

**BLACKNESS AND BEYOND:  
BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS AND THE ANTINOMIES OF IDENTITY  
NEGOTIATION IN SOUTH AFRICA**

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## DECLARATION

Unless otherwise stated, the ideas contained in this thesis are my own.

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis seeks to understand the significance of black consciousness as an attempt at creating the possibility of a black identity which challenged the apartheid definition of "black". As a discursive event, black consciousness signifies the search for self and place within a national context organised according to an exclusive/inclusive logic and is thereby shown to participate in a discourse of nationalism. The means by which this identitarian search is conducted is scrutinised with a view to establishing its origins within the topology of apartheid discourse itself. Through an analysis of essentialist racial discourses, the reconstruction of a positive black identity on the basis of a complete recovery of a pre-colonial reality and cultural purity is shown to be unattainable. Although understandable in the context of the cultural denigration suffered by blacks under apartheid, the claim to an authentic and independent resistance is revealed as being inevitably limited.

This thesis therefore argues for a contextual understanding of identitarian projects such as black consciousness, on the basis that its particular aims were governed to a large extent by the prevailing conditions of apartheid oppression.

① The psychological focus of the black consciousness movement meant that the movement concentrated on changing individual self-images rather than attacking the physical manifestations of power; hence, its concern with the assertion of identity and the incorporation of black people into history as

subjects. An important component of the legacy of black consciousness is the demand that it made on blacks to recognise their active agency in history and to transform their self-conception from that of passive victim into that of historical agent. This thesis attempts to trace this development in the political theory of Steve Biko, the fictional work of Mongane Serote and the cultural expression contained in and embodied by Staffrider Magazine. While conscious of the differences of context that such a study embraces, this thesis also attempts to draw links between particular manifestations of black consciousness, both political and cultural, and the project of European Modernity with the object of revealing, not how the terms of modernity are reproduced by black consciousness, but how they must inevitably be redefined.

## INTRODUCTION

In his preface to Steve Biko's I Write What I Like, Aelred Stubbs C.R. writes that "the definitive writing on Steve can only come from one who writes from within his own tradition - - historic, linguistic and political"(v). I am not from within Biko's historic, linguistic and political tradition in the sense that Stubbs defines it and I do not claim definitive status for my work on Biko and the black consciousness movement. My interest in black consciousness is motivated by a concern with the way in which colonialism has itself shaped the colonised and in that way determines the course of anti-colonial resistance. The black consciousness movement and Stephen Biko himself, as a subject embodying the quest for recognition of a particular "self" and "nation", provide opportunities for examining the attempt to overcome the deprivations and restrictions of colonialism, and investigate the possibilities for a postcolonial order, within a specifically South African context.

In its substance, then, this project is propositional rather than definitive and at all times attempts to maintain an awareness of its authorial discursive origins. Much of the impetus behind the black consciousness movement's desire to seek an independent voice, apart from the more obvious suppression inflicted by the apartheid government, lay in what Biko saw as a particularly paternalistic attitude towards blacks by so-called liberal whites. I have no wish to re-assume a privileged position of this nature.

The problem that Biko defines, to a large extent, is the problem of finding a position for one's self within the ambit of a broader political framework, structured, in the case of South Africa, according to colonial imperatives. Biko's organising principle of race, of "blackness" in particular, is conceived primarily at the level of the individual and takes, as its starting point, the need for a form of psychological/attitudinal reassessment. For Biko, it is this psychological reappraisal of the self which lays the groundwork for a reflexive political programme and which presents the relationship between self and society, to a certain extent, as a symbiotic one, informed by an understanding of the uniqueness of a racial cultural heritage.

The prominence given to the term "non-racial" by the African National Congress (ANC) and, to a lesser degree, other political parties during the build-up to the South African elections of April 1994, signifies an interesting divergence with the dominant political discourses of the past. The overwhelming electoral success of the ANC (both at a national and local level), which marketed itself repeatedly (and still does) as a "non-racial" organisation/party, concerned to build "non-racialism" in South Africa, speaks of an all-inclusive nationalism, which throws into relief the racially exclusive strategy of the black consciousness movement during the late 1960's and throughout the decade of the 1970's. The racial de-emphasis which characterised the parlance of the recent pre- and post-election era, points to the relevance of

an examination of the conditions (both discursive and material) under which the adoption of "race" as an organising principle became perceived as a necessary strategy of resistance -- as was the case during the era of apartheid oppression -- and the implications of this organising category for the type of political programme this created. Political theorist, Aletta Norval substantiates this line of justification by arguing from a position which sees the possibilities of the present and future being necessarily influenced by the past:

In the midst of discussions on the form of post-apartheid society, the need for a retroactive understanding of apartheid, and the division of the social accompanying it, have emerged with renewed urgency ("Social Ambiguity and Apartheid" 120).

What Norval's comments suggest, apart from the more manifest notion that we learn/are able to learn from the lessons of the past, is the idea of a mutually-influential relationship between South African apartheid and South African resistance movements, particularly black consciousness resistance. If we accept the notion of black consciousness as an instance or manifestation of, the "division of the social accompanying [apartheid]", it becomes important to examine the historical context of black consciousness not only in terms of its imperatives as a resistance movement against apartheid, but also, and equally importantly, in terms of the particular constitution of the dominant discourse of apartheid. This line of analysis finds justification through the words of Steve Biko:

Those who are at the seeking end, that is, those who want justice, who want an egalitarian society, can only pursue their aspirations according to the resistance offered by the opposition and if the opposition is prepared to fight with their backs to the wall, conflict can't be avoidable (sic)...<sup>1</sup>

Many scholars and followers of black consciousness might insist that Biko's words are uncharacteristic in that they propagate a capitulation to violence whereas in reality it seemed that the black consciousness movement, particularly Biko himself, continuously emphasised the merits of non-violent resistance. Others might assert the falsehood of any suggestion that black consciousness took apartheid as its point of departure and as its terms of reference, especially in view of the fact that black consciousness was seen to make overt attempts to propagate an independent style and strategy of resistance and to distance itself completely from the destructive influences of white/western-inspired apartheid dominance. I will argue, however, that as "independent" and as "authentic" as the black consciousness movement set itself up (and was perceived) to be, its origins were fundamentally rooted within the structure or rather, within the topology of oppression characteristic of its particular historical milieu -- that of pervasive colonialism and apartheid.

Mary Louise Pratt's analysis of the colonial encounter is instructive in this regard. Her term "contact zone" attempts to describe not only the point (physical and temporal) at which cultures come together in the context of differential power relations, but more importantly, seeks to foreground the "interactive, improvisational dimensions of colonial

encounters" (7). A "contact" perspective therefore understands colonial relations, not in terms of an absolute isolation of colonizer from colonised (or vice-versa), but in terms of "copresence, interaction, interlocking understandings and practices..." (7). Pratt's concept of autoethnography, I would argue, is largely a result of the interface provided by the "contact zone". Autoethnography describes the process whereby the "colonized subjects undertake to represent themselves in ways that engage with the colonizer's own terms" (7). This is a process involving "partial collaboration with an appropriation of the idioms of the conqueror" (7). The black consciousness attempt to retain a particular racial distinctiveness while at the same time endorse the transformation of society on the basis of a new humanist value system, means that the movement's position is paradoxical at the same time as it is transformative. Biko's opinion that the oppressed are to "examine and question old concepts, values and systems...always keeping in mind our fundamental beliefs and values" is indicative of this ambiguity. The process of selection and invention from the cultural forms of the colonizer by the colonized allows for an appropriation of the "colonizer's own terms", but for the purpose of change rather than that of reproduction.

Thus, an analysis of the "contact zone" of black consciousness and apartheid, while characterised by "interlocking understandings and practices" (Pratt 7), at the same time, also holds possibilities for challenge and change.

In chapter one I attempt to lay the theoretical groundwork for the establishment of an understanding of the organising logic of discourses. Black consciousness is conceived as a discursive event, signifying the search for self and place within a national context organised according to an exclusionary/inclusionary logic. Black consciousness is further theorised in terms of Richard Terdiman's concept of "counter-discourse", a concept which allows black consciousness to be seen as an oppositional, but parallel discourse in relation to apartheid.

Chapter two offers a theoretical discussion of the need for identity construction and suggests, following Ernesto Laclau's thesis, that the need for the order which identity brings, particularly in contexts of disorder, is (initially) of more consequence than the particular content which such order claims to promote. The need for order and a fixed identity is understood and discussed as a characteristic of modernity. The idea of an intrinsic link between "true" identity and the social order is challenged and this is shown to have consequences for the way in which particular identitarian claims, particularly that of black consciousness, are understood.

Chapter three discusses the grounds for comparison which exist between race-oriented African discourses and the racial theories expounded by European theorists at the height of colonialism and argues that while similarities undoubtedly exist, there is also evidence of real differences based on

both ethics and context. The similarities which exist between black consciousness and negritude will also be examined with a view to demonstrating the importance of a contextual understanding of movements of this nature.

In chapter four, I look at the fictional manifestations of black consciousness thought in Mongane Serote's only novel, To Every Birth Its Blood and I argue that, while the black world and its signifiers are prominent in the novel and certainly influence many of its concerns, ultimately, the ideology promoted by the novel is that of non-racial politics as embodied by the African National Congress. Serote's reliance on black consciousness ideas, however, provides an opportunity to examine the novel within a modernist framework, governed by the imperatives of a form of black nationalism.

Chapter five widens the scope of the analysis by examining the cultural significance of the magazine Staffrider. Produced at the height of black consciousness sentiment, I argue that the magazine assists in the process of interpellating black writers into an "imagined community" and thereby extends the influence of an essentially modern community of individuals, each constituting components of a larger national whole.

## CHAPTER ONE

**Politics as Discourse : Methodological assumptions**

A key premise of this study is the conceptualization of the black consciousness movement in terms of what David Attwell has referred to as a "discursive event". Attwell writes that the emergence of black consciousness in the early 1970's constituted a major "discursive event" which signified an attempt to combine a particular perspective of the self with a larger, historical view (28). The relationship between the self and history presents a problem of agency, a concept which, according to Attwell, is concerned with "nationhood", a somewhat loose term which attempts to reflect the imperatives of "inclusion and exclusion, of finding or not finding a place for one's own particular story within the framework of the broader, national narrative" (24). While this concept has obvious implications for national political/racial relations, I would argue that the manner in which the term "nationhood" is understood is still determined by the intellectual heritage of European and American modernity. Paul Gilroy has given this "intellectual heritage" the label of "problematic" (121) and accuses it specifically of fostering,

the continuing aspiration to acquire a supposedly authentic, natural and stable identity...[which] identity is the premise of a thinking 'racial' self that is both socialised and unified by its connection with other kindred souls...(121).

The implications of this "problematic" reliance on what may be termed the discourse of modernity, will be taken up in the course of the following chapters.

Richard Terdiman's conception of discourse and counterdiscourse also addresses the issue of the power of exclusion/inclusion contained within the organising logic of discourses. While expressing reservations about defining discourse generally and without recognising the "problematic from which it comes", Terdiman nonetheless, tentatively suggests that discourses may be understood as,

the complexes of signs and practices which organise social existence and social reproduction. In their structured, material persistence, discourses are what give differential substance to membership in a social group or class or formation, which mediate an internal sense of belonging, an outward sense of otherness (54).

In discursive terms then, South African apartheid has mediated the organisation of social existence into racial categories based on principles of inclusion and exclusion. The "outward sense of otherness" created by such a system, based on fundamentally discriminating principles, however, opens itself up to challenges of legitimacy which give rise to a discourse of resistance. The discourse of resistance, however, despite its oppositional stance, pursues a similar mediation: it seeks to create an internal sense of specifically "black" belonging, and condones a rejection of a "white" value system based on a perception of false values.

Understood as a particular discourse, black consciousness reflects the underlying social practices of resistance in South Africa during the late 1960's and during the 1970's. Terdiman argues that the 1848 French Revolution marked the demise of the dynamic which "sustained explicitly political counter-discourses in their negation of the degraded here-and-now and their projection of a more optimistic alternative" and argues instead that counter-discourses have since proceeded in "more subterranean and more subtle ways" (71). I would argue, however, that my application of the concept of counter-discourse in a fairly recent South African context, draws for its defence, on Terdiman's assertion that any particular discourse must "be referred to the problematic from which it emerges, for this determines its operational sense" (54). I would argue, therefore, that the "explicitly political" discourse of black consciousness with its "negation of the here-and-now" of apartheid and its concomitant "projection of a more optimistic alternative" fits comfortably into the parameters of "counter-discourse" as Terdiman defines it in its earlier historical stages. While Terdiman's contention that counter-discourses accept the principle that the "dominant remains dominant" (73) may seem irrelevant to an examination of black consciousness as a specifically oppositional resistance movement, I would suggest that while the movement sought to undermine the meta-discourse of apartheid, its objectives did not extend to the eradication of meta-discourse per se but rather, sought the establishment of a strongly antithetical discourse which

would ultimately result in the synthesis of a new discourse based on inclusion rather than exclusion.

Biko argues that the black consciousness movement was concerned, "...in all fields,...[to] talk to the black man in a language that [was] his own" (32). The importance of claiming a particular language as one's own, of embodying or giving expression to, the "self" of the oppressed black person within a context of epistemic as well as physical victimization, is highlighted in the project of black consciousness as a discursive as well as a political strategy because the re-claiming of an identity is seen to be an important means of securing the conditions for real/political transformation. Transformation would only be possible once relations of power had been stabilised, but being equal, would precipitate inevitable and positive change. When Biko argues that even "the very political vocabulary that the blacks have used has been inherited from the liberals" (63), he asserts the need for a new, authentic political discourse which speaks the "selves" of specifically black people. At the centre of these claims to ownership of discourse and expression of the "self" is, of course, the fundamental need for the (re)construction and expression of an identity which had been consistently denied through the over-determination of apartheid.

In the Foucauldian sense, the concept of discourse refers to a system of possibility for knowledge. Thus, to speak of black consciousness as a discourse is to invoke particular

ways of thinking about language, about truth, about power, and about the inter-relationships between all three within the context of social resistance practices. Truth becomes that which is accepted as such within the system of rules for a particular discourse, while power annexes, determines and verifies truth. Truth is thus never outside power, or devoid of power and the production of truth is thus a function of power. As Foucault claims, "we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth" (1977 12). Biko himself indicates an awareness of this need (while possibly conceiving of "truth" in a different way) when he argues that,

Blacks are out to completely transform the system and make of it what they wish. Such a major undertaking can only be realised in an atmosphere where people are convinced of the truth inherent in their stand...(49)

The discourse of black consciousness is therefore grounded in a struggle for power. It is an attempt to re-claim some form of governance over truth-production mechanisms monopolized for decades by an apartheid propaganda machine. As Foucault expresses it:

...discourse is not simply that which translates struggle or systems of domination, but is the thing for which and by which there is struggle, discourse is the power which is to be seized (cited in Young, ed. 1981 52-53).

Discursive formations do not, however, exist in isolation from other discourses. They are not, as Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin suggest, "hermetically sealed", but tend rather to,

overlap and intersperse in ways that may be fruitfully and reflexively utilised. It is, after all, at the point of intersection with other discourses that any discourse becomes determined (1989 168).

This overlap and interspersal, I would argue, is also true of discourses which are oppositional and which set themselves up as a challenge to dominant discourses. Applied to the "discursive event" of black consciousness, the comments made by Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin reveal the importance of understanding black consciousness as a discourse which not only exists in relation to other discourses, but is also one which exists, to a large extent, by virtue of other discourses. This is not an original assertion. It has as its precedent, among others, Wole Soyinka's critique of the racially-oriented discourse of negritude which, he argues, "took far too much colouring from European ideas even while its Messiahs pronounced themselves fanatically African...." (127). Soyinka argues convincingly that negritude "accepted the dialectical structure of European ideological confrontation" (127) which involved the tacit acceptance of the supremacy of the white man as thesis. The synthesis offered by negritude does not, according to Soyinka, replace the antithetical inferiority of the African, but instead substitutes for it an extended definition of the term "highly developed" which embraces the intuitive as well as the analytical, without questioning the racist and binary ("European compartmentalist intellectualism" (138)) presuppositions of the original premise (129).

