

black community, evinced by Bandi (Mvovo)'s piece on the black employer who insisted that a black sister working for her call her 'madam" (Mutloatse 1981a: 4).

To regard the 'black experience' as an ultimate reference point or essential core of 'true' consciousness cannot begin to suggest or encapsulate the variety of, or divisions among, experiences and interests in black society. If one accepts that difference and diversity are to be found in black South African society, the concept of 'black experience' has to undergo considerable reformulation. In this reformulation, the role and limitations of the petty-bourgeoisie's experience of their blackness is a crucial area of scrutiny and analysis. Most self-conscious black artists in the country in the period under discussion belonged to this better educated and more privileged class: they were by profession teachers, journalists, clerks, academics, managers, commercial artists and the like. In consequence it can be argued that 'being black' only partially afforded greater access to, and understanding of, the diverse cultural life of black people. Cultural norms emerge out of, and as part of, ongoing struggles over social values and priorities, and taking for granted that black writers have immediate access to all aspects of the consciousness, experiences and values of every individual or group within their community causes as many analytical problems as it solves: to base an analysis on the criteria (race, religion and so on) by which groups define themselves is, in other words, to take as given precisely that which requires explanation (Wolpe 1975: 230). As the

Guinean writer Nene-Khaly has pointed out, despite the fact that such racial and cultural dogmas have some validity, they may be used by a group of people to place themselves beyond historical evolution or criticism (quoted in de Andrade 1982: 177 – 8). As a result, an author's writing may too quickly be accepted as 'the values of the people and period ' (Mutiso 1973: 106).

Black Consciousness' emphases on racial experience sought to displace State and liberal attempts to hegemonise white values in the country as 'natural' and 'universal', showing instead an awareness of the specific political and cultural dimensions of black perceptions and forms of experience. At the same time, though, it froze this awareness of the ongoing transformative conflict in social identities at the point of race; basing itself on an appeal to a racial experience of a unique, inalienable nature. This is ahistorical and static. The 'black experience' became an allegory for the construction of a new black social selfhood based on the premises of Black Consciousness: and allowed a transcendence – and attendant evasion – of a number of crucial political and cultural issues.[86]

The concomitant tendency to perceive experiences and perceptions as entirely given through empirical experience also denies the degree to which Black Consciousness imagined and actively formed a conception of racial experience through political, ideological and discursive struggle.[87] Appeals to the notion of 'experience' can be seen, in Black Consciousness, to have understood experiences and identities as being formed in a literal,

unmediated manner by the subject's possession of biological and racial features; and at the same time posited them in terms of an already determined hierarchy of knowledge – in this case the psychological, epistemological and political agenda of Black Consciousness.[88] As mentioned, this is paradoxical and analytically insufficient:

> There is a point where the emphasis on sensibility, on the moral consciousness, on the validity of human experience becomes the sole object, and the subject, of historical disclosure.... Experiences are not unities which necessarily cohere. Nor do they confer upon historians (or poets) privileged access to the nature of social reality.
>
> (McLennan 1981: 117)

In the long run, subjectivity itself is a necessary but not sufficient evaluating principle for analytical and historical study. While inquiry into notions of experience and consciousness by psychologists such as Manganyi is understandable, and while these issues are the very stuff of literary expression, what is noticeable is that these terms were imagined as all that were needed to both explain and justify the relationship of individual black writer to a wider black community in South Africa at the time.

The Authority of the Black Writer: A Critique

The interactive relationship between writer and community encapsulated in Black Consciousness artists' version of 'commitment' must also be critically scrutinised. Uncertainty as to exactly who did the teaching and who was taught in this process is discernible in the way in which this

relationship was conceptualised; as in the following review of a Serote poem by a fellow poet:

> The artist, who is supposed to be the conscience of his people, has no time for dreaming.... He wants some action, revolutionary action, to be taken. The people who don't want the ire of the powerful to befall them see the artist as some spoilsport hellbent on rocking the boat. Then, because the artist is near to them and is, in essence, one of them, they convince themselves that he is, indeed, out of his mind ... the artist is made out to be an outcast. The anger and bewilderment of an artist then comes to the fore. The very people he loves are the ones who won't listen.... So the poet recognises the difficult task of conscientization!
>
> (M. Langa 1982: 202 – 3)

When all was said and done, the communal role designated for individual writers presumed that they already had, by and large, the ideological understanding, knowledge and clear-sightedness to which all black people, in their as-yet-undiscovered cultural and political essence, would eventually arrive.[89]

The unstable nature of the relationship between writer and audience as conceputalised by Black Consciousness was apparent, as an example, at the 1972 S.A.B.T.U. Festival in Cape Town, where the activists struggled to introduce poetry readings, according to Serote, because people were not used to reading or hearing poetry publicly (Seroke 1981a: 31).[90] Despite the pride this writer noticed among his immediate neighbours on the publication of his first book, he was later to comment that a book had been published 'by Mongane who lives down the street ... fine and enough. Whether I said the right things or not, this was not a problem' – implying

that the community could offer little informed criticism of the work due to their lack of political and literary astuteness.

The group of writers, artistically and politically knowledgeable, was smaller during this period than is sometimes claimed. For instance, a black reviewer, Mango Tshabangu, criticised the fact that the audiences at the Second Mdali Festival of the Black Arts held in Soweto in 1974 did not seem to extend beyond:

> ... a small group of conscious brothers and sisters, most of them would-be-graduates who go to a play expecting their imaginations to be stirred to thrilling extremes by hair-raising slogans.... Where were all the thousands who go to Gibson Kente's plays and set the walls rocking with their responses? Big question. And if Mdali can find the answer, they will be a success.
>
> ('The Mdali ...': 33)

Despite the attempts at, and partial success of, closing the gap between black writer and black audience through the forms of oral performance and popular participation, there were hiatuses and silences discernible in the depictions and expression of communal life – in short, the subject matter – in all genres of Black Consciousness literature. Despite the invoking of racial experience, the commitment to racial solidarity and championing of the cause of more oppressed blacks did not seem to be paralleled by a concomitant focussing on the day-to-day experiences of working-class black people within, or outside, the urban conglomerations where most of the writers and performers lived, at least in the period under review.[91]

When working-class life is described, the feeling a reader is left with is often one of a relative distance between such people and the writer concerned. It is often described in rather abstract terms: shebeen queens on the train, nightwatchmen, mine dancers, migrants, washerwomen and so on do not take on a life or reality of their own, but are used to stress the need for racial identification and unity, or to make the point that these people are subject to extreme forms of control and repression. In Manaka's play Egoli, for example, the character of the worker, Hamilton, is narratively distanced both from the audience and the more politicised character John, who says of him at one point: 'Poor boy. A mineworker from the living grave. Look at his face' (Manaka 1980a: 15).[92]

A great deal of black literature of the 1970s and early 1980s focussed on the manner in which individuals, often of a more privileged background, suffered oppression. This was then generalised as the experience of all blacks, of whom the writer or performer was one. In such a scenario the attitude that 'mutual knowledge' (Manganyi 1973: 18) existed between writer and community was a mystification of the relationship of individual writers to the complex, dynamic socio-cultural reality around them. This relationship had the potential to be typified and over-generalised, as in the following remark by the lawyer-poet Essop Patel:

> ... the committed poet is part of the comity of struggle.... Oppression, be it political, social or economic, observes no polite borders of class demarcations.... It is immaterial whether the poet writes in the first person or the third person. The pronoun "we" sustains a communal bond, it is at the same time the voice of the poet as well as the voice of the people. Even when the poet uses the first person, it is not the

> assertion of the individual regarding to his individuality (sic.) but he articulates the collective experience and communal spirit through the "I" ...
>
> (E. Patel 1980: 97 -8; see also 1983: 1)[93]

Such easy slippage of first person singular to first person plural pronoun was endemic to Black Consciousness thought, appearing in the interviews, statements and imaginative literature of a plethora of writers and performers. Such a slippage of pronoun was indicative of the desire to take possession of a community viewpoint, rather than simply express one view among many. Writers attempted to comprehend, possess and broadcast a communal viewpoint without taking into account or problematising their use of authority in either social or narrative terms. Thus Gwala, at a 1976 conference in Johannesburg, could confidently proclaim:

> BC is thus a true reflection of our situational period. Black writing as a cultural product strives to do away with false images of our black women ... of our working class ... of our ghetto youth ... of our socially-secluded miners and of our country-folks of whom much has been put down on paper; and of young politically banned student- youth leaders ...
>
> (Gwala 1979: 56; emphases mine)

while Tlali felt and still feels writing was important because it 'gives me the opportunity to expose what we feel inside' (Lockett 1989a: 77, my emphasis).

Such confidence sat uneasily side-by-side with Serote's belief that, in the early 1970s, black writers had not fully taken cognisance of popular culture and the creativity of ordinary people (Seroke 1981a: 32); or Mtshali's admission that through his poetry he was 'trying to gather the scattered pieces of my culture' (Mtshali 1976: 125); or Tlali's efforts,

through the 'Soweto Speaking' interviews with working men and women she conducted for Staffrider, 'to find out how they work, how they feel, and that kind of thing'.[94]

Despite the emphasis on popular and anti-elitist forms of art, Black Consciousness writers and critics seemed at times fascinated with the belief that art was a spiritually privileged activity forged by unique individuals. A fascination with the creative, imaginative burden of the writer became evident. It is in this vein that the formation of the C.Y.A. in Diepkloof, Soweto in 1977 was described by one of its young members:

> Talent flew all about and what remains is that Africa Must Rise, Grasp the Talent and Preserve it.... Soweto people are crying with envy to see their original thoughts of theatre.
>
> (Rabothata 1978: 32; emphasis mine)

A glorification of the figure of the literary artist became evident in the figure of the 'poet-priest-prophet' created at the turn of the decade by the critic Es'kia Mphahlele (Mphahlele 1980; see also the discussion in 1979d).

Concern with individual commercial interests and national and international success undermined Black Consciousness claims that the literature of the period was always first and foremost a 'people's art'. The contradictions necessitated by simultaneously straddling commercial and political positions occasionally became obvious:

> There is nothing I fear from the Whiteman – least of all the singeing of my identity. I think many of us are clear about where we are at. No one can touch us. The logical thing to do then seems to be to sell ourselves anywhere where the price is right. (Sepamla 1974/5a: 18)

> For the fact that the London-based international publisher, Rex Colling, has agreed to publish the banned book of verse by Ingoapele

> Madingoane, Africa My Beginning, is yet another proof that the Black man shall overcome.
>
> (Mutloatse 1979a)

While art exhibitions, poetry readings and dramatic performances in the townships in the 1970s assisted the stated goal of participation and communication, artists were still perforce connected to commercial publishers, theatres and galleries, with interests by no means identical to their own. Attempts to set up black-controlled publishing houses only partly alleviated this problem, as black commercial concerns were subject to the same constraints and demands as white ones, even if their books were subsidised.[95] Black-owned newspapers such as The Voice foundered in the early 1980s on poor management decisions and an inability to secure enough of a black readership.[96]

A New Readership?

Despite their claims to focus their energy and attention on a black readership, Nkosi has recently suggested that Black Consciousness writers such as Matshoba can be seen to keep a 'cross-border' reader very much in view: in other words, there is evidence in texts written during even this period that white readers were part of these writers' implied audience (Nkosi 1990: 20). Evidence in support of this contention is apparent with regard to the literary work of a number of writers, whose use of words and

phrases in indigenous languages tend to be translated into, or explained in, English. Furthermore, aspects of township life that should be known and recognised by a local audience are dwelt upon in some detail.[97] Such details are necessary only for a readership outside of the immediate ambit of black experience. Some examples of black literature of this period can moreover be characterised as having different modes of address, addressing different readerships within the same text.[98]

Some writers, such as Sepamla, seem at the beginning of the decade of the 1970s to have been more flexible to the demands and possibility of whites reading their work, although this writer's attitude in the matter had hardened considerably by the end of the decade.[99] Thus, the absolute divide made by critics such as Rive, Mzamane and Mutloatse between a black literature of 'protest' (aimed at whites) and a literature of 'resistance' or 'challenge' (aimed at blacks) is exaggerated. There was an ambivalence in many of the writers as to exactly where their readership priorities lay; an ambivalence which cannot be fudged by noting that in the 1970s a 'transitional' form of black poetry existed between that addressed to whites and an evolving form addressed to blacks (Rive 1977: 51); or by categorising black writers who seemed to have been popular with white readers as completely outside the ambit of Black Consciousness, as happened with Mtshali's first poetry collection.[100] This ambivalence can clearly be seen in Mutloatse's introduction to the important 1980 anthology of short fiction, Forced Landing; where, after dismissing whites as a

potential readership because of their escapism and complacence, he goes on to state that the majority of white people 'can ignore work by today's black writers only at their own peril' (Mutloatse 1980: 3; 4).

The implied and actual readerships of Black Consciousness literature did not correlate as completely as is now commonly believed. It is not sufficient, in this regard, to claim (as Tlali did) that even black people who had not read her work were aware of her 'presence'; or to assert (along with Manaka) that a banned book belonged to 'the people' (Lockett 1989b: 283 – 4; Alvarez-Pereyre 1988: 122; see also the statements by Serote in Kuhn 1974: 33 – 4). Such utterances sit uneasily side by side with complaints by writers – often the same writers – that the black press did not do enough to promote their work, or that they remain unread because black people in the township 'don't buy books' (Seroke 1981b: 41).

In South Africa still today large numbers of black people are non-literate or at best only semi-literate.[101] Black people had no choice in the introduction of European languages into the sub-continent: the use of English is therefore something of a forced option, given the realities of colonial conquest, and has historically been out of the control of black users of the language. It is noteworthy, in such a scenario, that a great deal of the literature produced by Black Consciousness was in English, despite the efforts of some literary groups and some individual writers to write in African languages or use township patois. The fiction and plays tended to be mainly in English, with a minimum of Zulu or Sotho to give

'authenticity' to the speech. Such gestures and linguistic choices still precluded an audience of lower-class semi- or non-literate people, even if oral performance was used as a means of overcoming this problem. In 1975, therefore, Sepamla noted that writers' use of English was potentially at odds with the unifying messages of Black Consciousness:

> I have said earlier on that I owe nobody an apology for writing in English. Yet inside me is this regret that at the moment there is a handicap that mars complete communication between me and my audience.... I fear for that point when we shall speak of "us" and "them" within the Black community. In fact I have heard the rumblings already. When people talk of iziFundiswa (the educated) or when they say khuluma isiZulu or hariwu tli buwa seSotho (we do not hear – speak Sotho) then the divisions begin.
>
> (Sepamla 1976: 19 – 20)

Language, as Ndebele points out, is the carrier of a range of social perceptions and customs, and is a powerful tool for the entrenchment of attitudes and beliefs (Ndebele 1986c: 11). In a situation where oral forms were often more popular and more immediate to a great number of people, the use of the written page and English-language expression by Black Consciousness writers can be construed as rather limiting. The ease with which some Black Consciousness literary figures believed English could be re-directed towards cultural concerns which embraced large numbers of the country's population can be seen, in retrospect, to have been overly optimistic.

Priority tended to be given to the content of what was being said, rather than the form and medium through which these political meanings were carried: Mzamane's assessment that African languages were not 'a

genuine expression of the Blackman's aspirations', due to their connection with Bantu education, is an instance of this (Mzamane 1978: 43). The urge towards mimesis and political authenticity thus pervaded this area of debate as well, and overwhelmed a closer analysis of the problems of audience contained in language usage.[102]

Biko's suggestion that black people would understand and adapt English or Afrikaans to maintain communication and understanding within their particular culture because they 'are not analytical with the English, they listen to black words when you are talking' (Biko 1988: 133),[103] and Gwala's assertion that, despite his choice of English as language medium, 'our identity does not rest within the English cultural context' (Gwala 1979: 56), no longer seem sufficient explanation: in fact, such statements blur over the effects that this language preference had on the goals of audience participation and cultural identity the writers desired. Other factors – such as access to international publishing markets – seem to have influenced some writers in their concentration on English usage (see Rive in Welz 1987: 11).

As a result of this, more recently some black writers and critics in South Africa have begun proselytising for the development of a mass-based, vernacular literature.[104] However, this altered linguistic choice has tended to be seen, particularly in the early 1980s, simply as a tool for furthering the messages of black solidarity the writers and intellectuals formulated and wielded:

> Let those who write in foreign languages do so; but they should not scorn their brothers who are battling to bring the peasants abreast with what is going on. By so doing the masses can contribute.
> (j'Mathonsi 1981b: 30)[105]

A Critique of Authenticity

While commentators have noted the difference between African and European cosmological, cultural and belief systems, these differences have too often been used to ascribe timeless and unchanging attributes to Africans vis-a-vis other peoples of the world, despite a continuing historical context of adaptability and change throughout the continent.

Samir Amin, the Egyptian political economist, perhaps puts the case for a distinct African culture best when he states that African societies, seen from a distance, do have a markedly similar set of cultural, social, economic and even political conditions. Seen with a closer focus, however, the cultural expressions of Africa and Africans are extremely variegated (Amin 1972: 503 – 4). The general nature of truisms about African culture is such that closer investigation of specific cases is immediately called for.

The desire for an 'authenticity' that combats European prejudices is endemic to modern African literature, for good historical and ideological reasons. Nevertheless, the danger of readers assuming the completeness of fictional claims to 'authenticity' can be shown with reference to many responses to African literature. 'Authenticity' has become the catchword of

an African intelligentsia, which is at the same time trying to challenge racist interpretations of Africa and naturalise its own legitimacy as leaders and visionaries of a racial community. The 'authenticity' which is advocated stresses a 'commitment' to Africa and its people; implying that the essence of African literature lies in its function as a political conscience and reflective mirror of African experience; seeking at the same time to naturalise the experiential relationship of writer to community.[106]

The literature of 'commitment' that arose in South Africa along with the ideology of Black Consciousness strove, as elsewhere on the continent, to cast authors in the role of spokespeople for their societies and communities, whose experiences and desires they were urged to articulate – especially in the face of ongoing struggles against neo-colonial domination and concomitant biased views of the continent. The criticism levelled by Black Consciousness proponents at white writers who gave a picture of helpless, bereft and defeated black people who suffered in silence was apt; the black writers tried, and partially succeeded, in presenting a more experientially accurate, compelling and politically incisive perspective of township life under apartheid. To this extent what emerged in the 1970s was certainly a 'more authentic art form', as claimed (see Mzamane 1978: 56 – 7). Indeed, in some cases the banning of this literature was precisely because it exposed a 'truth' the authorities wished to suppress.[107] Seeking to disrupt existing white justifications as to what black people 'really thought', black South African writers sought – through

a gesturing towards 'experience' – to denaturalise and politicise existing opinions and attitudes as to what blacks did or did not experience in a hostile, racist enviroment.

It is one thing, however, to note that black literature portrays and represents the life of black people in apartheid society (Mtshali 1976: 125); it is quite another to proclaim that this literature reflects a unified, 'authentic' communal consciousness and quotidian reality. These writers' 'commitment' tended to go hand in hand with an over-emphasis on the racially defined aspects of this experience, plus a belief that, in general, black communal experience was solely one of unity or potential unity.[108]

As has been suggested before, the cultural activists of the time were intent on remoulding communal consciousness. This can be ascertained in the prevailing urge to select from, and rework through artistic means, the variety of possible black experiences in order to generate and shape a new consciousness. While some artists focussed on the the need for writers to seek out the harsh realities of human suffering (such as Gwala's belief that writers must seek out the truth of the reality they sought to mime, 'ugly and vicious' though it might be (Gwala 1973: 132; 1984: 43)); others downplayed passive suffering, emphasising heroic self-assertion as a spur to the transformation of their audiences. In extreme cases, such self-assertion chose to ignore aspects of reality, as in the artist Fikile's comment:

> I have always hated this thing of seeing people creating kids with torn trousers and that kind of thing: How can BC go home to people who view these pictures? ... if you draw the black man, he must be

> beautiful, handsome; the woman must be heavenly. Drape them in the most beautiful clothes.... I am the people's artist.
>
> (Fikile 1980: 25)[109]

It is in this spirit that Ndebele noted early in the 1970s that mimetic literary techniques were not enough. The poet Mtshali, he thought, did not indicate the 'human worth of the oppressed, their abiding hope, their moments of ... creative togetherness, and their search for themselves' (Ndebele 1982: 192); while Mzamane criticised the same writer's first collection for being 'not even evolutionary, except in a very limited local sense' (Mzamane 1977b: 30). Clearly, then, even in the early years of the 1970s, perceptions of actual existence were being reformulated by Black Consciousness writers.

In such circumstances literary form came to be seen as secondary to the content of the work; which was required to reflect truthfully the experience of black people under apartheid. Any form or genre of writing applicable and available should be used: 'When I look back,' Serote observed, 'I still say I had more interest in being a writer than being a poet. I would rather be controlled by circumstances than form' (Seroke 1981a: 30)). Mutloatse made a similar observation:

> We see the new writing as ... a type of writing that is perfectly suited to the times. We need a writing that records exactly the situation we live in, and any type of writing which ignores the urgency of political events will be irrelevant.
>
> (Seroke 1981b: 42)[110]

This assumption of authenticity by Black Consciousness ideologues easily came to imply that the value of literature could simply be read off from its political attitudes and proclivities, or its assumed popularity with

black audiences. Thus, reacting to the criticism that black poetry spent too much time 'preaching to the converted', Mzamane asserted that:

> This is somewhat like telling the priest not to remind Christians of the message of Christmas. Anyhow, such poets are looked up to by members of their community, whether the misleading Western enemy critic likes this or not; they are listened to. Poetry in South Africa, as has been noted, is read at funerals, conferences, concerts and private parties, as part of a wider programme of conscientization ... it has produced a tremendous impact, especially in the minds of the youth ...
> (Mzamane 1978: 55)

In prose, the assumption of 'authenticity' depends on a shared belief between writer and reader that fiction accurately reflects social life, and is written from as close to personal experience as possible (Belsey 1980: 2). The community to which the individual author belongs is assumed to be transparent and wholly accessible to his or her experience; and the fact that all forms of fictional realism are literary constructs is thus forgotten.

Such was the case in South Africa. The emphasis notions of 'authenticity' placed on the mimetic transparency of the literary medium also served, in prose, to foreground realism as a preferred mode of writing. Such a perception was a powerful reason why so much of the black literature produced was doggedly realist in form; a perception it shared, ironically enough, with white protest literature.[111]

In poetry and drama, and in a small amount of the prose (such as parts of Serote's only novel, to be discussed in detail later), this mimeticism was added to with the use of imagistic and symbolic modes of expression. These modes were designed to set up mythic constructs to explain the genesis of black identity and aspirations, and trace out future paths for

these to follow. They sought, in other words, to propagate a commonly held value system – a common shorthand of easily comprehended symbols and images – between black literati and their chosen audience.

However, symbols and myths, ideologically potent as they are, may be used in differing ways in political and ideological struggles: their meaning is never fixed and guaranteed before their use within specified social struggles. In the case of Black Consciousness literature, it appears on closer examination that the radically disruptive potential of such modes of expression only covered areas of conflict between the black oppressed on the one hand and the white oppressor on the other. They functioned in a manner contrary to any appropriation of social or literary contradiction and paradox within black society. In this context they served the function of bringing about cohesion and identity; of soothing out contradictions between individual subjects within the black community.

Such expression at times pre-empted an awareness of contradiction and disjuncture, and resulting social conflicts, within the black community.[112] Myths of blackness, in other words, absorbed other community cleavages – gender, regional, class and so on – within an undifferentiated racial rubric. In this manner the myths and utopian extrapolations expounded by Black Consciousness ran the danger of becoming forms of signification depoliticising the dynamic history of the black 'community', in order to assert a world-view palatable to those who had created the myths in the first place:

> Myth does not deny things, on the contrary, its function is to talk about them; simply, it purifies them, it makes them innocent, it gives them a natural and eternal justification, it gives them a clarity which is not that of explanation but that of a statement of fact. If I state the fact ... without explaining it, I am very near to finding that it is natural and goes without saying: I am reassured. In passing from history to nature, myth acts economically: it abolishes the complexity of human acts, it gives them the simplicity of essences, it does away with all dialectics, with any going back beyond what is immediately visible, it organises a world which is without contradictions because it is without depth, a world wide open and wallowing in the evident ...
>
> (Barthes 1973: 143)[113]

Conclusion

There are two crucial areas in which easy assumptions that the Black Consciousness writer or performer (or, indeed, any writer or performer) is an 'authentic', accurate voice emanating from a socially undifferentiated community are deficient. Firstly, on a political level such a conceptualisation naturalises the assumptions, viewpoints and ideological interests of these articulate, urbanised, better educated writers at the expense of other, less articulate or more immediately visible segments of society. This is the case even in this context, where writers wished to be at one with the common people in the face of massive repression. Thus, instead of the ideological priorities, preoccupations and silences of the author being examined, he or she is taken by critics to be an unproblematically-conceived representative social voice; and the fact that his or her text embodies and expresses an ideological point of view is forgotten.

Secondly, on a textual level, such easy assumptions as to the 'authenticity' and accuracy of a writer's authority fit in snugly with text-bound approaches to literature, where the truth of the text is assumed and taken from the text itself. This, it must be pointed out, is a self-fulfilling, circular process of criticism. For in such a scenario:

> Whatever difficulties of inter-cultural communication are involved, professor and student share an assumption that novels are about life, that they are written from personal experience and that this is the source of their authenticity.
>
> (Belsey 1980: 31)

The measurement of South African writers by means of the facile yardsticks of 'relevance' and 'commitment', allow seemingly profound observations to flourish; observations which prove on closer examination to be extremely vague and easy to mobilise.[114]

Stereotyping all recent black literature as part of an authentic 'resistance culture' also serves to reduce the diversity and strength of expression of black literature, so that only works which conform to pre-formulated political preconceptions are held to be noteworthy. A writer's authority and 'authenticity' is always an ideologically achieved construct, as will be shown in the rest of this study. The extent to which a construct is politically or aesthetically significant can only be examined if the critic is prepared to examine how the writer understands and expresses the social life of his or her community, and how he or she represents and gives figuration to the political forces and social experiences of his or her society – including the experiences and desires of the lower-class black people

such writers wish to absorb into their texts and narrative discourse. If the authenticity of the text cannot be taken for granted, as I have argued, the literary analyst is left with two immediate tasks: to historicise and socialise the figure of the author and his or her motivations, formal choices and social surroundings; and to historicise and socialise the preoccupations, silences and modes of organisation figured in the texts and performances themselves. This is what the rest of this study aims to do, referring to several prose works (influenced by Black Consciousness) which emerged at the end of the 1970s and in the early 1980s.

Notes to Chapter Two

1. Matthews was to say in 1976 that he wrote only to motivate readers to socio-political action (quoted in Cornwell 1980: 55).

2. The exiled 1950s South African poet Dennis Brutus' declaration that 'You have to decide which side you are on: there is always a side. Commitment does not exist as an abstraction; it exists in action' at a 1975 Conference in the U.S.A. (at which Serote was present) is indicative in this regard. ('Panel on Literature ...': 35). At the same venue, the Nigerian novelist Achebe remarked:

> All that you may be concerned about is: "On whose side do I want to be committed?" It's not a question of whether or not there is commitment. It's a question of on whose side.... There are two sides.... There is the oppressor and the oppressed. (ibid.: 37)

3. Essop Patel: '... the black poets invest their hopes, their aspirations and their commitment in solidarity' (Patel 1983: 1).

4. For a general discussion of commitment in art, see Eagleton 1976: 37 – 58; Watts 1989: 35; 48.

5. It must be pointed out, however, that while writers before the 1950s had served in many occupations – Plaatje was a journalist, pamphleteer, social worker and politician, Dube a politician, preacher, biographer and newspaper editor, Mqhayi a journalist, teacher, novelist and imbongi (see Sole 1979: 148 for further details) – Mutloatse is here, in my opinion, speaking figuratively as well, believing that Black Consciousness writers must be present imaginatively at all points of experience in their society.

6. See the discussion of Kente and Mhangwane in the previous chapter. On a wider scale, Mogale castigated blacks who advocated 'art for art's sake' as 'prodigal sons' who lived in a cultural limbo of cowardly self-censorship, both alienated from their own community and unaccepted by the white culture to which they aspired (Mogale 1981: 30 – 1; see also Mzamane 1978: 42).

7. See, for such an utterance, Ndebele 1972: 23; 26 – 7.

8. In both quotations the emphases are mine. This viewpoint was also well-expressed by the young poet Maropodi Mapalakanye, writing in the A.W.A. Newsletter in 1983, when he stated:

> We, the writers/artists and educationists, are the people who must play a major part in the liberation of our people's minds.
>
> (Mapalakanye 1983: 1)

See also Asvat n.d.: 16; Cornwell 1980: 64 – 5; Mzamane 1978: 42; Ndebele 1982: 190.

9. This point is made by Driver in relation to black women's autobiographies vis-a-vis male writing; it can, in my opinion, be usefully transferred to the black-white interface in South Africa as well (Driver 1988a: 19).

10. > Black consciousness takes the black experience as a source for its starting point. The black experience is the experience of a people who have been dispossessed of their land and stripped of their political power.
>
> (Mosala 1980)

11. As another instance of the kind of inescapably dire experiences being black under apartheid occasioned, see Tlali's accounts of her harassment at the hands of the South African Police on her way to attend a conference in Stockholm in Tlali 1988a: 198; 1988c: 95 – 7; as well as Sepamla's general statements concerning the racial harassment of black writers in South Africa in Sepamla 1980a: 26. For statements regarding how the racial component of apartheid 'levelled' the experience of all blacks in South Africa, see Fatton 1986: 58; Gordimer 1976: 148.

12. It should be stated, from the outset, that the concept of 'authenticity' as originally developed by European existentialist philosophers such as Sartre and Heidegger referred to a private quality of existence; proposing that it is individuals' attitudes towards themselves that conditions their attitudes

towards other people (see the discussion in Jameson 1971: especially 219; 276 – 7; 280 – 1). Among African intellectuals in a colonial and neo-colonial situation however, as Appiah observes, notions of 'authenticity' urging the individual to begin struggling towards the discovery of his or her more real, deeper inner being – are usually social and individual at the same time. This is as a result of the impossibility of discovering one's 'authentic' being as an African in a situation of massive external domination; and so the notion gets caught up with the need for public commitment (see the discussion in Appiah 1992: 119 – 25). Gunew makes the good point that 'authenticity' becomes a contested arena of identification for writers in social formations subject to colonial and neo-colonial domination precisely because these writers are not allowed to obtain what she terms 'a full measure of cultural franchise' (Spivak/Gunew 1993: 194).

13. Speaking generally of her fiction, Tlali has claimed: 'I had to present things very much as they are in reality. I tried to do that, although it's all fiction.... I use my imagination, but it's always stemmed from my own experiences' (Lockett 1989a: 77; sic.). For a fuller discussion of the semi-autobiographical Muriel at Metropolitan, see Alvarez-Pereyre 1988: 112 – 4.

14. Indeed, Serote gave up a career as a journalist in the early 1970s to pursue creative literature, because he claimed newspaper reports limited him to categorising events when he wished 'to reproduce the thing verbatim' (Kuhn 1974: 35 – 6).

15. Both Appiah and the contemporary philosopher Charles Taylor have noted that, in such a discourse, the search for 'authenticity' is the domain of the writer par excellence (see Appiah 1992: 119 – 20; Danto 1993: 6). It is in this vein that Mzamane stresses the importance of literature in Africa as the 'last authentic, sincere, almost uncontaminated voice we still have as Africans.... In the midst of all this alienation from our true selves in the light of the 'rape of the continent' ...' (Handan/ Myesgin 1984: 40).

16. This short summary is crystallised from the useful discussions of myth in Okpewho 1983: 45 – 71; 222 – 61 and Knipp 1980: 40.

17. In the Nigerian critic Okpewho's telling phrase, 'Myth ... is an aesthetic medium for the exploration of large questions about existence' (Okpewho 1983: 259).

18. Madingoane described himself thus during a public discussion after Senate Lectures given by Jordan Ngubane and Chabani Manganyi at the University of the Witwatersrand on 11 September 1980. The notion that myth-creation would aid the structuring of a future society can also be seen in Mphahlele's criticism of the literature of the early Staffrider for lacking: '...a myth. Our myth should be that there is a tomorrow ... there is no resonance echoing the past, foreshadowing the future' (Manganyi 1982: 36 – 7; for further elucidation see the general statements in Mphahlele 1980).

19. It is in this sense, in my opinion, that one should understand Mutloatse's description of black writers as midwives of a new order (see Mutloatse 1981a: 2). A similar trope is used by Serote at the end of his novel To Every Birth Its Blood, to be analysed in chapters four and five.

20. There has been much debate between commentators as to exactly how radical Black Consciousness thought really was. Some historians, literary critics and political analysts (such as Moodley and Vaughan) have stressed the relatively small attention Black Consciousness paid to the economic underpinnings of South African oppression: while others (such as Nolutshungu and Lodge) believe that its sweeping attacks on human alienation, commmodity fetishism and the status quo gave the philosophy a 'radical unease' with capitalism (see K. Moodley 1991: 146; Vaughan 1984a: 197; Nolutshungu 1983: 155; Lodge quoted in Harlow 1987: 105). However, while someone like Biko can be seen to have commented on the economic underpinnings of the apartheid system relatively early in his writings, these underpinnings did not exercise a great deal of his attention (see, for instance, Biko 1988: 104).

21. For the view that Black Consciousness had 'no clearcut action programme' see Gwala 1988a: 90.

22. For discussion of this process in other social contexts, see Laclau 1979: 172; Ranger 1977: 131. There is a strong populist strain in black South African literary as well as political history. For discussion, see Hirson 1979: 308 – 9; No Sizwe 1979: 6 and Vaughan 1984a: 197. Saul 1979 discusses the intertwining of class and ethnic identifications in African populism. For comments on the ambiguous (forwards- and backwards-looking) nature of nationalist identification in colonised countries and among oppressed peoples, see Nairn 1975: 11 – 9 and Vilar 1979: 11.

23. Regardless of this, Black Consciousness leaders took credit for a number of the strikes that occurred between 1973 and 1980 (see 'Voice of ...': 435). The relationship between the two sectors was miniscule, despite the fact that, as Phaahla points out, many Black Consciousness organisations and student leaders were based in Durban, the city in which black working-class strike activity first materialised (Phaahla 1982: 38 – 9).

24. Such an emphasis can be found in the Preamble to the S.A.S.O. Constitution of 1970 (Hirson 1979: 72). For comment on and criticism of the position enshrined in this document, see Hirson 1979: 110 – 1; Nolutshungu 1983: 160.

25. Diseko notes that by 1973 criticisms had arisen both in S.A.S.O. and S.A.S.M. about the lack of attention paid to issues of race and class in Black Consciousness doctrine (Nozipho Diseko 1991: 59). See also Gwala's claim that, by the Third Annual Conference of S.A.S.O in 1972, both Ndebele's and his own papers reflected an economic interpretation of history (Gwala 1984: 40).

For discussion and examples of differing perceptions and emphases as regards this issue in the early 1980s, see, on the one hand, Wauchope 1982 and Letsatsi Mosala, quoted in Thema 1980; and, on the other, Molobi 1981: 2 – 4 and Phaahla 1982: 38 – 9.

26. While Nolutshungu believes that black businessmen associated with the National African Chamber of Commerce (N.A.F.C.O.C.) in general stayed aloof from Black Consciousness organisations until after 1976 (Nolutshungu 1983: 191), this is only partly accurate. Important N.A.F.C.O.C. figures such as Sam Motsuenyane took part in (and delivered papers to) the Black Renaissance Convention in 1974.

27. This belief was frequently referred to as 'Black communalism'; which, according to the B.P.C. Convention of 1976, was:

> ...based on the principle of sharing, lays emphasis on community ownership of land and its wealth ... and ... strikes a healthy balance between what may legitimately be owned by individuals and what ought to be owned by the community as a whole.... Black communalism ... is a modified version of the traditional African economic life-style ...'
>
> (quoted in Fatton 1986: 103)

Some proponents of this view saw any notions of class differentiation and struggle as foreign to Africa: for example, in the late 1980s poet Madingoane still voiced a belief that:

> ... the problems of race and class are things that ... we as black people did not create, so that people who come with these terms or with this terminology are the people who actually created these differentiations.
>
> (quoted in Welz 1987: 51)

As late as the A.Z.A.P.O. Annual Conference of 1981 delegates were still divided between those who wished to adopt a socialist approach, and those who saw 'class' as a signifier of 'foreign ideologies' (for further explication see Akhalwaya 1981b).

28. For mention of the militant Durban wing of the B.P.C., frequently at odds with the rest of the organisation, see Gwala 1988a: 92; Nolutshungu 1983: 169.

29. See 'Alienation and ...': 4. In addition, Nolutshungu cites an article in a 1975 S.A.S.O. Newsletter as proof of a tendency towards socialism in S.A.S.O. ranks by the mid-decade (Nolutshungu 1983: 159).

30. In the early 1970s, for instance, black workers were seen by Black Consciousness student ideologues such as Barney Pityana as 'ordinary oppressed people – like we were' (quoted in Nolutshungu 1983: 187).

31. Thus Khehla Mthembu, elected President of A.Z.A.P.O. in 1981: 'race is a class determinant in our country'- a view accepted by the majority of delegates present at the organisation's annual conference (Akhalwaya 1981b; see also Akhalwaya 1981a). After emerging from imprisonment in 1983, three leading Black Consciousness ideologues, including Saths Cooper and Muntu Myeza (an ex-President of S.A.S.O.) all still saw: '... South Africa as a society divided into a ruling class and an oppressed working class. Race, however, is the pivotal factor separating the rulers from the ruled' (Laurence 1983).

32. For further examples from literati of this tendency to read off all black people as belonging to the same class under apartheid, see Mnyele 1980: 42 and the views of the young poets in Emmett 1979: 79. For a particularly cogent critique of this fudging of social distinctions, see Phaahla 1982: 38 – 40.

33. Buthelezi notes in this regard that one of the foremost distinctions Black Consciousness intellectuals wished to make was between a politically committed black petty-bourgeoisie and that middle-class professional group whose blackness was only 'skin-deep' (S. Buthelezi 1991: 113 – 4). For further examples of this view (both subsequent to the 1977 bannings), see 'Black consciousness endorsed ...' and Laurence 1983.

34. The emphasis on attitude, it has been suggested, arose in a situation where interpersonal relationships among blacks under apartheid were both divisive and debilitating, and an appeal to attitude and culture therefore seen as potentially healing and unifying. Nolutshungu implies that the fact that notions of class and alienation were first used in such a context helped shape how such concepts were conceived (Nolutshungu 1983: 155).

35. This is perfectly illustrated by Pityana's 1972 statement (in which he approvingly quotes Colin Morris, Christian missionary and biographer of Kenneth Kaunda) that the challenge facing:

> ... the Black man today is a restratification of his values. Power is placed in a middle-class society. This can be defined as 'any society that becomes rigidified in predetermined forms, forbidding all evolution, all gains, all progress, all discovery. I call middle-class a closed society in which life has no taste, in which the air is tainted, in which ideas and men are corrupt!' The definition fits our society very well. We are then called upon to take a stand against such a society.
>
> (Pityana 1972: 186)

36. For an example of how this notion of Cabral was applied to South Africa, see Phaahla 1982: 35 – 6.

37. For further statements from the early 1980s in favour of free enterprise, see inter alia Motlana 1980: 8 and the general tone of the magazine African Impact, edited by Meshack Mabogoane.

38. Individuals of widely differing political persuasions can be seen to have been influenced by Black Consciousness at one time or another in their careers; even individuals such as the politician Carter Ebrahim (later to become a Labour Party Minister in the 'coloured' House of Representatives of the Tri-cameral parliament), and the playwright Maqina, whose 'Ama-Afrika' supporters came into violent conflict with the U.D.F. in the Eastern Cape during the 1980s.

39. For further discussion of this point, see Cronin 1985a: 44; Nolutshungu 1983: 193 – 6.

40. This, Buthelezi goes on to say, differentiated this generation from the A.N.C. Youth League in the 1940s and 1950s, who were generally drawn from 'well-to-do families, the sons and daughters of chiefs, rich traders and relatively wealthy petty traders and professional people' (S. Buthelezi 1991: 113 – 4).

41. For further discussion of this issue, see Nolutshungu 1983:147; 197 – 8; Rive in Welz 1987: 18 – 9.

42. This point has tended to be over-generalised in South Africa, however. Crucially, it refers in the main to life within the township and tends to be silent on the extent to which workplace experiences – and the presence of commercial forms of culture – affect cultural identity.

43. In support of this point, Davidson says:

> ... there can be no sense in considering the phenomenon of nationalism as being somehow apart from the responses of indigenous culture. In so far as nationalism has acquired real substance, this is because the masses have breathed life into it.
>
> (quoted in Ranger 1977: 131 – 2)

44. For this point I am indebted to a personal communication from Mpoetsi Goba and Oko Mabasa. In short:

> A clear distinction exists between the ethnic composition of those areas (of Soweto) established before and after the introduction of the policy of ethnic allocation of housing; the earlier townships consist of a clear mixture of groups ... whereas those developed after 1954 reveal a very marked clustering according to ethnicity.
>
> (Morris 1980: 52)

45. See Amandla: 163.

46. There are some exceptions to this generalisation. Ndebele, in a 1972 article, called for Black Consciousness activists to scrutinise the various 'power groups' in black society (Ndebele 1972: 15), and went on to deal briefly with categories such as the urban middle-class, urban workers, the peasantry and religious groups. Biko, according to one critic, was conscious in his writings of:

> ... addressing himself largely to a small, unrepresentative segment of black society; pointing out that the rural, 'traditional' African may have a different consciousness of self, one largely unaffected by the influences that had impinged ... upon the more educated, Westernised urban dweller.
>
> (Sibisi 1991: 134)

For a discussion, published in 1984, of the lack of portrayal of rural people in the black literature of the preceding decade, see Ndebele 1984: 43.

47. For commentary on this phenomenon at the time, see Southall 1980: 39 – 41; Vaughan 1984a: 210; Laurence 1980. For a general discussion of the black petty bourgeoisie in South Africa during this period, see inter alia the general discussions in Wolpe 1976; Southall 1980; Davies 1979. Although it falls outside of the ambit of this study, the successive States of Emergency in the mid-1980s tended, in my opinion, to slow this process down.

48. For discussion of the rise and burgeoning of trade union organisations in South Africa in the 1970s and early 1980s, see inter alia MacShane et al 1984: 48 – 117; Friedman 1987: 37 – 241.

49. The phrase is Letsatsi Mosala's, ex-A.Z.A.P.O. National Organiser and, by 1983, head of the Black Allied Miners' and Construction Workers' Union and 'probably black consciousness' leading trade unionist' (Barrell 1983: 29; 32).

50. 'The toiling black masses ... can use their labour power to bargain for fundamental change in this country. This implies mobilisation of black workers and development of workers' consciousness' (Mosala 1980); 'Realising that black workers finally shape and determine the struggle, we discover that the survival of black consciousness, to be relevant, depends on the black workers' (Quorish Patel, quoted in Sunday Post 30 December 1979). See also footnote 31 of this chapter.

51. These matters are discussed at length, mainly through a study of Black Consciousness poetry, in Sole 1987: 57 – 70.

52. 'Matsix' is a pseudonym for playwright Manaka. The simultaneous invoking of humanist and economic explanations for South African social oppression is characteristic of much of Black Consciousness literature; and is strikingly evident in the short stories of Matshoba to be discussed in the next chapter.

53. For discussion of the general terms of this dual oppression, as voiced by black women writers, see Ngcobo 1986: 82; 1988: 13; Tlali 1982: 98.

54. See the statement by editor Mutloatse in a 1981 anthology, on the contributions by women: 'This work by the 'sisters' ... is a highly welcome development, because our struggle has lacked the full voice of the black woman's viewpoint for far too long ...' (Mutloatse 1981a: 4).

55. Tlali has noted that black women writers were sometimes regarded as 'renegades' by other black women (Tlali 1984a: 26). See also Ramphele 1991a: 216 and the discussion of the 'female self" in Driver 1988b: 158.

56. This was stressed by Nchwe in the interview published in Staffrider in 1979 (see Boitumelo 1979: 60 – 1).

57. See, for example, the remarks in Boitumelo 1979: 60 – 1; Lockett 1989b: 284. Speaking later, Tlali still insisted that 'our liberation is bound absolutely with the liberation of the whole nation' (Lockett 1989a: 74 – 5).

58. Mutloatse (198Oa: 3 – 4) and Tlali (1984a: 26; 1988b: 56 – 7; and in Lockett 1989a: 83) both emphasised this point. Tlali still held this opinion at the end of the 1980s: 'If we speak of women in S.A., we have to remember that there are different classes of women in the S.A. context. We can never forget that women are divided into racial groups' (Tlali 1988b: 56).

59. Driver's discussion of this – with particular reference to Ellen Kuzwayo – in Driver 1990: 238; 245 is relevant here, despite Kuzwayo's book Call Me Woman being published slightly after the period this thesis scrutinises.

60. Tlali for instance later stated that women ' play a supportive role because they are not allowed to come to the forefront ... ', and spoke of the different oppression black women suffered from black men (Lockett 1989a: 75; Tlali 1982: 102). At the same time, she has insisted on the commonality of oppression and purpose black women and men share in the South African context.