Thus apartheid's position as a discursive determinant and as a point of reference for black consciousness opposition produces a relationship not unlike that perceived by Wole Soyinka between Negritude and European racism. This is not to suggest a denigration of the achievements of black consciousness as a significant movement in and of itself, but is instead, I would argue, an acknowledgement of the importance of the "material site of the text's production" (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin 168). In this regard, it could be argued that South Africa is unique in the development of a race-specific theory of identity which does not have its origin in diasporic or exiled conditions. Whereas Pan-Africanism can be said to originate in Liberia and accompanies the return from slavery, and negritude can be seen as a reaction to assimilationism on the part of French West Africans living in Paris, South African blacks, while undoubtedly influenced by the theoretical writings of negritudinists and pan-Africanists, were nevertheless responding directly to oppressive internal conditions within the boundaries of their own country. While it seems arguable that the feelings of alienation and exile induced by the apartheid state in its own inhabitants presents, in itself, a parallel with the origins of pan-Africanism and negritude, the existence of apartheid remains an important (and obvious) precipitative factor in the particular development of the black consciousness movement in South Africa.

The material site of the text's production is given recognition by Terdiman's concept of counter-discourse.

Terdiman argues for the existence of certain "moments" or "spaces" within the multi-dimensional matrix of discourse formation, particularly within the "structural limitation of social control" (56) which allow for the emergence of oppositional discourses. Terdiman argues that the most important function of dominant discourse is its capacity to "signify the dominant, to be recognised and exploited as such" (64) and thus is opened to "microinterventionist contestation, to functional disruption..." (65). His theory offers insight into the dynamic and mutually-influencing, rather than passive, uni-directional relationship that existed in South Africa between official apartheid discourse and the black consciousness movement. A pertinent starting point in Terdiman's thesis is his modification (following Louis Helmsley) of Saussure's distinction between "langue" and "parole", by the introduction of the positive, concrete term, "usage" between them. He argues that "usage",

...upsets the idea that language systems can usefully be split into a system on the one hand, and nonsystematic, somehow degraded or irrational manifestations on the other...It projects not a private, unique act but a pattern active in community, a pre-established set of determinate possibilities and limits (30).

For Terdiman, as for Foucault, culture is a "field of struggle". Social discourse, as it is conceived by Terdiman, is both an area for analysis and a site of activism and potential transformation where the multi-accentuality of the sign suggests that "no discourse is ever a monologue...it always presupposes a horizon of competing, contrary

utterances against which it asserts its own energies" (36). Hence, discourses come into being in a "structure of counter-discursive practices" so that the sign obtains its meaning in the context of conflict and contradiction rather than through simple assertion. Thus the construction of a particular discourse takes on a decidedly relational and contingent character.

The function of counter-discourse, according to Terdiman, is "to disturb the easy reproduction and reception of dominant discourse". Thus, counter-discourse disrupts the ideological strategies which act to "universalize" the dominant and aims instead at building a consciousness of the contingent nature of the discursive formation. According to Terdiman, this would suggest, however, that a counter-discourse accepts (in a discrete way) the legitimacy of a dominant discourse. Terdiman argues that,

...the counter-discourses which exploit such vulnerability implicitly evoke a principle of order just as systematic as that which sustains the discourses they seek to subvert (56).

Terdiman cites Descombe in order to substantiate further his argument concerning the dependency of both the dominant and opposition groups (within a mutual context) on a mutual discourse:

A dominant discourse is the imposition, not so much of certain truths...as of a certain language...which the opposition itself is obliged to employ to make its objections known (cited in Terdiman 62).

Perhaps the best argument of this nature has been advanced by Jacques Derrida, by means of his analysis of how any moment of speech or manifestation is always necessarily involved with the discourse from which it would ostensibly make its difference felt. This argument relies on his use of Saussure's analysis of language, namely, that no sign is ever a positive term standing by itself, but rather, a negative sign -- negative in the sense of meaning only by virtue of being different and oppositional to another sign. Thus, Derrida's arguments have to use the words of metaphysics in order to undo metaphysics. The second point which develops from the first, is that no act of signification can start *a priori* without reference to an already inherited system of signs. In other words, there is no pure origin from which one can speak, uncontaminated by the necessary inherited field of difference which would make meaning possible in the first place.

Derrida's argument has implications for a study of black consciousness as social discourse and the particular way in which the movement took up the challenge of opposition to apartheid. This requires an understanding of black consciousness as being not only a discourse in opposition to apartheid, but, necessarily, a discourse of apartheid. This claim may seem politically insensitive or even absurd. However, my aim is not to discredit black consciousness, but rather to illustrate the necessarily structural components of black consciousness discourse -- these structural features having their particular reference points within apartheid,

with the understanding that apartheid in its most abstract sense, denotes a manifestation and imposition of a form of modernity.

A theoretical excursion into the field of identity construction and an examination of the structural conditions out of which black consciousness developed will, I believe, necessarily point to the way in which "blackness" as a principle of a particular identity formation, as with any identitarian project, is accepted only to the extent that it is perceived, by those to whom it is directed, to be 'true', the parameters of such 'truth' being necessarily governed by historical imperatives.

## CHAPTER TWO

## Theorizing The Need For Identity

South Africa, particularly in its post-election circumstances, is not an isolated political entity, but is embedded in the matrix of a global political, social and economic system. South Africa too, has been significantly influenced by the end of the Cold War and the consequent dénouement of broad global ideologies that have dominated the world political arena since 1945. Political theorist, Ernesto Laclau, argues that the oppositional discourses constituting the Cold War represented a "last version of the political ideology of modernity" and defines the "political ideology of modernity" as "the attempt to legitimate one's own ideology by presenting it as a fulfilment of a universal task (whatever that might be)" (1994:1).

Today, in post-Cold War conditions, given the proliferation of particularistic political identities, he suggests that "[a]ny kind of universal grounding is contemplated with deep suspicion" (1). Laclau is circumspect, however, about leaving claims of this nature at such a level of simplification and therefore cautions against the assumption that the "crisis of universalism" means the effacement of the concept of universalism per se. Instead, the crisis of universalism refers, more accurately, to the "presence of its absence", an awareness of such "presence" leading to a consciousness of the complex, ambiguous and contingent ways in which all identity is constructed. Essentialist universalism, if

understood as a form of identity-claim itself, must of necessity, undergo a similar process of self-reflexive scrutiny regarding its own "constructed" nature (2). Once the transparency of social identities is questioned, however, the focus of analysis, according to Laclau, shifts from the recognition or discovery of identities to their (de)construction. The key term for understanding this process is the psychoanalytic (Lacanian) category of "identification", with its explicit assertion of a "lack" at the root of any identity, which means that one needs to identify with something, because of the existence of an originary and insurmountable lack of identity (3).

A consequence of the distinction between identity and identification is the introduction of a constitutive split in all social identity. If the lack is constitutive, the act of identification that tries to fill it cannot have a source of justification external to itself, since the order with which we identify is accepted not because it is considered as valuable in terms of the criteria of goodness or rationality which operate at its bases, but because it brings about the possibility of an order, of a certain regularity -- an "identity". This is not to suggest, I believe, that the content of identity claims is irrelevant and does not have important political consequences, but that the need for an order/identity is necessarily primary. Laclau explains it accordingly :

In a situation of radical disorganization, there is a need for an order, and its actual contents become a secondary consideration. This means that,

between the ability of a certain order to become a principle of identification, and the actual contents of that order, there is no necessary link (3).

Laclau's theory, I believe, effectively highlights the potential dangers which exist in cases where the need for order/identity in the context of social and political flux, is paramount and can thus create a situation whereby identity-manipulation and construction becomes a tool in the hands of politically-motivated ideologues. That the potential for this kind of scenario exists in South Africa, has been evidenced by the historical manipulation of racial and ethnic identities by apartheid and its agents in order to secure an effectively divided and thus, less organisationally resistant, social order.

The tendency to exploit the need for a principle of identification, however, is not unique to those seeking power at the expense of subordinate groups, but is, I would argue, also a strategy for the construction of a counter-identity/order by those seeking to challenge political and social domination, and to establish a more self-accommodating and self-reflecting order. One might argue then that the act of identification, or the need for some kind of resistance order by blacks has, in the history of South Africa, been governed by the same condition of an "originary and insurmountable lack of identity", which governed the imperatives of the process of forging a particular Afrikaans/white identity in South Africa at the expense of black identity. While the ethical dimensions of these

respective identitarian projects may be somewhat at odds, what remains of relevance in Laclau's argument is that the impetus towards identity construction is governed by a fundamental need for identity rather than because of some preconceived and universally recognised notion of the true nature of a peoples' inherent identity and an equally broadly-accepted notion of how it should be re-presented or expressed and that this need is often, if not always, expressed in relation to the perceived "other". Ralph Ellison's essay entitled "What America Would Be Like Without Blacks" demonstrates the practical force of Laclau's theory:

Since the beginning of the nation, white Americans have suffered from a deep uncertainty as to who they really are. One of the ways that has been used to simplify the answer has been to seize upon the presence of black Americans and use them as a marker, a symbol of limits, a metaphor for the "outsider". Many whites could look at the social position of blacks and feel that colour formed an easy gauge for determining to what extent one was or was not American. Perhaps that is why one of the first epithets that many European immigrants learned when they got off the boat was the term "nigger" - it made them feel instantly American... (1987 110-111)

Ellison's comments, while directed specifically at American society, nevertheless, effectively illustrate the essence of Laclau's argument concerning the rather urgent need expressed by (all) societal groups, to assert a plausible and "stable" identity. Ellison's words reveal how the search for an identity is focused, however, not on extracting the essence of what it means to be "white", but instead, is focused on the search for an entity against which definition is possible. For American whites, then, American blacks

represent a category of comparability and a catalyst of the identitarian project, rather than an intrinsically-distinct "other". Thus identities become forged at the expense of other (perceived) identities. In applying this theory to Apartheid discourse in South Africa, Aletta Norval argues that "the moment of institution of discursive formations -- such as that of apartheid -- always involves reference to the other" (121). Norval argues that this results in the establishment of a contradiction between the pretence to self-containedness and uncontamination by alterity on the one hand, and the fact that, on the other hand, the self can only be constructed by the exclusion of the other. While one could argue that the "extreme identitary logic" which characterises apartheid's assertion of its self-sufficiency and independence applies equally to the separatist inclinations of black consciousness, I would suggest that black consciousness philosophy, formulated as it is from the position of the externalised, shows itself to be more receptive to the idea that the constitutive outside of any order has the capacity to put into question the very identity which is constituted through its externalisation (122). I would suggest that when Biko remarks that "...the limits of tyrants are prescribed by the endurance of those whom they oppress" (90), he grants a degree of agency to the black resisting subject and points to the mutually-enabling/disabling relationship which characterises identitarian orders and their "others". In this regard, Biko occupies a position very similar to that of Homi Bhabha who, with reference to Said's Orientalism, comments that "...there

is always in Said, the suggestion that the colonial power is possessed entirely by the coloniser". Such a suggestion is, Bhabha argues, both "an historical and [a] theoretical simplification" (cited in Young 1990 200). While Biko demonstrates an intelligent insight into the way in which identities emerge, I would argue that his particular conception of the black self presents limited possibilities for achieving the aims he envisages.

### "Authentic" versus Authenticated Identities

...we cannot be conscious of ourselves and yet remain in bondage. We want to attain the envisioned self which is a free self (49).

For Biko, the suppression of "true" consciousness has negative implications for the type of social order under which people live. By implication then, the expression of a "true", essential, self will inevitably result in the development of a just and egalitarian social order. The relationship depicted by black consciousness philosophy, between the assertion of a positive identity and the subsequent benefits of effective political action, emancipation and a new political culture, appears a confident one and is one that seems to invert the logic of Laclau's assertion that there is "no necessary link" between the potential for a particular order to become a principle of identification, and the actual contents of that order. Biko's outlook suggests that the order he proposes will be accepted, not because it brings about the possibility of an/any order for blacks, but primarily because of the superior ethical

content of its identitarian basis -- for example, the fact that indigenous cultures embody "a lot of positive virtues..."(30) from which the "Westerner" might benefit. It is the presentation of a new, black-inspired, essentially humanist value-system that motivates much of Biko's philosophy.

The challenge that the programme of black consciousness mounts against the theoretical insights of Laclau's argument foregrounds the debate which exists between conceptions of a "racial" self, with an authentic, natural and stable identity and the anti-essentialist, pluralist conception of racial identities which views race itself as a social and cultural construction. Race theorist, Paul Gilroy, criticises the ontological essentialist position for its elitist stance in its attempt at the indoctrination of the mass of black people into "correct" cultural positions, and (of particular relevance) for the way in which its "overintegrated sense of cultural and ethnic particularity" tends to mask the "arbitrariness of its own political choices in the morally charged language of ethnic absolutism" (31), the latter comment giving credence to Laclau's notion of an order-inspired rather than content-based identity.

Despite his admonitions regarding the weaknesses of the so-called ontological essentialist position and its particular conception of nationality within black political discourse which he attributes (following on from the work of Martin Delany) to the "intellectual heritage of Euro-American

modernity", Gilroy also criticises the pluralist, libertarian perspective for failing to be sufficiently alive to "the lingering power of specifically racialised forms of power and subordination" (1993 32), a power, I would argue, which is particularly pertinent in an analysis of the South African context of racial domination and resistance. The interesting polemic which the debate outlined by Gilroy sets up -- a polemic which could be couched in terms of modern (western notions of identity, nationality and nationhood) versus postmodern (colour as an open signifier) identities, will be taken up more specifically in the context of the black consciousness movement in South Africa.

Undoubtedly, deconstruction presents a particular challenge to the construction of identities based on race. Questions of whether blacks should become identical to whites in order to become recognised as equal, or whether blacks should assert their difference at the cost of equality, appear theoretically empty once essentialist identities are put into question. A common practice among critics of essentialism has been the abandonment of the category of the subject as a rational transparent entity, able to confer a homogenous meaning to the total field of her conduct by being the source of her action (Mouffe 1993 75). Psychoanalysis has suggested that, far from being organized around the transparency of an ego, personality is structured on a number of levels which lie outside the consciousness and rationality of the agents. This has been an incisive tool in undermining the idea of the unified character of the subject and has been an effective

counter-response to the rationalist conceptions of the subject which see the individual as a source of origin by virtue of his or her human-ness.

While deconstruction reveals the impossibility of pure and complete essences, it never replaces essences. Instead it shows that, what appear to function as essences, are located in the terrain of contingency, rather than in the terrain of necessity. However, despite the difficulties involved in rationalising identity claims, the historical efficacy and powerful influence of the black consciousness movement in South Africa suggests that particular manifestations of identity claims cannot simply be dismissed and that despite the weight of the post-structuralist critique, there exists a need for a re-examination of the phenomenon. While deconstruction may reveal the historicity of identities, it does not mean their disappearance. Anna Marie Smith argues that, regardless of the power of deconstruction, claims to essences should not be dismissed but, rather, should be regarded as having important political effects, allowing for the self-naming and other-naming in the mapping out of antagonisms (173). Smith argues convincingly that claims to essences should always be placed within the context of particular strategies, such as the struggle against domination, rather than be considered in abstraction. Black consciousness offers an interesting opportunity to situate essence-based politics within the context of South African apartheid oppression.

### Race, Essence and Identity as "armour" in South Africa

In her examination of Rastafari as an essentialist resistance strategy against domination, Smith bases her definition of "essentialism" on the Aristotelian attempt to distinguish between form and matter. She observes that social practices within essentialist discourses tend to be shaped by a shared conception of social identity and that this identity tends to be considered as fixed, unique, undivided and ahistorical. "Essentialist" conceptions of identity claim that the "essence" or true character of an identity has been concealed by external forces of oppression and domination. The liberation of true identity, (both collectively and individually) is the highest goal of such philosophy and, like Plato's conception of the correlation between what the self is and the social order in which one exists, decision-making is brought within the structure of identity construction (175-6). The rediscovery of "true" identity involves a rejection of dominant value systems, political and cultural practices in favour of the creation of new ones in keeping with the nature of the increasingly apparent "true" self.

Smith argues further that, in creating an all-embracing framework for resistance to all kinds of oppression, Rastafari draws a single political frontier between the white racist system and the suffering black people (176). I would argue that black consciousness also operates in terms of a single frontier, understood in terms of a dichotomous division, which tends to simplify racial relations in terms

of an enemy (white)/liberator (black) manichaeism. Biko expresses the organisational logic of the struggle against apartheid in the following way:

It should...be accepted that an analysis of our situation in terms of one's colour at once takes care of the greatest single determinant for political action - ie. colour... (50).

Racially oriented oppression in South Africa is thus countered by racially-oriented resistance. The potentially heterogeneous experiences of black oppression is strategically reinterpreted as a singular phenomenon, concerned with the articulation of blackness and suffering and the depiction of the white racist system as external and foreign to the values of blackness. The constitution of a specifically black identity tends to disallow a conception of identity as a matter of a complex play of heterogeneous subject positions, of which blackness exists as one among many, and instead, offers a totalizing identity which does not readily admit contradictory identities within blackness and which cannot strictly be interpreted as a strategic response to colonial oppression:

One of the basic tenets of Black Consciousness is totality of involvement. This means that all blacks must sit as one big unit, and no fragmentation and distraction from the mainstream of events will be allowed (97).

According to Smith then, the return to essence entails a thorough-going clarification of multiplicity and contradiction in experiences and identities, such that the

social becomes represented as a simple two-camp system (181).

Biko expresses this dichotomy in the following way:

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 (97).

Here, the term "black" becomes an oppositional category, signifying "not white". The insistence on drawing into the fold "like-minded" "Coloureds" and Indians by the process of naming them as blacks, supports the idea that 'blackness' is defined by the movement as that which is not white. Indeed, those blacks who refused participation in the ethos of the movement were given the pejorative label of "non-white", the term commonly used by apartheid discourse to designate black. Blackness is thus defined against whiteness (which is synonymous with "evil" and exploitative values) and demarcates a topology which fits comfortably into Smith's "two-camp" system, with the relevant camps being defined not only by the colour of its members' skins, but by their adherence, as oppressed, to an oppositional system of values to that of the oppressive and dominant (white) value system. While Biko may seem to broaden the area of his critique by questioning white value systems rather than white racist attitudes, I would argue that Biko conceives of a direct link between whiteness and exploitative values and in most cases, his critique of whites is synonymous with his critique of their mercenary value system which it seems must be accepted as an inevitable component of the package of being white. It

is on this basis that Biko rejects the attempts by so-called white liberals to foster "non-racial" relations with a view to engaging in non-racial struggle, arguing that white man's integration is "an integration based on exploitative values...an integration in which black will compete with black, using each other as rungs up a step ladder leading them to white values..."(91). Biko argues that "whites in general reinforce each other" and that there "is no doubt that they do not question the validity of white values" (89). Thus the structural limitations Biko perceives which operate on particular racial groups within South Africa strongly reinforce the notion of a necessarily dichotomous struggle between black and white, each with mutually exclusive aims.

In spite of its tendencies towards simplification and homogeneity, however, I would suggest that black consciousness discourse constituted an important interruption in the dominant discourse of South African colonialism. As a discourse, it allowed for the reintroduction of blackness as a positive term, into the misrepresentative and prejudicial language of apartheid. Black consciousness attempted to demonstrate that the displacement of stereotypical conceptions of blackness in favour of a more positive identity could only be accomplished through a rejection of the existing social order, an order dominated by universalizing white cultural values which are also "exploitative values" (91) and the positing of a form of radical humanism in its place. While it is true that, through its emphasis on integration, wholeness and sameness in the

black world, South African black consciousness philosophy contained within it the seeds of a universalizing antithesis to white supremacy and racism, I would argue that the attempt by blacks in South Africa to assume a positive identity in contradistinction to the negativity of their inscribed positions in colonial discourse can be usefully evaluated only by placing these identification strategies within the context of the fragmenting effects of racist discourse.

The Lacanian term of identification whereby an image, reflected at a distance, on another surface, is accepted as a representation of the ego, not just because of its content, but more importantly, because of its form, not only offers an understanding of the constructed nature of identities, but also, importantly, a sense of the necessity for a bounded identity to serve as an "armour" (4), precisely because of the fixity it offers. While revealing the alienating effects of identification which arise out of the fact that the image of the ego remains irreducibly other, such that identification is also at the same time mis-identification, Lacan's theory also shows that without a conception of the ego's identity as fixed, there could be no foundational reference for the 'I' which the subject has not yet spoken (197). Therefore, while the construction of identity always involves an idealization which always fails to secure the substantiality and permanence promised by the image, it is nevertheless, the only effective response to fragmentary effects of oppression.

Under conditions of radical disorganization and tyranny, the need for a coherent identity with which to mount a resistance and the anticipation of a fully formed, whole identity in the future, become considerations in any assessment of essentialist politics. Thus, in psychoanalytical terms, black consciousness can be understood as a discourse that allowed for an imaginary which could suggest a solution to the "representational bankruptcy" (198) of colonial discourse and provide a strategy offering some form of resistance to the neutralizing, marginalizing, fragmenting effects of racist discourse.

W.E.B Du Bois' term, "double consciousness" describes the condition (experienced by racial minority groups) of being in society (specifically Western society) but not of it. While regarding the condition as potentially liberatory, offering flexible options for individuals caught up in the dualities of double consciousness (expressed by Paul Gilroy as existing as "an index of increase and authentic doubling" (160)), Du Bois was also, according to Gilroy, at times aware of the negative possibilities embodied in the potential of a fragmented, split self. While addressing his theory, in the first instance, to blacks who found themselves to be minority groups within predominantly white/Western cultures, particularly that of British society, Du Bois's conception of double consciousness nevertheless has psychological resonance for South African blacks caught up in the alienating experience of apartheid. It provides a hermeneutically useful point of departure for a study of the "black self" of South

African apartheid. In South Africa, the claim made by blacks to belong (in opposition to the exclusionary discourse of apartheid), has been doubly legitimated by real, first-hand deprivations and injustices. A state of being "in society but not of it" could not easily be seen to be, in the South African case, an "index of increase and authentic doubling" as Gilroy understands the condition, primarily because of the weight of deprivation experienced and the real possibilities which existed for social change. In South Africa, the double consciousness condition may more aptly be applied to the predicament of being of society, but not in society -- an exclusion effected by apartheid legislation, depriving people of access to basic citizenship rights. Such a claim was made by a people deprived not only of a sense of belonging but who, in real terms, were denied access through statutory restrictions, to full social and political participation. In this particular context, the problem facing black South Africans appeared more susceptible to material analyses, to being understood as a political problem, potentially resolvable through political solutions. In view of the material problems and the directness of the experience of suffering associated with apartheid oppression, Biko's strategy, which adopts a more psycho-analytical stance towards the issue of psychological and cultural liberation, is a challenging one.

Biko espoused the notion of psychological liberation as a means of achieving political change in a political climate which perceived political and material adjustments as pre-

eminent. The movement's preoccupations were governed, to a large extent, by Biko's sensitivity towards the language of apartheid, the effects of semiotics on the ways in which societies are structured and individuals interpellated within various systems of societal/cultural production. While the black consciousness movement undoubtedly recognised the split in consciousness described by Du Bois, it was recognised, I believe, as a condition to be overcome rather than as either a potential or an immediate resource. In the South African context, double consciousness is observed, according to Biko, in the loss of manhood suffered by the black man who "twists his face in silent condemnation of white society" in the privacy of his toilet, but "brightens up in sheepish obedience...to his master's impatient call"(28).

The fact that the black man, in Biko's words, has "become a shell, a shadow of a man, completely defeated, drowning in his own misery, a slave, an ox bearing the yoke of oppression with sheepish timidity" (29) suggests that the aims of the black consciousness movement constitute an attempt to merge/unify the individual and national consciousness, rather than celebrate the creative potentialities of a divided individual or national sensibility. While the appeal to "blackness" as a motivational factor is relevant to both the theoretical positions of Gilroy/Du Bois and Biko, what the divergence between them indicates, is the degree of influence which political context has in determining the emphases of identitarian projects. The perception that "black culture is nothing but its politics", while bemoaned by Paul Gilroy

because of its implicit essentialism, does, however, also point to the pattern of historically impoverished positions in which blacks in many parts of the world have found themselves -- positions which have begged a politically-oriented programme of action in order to overcome real oppression (as opposed to propagating cultural activism).

Despite the cultural specificity of Gilroy's observations, one could argue that Gilroy's philosophy matches Biko's to the extent that both show a concern to transform the status of the "double consciousness" subject from that of victim to that of agent. Essentially, what Biko's movement offers is a strategy for emancipation, primarily of the psyche, from the clutches of white psychological (and physical) oppression. To this end, Biko attempted to provide a narrative of self-creation and transformation for the victims of apartheid meta-discourse.

While Gilroy seems to be sceptical of the notion of racially-organised politics, he does however, make the important qualification that, while a political language based on racial identification is insufficient, it is however necessary. He suggests that what is needed is a middle path between the resoluteness of a therapeutic essentialism and the squeamishness of anti-essentialism which is complacent about the continuing effects of racism (1993 14). The ingredients he proposes are an anti-essentialism that involves "understanding that the radical contingency of racial identities does not diminish their power" (14).

Notwithstanding the problematic essentialism involved in black consciousness philosophy and other racial identity formations, the following chapters will argue that the historical burden faced by blacks in South Africa and Africa more generally, reveals the need for acceptance of the fact that as theoretically unstable as racial identity formations may be, particularly when subjected to deconstructive scrutiny, they provide an important means of securing a footing in the treacherous terrain of colonial and post-colonial relations.

#### **The Problems of a "Borrowed Tool"**

The adoption of the category of race as an organising principle towards disaffiliation, however, carries significant consequences. Gilroy points to the difficulties of claiming an authentic, essential and independent position vis-a-vis the European oppressor when he argues that,

[t]he understanding of race that we use almost without thinking, the ideas of nationality and culture with which we support it and the fundamental aspiration to freedom with which we orient our actions all derive from a history of ideas that has been integral to modern racial typology and white supremacy...(1993 9).

Gilroy's central thesis is that the intellectual heritage of Euro-American modernity "still determines the manner in which nationality is understood within black political discourse" (121). Thus identitarian projects, particularly those which promote racial imperatives, owing to the pervasive influence of modernity in all parts of the world, are necessarily

plagued by an intellectual debt to modernity and are forced to adopt borrowed conceptual implements:

Our debts to that history are so extensive that debating the ultimate utility of the master's tools in dismantling the master's house is pointless, merely gestural. Even if we spurn his toolkit, the plans we need in order to complete the job of demolition without injuring ourselves in the process were produced according to his assumptions...(1993 8).

For Gilroy, the influence of the west and its project of modernity is of such magnitude that any claim to "authenticity" made by identitarian groups in opposition to the west strikes a theoretically hollow note. By the same token, however, neither is the west in a position to claim, as Gilroy argues it does, that modernity or modern consciousness is the "exclusive property of the West" (156) or, as Steve Biko argues, "that whites are the divinely appointed pace-setters in progress" (24). Gilroy sees little sense in, or indeed possibility of, attempting an "independent" strategy of resistance. However the "first world" position from which, and about which, Gilroy speaks, allows for a measure of tolerance toward the "foreign" culture not easily matchable within a "third world" context. The problem of the struggle against racial oppression, by oppressed against oppressor, in a colonial situation, precisely because of the invasive, and in many cases brutal nature of colonisation, means that the strategies employed to challenge colonial authority, are inevitably (and rather desperately) scrutinised with a view to establishing their authenticity. The psychology of oppression in many instances

dictates that the particular strategy chosen is, in itself, seen to constitute a means of challenging that oppression.

Ashis Nandy, writing of colonial India, makes this point when he highlights the psychological consequences which invariably exist for those opponents of colonialism who allow themselves to participate with the coloniser on his/her own terms:

...worse is the loss of one's "soul" and the internalization of one's victor, because it forces one to fight the victor according to the victor's values, within his model of dissent (111).

Any fight within the model of the victor's dissent, according to Nandy, renders the dissenter an "acceptable" opponent, capable only of making "primary adjustments" to the colonial system. Thus Nandy offers a counter-view to that of Gilroy in the sense that he sees no possible benefit to be derived from the double-consciousness predicament because the psychological threat posed by colonialism, (to both colonised and colonizer), means that resistance can only be meaningful if grounded in the authenticity of difference and original cultural values. Nandy's focus is that of the cultural and psychological resistance strategies, which have helped Indian society survive the colonial experience, with "a minimal defensive redefinition of its selfhood" (xvi). While he concedes that the political economy of colonization is important, the real "crudity" and "inanity" of colonialism are expressed in the sphere of psychology (2). His concern therefore lies less with the overt and direct coercive methods and strategies employed by the coloniser than with

the "secondary psychological gains and losses from suffering and submission under colonialism" (3). The ultimate violence of colonialism, according to Nandy, is that it creates a "culture in which the ruled are constantly tempted to fight their rulers within the psychological limits set by the latter" (3). The psychoanalytic term, of "identification with the aggressor" (an ego defence often used by a normal child in an environment of childhood dependency, to confront the inescapable dominance by physically more powerful adults with total legitimacy) aptly describes the colonial condition for Nandy, and sets up a binary opposition which he describes as an "unbreakable dyadic relationship". Nandy retrospectively describes the objectives of his study:

I started with the proposition that colonialism is first of all a matter of consciousness and needs to be defeated ultimately in the minds of men...I have also, I hope, shown that the liberation ultimately had to begin from the colonized and end with the colonizers (63).

By focusing on the psychological rather than the organised aspects of colonialism, Nandy shares many of the concerns that Biko articulates through his philosophy of black consciousness. Biko shows an understanding of the importance of consciousness in the struggle for liberation when he argues that at the heart of black consciousness thinking is "the realisation by blacks that the most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed" (92). Biko echoes Nandy's concerns about the real potential for co-optation when he writes that,

...the major danger that I see facing the black community...[is]...to be so conditioned by the system as to make even our most well-considered resistance to fit within the system both in terms of the means and of the goals (36).

Central to Nandy's thesis is an understanding of the indivisibility of freedom -- that neither colonised nor coloniser can escape the detrimental effects of colonialism which propagates a culture or logic of oppression. Nandy thus debunks the myth which suggests that the colonised are the only victims in the colonial relationship, arguing that this is a view which is propagated by the coloniser who has an interest in downplaying the degradation that he/she undergoes concomitantly. This process of degradation is referred to by Cesaire as the "decivilization of the colonizers":

The coloniser, who in order to ease his conscience, gets into the habit of seeing the other man as an animal, accustoms himself to treating him like an animal and tends objectively to transform himself into an animal... (1972 20).

Nandy's important point is that both colonised and coloniser are co-victims in a system of oppression and exploitation. Nandy names this system "imperialism" which, he argues, is constructed on the basis of a dichotomy between winners and losers. A recognition of the falsity of such dichotomy, therefore, signals the demise of either an ethical or cognitive basis of justification for imperialism (100). For Biko, the system of oppression is a "strong white racism" (90) which, he concedes, is not as selective in who it names as its victims as is commonly believed. Speaking of the arrogance of white liberals who unproblematically deny

complicity in the divisive structures of apartheid, Biko argues the need for a more honest reflection by liberals of their oppression and their discursive position:

The liberal must fight on his own and for himself. If they are truly liberals they must realise that they themselves are oppressed, and that they must fight for their own freedom and not that of the nebulous "they" with whom they can hardly claim identification (66).

Biko's quest to bestow on South Africa the "greatest gift possible - a more human face" (98) speaks of a radical humanism based on what he terms "African cultural concepts" which he hopes will replace the (essentially "white") "Coca-Cola and hamburger-eating" culture threatening to engulf South Africa. Biko relies on what he believes are authentic traditional attributes, (which despite adversity, have remained with black culture to the present day) in order to effect this transformation and in so doing, I would suggest that Biko exhibits a tendency to absolutise relative differences between what he calls white culture and African culture. This is most clearly pronounced in his discussion of African cultural concepts.

Biko argues that whereas African culture was "unsophisticated and simple", "Anglo-Boer" culture was "the more powerful culture in almost all facets" (41). For Biko, black culture is "man-centred", communal, and conversational, while white culture is individualistic, utilitarian and competitive. African culture believes in the inherent goodness of man while white culture is inherently suspicious of its fellows (42). Black culture is prepared to sacrifice technological

progress for human development while white culture, embodying the individualistic "capitalist approach" does not refrain from using people as "stepping stones" (42). The African is characterised, according to Biko, by a "love for song and rhythm" (42) which builds togetherness and tenacity, enabling the African to continue "for hours on end" at a particular task. African culture embraces sharing and cooperation and is unfamiliar with the concept poverty, except in conditions of climactic adversity (43). The African's approach to problem solving is not, like that of the Westerner, based on aggressive scientific analysis and reason, but instead, rests on an approach of "situation-experiencing" (42). The African's response to a problem allows for contradiction and ambiguity to be embraced without this being perceived as defeatist as it constitutes a response of the "total personality" of the African. These, it is implied, are the cultural traits "which have been able to withstand the process of deliberate bastardization" and of which African culture can in the present day boast (45). Africans according to Biko, occupy a position which is closer to nature than their western counterparts and have not yet paid the price, as has white culture, for "cutting out the dimension of the spiritual" (46) in favour of "perfecting their technological know-how" (47).