61. See the discussion in Driver 1990: 239; Lockett 1988: 32 – 5; Ngcobo 1988: 141 – 5.

62. Biko 1988: 55; 56; 61. He also believed, using the utterances of Zambian President Kenneth Kaunda, that Africans were in essence 'situation-experiencing' people, while Western thought was (in distinction to this) essentially 'problem-solving'.

63. See the general discussion of this point in Mafeje 1976, as well as the insightful and more detailed analysis made by Lemuel Johnson in L. Johnson 1979: 185 – 91. Thus:

> It is ... interesting to note that ethnographic assessments of the nature and function of "primitive" ... "pre-literate" Art are remarkably uniform in denying it the degree of autotelic or autogenous individualism which becomes an issue in discussions of a nexus between modern art and ideology. Such anthropological studies ... deny the idiosyncratiuc visionary, almost always to the greater glory of a collectivity or to the logic of some transcendent Idea which defines collectivity.
>
> (L. Johnson 1979: 185)

64. This trend of thought ran though the work of the Negritude writers from the 1930s onwards; it ran through the work of many ideologues of Pan-Africanism and African Socialism; and it also ran through many tracts of Black Consciousness philosophy. See the general discussions in Case 1975 and Tsomondo 1975.

65. One recent critic has gone so far as to claim that the fundamental division in pre-colonial Southern African societies was based on the appropriation of the labour of women and children by married men and homestead heads (Guy 1987: 24).

66. For fuller explanations see Schapera 1965: 30 – 1; M. Wilson 1969: 153 – 63; Peires 1981: 27 – 44; Guy 1982: 168 – 88; Bonner 1980: 83; 85 – 97; Kimble 1982: 120; Harries 1982: 145 – 50.

67. I am aware of the recent debates surrounding the validity of the concept of the 'Mfecane'; in particular Cobbing's and Wright's criticisms of the notion. For a short resume of the debate see Omer-Cooper 1991: 12 – 6; Hamilton 1992: 37 – 41. This debate does not significantly alter the validity of the points I am making here, especially in the light of the trenchant general discussions of the strengths and weaknesses of the 'Mfecane' idea contained in Omer-Cooper 1993 and Peires 1993.

68.

> ... the ideology of kinship was used, even when the lineage mode was dominated by a tributary state, as was the case in both Swaziland and Zululand: the king was still 'father of the people'.... The chief's position was regarded as superior because of his genealogical relationship to the other lineages, although in many many cases this was no more than a convenient fiction.
>
> (Marks/Atmore 1980: 12)

With reference to the Eastern Cape, see Peires' remarks how, in oral societies, genealogies are often indexes of relative political standing rather than accurate chronicles (Peires 1981: 30; see also Peires 1992: 306).

69. For fuller discussion of this point, see Peires 1992: 306 – 9; Hamilton 1985: 388.

70. Even the same poem, when used in different historical periods, will gain new nuances of imagery and social purpose. See White's discussion of the differences between the 1919 and 1968 versions of a poem praising Moshoeshoe (White 1982: 18 – 25).

71. Two examples of this changing role from the Eastern Cape can be found in the cases of the izimbongi (praise poets) Mbutuma and Qangule (see Opland 1984: 192 – 3 and the general discussion in Mafeje 1967).

72. Clan praises would be an example of this in South Africa (see Mzolo 1978: 209 – 11).

73. The Nigerian scholar Okpewho in particular has stressed the aesthetic, pleasure-giving face of oral literature, as a rebuttal of the work of earlier European anthropologists (such as the Structural-Functionalist school) who exaggerated its functional and ritualistic aspect (see Okpewho 1979: 11 – 3; Finnegan 1977: 44).

74. For proof of these points, see Damane/Sanders 1974: 25; Gunner 1979: 239 – 67; Opland 1974: 7 – 9; Schapera 1965: 5 – 6.

75. Landeg White provides an example of this with reference to the installation of the young ruler Molefi Kgafela in Bechuanaland (now Botswana) in 1931 (White 1982: 23 – 4).

76. The fact that praises are a popular, broadly-based art form in Southern African society, as has been recently pointed out (see Gunner/Gwala 1991: 2; 32) does not, in my opinion, alter the ideological function of these poems.

77. In conversation with the author, Carolyn Hamilton has remarked that some of the praises of the amaLala show a degree of resistance to the denigration visited on them by the Zulu State. In this instance, ethnic divisions came to reinforce class divisions (Hamilton/Wright 1984: 18). See also ibid.: 16; White 1980: 537 – 8; and the statements by Scheub about iintsomi by women in Clark 1988: 46 – 7.

78. In addition, see the discussion in Hobsbawm/Ranger 1983: 1 – 14.

79. Although Mafeje is not specifically talking about Black Consciousness here, the point remains relevant.

80. Patel thus qualifies his discussion by noting that:

> In constructing an African aesthetic the poet readily draws upon ancestral spirits, traditional rites and identifies with Africa.... The black poet is not an interpreter but in essence he is an innovator. He synthesises ritual, magic, language, music and rhythm of Africa.
>
> (E. Patel 1983: 4).

81. For an example of this, see the remarks of Sepamla and Tlali in Seroke 1981b: 42 – 3. Ndebele, perceiving this as a mere dislike of criticism of their work on the parts of these writers, takes issue with them in Ndebele 1984: 47.

82. This was a phenomenon to be found not only in black fictional writing. Thus, the Black Research Programme, a unit set up for the research and propagation of black history, stated that 'only Black people are close enough to the Black situation to be able to comment on it authoritatively' (The Voice 10 – 16 June 1981. See also Gwala's remarks in Gwala 1979: 56). This viewpoint enabled some Black Consciousness ideologues to later explain away ideologies of liberation such as Marxism and feminism as 'non-African'

and as 'foreign ideologies', as already pointed out. See Shivji's comments on such lines of argument in Shivji 1976: 5 – 6.

83. Mike Kirkwood, publisher: 'Publishing is about letting things out, letting the cats out of the bag – all the South African cats' ('Raven: letting ...'). Such a view sees the writer, in discovering Black Consciousness, as immediately ceasing to be alienated and transmogrifying into the 'watchdog' of his or her society (for examples see Gordimer 1981 and 'Our artists ...').

84. For commentary on the novel to this effect, see Lockett 1989b: 277 – 9; Alvarez-Pereyre 1988: 112 – 4 and Tlali herself in 'Arts & Africa' BBC African Service transcript no. 267.

85. > ... one of the female writer's tasks being able to delineate the experience of women as women, telling what it is to be a woman, this will even help to a great extent, to unravel the heroic deeds of brave fighters in the struggle
>
> (Matlou 1987: 77; sic.).

86. For discussion of similar tendencies in a different context, see Suleri 1993: 761 – 2.

87. Schalkwyk's article (in relation to gender) is helpful in this regard, as he attempts to find a position between poles of argument which afford either absolute discursive or empirical/experiential primacy to the formation of 'experience' (see Schalkwyk 1990). I do not, however, align myself with some of his conclusions.

88. Such as Gwala's distinction between 'black drama' and 'drama produced by blacks' (Gwala 1974: 105 – 6; 111 – 2).

89. Thus Mogale:

> ... we have to struggle in all ways so that the artist creates for the people and so that the people in turn raise their cultural level and draw nearer to the artist ...
>
> (Mogale 1981: 31)

90. In a series of interviews published in 1974, Serote had pessimistically noted that 'It's not poems you see on sale in the townships' (Kuhn 1974: 35).

91. Despite the existence of significant exceptions (such as the prose writer Ahmed Essop) this hiatus can generally be said to be the case. Commenting on this hiatus, the influential critic and writer Njabulo Ndebele pointed out the need for a literature of the 'everyday' in his critical articles published in South Africa from 1983 onwards.

92. For further explication and examples see Sole 1987: 64 – 8.

93. For further expressions of this absolute merging of individual with communal experience (which Gordimer calls the 'Whitmanesque' use of the first person), see Cronin 1985b: 19; Gordimer 1973: 54; Rive 1977: 49.

94. Statement made during B.B.C 'Arts & Africa' Interview, BBC African Service transcript no. 267. See also chapter four, footnote 74.

95. It must be borne in mind that Africa was the only continent where the demand for books increased rather than diminished in the 1970s ('Africa's War ...': 34).

96. Mutloatse:

> We had heeded the yearning of the black community for a publication that would spell out events as black eyes had perceived them. There was a dearth of the black voice that could articulate the cries of children who were dying in the streets almost daily.... The Voice set out to echo those cries. But it turned out that the victims of the state machinery were, at the time, hardly aware of the extent of their suffering. We came to learn that we were far too radical. (Mosotho 1987: 84)

97. In terms of the writers under scrutiny in the next three chapters, this generalisation is particularly pertinent to Matshoba and Tlali.

98. This useful observation, made by Driver in relation to Maria Tholo's utterances in The Diary of Maria Tholo (Driver 1990: 227 – 9), can, in my opinion, be generalised to many other works as well. For example, see Matshoba's narrator's ambivalent viewpoint regarding the whites he meets in the story 'A Pilgrimage to the Isle of Makana' discussed in the next chapter.

99. Compare Sepamla 1974/5a: 19 with 1979: 19.

100. See chapter one, footnote 98. Similar claims, usually supplied without convincing proof, are sometimes made about the work of other writers as well (see, for example, Chapman's belief that Serote's first two books were written more with a white audience in mind (Chapman 1982b: 114)).

101. A 1980 study estimated that 64% of the South African urban black population was literate, while a 1984 study suggested that 50% of the black population over twenty as a whole was literate. Using four year's schooling as a yardstick for a minimal level of literacy, the former study indicated a belief that in actual fact it was only those people with a much higher, Standard Eight, level education who became library users and regular readers of books (see Machet 1988: 96 – 7).

In the 1980 South African census, it was estimated that 0,17% of the African inhabitants of the country used English as a first language (Alexander 1990: 140). A study published in 1978 claimed that the competence of African people in South Africa in English was, at that time, as follows: 43% of people interviewed could speak English; 51% could understand it; 48% could read and 43% write the language. English by this time had emerged as the

most predominant print language in the country; and, after Zulu, the second most widespread spoken language (Schuring 1978: 56). Another study, carried out in 1980, estimated that the number of those not adequately literate in their first language might be as high as a third of the total black population over the age of fifteen; and the problem was compounded by a subsequent unavailability of English to an even larger number of people (Wedepohl 1984: 9 – 10). For slightly more optimistic figures, but ones which do not substantially alter the points being made here, see Kantey 1990: x.

102. As late as 1986 Serote is still maintaining that it does not matter if the writer speaks English or not, as long as he or she 'tells the truth' about the lives of (in his case) the people of Alexandra (Ngugi/Serote 1988: 34).

103. Biko had earlier, in the same trial transcript, spoken of the difficulty blacks experienced building up sufficient analytical and debating skills in English. This point has since been reiterated by Ndebele (Biko 1988: 123; Ndebele 1986c: 14).

104. See, for instance, the arguments in Mchunu/Mnguni 1987: 99 – 100 and Ndebele 1986c: 4. This led Mzamane, during the 1991 New Nation Writers' Conference in Johannesburg, to note that the outcome of this call for the restoration of African languages would determine 'whether we're truly democratic or elitist' (Jaggi 1992: 14).

105. There has been some disagreement about the use of indigenous languages among black writers. Some writers have pressed for a wider use of these languages, while others (such as Sepamla and Maponya) have advocated the use of English. In addition to the Sepamla and j'Mathonsi quotes used, see Sepamla 1974/5a: 18; 1980a: 26; j'Mathonsi 1981a: 91; Luther/Maponya 1984: 30 – 1.

106. This tendency, previously discussed in this chapter, is as common to the rest of the continent as South Africa. See Ngara 1985: 2 – 38; and Simonse's remarks (on the views of Achebe and Soyinka) in Simonse 1982: 453 – 4.

107. For a telling example of this with regard to Matshoba's fiction, see chapter three, footnote 49.

108. Characteristically therefore, referring to the students' struggles in South Africa at a literary conference taking place in the U.S.A. in 1975, exiled writer Keorapetse Kgositsile saw 'committed' black South African writers as seeking to produce a literature 'authentic enough to reflect the values you owe your allegiance to' as well as desiring 'a kind of wholeness, an integrity' of themselves with their society (see 'Panel on Literature ...': 34 – 5).

It is also tempting to suggest, along with Moodley, that the discourse of 'authenticity' and interest in existentialism, phenomenology and psychology in early Black Consciousness thought reflected the influence of the (mainly

white) faculty of the 'black' universities, as well as the virtual blanket ban on Marxist literature in South Africa at the time (K. Moodley 1991: 146).

109. As another example, at the 1973 Mdali December Festival a spokesperson of the drama group Mihloti went on record as saying:

> Mihloti will not and does not present plays that tell you how unfaithful our women are. We do not present plays of our broken families, of how Black people fight and murder each other, or, bewitch each other, pimp, mistrust, hate and despise each other; this kind of theatre leaves the people broken and despaired (sic.). We tell the people to stop moaning and to wake up and start doing something about their valuable and beautiful Black lives.
>
> (quoted in Gwala 1974: 113)

110. Compare with Sepamla: 'You cannot make people read if you do not relate to their world. We are creating an audience for ourselves. Those who come after us will look at other qualities which we've ignored' (Seroke 1981b: 43).

111. For a longer, informative discussion, see Cornwell 1980: 56 – 7.

112. For a discussion of the manner in which myths may be used to 'dull' political awareness, see Morawski 1974: 11.

113. See also Culler 1975: 42. Thus, according to Kermode, while 'fiction' is a symbolic construct ironically aware of its own fictionality, 'myths' mistake their symbolic worlds for literal ones – and thus come to naturalise their own status (quoted in Eagleton 1991: 191).

114. Such as 'the artist must ... face his own reality, and he will have interiorised the standard of relevance set up outside'; and 'relevance and commitment pulse back and forth between the artist and society'. Both statements are Gordimer's. See Gordimer 1981: i; 1988: 137.

CHAPTER THREE: THE NARRATIVE APPROPRIATION OF EXPERIENCE

The Emergence of Mtutuzeli Matshoba[1]

Mtutuzeli Matshoba grew up as an aspirant writer and intellectual in deprived circumstances. Born in 1950, he spent his first four years living in cramped circumstances with an aunt in Orlando East, Soweto, visited by his nursing sister mother and father over weekends. In 1954 he moved, with his parents and younger brother, to the family's own 'matchbox' house in Mzimhlope, also in Soweto. Matshoba thus grew up with an intimate knowledge of the strictures and experiences of life in South Africa's black townships.

He was subjected to all the inadequacies and pressures of the South African government's Bantu Education policy. His early schooling took place in Soweto, but after standard six he was sent to the Wilberforce Institute near Evaton and, at the age of fourteen, to Lovedale in the Eastern Cape. His move from Soweto was occasioned by the advice of a teacher, who noticed his potential and feared it would be wasted in Soweto's crime-ridden streets.[2] It was at Lovedale that his literary flair began to show itself:

> In standard eight a composition ... won me the acclaim of my class teacher.... I read any paperback that came my way. I spent hours

> studying encyclopaedias in what was supposed to be the school library. I loved English poetry and I interpreted Shakespeare for my classmates.
>
> (M. Matshoba 1979: ix)

An interest in politics (first occasioned by the political crackdown of 1960) and, as he terms it, a desire 'to answer the why of it' (ibid.: viii) began to emerge in Matshoba, along with a growing fascination to find out 'more about human beings' and a 'strong desire for artistic self-expression' (ibid.: x).

However, his school education was constantly disrupted by the stark realities of life under apartheid, and his experience of education remained disjointed and precarious. A strike at Lovedale interrupted his schooling, and he subsequently failed Matric. Back in Soweto:

> ... the police seemed to take a special interest in me.... I re-adapted, and that was the year of my first and last visit up to now to Number Four, although police stations were like toilets, as they are to all blacks here.... Their pull is like that of the call of nature.
>
> (ibid.: ix)

Later passing Matric at Inkamana High School in Vryheid, Natal, Matshoba proceeded to the University of Fort Hare in 1972, first to study science, then law. At this institution he was strongly influenced by the ideas of Black Consciousness; and the presence of ideologues such as Harry Nengwekhulu, Strini Moodley and Biko (ibid.: x). He became a convert to the radical new philosophy that was proving attractive to so many young black thinkers of the time.

His academic career again interrupted at university by a strike, Matshoba worked for a while as a draughtsman in a die-cutting factory. He later returned to Fort Hare, but:

> ... June 16, 1976 exploded in my face. Memories of old were revived, my life was so full that I knew that if I did not spill some of its contents out I would go beserk. I started scribbling and burning the scraps of paper on which I wrote, torn between writing or heading for the beckoning horizons, my country become (sic.) my enemy.
>
> (idem.)

When The Voice newspaper asked for literary compositions in 1978, Matshoba submitted his first story. Encouraged by The Voice's Mothobi Mutloatse (himself soon to become a co-director of Ravan Press), Matshoba became involved with Ravan and began to submit stories to its new literary magazine, Staffrider, where they were published regularly from 1978 until 1980. Matshoba became, via the publication of his stories, closely associated with Staffrider; an association he stressed himself, calling Staffrider 'our magazine' (ibid.: vii). The book publication of most of these stories, Call Me Not a Man, appeared in 1979. Despite the banning of this book shortly after publication, Matshoba soon became the most influential of the black prose writers in South Africa who wrote inspired by Black Consciousness. His stories in Staffrider can be viewed as seminal to the burgeoning of black South African prose literature at the end of the 1970s:

> Matshoba's stories appeared consistently in each issue of Staffrider from the second issue in May 1978. He has therefore become identified with the magazine, and this association is not gratuitous. Staffrider, with its revolutionary insistence on allowing the voices of hitherto suppressed and silenced groups to be heard ... in whichever style they chose, regardless of traditional literary-aesthetic norms, opened up new possibilities for black literary expression in this country.
>
> (Mackenzie 1990b: 30)

Matshoba's stories are the most striking examples of the revitalised prose literature which emerged in the first few years of Staffrider.[3] This affinity can be seen in both the form and content of his stories, especially in the way in which his stories mix their imaginative fiction with information of social conditions and political opinions.

The importance he ascribed to Black Consciousness can be seen not only in his political affiliations during the period but also in the politics of his literature. His stories of the period demonstrate a self-assurance and assertiveness, and a desire to confront and describe the experience of those oppressed by a racist system.[4] In line with his Black Consciousness beliefs, Matshoba's stories lay stress on issues of black identity and experience. This is made clear in the title story of the collection:

> ... that component of me which is man has died countless times in one lifetime. Only a shell of me remains to tell you of the other man's plight, which is in fact my own. For what is suffered by another man in view of my eyes is suffered also by me.... Out of the same bitter cup do we drink.
>
> ('Man': 18; emphasis mine)[5]

He believed not only that his stories should reflect on the 'black experience' in South Africa, but also that, through these stories, he could inspire black people to action:

> As long as blacks lead ordinary lives under apartheid, they are not seen as people but as subhumans. I thought that letting them see themselves as they are would inspire them to regain their dignity.
>
> (quoted in Vlessing 1986: 1930)

He believed literature had the power to 'state your case before you act. It is a way of indicting the person against whom one is to act or is

acting so that person will understand the 'why' of it' (ibid.: 1931). Thus, it is apparent that Matshoba saw himself as writing for both black and white audiences. He saw his fiction as a powerful device to reflect on the social iniquities of apartheid, communicating to blacks (with whom he wished to 'share his feelings of disgust') and whites (in order 'to convert those who still have a bit of humanity in them') (idem.). His stories were therefore meant to serve descriptive and analytical functions at the same time.

Employed for a while by an advertising company, Matshoba remained an influential figure in the Mzimhlope community where he lived (Nat Diseko 1985); and, for a time at the end of the 1970s and beginning of the 1980s, in South African literary circles. He published a play, Seeds of War, in 1981, and a number of uncollected short prose pieces in Staffrider in 1979 – 80, but during the next decade published relatively little. Instead, he became involved in film, which he saw as one of the most effective media for reaching a wider public in order to be 'subversive' (J. Williams 1992: 25). His story 'A Glimpse of Slavery' was filmed as 'Hidden Farms', and he wrote a screenplay, 'Menacing Shadows' eventually filmed by the German Film Academy in 1991. He acted in two video productions, 'Apartheid's Children' and 'The Mohale St. Brothers'; scripting the latter (a personal testimony which dealt with the tragic deaths of two of his brothers during the 1980s).[6] Matshoba subsequently became an office-bearer in the Department of Arts and Culture of the A.N.C. until 1993, and published

short fiction in their journal Mayibuye.[7] He has authored an unpublished novel, Beyond the Minedumps; as well as a play, The Devil's Payoff.

The Reception of Call Me Not a Man

The initial reception of Call Me Not a Man was nearly entirely positive. The narrative skill and sociological accuracy of the stories attracted praise from several critics. They spoke in glowing terms of Matshoba's detailed observation of, and compassionate sympathy for, black experiences of apartheid, as well as his 'vision of a growing identity, and a growing commitment to a realistic future for blacks in South Africa' (Bikitsha 1979); naming the collection 'a landmark in the development of South African short-story writing' (Maughan-Brown 1985: 218); and (in one instance) judging his stories 'the best South African short stories that I have read for a long time' (Paton 1979).

His commitment to writing for and about a black community in struggle was also commended by critics, as was his accuracy of representation of a black community in a process of upheaval and resistance to apartheid. One critic, for example, regarded the stories as a 'handbook of investigation' of representative black experiences, attitudes and ideas (L. Abrahams 1979); while another noted their importance, not only in literary terms, but also because 'they speak for a people – with

great courage, and without defeat' (Bikitsha 1979). David Maughan-Brown extended these remarks, focussing on the stories' analytical as well as narrative skill:

> ... (they) are intended to have the effect of enabling their readers not only to recognise the conditions of their own existence imagined in the fiction, but also to recognise the accuracy of the story teller's analysis of the underlying reasons for those conditions of existence being as they are.
>
> (Maughan-Brown 1985: 217 – 8)

Several reviewers and critics noted the distance of Matshoba's style from any conventional short story technique. Many saw this as deliberate on his part. In a comment written a few months after the book's publication, Kirkwood stressed Matshoba's role as a popular Sowetan 'story-teller', a term that was then coming into vogue in South African critical circles:

> I confess that I find it difficult, as I read Matshoba's stories, not to see him in front of me. It is the polar opposite of James Joyce paring his fingernails behind the complete and self-sufficient artwork. And these aren't 'short stories' because the short story suggests deliberate artifice to me, pre-eminently among prose- forms. Neither are they stories in the traditional sense. Yet Matshoba seems to me the story-teller come to life, all the same.
>
> (Mzamane 1986: xxiii)

Taking as their lead the challenge Black Consciousness literature presented to liberal models of 'good' fiction, Marxist critics in particular welcomed Matshoba's displacement of liberal literary aesthetics and stereotypes. Maughan-Brown, for example, believed that Matshoba's stories operated in terms of a different audience and aesthetic (Maughan-Brown 1985: 217), while Michael Vaughan argued that he dispensed with the liberal aesthetic preoccupation with 'individual interiority, and hence with subtle and elaborate characterisation' (Vaughan 1981a: 45).

Instead, the latter critic designated Matshoba's style as that of a 'populist realism' which:

> ... has an entirely different relation to liberalism. Perhaps we should be wary of underestimating the degree to which this movement involves conscious opposition to hegemonic literary practices.... The reason for this is that the practitioners of populist realism – the Staffrider school of black writers – belong to racial-social groups which have only recently gained access to literacy through formal schooling (through the institutions of 'Bantu Education'). These writers are simply unschooled in the aesthetics of liberalism, and it becomes a practical necessity for them to evolve their own unifying aesthetic, with whatever materials are most immediately to hand.... Populist realism, then, is an aesthetic movement which reflects the emergence of new social and political forces within the dimension of literary culture.... (Matshoba's) stories are organised in terms of a configuration of concepts that is simply unimaginable from within the liberal framework ... writing is conceptualised as a practical tool of the struggle of the (black) people. The art and practice of writing is related to this political conceptualisation. There is much less of a mystique surrounding the (individualist) creativity of the writer, and the special texture of literary expression.
>
> (Vaughan 1982b: 133; 137)

More recently critics such as Daniel Kunene and David Bunn have continued to point out that Matshoba's mixing of imaginative and journalistic voices in these stories is intentional. They speak, during a 1987 conference, of the manner in which his work attempts to bridge the gap between fiction, philosophy, history and journalism; stating that Matshoba 'is very conscious of his own role as a historian ... stepping outside of the novelist's position'; his stories thus 'quite intentionally' engage in a 'movement back and forth between the fictional and the mini-essay mode in which he makes philosophical statements on topics dealing with the relationship of one human being to another'.[8]

However, the author's intermingling of literary genres has also caused some uneasiness in critics, especially those of a more liberal bent, despite their overall praise for the book. Alan Paton, for one, believed it:

> ... a danger for a story-teller to know too much sociology and history. Yet a bigger danger is the temptation, almost over-powering for a black writer, to use his story for polemics, politics and protest ... for me the acid test of a story is its power to entertain and hold the reader. Much polemical story-writing fails this test. Mr Matshoba passes this test because of his narrative gift.
>
> (Paton 1979)

while Lionel Abrahams thought Matshoba:

> ... forgoes the authority of proclaimed factuality in exchange for fiction's flexibilities. But these ... stories disregard a number of the rules for effective fiction, such as the need for narrative economy, for subjugation of the material to the form, for integrity of the illusion, and for objectivity in the presentation of characters. In fact they appear to provide a model of the sort of "non-elitist" committed school of local critics has been prescribing against the traditional standards of "liberal" or "bourgeois" literature.
>
> (L. Abrahams 1979)

Despite the potential for disagreement about Matshoba's technique among liberal and Marxist critics demonstrated above, the collection was held in high regard in the early years of the 1980s. It was a black critic, at one time an ideologue of Black Consciousness, who came to subject Matshoba's oeuvre to the most telling criticism after his return to Lesotho from university study overseas in the late 1970s. The criticism of Njabulo Ndebele, an academic whose work began appearing again in South Africa from 1983 onwards, played no small part in removing Matshoba from his position of pre-eminence.[9] Despite an early adherence to Black Consciousness and its literary assumptions,[10] Ndebele had become increasingly critical of the literature of protest and overt political

preoccupation in South Africa.[11] He has criticised the political preoccupations and stylistic cliches of much previous black South African literature, including the work of 1970s writers; arguing that this literature was often content with 'a tradition of almost mechanistic surface representation' and the 'phenomenon of the spectacle' (Ndebele 1984: 46; 1986a: 149); content with reflecting and commenting moralistically on the realities of oppression under apartheid. Reacting to white domination, he believes the fiction to have largely based its resistance on a 'descriptive documentation of suffering': its almost total concern with directly political themes had limited it to description rather than explanation, and allowed an image of a passive, destroyed people to emerge and consolidate (Ndebele 1985: 39).

Ndebele continues to believe that such literature deliberately set out to use conventions of journalism or political pamphleteering rather than the formal strengths of imaginative fiction, thus emerging satisfied with the merely expository. The predominant role of black journalism in black literary history has created and consolidated an idea among black readers that prose is primarily a vehicle for didacticism and political assertion. This has caused fiction writers 'to wear the mantles of adviser, preacher, and guide' (Ndebele 1989a: 22 – 3).[12] It can be seen that this critic wishes to separate the 'artistic' responsibilities of black writers from these other roles.

Although Ndebele was more intent on evaluating a model of literature than in criticising specific authors, he negatively cited Matshoba as an

example of this model in a 1984 article. The mixing of reportage, philosophical and political asides, narrator interjections and invitations to reader participation in Matshoba's fiction was criticised – sometimes explicitly, at all times implicitly – in Ndebele's critical interventions. Ndebele noted:

> I have ... found Mtutuzeli Matshoba's depiction of social reality in his stories simply too overwhelming. His basic technique has been to accumulate fact after fact of oppression and suffering, so that we are in the end almost totally grounded in the reality without being offered, at the same time, an opportunity for aesthetic and critical estrangement.
> (Ndebele 1984: 46)

In a subsequent article arguing strongly for the writer to subject experience and exposition to 'the mediation of artistic language and form', Lewis Nkosi also remarked negatively on 'the naive realism of ... Mtutuzeli Matshoba's fiction', which he believed owed a 'great deal to this frustrated desire to abolish any space between literature and the horrible reality of apartheid'. (Nkosi 1986: 43).

Ndebele demonstrates a marked concern for the concrete experiences of human subjectivity (which, following Marcuse, he calls 'interiority'), and rejects claims from critics such as Vaughan that a concern with individual subjectivity in character development inclines writers towards bourgeois individualism:

> ... Vaughan observes that in Matshoba's work 'the whole liberal preoccupation with the individual interiority, and hence with subtle and elaborate characterisation, is dispensed with. Characterisation establishes individual specificity and separateness, a function which is not relevant to Matshoba's project'.... On this basis ... Vaughan implies that a writer's concern with subjectivity in character development may

> amount to a bourgeois or liberal escapism into an ethos of individualism. But is that necessarily so?
>
> (Ndebele 1984: 46 – 7)

In terms of the characters depicted, previous literature such as Matshoba's denies, according to Ndebele, the need for full-bodied characters. The characters are formed as, and conformed to, 'mere ideas ... marshalled this way or that in a moral debate'. Unwittingly, therefore, such fiction aids and abets the 'very negation it seeks to transcend'. Characters are superficially embodied as 'surface symbols of the South African reality', forming configurations of the endless battle of good versus evil; they emerge in the text as 'finished products, often without a personal history' (Ndebele 1984: 44).

Good writing, as far as Ndebele is concerned, should be more interested in the processes of injustice than its finished products, facilitating (through careful characterisation) the portrayal of ambiguity and of characters' inner processes of thought and understanding. Even the 'villains' should be depicted within their social context, and therefore understood and allowed to 'condemn themselves through their dramatised effects' (idem.).

Referring (like Kirkwood) to the Marxist critic Walter Benjamin, Ndebele advocates the need for black writers to become 'story-tellers', contending that 'story-telling' downplays authorial intervention in its narrative processes and leaves greater space for reader enjoyment and participation.[13] It has an 'impersonal, communal' aspect – allowing

greater narrative objectivity and embracing a wider and more complex social totality. The 'story-teller', rather than the 'case maker' thus gives 'African readers the opportunity to experience themselves as makers of culture' (Ndebele 1984: 25; 48). Stories can be instructive, entertaining and popular at the same time. Bearing the minimum of authorial intervention, they allow emotional involvement with no loss of critical consciousness. They allow opportunities for the reader to reflect on and evaluate individual experiences: and as these individual experiences necessarily relate, in Ndebele's view, to a wider social world, to evaluate communal experiences as well.

Yet this concern with readership and with authority was not novel to Ndebele: quite the contrary. It must be remembered that the early Staffrider was as concerned with promulgating anti-elitist and 'democratic' forms of literature for a black readership (see Visser 1989: 42). In the light of this reminder, the rest of this chapter will examine the strategies whereby Matshoba brings the message of his stories across, both formally and as regards subject matter. It will examine the emphasis he puts on an examination and re-intepretation of the social 'truth' of South Africa, and his descriptions of the black community. This will lead to a perusal of his strategies of narrative representation and his use of narratorial comment. Crucially, it will also examine the manner in which he positions the reader vis-a-vis the narrative and the 'information' he presents, and the 'democratic' potential of his particular literary style.

The Antinomies of the Individual and the Social

First and foremost it must be noted that Matshoba's stories scrutinise the complex reality of South Africa, especially as this concerns and affects black people. He examines the values and interactions within the black community, and the way in which the wider world of white-dominated South Africa impinges on them. Consequently one critic speaks of Matshoba's success in documenting 'with a meticulous and penetrating realism the lives of his people' over a range of issues and environments (Bikitsha 1979); while another has commented on the author's desire to describe social conditions accurately, and analyse their causes for his readership (Maughan-Brown 1985: 217).

These stories involve themselves with a condemnation of social conditions under apartheid: the stagnation, isolation and repetitive nature of black life under apartheid forms a significant portion of their subject matter. More specifically, references to problems of lack of unity, the strained realities of family life, and the lives of political prisoners, migrant workers and so on proliferate. Such details are exhaustively, almost obsessively, detailed and expounded on. Characteristically, in Matshoba social conditions and their political implications are often explicitly discussed by the narrator or one of the characters:

> Matshoba does not concentrate upon constructing the complexity illusion (sic.) of a self-sufficient reality in his fiction. The fictional narrative, focussed upon the immediate experience of the fictional characters, is constantly broken through by non-fictional narrative. This

> may take the form of explicit authorial comment: lesson-giving ... practical advice. Or it may take the form of historical narrative, providing some sort of historical frame of reference within which to evaluate the present.... Then again, sometimes the central narrative itself appears as a fairly unadorned rendering of actual personal experience: Matshoba features as himself, and so on.
>
> (Vaughan 1981b: 8)[14]

He fixes these social conditions in the mind of the reader by expounding on them in narratorial comment or asides, rather than by representing them through the consciousness of his characters.

It would be mistaken to suggest, however, that the author is not concerned with the individual consciousness of his characters and readers at all, or that he does not move beyond immediately political concerns to focus on the manner in which these are recorded on and affect individual consciousness.[15] Vaughan has pointed out that, generally speaking, fiction is an individualising means of expression and reception, and Matshoba's stories are no exception to this:

> ...(fictional) narrative gives shape to its object through the medium of personal experience; thus personal experience, directly apprehended, as it were, provides the vivid basis for conclusions to be drawn about the nature of the social order. Thus one progresses, in fiction, from the individual to the social. Fictional narrative is dependent upon the centrality of individual experience.
>
> (Vaughan 1981b: 6)

Matshoba may well be less concerned with 'subtle and elaborate characterisation' than with situation (Vaughan 1981a: 45), with the consequence that his characters appear 'wooden' to some critics. Yet it can be seen that Matshoba's stories do focus powerfully on the lives of individuals. They represent the livelihood and experience of various individual black South Africans, focussing over and over again on the

individual, human predicaments of these characters, be they amagoduka (migrant workers) arrested by black police reservists ('Man': 22 – 3) or families left homeless by the machinations of apartheid laws and officials, as in the story 'Friend'. The stories weave webs of motivation and causality as regards how social conditions affect individual behaviour. Matshoba is often explicit in this goal, as he sets out (for example) to historicise Koos de Wet's belligerent and paranoiac personality in 'Glimpse', or the reasons for Martha allowing Dawid Steenkamp to sleep with her in 'Son' ('Glimpse': 37 – 8; ' Son': 71 – 2; 76 – 9).

It should be stressed, though, that Matshoba's concern for the individual is finally in terms of the manner in which the individual relates to socio-political and community issues: the isolated individual of European literary modernism does not interest him. The black individual is unfailingly embedded in social collectives, and these stories seek to explore the problematic nature of the relationship of individual to wider black community.

Matshoba proselytises the need for black people to accept a Black Consciousness philosophy and way of life in order to combat the effects of apartheid both on a personal and public level. Indeed, these terms cannot be separated as far as he is concerned.[16] The everyday experiences of black individuals in apartheid South Africa are those of violated individuals. For instance, Matshoba's fiction constantly counterposes the peaceful requirements of family life and romantic love with the violence, crime and

general instability of the townships (Vaughan 1981b: 12). Even if, as is the case of lovers, individuals might temporarily be oblivious to their social surroundings ('Veil': 189; see also 'Son': 73), they cannot escape its grasp (in the form, in the instance of 'Veil', of a brutal and mendacious white shopkeeper). Whites and their government are an unflaggingly covert, and often overt, presence in the stories; this is made clear, not only with reference to the plethora of apartheid laws black individuals may run foul of, but in the ambience overdetermining their experience of individuality. The black person who wishes to register for a pass, for instance, experiences an overwhelming sense of 'dishonour' after undergoing a prying, rude medical examination:

> My pride had been hurt enough by exposing myself to him.... The medical examination was over and the women on the benches outside pretended they did not know. The young white ladies clicking their heels up and down the passages outside showed you they knew. You held yourself together as best you could until you vanished from their sight, and you never told anybody else about it.
>
> ('Pride': 113 – 4)

In such circumstances individual black people's self-definitions are, ineluctably, immediately social at the same time as they are personal. The individual, for Matshoba, is not allowed an adequate privacy or interiority by apartheid, no matter how much he or she may desire it or struggle temporarily to achieve it. The sham normalcy and the politics of apartheid can blind, in Matshoba's view, individual blacks to the potential for a more apposite political system; thus he links up the human predicaments he displays with a wider political message. Matshoba's narrators continually

bear witness to the inequities and horrors of apartheid, in its day-to-day workings, in order to change the consciousness of his characters and, we will come to see, his readers as well. Possession of an interior freedom from oppressive social conditions can never take the place of, but requires, broader strategies of political and social resistance and struggle (Vaughan 1981b: 11).

The connection between the individual and the social is often achieved in the stories through various strategies of typification. Critics have remarked that, in the black literature of the period under examination, individual black experiences and specific township locales may serve simultaneously as synecdoches for a collective 'black experience' and general social conditions.[17] Matshoba's narrative strategy in this regard is mainly encapsulated around the figure and experiences of a first-person narrator, or of the experiences of other characters related to the narrator.[18] Matshoba's narrator acts, in Vaughan's words, as a co-ordinating principle of relationship and unity who, through his experiences and interactions, gives prominence to a range of situations in which black people in South Africa find themselves. The subject-matter of the stories thus has a model-like typicality for readers to absorb and ponder on (Vaughan 1981a: 46; 1982: 131). Call Me Not a Man can therefore be described as 'a set of exemplary lessons from common African experience' (Vaughan 1981b: 10). For instance, the narrator searches for lessons from different types of experience in one story as follows:

> I set out with a feeling of great relief from the sometimes ... unbearably vibrant conditions of my Soweto. On top of looking forward to a long-desired reunion with close friends ... there was also a measure of curiosity. It was a chance to observe, from another angle, the changes which never cease to mould my environment.... I chose a simple means of transport, the people's, which means public – a train and a bus, third class, people's class.
>
> ('Illusion': 143 – 4)

In addition, the circumstances his narrator encounters may set forth situations where members of the community debate or give a range of opinions on matters of social and political concern, assuming a range of conflicting opinions in these debates – such as the discussion which takes place over the role of black women in the bus to the Transkei ('Illusion': 152 – 7; see Vaughan 1981a: 46).

By such narrative means the interaction and communication of individuals is fictionally portrayed as the means necessary for forging a black social unity wider than established ties of kinship and tradition. Matshoba is concerned with personal growth and the stripping away of individuals' illusions – but in an immediately political sense. The focus on individuals in these stories is always, eventually, in terms of the search for a greater and more effective social knowledge.

The Depiction of Community

In Matshoba's fiction the black 'community' embodies an essential 'blackness' based on African traditions and values. This emphasis is a

constant theme in the fiction: expressions as to the positive nature of 'African values' abound. The narrators make approving statements about those 'who had never lost themselves in the cities, but had returned to the old land' ('Son': 78); 'the simple, despised people who feel the pinch of injustice' who exhibit 'a wisdom about life that is gathered from harsh experience' ('Glimpse': 54). A shared historical identity is at the heart of this black unity: blacks' social consciousness is underlined by their 'strong traditional inclination'. As the migrant workers who try to trace their kinsfolk in the urban township find out, 'This way you can never be lost, wherever you go, because everybody with the same surname or clan-name as you is regarded as a relative and is obliged to you' ('Pride': 126; 115). Blacks must therefore seek to build up a national unity that goes beyond ethnic affiliations in order to overcome apartheid.[19]

In line with Black Consciousness ideology, a racial unity which embraces all those oppressed by apartheid laws is represented as flowing out of the cementing force of 'blackness'. In this regard, the need to unify with 'coloureds' is a minor but constant theme during the narrator's visit to Cape Town in 'Pilgrimage' (see 'Pilgrimage': 98 – 9; 110; 112). Yet the unity of black communities is not simplistically portrayed by the author. There is diversity in the black community, as the author is at pains to demonstrate. This sometimes causes problems in terms of the unity of purpose desired. Some of the migrants in 'Pride', for instance, do not 'remember' (the choice of word is significant) their black compatriots in the

locations, and an atmosphere of hostility prevails between the two sectors ('Pride': 115). At times rural and urban blacks are shown exhibiting an attitude of contempt for each other; an attitude to which black 'sell-outs' such as boss-boys and police reservists are also prone (for examples, see 'Man': 24; 'Glimpse': 35). Moreover, male migrants are shown to treat rural women in a manner similar to the way their own employers treat them in the cities ('Illusion': 163). Moreover, Matshoba's narrators occasionally partake in discussions of exploitative relations which move in focus beyond racial issues to questions of economic power, class divisions and labour conditions (see 'Pride': 114; 'Illusion': 160; 'Pilgrimage': 97); paying particular attention to the ambiguous position of the black middle-class within the apartheid system.

The text also opens up at times to issues relating to the subjugation of black women. A number of the women Matshoba depicts – such as Mapula in 'Veil', Martha in 'Son' and Nongqause in 'Illusion' – are depicted as independent characters with initiative. The author retells the story of the last-named, for instance, in a manner which seeks to explore her actions and motivations during the 1857 Cattle-killing in a more favourable and sympathetic light than that allowed by white historians. He includes a discussion of the difficulty she faces being accepted as an igqira[20] by the tribal elders because of her sex; and shows her ability to 'slip out of those traditional chains and state her mind' ('Illusion': 173; see also 167 – 8).

He is sensitive to the problems caused for women by male chauvinism, giving space to a discussion between the male and female bus travellers en route to the Transkei about the predicaments facing black women, especially as regards the practice of lobola and the respective positions (and resulting antagonisms) of husbands and wives split apart by migrancy. In this instance, the narrator muses on the merits and demerits of both sides' arguments in this debate. On the one hand the narrator agrees with one of the men that:

> ... we're being blackmailed into slavery by the children (women) give us. Interesting. True to a certain extent, when one thinks of most of our sisters who regard matrimony as their sole ambition and salvation. Leave everything, education, government and work to the men. Fold your arms and watch with hawks' eyes for the one that'll flounder into the pit of rapture of your companionship, thus limiting the scope of his thinking to work alone, slaving in order to feed, clothe and house an ever-growing family, without any chance to pursue the very natural virtues of justice, prudence, temperance and fortitude.
>
> (ibid.: 155)

yet on the other hand chastising another male speaker's 'typical chauvinist arrogance, as 'libbers' would see it' (ibid.: 154); and giving textual space to the views of a young, independent-minded woman who turns the man into a 'cornered rabbit' with her forthrightness (ibid.:155 – 6). In another story the main female character is a 'modern' black woman, who knows she will 'marry when I like; not when someone else feels it's time'; with a lover who shows his admiration for her initiative in dragging herself out of her previous life of drunken fornication ('Son': 76; 71). A woman in yet another story criticises women for using make-up to attract men, and berates her lover for not having 'sound criteria for evaluating other people, not just

their sex' ('Veil': 192). These examples all serve to prove that issues relating to the emancipation of women engage the author's attention.

At the same time those blacks who underrate unity and the positive values of their black identity, and trade instead on their class privileges, are open to criticism; implicitly (such as the narrator-protagonist in 'Pride' who does not recognise a migrant who works for the same firm and lives in the same area of Soweto as he does ('Pride': 105)), or explicitly (such as the narrator's black middle-class Transkeian friend who makes him feel 'like a fly in a milk container' when he fetches him in a Mercedes Benz in Umtata ('Illusion': 186)). Therefore it can be seen that the author wishes the more privileged and better educated class of black people (of which, as a writer, he may be said to be a part) to commit themselves to an identification and commingling with their fellows. More privileged and better educated black people are prompted to eschew their self-absorption and political ambivalence and join the body of the community. The narrator's wish to travel to the Transkei in a third-class train carriage, along with people of the 'third denomination', symbolically enacts such a desired social re-positioning ('Illusion': 146).