On the basis of these cultural oppositions, Biko might be accused of a lack of commitment to breaking out of the topological binarisms of apartheid or the "Manichaeian aesthetic" of post-colonial societies, an aesthetic which

expresses the binary divisions of centre-margin, self-other, good-evil, black-white. What Biko tends to do instead, is to offer a competing theory of universalising stereotypes. The recovery of indigenous culture which Biko attempts, with its focus on traditional symbolism and images, can be understood as an attempt to substitute categories of colonialism with positive elements rather than replace them with new patterns and as such, constitutes a counter-myth against the similarly mythologising and stereotyping techniques of colonialism. The process of recovery, is however, a selective one. While selecting for retrieval the attributes of communalism and "man-centred" living, Biko's intention is not historical or anthropological accuracy as this would demand an acknowledgement of the hierarchical structures on which many African societies have been, and still are, organised. However, Biko's disillusion with what he perceives as the negativity of Western individualism and "white" values initiates a process of identity construction which is essentially a relational one. Biko's identitarian project, despite its apparent scepticism of the west and its cultural values, also reveals an identification with critical moments in western culture. Biko's critique of the west sounds a strikingly similar note to Romanticism's critique of modernity. The black consciousness movement, certainly through the expressions of Biko, is seen to react against the same things in western culture that Romanticism reacted against, such as the cold rationalism and the over-whelming industrialism which accompanied modernity.<sup>2</sup>

**Modernity versus Itself**

Ernesto Laclau's understanding of the "political ideology of modernity", as "the attempt to legitimate one's own ideology by presenting it as a fulfilment of a universal task (whatever that might be)" captures the thrust of uniformity and homogeneity which accompanied much modern political thinking. Contextualising the South African experience within this framework allows for the opportunity of conceptualizing apartheid as a modern political ideology, caught up in the implementation of the "universal task" of maintaining racial purity and economic superiority through rigid racial segregation and the authoritarian imposition of an "ideal" order/hierarchy. Black consciousness, responding as a challenge to apartheid, is nevertheless informed by similar modern imperatives -- both being racially-organized ideologies, seeking a guaranteed position for the "self" of their respective constituencies, in the social order. For Zygmunt Bauman, it is the recognition of the essential artificiality of the social order and the inability of society to attain an orderly existence on its own (against Aristotle) that constitutes the defining moment of modernity (1991 99). This particular view of modernity allows for the objective legitimation of all forms of political/social struggle, but at the same time, invites conflict over issues of which claims to "order" are stronger. What this amounts to in South Africa and other colonial situations, is an expression of (apartheid) order at the expense of the (black) other and an expressed need by such an "other" for

reassertion. Elleke Boehmer expresses this as, ultimately, a discursive struggle over language and meaning:

Colonialism was not different from other kinds of authority, religious or political, in claiming a monopoly on definitions in order to control a diverse, unstable reality...dominance was gained first by the constant incorporation and suppression of difference, and then also by a vigorous reiteration of authoritative meanings (1995 167).

Thus an important strategy in this order-creating project is the naming of people through language which contributes to the restoration and maintenance of order and the establishment of a system of categories. The concept of "ambivalence", however, according to Zygmunt Bauman, describes the "possibility of assigning an object or an event to more than one category" and is thus a direct threat to such systematic categorization. Ambivalence constitutes a disorder and thus, a "failure of the naming (segregating) function that language is meant to perform" (1). Language then strives to sustain the order with which we are familiar and to deny or suppress randomness and contingency. Thus the naming/classifying function of language has the prevention of ambivalence as its purpose.

The classifying effort is, importantly (and in the same way that nationhood was conceived earlier), constituted by acts of inclusion and exclusion. Each act of naming (ordering) splits the world into two: entities that answer to the "name" and those that do not. Essentially, such naming is an act of violence and requires the support of coercion. Bauman's analysis perceives that violence is endemic to the process of

order, and I would argue that Derrida's concept of epistemic violence contained in the "Battle of Proper Names" has a similar theme. Derrida claims that,

[a]nterior to the possibility of violence in the current and derivative sense, the sense used in [Levi-Strauss's] "A Writing Lesson", there is as the space of its possibility, the violence of the arche-writing, the violence of difference, of classification, and of the system of appellations" (1976 110).

The quotation needs to be understood within the context of the "dialogue" between Derrida and Levi-Strauss over the issue of writing. While writing for Levi-Strauss is an instrument of oppression, a means of colonizing and its acquisition signifying the loss of innocence, Derrida sees "writing", in the narrowly defined sense in which it is used by Levi-Strauss, as a merely derivative activity which always supervenes on a culture which is always already "written" through the forms of its social existence. These forms include codes of naming, rank, kinship and other forms of societal restraint/hierarchies. According to Bauman, in modern society, (characterised by a technological and management-based approach to ambivalence control), these restrictive "forms" of social existence, which Derrida identifies, are integral to the "fight of determination against ambiguity, of semantic precision against ambivalence" (4). Thus the apartheid state, with its rigid racial categorisation and segregationist policies constitutes an exemplary moment in modernity's struggle for order. However, because the struggle is not, according to Bauman, a fight of "one definition against another" or "one way of articulating

reality against a competitive proposal" (4-5), I would argue that the "uncertainty" and "indefinability" which characterises the "other of order" is not applicable to the black consciousness movement which attempts its own clarification of "fuzziness" and "obscurity". Bauman is categorical in his belief that the "other of order" is not another order -- chaos is its only alternative (5).

Bauman's typology thus places the black consciousness movement outside the category of the "other of order". If "friends" control the classification and the assignment, the opposition, "enemies" are the product and the condition of the friends' narrative domination, of the friends' narrative as domination. As far as they dominate the narration, set its vocabulary and fill it with meaning, friends are truly at home, among friends, at ease (53). Thus the friend/enemy opposition acts to make the world readable (54). It is a characteristic of strangers, as embodiments of ambivalence, that they question not just this one opposition here and now, but oppositions as such, the principle of opposition and the plausibility of the dichotomy it suggests and the feasibility of separation it demands (58-59). The presence of the stranger, then is a challenge to the reliability of orthodox landmarks and the universal tools of order-making. Black consciousness does not represent this kind of disturbance because it does not radically challenge the boundaries of same and other, but to a certain extent, relies upon them. Despite the aim of the black consciousness movement as expressed by Biko, to "overhaul the whole system in South

Africa" (64) and despite Biko's recognition that the greatest danger facing black communities in South Africa is "to be so conditioned by the system as to make even our most well-considered resistance to fit within the system both in terms of the means and of the ends" (36), Biko's conception of identity allows little room for ambiguous or multiple social identities.

In summary, I would argue that the imperatives of modernity, such as the "naming" functions of language, work as a classificatory/segregationist/fragmentationist project designed to perpetuate order, but which is, of necessity, also always caught up in the battle against ambiguity and disorder, thus perpetuating the order/disorder, insider/outsider, friend/enemy oppositions. I would argue that the black consciousness movement's relationship with the white apartheid state falls within this friend/enemy topology because, unlike the category of "the stranger", which cannot be included within philosophical (binary) opposition and which resists and disorganises it without ever, in Derrida's terms, "constituting a third term" or without ever leaving room for a solution in the form of "speculative dialectics" (1981 71), the black consciousness movement, while questioning some oppositions, does not question the principle of oppositions as such.

Terry Eagleton places the "impossible irony" of the friend and the enemy being two sides of the same coin in perspective when he argues that,

the politics of difference or specificity is, in the first place, in the cause of sameness and universal identity - the right of a group victimised in its particularity to be on equal terms with others as far as their self-determination is concerned. This is the kernel of truth of the Bourgeois Enlightenment: the abstract universal right of all to be free, the shared essence or identity of all human subjects to be autonomous (1988 15).

Eagleton's argument is an attractive one. He argues that categories such as race, class, gender, which have been consistently used in identitarian struggles for recognition and equality, while being "ontologically empty" and necessarily caught up in the "metaphysical categories" they hope to finally abolish, are nevertheless, important and necessary means by which to plot a chart towards freedom which goes, not around difference, but "all the way through it and out the other side" (10). Eagleton's argument is that the project of emancipatory politics is "doubly disabled" in that if it seeks to evolve its own discourse of place, body inheritance, sensuous need, it will find itself "miming the cultural forms of its opponents". However, if it does not do so, it will,

appear bereft of a body, marooned with a purely rationalist politics which has cut loose from the intimate affective depths of the poetic (16).

Eagleton argues that collective identities are "importantly negative" in the sense that the members of such collectives share a common oppression. He suggests, however, that this negativity, based as it is on the realisation of a need for change, has the potential to become positive. However, owing to the oppressive conditions under which such battles are

fought, political gain will never be unambiguous and will always be, to some extent "collusive with its antagonists" and this, according to Eagleton is the predicament which characterises projects of this nature.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### Black Consciousness and the Possibilities for a New Humanism

In The Wretched of the Earth, Franz Fanon writes of decolonization that it,

...sets out to change the order of the world, [and] is obviously a program of complete disorder...Decolonization is the meeting of two forces opposed to each other by their very nature, which in fact owe their originality to that sort of substantification which results from and is nourished by the situation in the colonies (27-28).

Fanon's suggestion is that the relationship between the state and the Algerian people has been rendered dialectical by the exigencies of the liberation struggle. However, the synthesis at times offers little more than a reversal:

In decolonization, there is, therefore the need for a complete calling in question of the colonial situation. If we wish to describe it precisely, we might find it in the well-known words: "The last shall be first and the first last". Decolonization is the putting into practice of this sentence (28).

Fanon's description of the decolonizing process as a "murderous and decisive struggle between two protagonists" effectively echoes Bauman's friend/enemy dichotomy and lends further support to the idea that the decolonization process involves not the disruption of order-seeking projects, but rather, the contestation of their content. However, while the oppositional counter-narrative is characterized by reversals, inversions and binaries (the danger existing that such efforts remain inscribed within the very logic that

dehumanizes them), I would suggest that the positing of black "positive" images against white supremacist stereotypical images, may be understood as an attempt at a re-presentation of monolithic and homogeneous black communities in a way that would displace historical representations of these communities (West, October, 103). While the potential exists for the mimicking of a European universalism and humanism, I would suggest that, as a gesture towards postcolonialism, it is possible to appropriate and incorporate concepts such as "universalism" and "humanism" and still reform them to the extent that they take on new significance and relevance in a postcolonial context. Neil Lazarus, for example, argues that in concluding The Wretched of the Earth, Fanon is able to proclaim a "new" humanism by formally repudiating the degraded European version:

Leave this Europe where they are never done talking of Man, yet murder men everywhere they find them...When I search for Man in the technique and style of Europe, I see only a succession of negations of man...For Europe, for ourselves and for humanity, comrades, we must turn over a new leaf, we must work out new concepts, and try to set afoot a new man (1968 311-12,316).

The optimism that Fanon demonstrates in the possibility of the creation of a "new man" is shared in Biko's "quest for a true humanity":

We have set out on a quest for true humanity, and somewhere on the distant horizon we can see the glittering prize...In time we shall be in a position to bestow upon South Africa the greatest gift possible -- a more human face (98).

In striving for this goal, Biko relies heavily on the strength of a communal identity derived from "our common

plight and our brotherhood" (ibid) and in so doing, reaffirms his commitment to an essentialist conception of black identity -- one which declaims Ernesto Laclau's thesis which argues that in situations of potential disorganisation, the need for order is necessarily more important than the content of that order. Biko's adherence to the notion of a common brotherhood which, to a large extent, informs the type of dispensation achieved, is challenged by Cornel West on the grounds that this form of identity re-presentation, involves the assumption that it is possible firstly, to gain access to the "real black community" and secondly, to achieve an understanding of what "positive (black) images" really are. West argues that notions of the "real black community" and "positive images" are <sup>no</sup> innocent <sup>but?</sup> value-laden, socially loaded and ideologically charged and, following Stuart Hall, West argues for the need for a recognition that "black" is a politically and culturally constructed category (104). He calls for an investigation of the alternative existing beyond the opposition of blackness/whiteness -- an "other" based on the recognition of the profoundly hybrid character of the category of "race" and which, on the basis of this recognition, seeks to traverse forms of conventional binaries (105).

Cornel West's reservations concerning what I would term the postcolonial possibilities for identitarian discourse are further elucidated by Abiola Irele's discussion of the concept of negritude in his essay entitled "What Is Negritude", which reveals many similarities between negritude

and black consciousness. Irele speaks of negritude as a "counter-myth", juxtaposed against the ideological rationale of Western imperialism. The belief, embraced by negritudist thinking, that each race is "endowed with a distinctive nature and embodies, in its civilization, a particular spirit" (1981 70), is not without similarities to the racist doctrines propagated in Europe which used the same argument to justify elevation of white over black. There exists, therefore a degree of epistemological entrapment of African identitarian movements within the colonial episteme. While obviously similar, however, negritude does involve certain modifications vis-a-vis western racial philosophies. Irele claims that for Leopold Senghor, largely recognised as a founder of the negritudist movement, Negritude does not "consist in a systematic rejection of Western racist theories, but instead, constitutes a "modification of the terms in which they are set out, and in a redefinition of the very notion of race" (71). Thus Irele concludes:

Senghor's conception of the black man contains important elements taken over from these theories, but in his system, they are given a new perspective. Thus while accepting the objective reality of race as indicative of a specific inner identity and aptitude, Senghor rejects the idea that the black man is inferior in his human quality to the white man (71).

What Senghor seems to stress, therefore, is that a difference lies in the ethical content of the racialism adopted. Kwame Anthony Appiah's distinction between intrinsic racism and extrinsic racism which, he argues, is important for understanding the character of contemporary pan-Africanism (1992 17), has relevance for an understanding of this ethical

difference. While both intrinsic and extrinsic racists differentiate morally between members of different races, the extrinsic racist will do so on the basis of a "cognitive incapacity" or refusal to accept evidence for the equal moral status of other races, while the intrinsic racist holds that the mere fact of being of the same race is reason for preferring one person to another and is thus impermeable to evidence which attests to the moral capabilities of another race (14-15). Appiah goes on to argue that there is a "significant pattern in the rhetoric of modern racism", which reveals that the "discourse of racial solidarity is usually expressed through the language of intrinsic racism, while those who have used race as the basis for oppression and hatred (as have South African whites), have appealed to extrinsic racist ideas" (17)<sup>3</sup>. Thus it seems for Appiah that it is the "fact of a shared race" rather than a "shared racial character" (ibid) that provides a more accurate basis for political solidarity based on race.

According to Irele, criticisms of (Senghor's) negritude fall into two categories which relate firstly to its theoretical paradigms and secondly, to its practical implications. On the first level, Senghor's attribution of a racial basis to mental processes is accused of being simplistic, general and unscientific. Senghor's emphasis on the mystical and religious qualities of African-ness is considered ahistorical in light of the argument that all traditional societies, not merely those in Africa, are situated in close relation to the natural environment over which they have little rational

control. This lack of mastery then justifies a recourse to the mystical and supernatural. The idea of a unified African culture, emanating from an African essence which is constant also eschews the transformational powers of historical evolution (Irele 84).

Regarding the second level of criticism based on practical shortcomings, Senghor's Negritude has been accused of lacking content in that it does not offer the possibility of meaningful and transformatory social action in the present and, I would argue, the future. Its recourse to the values of the past has the potential of casting Negritude in a conservative framework which is at odds with the exigencies of the present. Its emphasis on spirituality suggests a neglect of socio-economic and technological realities, and has the potential to act as a method of detraction from immediate practical tasks in favour of the protection of ruling elite interests.

While Irele concedes the partial validity of these criticisms, he argues that what is neglected in many of these attacks is an examination of the historical conditions and political imperatives out of which Negritude emerged and I believe that the same can be argued for the South African black consciousness movement. Such an oversight tends to lead, accordingly, to a failure to understand, in Irele's words, that,

what really counts here is the need felt by the deprived group for a sustaining vision of the collective self and of its destiny...The

historical connections of Negritude with the various movements involved in black nationalism since the nineteenth century in particular show that it forms part of an on-going process of self-reflection by the black man...(85).

In appealing for a recognition of the importance of an historical understanding of positions like that of Senghor's, Irele thus modifies Senghor's non-relativist, essentialist view of racial identity construction by showing how identities are established in a relational way -- that one defines oneself against that which one is not. Irele thus reveals the potential for an understanding of identity construction as a synthetic and a heuristic process, and as a complex response to an equally complex colonial situation, rather than as a simple process of uncovering or rediscovery, of an essential self (both collective and individual). This is not to suggest that response to European hegemony in the form of African identity assertion has been just that -- merely and only a response to colonization and thus a direct product of that colonization, but rather, points to the necessity of a contextual understanding of the need for identity re-evaluation and assertion and its particular manifestations. This understanding, I would argue, is also crucial to a conception of black consciousness in South Africa. C.R.D Halisi writing on "Biko and Black Consciousness Philosophy: An Interpretation", argues that black consciousness, informed by a "distinct generational perspective" (1991 101) marked a need by younger black South Africans, who were "compelled by circumstances to rethink the very meaning of politics in the South African struggle" (100). It follows then that Irele's appeal for a greater

contextual understanding of identitarian projects is well-founded in the case of the South African black consciousness movement where the creation of a new and truly humanist value-system had its origins in an inconsistent application of Western humanitarian value systems.

The video, Biko: The Spirit Lives, screened on NNTV during June, 1995, features extracts of an interview with Steve Biko in which he suggests that the objectives of black consciousness are closely related to a particular kind of value system. Biko remarks that the aim of black consciousness is,

... for the black man to elevate his own position by positively looking at those value systems that make him distinctively a man in society...

A correct consciousness, therefore -- one that permits the "black man" to operate as a fully-constituted "man in society" -- is dependent on a similarly correct and complementary value system. Biko's comment also announces an allegiance to a conception of the modern, individual man, conducting an active search for a place in society which will secure for him the necessary rights, dignity and psychological support needed to engender a fully-constituted black man, but also, more generally, a fully-constituted "citizen" within the framework of the nation-state. When Biko claims that the "type of black man we have today has lost his manhood", and that he is "reduced to an obliging shell" (28), he is referring, on the face of things, to the loss of agency of the black person in the face of an all pervasive, white-

inspired domination called apartheid. What can be discerned on a more discrete level, however, but nevertheless quite consistently, is the prevalence in the discourse Biko presents, of the idea of "manhood" and masculinity in the self-definition of the black man and the problem that apartheid presents for the playing out of a particularly "male" role in society. If one accepts the signifying power of language to shape power relations in societal contexts, Biko's "male-speak" and his notable silence on the issue of gender oppression, constitutes a significant and defining feature of the black consciousness movement as a whole, and demonstrates the limitations of the movement as a liberatory project in that it addressed only particular manifestations of oppression.

The observation made by Mamphela Ramphele, one of the few active early female members of the black consciousness student organisation, SASO, founded by Biko at the University of Natal Medical School, that women "were...involved in the movement because they were black" and that "[g]ender as a political issue was not raised at all" (cited in Pityana et al Ed. 1991 215) is indicative of a degree of real heterogeneity within the black community and an inescapable differentiation of the black subject which the black consciousness movement, through the adoption of its master-narrative of race, tended to ignore. She argues further that women were viewed as important only to the extent that they were involved as "wives, mothers, girlfriends and sisters,...fighting a common struggle against a common enemy

- namely, white racism. Scant regard was given to their positions as individuals in their own right" (216). The few women, such as Ramphele, who did succeed in elevating themselves to positions of leadership, had to do so in their capacity as "honorary men" and were thus forced to become "tough, arrogant and assertive", often at the expense of empathy with women fulfilling more "traditional" roles in society and within the university.

This observation has interesting implications for claims that black consciousness represented in some ways, a re-invention of "traditional" values. Women, in order to partake of the liberatory function of the black consciousness movement, were forced to act in ways which could be considered decidedly "non-traditional" from the perspective of Africanist patriarchal discourse. Furthermore, there is a significant tension within black consciousness discourse which asserts that the "white" oppressors could not and should not be contested on their own "white" competitive standards while this discourse simultaneously expects its female participants to assimilate the codes and conventions of male discourse.

Ramphele argues in a similar vein to that of Irele, that "[o]ne has to judge black consciousness male activists as products of their environment" (219), and that part of the ease with which men's superior status remained unchallenged was owing to the fact that many of the women themselves had a great deal of respect for 'tradition' and traditional roles which acknowledged the primacy of the man in the

"patriarchal, patrilineal and patrilocal system that underpins most gender relations in South Africa" (224). While this explanation is undoubtedly accurate, I would argue that the attitude of black consciousness followers towards women goes beyond having an influence on the particular terminology used to express ideas. As a male-centred grouping, it was caught between the scope of a traditional societal structure which placed value on the position of men as leaders and initiators and the imperatives of a modern conception of a humanist social order which demanded the extension of the rights of citizenship and equality to all.

The emphasis on agency and the role of the man/citizen in society characteristic of black consciousness thinking, is reiterated by Peter Jones, when he remarks that black consciousness,

opened up the way that people saw themselves, the way they saw their role within the world.<sup>4</sup>

Integral to both the comments of Jones and Biko is the notion of a definitive relationship between self and society. Biko indicates that self-appraisal can only be achieved through simultaneously looking at the role that "self" plays within society and the value systems which govern the nature of that society. Jones's comment, containing as it does, echoes of an Hegelian idealism, similarly lays stress on the idea that a people's conception of themselves is closely tied up with the way the world is perceived by it. Suggestions of a definitive, ontological link between self and society,

however, are complicated by Biko's suggestion of the need for critical choices in the process of self-definition:

The first method for our own liberation is self-conception. Black people have reached a hybrid bridge where they do not even know whether they should define themselves in terms of what they are or in terms of what they desire to be. Theirs is the great weight (interview extract).

The comment gives weight to the adulterating effects of colonial culture on the minds and being of black South Africans. It offers an image of intense psycho-cultural breakdown. However, Biko's reliance on the past, his belief in the benefits involved in uncovering a history of heroic resistance is offset to some extent, by the suggestion contained in the above comment that conceptualisation of the self cannot take place only on the basis of retrospective thinking. The need for some form of conceptualisation on the basis of desired cultural attributes and societal value systems is implied in the suggestion that self-conceptualisation cannot be regarded as a given. This ambiguity allows for a conceptualisation of identitarian projects as involving some degree of construction and not merely retrieval (an Ireleian revision of a potentially essentialist, non-relative position). To some extent, this is conceptualised in Biko's chapter in I Write What I Like entitled, "The Quest for a True Humanity", where he moves explicitly away from an essentialist conception of race and racial identity towards an astute political understanding when he says that "we have to find out whether our position is a deliberate creation of God or an artificial fabrication of the truth by power-hungry people whose motive is

authority, security, wealth and comfort" (87). Biko's conception of the origins of racial oppression is quite clearly the latter. This is confirmed when he argues that there "is no doubt that the colour question in South African politics was originally introduced for economic reasons" (87-88).

Tony Morphet has suggested the existence of "four intellectual moments" in the Durban academic milieu during the period 1970-74. These moments, according to Morphet signalled unique possibilities for upsetting the oppressive course of history in South Africa. Initiators of these "moments" include -- among others such as Dunbar Moodie and Mike Kirkwood -- Richard Turner (working on The Eye of the Needle) and Stephen Biko, who was formulating the "intellectual core, political discourse and practical programme of Black Consciousness" (Morphet 1990 88).

Morphet argues that Richard Turner's work epitomises the spirit of this period. He suggests that Turner's understanding of Walter Benjamin's dialectic of civilisation and barbarism (as each in and of the other rather than oppositional), allows Turner to hold and to advocate the holding of a double perspective or hermeneutic (Paul Ricoeur's term). This double hermeneutic is constituted by the hermeneutic of hope on the one hand, and the hermeneutic of suspicion, on the other. This dual perspective, Morphet argues, is also characteristic of Biko's work. The need for

a double hermeneutic is evidenced by Turner's call for a more nuanced approach to colonial discourse analysis:

The polarisation of the issue into a civilised/uncivilised dichotomy has prevented a clear analysis of the difference and similarities between African and European culture. Furthermore, by describing European culture as civilization, one unconsciously tends to see it as unchanging, as final (1972 24).

While Turner demonstrates a hermeneutic of suspicion when he demonstrates the weight of discourse in the structuring of perceptions and power relations, his hermeneutic of hope on the other hand, allows him to believe in the possibilities of human agency and change. Morphet argues that while both Biko and Turner were reacting (in the spirit of modernists) to the intellectual disintegration and defeat of late 19th century liberalism, their "grounding category" was, nevertheless, the "traditional conceptual bastion of liberalism - the individual consciousness: the view that the inner intentionality of people counted in the end more than their public meaning" (89). Where Biko and Turner digressed from conventional liberalism, however, is in their call for a radical and critical consciousness of the conditions of exploitation and repression which existed in South Africa during the apartheid era. Real social change then follows as a matter of course.

Biko's conception of a "true humanity" contains an element of the visionary (hermeneutic of hope). He demonstrates a concern to move beyond the negritudinist/nativist positions described by Irele and Appiah respectively, but also at the

same time, is concerned to revise received concepts of humanity and universalism supplied by the west. He expresses the need to create a new and distinctly South African society based on the reworking of (liberal) political traditions into new forms of awareness and consciousness of the poverty of human relations and values. Halisi argues that both black and African nationalism undergo a "theoretical reconstruction" at the hands of black consciousness philosophy, a reconstruction which, according to Anthony Giddens, "signifies taking a theory apart and putting it back together again in a new form in order to attain more fully the goal it has set itself" (1982 100).

## CHAPTER FOUR

**Black Consciousness and the Crisis of Self in *To Every Birth Its Blood***

David Attwell makes the claim that Serote's work has "close affinities" with black consciousness. In this regard, he suggests that Serote's "earliest categories of social analysis are racial ones", and that Serote "unmistakably deploys formal and ideological strategies that show a conscious identification with the black world and its traditions" (DLB 125 295).

My concern in this chapter is twofold. Firstly my focus will be the identification of the "formal and ideological strategies" used by Serote which cast him as a "black consciousness artist", with specific reference to his single novel, *To Every Birth Its Blood* with a view to ascertaining the implications this particular reliance on the so-called racial categories of analysis has for the type of social order Serote envisages through his fiction. In doing so, I rely on the theoretical writings of Steve Biko, so-called founder of the black consciousness movement, as a point of entry into the theoretical intricacies of the philosophy of the movement established to some extent in the preceding chapters and which, I argue, verify the contentions made by Attwell concerning Serote's position vis-a-vis black consciousness.

Secondly, I intend to situate Serote, (as a black writer and as a black intellectual) as well as the Black Consciousness

movement, within a specifically modernist framework characterised by an emphasis on a focused individual subjectivity (the search for self) and an emphasis on the assertion of national identity (the search for nationhood).

To an extent, these two projects are related. I would argue that much of what is put forward as a specifically black response to apartheid oppression cannot readily be separated from the modernist drive towards national identity. As Gilroy has argued, the assertion of black nationalism represents an approach which has deep roots within the intellectual traditions of European enlightenment and project of modernity (1993:121). Indeed, I would suggest that black consciousness offers a pivotal moment which allows black South Africans to be interpellated within the discourse and trajectory of modernism (to "enter history" as it were) and that this is revealed through the impact which black consciousness is shown to have on the Alexandra community about which Serote writes.

The "Power Days" are shown to have had a profound effect on the collective psyche of the black community. Movement activist, Tuki, acknowledges this influence when he reflects that "...when the slogan was: Black Man, you are on your own!...South Africa had become, in no time, a different country" (330). Tuki's political career, from its inception in the ranks of the black consciousness movement, is depicted in terms of "going through time" with other people (331), the path towards the telos of liberation being depicted as a

"timeline" of history. The struggle towards an inevitable liberation is again shown to rely securely on the movement of time when John reflects that, as a result of the 1976 uprisings, a "relationship had been established" that "time was to nurture" (169). This relationship, however, is necessarily dependent on the development of a true consciousness and knowledge of the conditions of oppression in South Africa. Serote suggests that this "true" consciousness owes its origins to the Power days of black consciousness resistance which precipitated the re-birth of a new generation of black people. Reflecting on the "Black Consciousness days", Dikeledi remarks that "...in those days, a new, brand-new black woman and man had been created" (235), the suggestion being, of course, that the creation of a new black man and woman will necessarily lead to the creation of a "brand-new" social order.

Kelwyn Sole, using much of the evidence already cited, argues that the inevitability of liberation through (specifically) Movement politics is "open to doubt only in the length of time it may or may not take" (72) and argues that Serote's novel presents an understanding of politics that is largely "positivist and nationalist" and which stresses that "the common goal of ending foreign (in this case white) domination in itself brings about a unity among colonised (or, in this case, oppressed) people" (72). Sole argues that the inclusivity and confidence with which the Movement is presented by Serote as a panacea to the problems of colonial oppression, allow for an interpretation of Serote's novel on

the basis of a "sweeping" 'Third World' nationalism (70). This optimistic nationalism, for Sole, highlights the manichaeism which operates in the novel and which presents an "absolute dichotomy" (69) between pre- and post-liberation existence. Sole argues that Serote's idea of revolutionary change is based on a re-inversion of "normal standards and values" (61). The false sense of order imposed in South Africa by "mad men" (166) constituting white minority leadership is to be exposed for the disorder it represents for black South Africans and a proper sense of order established in its place. Sole's criticism of Serote rests largely on what he construes as an "overstatement" of the power of the Movement/liberation (the two are essentially synonymous) to effect such a comprehensive reversal. Sole argues that by depicting the Movement as an "order-creating" remedy which at the same time "guarantees" a happy human subject, Serote is guilty of naively simplifying the process of decolonization. Sole also remarks that this "overstatement" has affinities with "...the problems [that] similar conceptualisations of the politico-psychological interface bring about in the work of theorists of national identity and psychology" (74). Sole cites Fanon as an example of such theorists and implies an intellectual debt on Serote's behalf when he remarks that Fanon was "an important influence on Black Consciousness writers in South Africa" (74).

Sole's misgivings concerning the misconceptualisation of the "politico-psychological interface" (by Serote and Fanon), I

would suggest, amount to a more fundamental concern relating to the conceptualisation of the relationship between the self and the social in the particular formation of black consciousness discourse as represented by these two authors. The "affinities" which To Every Birth Its Blood bears to black consciousness philosophy are consistently revealed through the links presented by Serote between consciousness and reality. Serote describes the Movement as "an idea in the minds of a people" (327). Oupa again articulates the dynamic of this relationship when he remarks that as a result of the Power days "[p]eople have realised, have discovered who they are, and what they can do" (193). The capacity for action is thus a necessary product of self-consciousness. What is apparent is the extent to which Serote presents a conception of the (black) self which qualifies him for inclusion within a black consciousness paradigm as expressed by Biko himself:

The interrelationship between the consciousness of the self and the emancipatory programme is of paramount importance...we cannot be conscious of ourselves and yet remain in bondage. We want to attain the envisioned self which is a free self (49).

The specifically black political struggle waged by Biko and the black consciousness movement is construed as automatically expressive of the racial differences with which it is articulated. Like Serote's novel, it speaks of a unified conception of the South African black world, united in opposition through the consciousness of its oppression to apartheid.

Tsi Molope's ambivalent position in relation to the Movement, instead of undermining its liberatory possibilities, demonstrates the dangers which exist in making incorrect choices about one's ideological alignment. Tsi captures the predicament of the alienated, angst-ridden intellectual, bearing the burden of modernity -- the quest for meaning in a world that seems bereft of meaning:<sup>5</sup>

...[s]omething had snapped. Nothing was visible.  
No words meant anything (Serote 1986 62).

Tsi's lack of faith in the meaning of words threatens to render him impotent in the struggle for change, in the struggle to make sense in the context of what seems to him, senseless disorder. While his continual references to a fragmented memory create a self-conscious (modern) text which reflects on its own artistic disunity and temporal disintegration, memory is also shown in the novel to represent a potentially powerful retrospective discourse with which to challenge the disabling (present) discourse of silence. The problem that Tsi faces is that without a reliable memory, he cannot situate himself historically, recover a continuity with the past and thus achieve a consistent identity. As a result, he becomes a victim of hopelessness and powerlessness in the face of a perceptibly invasive and omnipotent political regime. The withdrawal from history that this effects, the retirement into an intense subjectivity, reduces the possibilities for development or change because it is a sense of history which allows for the possibilities of emancipation from present conditions of existence.

The lack of an historical consciousness and a fragmented identity which Tsi's memory dramatises, stands in contrast to the position of Ma-Maria, a character introduced in the second part of the novel. Ma-Maria's memory, unlike Tsi's, is able to provide both herself and Onalenna with a sense of historical worth and national selfhood. Onalenna comments how she and Ma-Maria are "totally different, yet terribly the same" (284) and in so doing, she draws attention to the difference in the strategy of resistance adopted by the two women owing, in the main, to the change of historical context affecting the particular roles assumed by women vis-a-vis the liberation struggle. (Oni has chosen a path of overt activism and guerilla tactics, while Ma-Maria's role, while acknowledged as important, was more a case of "keeping the faith" (284)). Ma-Maria's forbearance, however, and her faith in the inevitability of change through human agency and commitment (of one sort or another) is reflected in her comment that,

...not one of us is going to stand for the pain that these things cause us, and it is bound to change. If God isn't bringing any fire, we are going to make the fire (281).