A substantial degree of criticism is aimed at those individuals who remain passive and hopeless when faced with white oppression and disruptive forces in black social life. These are the people who have either allowed themselves self-consciously to become 'sacrificial lambs' ('Friend': 15) or who are ignorant enough to believe that the independence offered

by the 'Homelands' is anything but sham ('Glimpse': 45). Thus a character such as Martha, summoned by her white boss, forces the narrator to remark on her 'general appearance of a child summoned for a tanning', while the narrator's workmate Ntate Ali is a 'goodhearted old man, his only shortcoming being ... his religious fear of whites' ('Son': 73; 'Glimpse': 28).[21] Such blacks use whites as the measuring standard of right and wrong: tellingly, the narrator sees them as people whose minds have been stolen ('Pride': 126). They can never be accepted by whites, as those who try discover to their cost: they are treated little better than other blacks for their pains – blacks soldiers in the 'independent' Transkei are housed in barracks reminiscent of migrant hostels, for instance ('Illusion': 179). These blacks are regarded as being an obstruction to any achievement of the ideals of Black Consciousness, as the narrator discovers on his visit to the 'Plural Administration Board' for permission to visit the Transkei:

> I was not surprised by the Commissioner's amiableness when I reached the place. It was full of plurals, and as a black I stopped myself just short of turning at the door and forgetting my planned visit.
>
> ('Illusion': 157)[22]

Matshoba highlights the fact that black livelihood is constantly threatened by white oppression. In South Africa, according to the author, whites and blacks live in worlds of mutual antagonism. Although one of his narrators offers 'sincere apologies for labelling people' ('Veil': 189), and despite Matshoba's claim that a great deal of the inhumanity of whites is caused by the manner in which they typify and caricature blacks (see 'Friend': 6; 8), whites are often caricatured in his stories:

> This hulk was covered with a short thick khaki suit, cut Safari style, and on his head, the facial portion of which reminded me of the nose of an archaic aeroplane with its propeller represented by his grey brush of moustache, was perched a scout's hat with a leopard-skin band.
>
> ('Glimpse': 31)

> 'Mister Merwe', with a double chin, a glossy over-nourished pink skin and well-groomed black hair starting to grow white at the temples, looked like a Prime Minister.
>
> ('Son': 75)

Even in the situations in Matshoba's stories in which some hesitation towards, and acceptance of, whites occurs, there is always an example of white brutality near at hand to supersede the memory of more humane whites encountered (see, for instance, the passage from the 'pleasant young white man' to the 'so-called lady social worker' in 'Friend': 17). Noting (and perhaps ironically criticising) his tendency to regard all blacks who befriend whites (apart from himself) as 'sell-outs' ('Pilgrimage': 118), Matshoba's attitude of uncertainty as regards some whites does not undermine his attitude of closure as regards the rest (occasioned by 'your father's relentless hold on power' he tells a young white friend ('Pilgrimage': 128)); and it certainly does little to his writing about black State functionaries.[23]

White consumerism, and lack of fellow feeling, is referred to throughout: the white presence, and its baneful influence, is one of the principal points of focus in the stories. Beyond any individual whites who may be acceptable lurks the system which crushes black aspirations; and the black impulse to break free of this. All blacks undergo forms of slavery overdetermined by the apartheid regime, differing only relatively ('Glimpse':

41). Even the education obtained by more privileged social strata falls into this category:

> When a black person goes to school he does it in order to earn a certificate to serve in a better place, not for the sake of gaining knowledge to use for the betterment of his own people or to widen his scope of thinking so as to be able to analyze the world and find himself a place in it.
>
> ('Glimpse': 49)[24]

Thus, watching two migrants threatening to fight each other in a train queue, his narrator observes:

> Poor brothers, fighting among themselves, little aware that the congestion had occurred because we of the third denomination were fenced into a ... platform area, too small for our great numbers ...
>
> ('Illusion': 152)

Nevertheless, in line with the tenets of Black Consciousness, Matshoba in the long run constructs a black community which is either unified or potentially unifiable. This community is perceived as possessing inherent and admirable characteristics: a communalistic and humanistic ethic, reasonableness, humour, and solidarity. It is generally depicted as alert, resourceful and wise. Communal life demands 'respect' and 'equal and mutual obligation' ('Pilgrimage': 122): the narrator in one story remarks that whites do 'not know that among us blacks a man is never thrown to the dogs' ('Pride': 112). The individual who has full access to these communal bonds is to be envied. Thus, the black community collects money for the evicted family in 'Friend', offers them accommodation and agrees to keep their furniture ('Friend': 12; 16). An empathy towards each other's experiences of suffering is what makes up a communal consensus and

political solidarity in Matshoba's fiction. Despite its fissures and misunderstandings, and any class, gender or ethnic differences portrayed, this black community (and therefore its constituent individuals) has, it is finally suggested, a shared destiny. This hidden potential, fleeting as it might be at times, is the future imperative towards which blacks must struggle. It will require, it is implied and sometimes directly stated, a different attitude among individuals, and consequently in the community as a whole – an attitude of self-knowledge and knowledge of the world at large, and the initiative to act according to such knowledge. In this manner Matshoba wishes to produce a fiction committed to liberation and more closely in touch with popular experience, believing (in line with his Black Consciousness credo) that the black community has a wisdom and complexity that the writer needs to relate to and depict as completely as possible (Vaughan 1981a: 45).

Readers are therefore systematically presented with a trope of politically aware individuals moving within an only partly conscientised community. Despite his subsequent trial, Matshoba's narrator (who fights and defeats a racist white overseer) becomes an object lesson for blacks who have been rendered passive:

> Ntate Ali was terror-stricken through the whole circus in which the main bone of contention was why I had taken the law into my own hands, not who had been the aggressor or why.
>
> ('Glimpse': 31)

while in 'Pilgrimage' the narrator meets an example of such black initiative in the young Soks, a:

> ... typical South African urban black youth – trying to find a niche in a hostile world. As such we both lived in the world of tomorrow. We foresaw Azania, where ability and not the colour of a man's skin or his creed would be the criterion, where no laws would prevent any human being from living naturally, from being human.
>
> ('Pilgrimage': 122 – 3)

An attitude such as this is necessary for blacks who wish to build any sort of normal lifestyle in an abnormal political system.

The black 'community' imagined by the author is therefore premised on a collective past, and has the potential to challenge collectively the power relations of South African society. The potential of a unity cemented by individual human relationships and empathy is a possibility hovering over all Matshoba's stories. As a prisoner on a white farm, Matshoba's narrator comments openly on the message of unity which his stories express:

> I was moved by the way our little hardship brought us together in unity. We might be prisoners ... but our recognition of each other as people, human beings with feelings and desires common to all people, still held us above those who lived with hatred.
>
> ('Glimpse': 52)

An acceptance of the political beliefs of Black Consciousness is the catalyst in the fiction that allows black unity to occur. The black community might be diverse, but it is potentially like-minded. One notices, as a result of this assumption by the author, the speed and ease with which the urbanised narrator is accepted into a room full of migrants once there has been agreement on possible points of intellectual and political conflict ('Pride': 120). The rifts between individual blacks belong, Matshoba appears to believe, solely to the divisive influence of apartheid.

The Quest for Experience: Positioning the Narrator

Matshoba emphasises the need for a transformation in individual consciousness so that socio-political revolution might be facilitated. In order for liberation to be achieved, in his view, black individuals need to absorb and develop new kinds of social truth, both about themselves and the world around them. Many of Matshoba's characters are implicated in this desire for new insight and an alteration in individual consciousness.[25] A passage from 'false' to 'true' consciousness – from a less adequate to a more adequate and inclusive understanding of, and ability to deal with, the social and political life endured by blacks – can be seen as an immediate imperative in these stories.

They attempt to deal with the social and geographic complexity of black South African experience as fully as possible. Several of the stories describe the living 'maps' of those black communities Matshoba's narrators find in various parts of the country (see 'Pilgrimage': 100). Matshoba's fiction works from a regional level, piecing together a national dimension to the black liberation struggle out of disparate elements and experiences. In several stories the narrator travels between different parts of South Africa and seeks to understand a wide diversity of experiences in their relationships to each other. The travels of his narrators, and the range of issues for analysis they raise, serve to delineate the social complexity of black experience and consciousness:

> The traveller ... looks with a fresh consciousness at these places, distanced, questioning, in search of the underlying principles of a broad, corrective history. The map-maker seeks to connect the moments of a history of oppression and resistance, an alternative history ...
>
> (Vaughan 1982b: 131)[26]

It is hinted that each narrator's own experience of life is only one among many belonging to black people; thus forming part of a web of black experiences and interactions. In recounting their own personal experiences, the narrators may come to tell the stories of others: stories which point towards a vast realm of untold black experience ('The weekends were most exciting. They made me think of words I heard from a friend (I don't know where he had picked them up)' ('Pride': 123)), or further stories he promises for a future occasion (see 'Illusion': 103).

This suggests the possibility of a unity underlying these experiences beyond the 'contradictoriness of ... local predicaments' (Vaughan 1981b: 10). Matshoba can be seen to constantly humanise and politicise the landscape he depicts: rich farm lands are thus 'part of the eighty seven percent that belongs to the chosen' ('Pilgrimage': 106), while the aptly-named Traanfontein[27] 'was the place where I would learn the extent to which cruelty and hatred can turn man into something less than a wild beast' ('Glimpse': 34). He re-maps and re-names the geographical and social landscape in his own, black, terms.[28]

The role and positioning of his narrators is a stylistic choice which differentiates Matshoba from many other South African writers. In all but one of his stories Matshoba chooses to use a first-person narrator, a figure

usually identifiable as analogous to, and at times indistinguishable from, the author himself.[29] Most times the stories revolve around the actions and reflections of this narrator. The stories act as prolonged anecdotes of experiences the narrator has undergone and the sense he has made of them; or, if put forward on a diegetic level, the stories and experiences of other black South Africans the narrator has encountered. This narrator – resourceful, humorous and humane, inquisitive and cynical of the South African status quo – desires experience, empathy with and understanding of the situations other black individuals find themselves in. Despite the hardships he confronts, he can be 'in a queer way ... curious to go through with the experience of being on Traanfontein', or even be interested in what motivates 'sell-outs' like the farm-worker Bobbejaan ('Pilgrimage': 40; 46). He is generally socially enmeshed, having a friend or companions with him ('I reckon I hate loneliness', he says at one point ('Pilgrimage': 93)), and testing out others to see whether they will meet his requirements of friendship and conversation (see, for instance, 'Pilgrimage': 100).

The impetus towards self-awareness and a new, more apposite social truth for black people is expressed in terms of a dialectic between conversation and dialogue on the one hand, and self-reflection on the other. Travel, for Matshoba's narrator, allows both a 'critical and reflective estrangement from the impelled immediacy of local experience' (Vaughan 1981a: 46) and the production of new experiences – it promotes learning and reflection in the same context. New vistas come to promote compulsive

reflection in the narrator's mind ('Pilgrimage': 106). The first-person narrator is constantly placing such experiences and their reflections before the reader, to reflect on by example:

> At home I thought about the hostel before I dozed off. The more I recalled all the details of my visit the more I felt depressed. My last thought was that the world was still too far from perfection and that those who hoped for world peace at this point in time were building castles in the air.
>
> ('Pride': 122 – 3; see also 'Illusion': 151 – 5)

The narrator's travels therefore occasion debate and reflect on issues of socio-political and historical importance. The use of dialogue is an important means whereby inter-relationships between individuals are negotiated and experiences shared. Conversation is one of the principal modes whereby various members of black society state their feelings and learn to empathise with one another.[30] 'We all know', says the narrator at one point, 'that discussion is the easiest way to mutual understanding and honest friendship' ('Pilgrimage': 118). Conversation effectively decentres the narrator, allowing him to listen to other people's views and experiences – and, especially, any debates which may take place between other characters and himself – without imposing his own viewpoint. This is made clear in the attitude of the musing narrator on the train in 'Son', as he overhears the conversation which will come to generate his story:

> Don't anyone say I was listening in to anybody. In the first place I never go around with earplugs. And then, you see, they were talking through my head, my ears and consciousness forming a sort of crossed-line telephone system.
>
> ('Son': 66)

Conversation allows a shift in focalisation, as the narrator learns from the individual experiences of other characters in order to reflect on the wisdom he gleans: and, moreover, spread it further – in particular to the reader of Call Me Not a Man.[31] Matshoba's habit of addressing the reader directly, and pointing out meaningful elements of the story to him or her, helps achieve this effect.[32] The narrators of Matshoba's stories are constantly involved in a nexus of conversation and debate followed by self-reflection. Thus, as has been suggested by one critic, the author 'gives prominence to the motif of conversation because this is the medium of collective encounters' (Vaughan 1982b: 131).[33]

The characteristics of Matshoba's narrator embody a political dimension. This narrator 'exemplifies at a very humble, yet ineradicable level, the virtues of human fellow-feeling, and communal solidarity – virtues that are, in the populist perspective, the very basis of popular struggle' (Vaughan 1985: 214). Individual choice, commitment and investigation of the world are of paramount importance to such a project; and presuppose narrator empathy with, and understanding of, other fictional characters (such as the woman selling liquor on the train in 'Illusion': 145 – 6). The imperatives of black unity presuppose a narrator who can demonstrate and actualise a unity of human feeling: and Matshoba's humble, community-inclined, inquisitive and courageous narrators fit their author's chosen purpose exactly. Matshoba positions his narrators to be important only because of the experiences they undergo in

order to learn from and to share. His preparation for the trip to visit his brother on Robben Island in 'Pilgrimage' makes this clear, as he is inundated by questions from other residents of Soweto:

> ... 'How many people are kept there?' Another: 'Do they do hard labour?' And another: 'Do they wear the same uniform as ordinary convicts? And how many to one cell? They eat well? Sleep on beds?'
> 'I'll find out,' I would say although I had no idea how.
> 'Greet all those you'll see.' Plural. Not only him, but the others too.
> ('Pilgrimage': 93 – 4)

As a narrator, Matshoba inscribes himself as a fallible tabula rasa as far as the experiences of black society that await him on a wider countrywide level are concerned, despite his oft-stated resilience and resourcefulness. He stresses his 'childlike interest of a stranger' ('Pilgrimage': 132), and his uncertainty before new involvements. He shows a hesitant openness even as regards subjects he feels strongly about, such as whites ('Pilgrimage': 104; 118); and for a frequent traveller he confesses to a fear of long distances ('Pilgrimage': 94 – 5). He repeatedly brackets his own views with phrases which serve to relativise them, such as 'I thought' and 'I guess'.

Matshoba's narrators not only participate in his stories but are prepared to take action in socially or politically relevant ways. Even when listening to conversations of which they are no part, they wish to participate in them ('I felt like aiding him to coax the answer out of his friend' the eavesdropping narrator on the train thinks in 'Son': 67). In the one story where the first-person narrator is positioned as a distanced observer of the action – watching police reservists brutalise migrants – he still takes action

eventually, as part of an angry crowd who are sickened by the display of inhumanity, and intervenes ('Man': 25). If the narrator perforce remains powerless, anguish results, as evinced in the narrator's sense of impotence while witnessing the eviction of his friend and his family from their home (see the remarks in 'Friend': 9 – 11).

This openness on the part of the narrator serves to impel the reader towards a similar attitude of openness and alertness to new vistas and, above all, trust vis-a-vis the narrator and his views:

> One good thing about friendship is: a friend seldom asks 'where to' before he has joined you. It was only when he had got into the back seat next to me and greeted everybody ... that he asked where we were off to.
>
> ('Pilgrimage': 116)

The reader is also positioned, by dint of Matshoba's usage of direct narratorial address and immediate, oral style, to be part of this web of learning by experience. There is a sense in which readers are presumed to have had, or have the potential to have, identical experiences to those described in Matshoba's stories. Thus, when he goes to the pass office and is confronted by a white clerk, he notes 'I have heard some funny tales, from many tellers.... See if you can recognise this one' ('Pride': 112; see also 'Pilgrimage': 92).[34]

An implicit assumption therefore exists that, if black readers do recognise or undergo similar experiences as those embodied in the course of the stories, they will come to similar conclusions about these experiences. The partnership of author, narrator, readers and exemplary black

characters in the stories is everywhere implicit and, at times, explicit ('The victory was theirs, ours' remarks the narrator when faced with the political prisoners on Robben Island in 'Pilgrimage': 139). A confidential liaison is established between first-person narrator and readers, who are placed in a discursive space which allows them to identify, and mutually empathise with, the predicaments and identity of 'reasonable people' forced, each day, to suffer and experience the unreasonable.

The Quest for Knowledge: Teaching the Reader

Therefore Matshoba focuses on issues of knowledge and understanding in these stories. This can be seen by scrutinising both their subject matter and their choices of narratorial positioning and techniques of focalisation.

He seeks to empower readers – to urge upon them knowledge and insight – by means of a writing style in which direct explication and exposition predominate. Matshoba avoids techniques such as the separation of authorial from narrative voices, and rather interpellates his reader into the symbolic language of his stories via an act of immediate recognition. His literary style contains a noticeable infusion of oral elements – narrator interjections, digressions and exclamations, direct addressing of the reader, use of proverbs, and so on.[35] An authorial fascination with orality in all its

aspects is demonstrated – not only with other people's 'stories' and conversations but, on one occasion, even song ('Pride': 123). At times the author writes in the form of dramatic dialogue or supplies sound effects to enhance this illusion of orality (see the examples in 'Glimpse': 27; 38). The narrators' tendency to express explicit political statements and opinions can also be in part attributed to this oral mode of self-presentation. All of these techniques – techniques which, in my view, are more amenable to readers less familiar with conventions associated with Western-derived techniques of literary realism – attempt to embody the urge Black Consciousness intellectuals felt to fashion a literature which could be readily assimilated by a black South African audience.

Matshoba indulges throughout in a penchant for philosophising. His narrative voice is usually intrusive and immediately philosophical, pointing out and declaiming on issues of relevance to the themes of his stories. A movement from incident or conversation to interior monologuing is constant, as his prose interplays between events and the politico-philosophical musings of his narrators. His stories are interspersed with generic, abstract sentences and a didactic tone. A typical passage will serve to demonstrate this insistent pattern:

> ... the first time that I made myself known to them I was greeted with a helping hand. They provided me with the fare. Eighty-four rand for a second class ticket and three rand for provisions.
> The little that one gives grows manifold in the heart of the recipient. The recipient, not me, but the man incarcerated. The Christian saying goes something like: when I was in prison you visited me.
>
> ('Pilgrimage': 94)

This didactic mood is heightened by the use of questioning, argumentative narrators: who, in their interior monologuing and in their conversations, seek to grasp the significance of the events they undergo.

An urge towards knowledge infuses all the stories. It can finally be argued that a search for knowledge is the single most important characteristic of Matshoba's fictional output. The condition of racial oppression enforces a need for independent self-awareness that can liberate both self and society. In Matshoba, 'beyond the realism of the reportage one can discern ... a project in political self-education which unites these stories into a thematic unity' (Maughan-Brown 1985: 218).[36]

It is striking that the type of mind – meditative and speculative – that Matshoba's narrators evince closely resembles the minds of the positively-evaluated black characters in the stories. The white shopkeeper's actions in 'Veil', for example, force both black lovers into pensive moods as they ponder the ramifications of his violence ('Veil': 197 – 8); and this reflective tendency even occurs with the historical figures Matshoba evokes, such as Nongqause (see 'Illusion': 168 – 74). This self-reflection is a model for the act of reflection the author impels his readership towards:

> White jails are sparsely populated while black jails are overpopulated. How many black people are waiting in Central Prison for an appointment with the hangman? And, how many white people? What circumstances imposed on him and beyond his control led Solomon Mahlangu from a high school classroom to a cell in Death Row? Why? Think of this. Maybe one day we will get a chance to exchange views on this.
>
> ('Pilgrimage': 136 – 7)[37]

At the end of such musings, in all instances, 'my mind gave me an answer' ('Pilgrimage': 126).

Individual lack of motivation may, in the case of some individuals, block this search for knowledge. Incuriosity is a sign of political passivity, and tricks some black characters into accepting their political and social lot. Yet the author demonstrates over and over again that, politically, it is the knowledge imparted by whites to blacks – the lack of it and the substance of the little that is imparted – that causes this incuriosity and stifles black understanding. White oppression threatens the very possibility of acquiring meaningful knowledge. Here again, Matshoba echoes the Black Consciousness insistence that blacks need to articulate their own interests in the world. Thus, the narrator in 'Illusion' thinks back on the story of Nongqause taught him by a white teacher at school:

> He went on and on about a tale which I found hard to believe. For that reason I tried to construct my own version of the story: the conquest, the dispossession and the vision.
>
> ('Illusion': 165; see also 'Glimpse': 61 – 2)

It is noteworthy the manner in which the author transmutes the Nongqause story from the white history textbooks in which he first encounters it into a paean to black unity and political resistance.

It can be observed that Matshoba's narrators cease to be interested in new landscapes, artifacts or buildings on learning of any symbolic associations these may have with the apartheid regime. He loses interest in the Good Hope Centre when told that blacks need a permit to enter it ('Pilgrimage': 110), and has 'no further questions' on discovering that the

buildings of suburban Umtata are a legacy of pre-independence days, housing only whites and rich blacks ('Illusion': 179). He may comment ironically on the symbolic significance of such architecture: on being shown Rhodes Memorial in Cape Town, one of his narrators drily remarks that 'Rhodes's memorial has more recently come to light in Zimbabwe' ('Pilgrimage': 130) – a reference to the Second Chimurenga War at that time still in progress.

Repeatedly, Matshoba represents black initiative as what is required to resist and challenge white domination. The problem with the black prisoners in Traanfontein, as one of their number points out, is that:

> 'You guys all think as far as your own height. You forget that there's also some space occupied by many other things above you. If you're always looking down at the ground like pigs you'll miss a lot of things.'
> ('Glimpse': 56)

There is an overpowering need for a qualitatively better knowledge than that which enmeshes the black community under the apartheid regime. This knowledge requires honesty, truth and fellow-feeling from all blacks (see 'Pride': 112). Black aspirations have to be liberated from white assumptions as to what constitutes these aspirations. This new knowledge must go hand in hand with empathy. The narrator chiefly uses his imagination to understand the lives and motivations of others by putting himself in their places ('Illusion': 163, 'Pilgrimage': 94 – 5). Knowledge, for the individual, is embedded in his or her social empathy and actions.

Knowledge goes hand in hand with friendship and understanding – and is enmeshed with popular wisdom in the South Africa he depicts. The

problems faced by the individual are very often immediately problems of, and for, collective experience. This can be taken further. Knowledge, as it impinges on Matshoba's narrators, can be seen to affect the individuals in his fictional black community and actual readership firstly as collective knowledge, as they are '... always lost in crowds, our individual human nature nullified' ('Illusion': 146 – 7).

Techniques for Democracy?

The stories of Matshoba are, without exception, lessons related to South African socio-political conditions; lessons which articulate their author's Black Consciousness convictions. However, this didactic spirit eventually occasions profound, ultimately ineradicable, problems in his attempts to inscribe a political message which interlinks the individual with the community in a spirit of democracy. Matshoba's narrators come to direct the fictionally-expressed communal search for knowledge, both ideologically and narratively. The tropes of travelling and conversation, of humility before new experience employed work only fleetingly and inconsistently.

Firstly, in at least one story the narrator's innocent persona is exposed as a mere fictional device: we learn that prior to his visit to Cape Town the narrator has been to various other places 'in the four provinces' – throwing

into doubt his protestations of his fear of the 'unknown city' of Cape Town in that particular story ('Pilgrimage': 95; 110). Yet more importantly, readers are positioned to never stray too far in their expectations or conclusions from what Matshoba desires, despite the devices he uses to shift focalisation and political viewpoint.

Matshoba's style tends to overly direct his readers to draw the 'right' conclusions to the matters at hand. An obtrusive directing voice intrudes to fix into place correct conclusions for the reader time and again: Matshoba's narrator has a habit of eventually telling the reader directly what conclusion to draw from an incident, or what the symbolic tropes used by the author might mean.[38] At times this explicating, moralising voice intrudes before ('In order for you to understand why I never cared about the hostel, I think a brief description of how I viewed the hostel from afar will be necessary' 'Pride': 114 – 5), occasionally during, and most usually after the narrative action or descriptions of social conditions. Matshoba's fictional quests tend, at best, to unveil a knowledge about these human affairs which always proves Matshoba's main premises about the political state of affairs in South Africa. Very rarely do new experience and understanding lead to a knowledge which moves beyond the author's expectations.

Experience, in these stories, tends to <u>confirm</u> the ideological presuppositions of Black Consciousness which each narrator bears. The conversations, debates and musings they contain are determined by revelations that are ideologically in line with the author's, and narrators',

constantly stated main premises. An ideological closure is generally ensured which demonstrates the tenets of Black Consciousness philosophy. The narrator can thus be seen, somewhat paradoxically, to simultaneously know, and not know, what the experiences of other blacks will be. This can be clearly seen in the narrator's interior monologuing before he sets foot in the hostels in 'Pride':

> Before Somdali invited me there, the hostel was to me a place I knew of and didn't know about. I knew it must be hell to live there.... That was how I had seen it, and that was where my concern ended. But when it comes to the misery of life one has to partake to really understand. The deepest pangs of the man caught up in squalor are never really felt from a safe distance. Most people shrink from experiencing what it feels like to be down, licking the base of the drain. Somdali's invitations was my chance to get to the core of hostel life.
>
> ('Pride': 114)

Experience confirms knowledge, continually, from the micro- to the macro-level. The hollow lives of the black petty-bourgeoisie in Transkei, the actions of black policemen, the continual baneful presence of whites, the lessons of Robben Island – all strongly motivate and confirm the narrator's overall allegiance to his prior ideological viewpoint, despite his attempts to illuminate the diverse social landscape of South Africa. Experience secures a communal and racial hegemony dominated by the interpretations of Matshoba's relatively educated, articulate, and prescient narrators. Again and again, the narrator of each story ends up hearing 'what I had suspected all along', as his explorations evince 'to my searching mind the treachery of Apartheid' ('Illusion': 179; 183).

In this regard the device of the first-person 'open', 'uncertain' and 'popular' narrator Matshoba chooses – his way of opening up the text for readers to compare their own experiences to the narrator's experiences and the examples of social and political life to hand – does not allow the openness and uncertainty Matshoba prefigures to endure. The passage towards knowledge is always a passage towards correct knowledge. Even debates in the text are summed up and evaluated by the narrator (see, for example, 'Illusion': 155). When aspects, problems or experiences of black social life are discussed, these conversations generally end in closure. The narrator may also set up a dialogue in his mind with himself, and eventually answer the questions he asks on his own (as in the beginning of the trip to Robben Island ('Pilgrimage': 109 – 10). Meaning is thus clarified, and secured, by the summing-up of the narrator. While Matshoba is careful to provide an understanding as to what motivates his narrators and more positive characters, the voice of his own interpretations and conclusions drowns out any dissenting tendencies.

It thus cannot be argued that Call Me Not a Man provides a heterogeneity or dialogism of voices. Even when he uses a third-person narrator, for instance, as in 'Veil', the narrative voice used makes available an admixture of proverbs, interjections, poems and direct address to the reader remarkably in keeping with the first-person narrators in the other stories. One can further note, to a similar end, the ease with which Monde's views on the implications of Martha's 'coloured' baby in 'Son' segue

seamlessly into the views of the first-person narrator at the end of the story ('Son': 90 – 1). The viewpoints evinced by nearly all the characters in the community are usually in concord with the narrator's own – at times not only in views but in linguistic tone and register as well (most incongruously obvious in the diction of the migrant Khuzwayo in 'Pride': 119 – 20). It is rare for Matshoba's narrator to lack knowledge and understanding by the end of a story, as the stories are generally aimed at depicting his (and, implicitly, the reader's) passage from ignorance to wisdom.

The narrator's openly direct, confessional style sets the tone for most of the stories: yet the wisdom they demonstrate revolves again and again around two main themes: firstly, recognition and confirmation of the social conditions generated by apartheid and the individual-cum-social posture needed to combat these; and secondly, a description and evaluation of the social geography of black South Africans which lies outside the immediate ambit of experience of the relatively educated, 'African' township dweller the narrator is demonstrated to be (different experiences which belong to, for example, the migrant workers in 'Pride', and the 'coloureds' in 'Pilgrimage').

The author attempts not only to communicate with but also to instruct and form a putative black readership. This is the goal which infuses the ideological projects of his fiction. He, by and large, tries to mobilise a black readership towards the precepts of Black Consciousness in a white-dominated world, by 'mapping out' black unity and identity in the face of all

odds. In this cause the reader is given, if not a truth that is plain to see, at least a truth that is suspected and merely needs to be confirmed. In 'Pilgrimage', for example, the author's conclusion that apartheid can, and needs to be, combatted by black initiative, wisdom and sacrifice is confirmed by the narrator's conversation with his imprisoned brother at the story's end: a conclusion which summons the reader into the political consensus between brother-writer and brother-activist which is represented:

> '... one has got to think, brother. Use your spare time to think and read anything you come across if you're not studying. Develop your imagination to the point of being able to get out of here whenever you like.'
> You see, again? I told you. He confirmed it too.
>
> ('Pilgrimage': 140)

Furthermore, any reader who refuses Matshoba's lessons is dismissed out of hand:

> You tear a Rembrandt or a Da Vinci original from its gallery wall, break the frame over your knee, cut the canvas to shreds and set fire to the fragments.... Tell me, how would we who care about art feel towards you?... If you can't answer this one, you'd better stop reading right there, because you won't understand the real outrageousness of what I am going to tell you about (sic.). You're apathetic, a robot ...
>
> ('Veil': 188)

Irony and humour are used in parts of Matshoba's stories, but only to further position and direct his readership. An author's use of irony always relates to a disparity in understanding – between the author and his or her fictional characters, or between the narrator and the other characters, depending on the narrative mode and details of focalisation employed. As such, narrative irony always strengthens the author-function, and 'control of irony is a principal function of point of view'.[39]

Ironic means are used to show the conditions under which blacks in South Africa are forced to live. The ironic reality that black police reservists, supposedly the upholders of law and order, brutalise their own people is demonstrated and remarked upon in 'Man' (19); the honesty of Ntate Ali results in his being blamed for the goods stolen by the corrupt white overseer ('Glimpse': 28 – 9); the narrator's home is referred to as 'my beloved kennel'; a prison dog is 'our old friend the Alsatian' ('Pilgrimage': 92; 137), and so on. The irony Matshoba is concerned to establish, then, is the irony that comes from the apartheid system itself; a system which inverts all common sense and decency. Thus Vusi, in 'Friend', is a respectable family man, and his outcast status reflects palpably on the inhumanity of the political system which maintains order.

The irony may also be directed at the 'naive' narrator himself at the beginning of each story, before he has undergone the process of acquiring relevant knowledge. Thus, in terms of his subsequent experiences, the narrator's initial comment in 'Glimpse' that 'I had got away with a vacation on some farm.... Up to now no bidder had taken my fancy and I had stuck around hoping that a more Christian-looking person would turn up' ('Glimpse': 28; 31 – 2) reflects the incorrect knowledge and assessment the narrator then proceeds to lose: his 'initiation' into pain and humiliation and realisation of the 'slave' status of black South Africans on (or off) Koos de Wet's farm ('Glimpse': 36 – 7).

Consequently it should be noted that Matshoba's use of irony is uni-dimensional. It always immediately refers to the disparities between the apparent, false, normality of apartheid and its real effects on black struggles and aspirations. His irony is concerned with the disparity between white appearance and black truth, and the process from ignorance to knowledge of that truth his black protagonists experience. The author never inclines the reader towards an ironic posture with regard to the whole of the reading experience he or she is undergoing; he simply directs his irony to the untruths of white rule, and does not (for instance) direct it at other contradictions inherent in his characters and social tapestry.

Problems of Readership and Narrative Closure

Despite his urge to deal with and represent black South African society comprehensively in his work, and the need he perceives for as wide a black readership as possible, Matshoba in the long run allows the depicted 'community' in, and readers of, his fiction a marginal position of authority. The conversations, arguments and sorties into characters' viewpoints are enclosed and encoded in a final summing-up and dispensing of judgment generally expressed either implicitly, or explicitly, by each story's narrator. This narrative closure is a continual vindication of the author's didactic purpose and chosen ideological position.

This can be seen clearly in his characterisation of those blacks who are not amenable to change. While Matshoba, generally speaking, attempts to deal with character motivation and social causality, this is denied such individuals. They are the target not only of ideological condemnation, but also narrative closure. These 'sell-outs' accept degrading Afrikaans names, like Bobbejaan,[40] who has no compunction about assisting in causing black suffering ('I don't care about another black man who's poor like me' ('Glimpse': 40)). Blacks such as these are shown to be dishonourable, stupid and completely subservient to whites (see 'Friend': 4). In contradistinction to Matshoba's narrators, they are untravelled and parochial ('Glimpse': 35). They are 'starving leeches', 'a recurring pestilence' and may, symbolically enough, use skin-lightening cream ('Pride': 110; 'Man': 19; 20). They are constantly described as outside the ambit of black communality; the third-person plural pronoun being used to highlight their opposition to the first-person plural pronoun that includes the narrator with all other blacks.[41] They are always negatively portrayed and usually caricatured, a caricature which often resides in physical description:

> His eyes were bloodshot, as big as a cow's and as stupid, his breath was fouled with 'mai-mai', and his attitude was a long way from helpful. ('Pride': 111)

It is the hypocrisy, complacency and selfishness of such black people which have in the past, Matshoba asserts, destroyed the unity the author wishes to promulgate. They are bearers, when all is said and done, of a false

authority and knowledge given to them by the white political system, rather than the black community.

In contrast, each narrator is set up to be identified with, and to dissolve into, a communal voice; but in effect the narrator (and, due to the closeness of narrator and authorial viewpoints, the author) takes over this voice. The viewpoint of the narrator comes to encapsulate the community viewpoint it identifies with; for the eventual purpose of convincing the reader as to the accuracy of the author's opinions, which are presented as popular opinion. Such a strategy is in keeping with the notions of organic culture endemic to Black Consciousness; where, as I have shown, the writer is presumed to be able to speak effectively for, and on behalf of, an undifferentiated black community of which he or she is part.

This absorption of community viewpoint to authorial ideology can be seen most easily in the author's mobilisation of pronouns. For instance, in 'Illusion', the narrator ventures outside 'my Soweto' by choosing 'the people's' mode of transport – a third-class train journey. This is followed by a lengthy interior monologue during which the narrator reflects how 'the minds of my people' ('Illusion': 143 – 4; my emphases) are stolen by their listening to the views and ideology expounded over the radio – by these means transforming the pronoun from indefinite to possessive and enfolding the 'people' into the narrator's processes of authority and focalisation. Despite the identification of the narrator with them, these fellow travellers

(who are migrant workers returning home) are shown to be depoliticised, and thus in need of a healthy ideological lesson from the narrator:

> One disappointing aspect of their company was that they tended to reserve their personal opinions of migratory labour – victims perhaps, of the chronic fear (among the oppressed) of arrest for original views. Or perhaps their silence reflected the characteristic distrust of the poor for strangers. Or was it simply that they had accepted their lot?
> ('Illusion': 145)

Despite the narrator's surprise at the renewed alertness and confidence these migrants show on leaving the city, and the interest he takes in their conversations, his viewpoint prevails unremittingly in the narrative. He moreover unflaggingly identifies his own viewpoints and opinions as those he presumes his readers want to learn. This strengthens the ineluctable nature of the authority (in both political and literary senses of the word) to which he expects his readers to conform in the long run. This paradoxical – rather than dialectical – position of being concurrently both learner and teacher marks Matshoba's fictional purpose overall.

The ease with which Matshoba inscribes his choice of English-language expression is also potentially at odds with his desired readership. He shows a penchant for quoting from and referring to classical European literature (such as Plato and Shakespeare in 'Glimpse': 27 – 8 and 'Illusion': 163), which would be difficult for at least some of this putative readership to relate to. This goes hand in hand with an intermittent but continuing use of sophisticated and difficult English which is singularly inappropriate for wider township dissemination. While this inflated English can, at times, effectively capture the habit of using 'terms' employed by

scholars and students in the townships,[42] or assist the author's ironic intentions (such as the narrator's remark in 'Pride' that some hostel dwellers spend their weekends 'worshipping Bacchus' ('Pride': 107)), the problem nevertheless remains. Thus, the maid May and her young white charge visit 'verdant, willowy and tranquil parks' ('Son': 67; 76); the narrator's friend Joe in 'Pilgrimage' has a 'Herculean' figure, and later, in the same story, the narrator sees nannies walking 'mesdames' kids' ('Pilgrimage': 95: 128); the Mfecane ruler Mma Ntatisi is referred to as 'Regina belli' ('Illusion': 148); in 'Friend' the 'braggadocio' of those come to evict the black family is described ('Friend': 4); and so on.[43] This register of language, plus the fact that it is aped on occasions by other characters in the stories (such as Khuzwayo in 'Pride': 119 and Nongqause in 'Illusion': 178) works against Matshoba's concurrent efforts to use flytaal in order to mimic township speech; his slang-orientated inventiveness of diction and imitations of the register of oral township expression ('You're too strict maan, sisi! ('Son': 81; sic.)); or his efforts to intersperse his English with (particularly) Afrikaans and Xhosa. Furthermore, the use made of African languages in the text tends to be translated subsequently, thus highlighting an eventual reliance on English diction and expression.

This contradictory attitude of Matshoba's towards language usage belies the understanding embodied in his stories of the manner in which whites use English as a tool of personal power (see 'Pride': 110; 'Friend': 5; 'Pilgrimage': 101); and, indeed, his realisation of the way in which English

acts as a means of identification and communication among the better-educated blacks he is politically suspicious of:

> If you've been to school long enough to master 'the language' to a communicative level but have none of the hallmarks which place you on the rung of the gentleman, you know enough to compensate for the latter with the former: so you use 'the language' when the person addressed happens to be wearing a suit.
>
> ('Pilgrimage': 99)

It is possible to accept Matshoba's identification of himself as not quite the 'black gentleman' here. Certainly, his own biography – marked by interrupted schooling and political upheavals – suggests this. Nevertheless his command of English, and the skill and sophistication with which he mobilises this language places him at odds with a great number of black readers with whom he is seeking to communicate. Matshoba's usage of English betrays his own understanding of the problematic nature of any easy acceptance of it as a lingua franca of all South Africans. When in addition it can be seen that the oral infusions in his text have their effect diluted by more sophisticated reading techniques and modes of stylistic expression, such as flashback techniques and rapid shiftings in focalisation (see for example 'Glimpse': 60), it can be concluded that the degree to which his fiction can effectively reach all of the black audience it seeks, especially those less literate, is limited.

The author therefore circumscribes his own attempts to realise an effective pan-class black readership in South Africa by dint of his choice of language and register. As previously noted, he can be seen to keep white readers very much in view as well.[44] This unconscious gesturing towards a

white readership is, at times, visible in the text as Matshoba's textual explanations of vernacular words and phrases (see, as an example, 'Pride': 118). This is paradoxical, given the firmness with which Black Consciousness writers such as himself stated that they sought to direct their utterances expressly at a black community; although it accords with some of the problems other Black Consciousness-inclined writers were experiencing at the same time in their desire to reach such a readership.

The Class and Gender Inscription of Community

A strong racial inscription overpowers the gestures made towards any discussion of other social factors in Matshoba's stories. Class difference, for one, is sometimes simply identified with racial difference (see, for example, the discussion about education and white millionaires in 'Glimpse': 48 – 9). Moreover, a strongly humanist discourse, at times explicitly Christian, informs the text: as Vaughan points out, the type of explanation the author offers for oppression in South Africa seems to depend ultimately upon categories of 'human nature'. Consequently, racial prejudice is seen 'as an expression of distorted human nature' (Vaughan 1981a: 47; see also 1982b: 137 – 8).[45] There is a sense at times discernible in the stories that apartheid can be combatted by individuals who meet in trust and reciprocity: social exploitation and human alienation tend to be considered

as simply the result of a lack of understanding and the free flow of human communication ('Pilgrimage': 121). The problem with whites is consequently regarded as the fact that they do not adhere to the truth of the justice Matshoba is fighting for, or that they have lost their 'humanity' (see the narrator's speech to the white magistrate in 'Glimpse': 27).[46] Relationships of oppression therefore tend not to be seen in class or gender terms at all, but are explained through abstract, opposing concepts of 'sane' people against 'the trouble-makers'; of 'warmongers' opposing 'peacemakers' or of the 'humane' opposing the 'inhumane' ('Illusion': 147; 'Veil': 188; 197 – 8). While any reader would agree with the need for 'fairness and justice' and the 'dignity of man' to prevail in South Africa ('Pilgrimage':122, 'Glimpse': 47), these sentiments are to some degree limited by Matshoba's eventual reliance on such a discourse.

In the light of this, it is not surprising that Matshoba easily lapses into an attitude of distance from parts of the black community he is trying to incorporate. For example, despite the narrator's conviction that location people are 'not much better off than the hostel residents except in that we are allowed a temporary sojourn with our families' ('Pride': 122), the whole tenor of 'Pride' resists its stated purpose of showing that migrant workers are easily assimilable into the world of township life:

> Others formed bands who invaded the location at night solely to rape and kill.... This gave the hostel people a formidableness that made it difficult to befriend them or to sympathise with their terrible lot.
>
> ('Pride': 115)

Other attempts at the incorporation of black people into an overarching community also only partially and inconclusively succeed. Matshoba's discussions of socio-political and economic relationships are focalised through his own viewpoint and ideology: the viewpoint of a politicised 'original thinker' and relatively educated and articulate urban-dweller.

Rural South Africa in particular is often beyond the ken of his urban-based narrators. One admits, for instance, the ignorance urban black people have as regards the particularly vicious forms of exploitation black farm labourers suffer:

> These things are never heard of outside the farms because desperation and need keep the victims in silent desolation.
>
> ('Glimpse': 55)

Another narrator exhibits a sense of social distance from the working-class blacks with whom he boards the bus to the Transkei:

> I added my urban origin, though nothing to put much store by, to my short list of blessings.... The country was too dull and therefore mentally unhealthy. How could one develop a keen and creative imagination where the cow set the pace and the silence and loneliness of uninhabited space buzzed in one's ears?...
> My sympathies went to those who had come in last and had to stand all the way to wherever they were going. Nevertheless none of them showed any dissatisfaction with their lot. I reckoned that they were only too used to discomfort.
>
> ('Illusion': 151; 152)

In situations such as this story, the author's own social bias against rural people is evident.[47]

In addition, it is observable how the discussions of gender issues eventually enfold women into a community directed by men. Matshoba

displays a consistent inclination to encompass black women into an alliance with black men which is in opposition to white people as a whole, due to the racial oppression of apartheid. This can be seen in the narrator's discussion with the maid on the way to Cape Town ('Pilgrimage': 107 – 8), but is most obvious in the conclusions drawn by the narrator about the nature of Transkei's 'independence' which closes off the discussion of gender relationships in the bus in 'Illusion'. Here gender questions are subordinated to an agenda of racial oppression and resistance – with the independent, strong-minded female speaker finally berating and taunting the manhood of her male adversaries for accepting the 'independence' of the Transkei ('Illusion': 156). It can also be seen that Nongqause's positive characterisation in the same story relies solely on her relationship to Xhosa national resistance: on the fact that her 'young heart bleeds most for the fatherland'. Traditional women are therefore inscribed into a national unity directed by males ('Your maiden heart shall be fortified by the voice of your father.... Your word, through him, could gain the power to unite the tribe' ('Illusion': 169 – 70)).

Indeed, one of Matshoba's main concerns in a book entitled Call Me Not a Man is to project the need for a new spirit of resilient manliness – as opposed to an accepting cowardice – among blacks resisting the status quo. Matshoba is admonishing blacks to take on the 'authoritative manner of true African men' ('Pilgrimage': 120). Such a call will obviously be more meaningful to men. The reliance on such a discourse of 'manliness' can be

most tellingly observed in the fight between the narrator and the white overseer in 'Glimpse', where they act 'like a pair of schoolgirls.... Maybe if there had been only men on the ground floor the matter would have been settled in a manly way' ('Glimpse': 30 – 1).

The author tends to idealise the more positively-portrayed of his female characters. He inclines from time to time towards perceiving women as unthinking manifestations of nature, and even more often places emphasis on the physical descriptions of the women he describes. This amounts at times to obvious objectification; and is clearly articulated when the narrator directs his attention to the unfamiliar beauty of a 'coloured' woman on Kimberley station:

> I thought of a friend who used to say: 'When God makes a woman he's in real earnest.' I thought he had been right. Nature knows that without beautiful things to admire life would not be worth living.
> ('Pilgrimage': 107)

Matshoba thus displays an ambivalence as to whether he regards women as 'creatures' or 'sisters'. This ambiguity of attitude is continually apparent, but never more so than in 'Son', where Martha, who regards white women at the office party with contempt for being 'just ornaments' waited on by black women, accepts her own objectification almost immediately afterwards:

> 'Now you look like the queen of Sheba, beautiful sister. Abelungu bakho are going to wish they were black.'
> When she looked into the wardrobe mirror she saw that Busi was not flattering her. She wished she were a model and not a tea-girl.
> ('Son': 80)

Moreover, Martha seems to succumb to Dawid Steenkamp not only because of drunkenness, but also because her boyfriend Monde is not there 'to support (her) ... floundering will power ... to prevent her from doing what she was finding it hard to resist' ('Son': 83).

As a consequence of instances such as these, black women's initiative is ultimately merely functional to the 'authentic' social and political desires of their male counterparts:

> She ... had a constructively critical outlook on life. Most of all she was awake to and detested their state of subjugation. A sister who knew to which side she belonged; concerned with and thus giving courage to a young man the driving force of whose life was the conviction that he hated oppression and its resultant exploitation of man by man.
> The man himself explained to her how he saw this world and their position in it. She understood and contributed ideas that reinforced his philosophy.
>
> ('Veil': 191)

This ambivalence on Matshoba's part towards gender questions is, in my opinion, explicable as an anxiety as to his exact status and position as a black male vis-a-vis women. Such anxiety is echoed by Monde's concern, in the selfsame story, that if Mapula 'were sophisticated enough she would have labelled him a male chauvinist pig' ('Veil': 192).