For Onalenna, Ma-Maria symbolizes an entire history of black struggle against colonialism and apartheid. Thus it is "[f]or record, for history, for memory" (282) that Oni is driven to know Ma-Maria's age in order to reclaim that history as her own, the retrieval of which is directly related to a capacity for hope and inspiration. Ma-Maria's life then constitutes a documentation of the struggle by blacks against oppression and her position in the novel is symbolic of the aspiration

of the black consciousness movement to uncover an historiography of resistance aimed at the reconstitution of a people deprived of a positive historical image. Steve Biko, appropriating the words of Franz Fanon, explains this concern on the part of the black consciousness movement on the following basis:

...the colonialists were not satisfied merely with holding a people in their grip and emptying the Native's brain of all form and content, they turned to the past of the oppressed people and distorted, disfigured and destroyed it...There is always an interplay between the history of a people ie. the past, and their faith in themselves and hopes for their future (29).

Therefore, as logical re-dress,

...part of the approach envisaged in bringing about "black consciousness" has to be directed to the past, to seek to rewrite the history of the black man and to produce in it the heroes who form the core of the African background (29).

The concern with re-writing the history of the black man/nation is a persistent one in To Every Birth Its Blood. While not adhering consistently to formal black consciousness political positions in his novel, Serote reveals a unmistakeable "affinity" with black consciousness in his preoccupation with asserting the historical lineage of black struggle in South Africa, dating back to the inception of colonization. "The Movement", symbol of black opposition, is given primordial status when it is lyrically described at one point as being,

as old as the grave of the first San or Khoikhoi who was killed by a bullet that came from a ship which anchored at Cape Town to establish a stop station...(Serote 318).

The Movement is portrayed as being synonymous with black resistance to colonial oppression. If we assume (rather safely) that "The Movement" in Serote's novel represents the African National Congress, formed in 1912 as a body of organised resistance to colonial and apartheid oppression, literally centuries after "that unfortunate date - 1652..." (Biko 40), it becomes possible to detect a strategy of romanticisation in the extensive symbolic power and historical scope given to the Movement. However, the concerted attempt at the reconstruction of a heritage of resistance in To Every Birth Its Blood, the uncovering of an heroic African past, positions it securely within the parameters of black consciousness objectives as outlined above by Steve Biko.

The nostalgia demonstrated by both Biko and Serote seems to implicate them to some degree in what Anthony Kwame Appiah terms a "nativist" position vis-a-vis the struggle for freedom from colonialism, an exclusivist cultural nationalism which Appiah criticises for its facile division of the world into a topology of "inside and outside - indigene and alien" (56). Elleke Boehmer, in keeping with her emphasis on historical categorization, argues that what she terms the "early moment of anti-imperialist nationalist -- or more accurately, nativist -- resistance" (100), is distinguished by "a strenuous defence of the virtues of native culture, characterized as rich, pure, and authentic" (100). Such strenuous defence, however, is clearly manifest in Biko's essays, written during the 1970's in South Africa. A

distinctly nativist inclination is apparent in Biko's work when he explains the necessity of depicting the "authentic cultural aspects of the African people" and the need for uncovering the "fundamental aspects of the pure African culture..." (41). Notwithstanding the problematic assumption of the existence of a "pure" culture, of any sort, Biko's assessment of African culture, despite the inclusiveness overtly given to the term "black" by the black consciousness movement, means that his enunciation of the merits of a culture which is "man-centred", communitarian, has a natural affinity for "song and rhythm", is anti-materialist, spiritual and closer to nature which makes it easier for Africans to "identify with [people] in any emotional situation arising out of suffering" (46), clearly has application for African culture only. Notwithstanding the fact that the category of "African culture" is in itself an enormously broad one, and one that, in reality, does not easily submit to reductive categorization of this nature, Biko's analysis of "Some African Cultural Concepts", has little resonance for other cultural groupings in South Africa, who are equally oppressed and who have, according to the theoretical tenets of the black consciousness movement, been granted the right to declare themselves "black". I would argue that the tension which arises is that which exists between attempts to use the category of "blackness", on the one hand as a political tool, aimed at rallying as broad a support base as possible, and on the other hand, attempts to essentialise the qualities of "blackness" and in so doing, create an ultimately exclusivist paradigm and which provides

evidence of the oppositions or topologies enunciated and resisted by Appiah as being ultimately restrictive.

Although differences between Westerners and Africans are reduced to oppositional stereotypes, and despite his rhetoric concerning the purity of cultural origins, Biko does concede the existence of an essentially "modern" African culture, which he defines as a culture "that has used concepts from the white world to expand on inherent cultural characteristics"(45). Biko demonstrates a self-reflexivity here which takes him beyond the purely nativist categories outlined by Boehmer and Appiah. The likelihood of hybridization in the context of modernity, is again acknowledged when he speaks of his belief in the ability of the African to stay with "people of other cultures" and yet "be able to contribute to the joint cultures of the communities they have joined" (45). While open to the idea of mutually influencing cultures, Biko's conception of cultural origins nevertheless seems to embrace the notion of pristine and authentic beginnings and thus draws links with Boehmer's description of nativism as the idea that a peoples' identity lay embedded in cultural origins, and was fully recoverable, unadulterated by colonialism (100). While Biko would seem to concede the importance of identifying with these origins, and despite his apparent adherence to a system of binary oppositions between Western and African culture, I would argue that the origins of black consciousness itself and the perception of its necessity among oppressed South Africans, stem precisely from an acute awareness of the extent to which

black identity has undergone a process of brutal adulteration by colonialism. When Biko concedes that the "advent of the Western Culture has changed our outlook almost drastically" (46), leaving behind it a "bastardised" culture, he is already acknowledging a merger of cultures which disallows any unproblematic retrieval of culture and tradition. Boehmer puts this process into perspective when, discussing early anti-colonial movements, she argues that,

culture -- in the form of reinterpreted history, religious revivals, elegiac and nostalgic poetry -- developed into an important front for nationalist mobilization. To this end literary conventions and discourses inherited from the colonizer were appropriated, translated, decentred, and hybridized in ways which we now name postcolonial but were in fact at the time anti-colonial, often opportunistic, tactical and ad hoc, and which formed an important means of self-expression (100).

With the benefit of hindsight then, the bastardization of a culture at the hands of the colonising power, is never as one-sided a process as it seems. The inevitable "decentering" which occurs allows for interesting postcolonial possibilities. Boehmer's analysis tends to give more substance to the political and conscious aspects of identity construction and cultural borrowing. In so doing, she detracts, to an extent, from the importance of an analysis of the origins and implications of essentialism implicit in resistance strategies. Admittedly, Boehmer is speaking quite specifically about what she terms "the early nationalist vision", specifically in literature which, she claims, "did not rule out the prospect of interaction with Europeans" (101). Boehmer's understanding of "nativism" is again caught

within a particular historical moment. The term is used by her to denote a "relatively sedate preliminary to the more overt political liberation which followed". Boehmer argues that these earlier movements were distinct in their intention to achieve an "inversion" of imperial values and structures. However, while Boehmer's explication would seem to imply that nativism and its rhetoric constitutes merely an historical, transient phase in the development of the African intellectual, responsible for laying "the ideological and strategic bedrock of later developments" (100), Appiah, on the other hand, structures his understanding of the term, less on the foundations of historical periodization, but rather (and more usefully, I believe), according to the oppositions asserted by "topologies" which he is able to discern in the work of certain African writers and critics who are "able in contemporary Africa to mobilize the undoubted power of a nationalist rhetoric..." (56). The essence of Appiah's understanding and use of the nativist term, despite his more "universal" application of the term, is however similar to that of Boehmer in that he conceives of nativist work as constituting a reverse discourse whereby the terms of resistance are already stipulated by western cultural imperatives. What Appiah's definition allows for, however, is an application of the term "nativist" to aspects of present-day nationalist movements and it is this component of his definition which I believe has application in the case of both Biko and Serote, plagued as they are, by topologies of colonialism.

Appiah's ideas again coincide with Boehmer's analysis on the issue of the degree to which "mimesis" by the colonised intellectual of colonial tropes, in particular, the strong reference to the authority of the cultural past, formed a useful and necessary tool which the colonised could use to build a stable and defiant identity. Boehmer is anxious not to be seen to be suggesting that modernism as a set of discursive practices was simply "imposed" on the Empire, and to this end, stresses the fact that colonial writers were "critically engaging" with the writing of the centre. This criticality, it is implied, resides in the fact that colonial writers "appropriated its [the centre's] influences selectively, interpreting these to match their own experience" (125).

In drawing links between the Western cultural tradition and nativism by suggesting that nativists themselves demonstrate a degree of nostalgia and sentimentalism "so familiar after Rousseau", Appiah is abrogating the ease with which nativists can claim absolute cultural autonomy. The particular reference to Rousseau in this case, introduces strong parallels between nativism and the conception of man as individual of the Enlightenment on the brink of modernity. What Appiah's argument attempts, and I would argue, succeeds in doing, is to confirm the futility of any attempt at an absolute and unreflexive authenticity. Such an attempt results not in the formation of a new and independent identity, but in "counteridentification" (Pechoux 1983 158) which describes the process of participating in institutional

configurations, -- to be subjected to cultural identities -- one officially decries (Appiah 60). While referring in the main to African literature, I would argue that Appiah's analysis holds equal weight for an understanding of political and social structures and codes of meanings which prevail in post-colonial societies today. Despite the ease with which Biko enters the topologies of counteridentification -- against colonialist discourse which itself divides the world into self/other, inside/outside, alien/indigene -- the futility of an unreflexive authenticity, the impossibility of unproblematic retrieval, is nevertheless at times implicit in Biko's arguments, and leads him away from counter-identification, towards a position closer to that of "disidentification" (Pechoux 158). For example, his acknowledgment that,

[t]he great powers of the world may have done wonders in giving the world an industrial and military look, but the great gift still has to come from Africa -- giving the world a more human face (Biko 47).

Biko thus shows himself at times, capable of entering into what I would refer to as a "post-colonial disposition", which introduces the possibilities for a self-reflexive creation of a new state based on hybridity and amalgamation and starting from the premise of humanism (in itself a notably "western" construct). Biko's dismissal of the pattern of the dialectic as presented by white liberalism, which has, as its goal, a synthesis/alternative which is acceptable only to the white man and thus restricts itself to the possibilities of a white (exploitative) value system, is further evidence of his

desire for change which goes beyond a "mere change of face of those in governing positions" (149). Biko argues strongly that the antithesis of apartheid can never be non-racialism as this will produce a vaguely defined synthesis because the antithesis of non-racialism is not sufficiently different to its thesis. His alternative dialectic has white racism as the thesis, counterpoised by a strongly antithetical black solidarity. Biko's synthesis is "some kind of balance -- a true humanity where power politics will have no place". Biko's "some kind of balance", though ill-defined, nevertheless bears the seeds of an interesting, if open, new position.

The confident strategy of Solomon T Plaatjie in his novel Mhudi, of appropriating the colonial gaze through "sweeping scenic descriptions and bird's-eye views of battlefields" (Boehmer 103), and which asserts the right of the colonized/nationalists to claim the land under gaze as their own, and of course this claim to ownership extends, by implication to the sphere of politics and culture, differs from the strategy employed by Serote who, writing decades later after enduring a period of seemingly infinite oppression, employs the distinctly modernist technique of the quest -- the search for self and nationhood and the means by which to achieve this. While intellectually, Tsi Molope is able to understand the full extent of his deprivation, the nature of apartheid is such that he nevertheless still needs to struggle against losing "the memory" of having rightful claims to the country of his birth. This is an inherent

danger which is expressed in the novel by Tsi's friend, Boykie:

You know that it is only in our memory that this is our land. We imagine that we have a home, we know that in reality, if there was a quick way that these settlers would wipe us out, they would...(78).

Tsi's hold on the past is through his memory, but this proves to be a tenuous link. Memory, he claims "can be an unreliable mirror", that provides "no fixed picture", but a lot of "fiction". Hence, Tsi is unable to locate himself historically. His memory fails to give him a continuity with the past and thus challenges any attempt at a consistent identity and concomitant sense of empowerment.

The lack of empowerment experienced by Tsi is shown by Serote to be particularly demoralizing. I would argue however, that the approach adopted by the apartheid forces towards its victims, while it is dehumanizing, is one that seeks the demasculinization of its victims as well. Tsi's father epitomises the pathos of the "fallen man":

"...Tsietsi, if you think there are two bulls in this house, you better choose to go through that door," my father said. He was looking at me through his broken spectacles...(98).

Any attempt at manly potency and assertion suggested by the bull analogy is simultaneously undermined by the image of Tsi's ageing father with ailing eyesight, forced through poverty to wear "broken spectacles". The father figure is a recurring image in Serote's poetry. The father repeatedly represents an image of failure in the world outside his home,

the world of the white man. The powerless aggression of the father is treated with contempt by his offspring. This male impotency is also expressed in the poetry of Oswald Mtshali:

My father is not there  
He had left me, a child,  
with his penis to eat for a boerewors  
and his testicles to slice as onion and tomato  
to gravy my dry and stale mieliepap.

In the absence of the male as provider and head of the family, the male phallus is given up for reproachful consumption by the child because of its utter uselessness and denigration in the world of the white man. The black male under the force of apartheid has lost the symbol of his maleness and thus his agency. The lines of connection between sexuality and identity are constantly drawn by Serote during the course of his novel.

After the permit raid on Tsi and Lily's house, Tsi lies in bed, the incident having exposed him as a powerless and destitute victim with nothing to offer to anyone. He has difficulty defining himself in positive terms:

Everything that I was was there with me in the bed. My bad breath...; my pounding aching head; my fear...; my recollection of the banging on the door; my helplessness, my despair, my anger, my limp muscle, which lay looped as if it were ashamed to have ever erected; I lay there and gave my life to Lily (51).

Tsi's "limp" penis extends the metaphor of despair and ineffectuality. While it is Tsi's human dignity which has been assaulted by the permit raid, his concern seems to be expressed largely in terms of an assault on his sexual virility. His sexuality is again under threat when he and

Boykie are detained and assaulted by policeman when travelling back from Lebowa. Tsi is forced to undergo a degrading and agonising attack on his genitals. It is the incident of his meeting with Tshidi however, after his release, that demonstrates the extent and nature of the trauma caused to the male psyche. Tsi reflects on the ordeal of the assault:

I thought about the floor of shame and the eyes that had pierced me, pushing me into accepting that I belong to shame, by pulling my balls...That took me face to face with the past night I had spent with Tshidi...

Tsi's assault at the hands of the security police has repercussions for him in the sense that he views the incident with shame and self-loathing, but what is interesting is the immediate way in which this incident is connected to his failed sexual encounter with Tshidi. Despite the demand uttered by Tshidi that he "be a man", Tsi cannot easily dissociate the sexual act from the violence inflicted on him at the expense of his male dignity. Tsi's concern is that because he failed to have an erection, Tshidi has realised how "hollow a man" he is and he fully expects to be ousted from her home because of his failed performance as such. Tshidi herself then undergoes a process of self-doubt about her capacities as a woman because of her failure to induce the correct male response. Afterwards, Tsi is "[l]ost and torn apart, my mind erased speech from me" (113).

Tsi's threatened identity is compounded by an inability to express/assert his self verbally. It strikes me that the way in which sexuality is tied up with identity, particularly

gender identity, has important ramifications for the ways in which oppression is handled by its subject. The guilt which Tsi feels is in itself, a breach of the male code. Tsi's father on a later occasion, in a reconciliatory mood, says to Tsi,

No, I don't want you to feel guilty, a man must not feel guilty, but a man must know what he is doing (145).

Tsi's very existence, however, seems to embody one of shame and guilt and thus offers few possibilities for the reconstitution of the (male) subject. When Tsi tells Lily that he has "no confidence as a reporter" (71) one can discern a lack of confidence which extends beyond the field of professional occupation. There is a sense in which Tsi lacks confidence as a man, as a human being and as a citizen of his country. The suggestion that this lack of confidence runs deeper than his capacity to do his job, is verified by his failure to sustain any form of employment. Even his job at Mcleans College fails to offer him sufficient meaning with which to re-articulate a meaningful identity, a failing which Serote attributes to the ideological principles of the college.

However, Tsi's attitude after the assault develops an interesting degree of decisiveness which suggests that the assault, in epitomising the brutality of the white apartheid system against blacks serves to focus his animosity and potential for resistance and positions him clearly as black against white. His comments and thoughts at this point are

interestingly similar to the black consciousness positions propagated by Biko. In his interview with fellow reporter Anne, Tsi claims that he does "not recognise the police, the courts, the law which is made by white people in this country..." (121). He goes on to describe the relationship between himself and fellow reporter, Anne at that point:

She [Anne] knew that I had contempt for her, for her symbolic self, for her having been born into that world whose dreams were my nightmares, whose nightmares challenged my life, luring it to death. I knew she knew this. We had talked about it, in those days when my eyes were blurred to the flame that now and then came closer and closer to my wings as I grew up (122-123).

Tsi echoes Biko's opinions on the futility of black/white interaction. Tsi's intimation is that the time for talking about things with whites has passed, now that he has realised and lived the full "flame" of apartheid tyranny. What Serote is illustrating, through the tense relationship between Anne and Tsi, is the ultimate futility of what Biko would call "artificial" integration and which dictates that true integration is not possible under the circumstances of real segregation and discursive positioning under apartheid, and that each brings to the table certain complexes which it is first necessary to overcome. Tsi's bitterness towards the impotent and misdirected white liberal is apparent in his ironic representation of the lift scene. While consciously choosing to ignore the baiting of the racist lift man, Tsi's white college takes up his defence "perhaps thinking [he] was speechless as kaffirs should be" (127).

Tsi's resignation from his newspaper job and his withdrawal from journalism indicate a refusal to participate in the codes and institutions of white-controlled industry:

I left the white paper blank. I refused to return the stare of the typewriter keyboard (135).

Tsi chooses silence and inarticulateness over participation in the conventional master/slave narratives which he perceives as characterising his participation in all facets of South African life. Like his father, Tsi becomes silent, but nevertheless continues to "witness" the events around him. He comments on the significance of the power days which are described by him in organic terms and as being an agent of change:

The flood had come, had happened; the infants of that year bore their real names (140).

Tsi describes his parents as having changed too, as having become more accepting of the political movements initiated by black youth. When Tsi's mother says, "I don't envy anyone who tries to control people's minds" (163), she reveals a sophisticated understanding of the psychology of apartheid which echoes many of the concerns expressed by Biko relating to the psychological effects of oppression. There is, in Tsi's mother's comments, evidence of a positive intellectual and ideological progression towards a viewpoint which echoes Nandy's idea of an oppressive system as incorporating both

oppressors and oppressed not as victors and losers respectively, but as mutual victims.

Tsi's commentary to the media about McLean's college is again indicative of an intellectual debt owed to black consciousness philosophy. His idea of a successful education system as one based on "the dynamic relationship between consciousness and reality" repeats the black consciousness emphasis on the intimacy between (self) consciousness and material reality as expressed by Biko himself:

The interrelationship between the consciousness of the self and the emancipatory programme is of paramount importance (49).

The black consciousness position, however, is taken further in Tsi's analysis when he argues that such an educational system would also "respect the principle that knowledge must be supplemented by action" (Serote 160). Here, Tsi acknowledges the truth of Oupa's later comment that (owing to the Power days) "[p]eople have realised, have discovered who they are, and what they can do" (193). It is the process of discovery initiated by black consciousness philosophy which is recognised by Tsi, while at the same time, it is understood to be merely groundwork. Tsi goes on to stress that much work needs to be done to "re-establish an educational system which will teach the black child that he is a citizen of South Africa and that he bears responsibility for this country" (160). While the emphasis in Tsi's remark appears to be the link between ideas and reality, Tsi's resignation from McLeans on the basis that no educational

system can be devised to benefit blacks while the white government continues in power, also shows a more practical and materialistic concern with the unequal distribution of educational resources by a power-hungry, self-seeking regime.

The binaries of black consciousness discourse are given expression in To Every Birth Its Blood and are articulated most succinctly by Boykie who declares that Tsi must "...understand the name of the game, it is called, 'them and us'" (96). On the issue of Bram Fischer's treatment at the hands of the South African state, Boykie argues that "[i]t was a lesson for those white boys who disregard white rules...[a]ny white person who does not keep the rules of the game will be punished and that will be a lesson for the others who want to get out of step" (96). Boykie appears to adopt a position in the novel which has strong affiliations with the black consciousness position on non-integration. He castigates Tsi's activist brother, Fix, whom he labels as "sharp but clumsy" (93) and takes a strongly antithetical position to that of Fix. It is Fix who shows a more conciliatory attitude in the novel :

I was taught to love and to respect and be polite. I cannot disregard that because whites are doing what they are doing. I have to find a way of using their gift (93).

Boykie's understanding of and adherence to the theoretical foundations of the black consciousness movement is further evidenced when he tells Tsi that he is "with the BSO<sup>6</sup> right now but ...realise[s] that it is only a stage, just a stage in our battle to reclaim a home for ourselves..."(79). As the

central protagonist (at least in part one), Tsi attempts to live out the "battle" to which Boykie refers. The figure of Tsi articulates one of the founding tropes of the "modern" in literature: that of the individual, alienated and estranged from the surrounding society. Tsi Molohe assumes the proportions of an existentialist hero in the early stages of the novel when, once again on the streets of Alexandra, he says,

[a]s usual, I was walking into crowds. I have never walked with crowds. I walk into them. Where was I going with four rands in my pocket? (5).

While Tsi's withdrawal from "the crowd" arguably contains echoes of the claim made by existentialist philosopher, Soren Kierkegaard that "a crowd in its very concept is the untruth", a philosophical pronouncement of this nature becomes more complicated in a South African context, where rejection of the crowd throws into jeopardy all attempts at oppositional solidarity politics. Tsi's inability to integrate himself, while registering his personal alienation, also symbolically registers his political alienation, his inability to commit himself to "movement" politics. It is this lack of commitment, this withdrawal from the crowd, which the novel suggests, perpetuates his alienation, both personal and political.

In his introduction to a collection of essays entitled The Modern World: Ten Great Writers, Malcolm Bradbury describes

the plight of the "modern" writer as bearing the burden for expressing,

...the fractured disorder of an era where abstract nouns seemed irrelevant, nature seemed an aggression against the self, and the self seemed to be able to discover only defacement, despair and defeat (1989 13).

Tsi's continual references to the "madness" of the government and its agents which represent an outward political disorder, is mirrored by an internal anguish and anxiety where the self seems to be able to discover only similar "defacement, despair and defeat". Tsi's sense of impotence and alienation in the face of modern development is also evident when he says,

Crowds and crowds of footsteps...all manacled by time, by the cruel and real time of moments, when machines demanded attention because something called gold demands to be crushed and sifted and sold (111).

According to C R D Halisi, Steve Biko considered the transformation of consciousness to be a catalyst for mass action. Common to most student ideologies of the decade (the 60's) was a concern with consciousness, culture, alienation, community and the dimension of everyday life as the most important reference for political activity (Pityana Ed. 109). This is in keeping with the existentialist idea that a moment comes for the individual when he or she must make an irrevocable choice and that such moments are the only "real" ones. The choice to be made for existentialists, is an ethical rather than an aesthetic one which is based on transient preferences. The choice is paramount because even

if we choose wrongly, if the choice is made with earnestness and struggle, we become new selves that could not have existed until that particular choice was made. The choice then acts as catalyst for the development/discovery of the self. Throughout To Every Birth Its Blood, Tsi and the other characters in the novel, are presented and are continually presenting themselves, in classic existential style, with choices about their lives, choices which inevitably involve some form of change. In the early stages of the novel, Tsi is seen to resist even contemplating the choices which confront him:

I was sitting on the grave of my grandfather. I fought the thought that nagged me, which wanted to know whether he heard me when I asked about Fix; and also, when I told him that I was getting tired of going to the shebeen; and that I wouldn't go to church. I fought this thought. I will fight, fight it forever, By coming here, every Sunday, I will fight it; I know he is listening, and asking whether I was willing to change. This is where the trouble started -- was I willing to change? (11-12).

Tsi intuitively seems to sense a certain self-deception, an existence based on Sartrean "bad faith".

While the novel endorses the motivational force of retrospective thinking, the difficulty of translating this progression into reality is also acknowledged in the figure of Tsi. Tsi's search for meaning and real commitment is plagued by a sense of hopelessness and powerlessness which translate into a subjective angst. The final moment of epiphany, however follows the death of his nephew Oupa, at the hands of the security police. Up to this point, Tsi has avoided direct political engagement. The imperatives of the

novel are such that all characters in the end necessarily prostrate themselves at the altar of political activism. The position Tsi takes on the issue of Oupa's murder constitutes the leap of faith required, but existing avenues for political involvement, short of incarceration, deny him the opportunity to implement his principles in the form of political action. He is exiled from South Africa and is, ironically, still unable to name himself ie. define himself and his position:

I had become something called a refugee. At first, that is what I called myself. Then I said, I am a political refugee. Then I did not want that tag. I said I was an exile. Then I said, how can I say I am an exile when I am in Africa? No, I am not an exile. What am I then? (346).

While on the one hand, the novel seems to endorse the position that dedication to the Movement offers the only salvation to the life of the oppressed in South Africa, Tsi's inability to finally locate himself, both materially and discursively, vis-a-vis the country of his birth, creates a degree of ambiguity regarding the extent to which the Movement can guarantee a successful political and cultural revolution. However, the ambiguity is rather tenuous when compared with the degree of inevitability with which the characters of the novel finally commit themselves to "Movement" politics. It is in this regard that the existentialist ethic in the novel does not reach fruition. This is evident in Onalenna's comment that,

...the struggle is forever assured of its victory, when those who carry it forward follow the correct line (284).

The "correct line" in this case, is the "line" of the "Movement" and most characters in the novel reveal a vulnerability to its persuasive force. The lack of an articulated political programme is often cited by its critics as a weakness in black consciousness thought, a lack which inevitably detracts from its efficacy. However, the goal of black consciousness was at that stage and very candidly, a specific one. Biko argues that the "first truth" is that the black man has lost his "personality" and that the retrieval of that personality is the first/primary hurdle to be crossed before one can really speak of political emancipation:

This is the first truth, bitter as it may seem, that we have to acknowledge before we can start on any programme designed to change the status quo... (29).

Black consciousness, to a large extent, thus abdicates responsibility for determining the precise content of the "programme designed to change the status quo", but claims to be able to provide the necessary confidence with which to devise (a truly suitable) one. Biko reveals the black consciousness belief in the unique capacity of humankind to make and remake its own conscious life and the sentiments expressed here are closely aligned with existentialist thought. C.R.D. Halisi supports the notion of existentialism in black consciousness thinking when he argues that "at the core, Black Consciousness philosophy embraced the

existentialist view that individuals and communities choose freedom or enslavement (Pityana Ed. 101). This is reflected in Biko's chapter, "The Quest for a True Humanity" where he argues that,

Freedom is the ability to define oneself with one's possibilities held back not by the power of other people over one but only by one's relationship to God and to natural surroundings.

The existentialist conception of freedom is shown to be known by Biko, and can only be made real through a process of dissolving the bonds of power held over blacks by whites. Evidence of an existentialist position is given by Biko's (Heideggerian) contention that the black consciousness movement embodies an attempt to "make the black man see himself as a being complete in himself" (92). While Serote would seem to acknowledge the significance of black consciousness as a particular phase in the struggle for liberation, he also seems to be concerned to issue reminders of its limited application. Serote's novel seems to suggest that "Movement" politics (here I read ANC politics) is a logical and organic outgrowth of black consciousness as represented by the "power days" and that black consciousness philosophy can be unproblematically subsumed by the discourse of Movement politics. The existentialist concept of choice, I would argue, is thus also shown to have limited application in the South African political context as represented by Serote. Having committed oneself to making a choice for freedom, one must, in Serote's terms, make the obvious choice of allegiance with the Movement. While black consciousness,

on a philosophical level, is existentialist insofar as it endorses the freedom to choose to change, the avenues open to those characters in To Every Birth Its Blood who seek change are necessarily limited, thus creating difficulties for absolute existentialist fulfilment. Tony Morphet's argument in "Cultural Imagination and Cultural Settlement" would seem to suggest that a crucial ingredient of the black consciousness ethic (as evidenced in his discussion of Biko in "Brushing History Against the Grain") has been lost through "Movement" politics resulting in the waning of the double hermeneutic of hope and suspicion and the decline in the commitment of members to dialectical thinking and analytical rigour. I would argue that the ideological manipulation by Serote of his material is akin to the closure of which Tony Morphet speaks. The loss of the dialectic which Morphet attributes to the work of both Biko and Turner becomes subsumed under the rhetoric of Serote's Movement where the existence of only one choice is, in fact, no choice.

In an interview with Jane Wilkinson in On the Horizon, Serote comments on the black consciousness movement that "it was a movement that didn't take the history of the struggle into consideration", but goes on to add that later, "the organisation [BC] itself became a vehicle through which the history of the struggle was explored" (178). Despite the secondary role he attributes to the black consciousness movement, he nevertheless recognises the need to view black consciousness positively because "it did mean that Blacks

could look at themselves as people, not as negatives of other people, and could assert themselves, especially the young people..." (178). Serote suggests however, that these benefits are essentially limited, unless viewed in conjunction with an acknowledgement by black consciousness adherents of a "very very long history of struggle" and an acknowledgement of "our very old and very experienced organisation, the African National Congress" (179). For Serote, however, such acknowledgement also marks "a point of departure" (179) from black consciousness. I would argue that it is this conception of black consciousness, as a secondary aide to the process of liberation, which prevails in his novel.

## CHAPTER FIVE

**"Still Riding" : Staffrider as Cultural Product**

In the previous chapter I argued that Serote's novel, To Every Birth Its Blood, reveals how the context of oppression in South Africa during the seventies and early eighties, necessitated the response of black consciousness discourse. Furthermore, in Serote's case, black consciousness discourse offered an important means for the location of the self vis-a-vis a broader national framework. The concern of black consciousness with the development of a black identity in response to the debilitating effects of apartheid has been taken up in various cultural forms and has manifested itself across a far broader cultural spectrum than this thesis has been able to reflect.

In recognition of this lacuna, this chapter will consider the role played by the magazine, Staffrider, in giving expression to a specifically "black" South African experience during the period 1978 to 1988. As I have attempted to argue, the discourse of black consciousness constituted a particular pivotal moment which allowed oppressed black South Africans to be interpellated into the culture and discourse of modernity. I would argue that this interpellating function is also performed by Staffrider, a publication which allowed for the cultural expression of ideas and feelings which were crucial to the development of a new consciousness in the national black community.

In an interview published in Staffrider, Christopher van Wyk, one-time editor of the magazine, argues that black consciousness was "the dominant ideological perspective of the time and we, like almost all cultural activists, subscribed to the self-reliance advocated by this perspective" (166). This culture of self-reliance was manifested by Staffrider in the form of the somewhat controversial "self-editing" policy adopted at the inception of the magazine which allowed blacks to determine standards of criticism applicable to their work because, it was argued, "[b]lacks ... knew what standards they would like to impose on their culture" (167). While this policy was the subject of criticism by, among others, Chris van Wyk himself, largely because of the stasis it encouraged within black writing circles, I would nevertheless argue that accepting literary and academic submissions from all kinds of writers, regardless of the extent of their education, created the means whereby black writers could enter into the "imagined community" (Benedict Anderson 1991 25) of the national oppressed. This process of interpellation made it possible for rapidly growing numbers of people to think about themselves, and to relate themselves to others in new ways. The first editorial of the Ten Years of Staffrider collection bears witness to this self re-conceptualisation when it is remarked that,

A feature of much of the new writing is its 'direct line' to the community in which the writer lives ("About Staffrider" Vol 1 No 1, 1978).

The writer becomes the representative of his or her community, voicing the concerns and frustrations of that community and in so doing, joins a multitude of other community writer representatives in a network of national solidarity.

In an essay published in the "ten year" collection entitled, "Remembering Staffrider", Mike Kirkwood writes that Staffrider protects the "right to write badly" (5), and I would add to this that the magazine also, importantly, protected and offered the right to write (badly) about oneself, and offers the writer the opportunity to enter into a national community of imagined readers, many of whom share similar life experiences through apartheid. Anderson's definition of nationalism as "an imagined political community" (6) would suggest that the cultural expression which Staffrider articulates, represents an opportunity for "nation-building". While the relationship to a broader political context may be an "imagined" one, it is nevertheless a necessary one.