Thus, while Matshoba's narrators make efforts to empathise with different social positions and individual viewpoints (such as those held by whites or by a travelling companion in 'Pilgrimage': 104; 109), or to remain open to experiences other than their own and thus avoid prejudice (see 'Pilgrimage': 140), such attempts are absorbed into the quest for truth and knowledge his stories demonstrate. This empowerment of certain views and

opinions in his fiction fits into an overarching ideological programme. The fact that this programme is ideologically closed can be seen in the fact that, despite the 'map' he wishes to convey of the basic unity of black experiences in South Africa, Matshoba only partially succeeds in moving beyond his own urban, male, intellectual viewpoint. Ideologically slanted depictions such as those I have described above (of gender, class and urban residence) subvert the author's ability to represent the black community authentically and with authority, in an egalitarian, unified, manner. The unity of purpose Matshoba seeks to inculcate in and through his texts is as fractured with regard to the ideological content of his stories, as it is with regard to his language and implied readership.

Conclusion

The short fiction of Matshoba can be seen to fall within the guidelines of the ideology of Black Consciousness he espoused at the time of writing the stories. His fictional programme seeks to create a black community knowledgeable and experienced enough to oppose apartheid ideologically and politically; and thus lend support to the political struggle taking place outside of the confines of the text ('The best way to live with apartheid is to destroy it' the narrator at one point remarks ('Pilgrimage': 126)). He seeks, therefore, to conceptualise and build a black community with a unity of

purpose and goals which will initiate and carry through a political and mental liberation from the shackles of apartheid. Despite this racial emphasis, Matshoba, following the concepts of many Black Consciousness thinkers in the 1970s, subscribes to the ideal of a future democratic non-racial society and, indeed, appears at times more open to the issues pertaining to white membership of this society than some of his contemporaries.[48]

He is involved in a fictional project which seeks to represent the acquisition of experience and knowledge (chiefly pertaining to the positive value of black experience and the need for a communal struggle against apartheid) in his protagonists, while at the same time inculcating this knowledge in his readership. He therefore writes a fiction which aims at assisting the empowerment of black people and authorising the validity of their experiences and values. Following on this, critics have tended to praise the authenticity and mimesis of these stories' depictions of black social reality under apartheid; while, as mentioned in the previous chapter, the author himself has claimed that his writing 'acts as a window into the black way of life' (Vlessing 1986: 1930). Such statements are often cogent. For example, shortly after the banning of Call Me Not a Man due to the Publications Control Board's dismissal of inter alia the 'improbability' of the subject matter of 'A Glimpse of Slavery', a lawyer writing in Staffrider defended the accuracy of Matshoba's portrayal of the parole labour system on white farms.[49]

However, it is clear in the subject matter and themes of Matshoba's stories that the actual experiences of many blacks in South Africa are incompletely explored and examined in his stories. Thus, while critics are correct when (for instance) they note that his story 'To Kill a Man's Pride' spells out 'in uncompromising and graphic detail the life of the black man in this country, and in particular the life of the hostel-dwelling migrant worker in Johannesburg' (Mackenzie 1990b: 29), this type of analysis begs a closer ideological examination of this author's work. Any sense of the specificity and ideological thrust of Matshoba's particular version of the black experience is eventually lost in sweeping claims that Matshoba's stories are 'an exemplary instance of life for the vast majority of black urban dwellers' (ibid.: 32; emphasis mine). This critic seems oblivious to the fact that the voices and opinions of black migrant workers in the story referred to ('Pride') are made subject to Matshoba's own discourse, ideology and vision.

Few critics have discussed the exact nature and implications of Matshoba's representations. His fiction concerns itself with forms of ideological empowerment: it attempts to formulate social reality at the same time as it appears to describe it. Thus, while his work does indeed give relevant and hidden insights into a violent and repressive society, the truth and authority of Matshoba's, or any other author's fictional expression cannot be assumed, compelling as such expression may appear to be. Such

literary expression is always, perhaps necessarily, ideologically fractured and socially incomplete.

Matshoba's fictional programme necessitates a prior authorial knowledge and understanding which is partly at odds with the fiction's 'democratic' and socially inclusive thrust. It can be seen that his attempts to make his texts as socially inclusive and many-voiced as possible are, eventually, overdetermined by the ideological and didactic impulses which generate his fiction as a whole.

On a broader scale, it is questionable the degree to which a 'democracy' of voices in literature is possible outside of more communal forms of literary production such as drama, theoreticians such as Bakhtin notwithstanding. Certainly such a democracy is difficult for an individually-generated work to achieve. In my opinion, the degree to which writers can take on different literary personae, and express points of view other than their own, is eventually curtailed by their own ideological and experiential proclivities and limitations.

Several critics have displayed, as I have shown, a tendency to stereotype Matshoba's work in a manner which says more about the ideological bent of the critic concerned than about the work at hand. The notion that literature can be 'democratic' and escape the authority of the writer concerned has been accepted in many quarters; as has the belief that most previous black literature about apartheid has been a literature of defeat, despair, surface stereoptyping and political dogma.[50]

The acceptance of Benjamin's notion of 'the story-teller' was the principal vehicle whereby this 'democratic' notion of Matshoba's fiction was inculcated into South African literary criticism in the 1980s.[51] The rubric of the 'storyteller' with which Kirkwood paints Matshoba, and which Ndebele subsequently designates as the preferable future mode for black writers in South Africa, is curtailed by the fact that, as Kirkwood himself notes:

> This storytelling milieu within which the storyteller invites the participation of the community is, however, a fictional construction within what remains a written tale, a literary production determined by the medium of the printed book and commodity distribution.
> (Kirkwood 1985a: 46)

Thus, the similarities of Matshoba's short stories to a form of 'storytelling' should not disguise the ideological closures of what is, when all is said and done, an example of written, realist fiction that is infused with an ideological viewpoint determined by Matshoba's own authority.

Notes to Chapter Three

1. The biographical detail in what follows is largely derived from 'An Autobiographical Note' in M. Matshoba 1979.

2. As Matshoba himself remarks:

> From time to time someone that I knew would stab someone else that I knew, fatally.... My friends started going to the Van Ryn place of detention for juvenile delinquents or to 'Number Four'... I knew prison long before my turn came to pay a visit there. (M. Matshoba 1979: viii)

3. In these assessments of Matshoba I am excepting, of course, the influence of performance-oriented literary figures at the time, such as the poet

Madingoane, whose direct stylistic, inspirational and physical influence was much greater than a prose writer such as Matshoba could hope to achieve.

4. Thus Mackenzie describes Matshoba's story 'To Kill a Man's Pride' as displaying a stridency of tone and self-confidence in order to proclaim:

> ... that the black writer of the seventies has nothing to thank the white man for ... (and) will through sheer force of will and indomitable perseverence (sic.) make his voice heard.... (It) makes it clear that the black person's struggle will be waged on his terms.
>
> (Mackenzie 1990b: 29 – 32)

5. Page references from the stories themselves are to the Ravan Press edition of Call Me Not a Man. Story titles are abbreviated as follows: 'Pilgrimage' ('A Pilgrimage to the Isle of Makana'); 'Illusion' ('Three Days in the Land of a Dying Illusion'); 'Man' ('Call Me Not a Man'); 'Son' ('A Son of the First Generation'); 'Pride' ('To Kill a Man's Pride'); 'Glimpse' ('A Glimpse of Slavery'); 'Friend' ('My Friend, the Outcast') and 'Veil' ('Behind the Veil of Complacency'). Note that I have added one story ('Pride', published in Forced Landing – the collection of stories edited by Mutloatse and published in 1980) to those in Call Me Not a Man.

6. For further information on these films, see J. Williams 1992: 28 – 9; 34 – 7.

7. See K. Williams 1992/3 and Matshoba 1993, as well as Matshoba's story 'The Return of Nxele' in the March 1992 edition of Mayibuye.

8. Statements by Bunn and Kunene in Gibbons 1987: 35; 19 respectively.

9. Ndebele had, as a student at the Roma campus of the University of Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland, taken part in the early debates and activities of Black Consciousness. However, thereafter he had spent periods of time studying for an M.A. and Ph.D. at the Universities of Cambridge and Denver respectively, becoming a citizen of Lesotho in 1979. He was subsequently refused visas and work permits to enter into, or work in, South Africa on several occasions during the 1980s.

10. See, for instance, statements made by him in Ndebele 1972 and 1982.

11. Despite Ndebele's remarks about his adherence to the dictates of political protest as a young man (Brown/van Dyk 1991: 50; Oliphant 1988a: 343 – 4), there is a tendency (see, for instance, Mackenzie 1990a: 22) in my opinion for critics to over-emphasise the completeness of the break Ndebele made with his earlier Black Consciousness beliefs. Many of his philosophical and social assumptions on art and reading remain, it can be seen, relatively unchanged from his student days (see especially Ndebele 1972).

12. Such comments imply, of course, a radical unease with the assumptions about literature prevalent in Black Consciousness circles. I do not attempt here to

discuss these fully, as the use of Ndebele's criticism in this chapter is meant only to highlight certain aspects of the reception of Matshoba's fiction.

13. Ndebele's and Kirkwood's totally different evaluations of Matshoba throw into question whether their assumptions as to what constitutes 'story-telling' are as similar as they appear. For further discussion, see footnote 51 of this chapter.

14. The fact that 'Matshoba features as himself' can be seen in the strongly autobiographical aspect to many of these stories. The first-person narrator, a resident of Mzimhlope in Soweto in 'Pilgrimage' – the township where Matshoba lived at the time of writing – has experiences at times virtually indistinguishable from Matshoba's actual life, with a thin veneer of fictionalisation over them (for instance, Matshoba's younger brother Diliza was in actual fact a prisoner on Robben Island, while the fictionalised brother in 'Pilgrimage' is older, and so on. Note that the narrator – always bearing the same characteristics and mode of speech – on some occasions is called 'Mtutu' – short for Mtutuzeli – and on others 'Thandi' (compare 'Pilgrimage': 99; 112; 'Illusion': 146).

    For further information on Diliza, killed in suspicious circumstances in 1986, and the rest of Matshoba's family, see J. Williams 1992: 34 – 7.

15. Thus Matshoba, according to one critic, uses images of township culture not directly associated with organised political expression in order to tap 'resources of previously unpoliticised, unstructured, disorganised (from the political point of view) dimensions of township cultures' and to bring 'in all kinds of oppositional nodes and forces into some kind of relation with a centralised mobilisation' (Vaughan 1984a: 204).

16. This is a familiar if unrecognised theme in Black Consciousness and the black literature of the 1970s and 1980s. Vaughan notes that from its inception, even when they referred to:

> ... highly volatile situations in which the 'whole community' seems involved, the stories of Staffrider tend to follow a fictional course that is oriented upon specific, individual trajectories - rather than giving sustained attention to structured, organisational developments of the 'popular will'. The preference is for locating popular action in the region of informal interactions between individuals 'of a relatively free-wheeling type. (Vaughan 1985: 220).

17. For further examples and discussion of this, see chapter five, footnote 34.

18. Only in two cases ('Son' and 'Friend') does the latter occur. Matshoba uses consistent third-person narration in only one story of those here under consideration ('Veil'). Its use in one other story ('Son') is encapsulated by a first-person narrator framing device.

19. See the discussion of the distorting potential tribalism holds for 'the concept of nationalism', as far as the author is concerned, in 'Illusion': 182.

20. I have followed Matshoba's spelling here. Uqgirha is Xhosa for a doctor; in this case, a traditional doctor and diviner.

21. Thus Vaughan notes that Matshoba's 'emphasis upon the personalised relation of the counsel-giving friend seems to go with a representation of popular consciousness as politically passive and fragmented' (Vaughan 1981a: 47). This is reminiscent of the paradoxical attitude Black Consciousness writers adopted to many other members of their society discussed in chapter two.

22. 'Plural Administration' was the word used by apartheid officials in the late 1970s – in place of the hated term 'Bantu Administration' – to refer to the management of Africans.

23. It can be noticed that Matshoba's attitude to whites, and to the political solution to South Africa's problems, actually hardens for a period after these stories were published, during the successive States of Emergency of the mid-1980s. While in 1981 he is warning black writers who oppose apartheid not to use racialistic utterances to fight racism (M. Matshoba 1981b: 45); by 1986 he is roundly and sweepingly condemning white complacency in the face of continuing black suffering (Vlessing 1986: 1931).

24. Matshoba enlarges, in another story, on the manner in which education in black society is overdetermined by white manipulation, and therefore aids and abets the class differentiation abjured by Black Consciousness:

> Alice.... That hell of my mental strife. My refusal to conform to a training aimed at raising me above the grass-roots level of life to pioneer a 'middle-class' or help make the Bantustans viable. Seventy Six, and my loss of interest in academic pursuits that had come to seem selfish. The many others who wanted to go on with 'their studies' as if the nation was not undergoing an upheaval. Death did not mean anything, as long as they lived in dreams of 'comfortable futures.
>
> ('Pilgrimage': 99)

Alice is a town close to the University of Fort Hare in the Eastern Cape.

25. For a discussion of this facet of Matshoba's fiction, see Vaughan 1982b: 137.

26. For further discussion of this 'traveller' figure in Matshoba, see Vaughan 1981a: 45; 1985: 204.

27. The word means 'fountain (or spring) of tears' in Afrikaans.

28. Matshoba himself notes his wish to examine social causes and human motivations:

> I want to reflect through my works life on my side of the fence, the black side.... So that I may say: 'These were the events which shaped the Steve Bikos and the Solomon Mahlangus, and the many others who came before and after them.
>
> (M. Matshoba 1979: x)

29. See footnote 14 of this chapter.

30. 'The conversation ... incorporates experiences and perspectives that are divergent, contradictory: it is thus also a medium of counsel, of critical interchange at a spontaneous level' (Vaughan 1981a: 46). Conversational skill is always regarded positively in these stories: witness the respect Mapula generates, for instance, as a 'creative conversationalist' in the single story with a third-person narrator ('Veil': 191).

31. For Vaughan, therefore, Matshoba's traveller is not:

> ... an elite figure, experiencing travel as freedom.... The traveller must ... be rooted in a local community: he must complement the role of the map-maker with the role of the friend, the neighbour, the counsellor who is also the all-but-identical victim.... There is a strongly practical emphasis upon the story as offering to individual persons - readers - the support of the resources of collective experience. The story offers advice drawn from these resources: it helps to orient the individual positively.
>
> (Vaughan 1982b: 132)

32. Vaughan believes Matshoba's 'thinness of ... fictional narrative serves the purpose of breaking down the customary distance between writer and reader' (Vaughan 1981b: 8).

33. It nevertheless seems mistaken to assert, as Vaughan goes on to do, that the fictional representation of encounters and interactions between individual persons is necessarily implicated in a liberal aesthetic (see Vaughan 1982b: 119 – 21; 1984: 198 – 9).

34. As another example of this, when visited by prison officials in Soweto in 'Pilgrimage' the narrator comments 'You know how it is: you want to crash out of the window and run for your life when you hear a white man's voice in the other room – asking for you in Afrikaans!' (92).

35. Indeed, one of the author's faults, according to at least two of his critics (Trump 1988: 39; Robertson 1980: 20), is the tendency for such digressions to interfere unduly in the process of the main story itself.

36. Typically, the narrator of 'Pilgrimage' therefore declares his journey to Cape Town is 'to open the eye of my mind to truths I've never pondered before' (94).

37. This passage is a striking example of my discussion so far. Its thrust is political in more than one sense: it prompts reader participation (via direct address and argument) and refers to the need for individuals (readers?) to act in the real world (following on the example of the executed martyr Mahlangu).

38. This is, of course, exactly what critics such as Ndebele find problematic in his work. For an example, one needs only point to the incident relating to the knocking down of the outhouse wall in Traanfontein ('Glimpse': 53).

39. These two points are made by Spivak 1987: 266 and Scholes/ Kellogg 1966: 241 respectively.

40. i.e. the farm worker in 'Glimpse'. 'Bobbejaan' means 'baboon' in Afrikaans.

41. Thus,'There were no morning greetings between us and the baas-boy, although among us it is customary to greet others every new day' ('Glimpse': 48).

42. See the remarks of Ndebele in this regard (Ndebele 1989b: 30).

43. One reviewer touches on this problem of register when he notes, 'Personally, I detest the idea that Robben Island should be referred to in abbreviation as an "isle". An isle to me is an idyllic, cool, peaceful place' (Musi 1979).

44. For a fuller discussion of this, see Vaughan 1990: 196 and Nkosi 1990: 20. Ndebele's discussion of the distinction between black South African writers' 'objective' and 'effective' audiences pertains here (see Ndebele 1986a: 148 – 9).

45. I disagree with Ndebele's assertion that Vaughan exhibits a form of 'Marxist economic determinism which has tended to reduce the complex operations of human society to mechanistic principles' (Ndebele 1986b: 55) by making statements such as these. The point, surely, is that Matshoba's humanistic explanations overpower and overdetermine the other explanations for exploitation he is simultaneously trying to give. Vaughan does however appear to exaggerate his point by criticising Matshoba for presenting these issues 'in a thoroughly personalised way' (Vaughan 1981b: 13). This gives the (from my viewpoint, erroneus) impression that an emphasis on individual characterisation necessarily denies any subsequent positive evaluation of a literary text from a Marxist standpoint.

46. For further, similar expressions from Matshoba, see M. Matshoba 1981b and Vlessing 1986.

47. A sense of relative social distance to some other categories of black South Africans is especially evident in Matshoba's introduction to his play Seeds of War, published in 1981, in which he dramatises the lot of rural people subject to forced removals:

> Such events have occurred many times before ... yet those of us who are relatively secure for the time being have either never heard of them or tend to overlook them.... So, dear reader, please meet Mhlab'uyalingana and his people neither as numbers nor as you might come across them in a hastily-written news column ...
>
> (M. Matshoba 1981a: v – vi)

48. The fluctuations of Matshoba's position in this regard are noteworthy. For instance, he is one of the black writers (along with Gwala) opposed to the break-up of the multi-racial P.E.N organisation in 1981 under pressure from its more Africanist members, such as Mutloatse, noting that differentiation on the basis of colour could be a hindrance to the unity of those 'ostensibly committed to the struggle against racialism in our society' (M. Matshoba 1981b: 45) – an utterance close to the A.N.C position Matshoba is eventually to adopt. Five years later, however, he is still expressing bitterness at the 'cold-hearted' nature of most whites in the country, saying that his fiction is 'trying to convert those who still have a bit of humanity in them' (Vlessing 1986: 1931). See also footnote 23 of this chapter.

49. The lawyer cited a legal case where a former parolee, Petrus Mofokeng, sued a white farmer for damages resulting from an assault on a farm in 1978 ('A Glimpse ...': 36 – 7).

50. For a refutation of this belief see Trump 1988: 59 – 60.

51. It should be pointed out that the definition (of what precisely a 'story-teller' in contemporary South African literature is) varies from critic to critic: thus, while Kirkwood and Vaughan both regard Matshoba as one of the first examples of a 'story-teller' in recent written literature, Ndebele's propagation of this mode of writing as an important step forward for black South African writers goes hand in hand with a dismissal of Matshoba's fiction (compare Mzamane 1986: xxiii; Vaughan 1981a: 45 with Ndebele 1984: 46).

CHAPTER FOUR: FICTION AND THE RECOUNTING OF HISTORY

Black Consciousness and the Narration of Soweto 1976

16 June 1976 marked the onset of a period of intensifying confrontation in South Africa, and it is no surprise that several novels written by black writers shortly afterwards dealt directly or indirectly with this event and its aftermath. Mzamane's first novel The Children of Soweto, and Sepamla's and Tlali's second novels (A Ride on the Whirlwind and Amandla respectively), investigate the human experiences, reactions and political activity in Soweto immediately before and after that fateful day in June. Serote's only novel so far, To Every Birth Its Blood, while referring to the 'days of Power' only fleetingly, extrapolates from the growth of armed resistance to the white government in the period following the Soweto uprising. The events of 1976 have a powerful implied presence as a fulcrum in this narrative, transforming the agonized subjective narration of Tsi Molope in the first section of the novel into a more objective focus on the activities of a group of revolutionaries in the second.

Regarding his novel, Mzamane has remarked:

> The Children of Soweto is a reconstruction, from an autobiographical perspective, of the events of Soweto in June 1976.... I try to convey, in a way that the several accounts by White reporters do not, what it felt like to be one of those involved, and to convey how life in the townships was transformed in its response to the call of the students.

> The book has been written to preserve the memory of these events, as in the 'tales' of my people I was told as a child. In this 'tale' I see little need to delineate individual character sharply because the community as a whole is the hero. My book is a record of the attempt to create a new collective consciousness, for which Black Consciousness in South Africa stands.... I have hardly bothered to disguise the didactic purpose of my tale.... My story therefore, is another effort to 'tell more of the truth than the historian's truth'.
>
> (Mzamane 1984a: 158 – 9)

In this quote Mzamane makes several claims which this chapter will subject to closer investigation, with respect to the four novels mentioned above. These claims, as we have already seen, are common to many black writers in South Africa who responded to the radical call of Black Consciousness, the major anti-government ideology prevalent among black artists, activists and intellectuals during the time of the uprisings. Firstly, it is maintained that black writers can claim to understand a wide range of the experiences and events which impinge on the black community as a whole, as a result of shared skin colour; secondly, that writers' can, as a result of literary choices of a formal and ideological nature, successfully and comprehensively reflect black communal experience in this period of political struggle; and thirdly, that radical fiction of this nature can convey these historical events and human experiences more authentically and strikingly than historical accounts, partly as a result of using forms of literary expression (which Mzamane calls 'tales') indigenous to the country's oppressed majority.

All four of the novelists under discussion admit to being influenced by Black Consciousness at one time or another during the 1970s.[1] It can be argued that their novels systematically put forward and elaborate aspects of

this ideology – even if, as in the case of Serote, to criticise and eventually move beyond it. As a result these writers have a noticeable similarity of preoccupation and motivation in articles and interviews supplied by them at the time. They were and are all urban dwellers (Sepamla – 'My inspiration is urban, completely urban' (Herber 1979: 140)), born and brought up in the urban milieu of the Witwatersrand; although Mzamane and Serote both underwent periods of schooling outside South Africa, in Swaziland and Lesotho respectively. Sepamla, born in 1932, trained as a teacher; while Tlali was a student at the University of the Witwatersrand when it was closed to blacks in 1959, and was eventually forced to become a clerical worker. Both of the younger writers, Serote and Mzamane, were in their twenties when Black Consciousness appeared as a force on black campuses – although only Mzamane was a university student at the time.

All four conceived of themselves as having discovered literature and their urge to write in the context of the cultural vacuum caused by the Publications Act of 1963 and the bannings, imprisonment and exile of many of the previous generation of black writers (Mzamane 1984b: 301; Sepamla in Seroke 1981b: 41; Sepamla 1980a: 26; Tlali 1980b; Serote in 'Panel on Contemporary ...': 25). This repression resulted, they held, in a general ignorance about literature among black people in South Africa; an ignorance which, they pointed out, had been deepened and extended by the nature of Bantu Education (Sepamla in Herber 1979: 138 – 9; Mzamane 1980a: vii; Tlali 1984a: 22).

They found various ways to combat this cultural void. The discovery of books – in particular African writers – was crucial to the intellectual development of all four. By receiving his education in Swaziland, Mzamane noted that he managed to gain access to the writings of banned writers early in his development, 'at a time when they ... were beyond the reach of most school kids' – and spoke of occasional extra English lessons with Can Themba (Mzamane 1980a: viii – x; see also his remarks in Handan/Myesgin 1984: 39); Serote remarked on 'the adventurous spirit I had' which allowed him to find ways to read the 1950s generation of writers, as well as the ongoing contact he kept up with literary contemporaries such as Matthews, Sepamla and Gwala (Seroke 1981a: 30); and both Tlali and Sepamla spoke of the difficulties they experienced in gaining access to books: Tlali in particular mentioning her surprise on finding her late father's collection of books and discovering that some of her own forefathers had run a printing press in Lesotho (Tlali 1980b; Seroke 1981a: 30; Sepamla quoted in 'Writers and ...': 28 – 9; Sepamla 1980a: 26).

The four developed further points from these observations. They noticed that, as black writers, they were perforce seeking new directions in their work, without the benefit of established literary models or standards. Both Serote and Sepamla questioned the validity of criticism from white commentators, and lamented the dearth of black critics or any form of guidance from the black community (Sepamla in Seroke 1981b: 42 – 3;

Serote in Seroke 1981a: 31). All four of them disavowed any watertight distinction between art and politics, seeing themselves as engaged in a search for 'black literary standards'. In the spirit of Black Consciousness, they all believed that writers should concentrate on subjects relevant to black life and thereby court, and intellectually mould, black readers to a new understanding of their personal and public circumstances:

> The black reader in South Africa today, the truly discerning one, demands that the kind of books he reads should reflect his true feelings and make him cogitate. He knows that he must place himself somewhere in the world today: he must decide his destiny. He wants to re-discover himself, to regain his dignity.
>
> (Tlali 1980b)

For them writing thus becomes a form of political activism, emphasising the historical continuity of black resistance in the country as well as acting as a conscientising force towards bringing about social change (Tlali in Seroke 1981b: 43; Mzamane 1984b: 303; Mzamane in Handan/Myesgin 1984: 39; Serote in Seroke 1981a: 30 – 1).

The Choice of the Novel Form

In a situation where performance was seen as an optimum form for the dissemination of views, several of the writers under discussion have commented on the problems of finding a black readership through writing longer fiction. As has been noted, the use of prose fiction took a secondary place to poetry and drama in early Black Consciousness cultural production.

As far as prose was concerned, short stories (which could be produced more swiftly than novels) were regarded as optimum media in a fraught political scenario (Mzamane 1977a: 1). This led to a situation where, even in 1973, the poet Mtshali could still say:

> In the near future I do not foresee any novelist coming out of South Africa because the urgency of the situation does not allow time to sit down and pen a lengthy piece of writing as demanded by a novel. Another factor against a novel is that poetry, music, and drama can be shared with many other people at the same time. But a novel can only be read alone.
>
> (Mtshali 1976: 127)

This emphasis on shorter forms of fiction was historically and socially determined, according to Mzamane, by the difficulties black writers inside South Africa encountered in writing longer literary forms such as the novel; lacking as they did security of tenure in urban areas and peace of mind, due to the intrusive and all-persuasive nature of apartheid (Mzamane 1977b: 25 – 8). The novel requires concentration and leisure from its writers and readers, if they are to fully cope with its formal stringencies:

> A novel is something you have to reflect on.... You have to analyse situations, and all that needs peace of mind and time.... You have to have form, you have to have perspective, you have to have style; you have to think of so many things.
>
> (Tlali in Lockett 1989a: 71; Tlali 1989b: 75)[2]

Thus, no continuous tradition of black novel-writing existed inside the country: many of the novels produced previously had been written in the vernacular and designed for consumption in Bantu Education schools. Most novels in English by black South Africans tended to have been written in exile (Alvarez-Pereyre 1988: 111). Mzamane's 1977 view that the black

writer therefore 'simply cannot publish an original, authentic novel' in South Africa (Mzamane 1977a: 1), while in my view overstated, nevertheless indicated a type of thinking prevalent among politically radical black writers in the early days of Black Consciousness.

However, a wider usage of prose was accelerated by the advent of Staffrider from 1978 onwards, although short stories were present throughout the 1970s in journals and magazines. Crucially, however, it was the novelists of the experience of Soweto 1976 who were among the first to alter the prevailing uncertainty about the usefulness and pertinence of the novel form. It was noticeable that most of the black novels published at the end of the 1970s were by writers already established in other genres, and that novels which dealt with the 1976 uprisings formed a significant part of the total output of novels in that period.

Mzamane believes these novels of 1976 to have been a 'qualitative leap' in black fiction, and another critic has described them as:

> ... a new category of literature. They have a more direct, less mediated relationship with the forces of history and politics than western (sic.) novels, seeking, indeed, a much more interventionist role than their counterparts in the West would dare to lay claim to, and seeking also access ... to a mass audience – a mass audience already receptive to literature through its exposure to street and community theatre and poetry.
>
> (Watts 1989: 248)

Critics spoke of these novels as exhibiting an ideological and formal purpose different to previous novels in South Africa written by blacks or whites. The 'Soweto novel' had:

> ... a structural complexity which its immediate predecessor lacks ... and contains a number of innovations and modifications. In both character and situation there is a deliberate turn away from ambiguity and subtlety to direct confrontation and radical action. Events in the novels jump into one another; the numerous characters fuse and separate; the time sequence varies with each episode and point of view, so that the work becomes loose and variegated.
>
> (Mzamane 1991: 192)

Claims were made about the political efficacy of these novels: Mzamane putting forward the familiar claims about their 'comprehensive coverage of the nature, the character and essence of the revolt. The sum total of the picture adds up to a documentation of African experience in the period' (idem.), and Watts stressing the effect these novels sought to inculcate in black readers through their choice of literary techniques; techniques which allow, she believes, a re-identification of the reader in 'positive, optimistic and active terms, rather than ... old negative, pessimistic and passive ones' (Watts 1989: 221). This was, essentially, the goal which Black Consciousness had in mind as well.[3]

The novelists of the 1976 uprising under discussion in this chapter all opted to use English as their language medium in portraying the political crucible of Soweto during and after 1976. Various reasons were given for this choice: the unifying potential of the language, the access it gave to a wider world of ideas and an international audience, the association of the vernacular languages with Bantu Education, and the fact that the novelists saw themselves as adapting and using a form of 'African English' (Sepamla 1976: 20 – 1; Sepamla 1980b: 85; Tlali 1984a: 24; Mzamane 1978: 43).[4]

Moreover, these writers seem to have been impelled towards the novel form in dealing with this uprising, and its wider effects on South African national politics, because of the scope and depth of depiction this genre allowed. Mzamane for one noted during an interview that it was "only very recently, particularly after Soweto, that we almost all of us decided "Look, we can write novels"" – agreeing with the interviewer that he had chosen the particular genre because he wished to record 'everything of an event'. The novel had promised him 'extended documentation':

> It seems that you can do that in the novel. That is why my structure of that particular novel (i.e. Children) is so episodic. You see, in a novel form you can put in a scene that is really seriously speaking peripheral, but if you have considerable craftmanship you can, as the scene develops, integrate it into the totality of what you want to do.[5]

Earlier, a year and a half before the publication of Children, Mzamane elaborated on his motives for choosing a longer prose form:

> Four years have passed since the Soweto uprisings. We've had time to ponder over a wide range of issues connected with the events. I feel that a major literary statement, not just a snipe-shot, is now due, which is just what I've tried to do in this work.[6]

Other reasons have been postulated for this shift towards novels after Soweto by critics as well. Kirkwood suggested in 1980 that the move towards written literature might be connected to the disintegration of many of the performing writers' groups that had flourished in the mid-1970s: 'perhaps because the political momentum of 1976 is dying away a little'. In such a scenario some writers were, he postulated, moving towards individual acts of writing and a concern for technical, rather than simply political, literary concerns (Visser 1980: 25). Conversely, Watts believed these novels

were part of a new kind of 'literature of combat' in South Africa, aimed at not only social and historical documentation but also a movement towards commitment on the part of black writers and readers. At the same time she saw them as 'attempting to give form to the escalation of the liberation movement in the seventies, and to convey to their readers the dynamics of the corporate effort involved' (Watts 1989: 211 – 2).

The re-emergence of black novels by writers working inside the country became an established fact by the end of the 1970s. It was furthermore noticeable that these novels often expressed similar concerns in their fictional treatment of the 'days of Power.' It is the emphases and disjunctures of their concerns, and the manner in which these are put forward, which are at issue in what follows.

The Novels of 1976[7]

The three novels which deal directly with June 1976 have a large degree of similarity in plot structure and thematic preoccupation. Tlali's novel is constructed as an account of the lives of Soweto residents in the year following the uprising. The use of dialogue and the interweaving of several stories of human interest allow her to present a number of areas of black discontent. Mzamane is mostly concerned with the activities of high school pupils who try to organise resistance to the State. His narrative is

interspersed with digressions, sociological explication and authorial interjections. A socio-historical element is important to both these novels. Sepamla's novel is a more conventional piece of prose, containing elements of popular fiction and written somewhat in the manner of a thriller (Barboure 1984: 171 – 2).

After a brief prelude during the Israeli Embassy siege in Johannesburg in 1975, Amandla describes (using a third-person narrator) the events of the uprising mainly through the experiences and conversations of an extended family living in the Rockville area of Soweto. The love affair of Felleng and Pholoso,[8] the latter a high school student who becomes the leader of the Soweto Students Representative Council until his arrest, is one of the main areas of attention of the novel: Amandla ends with their parting and his departure into exile. Several other stories are interwoven with this: the death and funeral of Dumisani, shot by the police in the first clash between police and students; the attempts of Pholoso's grandmother Mrs. Moeng (Gramsy) to save enough money to erect a tombstone on her husband's grave in Braamfontein cemetery; the difficulties her niece Agnes has in her marriage to a drunken husband; the effect the dislocations of the Soweto uprising have on her other niece Nana and her politically articulate husband Moremi; an adulterous affair featuring a black policeman, Nicodemus; the political organisation undertaken by a group of students under Pholoso; Pholoso's capture and escape from imprisonment, and his subsequent exile. Into this web of family experience Tlali places a number

of other figures, historical events and issues of discontent and political debate in Soweto at the time.

The Children of Soweto is divided into three sections, the first and third narrated in the first person by the protagonist Sabelo, a high school student who leads student organisation in Soweto until his exile in Botswana at the end of the novel. The first section gives an idea of the inadequacy of Bantu Education and resulting student grievances, and culminates in their organising debates and a political structure to resist the imposition of Afrikaans. The second section tells, in the third person, the story of a white insurance salesman caught in the house of a black colleague on the day of June 16, and the family's grudging efforts to save him. The third section, by far the longest, deals in the main with student resistance to the State, led by Sabelo, for a period of roughly a week after the beginning of the uprising. In this short period Mzamane places most of the major historical events of the six-month period after the uprising: the spread of resistance, the arrest and torture of students, the backlash by Mzimhlope hostel residents, the attempted march by students through Johannesburg to John Vorster Square, the assassination of the hated black policeman Hlubi, and the funeral of the narrator's friend Muntu. The action is regularly punctuated by asides and digressions explaining the origins, motives and results of events: in parts the novel resembles nothing so much as a sociological treatise.

A Ride on the Whirlwind downplays the sociological and historical concerns of the other two novels, without losing sight of them entirely. The action begins two days after the uprising with the arrival at Park Station of the guerrilla Mzi, sent by the Resistance Movement in Dar es Salaam to kill a brutal black policeman, Andries Batata. He meets with Uncle Ribs Mbambo, his contact man, and through him the student leader Mandla,[9] who with a small group of young followers is directing political resistance in Soweto from the house of Sis Ida. Mandla and Mzi form an alliance of common interest and together blow up a police station; Mzi subsequently assassinates Batata. Several of Mandla's followers, including Sis Ida, are arrested after an accident with explosives at their house. Desciptions of their interrogation and torture follow. The novel ends with Mandla fleeing into exile and Mzi attempting to persuade a white helper to drive him to Swaziland.

In To Every Birth Its Blood Serote's concerns are rather wider. The first part of the novel, seen through the eyes of Tsi, an inhabitant of the township of Alexandra just outside Johannesburg, is pervaded with despair. Tsi, an ex-journalist who is trying his hand at acting, spends his time aimlessly moving between his friends' houses and the shebeens of the township, or listening to music. Although there are references to his brother's detention and to friends who are undertaking political work, Tsi's own life is fruitless and irresponsible. He broods on the traumatic assault he suffered at the hands of the police while he was a journalist. The onset

of a new era of black pride and determination (a reference to Black Consciousness) in the township galvanises him into action. He becomes an extension worker at a correspondence college in Johannesburg. The success of his efforts, both in real educational terms and in terms of the rehabilitation of his own personal life and psychological being, is shaken by his being interrogated by the Security Police. On his release he is confronted by the lack of political courage of his American employer.

The second section of the book takes place a year or so later, after the uprisings of 1976, and is focussed through the viewpoints of various characters. The uprising of 1976 is perceived as important for the black community in that, in their resistance, 'for the first time, we were one' (Birth: 193). The characters that emerge in the second part of the novel are involved in the burgeoning of organised resistance to overthrow the apartheid Government under the auspices of a political organisation, the Movement. In distinction to the anomie and defeat apparent in many of Tsi's earlier monologues, an atmosphere of political determination and commitment prevails in this section. Armed resistance against the State is carried forward by the Movement until the war spreads to the rural areas and surrounding countries as well. Some of the protagonists, such as Oupa (Tsi's nephew, whom we come across as a child in the first section) are captured and tortured to death; others flee to neighbouring countries or return to take up the struggle. The novel ends with South African airplanes circling over a beleaguered Gaborone, where Tsi has taken refuge. These

scenes are intercut with the symbolic birth of a child who signifies the desire for the birth of a new, post-apartheid South Africa arrived at through struggle and suffering.[10]

The Conceptualisation of History and Society

All four novels take place primarily against the urban backdrop of Johannesburg and its surrounding townships, and delineate the process of mobilisation and violent resistance against the apartheid system carried forward during and after June 1976. All refer to a variety of injustices suffered by black people in the country – Bantu Education, the pass laws, the 'Homelands' policy, the lack of housing and amenities in the townships, the anti-social and violent behaviour thus engendered, and the feelings of general frustration and hopelessness that apartheid wills on black people.

There is a striking sense that the events of 1976 herald the beginnings of a process which will culminate in a 'new life', despite any suffering which might occur in the meantime. This change will be the result of the active resistance of the community, spearheaded by a vanguard of school children and activists. Each novel can be seen as an expression of a desire for political revolution, as part of the struggle of a black South Africa infused with a sense of political destiny. The young lawyer at Dumisani's funeral makes this clear:

> 'South Africa is a signatory to the Human Rights Charter. Yet it is true that the whites of this land deliberately and consciously deny the blacks that right to freedom.... Like the Boers at Slachtersnek, we give our pledge today that we shall never lay down our arms, we shall never rest, until the truth prevails – until a just, peaceful society for all emerges here in our land ...'
>
> (Amandla: 77 – 9)

The Afrikaners (who are most often depicted as actively opposing this quest for freedom, despite their own nationalist struggle for liberation from British colonialism in the past) are shown to be unable to match this impetus with any moral and human values of their own. When in Sepamla's novel Colonel Kleinwater of the Security Police recognises that the uprising marks the birth of a new era in the country, for instance, his response is jaded and half-hearted ("Ag, I wish I could retire to my farm, Vergenoeg.[11] I am tired" (Ride: 227)). In general, the whites can only respond with brutality, fear or vacillation to the upsurge of black nationalist fervour the novels embody.

There are differences of style and register between the four novels and, except possibly in the case of Sepamla, within each novel itself. All four, however, can finally be described as desiring to give an authentic and mimetic portrayal of events. Despite the predominantly realistic mode employed in all of them (except in sections of Serote),[12] they can be seen not only as attempting to mirror the social history of the period, but also as trying to assist a political denouement through the conscientisation of their black readership. The similarities in their themes reflect similar political concerns. The authors, free to select from a range of available historical

episodes, incidents and settings, tend to select and interpret the history in suggestively similar ways.

Sometimes the political proselytisation is direct: the device most often employed here is authorial interjection, discussion between various characters where political viewpoints are expressed, and the quoting of pamphlets and speeches made at debates and funerals. An item which is perceived as symbolic of the white system, such as a P.U.T.C.O. bus, can also initiate wide-ranging discussion among spectators (Amandla: 117 – 28). Authorial ideology sometimes intrudes directly: in Sepamla and Mzamane a closeness to and identification with the action of the novels on the part of the authors can occasionally be observed, while it has been noted that in Amandla 'it is sometimes difficult to distinguish the voice of Miriam Tlali from that of her characters' (Alvarez-Pereyre 1988: 117).

The political debates that occur may provoke heated disagreement and portray differences in political and organisational perception, as in Amandla. Yet the difference of views expressed by the characters does not, finally, constitute any basic challenge to the ideological thrust the reader is left with. Each novel portrays a history where black resistance to apartheid is perceived in terms of an organic, racially communal groundswell which can be carried forward into the future, with little attempt to discuss or criticise past or present political strategies. Other than in the case of Amandla, where one character puts forward a politically critical, Unity Movement viewpoint,[13] the characters who are out of touch with

community feeling are all shown to be politically suspect in the long run. For instance, there is an incident in A Ride on the Whirlwind of a far-ranging criticism being made of the organised resistance to the Sophiatown removals in the 1950s; but the person who makes them, the shebeen owner Noah Witbaatjie (the name itself is indicative)[14] very quickly turns out to be a police spy. The novels therefore explicate and naturalise the inevitability and correctness of black political aspirations as formulated by their authors. While the reader may identify with these aspirations, it can be noticed immediately that these aspirations are depicted in a manner which does not undertake to show differences in political viewpoints in the black community, or to problematise and socially differentiate this community significantly.

One of the central concerns of the novels is a retrieval of black history. Constant reference is made to the figures and events of past resistance: the Sofasonke party, Sophiatown, Mandela, Sharpeville, the I.C.U., May Day and so on. At times elderly people, such as Gramsy and Makolo Magong in Amandla, function as individual examples of the history of black resistance and fortitude. Through Tsi's monologue, Serote traces the collective history of a township and community, Alexandra, in the 1950s (Birth: 28 – 30). The uprisings of 1976 are consistently regarded as the latest examples of a continuum of black resistance, and black suffering is traced back to the encroachment of whites. This last point is conveyed in narratorial comments on incidents such as pass raids ('For men knew the

meaning of these raids; they deplored their own impotence in the face of them and they cursed the day the last impi was routed by whitey' (Ride: 95), and in terms of the reasons for June 16 itself ('Looking back in time we can usually tell to the very minute when it all started; the day Dingane's forces were routed at Blood River, the day of Bulhoek, Sharpeville and so on' (Children: 77 – 8)). Furthermore, spiritual and cultural roots are mobilised as an active and ever-present force in the contemporary struggle for freedom. Consequently Pholoso is saved from the police by a combination of his badimo (ancestors) and Gramsy's prayers: while Sepamla's description of Mandla the student leader and Mzi the revolutionary planning the assassination of Batata emphasises how their voices 'droned in the room like the small home-made drum in a religious ceremony' (Ride: 122). Other examples of such conceptualisations are numerous. Therefore, the black history of resistance, suffering and potential future triumph in South Africa is written as part of a racial teleology which does not attempt to signify or discuss its discontinuities.

The only general exception in this regard is the implicit and explicit criticisms made of the older generation of parents for their lack of commitment. Neo, the student activist, expresses this succinctly when he observes that if

> ' ... they'd devoted more of their time to the overthrow of the System first instead of trying to carve themselves a comfortable niche in this faggot-ridden (sic.) country, we wouldn't have been in this mess.'
> (Children: 114)[15]

The parents may well identify the songs the schoolchildren sing as being the same ones they sang before the banning of the A.N.C and P.A.C (Amandla: 26), but we are left in no doubt that the younger generation leads the struggle within the townships: Mmane Marta says to Gramsy "We're in the hands of the children now. They are as good as our parents" (ibid.: 35). In terms of their concern with armed revolutionary struggle, Serote and to some extent Sepamla make further distinctions in this area; Serote focusing on the difference that emerges between Tsi's father's defeated silence and Ramono, Dikeledi's father, who is prepared to go to jail for his work in the Movement.

The Urban Community

These novels are characterised as having the collective black community as a primary focus and point of reference. Mzamane notes:

> Although we meet flesh and blood characters with real desires and distinctive eccentricities, their individualism is submerged beneath the collective predicament ... the private world of the individual, without necessarily being desecrated, ceases to be as important to explore as public conduct and accountability in the arena of struggle. The effect is to downplay charismatic leadership and emphasise interdependence and organisation in which all have a role ... their private lives are never allowed to cloud the collective predicament or to assert themselves too much over the collective aspirations of the communities in which they live. The community as a whole is the hero in these novels.
>
> (Mzamane 1991: 192)[16]

The despair and squalor of the black townships is juxtaposed to the advanced technology and comfort of the central city; and their inter-relationship – ghetto to industrial giant, labour to capital – is stressed. In the words of Serote, Johannesburg is the 'Golden City' that belongs to whites, serviced by its surrounding townships, the 'Dark Cities' that belong to blacks (Birth: 28).

Soweto is described as a 'monster' (Ride: 162). Nonetheless, it houses a disparate community of black people. Thus, the way in which this urban landscape is portrayed and humanised by the novelists is noteworthy. All of the works under discussion depict an urban community in place, despite the insecurity of apartheid laws. The writers comment on the divisive effects apartheid laws and migrant labour have on family life and any confidence blacks can have in their permanence in towns. Yet most of the important characters deployed in the novels form part of that stratum of the black community which is more or less permanently urbanised, even if they do still have links with rural life (references to the fact that parents send their children away from Soweto to country relatives during the school uprising are made, for instance, and Serote makes a rural-urban link through the village of Walmanstadt). It can be argued that this is a portrayal that has occurred seldom in black South African novels of earlier periods, elaborated only in the short fiction and autobiographies of the 1950s. In terms of previous novels, The Marabi Dance as well as some of the work of Peter Abrahams, Alex la Guma, Dugmore Boetie and Rive can perhaps be

seen to conceptualise black urban society in a similar manner. Much previous long fiction by black writers before the 1950s had, in fact, dealt with the city as a sink of vice and temptation, destroying the unwary and generally temporary visitor or migrant worker from the rural areas: a theme which still prevails in some vernacular novels in the 1960s and early 1970s.[17]

Inhabiting this urban milieu is a welter of people who individually may not be known to the novels' characters, narrators and authors but nevertheless are part of the community they perceive as their own. The protagonists move against a backdrop of urban dwellers who are identified as belonging to a diverse yet communal world existing simultaneously in time to the actual events of the novels, but with a reality outside this fictional world and familiar to many black readers:[18]

> As always there were many cars on the road because Soweto takes the beat of its own heart from the tense activity of throbbing Johannesburg: the butcher, the vegetable dealer, the grocer, the factory-hand, the window-washer, all these and more hurry into town in the morning and as the day stretches east to west and its shadows west to east Soweto trickles back into its own hole.
>
> (Ride: 148)

In a manner analogous to the anti-Government guerrillas operating in South Africa during this period (who are often prominent characters in these novels) this familiar yet faceless community can function as a space where both individual activist and (on an extradiegetic level) author can subsume their actions and draw inspiration from 'the people', whose 'employees' they wish to be.[19]

The landscape in which this community operates is geographically specific. Fictional activity takes place in a detailed real world: Sepamla's Uncle Ribs, we are told, lives in Mncube Drive, Dube; Tlali's Gramsy at No. 5035 Rockville and Moremi's family in Lekhooa Street; the characters in To Every Birth Its Blood move along familiar Alexandra streets such as Selborne, Hofmeyr and John Brandt; and most of the action in Amandla takes place in the meticulously described area around Vundla Drive, Moroka. Many of the characters could, indeed, be the people next door.[20]

Black people are shown to be part of a racial brother- and sisterhood stretching far beyond their immediate family or ethnic interests: the extended family in Amandla seems in fact to be the link mediating the individual characters' relationships to the larger community, as well as the social arena where the generosity and warmth postulated for the black community can be seen already in action. Here the personal and the political are fused. As the teacher Moremi points out, ethnic and generational roots are considered unimportant in 'cosmopolitan' Johannesburg and Soweto, "where in one family all are fused into one" (Amandla: 163; see also Birth: 235 – 6).[21]

The greed and avarice of the apartheid system are counterposed throughout to the humanism of the black characters. In A Ride on the Whirlwind Sis Ida, for example, is put forward as apolitical but prepared to house and feed the student leadership due to her quintessential caring nature. When she is imprisoned, she even sees her white interrogator as 'a

baby, 'n melkpens' (Ride: 190).[22] Even when the (fictitious) Jabavu Police Station is bombed in the same novel, the nearby residents come to assist the dead and wounded despite their hatred of the police. This humanism is met by incomprehension and brutality on the part of most whites, as in the confrontation between Sis Ida and Colonel Kleinwater:

> He stared back at her as if intent to cow her. She was convinced this encounter between them was a re-enactment of the many confrontations between Soweto and the men from the other side of the world. The law-enforcer would never understand any explanation of her humanity.
>
> (ibid.: 130)

This human empathy encourages and allows a degree of communal assistance in the townships. Thus, when Sis Ida is about to be arrested, her neighbour is prepared to care for Ida's grandchild as if it were her own: and the same empathy drives Tsi's neighbour in To Every Birth Its Blood to lie to the authorities on Tsi's behalf when they come on a permit raid. In the final stages of the latter novel, when the planes are blockading Gaborone, Tsi suggests that black human beings must finally outlast and triumph over white technology; for 'we know – as they roar above our heads – that since we are human and they are not, we can wait and they cannot. They cannot fly and wait' (Birth: 367).

The only way this community can be destroyed, as Serote implicitly warns us, is by individual selfishness, cynicism and greed. It is this self-interest and lack of empathy which makes the streets of Alexandra so dangerous and violent, as it is his isolation from the community which explains, in part, Tsi's anguish.[23] Such a response on the part of blacks is

seen as overdetermined by the inhumanity of the apartheid system which continuously threatens, and sometimes destroys, black community (ibid.: 54; 71; 219). The inhumanity of apartheid is seen as part and parcel of commercialisation, capitalist growth and the technology of the 'white man's machine' – a familiar Black Consciousness conception:

> At last we hit Pretoria. Many black faces and white faces, like ants, knowing nothing about laziness, or hate, or joy, but engaged in building forever. Cars, many cars, turning, hooting, screeching, traffic lights changing their colours.
>
> (ibid.: 95)

The Principle of Exclusion

The novels do not include everyone in the postulated black community. The most obvious candidates for exclusion are whites. The white policemen and township officials portrayed are almost uniformly callous in their dealings with blacks, a fact often borne out in real life. Other whites, such as Ann Hope in A Ride on the Whirlwind and David Horwitz in To Every Birth Its Blood, are shown as sympathetic to the suffering and frustrations of blacks, but the black characters regard even them with some suspicion and mistrust. There is a sense in all the novels that whites do not form a completely homogeneous bloc: nevertheless their economic and political position is such that blacks are forced, we are told, to view them in a certain way. For instance, although Ann is serving as a

conduit for funds for the revolutionaries, her desk shines with the sweat of the cleaner (Ride: 150). Tsi, who is friendly with the journalist Anne, still informs her that he has contempt 'for her symbolic self' (Birth: 122). The message is clear: attitudes may differ, but in general the battle lines between black and white in South Africa are drawn. Whites are, in general, excluded from meaningful participation in the struggle to rid South Africa of apartheid. As one of the heroes of Serote's novel explains, 'the African people are going to win this war, about that there is no question' (ibid.: 249; emphasis mine).

All the whites depicted are either agents of the system or well-meaning but vacillating middle-class white liberals. There is one exception – the lift man in the building where Tsi and Tuki work, who is an 'insane racist' (ibid.: 129) intent on sniping arguments with the black journalists. It is not particularly surprising that this representative of the white working-class is racist: such is often the case. What is surprising is the fact that in all the four novels this is the only time, along with the commercial salesman trapped in Soweto in Mzamane's novel, that a white character escapes from the liberal/State official/Afrikaner stereotypes usually chosen by the authors to designate white characters; and definitely the only time when a lower-class white figure emerges who is not perceived and represented in terms which link him or her directly with the State.

Liberal whites have access to privileges, opportunities and social networks which are not available to blacks. Thus, for instance, Mandla, Mzi

and the students come to Ann Hope and the 'Bishop' for money on several occasions, although they have 'no faith in the white man' (Ride: 149). In addition, sympathy between whites and blacks, when it exists, is most easily conceived of by the authors in sexual terms, as in various incidents mobilised by Sepamla and Serote (Birth: 156; 206; Ride: 149). In a country where sexual attraction and fulfillment across colour lines was punishable by law, miscegenation comes to serve, it would appear, a subversive function.

It is realised however that whites cannot be argued away, even if they are 'settlers' and 'three million die-hard fossils' (Birth: 326; Amandla: 123). Two incidents in the novels encapsulate an attitude of ambivalence towards whites. Pholoso tries to save a white man he has kidnapped, when the white man is discovered by an 'amorphous multitude' of blacks – who thereupon kill him; Pholoso then realises that, although he tried to save the man, he will be blamed by the authorities for his death. Sipho in The Children of Soweto hides his colleague Johannes Venter, albeit reluctantly, in a coal-box behind his house in Soweto to save him from a similarly angry mob (from where he eventually emerges with his skin blackened with soot, a description with symbolic overtones). What is significant here is the implication that it is the better educated, more articulate and radicalised sections of the black community who, at the same time, lead the black revolt against apartheid and come to mediate between the two racial enclaves and interpret them to each other.

Finally however, even Anne, Ann Hope and David do become involved in minor ways in assisting the black revolution. The vacillations in feeling by Mzi towards Ann Hope at the end of A Ride on the Whirlwind are symptomatic of an inconclusive attitude towards whites (although this is deployed by Sepamla principally in terms of sexual attraction). There is a desire moreover that South Africa will, eventually, become a non-racial country where racial obsessions will disappear: as Pholoso observes on his way into exile, "after our liberation, Africa will be through with settlers. Only people will live here, that's what we want ... EQUAL PEOPLE!" (Amandla: 291).

The importance of absolute non-collaboration with the State is frequently discussed and usually condoned in the novels, although Moremi in Amandla argues against the Unity Movement perspective as put forward by Killer.[24] In line with this, there is another group of people excluded almost by definition from the ideal of black collectivity. These are the informers, community councillors and policemen with whom, we are reminded, the black community is riddled. Some black policemen may be secretly disloyal to the whites they serve – Sergeant Ndlovu in A Ride on the Whirlwind is an undercover agent for the Resistance Movement, and Sergeant Rampa is admiring a picture of Shaka when he is killed during the raid on Jabavu Police Station – but most are seen as a 'venom' which must be removed from the community:

> '... the big-mouthed quislings like the witchdoctor who came to speak nonsense on the radio the other day. All of them must disappear from

> amongst us. They are carrying passes like us in Soweto and other townships – and yet they are on the other side of the fence. How come?'
>
> (Amandla: 134)[25]

The assassination of a black policeman (and, in the case of Serote, four white policemen in a separate incident) represents a crucial incident in all four works under discussion. The hunting of Andries Batata is perhaps the most important theme Sepamla puts forward; and the death of Hlubi in The Children of Soweto and Nicodemus in Amandla occur as important events late in the stories, just before the flight of the student hero into exile. These black policemen are typified without ambiguity, as mere adjuncts to white authority:[26] they decorate their houses with Voortrekker wheels; they relate to white policemen as autograph hunter to rugby hero (Amandla: 133; Children: 185). Mpando in To Every Birth Its Blood is shot, appropriately enough, in a shebeen toilet, and his spilled brains mix with the urine – a comment on the lack of self-knowledge of blacks who support the system (Birth: 263). Even Nicodemus, who in some ways is more sympathetically depicted by Tlali, is killed in a three-way shoot-out: presumably because, as an adulterer, he also transgresses the other social grouping Tlali holds up as exemplary in her novel, the family.

Political Organisation and Leadership

What these novels portray is both a black community in place and a 'community' which still has to be mobilised and unified for political action. Political organisation, and the relationship of black leaders to their wider society is therefore a crucial issue of representation. Given their politically normative nature, the issue of organisation is an essential preoccupation, and is tackled as a key issue by all the novelists under scrutiny. This is done in a manner which is most available to the novel form: through those characters who are involved with these very questions in the course of the narrative in their role as political activists and leaders.

The way in which these leaders emerge and are portrayed is significant. As has been observed (Visser 1985a: 13), the guerrilla Mzi comes across as a Byronic figure, isolated from the people he has come to serve – although Sepamla's attitude to his arrogance and love of violence does appear somewhat ambiguous.[27] Mandla however, is completely overawed by him ('For Mzi was to him little short of a god' (Ride: 34)) and indulges in clandestine action with him from which the other members of the student group are excluded, a fact which breeds considerable resentment amongst them. Moreover, the reader gains the impression that Mandla's handful of followers are responsible for nearly all the anti-State activity in Soweto.

While the disjuncture between leader and people is most obvious in Sepamla, the two other novels which deal directly with Soweto 1976 display a muted resemblance in this regard. The position of leadership enjoyed by Pholoso – the 'saviour'[28] – appears to be natural, stemming from his responsible and charismatic personality: he is a school prefect, nicknamed 'Moses' by his followers. When he addresses the other students in their hideout, his attitude is that of a schoolteacher ("I was rather disappointed that we in the "A" centre do not read enough of the books I put at your disposal for circulation" (Amandla: 83)). The other student leaders in this novel are similarly portrayed: Dumisani is mourned on his death by Moremi as a "real gem of a boy. He would have become a real scholar. I used to be proud of his English essays"(ibid.: 23).

Both Tlali and Mzamane are at pains to demonstrate the organisational efforts made by the depicted political core group, and refer to the way in which their fictitious student leadership sets up funds, helps families and mobilises other students. These references obviously have a strong mimetic quality, referring to the real circumstances of the Soweto uprising. Yet Pholoso and Sabelo both have a degree of political wisdom and sophistication which makes them appear rather manipulative in their dealings with others. Thus the leadership which in actual fact emerges in these texts is a small activist core of better educated young people who act on behalf of, but often with little political consultation with, 'the people'. The principal role they see for themselves is as purveyors of the truth of

liberation to the inhabitants of the townships, who are shown to be variously sympathetic, vacillating, apathetic or frightened. Indeed, the decision to take part in political activity and risk arrest is itself shown to be transformative – as, for instance, Bella is transfigured by her experiences in detention in Mzamane's novel – and the rightness of student methods of political activity never in question. Political means are described, but they are always subordinate to ends; and political strategies are portrayed as already in place and obvious. On analysis it can be seen that the political goals of the leadership overshadow and justify any type of action they may take.

The point is not that a degree of secrecy and vanguardism did not happen or was not inevitable during the uprisings, nor that the novelists are not to some extent reflecting this. The point is that it appears, from the historical accounts available, that the process of conscientisation embarked on by the students was itself contradictory and only partially successful. Their organisation, as Alvarez-Pereyre notes, was still in an embryonic, improvisatory phase (Alvarez-Pereyre 1988: 120; 122). The demands made by the student leaders vacillated between those concerned only with education and those with wider social and political ramifications. Only a fairly rudimentary form of political organisation existed in the townships before and during the uprising, due at least in part to police harassment and a subsequent lack of continuity of leadership. It appears that neither the A.N.C., S.A.S.O. nor the B.P.C. were prepared for the escalation of

events after 16 June, even though student leaders such as Motapanyane, Mashinini, Seatlholo and Montsisi have given differing accounts of the influence of the A.N.C. on their activities (see Hirson 1979: 178; 251 – 2; Molteno 1979: 72 – 3). Attempts to spread the revolt into the wider community also met with varying degrees of success: there was little or no attempt to mobilise workers in compounds around issues of importance to them, for instance, beyond expectations and calls on them for support.

The Absence of a Working-Class

Slogans around specific worker needs were rare in both student and A.N.C. pamphlets issued at the time of the uprising, and no attempts were made to bring lower-class black people into the process of organisation and leadership. Thus, in a situation where the mood of revolt spread both in Soweto and around many parts of the country, the causes of such widespread dissatisfaction – such as spiralling costs, unemployment, rises in rent and transport prices and inflation – were often downplayed vis-a-vis student and ideological issues (overcrowding in classrooms, Afrikaans, the poor quality of education, black dignity, and so on). Indeed, Sabelo in The Children of Soweto eventually admits that one of the real unsolved

dilemmas for activists during the uprising was the lack of available grass-roots, countrywide support (Children: 240).

The novelists, in naturalising a process of leadership, ignore important questions of democracy and representativeness which are still ongoing in South Africa today. The attitude to black workers is particularly striking. The characters tend to dismiss their value. Thus, the teachers Pakade and Phakoe:

> ... needed a constant reminder that we weren't the moegoes they sometimes took us for. They couldn't treat us as if we were raw amagoduka straight from Umtata or Thoko-ya-ndou just newly arrived in the city. We didn't vote Mangope either.
>
> (Children: 19)

and Joe, Agnes' wastrel husband, says in repentance:

> '... some of us thought it was silly going on with school instead of working and buying nice clothes. I regret it now that I was so stupid. Look at me today – a lousy factory-worker!'
>
> (Amandla: 203)

Workers are seen – by the narrators, as well as by many of the characters – as sheep-like, easily frightened, underpoliticised and more susceptible to the lure of 'Homeland' governments. Very rarely are they allowed to express their views in any of these texts. Their problem is that they are 'out of touch with developments', resulting in (for example) the attack by Mzimhlope hostel dwellers on the residents of Soweto (ibid.: 153 – 4; see also Children: 220 – 1). Their role is to be inspired by the courage of the students, as in the case of the window-cleaner who joins the student march to John Vorster Square, ignoring his shouting white boss and reasserting (significantly) his original African identity in the process ("He

can call until his voice is hoarse, for all I care.... Besides, my name is Ginyibhunu, not Jim!" (ibid.: 233)).

It is easy to criticise this attitude with the hindsight of the subsequent development of a militant trade union movement in South Africa. But one should point out that since early 1973 – years before any of these novels were written – militant worker activity had been visible and on the upsurge in the country, and that the stereotype of the under-politicised black South African worker was already not in complete accord with political events in the country.[29] Thus, this lack of attention to the working-class is indicative, mirroring the relative unimportance placed on issues affecting this group in Black Consciousness ideology. This observation remains true even if one accepts that, to a limited extent at least, black people in the townships have an immediate 'black experience' and racial consciousness available to them because of crowded, pan-class living conditions; and that worker demands were and are intermingled with racial identities and experiences and popular political aspirations as a result.

Despite the fact that Sepamla discerns divisions in his Soweto community with a subtlety that goes far beyond the efforts of the other novelists,[30] he uses a discourse of 'the people' throughout his novel, and his definition of the divisions within that part of the Soweto community supportive of the uprising is, firstly, in terms of age and, secondly, does not extend beyond the leadership core group. This type of extensive reliance on populist discourse is discernible in Tlali and Mzamane as well. To Every

Birth Its Blood is somewhat different, in that Serote demonstrates a commitment to socialism, emphasising the need for discipline and responsibility in the struggle for liberation. An implied criticism of the conceptions of African socialism can be discerned in his novel (Birth: 103 – 4); and the ravages of underdevelopment depicted are not confined to South Africa, thus suggesting a wider analysis of neo-colonialist practices on his part (Tsi notes, for instance, that Bontleng reminds him of Alexandra (ibid.: 348)).[31] Yet even Serote, who is most at pains to show the spread of resistance from a small group of Alexandra activists to urban and rural South Africa generally, mentions the domestic servants, street sweepers, bus drivers and others who take part in the national strike begun by students at the end of his novel simply under the rubric of 'parents of the children' (ibid.: 360).

Both Tlali and Serote, it must be noted, open up their novels to key political debates in which issues of race and class[32] and – in the case of Serote at least – where different economic systems are foregrounded for discussion (thus, Dikeledi finds herself wondering 'how this system could be destroyed, what system would replace it' ibid.: 232). Serote further shows the inconsistencies of this struggle – it cannot, for example, solve problems in personal relationships. For him, the role of the revolutionaries is to learn as well as to teach: Onalenna consequently realises that an old woman with whom she talks is one of 'the people who have kept the faith, who have made certain that the struggle is forever assured of its victory, when those

who carry it forward follow the correct line' (ibid.: 284). Earlier in the novel Boykie shows a similar perception:

> 'A few well-organised people have to challenge the power of the settlers, while the people watch, and if you convince the people that you know what you are doing, they in turn will lead the revolution.'
> (ibid.: 78 – 9; see also Amandla: 90 – 1)

Yet the process of politicisation to Serote is, when all is said and done, still a natural, unproblematic one. It is, according to both Boykie in Part One and Onalenna in Part Two, merely one of understanding and following the 'correct line'. Black people are, with the exception of functionaries of the system, potentially at one in their political demands, and can be easily accommodated under the auspices of the Movement, for 'the Movement is an idea in the mind of a people' (Birth: 327).[33]

All of the novels can be criticised for a tendency towards inscribing ready-made solutions to the complex and often dire problems of contemporary South African politics. They reflect a facile conception of the availability of 'the people' for immediate and successful revolt – a tendency which, it can be argued, denies the very principles of popular struggle which they strive to depict. When commenting on Serote in this regard, it must be pointed out that in many ways he is least culpable of this in To Every Birth Its Blood. However, he does downplay the contradictory nature of the social totality available for political mobilisation. His forging of a liberated black nation is based to some extent on the retrieval of a true consciousness and the laying bare of the machinations of the 'mad men' in power in South Africa (Birth: 290). He describes a process of political

mobilisation which, while impressive in a fictional account of this nature, is not completely adequate to his project. A concatenation of events he describes – student boycotts, attacks by the Movement on key Government installations, bombings, retaliatory attacks by South African security forces on neighbouring countries, news blackouts (ibid.: 359 – 61; 365 – 7) – is remarkably exact as regards actual events which occurred in South Africa in the handful of years after the book was published. Yet in the light of debates and struggles around strategies, goals and grass-roots democracy in internal oppositional politics at the time, as well as with regard to disagreements between adherents of Black Consciousness and non-racial organisations – disagreements which, fuelled by the State though they were, nevertheless spilled over into animosity and killings – Serote's blanket political assessments and projections into the future can be seen as insufficiently inclusive of events to be called a realistic, authentic portrayal.

The Question of Gender

An equally arresting set of inconsistencies around questions of gender relationships hinders the depiction of an equal community in these novels. On the one hand the stereotype of the loving and supportive wife and mother recurs, as do acknowledgements of the strength and resilience of elderly black women. This can be seen in the representation of Gramsy,

Nana and others in Amandla, for example, as well as Sis Ida in A Ride on the Whirlwind. Moreover, younger women appear outside of traditional roles in some of these texts, and are at times represented as being part of the inner circle of young activists.

However, in all of the novels except Serote's, women have an unproblematic relationship with food and the kitchen. This can be seen in Mzamane's novel in an incident involving Bella and Nina, two active functionaries of the S.R.C. In the midst of a fierce political discussion after a student meeting, Bella's mother brings those assembled food: but only the two girls are required to help in the kitchen or with the serving. This is not questioned in the narrative (Children: 104). Again, when Nina goes to hide in Bra P.'s house, he jokes that he has inherited a bride and excellent cook and compliments her on her cooking, causing her to blush (ibid.: 173 – 4). While it can be argued that Mzamane is here simply portraying an element of Bra P.'s character, there appear elsewhere in this novel other instances of an unconscious tendency towards gender discrimination and the objectification of women. This is never questioned or undercut. Finally conclusive in this regard is the presentation of Sabelo's ruminations in exile at the President Hotel in Gaborone, as he watches:

> ... pretty Batswana women with their well-padded buttocks shaking to a sensuous rhythm, with their breasts like watermelons and some of the most fabulous legs I have seen, walking up and down the Mall below, on my lap a copy of God's Bits of Wood.
>
> (ibid.: 244)

The female activists also reveal a surprising ability to be caught and tortured, with prurient attention to detail in Sepamla.[34]

Tlali on the other hand is more discriminating in her depiction of the importance of women to communal life, and the difficulties they face. In Amandla she shows women as capable of decisive action, both with regard to family life and in terms of the wider political struggle. Moreover, in one speech Pholoso notes that women must not be confined to the kitchen; while they cannot join the inner core because it is difficult for them to move around without being molested (sic.), they can form women's groups. In response a number of projects are initiated by the women – small gardens, education and self-defence groups, and so on.

While it is illuminating to note that Tlali's novel possibly shows the beginnings of a discernible shift in attitudes by and towards women taking place in black intellectual circles after Soweto,[35] it must be said that women's major role here too is still in relation to men and the family: in other words, as supportive characters. The extent to which women's needs are spoken for by men is disturbing.[36] In addition the romance between Felleng and Pholoso is represented in an extremely romanticised way:

> 'Even the bullets of the Boers will never stop me from coming to you. You are like a prize. I must fight to get you. You are like a whole package of ... of ... what shall I say? A package ... of sweetness ... of bliss. And to think that you are all mine ... you are Mother Africa – and how I love you!'
>
> (Amandla: 71)

Tlali accomplishes this romantic aura not only in the speeches of Pholoso, as above, but also in the inner monologuing of the young woman herself; and in the discourse in which the love affair is realised:

> Two doves fluttered their grey wings gracefully as they flew towards the so-called Sotho Section.
> 'Two for Joy!' Felleng muttered softly to herself as she watched the birds disappear into the distance.
> She thought of Pholoso, the man of her dreams....
> Throughout their one-year-old courtship, the hours that separated them had been just so many minutes, so many seconds of yearning, of waiting until they could be together again....
> She started when the familiar voice called out:
> 'Felleng!'
> Her knees sagged as she turned round and looked up into the eyes of Pholoso. She abandoned herself into his outstretched strong arms where for a moment she nestled while trying to regain her breath and composure ...
>
> (ibid.: 66 – 8)[37]

It is Serote who most consciously questions assumptions about the role of women. There is implicit criticism of men who avoid their social responsibilities, such as Tsi, and sympathy for the difficulties women face making their way through the social maelstrom of Alexandra (Birth: 7; 16; 47). Some female characters are shown to be the mainstays of families disrupted by male drunkenness or political detentions (such as Ausi Pule, Lily and Grace Ramono); while Onalenna, Dikeledi and others are fully active in the Movement, often performing dangerous tasks: Tsi, in contrast, does housework (ibid.: 19). Yet Serote displays an overwhelming inclination to either idealise or denigrate his female characters;[38] his positively-described women tend to be idealised. It has been pointed out that the marshalling of female characters into either one of these two opposite poles of representation – treating them 'either as victim or as goddess' – are

common in male depictions (the critic concerned calls them 'misrepresentations') of women in African literature (Mortimer 1982: 37).

The Preoccupations of a Radical Intelligentsia?

The purposes of the above fictional representations are, I would argue, both mimetic and political. On the one hand, these novels describe and extrapolate from political and social life in South Africa today. On the other hand, a community of black people is being naturalised and called into action by both the activists in the novels and by the novels themselves. In constructing this community, the authors to some extent ignore its social cleavages and contradictions. A process of constructing social identity and political morality is being undertaken in these books, from the point of view of a radical urban intelligentsia denied access to political rights and seeking to identify with and conscientise other blacks in a struggle for freedom. Historically, this is a group which had been denied access to State power in a racially repressive society, and thus saw the need to align itself with and appeal to lower-class blacks in populist discourse, in terms set by Black Consciousness ideology.

While workers are not focussed on and are allowed little active participation in the novels' political denouements, the black middle-classes certainly are a point of focus. In A Ride on the Whirlwind, 'bourgeois'

blacks such as Dr. Kenotsi and Papa Duz are usually referred to by Mandla and Mzi in contemptuous terms, but are nonetheless useful to them for their money and transport. Kenotsi finds 'the children's revolution ... sucking him into its core irreversibly' (Ride: 206).

Such vacillating members of the black middle-class, as well as the State-controlled 'sell-outs', are in general sharply differentiated from that stratum of the black middle-class of which the novelists (and, indeed, many of their more favourably depicted characters) are part: that is, the radical petty-bourgeoisie which has identified itself with other black people and with the cause of their liberation. Thus, Mzamane makes a distinction between Chabeli and Rathebe (who in six pages are typified as having all the accumulated vices possible in community councillors or black businessmen in South Africa (Children: 153 – 9)), and Bra P. The latter is a conspicuous consumer, an enigmatic figure and a lover of good jazz. Whereas Chabeli and Rathebe are egocentric and misanthropic, he is a man of the people, possessing the rare quality of ubuntu (humanism) (Children: 153). He advises and assists the student activists. He has contacts everywhere, inside and outside the country, and even manages to get Bella out of jail. It is moreover hinted that he was involved in the murder of a reporter who bears a striking resemblance to the actual historical figure of Henry Nxumalo. According to the author, this reporter had made the mistake of moving from exposés of white social and political outrages to exposing organised black crime, for, as Sabelo observes, 'many people

pointed out ... it is one thing to expose the true and proven enemies of the people and another to turn in one who is black and struggling like yourself' (sic.) (Children: 89). Ramono in To Every Birth Its Blood is another example of the positive attributes assigned to the radical middle-class. His existence as a landlord in Alexandra in the 1950s is formulated so that he is a 'tough but just' landlord, who advises his tenants on marital and other problems and makes his decisions collectively with them. His wife advises their wives on health problems (Birth: 219 – 20). This short passage can, without too much fancy, be related to the social attitude and placement Serote wishes people like Ramono to accept. Social class is seen, then, to be largely defined in terms of one's relationship and connection to the State. The close relationship of the radical anti-apartheid intelligentsia to 'the people' is represented as inevitable. Indeed, the 'right' approach to politics will render this class invisible among its (racially-defined) community.

Serote emphasises the 'respect' people who have taken part in political action engender in the community, as well as their rediscovery of dignity and self-worth in a racist milieu which has previously shown them scant respect. An ambivalent attitude to the existing organs of public life is shown, by him and the other novelists, as their characters' faith in courts, lawyers and other supposedly impartial institutions is constantly shaken. As the novels progress the reader's attention is drawn to the racial bias of these institutions: one of the most poignant moments in To Every Birth Its

Blood is when the journalist and intellectual Boykie shouts 'you should remember that you are nothing but a public servant, stop pushing me around!', as he is assaulted by a policeman and his camera smashed (Birth: 80).

References to education and scenes including books and the act of reading abound. Books are a constant presence in most of these novels, and are seen as crucial to the process of self-education and political education. Reading is both uplifting and therapeutic, especially if undertaken in unfamiliar settings. Pholoso notes, in his lecture to the other student leaders:

> 'Get out of the towns sometimes, go to the countryside and wander around. Sit down under a tree and read. It is good for your soul. Read and discover yourself. Remember the words of Mao-Tse-Tung: "Revolution begins within the consciousness of men." We have to start changing from within before we liberate our people.'
>
> (Amandla: 92 – 3)

Characters in the novels read Fanon,[39] Mao and other political writers: memorably, Oupa comes across a comrade reading Lenin's 'What Is To Be Done?' in the servants' quarters of a white house. Not only reading but the right reading is shown to be essential: Tsi criticises his sister for reading stupid romances; while Oupa, on reading Ramono's speech from the dock, advises the others: 'Every one of us must make a cutting of this speech and read and study it. It has lots for us' (Birth: 288). Indeed, such is the unconscious authorial stress on the written word that Oupa's capture and subsequent death in detention are the direct result of a police search finding a booklet of the Movement in his pocket.

A plethora of film and literary references occur in Mzamane, sometimes used as 'terms'[40] in the students' conversations ('We've no time for guys who want to play at Macavity the Mystery Cat here' (Children: 43)). While it can be argued that this is true to type for his student protagonists, such a discourse must limit the understanding and enjoyment of Mzamane's actual readership in a country where a lack of literacy (let alone the ability to decipher literary references) is still widespread among black people.

The importance of books and reading as delineated by these writers is significant, as it pertains to wider issues of literary form and audience. The choice of the novel as a preferred form to portray events of Soweto 1976 needs to be subjected to scrutiny, particularly in the light of their avowed desire for a black audience. Mzamane, for one, regards the novel as a more 'serious' form, believing his previous short story collection Mzala was 'groping' (Mzamane 1984b: 302). In addition to the suggestion that a novel is a form suited better to an earnest attitude on the part of the author, it could further be argued that 'the formation of a knowable and known community, in which common habits of thought, social customs, aspirations, and values might be discerned' (Rabkin 1977: 28) is a typical area for the novelist, and that such a concern and subject matter in these novels to some extent dictates this formal choice. Furthermore, Mzamane has pointed out that there are problems of scale associated in presenting a subject as broad as Soweto 1976, which points towards the use of the

novel.[41] However, in a country where a mass black audience for newspapers is only a few decades old, and where literacy is still anything but general (let alone proficiency in English) such a choice precludes consumption by many lower-class black people.[42] Working-class people still use mainly oral means as a form of cultural expression: and, in recent black literature, the performance of poetry and plays still holds considerable sway, as outlined in the first chapter of this study. Nevertheless, the growth of prose fiction during the late 1970s seems to have reflected a change in reading patterns, among younger black lovers of literature at least.

Narrative, Literature and Social History

Lukacs holds that all realist novels indulge in a process of selection, abstraction and specificity, in that he believes that they aim to reproduce cognitively the objective historical essence contained behind mere sensate appearances, and portray the lives of individual characters as part of the entire historical dynamics of their society (Lunn 1985: 78; 118). According to Jameson:

> The originality of the concept of realism ... lies in its claim to cognitive as well as aesthetic status ... the ideal of realism presupposes a form of aesthetic experience which yet lays claim to a binding relationship to the real itself, that is to say, to those realms of knowledge and praxis which had traditionally been differentiated from the realm of the

> aesthetic, with its disinterested judgments and its constitution as sheer appearance.
>
> (Jameson 1977: 198)

As in history of a 'realist' nature (such as Marxism) there is in such literature a commitment to the belief that processes of knowledge aim to incorporate objects and practices that exist independently of thought.[43] Both realist literature and 'realist' history are concerned with the relationship of individuals and social groups to a real world which, while not knowable outside of the historian's or the writer's organising perceptions, nevertheless exists independently of them.

Fictional narratives about historical occurrences in particular demand an assumption of mimesis on the part of the reader, even if it is granted that the novel can only approximate the actual historical events referred to.[44] However, it would be overly simple to regard these novels as being measurable in an unproblematic relationship of 'fiction' to the pre-existing and immutable 'facts' of 1976 and its historical accounts. Several theories of literary narrative and realism give such a premise of comparison and difference between, in Rimmon-Kenan's words, 'story' and 'text' a central position in their analysis; or speak about the relationship between the literary text and the corresponding 'real' history on which its fictionalisation is based.[45] This appears in some ways to be a useful model: in historical novels such as the ones here under scrutiny, the 'facts' of 1976 as they are played out in each novel assist a gauging of the preoccupations and silences

of the text, and consequently serve as indicators of the author's ideological position.

Yet this dualist model of 'story' and text' is misleading, because:

> ... what narratologists refer to as the basic stories or deep-plot structures of narratives are often not abstract, disembodied or subsumed entities but quite manifest, material, and particular retellings – and thus versions – of those narratives, constructed, as all versions are, by someone in particular, on some occasion, for some purpose, and in accord with some relevant set of principles.
>
> (Herrnstein-Smith 1980: 218)

The view that a basic story or historical fact exists independently of any teller or occasion of telling (and therefore of any human agency) is fallacious. No unmediated 'facts', nor neutral methods of historical verification, are available to novelists or even to historians.[46] While objects can be held to exist independently of interpretation, claims to knowledge necessarily presuppose activities of interpretative thought and historical agency on the part of the thinker. Neither literary realism nor historical exegesis can be as complex as the history they gesture towards: reality in both cases is processed through modes of narrative representation and forms of cognition as they are organised by the perceptions of the writer concerned. Both aim to condense and explain, and contain ideological proclivities.

It is possible to become glib at these similarities between the narrative aspect of historical analysis, and fictional narratives which deal with historical events. Philosophers of history who reduce historical texts to mere literary artifacts, while encouraging important criticisms of empiricism,

eventually must adopt a position where the reality of historical processes become shrouded in doubt:[47] while literary analysts who perceive literature as simply a free play of signifiers, as well as the recent spate of novelists in the U.S.A. who believe, along with E. L. Doctorow, that:

> ... there is no fiction or nonfiction.... There is only narrative. We have it in us to compose false documents more valid, more real, more truthful than the true documents of the politicians, the journalists or the psychologists ...

adopt eventually an excessive historical relativism where, in effect, radical gestures on the page are seen as the epitome of political action.[48]

Theories of narrative which see literature simply in terms of a free play of signifiers (as in post-structuralism and deconstruction) or the approach of (for instance) Lukacs are extreme opposite poles of the hermeneutic process: the latter stressing the mimetic nature of novelistic presentation and the former insisting on the distance of all language from what it claims to represent. Focussing on either pole at the expense of the other leads to incomplete analysis by the critic (Jameson 1977: 198; 204).

It is consequently more fruitful to regard narratives not only as structures but also as social acts, responding to a set of material conditions in formal and ideological ways: as Birchall points out, 'in talking of the death of the author and the self-producing text, we neglect to see that all literature derives from a choice' (Birchall 1979: 113). The various histories of Soweto 1976 are not simply about recording the past, any more than the novels are. It has been pointed out that the published historical accounts of the period tend to be inconclusive; and that they sometimes make

ideological points at the expense of a more sober analysis. Moreover, official, newspaper and popular versions of the uprising have all run into considerable difficulties attempting to account for and interpret this event – difficulties enhanced by the sheer weight and disparity of available information; the suppression of much of this information by the South African Government; and the diverse political positions and conceptual frameworks employed by its historians, which tend to influence what questions are posed and what social aspects are focussed on (Molteno 1979: 55; Lodge 1983: 330 – 6). In all cases the genres of history and fiction are not only mimetic but also, at times, normative and anticipatory, for 'we are not talking just about the deaths of children and why they died: we are talking about the lives of future generations and how they are going to live' (Molteno 1979: 55).

As disciplines, history and literature contain differences of expectations, codes, conventions and methodology. They are themselves historical practices, subject to some extent to their own generic limitations. History is generally more concerned with validation in its method of inquiry; it strives to be adequate to the material researched. Historians desire to be far more rigorous and painstaking in their mobilisation of empirical data, while the accuracy and complexity of novelists' social backdrop is not always assumed to be of primary importance.[49] Creative literature may in some instances concern itself with a mere approximation

and symbolic appropriation of social detail, foregrounding instead aesthetic and politico-ideological concerns. As Mzamane notes:

> I don't think it matters much ... whether my references to real people are identifiable. I don't think this has made my readers in East Germany, where the novel has been selling very well, appreciate the core issues at stake less. But the black people of South Africa, who are my primary target audience and on whose painful memories these painful events are indelibly imprinted, will, of course, turn back and say: This reminds me of so-and-so. Oh! is that the true significance of their actions? Is this, then, another way of looking at what happened to us? Others may even say: No, this is not how it happened. Heated controversy is sparked. Resolution. Action. It is a popular history, you see, written from a particular political perspective, which may be illuminating to some people, which may or may not sharpen the political perceptions of others.[50]

Literature, especially fiction, has an ability to penetrate into psychological processes and lay bare motivations, responses and desires in a way history has only been able to do by reference to cultural determinants and subjective elements via, for instance, oral testimony.[51] Historical fiction can thus in certain circumstances probe more to the heart of things than sociological or historical studies: Engels' observation that he learnt more from Balzac than 'from all of the professed historians, economists and statisticians of the period together' is illustrative.[52] Accurate depictions of social life can be discerned in works of literature despite their authors' opinions, conscious intentions or ideological affiliations.[53]

Fictional literature is polysemic – the interplay of meanings and literary devices employed never point simply in one direction, but have several possible interpretations and readings (Moretti 1983: 22). Ambiguity is a deliberate and often utilised fictional device, although only Sepamla makes use of this technique consistently in any of the four novels under

discussion.[54] While different interpretations are also possible for historical data, subsequent historical analysis tends to concern itself with hypothesis and proof. In other words, the historian amasses data in order to reduce it to a pattern, while the novelist elicits detail in order to authenticate a symbolic order.[55] This understanding is crucial to a comprehension of the creative process employed in these novels to authenticate the ideological and symbolic order of Black Consciousness.

Literature functions much more obviously through the usage of metaphorical, symbolic and allusive procedures. Symbol and metaphor are marshalled consistently throughout the predominantly realist mode employed in these novels. An immediate example of this comes from To Every Birth Its Blood, which is less concerned with sociological explanation than, for example, Mzamane. In place of explicit diatribes against the politically biased role of the newspapers before and during at least the early stages of the uprising,[56] Serote simply describes a World billboard his characters observe in passing: 'Pantie slitter shot' (Birth: 201). In this innuendo the voyeuristic and sensationalist concerns of a section of the South African press of the time are brilliantly crystallised.[57]

Such usage of symbol may be the result of a fear of censorship (Sepamla observes that 'South Africa has taught us to speak in metaphors' (Sepamla 1980a: 27)); yet it has been remarked that simple descriptions of certain objects such as Hippos in black South African literature serve a deeper, more symbolic meaning, where the Hippo becomes an immediate

metaphor for Afrikanerdom, the South African State, and its apartheid policies (February 1979: 257). This can be seen in Tlali's textual deployment of the burning township municipal offices in Amandla: symbolic, to the characters watching, of the way in which this act forebodes the possible destruction of the apartheid system. In addition both Serote's and Sepamla's novels (and to a lesser extent Mzamane's and Tlali's) consciously act as synecdoches, allowing description of the part to stand for description of the whole.[58]

Yet it is simplistic to expect these novels to reflect accurately the events of 1976 on a mimetic, socially-encompassing basis. The novelists, partly as a result of their greater interest in story-telling than analysis, do not speak overmuch of some of the main reasons historians have given for the immediate response to the revolt on the part of the broader population of Soweto: rents, housing, inflation and so on (although they are not completely silent on these issues). However, some of the historical accounts make an equally insufficient use of critical analysis: Brooks' and Brickhill's acceptance of the student leadership as natural 'bearers of the past' of black resistance, and their assumption of an ease of mass mobilisation and communal identity is a case to point. Thus, in historical accounts the facts are selected and shaped by the historian who uses them. The use of narrative techniques is a constant, irremovable presence in historical exegesis: one can point to the constant use of narrative description in Whirlwind Before the Storm – its rhetoric of a continuity of resistance, and

of a popular consciousness in Soweto which is constantly being politically clarified and more widely spread; or the partisan and emotive use of language in Hirson's Year of Fire, Year of Ash. Although at times the novelists manifestly do not provide a more authentic picture than the histories – Tlali's and Mzamane's acceptance of the myth that the massacre by Mzimhlope hostel dwellers was the work of 'Zulus' is an example[59] – they do on occasion look into areas of human and social experience where academic historical analyses are silent. Mzamane for one gives graphic examples of the importance of religion and gangs in township life and culture, a subject only fleetingly present in most historical accounts;[60] and emphasises often underplayed but relevant aspects of the uprising, such as the student organisation leading up to 16 June,[61] and student methods of acquiring petrol.

While fiction displays its own institutional history as a genre and set of assumptions on the part of readers, the novelists interest themselves with historical issues in dealing with Soweto 1976. Despite their stylistic differences, all four attempt to reflect, personalise and (in the case of Serote) extrapolate from the uprisings. In his novel, as quoted at the beginning of this chapter, Mzamane wished to tell 'more of the truth than the historian's truth' and formulate an 'authentic' version of black experience to counteract white versions of the event. He is not alone in this: Mzamane speaks of an anthology of poetry by Sepamla, prompted by the experience of 1976, as a work in which its author:

> ... fulfils the role of historical witness. 'I'm an historian,' he says, explaining his role in the context of Soweto and its aftermath, 'and I've only scratched the surface so far ... blacks have been silent for too long.'
>
> (Mzamane 1984c: 15)

Harlow adds that A Ride on the Whirlwind 'takes over from the police spokesmen and the newspaper reports the charge of exposing the historical reality of the resistance ... as it unfolded in Soweto in the winter months of 1976' (Harlow 1987: 107), while Alvarez-Pereyre notes that, for the duration of the long debate between Killer and Moremi, Amandla 'becomes a history book, as if Miriam Tlali wanted to remind her readers of events two decades old which have been obliterated from official publications' (Alvarez-Pereyre 1988: 121). Historical verisimiltude also concerns the novelists in these texts. Mzamane's researching of newspapers to increase the air of authenticity in his novel is a case in point (Mzamane 1984a: 159), as is Sepamla's newspaper headings at the beginning of some of the chapters of A Ride on the Whirlwind. A clear demarcation between 'fact' and 'fiction', or a watertight compartmentalisation between literary genres, are not always important to these novelists – Tlali, for example, has made use of the same quotes from the South African parliament in the 1940s in one of the debates in Amandla and in one of her articles about censorship and political repression in South Africa.[62]

All the novels refer to political incidents of the 1970s which continue to haunt the consciousness of black South Africans: the parcel-bomb murder of student leader Onkgopotse Tiro in 1974; the fall of Ahmed

Timol from the Security Police section of John Vorster Square; the 'Bantustan' question (Transkei was to become the first 'independent' 'Homeland' in October 1976); the Geneva talks between Vorster and Kissinger, and others. These events are sometimes referred to in passing and sometimes fictionalised as part of the larger narrative. In To Every Birth Its Blood, for instance, it is the heroic Oupa who falls from the tenth floor of John Vorster Square; while the character Nkululeko, who teaches Sabelo in the early stages of The Children of Soweto, is obviously meant to refer to Tiro.

As regards The Children of Soweto, Mzamane has observed that:

> ... my use of newspaper reports ... is not due to creative ineptitude or simple iconoclasm; it is done on principle. The separation between aesthetics and politics, fiction and fact, is one of the fundamental dichotomies the novel seeks to overcome – in the spirit, I might add, of Brecht's epic theatre.[63]

Mzamane's novel, which makes most use of journalistic accounts and thinly disguised sociological exposition, can serve as an example of this process. The novel elides actual events and, as the author notes, compresses the time sequence of events (Mzamane 1984a: 159) – but does so with great attention to detail. For example, the description of the funeral of Muntu (a name which means, in Zulu, 'human being', and whom Mzamane claims typifies 'Everyman' (Mzamane 1984a: 159)) on 20 June in the novel closely resembles the actual funeral of Jacob Mashabane on the weekend of 23 – 24 October of that year.[64] Two separate marches on Johannesburg by Soweto students, which took place on 4 August and 23

September, are represented as occurring on two consecutive days. Sabelo's headmaster Kgopo transmutes by the end of the novel into a Mr. Kambule Mathabathe[65] – the latter name an amalgam of the surnames of the principals of Orlando High School and Morris Isaacson High School at the time of the uprising. The shooting of students by police is remarked upon by the Minister, Jimmy Parkes (a thinly veiled portrait of Jimmy Kruger) as having 'left him cold' – in reality a statement made about the death of Biko in 1977 (Children: 96). The pamphlet from the Transvaal Chamber of Industries in the novel is a shortened but word-for-word facsimile of a real pamphlet dropped in Soweto during October,[66] and the brutal policeman Hlubi refers to 'Hlubi' Chaphi, a Detective Sergeant who was shot dead in 1978.[67] The statements uttered by fictional characters such as Colonel Fierce and Hlubi during and after the Mzimhlope massacre are precisely those reported on by newspapers as having been made by the Commissioner of Police of the time, General Prinsloo, and an unidentified black policeman.[68]

The realism and gestures towards mimesis in these novels should nevertheless not obscure their normative aspects. There seems to be a desire in this prose to develop new ways of public behaviour and morality and new forms of character-identification associated with the formation of a combative black secular conscience. They do not merely attempt to provide information about social life but also constitute new surfaces of public morality on which certain types of human behaviour are shown up to be

acceptable while others (such as that of the black community councillors and informers) are not.[69] In the fraught social context of apartheid South Africa, they seek to promote new norms of ideological consciousness among their putative black readership, through the re-formulation, via the historical events of 1976, of a black 'truth' that combats white representations of the event: a 'truth' formally authenticated through the devices of an overarching realism.

Thus the novels demonstrate a selection of historical facts and events and a (sometimes unconscious) ignoring of others; in each novel a hierarchy of social events is constructed in which the fictional characters move, and which are deemed by the novelists to be essential and significant to what they are trying to say. A process of selection and typification can be seen to occur. In this process, the creative skill of these novelists in underlining their ideological messages becomes apparent. For example, Mzamane's eliding of the two student marches mentioned above allows him to both keep up narrative tension and stress the continuity of resistance; while the similar State responses to the actual death of Biko and to the deaths of his fictional students seeks, in my view, to underscore the implacable sameness of State repression. In addition, in the passage where Chabeli and Rathebe are excoriated (Children: 153 – 9), these two are endowed with the activities and possessions of a handful of actual Soweto councillors and businessmen of the time, presumably to promote a feeling of authenticity

and recognition in the readership within the country and accent the two's quintessential 'sell-out' behaviour.[70]

An examination of not only the preoccupations but also the silences of these novels is instructive. One is left in no doubt which characters the authors approve of (Muntu, Mandla, Nkululeko, Pholoso, Tandabantu, Ann Hope) and which they do not (Noah Witbaatjie, Matlakala, Deputy Minister of Education Johannes Onsskwiel).[71] All the novels show the process of politicisation and unification of an increasingly self-aware black community, as it begins to understand its ongoing political degradation and the means necessary to combat it. Conversely, the agency of the black working-class is an area of silence. There are others: Mzamane's reluctance to describe the violent results of the refusal of an apolitical black worker to heed the student stayaway call is one example, especially in the light of graphic previous descriptions of police torture (Children: 182 – 8; 220 – 1), as is Tlali's ambivalent depictions of 'polite' students physically punishing their elders who ignore consumer boycotts (Amandla: 194 – 7).[72] Too much space given to descriptions of the lack of a natural solidarity would, certainly, impede the political thrust of these novels. A similar point can be made about Onalenna's bomb in Serote's novel. While symbolising the beginnings of a new psychological and political dispensation, its explosion hurts nobody and only damages cars (Birth: 271). What killing there is by the Movement in this novel is described as purposive, and therefore morally condonable within a framework of the wanton brutality of a State being

resisted by the humanistic, democratic upsurge of the people. In this fashion the actuality of violence is downplayed and smoothed over.

Thus it can be observed that these novelists are all involved in an ideological process. One of their express purposes is to call into question received interpretations of history among black people, in terms of a counter-ideology of black pride and self-worth.

Popularising the Novel

The authors here scrutinised have employed various means, both inside and outside their fiction, to get 'closer to the people' and express the black community's concerns and everyday experiences. Tlali, for one, wrote a column in Staffrider between 1978 and 1981, published under various titles ('Soweto Speaking', 'Voices from the Ghetto'), in which she interviewed Soweto old-age pensioners, peddlars, greengrocers and the like.[73] Serote associated himself with the Medu Art Ensemble and the A.N.C. in Botswana when he returned to Southern Africa in the late 1970s; while Sepamla edited the literary journals New Classic and S'ketsh' for a period during the 1970s. Within the texts themselves, other means were used to cement the relationship between writer and community: it is interesting to note in this regard the relation of author to narrator in Mzamane's novel. Sabelo's father is a churchman and his mother a nurse,

the professions followed by Mzamane's parents. This allows the novelist to don the mantle of central political protagonist in the events of his own novel: it also facilitates an assumption of the political centrality and acuteness of the narrator-cum-author's standpoint in the two sections of The Children of Soweto which are written with Sabelo as first-person narrator. It assists the author's desire to write of a collective community by dint of a first-person narrator, for this narrator is of central political significance in the story and, consequently, may be presumed to speak legitimately for 'the people'.[74] Mzamane's placement of the narrator-protagonist of his book of short stories Mzala, published two years before this novel, also as the 'son of a minister, very much a centre of social life' (Mzamane 1984b: 301) is further indicative of this trend.

The desire to both provide a realistic picture of Soweto and South Africa, and mould the identification of a black readership into a collective experience, is discernible in some of the writers' formal techniques within these four novels as well. Tlali and Mzamane occasionally transcribe (and sometimes translate) Sotho and Zulu conversations between their characters; Mzamane uses freedom songs and poems by poets such as Serote, Tladi and Mandla Langa, which would be known to at least some of his black readership.[75] Other techniques to demonstrate an 'authenticity' of representation can be discerned, such as Serote's attempt to transpose the cadences and sequences of African languages directly into English (especially visible in the first section of To Every Birth Its Blood) and

Mzamane's (in my estimation rather ponderous) attempts to characterise his students' language with literary references, malapropisms and the use of Latin.

There is an attempt to display a collective experience in all of these novels. Mzamane has spoken of his desire to make the community the hero through a politically central first-person narrator; Tlali focusses on the community through one family, and makes efforts throughout to present the viewpoints of many different characters via conversation and debates; and Serote, in the second section of his novel, shifts viewpoint between his characters and eventually uses montage to show the countrywide spread of political insurrection and the speed with which events occur. As a result of these formal choices, critics have come to observe that the Movement is the hero of To Every Birth Its Blood (Glegg 1982: 34), or that 'the struggle itself' is in general the hero of these novels (Watts 1989: 219).[76]

As the 'methodological individualism of the novel's typical form' (Visser 1985a: 13) is under attack, to some degree at least, in all the novels except A Ride on the Whirlwind, much of the subsequent commentary about these novels seems to have been somewhat misdirected. Many critics have remained dogmatically steadfast in their assumptions that these novels are, or should be, ultimately concerned with the exposition and denouement of individual characters and their emotional states rather than with the socio-political world in which they move. Such critics have not been able to deal with these novels on their own terms. The Children of Soweto, the

most sociologically rich of the novels, also tends to have been least highly regarded by literary critics; often on the grounds that 'literature' is not 'journalism' – a viewpoint which ignores the close historical connection between fiction and journalism in black South African writing, as well as the possibility of rather different genre assumptions made on the novel form in that context outside those of classical European realism.[77]

Thus, Ndebele dislikes The Children of Soweto because 'I found no independent narrative line that permits any reader involvement beyond the act of recognition'; and believes Amandla succeeds partly because it has a love story to attract the reader's attention (Ndebele 1984: 46 – 7); some critics have had difficulty relating to To Every Birth Its Blood because, aftey the first section dealing with Tsi, it moves into a more collective mode.[78] Finally, the one critic who has pointed out that (despite its sociological discourse and social detail) Mzamane's novel is nevertheless a literary construct, uses this point merely to belabour his notion of the aesthetic inadequacies of the novel, rather than to examine the ideological effects of its fictionality (see Roskies 1985: 28 – 9).

It is a moot point, however, whether the novel form eventually allows a collective viewpoint to emerge free of the organising perceptions and ideological predilections of its individual author. The ideological preoccupations of authors will, in my opinion, necessarily serve to misrealise the completion of any conscious intention of authentic, socially inclusive representation on their part. While the works under discussion seek to

disrupt the traditional novelistic emphasis on the individual character, their attempts to reinstate a new, black- and community-orientated, vision of order is – and must be – incomplete in some respects. This problem can be seen even in Serote's novel, in my opinion both technically and politically the most radical of the novels under discussion. While Serote depicts the contradictions between the personal and political and the existence of oscillating, apolitical individuals meticulously, his political activists in section two of the novel are all viewed monochromatically – they all aspire to the same political programme, and the reader (and they) are required to take for granted the correct methods and strategies to achieve their goal. Furthermore, they are all held up as exemplary figures in a political sense, whatever their personal foibles may be. There are subsequently elements of closure and partisanship in Serote's novel which need to be recognised, and which will be discussed fully in the last chapter of this thesis.

The keen awareness by Black Consciousness activists and artists in the early 1970s of the need to strive to <u>become</u> popular was less obvious by the time the novels under discussion were written at the turn of the decade. At times, writers assumed that their role as popular spokespersons was incontrovertible, simply because of their radical views. Similarities were assumed between the role played by the modern urban artist and that played by artists in traditional oral societies. In this vein, Mzamane believed:

> In The Children of Soweto, the community as a whole is the hero. As a chronicler,I chose the role of the traditional griot, who is the custodian of his people's oral tradition, their verse and songs, their history and culture of resistance.
>
> (Mzamane 1984b: 304)

Such a statement was inflated and rhetorical; assuming that this particular individual author – an urbanised, middle-class male academic – could write with and for a social community in a reflective, truthful manner in a manner which gestured back to the less socially divided and diverse communities of a mythologised African past.

The acceptance of the novel form alters the relationship of black writer to black community in ways which need to be acknowledged. As writers such as Mzamane and Tlali have pointed out, the form demands organisation of the writer's leisure time and a milieu which allows a certain amount of security and space for reflection. The position of professional writer mitigates against any easy assertion by novelists of their immediate political relevance and impact on the community on the basis of the writing alone. When this is unacknowledged, unresolved contradictions emerge, as with Mzamane's self-authorisation of his relationship to those undergoing the travails of the Soweto uprising while writing The Children of Soweto:

> For many of us, the events which broke out in Soweto in June 1976 caused a great deal of soul-searching. Two or three years previously I had decided to drop creative writing for a while.... Then Soweto exploded in our faces. How could I continue along the subtle path, when they were shooting my kid brothers and sisters openly in the streets, in broad daylight? My quest was complete. Only the right serene setting "to recollect my emotions in tranquility" was lacking. I found just such surroundings as I wished for along the Cambrian coast in the tiny university town of Aberystwyth, Wales ...
>
> (Mzamane 1984b: 302 – 3)

It is useful to stress the relative social distance some of the novelists had from the actual experience of Soweto at the time. Serote was not resident in South Africa in 1976 but was a fine arts student at a university in the United States; while Mzamane, employed as an academic in a neighbouring country, was only briefly in South Africa during 1976, nonetheless gaining insight into events and participants' perceptions as the Chairman of the Soweto Students' Relief Committee in Botswana, set up to co-ordinate the activities of organisations catering for refugees.[79] Tlali had a close personal experience of the process of events:

> I've introduced my own plot and the characters are fictitious. But I'm writing from a very real experience. There were so many people involved. So many families affected. It tells of "their state of insecurity," the harassment, the losses and deaths. The book doesn't end in a cloud of death – there are debates as a result of the riots. These made us aware of the feelings of the people. And the question of our children – we have their lives to worry about.
>
> (Tlali in Baron 1979)

Yet her emphasis on the disruption of children and family life clearly shows, even in this instance, that by the time her personal experiences emerged on paper, they were coupled with and partly shaped by her own social beliefs and desires.

Conclusion

The four novels under discussion can be contextualised as having a moral and didactic purpose, demonstrating the correctness and inevitability

of the organised resistance to white domination of which the Soweto Uprising was a crucial part.[80] They constitute, moreover, in many ways a more compellingly first-hand expression of some of the issues of 1976 and its aftermath than historical accounts or works by white writers. This having been said, it must be stated that it is doubtful whether any novelist, in South Africa or elsewhere, can lay claim to expressing a comprehensively 'authentic' experience of his or her society at any point in time, despite the use of narrative effects which may disclose penetrating insight into the historical period under review. Taken to a logical conclusion, authenticity demands a completeness of experience and an objective point of view that no novel, written from an individual viewpoint, can possess.

Three of these novels end with the exile of their chief protagonists, and To Every Birth Its Blood also reaches its conclusion outside of South Africa. Despite the ambiguity of such endings, where the main revolutionary protagonist is last seen removed from the crucible of political struggle, it appears that this exile does not depict defeat so much as a need for regroupment and reflection before returning to the fray. There is a strong feeling that the struggle for liberation of an awakened black South Africa will proceed, whatever happens to the individual participants. What emerges is the sense of a new-found black confidence not to accept South African society as unchangeable, and a readiness to risk everything for the cause of freedom.

By the early 1980s there was a shift discernible in black oppositional politics inside South Africa, in its more radical aspect, towards debating questions of class and gender and stressing the primary importance of the black working-class in the struggle for liberation. Of the writers here discussed Serote, for one, had by the late 1970s moved away from a Black Consciousness perspective towards a more class-orientated approach in line with his allegiance to the A.N.C.[81] Mzamane, too, had begun to use elements of a discourse recognising issues of class in his statements and perceptions.[82]

These novels belong to a challenging new black literature in South Africa. That they were so considered by the white authorities at the time of their publication is without doubt: three of them were, at one time or another, banned inside the country.[83] They formed an important milestone in black South African literature, and cast light on the 'forced next stage' to black liberation 1976 in South Africa represented, when Black Consciousness ideological and cultural concerns began to give way to wider questions of political organisation, armed struggle and socialism. They should therefore be regarded as part of the thrust by a black intelligentsia to mobilise and unify a black community against the strictures of apartheid and the predominance of white viewpoints of South African history. It is, on the other hand, against the possibility that such a counter-hegemony and ideological discourse can itself be used to legitimate a new group in power

and deny class and other cleavages within and outside this mobilised black community, that they must be tested.

Notes to Chapter Four

1. Evidence of this fact is to be found in the utterances of the writers themselves. See Serote 1973a: 18 – 21; 1982: 111 – 2; Mzamane 1984a: 159; Sepamla 1980a: 25; and Seroke's interviews with Serote (Seroke 1981a) and Mutloatse, Sepamla and Tlali (Seroke 1981b), as well as the use made of opinions from all four writers in chapters one and two of this thesis.

2. It should be noted that while Tlali's views in this regard are similar to other writers such as Serote and Mzamane, in the interviews quoted here she is identifying problems faced specifically by black female writers.

3. Watts believes that these books seek to form, not only an activist reader, but also an analytically astute and thoughtful reader (see her remarks in Watts 1989: 221). This parallels the goals of Matshoba discussed in the last chapter.

4. For further debates by Black Consciousness writers over the merits of using English or African languages in South Africa, see the discussions in chapters one and two.

5. All of the above quotes are contained in an interview with Mbulelo Mzamane, Arts & Africa No. 662G, B.B.C African Service transcript (London).

6. Mzamane correspondence to the editors of Donga (Welma Odendaal and Kelwyn Sole) dated 19 August 1980.

7. The novels discussed are Mzamane's The Children of Soweto (hereafter referred to as Children); Sepamla's A Ride on the Whirlwind (hereafter referred to as Ride); Serote's To Every Birth Its Blood (hereafter referred to as Birth); and Tlali's Amandla. All references to page numbers from the text in what follows will be to the South African editions of these novels which are cited in the bibliography.

8. Their names mean 'the one who stays' and 'saviour' respectively in seSotho.

9. It can be observed that Mandla, which means 'power', is a frequently used patronym in the literary expressions of Black Consciousness; usually lending heroic and symbolic overtones to these characters.

10. The symbolic birth of a new order, concretised through metaphors associated with childbirth, occurs frequently in black literature in the period under discussion. For instance, note Mutloatse's likening political liberation to 'labour', a process in which the 'dispossessed people' serve as 'vigilant midwives' (Mutloatse 1981a: 2).

11. An Afrikaans word which means, significantly, 'far enough'.

12. The range of styles in Serote's novel, and its ideological ramifications, will be discussed in the next chapter.

13. I am thinking here of the character Killer.

14. 'Witbaatjie' means, in Afrikaans, 'white jacket' – gesturing to his political allegiances. Moreover, he has a girlfriend, Matlakala, which is an extremely derogatory term among Sotho-speakers. See also footnote 71 of this chapter.

15. Compare this to black editor Aggrey Klaaste's remarks vilifying 'coward parents' in the Weekend World at the time of the uprising, quoted in Kane-Berman 1978: 126.

16. Although this critic's point about the thematic importance of the black community in these novels is indisputable, this chapter will go on to disagree with several of the points made in this quotation.

17. See, for general examples, the plot summaries of such novels by Scheub and Masiea in Andrzejewski et al 1985: 493 – 649.

18. A similar conception comes into being with the novels written contemporaneously with the rise of local nationalisms in Latin America and South-East Asia, in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (see Anderson 1983: 28 – 40).

19. The phrase 'employees of the people' came from the defendants in the 1989 trial of four A.N.C. guerrillas, one of whom used it to justify his (admitted) killing of the policeman on whom the character Hlubi in The Children of Soweto is based (see 'Employed by ...', and footnote 67 of this chapter).

20. Among certain readerships, conversant with the areas being dealt with by realist authors, geographical names – not necessarily followed by descriptions – will guarantee a reference effect in themselves (Schipper 1985: 570).

21. Readers can and may refuse the inevitability of the black community postulated, but descriptions offered of families are harder to deny. Sartre notes that the family is an important node at the level of the primary socialisation of the individual; it is in family relationships where the individual's 'interiorization of the exterior' truly begins (Sartre 1963: 63). According to Raymond Williams, 'No such condition is as physically available as a family' (R. Williams 1984: 243). See also the remarks by Serote in

Seroke 1981a: 31, and Clayton's belief that in some examples of Tlali's early fiction:

> ... the family and the oppressed black 'nation' are experienced as one.... Even while recording the breakdown of family life ... Tlali ... draw(s) on metaphors of family bonding as the deepest connections (she knows).... Political violence summons up the need for care and protection, which family love is meant to guarantee even if it has not been actively experienced. There is no self-conscious fictional manipulation or criticism of the family itself, and no suggestion that certain power structures or abuses may be replicated within the family ...
>
> (Clayton 1991: 140)

22. 'Melkpens' is idiomatic Afrikaans for a young baby or naive person.

23. This point is discussed at greater length in the next chapter.

24. Alvarez-Pereyre (with neither proof nor justification) mistakenly attributes these views to the P.A.C. (Alvarez-Pereyre 1988: 121).

25. A reference to Credo Mutwa's radio broadcast in support of the army in Soweto, which led to his house in Diepkloof being burnt down. Mutwa had earlier written a letter to Jimmy Kruger, the Minister of Justice, in which he had compared Black Consciousness to Nazism (see Kavanagh 1981: xviii).

26. Steve Biko commented:

> I must state categorically that there is no such thing as a Black policeman. Any Black man who props up the system actively has lost the right to being considered part of the Black world.... They are the extension of the enemy into our ranks.
>
> (Biko 1988: 92)

27. Harlow states, I believe correctly, that in A Ride on the Whirlwind Uncle Ribs, Mzi, and Mandla are all shown to have flaws, contained as they are within the author's analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of differing strategies and generations of black resistance in recent South African history (see Harlow 1987: 108 – 10).

28. See footnote 8 of this chapter.

29. In the year and a half after January 1973, for example, there were over three hundred strikes in South Africa, involving over eighty thousand black workers (Hirson 1979: 88). This renders invalid Alvarez-Pereyre's belief that the lack of organised trade union structures at the time is sufficient reason for the omission of workers from these novels (Alvarez-Pereyre 1988: 122).

30. See footnote 27 of this chapter.

31. Bontleng is a slum on the outskirts of Gaborone in Botswana.

32. Tlali does this only to 'solve' the debate again, through the now familiar equating of race and class in black society, and through holding out the possibilities of individual upward social mobility in an apartheid-free society. Felleng, the young heroine of the novel, notes at the end of the debate:

> '... Nana has helped us a lot in our understanding of social dynamics. There's no such thing as a middle class as far as we are concerned. People know that we are all equal and that whatever inequalities seem to exist, are false. They are made to look real by the system. We know that given equal opportunities, any one of us can succeed in any endeavour.'
>
> (Amandla: 258)

33. The role of the Movement in To Every Birth Its Blood will be discussed more comprehensively in the next chapter.

34. Bongi's frayed bodice is ripped off, 'exposing the fullness of her turgid breasts and pointed teats to the beastliness of the two cops' (Ride: 157). See also Nkele's torture in ibid.: 182.

35. > In Amandla ... the adolescent women and girls have a place equal to that of the boys, but do not occupy the same positions in the struggle, because they risk more if they fall into the hands of the police (sic.). One of their tasks is to politicise their sisters or their mothers who are not yet politically aware. Miriam Tlali thus sketches the portraits of numerous women, young and not so young.... If this cannot really be called a feminist work, the place accorded women both in the discussions and in the action is important enough for us to become aware of the intellectual evolution taking place.
>
> (Alvarez-Pereyre 1988: 119)

36. By such characters as Pholoso (see Amandla: 88 – 89). Furthermore, after a woman finally does speak on behalf of the women's organisation F.I.Y.O.H. ('Freedom in your own hand') during the debate between Killer and Moremi, Killer's response in praise ('I am really proud of you ladies') is noticeably patronising (ibid.: 259).

37. As Driver has remarked, the symbolic space occupied by Felleng in the novel is that of a quintessential mother figure – that is, of a static 'backdrop' against which Felleng actualises his own potential:

> The figure of the mother, then, signifies both the woman from whom the male separates in order to define himself as masculine, and the woman whom the male possesses in order to define himself as masculine.... Separation and return ... are the movements through which the male subject defines himself. The return, here is the return of possession: the body of the mother will give birth to all that is his.
>
> (Driver 1990: 237)

This is made manifest in a statement by Pholoso to Felleng in Amandla: 71; and in the meaning of Felleng's name noted in footnote 8 of this chapter.

38. Witness, for instance, the denigration of the shebeen queen Hilda as 'nauseatingly huge and untidy' (Birth: 355).

39. Fanon is consistently cited in Black Consciousness pronouncements in the 1970s and early 1980s, from at least the time of Biko's and Pityana's reference to him in their essays in van der Merwe/Welsh 1972:

> It seems to me it is to Frantz Fanon that the modern black man owes much of his mental liberation. The writer of the seventies seems to have read him well. Certainly people like Steve Biko seemed to have done so.
>
> (Sepamla 1980a: 28)

See also chapter one, footnote 76.

40. See chapter three, footnote 42 in this regard.

41. Mzamane correspondence to Sole 28 July 1986; see also the previous discussion of this point earlier in this chapter.

42. See the discussions on English usage and literacy levels in chapter two, footnote 101.

43. McLennan 1981: 31; 66. As with Marxist history, so with Marxist notions of literature:

> Traditionally in one form or another (realism is) the central model of Marxist aesthetics as a narrative discourse which unites the experience of daily life with a properly cognitive, mapping ... perspective.
>
> (Jameson 1981: 104)

44. Culler speaks of the 'double logic' of narrative assumption:

> These two logics, one of which insists upon the causal efficacy of origins and the other of which denies their causal efficacy, are in contradiction but they are essential to the way in which the narrative functions. One logic assumes the primacy of events; the other treats the events as the products of meanings.
>
> (Culler 1981: 178)

45. As examples, see Chatman 1978: 15 – 42 especially, and Rimmon-Kenan 1983: 43 – 58.

46. In other words, for historians, methodology can never be used to completely sidestep prior substantive commitment to an ideological and ethical position, even if such commitment may alter or expand as a result of the ensuing investigation. Empirical evidence obviously makes a difference to the

judgments of an historian, but a constant interplay and modification of such evidence vis-a-vis prior hypotheses and modes of perception takes place (for discussion see Jameson 1971: 161; McLennan 1981: 90).

47. For a critical discussion of the work of Hayden White, Mink and others, see McLennan 1981: 76 – 87.

48. The Doctorow quote is from Foley 1983. See this article for further critical discussion of such a view.

49. History concerns itself with falsification in a way literature does not. Thus, while we cannot say that either genres can ever completely define and illustrate what is 'true', the explanatory nature of history ideally requires that functional and causal explanation support each other and that the combination is epistemologically legitimate (McLennan 1981: 66). Furthermore, historical analysis has strong reference to paradigms: in the process of its explication categories are produced either implicitly or explicitly which allow the reader to grasp differences in the social process and framework being described (Philipson 1985: 180 – 1). In this process, the best history is selective, but tries not to be reductive in its explanations and abstract analyses (R. Johnson 1982: 161 – 2).

50. Mzamane correspondence to Sole, 28 July 1986. It can be seen, however, that this author's acknowledgement that his novel may be read in widely differing ways as regards its accuracy is imbricated with a strong belief that it contains ideological 'truths': truths which will, moreover, instill some of his less politicised black audience in South Africa with a new impetus to action and a new, more adequate, understanding of the historical events of which they were part.

51. In the 1970s and 1980s radical historians in South Africa again began experimenting with expressly audio-visual and literary techniques, and honing their narrative skills, partly as a means of emphasising human agency (see the discussion of this trend in Europe in Hobsbawm 1980: 3 – 5). The use of conscious narrative effects in historical writing was claimed to be a means of illuminating wider questions and sets of social relationships, going beyond the particular 'story' being told or its specific actors (see Abrams 1980: 8 – 9).

52. Quoted in Baxandall/Morawski 1973: 116. Victor Serge: 'Historical work does not satisfy me entirely ... it does not allow enough scope for showing men as they really live, dismantling their inner workings and penetrating deep into their souls' (quoted in Visser 1985b: 21).

53. It is easy, unfortunately, to transform an argument such as this into an idealistic notion of the superior 'truth' of art. I would argue that ideological inclinations and social determinants play a large part in setting parameters for literary work.

54. It can however be argued that this may mark an ambivalence on the author's part as to some of the implications of the Soweto Uprising. See for instance his remark about his being 'frightened' by some of the actions of the youth (interview with Alex Tetteh-Lartey, 'Arts and Africa' no. 388, B.B.C. African service transcript: 3; and see also his comments in Gray 1977: 89).

55. Stephen Gray makes this point in Gray 1984: 5.

56. While Mzamane speaks of the bias of white newspaper accounts of the Soweto Uprising (Mzamane 1984a: 159) and, in his novel, mentions the way in which black editors and journalists such as Aggrey Klaaste and Percy Qoboza are detained for trying to put forward the black point of view in the World, Serote, typically, deals with the issue through fictional process (describing Tsi's setbacks as a reporter and Dikeledi's attempts to write a relevant newspaper column) and use of symbol (see Birth: 118 – 24; 127 – 35; 265 – 8 vis-a-vis Children: 230; 237 – 8).

57. Even more tellingly the billboard slogan was, to my memory, an actual one.

58. See Serote's statement in Seroke 1981a: 30, as well as footnote 34 in chapter five of this thesis.

59. Compare the fictional accounts with the very different rendering of this event in Brooks/Brickhill 1980: 215 – 23 and Kane-Berman 1978: 113 – 4.

60. This lack is remarked upon by Rathbone 1979: 130 – 1.

61. For a commentary on the rise of N.A.Y.O., S.A.S.M. and the Action Committee of students before 16 June see Hirson 1979: 100 – 5; 175 – 80; Brooks/Brickhill 1980: 80 – 92; Nozipho Diseko 1991: 41 – 60.

62. Amandla: 220; compare with Tlali 1984a: 24.

63. Mzamane correspondence to Sole, 28 July 1986.

64. Children: 218; compare with Kane-Berman 1978: 33 – 4.

65. This disparity in naming occurs in Children: 8; 210.

66. Children: 222; compare with Kane-Berman 1978: 115 – 6.

67. The death is reported in the Rand Daily Mail of 27 June 1978. See also footnote 19.

68. Children: 226 – 7; compare with Brooks/Brickhill 1978: 216 – 7.

69. The argument here is adapted from Hunter 1984: 407.

70. One can postulate that another reason for such fictionalisation is to avoid libel. Chabeli and Rathebe bear strong resemblances to, inter alia, the

'mayor' of Soweto in the late 1970s, David Thebehali, and the businessmen Motsuenyane, Maponya and Tshabalala.

71. The positive names mean, respectively, 'Person', 'Power', 'Freedom', 'Saviour' and 'Lover of People'; while 'Matlakala' means 'rubbish'. See also footnote 14 of this chapter.

72. See Kane-Berman's account of student coercion in Kane-Berman 1978: 112. That the students' methods in maintaining boycotts and stay-aways were excessive is beyond question. Commenting on the formation of the school student organisation C.O.S.A.S. in 1979, Phaahla observes:

> Students were able to reflect back on the mistakes of the past and realised that during the uprisings (of 1976) not enough groundwork had been laid. So when students realised that students alone could not challenge the system and that there was a need to rally the workers as well, there was not any groundwork laid for this. Therefore the situation which developed was one of the most nasty confrontations in our history - the clashes between students and workers, especially between students and the workers of Mzimhlope Hostel. Students had to coerce workers not to go to work.
>
> (Phaahla 1982: 41)

73. See also chapter two footnote 94.

74. Watts uncritically accepts this particular narrative strategy, to the point where she believes Sabelo's opinions:

> ... are never individualised but are representative of the whole group of students.... Mzamane's 'I' is not this individualised, self-engrossed 'I', but the almost anonymous 'I' or 'eye' of the reporter who exists to transmit information, not to intrude his personality on the reader.
>
> (Watts 1989: 229; 236)

Her understanding that the protagonist-narrator's presence within a group of students and, later, the S.R.C leadership, renders him more objective and reliable is remarkably innocent of any critical awareness that such a position of focalisation is a choice of Mzamane's, which begs further scrutiny and analysis.

75. This use of poetry in a different medium would, in my opinion, have a resonance effect on some black readers; reinforcing the emotional and political message being transmitted.

76. Watts makes the point that these novels seek to focus more on the development of political action rather than on the development of character, presuming relationships in the black community to be already in place (see especially Watts 1989: 219; 221). However, she overstates her case by

refusing to believe that divisions may occur within this politicised black community (see especially ibid.: 249). Watts' reading of these novels (in terms of her notions of characterisation, corporate identity and their use of historical and journalistic accounts) and the aesthetic value she ascribes to them, is – it must be said – noticeably confused and contradictory (see especially her discussions of Amandla and A Children of Soweto in Watts 1989: 223 – 4; 236 – 7).

77. An interesting case to point is Jordan Ngubane's assertion that his novel Ushaba contained inter alia sociological explication because it resembled the Zulu umlando, a form of historical narrative where the break between fact and fiction is not expected (Nazareth 1978: 57). It should be noted that most attempts to discuss the issue of the usage of European forms in African literary expression, such as that of Jane Watts, remain free of careful historical analysis of the way in which specific writers have been formally influenced by a mixture of European- and African-derived literary forms, and tend to rely on sweeping generalisations and exaggerations.

78. See, as examples of this tendency, Dangor 1982b: 48; Clayton 1982; Ngwenya 1981.

79. This brought him in close proximity to the students and their recollections (Mzamane correspondence to Sole 28 July 1986).

80. Even Mzamane's use of irony in The Children of Soweto can be seen in this light: irony tends ultimately towards a serious, didactic purpose (see Jameson 1981: 160 and Berman 1983: 14).

81. See for instance the views expressed in Serote et al 1983.

82. See his remarks about the 'real spring' of his work being the working-class, in Handan/Myesgin 1984: 40.

83. A Ride on the Whirlwind was banned between 11 September 1981 and 4 June 1982; Amandla was banned in 1981 and unbanned in 1986; and The Children of Soweto was banned between 19 July 1982 and 14 October 1987.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE POETIC RESOLUTION OF POLITICS

The Passage of Wally Serote

Mongane Wally Serote's early interviews and statements show that he was a passionate exponent of Black Consciousness for the first half of the 1970s.[1] However, during the later part of the decade he shifted away from this affiliation towards the non-racial perspectives and policies of the A.N.C.[2] Nevertheless, his views on the function of literature in society and the role of the black writer in South Africa reflected noteworthy continuities over that decade: as he subsequently noted, Black Consciousness 'shaped my writing at a very influential moment.... It was important ... in shaping my understanding of the relationship between art and politics' ('Serote still ...'). Throughout his career he has stressed the inextricable intertwining of literature with politics: writers should be spokespeople for, and responsive to, their social communities.

He has constantly reiterated the need for a close connection between writer and community: for him, 'The content of our writing has to be dictated to by the aspirations of our people (sic.). This is going to be the criteria of the quality of our writing' (August 1990a: 94).[3] In his view the black writer must not only reveal the true face of apartheid so that

'inarticulateness ... can be overhauled by knowledge'; authors should also participate in the democractic transformation of society, by widening their experience of social conditions and disseminating that enhanced vision to their readership.[4]

Serote therefore shared the understanding common to black writers of the period under discussion as to the political determinants their writing should engage with. Shifts in his perspective in this regard have been relatively small, and measurable against his own political development – interviews, conducted prior to his departure from South Africa in 1974, hinted at a degree of personal withdrawal and social alienation (see Kuhn 1974: 40). Later statements, made after joining the A.N.C. (which he frequently identifies as 'the Movement' in his non-fictional writings, a tendency which resonates with the use of that term in To Every Birth Its Blood), have identified the writer closely with political commitment, organisational membership and collective endeavour.[5]

Serote has continually claimed that political change occasions not only ideological but also generic and formal changes in literature in an immediate, reflexive manner: remarking to an interviewer in 1981 that the black writer should tailor his or her work to circumstances, as form is functional to purpose (Seroke 1981a: 30). The writer, in his view, should 'articulate the experience of our people through whatever language, in whatever form' (August 1990c: 101). Throughout he has accepted the authentic and mimetic calling of the black writer; noting in the early 1970s

that the writer should be a 'mirror of society' (Kuhn 1974: 41): a perception he reiterated in an article published in 1990.[6] He abandoned a career as a court reporter for a newspaper in the period when he realised:

> ... how limiting it was. I wanted to reproduce the thing verbatim. But in a report you categorise things ... and no-one knows anything of the real person behind the deed.
>
> (Kuhn 1974: 35 – 6; emphasis mine)

Later, in answer to an observation by an interviewer in 1980 – the year in which To Every Birth Its Blood was completed – that an earlier volume of poetry was 'frightening, even hallucinatory' he replied that:

> ... the poems are a straight record of the violence which people in Alexandra, in Soweto, live with. My countrymen had better believe Tsetlo; it is a report of the everyday lives of the people, a record of what burdens their sleep.
>
> (Chapman 1982b: 114)

His view that the black writer in South Africa needs to deal adequately with and reflect a wide-reaching black communal experience has strengthened, if anything, over the years. By time he returned to South Africa for good in 1990 his belief in the inclusive potential of politically-directed art was even more pronounced, as was his perception that the individual black writer could portray, and analyse, an exhaustive catalogue of community experience:

> If a work of art is able to give us a vision to enable us to achieve our aspiration, it becomes genius because it has the skills to articulate the total experience of our people.
> It also gives us clarity as to why we are where we are.
>
> (Johnstone 1990)

Despite a later recognition that South African society displays diversities and hierarchies which are not always strictly racially determined (see

Chapman 1982b: 114; August 1990a: 94 – 5), this author's perception of the relationship between black writer and community – and between members of the black community – has always stressed the racial bonding required to oppose apartheid. What divisions have occurred in this community, he noted, were the result of apartheid, and could thus be eased and erased by political action towards moulding unity. Since his change in affiliation Serote, has defined his community in terms of its relation to the liberation struggle and his own party, the A.N.C. Indeed, he has come close on occasions to implying that membership of 'the Movement' will give the individual unproblematic access to a close relationship with 'the people': at the same time 'alienation for a cultural worker is shame and death' as far as he is concerned (Ngugi/Serote 1988: 33).

Critics on Unity and Composition

Serote is recognised primarily as a poet, and his poetry has received acclaim both in South Africa and internationally. To Every Birth Its Blood, his only novel (published in 1981), has however provoked a more equivocal critical reponse. Some commentators praised the work's acuity and comprehensiveness. Doriane Barboure, for one, claimed that it was 'the most powerful and penetrating exploration of the Power period' in South Africa (Barboure 1984: 172); Piniel Shava designated it as the only

significant novel written by a black writer since the Soweto uprisings (Shava 1989: 157), and Jane Glegg believed it managed to represent a whole community involved in political struggle successfully, in a manner which shows up the failure of English working-class novels to do the same (Glegg 1982: 34).

Other critics, however, have been less convinced. Nkosi felt the work 'too chaotic, too dispersed, to offer anything more solid than mere moments' (Nkosi 1986: 45); Harlow observed that it remained content with the portrayal of racial conflict in the country, showing few of the internal contradictions within the black community (Harlow 1987: 108); while Ndebele remarked that, despite the author's attempts to deal with the everyday concerns of people within a broader political canvas, in the end 'the spectacle takes over and the novel throws away the vitality of the tension generated by the dialectic between the personal and the public' (Ndebele 1986a: 156).

The novel's reception, in reviews and articles, reflects a noticeable uncertainty of response. It is apparent that commentators' assessments were implicitly bound up with their own prior literary assumptions to an even greater extent than usual in this area. This indecision appears to have been related to the peculiar bipartite structure of the novel, hinging around how the two sections should be read off against each other. Further disagreement resulted from the relative weight diverse critics seemed to attach to the differing narrative techniques used in the two parts, whereby

Serote appears to whet disparate aesthetic and ideological appetites only to finally refuse complete satisfaction to any of them.

On the one hand, some critics praised the realistic depiction of political activity and mass uprising embodied in the second half of the novel.[7] Others found themselves more attracted to the modernist stylistic inclinations and emphasis on individual characterisation in its first half, dismissing the depiction of guerrilla warfare in Part Two as 'superficial and sentimental' (Ngwenya 1981). The latter critics tended to contrast Tsi's 'sensitive soliloquies' in the early stages of the novel with the 'plethora of cliches' following (Dangor 1982b: 35 – 6).[8]

Despite the diversity of evaluations displayed, however, only two critics have so far subjected the novel to anything approaching fuller scrutiny. As my arguments in what is to follow partly rely on and partly disagree with the insights of both, it will be necessary to paraphrase some of their more important conclusions.

Barboure argued for the aptness of the novel's structure. She sees Serote as explicating a process which moves from the individual consciousness of Tsi and the more subjective mode of representation of the first half, to a second half which ramifies the focus away from a single character to a group of Movement activists and a more objective mode. She believes that the novel should be read as a consistent narrative, moving from individual alienation to group political commitment. She praises (with one or two reservations) the author's conceptualisation of political

radicalisation under the auspices of the Movement in Part Two, stressing that an understanding of the relationship between Parts One and Two is integral to a discovery of the author's purpose, both politically (the passage from Tsi's alienated anguish to comradely commitment and armed struggle) and formally (the movement from first to third person, encapsulating a thematic movement from subjective isolation to objective social engagement).

Using this explicatory framework, she explains further complexities and features of the novel. For instance, she understands Serote's deployment of Tsi's 'defeated' family in Part One to be set against the 'very different' Ramono family, politically active and psychologically strong, in Part Two. She commends the novel's avoidance of a polarisation between the personal and the public. The revolutionaries are shown to be human individuals, with their own quirks and failings – Serote neither romanticises violence nor shirks from showing the personal difficulties associated with revolutionary choice. Finally, she tries to explain facets of the novel which remain difficult to interpret, agreeing with Schoon (Schoon 1982: 35 – 8) that Tsi's one attempt at political activism at the end of Part One is doomed because he makes the wrong choice and joins a liberal organisation. Furthermore, she believes, the transition to political revolution in the second half is carefully phased by Serote through the new lease of life Black Consciousness ideology gives to the community, the advent of the Soweto uprising and the angry sense of purpose left in the black community

radicalisation under the auspices of the Movement in Part Two, stressing that an understanding of the relationship between Parts One and Two is integral to a discovery of the author's purpose, both politically (the passage from Tsi's alienated anguish to comradely commitment and armed struggle) and formally (the movement from first to third person, encapsulating a thematic movement from subjective isolation to objective social engagement).

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by the deaths of loved ones at the hands of the police during and after 1976.

Nick Visser later took issue with Barboure's interpretation; suggesting that the uncertainty in critical responses to the novel had been generated by an inconsistency and fluidity in the text's structural and ideological processes. This undercut the judgment of those critics assuming that the work has a unified, consistent narrative. Much of what emerges structurally in Part One escapes commentators such as Barboure, he argues; and there are further complexities implicit in the work as a whole which were not identified correctly by herself and others.

He shows that much of the disagreement that occurred amongst critics was due to a lack of consistency of temporal vantage point in the action of the novel. Despite references to events in recent South African history, the assigning of dates or any satisfactory duration of time to episodes in the text becomes increasingly arbitrary and difficult. In particular, the chronology of Tsi's main experiences are easy enough to follow, but the closer the reader tries to plot these experiences the more they start to blur. Furthermore, he disagrees with Barboure as to the aptness of the portrayal of the Movement in the novel. He criticises Serote's depiction of this organisation as ambiguous, operating on a realistic and symbolic level at the same time with scant regard for ensuing problems of representation.

Visser explains the discrepancies and contradictions in the novel by referring to the date of its composition. It was written during a tumultuous

time in South Africa's recent political history – the five years between 1975 and 1980. He suggested that, as Serote himself became involved in this unfolding history as a cultural activist, he tried to incorporate new events into a novel he had already begun to write. The effect of the Soweto uprising of 1976, and his own change of allegiance from a Black Consciousness viewpoint to membership of the A.N.C., were, Visser believed, especially relevant. As each new phase of struggle and repression occurred, Serote opened up his narrative further to incorporate it. Eventually, changes in his literary priorities compelled him to abandon one type of novel (the modernist, existentially-orientated first part) for another (the social realism of the second part). Yet the author did not completely abandon the first fictional project or fold it satisfactorily into the second. The two sections remain incompletely integrated, and a transition from one to the other is never finally accomplished.[9]

This critic makes a powerful case: although, as he points out himself, his argument begs manuscriptural evidence. He demonstrates convincingly that Barboure's totalising proclivities distort those parts of the text which run counter to her framework: firstly, her highlighting of the Ramono family as a counterpoint to Tsi's is seriously compromised by Ramono's harsh treatment of his son Morolong, a treatment she cannot explain away adequately.[10] Secondly, if the thrust of the novel is towards political radicalisation and the successful taking up of arms against the oppressor, the re-introduction of a relatively unchanged Tsi at its end needs more

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careful analysis than she is prepared to give it, as it seriously disrupts any satisfactory political denouement or ideological closure to the novel.[11]

The Arming of Logic

While damaging to Barboure's conclusions, Visser's own reading of the novel leaves several issues either pending or not adequately discussed. His conviction that features of structuration of the novel are of considerably less importance than the results of the clash of two incomplete fictional projects (Visser 1987: 72) leaves a number of the novel's formal, thematic and ideological intricacies unexplored. His explorations of the text's irregularities of composition might be accurate to a large extent: yet they potentially foreclose further examination of the text itself.

This task of re-examination is made imperative by a subsequent statement by the author with regard to his own generic choices in writing:

> When oppression is very intense (as in the early sixties and mid-seventies), when there is no political activity to give release to oppression, people become much more conscious of the might of the state ... there is a lack of skills and tools to read, analyse and create. So poetry ... did provide an expression for people affected by this. And while it is not possible to compare the novel and poetry, they do make different demands on people. Poetry can be condensed and the writer can use imagery very extensively, which means you can remain obscure, perhaps unclear, but give a feel of what you want to say and it can be identified. But while you can do that with a novel, in truth it cannot be recognised as a novel. A novel depends a lot on logic, on creating a logical process of development.
>
> (August 1990c: 102; emphasis mine)

While the historical explanations for genre choices in this statement are open to debate, it contains perceptions which occur often in Serote's interviews and non-fictional articles.

Serote's highlighting of the logical demands made by the novel form are especially significant. In my opinion, his choice of the novel form for To Every Birth Its Blood was at least partly due to the form's facilitation of logical process. This is in fact vindicated by a further remark, in the same interview, that the A.N.C.'s political struggle against apartheid in its phase of armed struggle supported by popular mobilisation 'taught us logic ... armed us for storytelling in a logical manner' (idem.; my emphasis).[12]

It follows that what needs to be searched for in Serote's only novel is just such an attempt at logical development. Whether such an undertaking is contradictory due to its circumstances of production is not here the point: the point is that it was attempted. The disjunctures and inconsistencies which riddle Barboure's overview are obvious: indeed, Visser is lenient in the number of inconsistencies of temporal vantage point he points out that she is oblivious to.[13] Yet Visser leaves us with a sense of the relative inadequacy of all explanations which attempt to read the novel for thematic and ideological overview. In my view there is an alternative reading of the text possible which suggests that the author's control of his material was up to a point much more sure than Visser assumes.

The novelist's remark about the relative strategic spaces open to poetry and the novel are reminders that he is both a poet and a prose

writer. This has relevance for the study of this novel which tends to be overlooked. Critics have been hamstrung by a fundamental assumption that, when all is said and done, the work is essentially a work of realism: and (at least until the last episodes) a work of realism which attempts to reflect contemporaneous political events of the 1960s and 1970s. Such a belief is not incorrect, but insufficient. The mimetic urge is undercut by numerous inconsistencies in the relation of textual events to historical events, as already noted; and furthermore the action of the novel is projected into the immediate post-1980 future as it is imagined by the author, when the Movement's political struggle is ever-intensifying but still inconclusive as to its outcome.

Thus, while To Every Birth Its Blood has rightly been designated by critics as a novel 'inspired by the 1976 Soweto student uprising, a historic tragedy that has lent impetus to the national liberation struggle' (E. Patel 1990: 191; see also C. Abrahams 1988: 35), its interests and concerns encompass much more. While the events of June 1976 are an important turning-point in the book, they play a comparatively minor part in the text's action, given only through the memory of one of its characters at the beginning of the novel's second part.[14] Indeed, one critic has categorised this novel as indicating a major shift in consciousness in black South African fiction, where it is the country's future that is primarily being addressed ... (Clingman 1990a: 157).

Serote's 'Felt Thought'

There is a form of temporal and political logic at work in the text other than the strictly realistic. Some critics have touched on this aspect of Serote's writing by remarking on the 'poetic qualities' of the novel (Klaaste 1982) or (with regard to a subsequent volume of his poetry) by noting that he uses imagery as 'strategic interventions in the political arena, of inspirational myth' (Chapman 1988: 27). Barboure also fleetingly explores the development of symbolism in Serote's poetry as a touchstone to his increasing stylistic complexity and political radicalisation, reaching 'a culmination' in To Every Birth Its Blood (Barboure 1984: 179); while Visser, at the end of his critique, comments in passing that the role of the Movement in the novel is eventually shifted from the realm of the analytical and political to that of the metaphoric (Visser 1987: 75). Yet no critic of the novel has carried through the logic of such observations to their conclusion.

The novel can be seen to be marked stylistically by a consistent shifting interplay of symbols and motifs: references to rivers, journeys, silences, storms, eyes, holes and music (to name only the most intrusive) abound. Such an interplay is also characteristic of the author's poetry, even to the point where it is often the same or similar symbols that are used. With reference to the latter genre, Mphahlele has described this interplay as part of a strategy of compulsive exploration and development:

> Serote records 'felt thought' almost as if he were transcribing directly from a response mechanism within, while it was registering impressions and flashing its messages.... There are words and images that he uses and frequently returns to. Again,he does this relentlessly, compulsively, as if to extract the last drop of meaning from them.... These repeated images are turned around and inside out in a manner that quite clearly portrays a poet searching for meaning, up and down the vertical and horizontal planes.
>
> (Mphahlele 1985: 67 – 8)

In the novel, to some extent, such commonly used symbols and motifs change meaning as their contexts in the novelistic action change, and the text acquires added resonance and emphasis as a result. This is to be expected. Thus, in a few short pages at the novel's end, as Tsi continues his drinking sprees with Yao in Botswana, the reader will compare Tsi's sister's eyes 'staring straight at me' in his memory with the adjacent remark that Yao does not wish to lift his head 'for then he would not know what to do with his eyes' (Birth: 352; 354); and realise that eyes are here meant to function symbolically as an index of shame and reproach. Obviously, there are didactic and moral implications the author wishes to highlight from such a juxtaposition.

However, in the long term each symbol used continually becomes operative in rather contradictory ways as the novel progresses. It is very difficult to see, for example, how at various points in a single literary work the symbol of the 'journey' can be used to refer to such different events as the sexual act, the trek towards liberation, the journey of the individual through life, the journey into exile, the experience of being tortured and the music of Dollar Brand and still maintain any overall coherence (ibid.: 3; 23;

69; 112; 249; 346; 357; 367). When this can be seen to happen with a series of symbols and motifs, the metaphorical language in which they are expressed starts to form intrusive patterns of its own, pulling the novel into several possible levels of reading simultaneously.

Rather than adding further resonances of meaning, these symbols' protean, shifting patterns act as a hindrance to the novel's satisfactory denouement. Any controlled accuracy of usage begins to bleed away. Thus, it would appear that the author has not satisfactorily differentiated the 'different demands' poetry and the novel make on author and reader (August 1990c, see above). The novel is pulled into two different forms of expression, the one realistic, analytic and linear and the other imagistic, repetitive and intuitive.

Critics such as Barboure and Glegg misapprehend the novel, as Visser has pointed out, by assuming an unruptured organic unity and logic of narrative process and language. Yet many of the points they make cannot be completely cast aside – their insights make partial sense in the unfolding of the novel. It is therefore necessary, initially, to try and discover the authorial ideology which allowed Serote to believe he could publish the novel in the precise format he did, whatever disjunctures of composition it might have gone through. A suggestion as to authorial intention and textual logic is of course not sufficient explanation in itself; but is a necessary first step towards unfolding the fuller implications of the novel's contradictory presence.

It can be seen under closer scrutiny that Serote disrupts narrative convention and critical reception by using two systems of narrative logic throughout the book – the realistic and the metaphoric. This is more than the mutual interference of two critical projects: the metaphoric and the realistic are intertwined in a conceptual unity which directly indicates the terrain of Serote's own ideological convinctions. His ideological and political viewpoints are interlaced with the novel's stylistic and structural processes in a complex manner, but a manner which is definitely not outside of the ambit of critical scrutiny. The author's overarching scheme of logic – his political message and vision – is the point towards which these two levels of language and logic focus. It is, as a result, only through an exploration of this conceptual framework that the nature of Serote's ideology, and any resultant conceptual problems for the reader, can be approached. The decisive contradictions in To Every Birth Its Blood are fundamentally ideological and political – rather than structural – in origin.

The Emptiness of Time

The formal structuring and temporal sequencing of any novel are never a completely mimetic imitation of what happens in reality, but of necessity display a choice of both what events to highlight, and when to highlight them. Thus, sequencing in fiction implies a principle of ordering

and choice of values on the part of its author (Izevbaye 1982: 75).[15] On closer reading it appears that the structure of Serote's novel does indeed yield evidence of a consistency and logic of authorial intention, a consistency best read off in terms of the temporal sequencing of the novel. Rather than dismissing the uncertainty of temporal vantage point and the existence of anachronisms as impediments to the author's purpose, it is more fruitful to understand that time – however unfixed and paradoxical the manner in which it is expressed – is the presence which dominates and ultimately delineates the narrative body Serote constructs. It is here, too, that the dual existence of the poetic-symbolic and socially realistic imperatives of the text can be seen to weave into some sort of concurrence. The most important structuring force which delineates To Every Birth Its Blood is not the ideological signifier of the Movement at all, as has been claimed by otherwise dissenting critics, but the temporal perspective and logic through which the text operates.

Temporal indicators and diectics abound in the novel: if anything, they are so plentiful that they are a source of confusion rather than clarification.[16] While the mimetic paralleling of narrative events to extra-textual historical events is undeniably a problem, the temporal looping employed by the author in Part One is the key to understanding Serote's logic, and signifies an ideological and conceptual choice on the part of the author.

The novel starts, as far as Tsi is concerned, in media res. The first three chapters present Tsi after his days as a journalist, but before his time at McLeans College. Tsi is presented as an individual dislocated from, but ineluctably held within, the body of the Alexandra community – its streets, its crowds, its violence. 'I have never walked with crowds, I walk into them', he reflects (Birth: 5); but there is no place in apartheid South Africa for him to escape his social community. Politics so overdetermines individual life for black people in South Africa, due to the particular nature of apartheid and its interference in private life, that individual experience and even psychological trauma can never be seen in isolation from political events. Even in the most anguished sections of Tsi's early monologues, he cannot escape the painful memory of the political history which has constructed a 'people's defeat' in Alexandra, nor the meaninglessness of individual life ~~within~~ such a history.[17] Even drowning himself in music and drink cannot stop Tsi's obsessive political-cum-existential reflections: but these reflections, despite their cogency, cannot bring Tsi to act. This is nowhere more apparent than when he is at home, listening to his mother sing:

> Something had snapped. Nothing was visible. No words meant anything.... But then, where is home? What is it that ever suggested to us that there was a home other than the one we had seen, lived in, which also defeated us? We, the children, perhaps a little bewildered by the realisation that we were about to lose, about to have to go it alone, about to have to experience a deep loneliness, a feeling of distrust for life, a realisation that death has, above all, power, triumph over life, we were witness to it all. These old people had, with all their strengths, with all their lives, tried to build a future for us, but everything was against it.... I thirsted for the goodness, the kindness in life, I got snared while I was looking.... and I lost my strength.... Yes,

> the old people had no more strength, there had not been any battles won, everyone of them was worn out and had decided to take the path that leads to the hole.
>
> (ibid.: 62 – 3)

The first chapters of To Every Birth Its Blood depict a painful dissolution, which affects the broader community as much as it affects Tsi. Time is portrayed as repetitious, all but circular, as Tsi lives in the continuous, indeterminate past of his own (and implicitly all other black people's) pain. Stylistically, in the beginning the author works predominantly in a recently past but non-specific tense, constructing the plot via Tsi's memory and repeated first-person narrator asides to make sorties into personal and community history. In this context, the assaulted Tsi and Boykie are:

> ... lost in the night, and the drama of our time was this time set again.... It was us who were the issue of the drama, of the vicious hatred white people have managed to have against black people.
>
> (ibid.: 84).

This endless circularity of defeat and the existential despair it engenders are not allowed to last. The first few chapters of the novel move from the hopelessness of Tsi's post-assault agony to a recollection, over several chapters, of the assault in question and its surrounding circumstances (ibid.: 71 – 134). It is first apparent in this section what a powerful role the act of remembering has in the work as a whole.[18] Memory is 'an unreliable mirror', as Tsi points out (ibid.: 29) (a remark which Visser makes one of the lynchpins of his analysis (Visser 1987: 70)). It is a painful process as well, reviving thoughts of the defeat suffered by

the indigenous inhabitants of the country under white rule: 'you know that it is only in our memory that this is our land', Boykie remarks to Tsi (ibid.: 78). Military defeat and the advent of capitalism have made blacks 'all manacled by time, by the cruel and real time of moments, when machines demand attention because something called gold demands to be crushed and sifted and sold' (ibid.: lll).

The normality of a country under apartheid is revealed to mask an intense experience of disorder for black South Africans, a profound dislocation of black self- and nationhood.[19] The South African State is typified as inverting normal standards and values, controlled as it is by 'mad men' whose statements about the 'lawlessness and disorder' and 'crazy' nature of black aspirations are always deployed ironically by Serote (ibid.: 166; 235; 359). The power of this Government is both absolute and morally arbitrary.[20] The ultimate immorality of apartheid makes the order it upholds destructive. It disrupts social space and time for the people it oppresses, and demands an overturning by them of its false notions of order – literally, a revolution – for a proper sense of order to be established.

Tsi's dilemma, and the dilemma of his family and those like him, is that as individuals they either understand and will not change their circumstances, or otherwise do not understand at all:

> ... I began to envy those who had never read, who had never dared to be ambitious about anything, those people walking so fast, laughing, producing millions of almost directionless footsteps, these people who like my grandfather, mindless, were born in South Africa, black,

> children of pagans, heathens, children who, cursed because they dared to see their fathers naked, were to be punished forever, and forever were to draw water, chop wood, and be servants to cruel masters.
> I envied them, for, in their movement, in their faces, in their laughter something was there, the graffiti written in the dust on the paved streets.
> The graffiti were legible, but all of us, the masters and the servants alike, did not want to know anything about them. So they were not legible. Those of the cursed who tried to decipher them ended on some island near Cape Town, where the law of the white people was made.... There were many, many of them there, and many were still headed there, but a lot more refused to look at the graffiti. The price was too high.
>
> (ibid.: 125)

The 'graffiti' Tsi refers to cannot be read by just anyone – it remains illegible precisely because there are black people who do not want to 'know' what the reality of their situation is.

Those who do act in the first part of the novel – such as Fix, Nomsisi and the Tsi of the McLeans College episode – either make the wrong political choices, or find their actions too unco-ordinated and dispersed for success. Tsi is passive: he believes social intercourse can only destroy him (ibid.: 34; 45). Despite understanding the cause of his alienation, he thinks all action is worthless because it will end in defeat; and this lack of belief in his ability to make a difference ensures that he cannot begin to change himself or his social milieu. In a situation of generational conflict and political oppression, all he can say to his mother when she questions his activities is: "Mama, truly I do not know what I have been doing" (ibid.: 27). Yet he is simultaneously depicted as being aware of the need to act, in accordance with a communal concord that might work against the external political conditions destroying black society.[21]

It is this inability to take the first step towards change which makes Tsi, by his own admission, 'an observer rather than a participant' (ibid.: 71). In such an ambience, Serote seems to suggest, any relationship the individual undertakes of a sexual nature, or as regards family, is also ultimately doomed:

> We together, locked like that, by time, place, blood ... by sweat, and by all that makes us think and wish we could know each other; if we were now, once more, to rise, to move closer to each other, in fear, desperation, uncertainty, moved by a sadness, helplessness, hopelessness, by a wish to know what it is we could do, we were capable of doing: so that, once and for all, we would be with those we love, those we have as our families, to begin a journey. Where, where does a river begin? We were born, and we had come to be witnesses of life, distorted by time and by place. Everything that we could claim immediately left bloodstains on our fingers.
>
> (ibid.: 69 – 70)

Memory and rumination are painful but nevertheless important. Memory has at least one other important function as well: recollection of private or public history establishes bonds of causality in the novel. Such recollection is the only way to understand the present; and understanding the present is the only way for black people, individually or communally, to start moving into a future which is not meaninglessly repetitive. This theme is hinted at from early on: while Tsi is being assaulted, the grandmother he imagines watching utters significant words: "Child you must know ... that your past is so scattered, nothing could hold it, that you have a future to build" (ibid.: 88).[22] Both Tsi's sketching out of the history of Alexandra (ibid.: 28 – 31) and the assault scene act in part to explain how the state of affairs at the beginning of the novel has come about, both for Tsi and for

his wider community. The reason for the street violence, Tsi's drunkenness and his family's marital problems are to some extent clarified. He is led to think about the past, and the significance of his life: and Tsi's state of mind is made more understandable, if not permissible, for the reader. The novel's initial style and use of tense begin to shift, and a greater usage of the active voice and definite past tense intrudes (ibid.: 71ff.). These changes are associated with a shift towards linear chronology and causal process and explanation.

The characters, moreover, need to remember the past in order to break with its negative aspects, and to realise the need to disrupt the endless 'forever' of apartheid South Africa. This is already hinted at during the police assault:

> 'What the hell do we do when things are like this?' Boykie said. He said that with a controlled voice. It was a voice saturated with memories, a voice brimful of and spilling with despair, it was a voice determined to live, determined to die if need be, if indeed the cycle would be broken, once and for all.
>
> (ibid.: 85)

This becomes more explicit as the action proceeds. Changing the political reality is not possible from a passive standpoint. Even in the midst of a growing awareness brought about by the 1976 uprisings, Tsi's family remain passive in the face of Fix's detention and Special Branch incursions into their house – 'we waited, while time mercilessly sped by, or mockingly tortoised by, and all of us got older' (ibid.: 138). Even if Tsi, consoled by his dead grandmother, eventually realises that 'I have a journey to make, and the journey has to be made with and among other people ... I was the only

one who would know which people I could make the journey with' (ibid.: 88), his choice of affiliation at the end of Part One misfires. He achieves some meaningful work at McLeans College, yet his choice of organisation proves to be wrong because McLeans does not address fully enough the political issues at stake in the country, especially the need for a complete overturning of the status quo.

'Now We Enter History'

Serote attempts to allow individual characters a certain measure of autonomy in their portrayed actions. Critics have noted that he is careful to depict individuals, even the revolutionaries, in all their weaknesses as well as strengths (Glegg 1982: 34; see also Barboure 1984: 176; Watts 1989: 246 – 7). Such analysis is given additional weight by Serote's statement of purpose in choosing the novel genre for To Every Birth Its Blood:

> One thing which attracted me a lot to the novel, is the individual experiences of our people. Our young men and women, for example, should be growing up like young people anywhere in the world.... But our young people have an additional responsibility: they come from the oppressed, and because they are the youth, they carry the overwhelming load of our struggle on their shoulders. They have to deal with the question of life and death in a much more intense manner than other children of their age.... as the struggle is unfolding and involving everybody, you begin to understand the question of heroes. Our situation has produced hundreds and hundreds of heroes, some with very little things which they did, some with contributions bigger than life. I didn't think I could handle this through poetry. I arrived at a point where I wanted to examine all these relationships, including the demand of struggle on people.

> I thought the novel was one way which must be used to do so.
> (August 1990c: 103 – 4)[23]

Yet it is noticeable that the characters who begin to move beyond the impasse of repetitive time are those who arrive at a clarity of understanding, not only of the causes and existence of black oppression, but also of the need to take radical action to change it. The 'days of Power' (referring to the period of Black Consciousness influence which resulted in the 1976 uprising) are crucial for Serote in this transfiguration. It is the activities of Black Consciousness militants who first begin to turn South Africa into a 'different Country' (Birth: 330).[24] The 1976 uprising makes many of the characters realise that there is no turning back. We are given access to this knowledge at the beginning of Part Two through the musings of John, whose lover has been killed by the police during 1976:

> The days of Power had passed. Some people had cleaned up the blood, on the stoeps and floors; some cleaned their guns. A relationship had been established; time was to nurture it.
> John moved his face away from the window. His eyes were a little wet when they met the face of the clock.... John sometimes thought he would go mad; and then, he would decide that he personalised these public issues too much – how could he not, he would ask himself. Yet if anything was needed now, it was clear vision.
> (ibid.: 169 – 70)[25]

Time begins to move forward in a meaningful, linear direction for those who realise that normality for black people requires an inversion of the apartheid order, in all its aspects. This conviction goes hand in hand, according to Serote, with an exercise of willpower and a choosing of sides. John has been made a 'deadly man' (ibid.: 168) by his lover's death; and in the first chapter of Part Two he comes to a full knowledge of the political

and social reality of South Africa, and a realisation that political commitment is required to change that reality.

Part Two of the novel begins again with the recollections of an individual character: but these are recollections which prompt him, and the equally important other characters, to action. John, like many of the characters in Part Two, accepts the burden of black public despair and expectation and behaves adequately, according to Serote's logical schema. He abandons his 'sitting-forever' posture when he begins to realise that black people can use their intelligence and knowledge correctly. After the object lesson of Ramono's trial, he joins the Movement (ibid.: 183; 188). From this point the plot moves steadily forward into the future via an exposition of Movement setbacks and victories, and the experiences of people caught up in the unfolding logic of events. This process is favourably portrayed, despite the unavoidable personal suffering that must needs accompany it.[26] For black South Africans, the choice is between the living death of apartheid and the possible death of trying to end it, and the second is always preferable (ibid.: 167; 249). As Tsi realises in a Gaborone beleaguered by South African aircraft:

> The first leg of the journey is now well and truly in progress. There is no safety anywhere – not for anyone. The pilots who fly the planes – like these mothers and their children and their bundles – stare.... At a certain point, the stares of fear and of hunger look alike. It does not matter whether one flies a plane or stands in a queue ... we also know that, while we fear them, they also are in great fear to fall.... We can fall, and they will fall.... We see their huge shining bodies whizz past and roar afterwards, and before we know where they are they come

> back. But that is because they do not see us, or know us, or want to know us. The strongest will win this game. It is costly.
>
> (ibid.: 367)[27]

A crucial belief in the text as a whole here emerges again, this time in a more overt manner: John realises that it is not possible for a black South African to separate the personal from the public, or his individual fate from the fate of his community. Although his final decision to join the Movement still takes two chapters, the disruption of John's love relationship allows him the clarity he needs for action. We are shown that his individual decision to act within broader communal political frameworks is inextricably tied up with his desire to facilitate more humane individual relationships among black people in a future, apartheid-free, South Africa:

> The one thing he wanted her to know was that he did not only possess a heart of steel because they had killed her, but mainly because their love, like all love in this country where there was 'no crisis', would otherwise rot and be vulgar.
>
> (ibid.: 168)

John's process towards a clarity of vision and action is the first demonstration of clear thinking we are offered in the novel.

Understanding the bogus 'truth' of apartheid, and subsequently making the correct political choice, are both essential. Characters such as Tuki (on the run from the security forces) think how for centuries blacks have fought:

> ... for what seemed to us a very simple and easily understood reality: this is our land, it must bear our will. South Africa is going to be a socialist country, this is going to come about through the will, knowledge and determination of the people.
>
> (ibid.: 330)

Individuals who are part of the Movement are never alone. Even when Tuki feels a momentary sense of isolation in his predicament, this is quickly repudiated:

> It was no longer a personal knowledge, a private knowledge for anyone, that the only way to win back the country was to fight. How?... There is no looking back now. It was as he thought this that Tuki felt tears come to his eyes. He had become used to going through time, with other people. Now, he was so alone.... No, that was not true. There were thousands on thousands of people who could come to his rescue. He had only to get himself there, intact. That was his responsibility.
>
> (ibid.: 330 – 1)

Rather than the novel revealing a comprehensive picture of a whole community of people, as some critics have claimed (Glegg 1982: 34), it appears that the author categorises his characters in terms of whether they make the right choice or not. The only positive choice is to become 'clear-minded' (ibid.: 249) and join the Movement. Therefore, although the author strives to depict individual relationships as having a momentum of their own, he eventually measures individual action in relation to Movement politics. The characters in Part Two are all measurable against the degree to which they, like Ramono and Oupa, accept responsibility for their community and join the Movement's effort to regain socio-political dignity and psychological completion by the overturning of white and capitalist (Serote seems to see no distinction possible between the two) rule.

The quintessential nature of this choice can be seen in the manner in which the Movement can alter the perception of time for the novel's characters. Those characters who make the correct choice are all struck by

the enormous significance of their decision. Dikeledi, for instance, thinks of the yesterday before she was told that her friend Onalenna belonged to the Movement as the 'old past' (ibid.: 271). Subsequent militant activity increases this sense. When the first Movement bomb, planted by Onalenna, explodes, 'for a second, it was as if Johannesburg, for the first time since it was created, stood still; just for a second. Then it got into action' (ibid.: 269). The meaningless forward motion of white capitalist time (non-progressive in terms of black experience) is disrupted.

The emptiness of 'conquered time' is nudged during Part Two into progressive, linear time by and for the supporters of the Movement. Human will alters the experience of time, and an inexorable process of liberation is set into motion. Individual Movement affiliates set time free, setting loose a chain of events which finally no individual can control: even non-members of the Movement in the black community, such as Tsi, become prey to this ineluctable process. It is striking the speed and facility with which individuals are quickly and thoroughly integrated into the Movement.[28] The Movement is effectively shown to speed up time: for instance, the decision in the text that the black policeman Mpando must be assassinated is juxtaposed with the deed's successful outcome, which thus appears to happen almost instantaneously (ibid.: 258 – 64). Towards the end of the novel, time accelerates: the montage effect employed by Serote in the last three chapters is not only meant to emphasise the burgeoning popular support for the Movement, but also indicates a headlong rush into

the future. In contradistinction to the early passages of the text, the crowd at the political funeral in Part Two (under cover of which the Movement assassinates several policemen) are singing "Vorster, you own guns, we own history" (ibid.: 304). Time, and history, are retrieved by the author for the black inhabitants of South Africa. The events the Movement puts into operation will, it seems, change the pattern and experience of time.

The regulation (or re-definition and re-regulation) of time can bind together groups of people and individuals who conceive of themselves as part of the same social entity, even if they are strangers to each other (Canetti 1973: 463). Moreover, a group conception of identity among individuals who perceive themselves as part of a common social bond is essential to nationalism.[29] National identity is built around a self-conscious community which progresses and develops together, simultaneously, along a linear time measurable by clock and calendar. Such a linear perception of time is thus essential for the psychology and ideology of nationalism and national liberation to operate.[30] In other words, there is a presupposition of logicality and linearity in the temporal experiences citizens of any defined nation possess.

Similarly, the realist novel, a genre which emerged coterminously with the new nations of Europe from the late eighteenth century onwards, frequently depicts a hero or group of characters moving towards a conclusion against a fixed sociological background in the 'precise analogue of the idea of the nation, which also is conceived as a solid community

moving steadily down (or up) history' (Anderson 1983: 30 – 1). This principle is, in varying forms, also discernible in (for instance) the anti-colonial novels of South-Eastern Asia and South America from the early nineteenth century; and examples of this conceptual trend are also found in African fiction prior to, and immediately after, their political Independence. These novels regularly evince the notion that linear time is the modality which best expresses the desire for liberation and progress towards a socio-political destiny which has not been fulfilled by earlier generations (Izevbaye 1982: 80). Therefore Serote's choice of the novel, and his representation of the growth of national aspirations and national identity among black people in terms of a revolution in their consciousness of time, has conceptual precedents.

In order to break the false time of white minority rule, Serote asserts the need for a new type of social order and a new, non-shameful (he uses the word often) experience of self and time. This extremely Manichaean viewpoint presumes that there is an absolute dichotomy potentially present in pre- and post-liberation South African consciousness and experience. As Canetti asserts:

> A new power which wants to assert itself must also enforce a new chronology; it must make it seem as though time had begun with it.... For a civilization, as for an individual, periods when the awareness of time is lost are periods of shame, which are forgotten as soon as possible.
>
> (Canetti: 462 – 3)[31]

Therefore, time is not only a thematic presence in To Every Birth Its Blood, but also the conceptual dimension which shapes the plot structure

into logical form, and which predetermines the relatively unimportant nature of the anachronisms Visser has indicated. Time is essential to the author's political message: the manner in which he develops time, becomes a fundamental means whereby his ideological beliefs are formally articulated. A correct approach to politics and history will change the nature of social and personal livelihood and simultaneously transfigure the self. This element – at the same time both intrusive theme and underlying framework – is crucial to an understanding of the purpose of the novel; and in the long run overshadows any dislocated attempts Serote might make to mimic the 'real time' of contemporary South Africa.

The logical movement of the novel, at this sweeping level of abstraction, is thus from individual alienation towards social involvement; and from the meaningless circular time this alienation both occasions and is occasioned by, to a willed social progress towards the birth of freedom. Tsi's post-assault recollections are, in my opinion, placed first and outside of the 'proper' temporal sequence of the fabula[32] as part of a teleological drive towards social liberation and fullness, whereby the most alienated and individualised depictions of the action are placed first and the implications of the 'false consciousness' they embody made explicable and nugatory by subsequent events. In the process, time is transfigured by human agency and made to work for, rather than against, black South Africans.

~~The novel is projected towards~~ a desired ~~but as yet~~ unrealised ~~future~~: a future ~~not yet realised in the South Africa the novel represents~~. Yet the

push towards this future is so strongly-willed by the author and his positively-evaluated characters as to be inexorable. Indeed, towards the end of the novel there is one instance where the mere resurrection of a person in one of the character's memories is enough to bring that person himself into action as a character in the novel within a few pages, in a sequence which appears to overcome the exigencies of space and time.[33] However, authorial desire is not enough to complete this future. The denouement this novel gestures towards was, in a very real sense, incomplete at the time of its composition and publication. This lack of political and ideological closure means that the narrative vantage point of To Every Birth Its Blood remains uncertain.

Community and the Movement

The Alexandra community serves, as has been noted, as a synecdoche for conditions among black people in South Africa as a whole (Visser 1987: 68).[34] The community is highlighted on two levels: a level of realistic behaviour and action; and a level of symbolic, more generalised socio-political typification and myth. Alexandra at the same time possesses its idiosyncracies of history and geography, whilst bearing the essential character of all black townships in the country.

It is crucial to realise that Tsi's sense of defeat is mirrored in the black community of Alexandra early on. One of the first scenes in the novel takes place, significantly, in a graveyard: and the township (one of the last remaining freehold areas in South Africa at the time Serote was growing up) is a place of death and despairing passivity, where the whites are 'building bridges, hostels, beerhalls ... without even asking us' (Birth: 17). It is a community, however, that the reader is increasingly positioned to perceive is profound in its potential. At the novel's beginning, it is at once fragmented into defeated apathy and at one in its endurance and historical resistance to apartheid; at once a passive creation of whites and the centre of an alternate communal lifestyle; at once the home of people living in appalling and dangerous conditions and the only point of communal and moral reference for its inhabitants – 'this arsehole, my only, perhaps last world, or perhaps the only world I could claim to know' in Tsi's words (ibid.: 51).[35]

In its negative aspects, it is a community which is inclined to 'take things easy, it would seem they are not aware of the danger they are facing' (ibid.: 82). There are those inhabitants who remain in a state of permanent 'false consciousness' and escapism, unaware of the objective disorder of their day-to-day lives, 'at ease as if owning time' (ibid.: 341). Yet, as noted in the previous chapter, the relationship between community and activist depicted by Serote is a close, natural one. Black people will be easily led, in

Serote's view, by those who are not only more politically active, but also better educated and more perceptive.

With the exception of a few blacks – such as the policemen – who have chosen to exclude themselves from this community, the possibility of a militantly unified social collective is implicit from the novel's early stages. Before the watershed of the 1976 uprisings, relationships within this community are prey to the uncertainty of legal insecurities and township violence: it is split under overwhelming socio-political pressure. It is the Movement which opens up the promise of normal social and individual life. The Movement is the bearer of, and process towards, 'true consciousness' and (consequently) human and political fulfillment. Its presence looms over the insights and machinations of the novel's characters for much of the time, and has an unspoken but unavoidable ubiquity even during the days of defeat. For example, when it is first mentioned (by the Security Police captain questioning Tsi) both parties seem au fait with its significance – a narrative strategy which underlines its importance (ibid.:157; see also 252). It is a fuse among the oppressed of the country, waiting to be ignited by knowledge and willpower.

At first politics is seen as a hopeless activity: the lost art of a defeated people, whereby individuals such as Nomsisi remain vulnerable and isolated (ibid.: 42 – 3). Mistaken political activity kills life.[36] Yet political activity is a site of desire from the first. There is a political urgency discernible in the presence of Nomsisi, in the absent Fix, and in Tsi's constant sense of a

significance missing from his own, and his fellow Alexandrans, lives. While McLeans College and the B.S.O. are both, in different ways, wrong political choices, the right political choice is the one the Movement offers and absorbs.[37]

From the first time it is mentioned by name, every utterance and scenario in the book is aimed at facilitating the qualitative imaginative leap into Movement politics. The Movement is seen as a culmination in epistemological as well as political terms. It is, without fail, referred to as purposeful and correct: despite fluctuations of fortune that occur to its individual members, it is inexorable because it is the united willpower of an oppressed people. Even Tsi notes finally that there is no way in which whites in the country can be victorious, because 'all the people in my country to whom they had given no choice, whom they had turned into enemies, were plotting their defeat every day' (ibid.: 345). In its active and militant opposition, the Movement unmasks the truth about South African oppression (ibid.: 290), and sets in motion a process of polarisation whereby more and more of the country's inhabitants choose one side or the other, until the final apocalyptic confrontation looms near. Crucially, the trial of Ramono is symbolic of the dignity and sacrifice needed to initiate such a state of affairs, and acts as a spur to accelerate this process of community decisiveness and support subsequent to the Power days (see especially ibid.: 239).

Serote's political statements are very strongly filtered through individual behaviour and consciousness. The role of the characters as represented in the novel is, as Watts has suggested, to facilitate the actualisation of a community of struggle made up of disparate individuals:

> ... the novel apparently focuses in the first part on the individual figure, whether he be hero or anti-hero, of Tsi, and in the second part on John, in authentic liberal-humanist tradition.... Yet it has to be asked where this apparent focus on individuals leads: certainly not to Tsi's or John's discovery of their identity, as is usually the case in the standard liberal-humanist novel. Rather, Tsi and John lend themselves to the exploration of changes in the consciousness of an entire population, and are individualised the better to realise the process at work.
>
> (Watts 1989: 237 – 8)

Political transformation is therefore the consequence of the growing number of individual transformations taking place. Yet Serote goes further than this. The opposite is also true: individual transformation cannot begin to happen without the acknowledgement of the need for political transformation, and the (for the author) logically consequent decision to become a Movement member. As a black person it is not enough to rely on oneself, as Tsi's father does (Birth: 61), or to make the wrong decisions, as Tsi does, or to drown in self-pity at the horror of apartheid, as Tsi, Yao and the pre-Movement John do (ibid.: 182). To make the wrong choice is, in effect, to remain passive; to remain on the periphery; to remain a victim. Individuals who do not join the Movement remain socially and spiritually lost.[38]

The puzzle the re-appearance of Tsi, to all intents and purposes unreformed, at the novel's ending initiates among critics can be partially

clarified by noting that Tsi never joins the Movement.[39] Despite changes in his political views occasioned, in Part One, by the McLeans incident and, in Part Two, by Oupa's death, Tsi does not follow up the logic of his own increasing anger with pertinent decision-making and action. He remains passive, in the same relationship to the Gaborone crowds at the novel's end as he was to those in Alexandra at the beginning, even though he realises once more that 'I am being an idiot' (ibid.: 348). Tsi lacks the essential ingredient of willpower which would allow him access to true consciousness. As a result his presence in the novel in terms of character development is, like Yao's, close to circular.[40] Choice changes character: thus Tsi remains isolated and hopeless.

Serote of course does not minimise the difficulties that still may be encountered once this choice has been made. The personal relationships between Granny and Themba and between Yao and Onalenna are not solved by Movement membership; and, on a wider level, the success of the enormous venture initiated by the Movement is left hanging in the balance at the end of the narrative. Yet it is only possible to make logical sense of the re-appearance of Tsi – and the return to the indeterminate past tense he occasions – if one understands that he has not made the correct choice of joining the Movement. He has realised that the security policeman who interrogates him after his speech at Oupa's funeral 'was wasting my time. There was nothing in common between us' (ibid.: 345) and has gone into exile: but that is all. Although he realises that one needs to choose sides in

South Africa, his refusal to complete the process of social re-integration disallows Serote, consciously or unconsciously, from portraying him dynamically in political, and therefore individual, terms. Tsi and Yao enter the familiar ambience of shebeen life reminiscent of Part One. This is a vicious circle; for, as Boykie has pointed out to Tsi much earlier, it is impossible to be drunk and alert at the same time (ibid.: 52).[41]

Individual participation is needed for political victory. While the Movement cannot assure instant success, it is the crucial component which will ensure eventual success (ibid.: 251; cf. 367). People's interpersonal relationships may be unpredictable, but the Movement is necessary to ensure a programme whereby South Africa will be saved, and oppression and exploitation destroyed (ibid.: 252 – 3). Individuals who join the Movement are transformed; this we see in Dikeledi's metamorphosis as she becomes (literally) at one with the Movement:

> It was strange to know that she was one with this wind. She wondered how she would integrate into it, be part of it and it part of her.... She wondered who indeed she was. She wondered whether she really could, whichever way it had to be done, gain the calmness, the discipline she had observed in Oni and Oupa.... She wondered a lot about herself; would she be able to cope, could they teach her how to be like them. How was it done, she wished she could know, that she could be sure it would be all right, that she would be all right, that she would qualify to be a member.
>
> (ibid.: 272)

The Movement transmogrifies the characters in the novel who accept its inevitability into calm, dignified and disciplined individuals with a sense of purpose; in direct distinction to Tsi, who acts as a point of negative reference. This correct deportment assures that the larger community will

feel and exhibit 'respect' for the individuals who have made the correct choice (see for instance ibid.: 239; 248; 250). At times it is hinted, moreover, that the Movement has the potential to change the manner in which individuals perceive their inter-relationships (see ibid.: 270). Partly through its dictates and clandestine activity, and partly due to the way it facilitates understanding between its members, the Movement can even change the style of speech between relevant characters, and break down the endless cycle of interior monologuing, prevarication and bewilderment readers are initially presented with (see, for example, the terse yet meaningful conversation between Charles and Themba in Walmanstadt, ibid.: 316 – 7). In the case of individuals in the Movement whose personal relationships are disintegrating, while the Movement cannot prevent the pain of their sundering it can allow them an objective insight into their situation, and absorbs the consequences of their private idiosyncracies: in the case of Granny and Themba, for instance, it adopts and educates their son Fidel (ibid.: 292 – 4; 362).[42]

Thus, while the author is at pains to show that the Movement cannot resolve private relationships or solve the yearning for love, it nevertheless affects these relationships in a meaningful way. Individual relationships are and remain, for the period of political struggle at least, problematic; but the only way such problems can begin to be addressed is by removing the status quo of white overrule. In this manner human beings can be freed from the overwhelming weight of political interference which has previously

destroyed them in an endless round of repetition. The attention the author gives to individual characterisation in this novel is noteworthy; but must always be seen in terms of the particular character's relation to the Movement, and in terms of his or her insight into and attitude towards ('knowledge' is the term generally used in the novel) South Africa's socio-political present, past and future.[43]

The Fixed Movement of Political Struggle

Serote's version of the Movement, as Visser observes, refers simultaneously to one political organisation, the A.N.C., and the political will of all the oppressed people of South Africa. The Movement blurs into and absorbs other, opposition political tendencies.[44] However, while the A.N.C. may, in the world outside of Serote's novel, continue to remain a major force in South African liberation politics, it is and has not been the only one; and the overlapping of these two levels of meaning affects the narrative in a significant manner.[45] Furthermore, in many senses – in terms of individual psychology, in terms of democratic processes and practices, and in terms of how a damaged society can be healed, the liberation of South Africa will be an extremely complex and difficult process. Serote's fictional conclusions in this respect are, it can be said, somewhat facile. What is eventually noteworthy about To Every Birth Its

Blood, is the manner in which the political and social difficulties Serote attempts to determine escape his ideological programme; and the manner in which what is repressed or wished away returns to haunt the book's less consciously controlled depictions and attitudes.

Nothing has a fixed ideological position in the novel except the Movement. It renders anti-apartheid work effective rather than ineffectual; it absorbs the history of previous resistance to apartheid, including the 'days of Power'; and finally it acts on behalf of and begins absorbing and changing the entire social body of the oppressed black majority, even those who have not yet recognised its truth and vacillate in their allegiance. Once apartheid has been questioned, no further questions are important: indeed, Serote seems to believe that debate can only cause agreement among the oppressed. Questions can only reveal the truth of the Movement's operations and goals; thereafter only minor debates concerning tactics are necessary (see Birth: 243; 290; 329). At times questions can become dangerous to the Movement's security (ibid.: 193). Agreement on the need to destroy apartheid and on the central operative role of the Movement unwaveringly becomes agreement as to the means necessary for this passage, under the auspices of the Movement.

Such a conceptualisation is circular and self-justifying, and contains strongly teleological elements. The process of logic the author argues seems to be as follows: individual commitment to, and the day-to-day success of, the Movement might vary; but as a means it is in place and incontestable,

and this process is open-ended only as regards the length of time it may take.

It is accurate to say that Serote deploys the Movement in an attempt to arrest structural and ideological fluidity in the novel, and that this attempt is unsuccessful (Visser 1987: 73 – 5). The Movement exists fictionally to absorb and smooth over contradictions of individual and group behaviour, as well as the intricacies of South African oppositional political history. Yet it ends up generating further contradictions due to its ubiquitous fictional presence. The Movement is given an eventual weight it cannot bear, as it is expected to perform on all levels of human intercourse and psychology simultaneously. It is seen as the political catalyst which will transfigure the oppressed people of the country, and the result of that transfiguration, all at the same time. It is not only simultaneously one distinct political organisation and the combined weight of historical resistance to white rule: on occasion it comes close to being represented by the author as all that is required to solve South Africa's problems: socially, psychologically and politically.

The manner in which the Movement is conceptualised as serving as an answer to all problems is endemic to Serote's non-fictional utterances as well. For example, in reviewing an A.N.C. comrade's novel subsequently he has noted that:

> The men in the novel, like the women, are caught up in the characteristic lives of Black people in South Africa.... What is going to change the social landscape of South African literature, the shebeens etc.? What is going to tear the insulation of Whites and the

> suspiciousness of Blacks?... The broadest anti-apartheid mass movement, linked to the underground and to the armed struggle, will change the character of the shebeens, the church, the street violence and the relationship between Black and White. The strongly progressive politics of the Movement; the discipline required to be a member and to participate in the demands of the underground and the armed struggle, where the operative words are discipline and sacrifice; these will change the quality of the individuals participating, and, since it will be a people's war being fought, the quality of the social life will also change.
>
> (Serote 1988a: 30 – 1)

It is the author's own perception of political developments and processes which feeds the novel's idiosyncracies. On a mimetic level, the practices of Leninist vanguardism he appears to favour are used by all of the more favourably-depicted characters, and change the black community with remarkable ease (see Birth: 234; 259; 278 – 84). This having been said, he eventually appears more concerned with the symbolic influence and existence of the Movement than with any realistic demonstration of its actual struggles and setbacks. Natural and organic images are consistently deployed to characterise it, thus reinforcing faith in its natural and irresistible essence:

> Dikeledi was overwhelmed by everything at this point of her life. She felt strange, knowing that now she belonged to a force which was slowly, very slowly but very systematically, like water flowing from a dam, approaching every corner of the country.
>
> (ibid.: 272)

The novel strives to exhibit a sense of narrative process predicated on a vindication of Movement activity – in this respect it can be typified as a kind of Bildungsroman involving an entire oppressed people rather than an individual character. Yet, as the author tries to subsume all the marginal or parenthetical issues that come up in his text into the body of his ideological

conviction, the overwhelming political compulsion this entails interferes with any process of differentiation and blurs any distinction between what lies inside or beyond the borders of Movement effectivity at any point in time, especially vis-a-vis its workings among black people.

Critics have taken Boykie's remarks (discussed earlier) about organisations like the B.S.O. as a criticism of Black Consciousness, and symptomatic of Serote's move away from his early Black Consciousness leanings in the process of writing the book. Yet, as has been observed, Black Consciousness thought neither disappears from the novel, nor is essentially opposed to the non-racial practices of the Movement: instead 'we get traces of BC, and many other ideological strains, right up to the conclusion of the novel. What shifts is the emphasis ... a new ideological position begins to emerge from an earlier one' (Visser 1987: 73).

Paradoxically, it can finally be seen that the right course of action is implied throughout. Due to the fluctuating, interweaving presence of the motifs and symbols employed by the author, the novel appears at every point to relentlessly foreshadow or contain lingering traces of its own major themes, depictions and viewpoints. Neither can this characteristic be accurately described as a use of pro- and analepsis on the author's part: the near-repetitions and echoes are too insistent and uncontrolled to be eased away with such an explanation. There is a tendency for the process of narrative logic to be more minimal and incomplete than the overview suggested so far can fully indicate. This is nowhere more clear, on a

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structural level, than with the re-introduction of a practically unaltered Tsi in the last pages.[46]

The correct tactics are hinted at even by characters active in the temporal structure of the novel before the Movement's emergence. It thus becomes ever more difficult to discover why, precisely, the Movement makes the difference. For instance, even if the B.S.O. is mistaken in making too many press statements (Birth: 77) and not communicating effectively with the oppressed majority, Boykie (who has no connection with the Movement) is on hand to give utterance to the correct path; as is Onalenna in her pre-Movement days with Takalane Black Theatre (ibid.: 78 – 9; 173). The novel's dismissive reference of blacks with European 'slave names' precedes the emergence of Black Consciousness with which it should historically be interlinked, in terms of that ideology's positive assertion of African identity (ibid.: 130). There are many similar examples of this tendency.

The reader, perceiving that there is meant to be a transformation from less effective to more effective forms of political consciousness and activity, will in such cases perceive that very little actually changes in the conception of correct political action being put forward in the work. It is as if its author cannot allow 'false consciousness' to exist textually for too long without a corrective – even the alienated Tsi is aware of what he should be doing.

The fact that the truth is, implicitly at least, to some extent ever present makes the forward progress of the narrative more halting and circular than it at first appears. The author's themes, symbols and language come to possess an autonomy beyond their functional and contextual pertinence in the process of the novel. Despite a change in formal and ideological direction in the course of the novel, underlying facets of the author's philosophical, politico-organisational and stylistic habits recur. Black Consciousness is enfolded into the later, stronger and more compelling, logic of the Movement. Many of Tsi's early acquaintances easily and logically join the Movement – a tendency explicated by Boykie in Part 1 when he notes that the B.S.O. is 'just a stage in our battle to reclaim a home for ourselves' (ibid.: 79; my emphasis). On a closer reading it is apparent that few of his basic Black Consciousness conceptualisations are actually challenged or altered by Serote. The fact that the Movement has chosen revolution and armed struggle is, I would argue, what really differentiates it from the other forms of opposition mentioned in the text.[47]

On a stylistic level this is also the case. While it becomes clear that there are at least two modes of generic assumption and perception in the novel – a first part immersed in modernist existential narrative practices and a second part consisting primarily of a realist, radical political novel – the interpenetration of these two modes is more striking than the novel's previous critics have allowed.[48] It is noticeable that a usage of interior

monologuing occurs throughout the novel, even among Movement activists. Thus, while Serote's techniques of rapid movement from inner to outer life, his juxtaposing of the figural and representative, his emphasis on psychologically fractured individuals heightens the air of ambiguity, indeterminancy and alienation in the first part, the second part shows some similarities.[49]

The second part of the novel strives towards embodying an objective knowledge and truthful process of action which will undermine the alienated social horror of Part One. The Movement, as bearer of the accumulated knowledge and willpower of the individual protagonists, seems to signify the end of political oppression and 'false consciousness'. As it implies the beginnings of a movement back towards social normality and a correct ordering of public and individual consciousness for Serote, it comes as no surprise that it should be mirrored by an attempted motion by the author back towards a classical realism, encoded in a hierarchical evaluation of language and ideology.[50] Yet there are techniques at work in this section that go some way to reducing this thrust, even as Serote tries to repress them with an emphasis on third person narration and realist techniques.

Modernist influences – lack of ideological closure, psycho-narration, the denial of any absolute positioning of languages in a hierarchy of subordination and dominance, the absence of a discernible disparity and discrimination between the figural and the representative – only partially

disappear in the 'social realism' of Part Two. Moreover indeterminate explanations – significantly enough, relating to politics as well – can be ascertained in this section: thus, 'There were many trials in South Africa in those days. However, for some reason or other, this one of the twenty five people attracted everyone's attention' (ibid.: 229; emphasis mine). In this section a swift passage from figural to representative language and back again is still traceable; as is a blurring of narrator with protagonist consciousness (see, for instance, ibid.: 313). While there are attempts made to build in an objective, political meta-language to position and explicate the action, such devices are neither consistently nor uniformly maintained.

As a result, while the Movement solves social relationships and political dilemmas for Serote, the effects of the novel's lack of closure is eventually to weaken the myth of order and ideological conviction he endeavours to establish. The Movement comes to act in the terrain of desire and myth rather than actual human politics. Thus, the text resists anything approaching full appropriation back into the discourse of representative realism. Its representations of human willpower, organisation and action as the activators of a future liberation, lie ill at ease with the determinism implicit in Serote's mythical, symbolical level of politics, where the Movement is ascribed a position in the novel as the arbiter of fate and chance.

Presumptions as to the novel's authenticity and accuracy of depiction deny the extent to which it is a production of Serote's ideological

predilections, and beg further scrutiny of these preoccupations and silences. His understanding of the forces at work in South African political history remains, arguably, predominantly racial, despite Ramono's injunction to his daughter that her generation has placed too much emphasis on questions of race (ibid.: 250). Inevitably, pride in blackness is the beginning of individual and political change in the novel; (ibid.: 139 – 40) and, despite some ambiguity in the text's depiction of white liberals, the mechanisms of oppression are overwhelmingly understood throughout in terms of race.[51] Blacks who oppose militant black aspirations as articulated by the author are depicted as either ignorant like Chief Lerato (ibid.: 74 – 8) or vicious 'sell-outs' like Mpando. Any representation of the fissures caused in a community by class differences is almost entirely absent from the work.

The novel operates in terms of a populist discourse which is practically synonymous with the racial discourse of Black Consciousness.[52] Class difference, when acknowledged, is defused by this more powerful racial or populist discourse. Thus, Ramono's position as a landlord is scarcely discussed in terms of differences within the black community. It is acknowledged that the tenants pay him rent, but we are immediately told that he: 'in turn, paid into the bag held by a white hand, a bag which was as insatiable as a stomach'. This is followed by a long passage elucidating Ramono's consultative, educative and advisory role in the community (ibid.: 219 – 20). Later, if the black working-class is mentioned at all, it is as an unproblematic constituent of popular unity; or used symbolically. For

example, mineworkers are deployed, in Themba's thoughts, in an elaborate trope which blurs them into both a discussion of the underground work of the Movement and the priorities of the committed artist (ibid.: 313 – 4).

As the novel moves from the undirected, quasi-political activities of a group of characters in Alexandra to a country-wide confrontation, it is still noticeable that the characters who involve themselves in this procedure and join the Movement are all from a similar social orientation:

> They had not only come from the same place and from the same time, they had also come from the same space, or to put it correctly, from no space at all.... Alexandra is a very small place. It is big in terms of space. It is small in terms of the numbers the space is made to carry. Here, everybody knows almost everybody.
>
> (ibid.: 188)

They are articulate, well-educated people,[53] who quickly become a network of underground activists supported by, and able to communicate with, all classes in the black community.

Serote's allegiance to socialism, articulated within the text by the exemplary Tuki (see ibid.: 330), is formulated only in terms of a contestation between first and third worlds (ibid.: 249; 328).[54] Following this, in more recent speeches and articles as a cultural activist, Serote has substituted a militant third world consciousness for some of his earlier beliefs. Yet this consciousness does not appear to raise issues pertaining to post-colonial politics, especially as regards problems of class elites within independent developing countries.[55] He stresses that a common goal of ending foreign (in this case white) domination in itself brings about a unity among colonised (or oppressed) people. Politically, this is not a thorough

enough perception of political power to be called socialist: Serote appears to believe that the liberation struggle needs only to restore what are posited as 'normal', African, relations to society for his social revolution to be a success.[56]

The black community the Movement serves is thus both split and potentially at one. When all is said and done, Serote seems to be saying, it is the actions of external forces – white settlers, colonialism, and finally the apartheid State – which have caused social and political disparities. These will eventually easily be healed by the Movement as it gives direction and leads armed resistance. The author, in a realist reading of the novel's second part, shows the Movement struggling through guerilla activity to change South Africa. At the same time, it seems to have gone a long way towards changing this reality simply by its presence and actions.

The Movement is the fulcrum around which both the realist and the metaphorical levels of the novel turn, and is meant to serve the logic and priorities of both levels at the same time. It acts as a symbol which overdetermines the answers to the questions it raises, resolves the future it puts into contestation, and comes to solve problems in every walk of life as it succeeds. Such over-statement, in my opinion, in the long run undercuts the radical potential of the whole novel; allowing a final description of Serote's political thought as apocalyptic, Utopian and insufficiently problematised; as its author points his readership on the road to the 'true consciousness' he already possesses.

The Aberrant Individual

The novel's characters inhabit a textual universe that is at once symptomatic of more traditional realist and modernist modes of narrative (interiority as a motive force and explanation of character actions, a focus on a special individual set against a social backdrop) and social realist modes which stress individual dependence on, and action in response to, social and political forces.[57]

There is an asymmetrical relationship between realistic and symbolic levels as far as characterisation is concerned. There appears to be a desire on Serote's part to have his characters bear differing individual experiences at the same time as they stand for typical representations of the limited individual responses the author sees as possible in the black community during a time of dire upheaval. While it is always difficult to differentiate the representative and typical from the idiosyncratic and specific implications of character behaviour in a novel, in To Every Birth Its Blood this is even more noticeable than usual.

Ideologically, the differences in modes of character portrayal in the novel are stark. It is as if Serote believes there are only two – polarised – types of trajectory that a black person can follow: the 'lost' life in the streets or the meaningful political life of the Movement.[58] Tsi is typical of

one sort of trajectory (in which he is eventually joined by Yao); Dikeledi, Onalenna, John and other Movement characters typical of the other.

The author measures, and wants the reader to measure, the individual experiences of his characters vis-a-vis the 'heroes' they must become, in various ways, as the demands of the struggle direct everyone to their dictates. It is possible to see Oupa as part of a symbolic line of inspirational heroes and martyrs stretching through time, a line which runs from heroes of the past such as Ramono, to heroes of the future such as Fidel (whose future importance is hinted at). Yet only the hero of previous struggles, Ramono, engages authorial attention in terms of individual history and motivation, and any specificity he has is still secondary to the ideological role he fulfills. The heroes become more one-dimensional the more flawless and obviously symbolic they become. While Serote does give space to (for example) the history and interaction of the Ramono family, and the inner musings and problems of Dikeledi, John, Onalenna and others during Part Two of the narrative, the space allowed for the representation of individuals seems to become less important the further the novel progresses.

This can of course be explained away in terms of the author's lesser interest in non-affiliated, atomised individuals in Part Two, as a result of his own decision to embrace organisational activism. The problem, for this reader at least, is that the characters who join the Movement begin to blur into each other once they have made their choice. Their correct action – seemingly put forward for approbation – renders them less multifarious in

their personal actions and responses. In Serote's depiction, the Movement allows individuals to exist in an existentially and politically meaningful manner, but at the same time removes their ability to think and act at all differently.

There are further difficulties which emerge for any understanding of the significance of Serote's characters and their actions in the text as well. If there is a sense that the author is depicting a process of politicisation and enfoldment of individual consciousness into Movement structures, the reiterated presence of Tsi is, again, baffling. His wrong-headedness and prevarication is fleshed out in a fuller and more striking manner than the correct actions of the Movement characters, sympathetically as these are drawn. The emphasis on Tsi, and his placement at the novel's end, is all the more curious when it is seen that a hero such as the 'miracle' (Birth: 191) Oupa is only perfunctorily sketched in terms of character and motivation. Onalenna, Dikeledi and John are the Movement followers who are more convincingly depicted. Even as their roles as heroes are slighter, they are more open to reader sympathy and identification.[59]

Interiority and a stress on individual psychology are meant to segue, via the 'days of Power' and the growing presence of the Movement, into a stress on individual action in terms of social and political inter-relatedness. Yet this process is halting and uncertain. The disturbing re-appearance of Tsi's anguished monologues comes to haunt the triumphant progress towards 'true consciousness' at the end of the novel. This can only be

explained in terms of the experiences Serote is dealing with having too much complexity for his ideological purpose, both on the levels of individual psychology and political ideology. The author cannot seem to relinquish the character of Tsi, the closest there is to a central character in the novel. A final overturning of his 'false consciousness' is never fully completed, and the end of To Every Birth Its Blood thus exhibits a political and structural aporia. Authorial ideology as displayed in the text is disruptive of its own answers.

Resolving the Divided Self?

Moreover, the author's pertinent disclosures of the inter-penetrations of private and family life with politics in South Africa (where the individual is at the beck and call of political and legal restraints of an extreme kind) come close to over-balancing into a collapsing of the categories of the existential and the political into each other entirely. This tendency is enhanced by the fluidity of language in the novel, where – as argued before – symbols and motifs can stand for varying facets of human experience.

This collapsing has various effects. Firstly, the indeterminacy in motif usage has confusing, even ironic, effects. For example, the journey of the river – initially symbolic of individual destiny on the journey through life –

transmogrifies by Part Two into the river of the Movement on its inexorable course to political liberation (compare Birth: 65; 272). One could well enquire whether, in the context of the novel as a whole, the author perceives the river's journey as ending in death or freedom;[60] or, alternatively, whether the 'sea' at the end of the river's journey does not presume a socially undifferentiated, post-liberation harmony in South Africa.[61]

Secondly, the collapsing of existential and political meanings demonstrates a desire to solve existential psychosis and political suffering in one fell swoop. The political unity Serote posits in the black community is also an inter-personal unity on an immediate level. The Movement assures this ('Oupa knew that he had nothing to fear, that he could trust John and Dikeledi. Somehow he knew this' (ibid.: 254; my emphasis). In a country where it is an act of willpower not to go mad (ibid.: 180), the Movement brings calmness, discipline and an organic unity of one and all of its members. The Movement is a means of resolution of a world vision which simply projects the psychological in an unproblematic manner onto the field of political commitment, opposing its membership to the 'false consciousness' of non-participation in the Movement.[62] South Africa, according to Serote, traumatises all individual and social relationships, including the family. The Movement, and the liberation it brings, does not only begin to reverse this pernicious process. It not so much allows as guarantees 'healthy' human subjectivity at the same time as it guarantees a

'healthy' politics. Inter-personal and psychological processes are transplanted wholesale onto the realm of political relationships, and psychic repression and disjuncture are seen merely as factors of the socio-political.

The slippage from profundity to overstatement in this conceptualisation is obvious. All desire is channelled into the symbolic trope of the Movement: but, eventually, the political teleology of To Every Birth Its Blood is undermined by the very aspects Serote is desirous of suppressing – the manner in which non-reducible aspects of social, family and psychological experience intrude into the author's ideological closure. While the Movement and its politics can give succour to the alienated, divided human subject psychologically dismembered by apartheid, there is evidence in the text that it brings with it other forms of psychological and social repression, in the manner in which Serote has chosen to depict it.

There are noteworthy fractures and tensions in the psychological make-up of characters involved in the sexual and family relationships of the novel. While critics have tended to differentiate Tsi's 'alienated' family in Part One from Ramono's 'committed' family in Part Two,[63] it is noticeable that both families have a stern, uncompromising father-figure. What is more, the scenes of easeful co-existence in the Ramono family are depicted as always taking place without the presence of the father (ibid.: 201 – 8).

As far as gender representation is concerned, in all his interactions with women Tsi mixes insight into their vulnerability with a realisation of

their qualities of strength and succour (see for example ibid.: 23; 43; 49; 67; 113). This perception of women pervades the consciousness of other male characters in the second half of the novel as well. The 'mother figure', in particular, jostles with the female freedom fighter for textual space, holding out a promise of homeliness and rest to the men.[64] Yet this idealisation of women goes hand in hand with a shadow of dissonance in relationships. There are hints of sexual disjuncture and incompatability stippling the text. The only time, for instance, the 'beautiful' Dikeledi loses her attractiveness is when she thinks of an experience of sexual harassment which comes to determine her attitude, it would seem, to black and white men alike (ibid.: 206 – 7). This ambivalence of depiction is even more noticeable in the relationship between Tsi and Tshidi. Even if the reader takes into account that, as an adulterous affair, this relationship is not meant to be positively portrayed, its representation is shot through with the presence of misused power and impotence Tsi recognises as brutalising her 'beauty, kindness, understanding' (ibid.: 113).

There are further degrees of inter-sexual conflict that emerge, unbidden, in the text. During Grace's pregnancy, her female happiness is not only shown to be generated by a benign use of male authority, but the language used to portray this event also contains traces of a use of force which does not seem to have been intended by the author:

> Grace was happy. Something had happened to her husband for now, every day when he came back, he kissed her full on the mouth, almost as if their mouths were becoming one. He was careful; his hands were always ready to touch her, caress her, tighten around her; his tough

> hand, breaking inside her, exploding, and making her knees melt. She would cling to him.
>
> (ibid.: 218)[65]

It is perhaps less ironic than it first appears that the outcome of this pregnancy is Morolong. In such examples, a potential for gender conflict and lack of harmony presents itself despite Serote's repressions of sexual difference and simple alignment of the psychosexual to the political. Indeed, this tendency manifests itself among black siblings as well, such as in the recollection of Tsi that he once tried to force his sister Mary 'to make a pee standing up, and the urine ran down her legs, and her mother, angry, looking ashamed, slapped her and pushed and pulled her to the house screaming at her' (ibid.: 100).

Consequently, the postulation of a reflexivity between the political and the psychological in this novel can only finally operate by attempting to repress social and psychosexual traits and formulations which run counter to it. Yet this proves impossible for the author to achieve. Some of the characters begin to resist, in the text, their satisfactory and final absorption into the Movement and its social teleology. Thus, the novel cannot eventually escape the endemic nature of existential and social fractures in human experience, not reducible merely to political context, in South Africa as everywhere else.

Conclusion

Interpretation is one of the major problems of To Every Birth Its Blood because, on one level, the book lends itself to being read as a fictionalisation of major aspects of the history of black resistance in South Africa over the last quarter of a century, through the eyes of a number of characters originally cohering around the township of Alexandra. On the other hand – and this is first implicit as the reader is faced with the temporal disjunctures and generic multiplicities of the novel – it gestures simultaneously towards a symbolic level of interpretation with the transforming presence of the Movement as a key signifier.

The novel's difficulty and fascination for readers lies in the fact that no single interpretation of the work can satisfactorily resolve its multifarious structures and themes into a unified perspective. While, as I have argued, it does display a fictional organisation of time and ideology both similar to and more complex than Barboure and Glegg perceive, the novel resists the ideological and political closures they and (from his own statements about the ability of literature to mime everyday life and inspire political action) the author have tried to impose upon it. The readings of Barboure, Glegg and Schoon are suspect in their belief that disclosing authorial intention is enough for analytical clarity. Yet while Visser's intervention eventually constitutes, in my opinion, an advance on how Serote's novel should be viewed, he appears to over-emphasise the author's process of writing. While

the ambivalences in the text might in part be occasioned by the differing contexts in which Serote began and finished the work, there is still an overarching logic to the text as a whole, too insistent to entirely accord with Visser's 'disruption' thesis. A closer reading shows that some of the novel's confusion for readers is caused by contradictions of viewpoint and purpose occasioned by Serote's ideology.

When it is realised that this novel can be variously perceived on a political or existential level – and when it is further apparent that they are ultimately regarded as one and the same thing in apartheid South Africa by the author – it comes as no surprise that a lack of clarity in the text eventuates. Factors of political differentiation and psychosexual disruption interfere with the logic of the text, powerfully resisting critical closures imposed on the work which seek to delineate it as an 'authentic', inspirational paean to Movement politics and the liberation struggle.

Serote has tried, in a manner more compelling than any work of fiction written in South Africa before him, to encompass the intertwining realities of social, political and individual life; and for this reason his explorations in this regard are admirable. The need for a political liberation that normalises the social space in which human life operates, and which allows new egalitarian, democratic social and political structures to emerge in South Africa cannot be gainsaid: and the baleful influence of apartheid cannot be exaggerated. Serote convincingly demonstrates this in his novel.

For this purpose, certainly, political struggle is necessary and individual heartbreak and trauma is unavoidable.[66]

However, the disruptions and tensions in Serote's work disclose, unbidden, traces of another facet of the struggle towards nationhood and freedom in South Africa. These hint at the fact that political discipline cannot be a cure for psychic disorder: the results of liberation will be a new, better, but still unstable and conflictual society, not the undifferentiated sea at the end of all rivers. To pretend otherwise is to court the possibility of psychic, social and eventually political trouble.

It can be argued that the disjunctions of this novel are themselves fruitful areas for debate for those who wish to begin grappling with the exciting possibilities of South Africa's post-apartheid literary and socio-political future. Nevertheless for Serote, as for his readers, this will become an area of struggle too. Immediate political liberation might well be the sine qua non for allowing the realms of psychic satisfaction and democratic, non-exploitative relationships to emerge as possibilities in the country. Yet liberation cannot guarantee this emergence. For the inhabitants of South Africa the society that breeds social harmony and satisfies all individuals, that smoothes over political and social contestation and cures the divided self, is still far away.

Notes To Chapter Five

1. For Serote's Black Consciousness utterances, see Serote 1973a, 1973b, 1977; Kuhn 1974; 'Panel on Contemporary ...'. For statements with regard to the relationships between blacks and whites in South Africa, and the position of 'authentic' blacks vis-a-vis 'non-whites', see Serote 1973a: 16; 19 – 20; 1982: 112; 'Panel on Contemporary ...': 25 and Chapman 1982b: 113. For his later reflections on, and criticisms of, Black Consciousness, see Serote 1989b; Ngugi/Serote 1988; Wilkinson 1988: 104 – 5; 'Face to face ...' and especially Serote 1990b: 9 – 10.

2. As an example of this shift in priorities, witness his wish, as a member of Mihloti Black Theatre in Alexandra in the early 1970s, to write for and conscientise a black readership and audience (Seroke 1981a: 30 – 1) vis-a-vis his later (1980) modification of this to note that he did not write for 'the colours of skins' (Chapman 1982b: 114). It appears that Serote changed his allegiance to the A.N.C. during his three year stay in the U.S.A. between 1974 – 77 (see Ngugi/Serote 1988: 40 – 2).

   Mihloti Black Theatre was a subsidiary of Mdali, the Black Consciousness cultural group mentioned in chapters one and two.

3. Perhaps more than any other major black South African writer of the last three decades, Serote has insisted that literature as a cultural process is potentially non-elitist, and can be extended to more and more black people as they become literate and acquire literary skills (see his comments in Seroke 1981a: 32; Serote 1988b: 9).

4. This can best be seen in a statement he made in 1990:

> ... how can we save the noble word democracy from becoming a cliche by knowing what we, as people, think, feel, want, and are supposed to be doing here on this earth? How can all these elements of democracy walk, gesture and become our gait in the streets?
>
> (Serote 1990a: 25; emphasis in original)

5. The transformation of Serote's attitude to his social position in his home township, Alexandra, can be observed by comparing early observations that:

> ... in Alex township there are so many broken homes, broken people with no future. It is a terrible place to live in. You have to take care of yourself and you build a defence mechanism if you are to survive. You learn to observe without showing your own feelings.
>
> (Keill 1974)

   and:

> If I had an alternative to Alex, I would not be there. But I was

> given no alternative, so I had to create the things which would allow me to survive. And these things become a part of you.
>
> (Kuhn 1974: 35)

with the later statement:

> In a place like Alexandra one has no choice except to become politically committed. Alexandra is a very closely knit community.... Coming out of Alexandra I was aspiring to become part and parcel of the energy that will create a livable world. I thought that one of the ways of doing this was to give expression to the condition of my people through writing and as one does this one begins to understand the size and depth of oppression. One also becomes aware that one has to become part and parcel of the force that is going to do away with oppression.
>
> (Ngugi/Serote 1988: 34 – 5)

The change of viewpoint in the decade and a half between these statements is striking. By 1980 Serote was to stipulate that the direction of the liberation struggle in the forthcoming decade should also be the direction of the black poet (Chapman 1982b: 115).

6. In this later article, he defined creative literature as standing 'before us as a mirror which reflects the tapestry of our fibre as a people' (Serote 1990a: 25).

7. This is particularly the case with Barboure 1984, Glegg 1982 and Schoon 1982.

8. See Clayton 1982 for a similar response.

9. > I want to stress that we would be misconstruing the novel if we were to impose some sort of simplistic political thematics on the change of ideological stance, on the model of such conventional thematic antinomies as 'being' versus 'becoming' or 'appearance' versus 'reality'. There is no shift from Black Consciousness to an ANC 'line' ... we get traces of Black Consciousness, and many other ideological strains, right up to the conclusion of the novel. What shifts is the emphasis, as ... a new ideological position begins to emerge from an earlier one.
   >
   > (Visser 1987: 73).

10. To Barboure, Morolong is 'ironically not able to cope with the pressures of succeeding, and becomes a street youth dropout' (Barboure 1984: 176).

11. It must be noted that Serote has since maintained that his detention in 1969 was due to work done for the A.N.C. (Serote 1989c: 65), a statement which might lead to the modification of Visser's argument. However, it is possible that Serote might not, in 1969, have regarded his Black Consciousness viewpoint as at odds with work for the A.N.C. Furthermore, there is

evidence in subsequent interviews that a degree of re-interpretation of Serote's earlier biography taking place, in the light of his later political commitments. Witness his mother's statement (made in 1989) that, in 1976, Serote was 'one of the first people to be detained ... and it was said he might hang', when Serote was in actual fact studying in the U.S.A. at the time ('Alina Serote ...': 50).

12. It should be noted that this observation about the essential character of the novel, made eight years after Serote had completed To Every Birth Its Blood, is slightly different in emphasis from a statement of purpose he made several years before beginning his novel, when he noted that 'I am writing more prose now than poetry. I'm going to concentrate on that. Perhaps, that way, I can get right down to the root of things – open up the inside – know why these things are happening to me' (Kuhn 1974: 40). The author's shift from subjective self-exploration to objective social exposition implied in the difference in emphasis of these remarks is reflected, in my opinion, in the course of the novel itself, as is here argued.

13. One notes, for instance, Oupa's almost miraculous growth from boy to young man (Birth: 141; 190); and the narrative speed with which Tsi moves from outsider to family man with three children (Birth: 149). Please note that all references to the text are to the Ravan Press edition of the novel.

14. Watts notes:

> Though Serote's novel covers the same historical period as Tlali's, Sepamla's and Mzamane's, it is less concerned than the other three with the documentation of events than with the chronicling of transformations of consciousness during the momentous years that led up to the 1976 uprising.
>
> (Watts 1989: 238)

As a consequence, Visser has spoken of 1976 as the 'absent centre' of the novel (see Visser 1987: 68 – 9).

15. To explain more fully:

> ... in discriminating the types of anachronistic deviations that a narrative text makes from the underlying story, all our observations are relational. That is, we proceed not with the goal of simply unravelling the sequential jumble ... (and) restoring the wholesome chronology that might satisfy a scientist. Certainly unravelling is involved and is important, but equally so is a sense of the relations between the various chunks of the text.
>
> (Toolan 1989: 54 – 5)

16. Barboure mentions the time shifts and flashback techniques in Part One (Barboure 1984: 172 – 3) while Glegg criticises the novel for 'too summary a skipping of several years' (Glegg 1982: 35). Visser rejects these attempts, concluding that:

> ... any effort to impose a definite time scheme on Part 1 ... will be frustrated by the absence of a consistently retrospective temporal vantage point ... (which) by attempting to smooth over contradictory tendencies in the novel, can only obscure rather than clarify the structural complexities of the work as a whole.
>
> (Visser 1987: 71 – 2)

17. Thus, while Clingman is correct in observing that To Every Birth Its Blood is about 'the idea of a necessary alternative future ... that ... must be constructed through collective political agency and organization' (Clingman 1990b: 50), Serote's novel deals with the past as well.

    Serote's delineating of the fate of the black individual under apartheid is, of course, strongly reminiscent of Matshoba's.

18. In a long poem written at the same time as this novel, and published in 1978, Serote notes that: 'There is nothing that we must forget or let be forgotten' (Serote 1978: 11).

19. As Serote himself put it in an interview:

> One one level (the pesence of police and gangsters in the streets) begin to make one doubt oneself as to the significance of being alive at all. On the other you feel you have been wronged - to use a very mild word indeed. Although you try to resolve the contradiction: what is the meaning of all this? One can deal with it in that sense if one can become abstract, but things in South Africa are not abstract. The police come into the locations, into the townships, and you begin to understand that they have absolutely no respect ... and at the same time you understand that they are supposed to be representing law and order. And then of course you hear from your parents about how their lives have been; you see what happend to them when you travel with them or go with them into town and you begin to understand that in fact you being alive is really considered a crime.
>
> (Wilkinson 1988: 104)

20. As Nomsisi points out to Tsi, they can do 'anything' at all they wish to Fix in detention (Birth: 41).

21. See, for example, his soliloquy on visiting the grave of his grandfather at the novel's beginning ('That is where the trouble started – was I willing to change?') (Birth: 11 – 2).

22. Right throughout the novel memory is potentially redemptive as well as immediately disruptive: not only the introspective Tsi but also the guerrilla Tuki and others try to understand their own and their people's history (compare Birth: 28 – 30; 326 – 8). They discover that old people, defeated as they are, are also the bearers of a proud history of resistance to white encroachment: thus Onalenna's desire to question an old lady 'for record, for history, for memory' in order to understand why she is 'still a fighter' (ibid.: 282).

23. Interestingly enough, in the original version of this interview (published in New Nation 1 – 8 December 1988) the last sentence of this quote reads 'I thought the novel was the only way I could do this' (emphasis mine).

24. Significantly, it is the guerrilla Tuki (who has been a Black Consciousness activist, but subsequently joins the Movement) who acknowledges this.

25. In similar vein, in her Takalane Theatre poetry performance shortly after the 1976 revolt, Onalenna states:

> We are people
> Who have struggled for a long long time
> Now we have to use the lessons of our struggle!
>
> (Birth: 173)

26. Watts' analysis of the novel's bipartite structure, based on a suggestion that the two parts embody a structural repetition moving from the individual (Tsi in the first part, John in the second) to the collective, and representing 'two waves of consciousness ... one which swells and disperses and apparently reaches no goal, but which in fact is swept back into and increases the force of the second wave' (Watts 1989: 245) is subtly conceived. Nevertheless, it eventually falls prey to her acceptance of Serote's assumptions as to the manner in which the individual can be absorbed into the collective, to be criticised below.

27. No critic has explored the author's uncertainites of ideology and extrapolation as they are conveyed in this crucial passage at the end of the novel. Tsi simultaneously seems to be arguing an equality of suffering between white oppressor and black oppressed, and an inequality based on the lack of 'humanity' of the oppressor. Moreover, an urge to reject the whites because of this lack co-exists with a desire to enfold them into a future dispensation where everyone 'will know each other'. A further ambivalence can be noted, as to whether or not it is possible to forecast who the victors of this struggle will be – an ambivalence depending on what social, political or technological aspect the reader chooses to define the word 'strongest' in relation to.

28. This is narrated most fully in the case of Dikeledi (see Birth: 250 – 269).

29. For instance:

> An American will never meet, or even know the names of more than a handful of his 240 million-odd fellow Americans. He has no idea of what they are up to at any one time. But he has complete confidence in their steady, anonymous, simultaneous activity.
>
> (Anderson 1983: 31)

30. See the discussion in Anderson 1983: 28 – 40.

31. It should be noted that Canetti's remarks are extremely sweeping, dealing with world-epochal periods of history and ideology.

32. Fabula is applied here as used by the Russian Formalists: to signify the extra-textual chronology of the events being recounted (as opposed to the sjuzhet, the textual progression of events). See Martin 1986: 107 – 9.

33. The use of the character Hlase is indicated here (see Birth: 319; 322).

34. 'Alexandra was for me a definition of the way blacks lived in our country as a whole' (Serote in Seroke 1981a: 30).

35. Immediately prior to leaving South Africa in 1974 for what was to become exile, Serote displays a similar ambivalence to Tsi:

> When I am in Johannesburg ... I feel insecure: all that concrete, all those cops. I am glad to get home again. But in the township fear is very real, too. I can walk out of a friend's house, and it could be that friend, walking in the night, who is stabbed and killed.
>
> (Kuhn 1974: 38)

36. This explains, perhaps, why some critics have taken this emphasis on humanity and concern for the individual on Serote's part as proof that To Every Birth Its Blood is a 'humanist' novel, a conception which is otherwise bizarre (see Barboure 1984: 180; Glegg 1982: 35; Watts 1989: 247; for a critique, see Visser 1987: 72).

37. Critics have taken the B.S.O. to be a fictional reference to Black Consciousness organisations such as S.A.S.O.; and have seen Boykie's statement that this organisation is engaged in a 'repeat performance' (Birth: 77) as part of Serote's critique of Black Consciousness (see Visser 1987: 73).

38. This is, in my opinion, the implication behind the seemingly innocuous remark Oupa makes to Tsi ('Uncle ... are you lost?') the last time the latter sees him alive (Birth: 324).

39. It is possible to believe that Tsi's anger after Oupa's funeral (see Birth: 345) implies that he has joined the Movement; however, a detailed reading does not confirm this assumption.

40. Even though we are told that Yao has acquired a 'different knowledge' – like Tsi – but in the U.S.A. (Birth: 174).

41. In support of this reading of Tsi in the novel, it should be noted that during a seminar in London in 1988, Serote re-articulated this Manichaean viewpoint of the determinants of human consciousness:

> The cultural viewpoint I express recognises a choice between being among the fighters or the defeated. Fighters and the defeated look at the world differently: fighters for freedom, who

> know unity and democracy, and are ready to lay down their lives for their ideals, are forever optimistic - even in defeat; the defeated who have no high human objectives are a despairing people, ready to be crushed even as they play at fighting.
>
> (Serote 1990b: 4)

42. Furthermore, although Granny thereafter becomes involved with another man, her new lover is dismissed by the narrator as a denizen of the streets – probably a gangster – and Granny's acceptance of him rationalised as a way of punishing Themba (Birth: 293 – 5). The author's attempt to allow a space to individual volition thus founders on his urge to judge and vilify those who do not get swept up by the Movement's impetus.

43. This can be verified in remarks Serote made in a speech during a conference in Sweden in 1986:

> Three hundred years of living under oppression and exploitation is a thorough process of generations upon generations being subjected to a systematic programme of dehumanization; and, seventy four years of being an organised people struggling to become part of humanity is on the other hand a pointer to the size, depth and height of odds faced, also to the vastness of the wealth of experience gained. This, in varying degrees of ability has been the exploration of the cultural manifestation of South Africa. (Serote 1986: 194).

The date referred to, seventy-four years before, was the date of the founding of the S.A.N.N.C. (later to become the A.N.C.).

44. Visser notes the alacrity with which references to 'any Movement' in the novel become references to 'the' Movement (see Birth: 247; 252 and Visser 1987: 74 – 5).

45. One need only point to the other substantial anti-apartheid black organisations active in South African politics (either covertly or overtly) at the time this novel was written – the P.A.C., A.Z.A.P.O. and the Unity Movement. The pre-eminence Serote gives to the A.N.C. in this regard is reiterated in his belief that:

> ... in my opinion, also, South African writers in exile must belong to the ANC. The reason is that, whether we like it or not, the only organization which is waging a meaningful struggle in South Africa is the ANC. And for them to keep in contact with what is happening within the country they must be part of the struggle. This is very important.
>
> (Serote 1989c: 64)

46. An event, note, that is foreshadowed in the very first sentence of the novel: 'So, when she and I walked into the house after we had been in the street so long, I knew that another time was coming when we would have to be in the street again' (Birth: 1).

47. This might be a cogent premiss on which to differentiate various anti-apartheid organisations in South Africa; but it still blurs different organisations who chose this path together, such as the A.N.C and P.A.C. For a discussion of the 'parting of ways' over questions of violence of different Black Consciousness activists in the post-1977 era, and the absorption of some into Umkhonto we Sizwe, the armed wing of the A.N.C., see Mokoape et al 1991: 141.

48. Although Visser does note that 'nothing is really abandoned' (Visser 1987: 70 – 2).

49. Most of my argument here, and in what follows, borrows its conceptual precepts from Cohn 1978 and McCabe 1978.

50. For a discussion of 'classical realism' in these terms, see McCabe 1985: 34 – 7.

51. The nuances of this standpoint should not be over-simplified. Serote does not, for instance, accept an African identity as available outside of the continent (there are several critical remarks aimed at African-Americans in this regard in the novel); and has increasingly come to perceive the problems involved in analysing and conceptualising the 'complex issue of the scale of privileged positions in South African society' (Chapman 1982b: 114). More recently, he has noted that the 'nation has a class content' (August 1990a: 98) and has become fascinated with questions relating to the positions of whites in the country (August 1990a: 94 – 5; Serote 1988a: 30 – 1). His analysis of class, however, seems to depend on the individual's relationship to the liberation struggle ('On the other side, you have blacks who – consciously or not – have not identified with the liberation movement ... they have lots of money, beautiful cars, beautiful women' (August 1990a: 95; emphasis mine).

52. Medu Art Ensemble in Botswana, of which Serote was a member after its inception in 1979 until his departure from the country in 1986, adopted a terminology which transposed the racial ideology of Black Consciousness into one which operated in terms of dichotomies of 'oppressed' and 'oppressor', using 'resistance' to apartheid as its analytical touchstone (for example, see the general discussions in Serote et al 1983 and Naledi Writers' Unit 1985).

53. The importance of books and education is a substantial formative influence on these characters, as has been discussed more fully in the previous chapter.

54. This political perception is common to Serote's speeches made during the 1980s, and the division is often insisted upon in sweeping terms; for instance: 'there is in this world and in this life, a culture of let live and anti-life culture. This is what I think is meant when terms like 'third' and 'first' world are used' (Serote 1990a: 25; sic.).

55. Talking about the systems which exploit labour world-wide, Serote says that the fact has:

> ... formed items on the agendas of ... conferences throughout the world. And these discussions, if nothing else, have informed the oppressed majority that in the end, what matters is how they themselves define the objective of their struggles for liberation, and who they themselves choose as their allies. The liberation of these oppressed majorities had been fought for, and won, by their own political organisations, consciously mobilising their own forces to overthrow the oppressor ... both the now independent countries and those still fighting have clearly defined to the world the direction and objective of their struggle. It is wise (to) ... note this and be guided by either the governments of these countries or the liberation movements in those countries still engaged in the struggle for liberation.
>
> (Serote et al 1983: 30; see also Kgositsile 1988: 24).

The facile connections here made between political organisations, or rulers, and 'the people' is obvious; as is the belief that such organisations and governments absorb any contradictions and divisions amongst those ruled, thus unproblematically serving as their mouthpiece.

56. Revolution thus merely comes to serve the restoration of an ill-defined social 'normality'. For instance, Serote believes 'the aspirations of my people can be said in one word – happiness. That is all that people want: happiness' ('Exiled writer ...'). This allows Serote to skirt over many of the problems associated with what he regards as 'normal' social institutions and groupings, such as the family. It has been pointed out elsewhere that the 'ideology of familialism' oppresses women worldwide: 'it is only through an analysis of ideology that we can grasp the oppressive myth of an idealised natural 'family' to which all women must conform' (Barrett 1980: 251).

57. > ... the novel seems like a gloss on Lukacs's differentiation between modernism and realism: Tsi's stream of consciousness is his entrapment within the world of ... pure subjectivity; but the second part of the book puts this in what Lukacs would call perspective.
>
> (Clingman 1990b: 51; see also Visser 1987: 70 – 2)

58. Clingman has put this even more bluntly:

> The choice seems to be clear: either one lives in the crazed world of Tsi's individualism - which it appears can only be a dead-end - or one works rationally and purposively together with others towards a new order.
>
> (Clingman 1990b: 51)

59. The slightly strained syntax of this sentence reflects a suggestion that the somewhat more spacious characterisation accorded them might be related to their lesser roles as 'heroes'.

60. For a fuller, excellent discussion of the implications of Serote's use of the river motif (in this case as regards his third book of poems, No Baby Must Weep), see Levumo 1979: 54.

61. For a discussion of this in a wider African context, see Izevbaye 1982: 78.

62. For an incisive discussion of the pervasiveness, in African liberation doctrines, of this melding of the private-psychological with the public-political realms of experience in oppressed communities (especially relating to the theories of Fanon) see Couve 1986: 92 – 9; 115 – 9 and 1988: 58 – 9. See also Visser 1987: 73.

63. See Barboure 1984: 175 – 6 and, for a slightly more nuanced view, Watts 1989: 243.

64. It is discernible that this promise can never be fulfilled due to the men's intransigence, caused in turn by the debilitating effects of apartheid.

65. Witness also Tsi's earlier perception of his penis as a 'terrible muscle' (Birth: 49).

66. For a memorable expression of this fact, focalised through the thoughts of Dikeledi, see Birth: 232.

CONCLUSION

In South Africa, the continual smashing of organised opposition to the State led to writers being regarded as significant sources of anti-government attitudes by both the State and many of their readers. In such a situation, the radical black writer felt an obligation to construct ideological and symbolic means through which liberation could be hastened. Placed in a society where popular discontent against the ruling regime was rife, disaffected black intellectuals and artists saw a mobilising role for themselves through literary activity. These writers recognised a salient propensity of literature: as a means of expression, it can make active interventions in, or influence, the political world outside of its textual boundaries. Literature, as the culture from which it flows, is an ideologically formative, as well as an ideologically determined, process: 'simultaneously the fruits of a people's history and a determinant of history' (Cabral 1973: 41; see also R. Williams 1977: 128 – 9).

This study has examined the manner in which black writers writing under the aegis of Black Consciousness experienced and constructed the world around them. It has attempted to demonstrate how class, gender and urban identities influenced Black Consciousness literary expression. It has tried to show the ideological constituents and limitations of some of the

literature by citing the resultant preoccupations, hiatuses and silences in a number of prose texts. In order to test the argument that a great deal of the literature forthcoming in the period bore the priorities and viewpoints of a more privileged group, the writers' extra-textual views, their biographies, and their conceptualised allegiances to Black Consciousness were inspected; as well as the effectivity of their literature in terms of questions of audience, means of dissemination and language choice.

While the social origins and placements of black writers and performers in this study are to some extent diverse, a remarkable prevalence of themes and attitudes in much of the published literature can be noticed. While these themes and viewpoints are mainly examined in the light of four novels and one collection of stories, such a statement remains true, in my opinion, for much of the poetry and drama (oral or written) produced in the period under examination as well.[1] A preponderance of visible black literature aligning itself with Black Consciousness ideas in this period would appear to have assumed a relatively privileged viewpoint, despite its political stance: and the passionate identification made by these writers with lower-class blacks, rural dwellers and (at times) women tended to hide preconceptions which were anything but fully representative of their racial community at large.

In attempting to formulate and speak a counter-ideology to the hegemony of white literary criticism and political commentatory, Black Consciousness itself necessarily produced a discourse and set of concepts

which strove to establish itself as hegemonic among black people. In this process, it also of necessity produced ways of perceiving society subject to its own silences, biases and gainsaying. Consequently, it is suggested, political and 'committed' stances in literature, and claims for 'authenticity' or 'authority', need to be subject to closer analysis and research than has generally been the case, before their potential can be measured.

Moreover, the strong teleological and Manichaean elements explicit in Black Consciousness thought – its belief that blacks must move from a state of ignorance to 'true consciousness', plus its tendency to evaluate individuals in South Africa (including individual writers) solely in terms of their belonging to one of two opposing camps – can be argued to have had many points of myopia. In particular, insofar as an expression or examination of social and political diversity and divisions in black society were concerned, this doctrine (and the literature inspired by it) proved less than incisive.

These writers generally sought, in my opinion, to reduce and restrain the possible ambiguities of meaning that could be given their literary utterances. Knowledge, for them, became 'a belief that acts as proof, a belief that demonstrates its own truth'.[2] Their literature provided an incisive examination of the interfaces of racial conflict and fracture in South African society; beyond that it was not politically particularly questioning of social inequalities and divisions.

If it is the unalienable right of people to have their own history, as Cabral asserts, then that history must be accepted, analysed and used with all its contradictions, struggles and inconsistencies (Cabral 1980: 143). Black Consciousness writers' lack of recognition of their own class and gender placement in society resulted in an area which was important for them to recognise – their contradictions with the people they claimed to speak for – being too often downplayed, rather than explored.

The problem of writers and performers' lack of organic relationship to their audiences is an ineluctable one.[3] In this historical context, even the most socially committed of the Black Consciousness writers were individuals or small groups who tried to represent and deal creatively with wider social concerns. Political consciousness and self-knowledge, it was implied, could be instilled into black people from a politicised coterie; taking root first among a reading community, and then (the problems of this interface were never really considered) among other less literate black people in a sweeping, inexorable manner. Such assertions took it for granted that the goals and identities of all blacks could be expressed easily by writers and activists with a 'committed' attitude and radical perception of society. On the contrary, this study has shown that disjunctures can and do occur in such a relationship, even if the political issues taken up by writers and political activists do have a great deal of resonance and support among people.

Throughout the 1970s, black writers and performers were constantly seeking to widen and deepen their concerns and subject matter. Indeed, at the end of the historic period under discussion, several of the authors dealt with – Serote and Matshoba in particular – appear to have begun questioning notions of racial identity as they struggled to conceive of a way in which South Africa could become a non-racial society. Towards and after the end of the period here studied, views on readership and on cultural priorities began to shift. For instance, commenting in 1980 on the audience he envisaged for an earlier volume of poetry, Serote noted:

> It's directed at Africans in particular. Look, I don't simply want to write for the colours of skins. I want to try to understand the complex issue of the scale of privileged positions in South African society, which includes the white, the Indian and the coloured – I have been called a 'kaffir' by all of them. This is complex, but I have become increasingly aware that it is the Africans who hold the tools of liberation in South Africa.
>
> (Chapman 1982b: 114)

In another instance, Mzamane stated that he did not see the writer's role as popular mouthpiece and conscience as merely an effect of the struggle against apartheid – and projected this role forward into a post-apartheid future under an majority government:

> In most countries today the true needs of the people are very often more honestly and faithfully reflected in the works of that country's committed writers, themselves ordinary citizens (with perhaps slightly more guts, sensitivity and talent than others) than in the official government proclamations and pronouncements. As a result, it would be to the advantage of any government, trying to formulate sound policy in the interests of the majority of its people or to gauge their popular appeal, to study its creative writers very carefully.
>
> (Mzamane 1980b: 40)

Nevertheless, in my opinion many of the basic precepts of Black Consciousness literature are still active and even dominant in assumptions about literature in South Africa. This is especially true of the main issues discussed in this thesis, pertaining to the existence of homogeneous, racially-defined and completely separate 'cultures' in the country; the political role of the writer; the possibilities of mimetic accuracy in literature; and writers' and intellectuals' assumed authority vis-a-vis 'their' community – whether examined in terms of race, class, or gender.

Struggles over the meaning of history, over cultural symbols, over the ideological identifications of individuals, groups and classes are endemic to South African society today. While this struggle over the political potency of cultural symbols and forms of identification can most clearly be seen in the move of Black Consciousness ideology away from white-derived, to black, symbols and identities, it can also be seen in the emphases, silences and appropriations of cultural and historical identity taking place among various classes and groups of black people.

The problem of how individuals and small groups of literary activists can link into and influence the growth of a popular and dynamic culture, appealing to as many people as possible, is still a crucial one. The unanswered questions of a committed literature lie in a discovery of how best to use it in the times ahead. That this is necessary cannot be denied. In a situation where the issue of apartheid is being 'solved', at least at a constitutional and legislative level, problems of representativeness, of social

ventriloquism, and of the availability of democratic expression for all South Africans, are still crucial issues which remain on the political agenda. Consideration of such issues will consequently remain as questions to be raised in literary and cultural analysis and research.

Notes to Conclusion

1. Although this point cannot be argued in this thesis, see Sole 1987: 47 – 70 for a similar examination of Black Consciousness poetry and drama.

2. The phrase is Susan Suleiman's. Her study of the French roman a these of the first half of the twentieth century shows this literature has similarities to the fiction discussed in this thesis. In particular, witness in such literature also the dualist categories of value set up (one is either a supporter or opponent of whatever model of political behaviour and knowledge is set up for approbation); the ethical gulf between positively- and negatively-evaluated characters; the manner in which a 'structure of confrontation' is used to mask ideological contradictions in the texts; and the demands of mimesis and action placed on the reader (see in particular Suleiman 1983: 26; 37; 54 – 6; 101 – 6; 142 – 6).

3. This thesis does not, therefore, imply an exhortation to middle-class writers to perform a literary equaivalent of 'class suicide' and pretend to be working-class: some of the consequences of easy gestures such as this are shown above. Rather, it believes that attempts to forge more genuinely popular forms of art need to confront, rather than explain away, social and ideological differences.

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