Kirkwood suggests that the magazine was integral to the process of historical retrieval in two respects: firstly, through the decolonisation of the material, a process he describes as "prising history from the death grip of the rulers...[and the]...rewriting history from below" (7) and secondly, "the infusion...of the continuity that links us with the almost simultaneous events in 1912-13 that exiled a people and embarked us on the great trek to freedom..." (7).

The specifically black consciousness concern with the reading of South African history in terms of a history of black dispossession and resistance again forms the thematic substance of many of the submissions. In the preface to Ten Years of Staffrider, Andries Oliphant and Ivan Vladislavic note that by re-inserting the writings of earlier generations of black writers, the magazine assisted in the restoration of a suppressed tradition of resistance literature in South Africa. On a similar note, Kirkwood speaks of the interest shown by the readers of Staffrider in the history and dispersal of their ancestors brought about through various colonial strategies and argues a role for the magazine in the propagation of stories which tell/retell a "peoples history". As has been argued, this is a process in which both Biko and Serote, express a large degree of interest.

The importance of Staffrider may also be understood in terms of the challenge it represented to "officially sanctioned culture and its concomitant aims of domination" (Preface). In arguing that Staffrider allowed the "cultural perimeters of apartheid [to be] breached" (3), Kirkwood acknowledges the extent to which Staffrider represented a significant challenge to the cultural taste of established (white) society in South Africa. The black artist, as the "skelm of sorts", the disapproved, the disreputable, the cultural trouble-maker (in terms of white artistic standards) occupies a position not dissimilar to major European artists of the *avant-garde* who faced a similar degree of disapproval on the grounds of their "rebellious" stance vis-a-vis the dominant

culture. Mr X's conversation with Miriam Tlali in the "Popular History" section of the edition, entitled, "You Have to Be a Man" elevates "Mr X" to the status of a community spokesperson. The fact that he is an unlicensed vendor places him in a rebellious position in relation to the (white) law of the country. His account of his life and his efforts to make a living and "to be a man", nevertheless speak of a great deal of initiative and industriousness and indeed, his tenacity is admirable. Mr X celebrates his position outside the discourse of white legal prohibitions and his repeated insistence that one has to "be a man" demonstrates a self-reliance and realism necessary for adequate survival in township conditions. Mr X's opinion that "[y]ou've got to trust yourself" is reminiscent of the black consciousness slogan, "black man, you are on your own" denoting independence and self-reliance.

...Black Consciousness makes the black man see himself as a being, entire in himself, and not as an extension of a broom or additional leverage to some machine... (Biko 92).

Biko's comment captures the real need for a project of self-expression which allows for the reconceptualisation of the self in more positive terms. Staffrider, in providing a forum for the cultural products of oppressed communities and their individual members, I would suggest, performs a crucial role in the reconstitution and redevelopment of the black self and the black nation.

In Chris van Wyk's poem, "We Can't Meet Here, Brother" (for Thami Mnyele), the assertion of selfhood is strongly represented and much of this assertion is expressed against the invasiveness of white cultural and technological influence:

We can't meet here, brother,  
We can't talk here in this cold stone world  
Where whites buy time on credit cards.

I can't hear you, brother!  
for the noise of the theorists  
and the clanging machinery of the liberal Press!

I want to smell the warmth of your friendship, Thami  
Not the Pollution of gunsmoke and white suicides.

We can't meet here, brother  
Let's go to your home  
Where we can stroll in the underbrush of your paintings  
Discuss colour  
Hone assegais on the edges of serrated tongues.

The white world is consistently depicted by Van Wyk as cold, hard, consumerist, industrial and theoretical -- qualities which are thrown into stark relief by the numerous references to warmth, home, texture and colour associated with black interests. The tendency towards "othering" and assertive polarities, characteristic of black consciousness discourse, is emphasised through the dichotomy set up between black and white and the experience of black alienation in what is perceived as a largely white-dominated "outside" world. The "inside" black world, on the other hand, symbolised by the word "home" is inviting in its warmth, subtlety and intimacy. The "inside" position, however, while suggestive of a place



transformation offered by the "new" machine thus constitutes a form of resistance to the old machine, but such resistance is qualified by the extent to which the elements of language used to constitute its existence are borrowed ones. The new machine thus presents a challenge to the old, but at the same time, itself undergoes a degree of interpellation into the system of discourse constituting the old. The romanticisation of the new machine in terms of its "flesh and blood" attributes, reflects an optimistic belief in the existence and achievement of a utopia which, despite its intention to eradicate an order, constitutes, in itself, and thus offers for replacement, another order.

Claire Lamont, writing of the Romantic Period in literature, notes that the resistance by the so-called Romantic poets to the emphasis on the material was motivated to a large extent by the fact that "[f]or most of them, there was a more real order, only to be glimpsed but which commanded their faithful allegiance" (275). For the Romantics, this "real order" was represented by a scepticism of society, particularly as embodied by the industrialising city and their response was a search for a more spiritual means of existence. A certain nostalgia is involved in the romantic return to a belief in the spiritual power of nature, a nostalgia which is repeated in aspects of modern literature almost a century later when, among other ideas of the time, it was asserted that "primitive myths can help us to grasp and order the chaos of twentieth century experience" (Rogers ed. 408).

To "grasp and order the chaos" can be seen to be a real concern of black South Africans whose identities were threatened with dissipation by apartheid. The poem, "Afrika (My Peace with Life)" by Eugene Skeef, depicts the Africa-centredness of much black consciousness thought and writing and arms the African with a valuable sense of spiritual and historical security. The need for a "deeper order" manifests itself, in the case of this poem, through the personification of "Mother Africa":

Afrika  
 You are the horizon  
 To which I turn  
 To see the sun rise  
 To wean the poet  
 Who praises you daily  
 For bearing your breasts  
 To these my seasoned lips  
 Do not desert me  
 For I love you  
 I want to cherish you  
 Take me into your heart  
 For you are the path  
 Whereupon treads my pride  
 Do not beguile me  
 For you are the sky  
 That measures my manhood  
 And spares me stars  
 To kindle my soul  
 Let me drink of you  
 For you are the river  
 That flows with vigour  
 Carrying the taunting tale  
 Our forefathers died to tell...  
 Afrika  
 You are my peace with life...

Africa is depicted as the symbol of hope and pride and the point of reference for existence itself. The historical profundity of the continent allows for an important sense of continuity between the present and the heroic past. Jean-François Lyotard argues that realist art is driven by a

desire for totality and a "fantasy to seize reality" (148) but at the same time argues that "realism" is a myth. Much of this "desire for totality" is evident in the poem by Skeef in his conception of Africa as a continent in its entirety. To achieve such totality of vision is, however, impossible. The poets reliance on the horizon as a definitive and inspirational landmark is misdirected because it can offer no real fixity. Thus conception is inevitably limited.

Against realism, however, Lyotard contrasts the modern (and postmodern) aesthetic, characterised by the "sublime sentiment". The sublime sentiment is a Kantian notion which characterises the logic of aesthetics which foregrounds a "lack of reality". In accordance with Kant, Lyotard notes that, the sublime is a "strong and equivocal" emotion which "carries with it both pleasure and pain" or, more to the point, "pleasure derive[d] from pain" (143) and in the case of the modern aesthetic, is also nostalgic. According to Lyotard, the sublime occurs "when the imagination fails to present an object which might, if only in principle, come to match a concept" (143). In the modern nostalgic aesthetic, the sublime involves the registration of the unrepresentable in the signifier while still longing for the corresponding signified (46). The modern aesthetic thus allows the "unrepresentable to be put forward only as the missing contents; but the form, because of its recognisable consistency, continues to offer to the reader...matter for solace and pleasure" (149). The real sublime sentiment, therefore, is the moment combining pleasure and pain: "the

pleasure that reason should exceed all presentation, the pain that imagination or sensibility should not be equal to the concept" (148). Thus Skeef's references to the river, the sky, to the continent of Africa convey the pleasure of a grand view, but because in reality, the poet can only perceive fragments of these elements at any one time, the pleasure is necessarily qualified by the pain of the unrepresentable.

In Charles Mungoshi's poem, "burning log", the devastation of a colonial process which "turned to the past of the oppressed people and distorted, disfigured and destroyed it" (Biko 29) is captured in the analogy of burning:

i am  
a burning log  
my history being reduced  
to ashes  
what i remember  
of yesterday  
is the ashy taste  
of defeat  
my hope  
for tomorrow  
is the fire. (234)

The destruction of a "peoples' history" by apartheid is shown to have the dual effects of defeatism and inspiration on its victims. The poem leaves the lasting impression, however, of assertion and defiance. Again, the extended metaphor of the log is a pre-modern and nostalgic evocation of an agrarian lifestyle. The log disintegrates through fire, but it is fire which takes its place and which provides future hope.

The view, expressed by Mbulelo Mzamane, that the legacy of the black consciousness movement lies in the "way culture came to take on the burden of articulating African political aspirations after the African National Congress and the Pan Africanist Congress had been outlawed in 1960" (Pityana Ed 185), while evident in the vehemence of the poetry examined above, is carried forward in the short stories of the Staffrider collection in a different way -- through the construction of community. The short story, as a genre which is able to create a "community" of characters, plays an important role in the creation of a discursive home for community members and to some extent defines their relation to the broader political framework.

The conversational tone of Mtutuzeli Matshoba's short story, "My Friend, the Outcast" has the effect of inviting the reader to participate in a shared experience. This sense of community is emphasised by the narrator's admission that while not being present when many of the ensuing events unfolded, he is nevertheless able to "imagine" how things transpired "what with such things being part of life for us darkies" (12). The reader is drawn into an epistemic community of people, bound by their shared knowledge and understanding of the way oppression and poverty manifests itself in black South Africa. Matshoba's story depicts, in a consistently conversational tone, the brutality of the white system of governance, where power is exercised arbitrarily and unjustly and white officials have the power to create "truth" in the context of a powerless community of victims.

Vusi and his mother are shown to have "come to accept that they owed" (18) extra rental money and indeed, the alternatives are shown to be non-existent and Vusi himself is reduced to exercising his "best pleading voice" (21) in the face of white obstinacy. Dikeledi is described as lacking confidence when talking to the new tenant of their house -- "...the way she felt when she faced a white man" (24) and Vusi's mother seems almost relieved to relinquish responsibility in the fight to regain her house on the grounds that she had allowed herself to become one of the "sacrificial lambs" of the white man. While the white officials at the housing office articulate their attitudes towards the black people with whom they deal in terms of gross stereotypes, it is only through a subtle ironical tone that Matshoba seems to contest their positions. The only reference to any overt form of black resistance is in the context of a remark made by the housing superintendent that he cannot produce a receipt to prove payment because such records were destroyed in the burnings initiated by the youth of the "black power period" (17). At the end of the short story, upon having been kindly treated by Vusi's "pleasant white" employer, Vusi and the narrator marvel at "[h]ow contrasting people can be" and the story ends without the affair being resolved.

The articulation of "black political aspirations" (Mzamane 185) in this particular story, is conveyed in a different form to that of the implicit militancy of the previously-discussed poetry contained in the Staffrider collection. The

strength of Matshoba's story, however, (and this is a point made by Michael Vaughan in his critique of Matshoba's stories (also in Ten Years of Staffrider), lies in the exemplary quality of the story. As Vaughan argues, Matshoba's stories treat "the situation that is its subject-matter as a model situation, from which a lesson can be derived" (312).

In "My Friend, the Outcast" Matshoba's lesson revolves around the importance of community support. Vusi's neighbourhood comes to the aid of his family when they are locked out of their home. The community is shown to make willingly real sacrifices in order to ease the plight of the destitute family. The lesson of individual humanism also seems to be apparent. The helpfulness of the English-speaking press and the kindness of Vusi's white employer are set against the tyranny and racism of the (white) government officials and their (black) lackeys. Matshoba's story, in the final analysis, offers little guidance with regard to the formulation of a strategy of resistance against white domination. While this would seem to be contrary to the spirit of defiance embodied by black consciousness, I would suggest that the support and solidarity shown by the community towards Vusi's family means that ultimately, it is the community that is shown to be victorious and to occupy the moral high ground in relation to the forces of oppression and exploitation. While most of the stories in the Staffrider collection tend to lack the element of the dramatic, particularly in their resolution, I would suggest that this strategy should be understood in terms of the intention of

the writers concerned to appeal to a sense of shared experience. The first editorial to the magazine describes this intention:

"[t]he writer is attempting to voice the community's experience ('This is how it is') and his immediate audience is the community ('Am I right?')".

The emphasis on community orientation is taken up in an essay entitled, "Thoughts on Bongiwe and the Role of Revolutionary Art", written for Staffrider by Thamsanga Mnye. In her discussion of South African artist Bongiwe Dhlomo's exhibition at Botswana National Museum and Art Gallery, Mnye notes how she is struck by the development of a new art in South Africa and calls for the birth of a new cultural worker:

We must now create this new man and woman whose visuals and songs will be informed by the most pressing needs and demands of their time, place and circumstances (299).

Mnye's vision endorses the move away from individual consciousness to a collective consciousness manifested through collective cultural efforts. The necessity of black solidarity is again expressed in an interview conducted by Jaki Seroke at the African Writers Association Meeting in 1981, published in Staffrider and entitled "Black Writers in South Africa". On the issue of the lack of promotion of black literature by the black press in South Africa, Mothobi Mutloatse argues that, "[t]he black press seems not to have found its cultural base. It is still mostly conceived on the

western concept of viewing our life" (305). He goes on to argue that in recognising the achievements of black artists, the press should extend the scope of their concerns to the "whole black diaspora" (305). The perceived fact of blackness is held to contain the seeds of solidarity.

Sipho Sepamla takes the issue of black solidarity to extremes when he accuses black consciousness adherents who are critical of black artists of not having understood the true nature of black consciousness philosophy. He argues that in being critical of the work of these artists, black critics reveal that "we are full of self hate as black people in this country (307)" and argues for a common understanding of what black consciousness is. This understanding, according to Sepamla is to be gained from listening to the man in the street. The self-editing policy of Staffrider which seemed to endorse this view of unrestrained black expression is best understood, I would argue, within its particular historical and cultural context. In his interview referred to earlier, Chris Van Wyk explains that his reluctance to join the editorial board of Staffrider was based on its loose editorial policy which, he argued, "led to a situation where some work, especially poetry, was published although it did not merit publication" (166). Van Wyk also notes the danger which existed that work which "dwelt so persistently on the manifestations of oppression...ironically exacerbated oppression instead of assisting with its eradication" (167). Van Wyk argues that problems of this nature could be addressed only marginally by the particular editorial policy

of the magazine and that in reality, the problem required "critical intervention and long-term strategies which would replace the reactive protest writing with a more profound imaginative engagement with South African reality" (167).

Many of Van Wyk's concerns are reiterated by Njabulo Ndebele in the Staffrider ten year collection. In an interview with Andries Oliphant, Ndebele gives credit to Staffrider when he argues that the magazine was involved in re-emergence of resistance movements in the seventies and the spread of a democratic culture, giving more people an effective say in social, cultural, political affairs affecting them (346). However, the importance of self-criticism and self-evaluation, of "avoiding trivialisation and infusing greater complexity and richness" (343) into creative writing are also emphasised by Ndebele. Ndebele holds the view that a concentration on literary skill and technique does not necessarily mean a loss of political relevance, but instead, "mastery over one's craft enables one to return to social and political issues with far greater freedom, understanding, insight and comprehensiveness" (343). Many of these issues and viewpoints are discussed in more depth by Ndebele in his article entitled, "Turkish Tales and Some Thoughts on South African Fiction" also published in the ten year Staffrider collection. The critical stance adopted by Ndebele would seem to directly contest the notion of unqualified black solidarity on the part of black critics as articulated by Sepamla in the panel discussion mediated by Jaki Seroke. In fact, Ndebele makes direct reference to this panel discussion

in his article and I would suggest that publishing controversial articles together in one volume has the effect of portraying Staffrider as a forum not only for the expression of (then) current political aspirations and feelings, but also for cultural and theoretical debates involving issues which have an important bearing on the future development of culture in South Africa.

Elleke Boehmer describes postcoloniality as "that condition in which colonized peoples seek to take their place, forcibly or otherwise, as historical subjects" (3). This "condition" is articulated in the production of Staffrider. The submissions published by it represent the attempts by marginalised people, to stake a claim for themselves in both the historical and future development of their country. Ben Okri's conception of postcolonial literature as "literature of the newly ascendant spirit"<sup>7</sup> describes the enthusiasm and earnestness which characterises the writing of Staffrider. Staffrider provided a vehicle through which the participants therein could generate a self-conception and a re-invention of the self which functioned as a significant interpellative counterpoint to the historical condition of being the marginalised "other" of the racial modernity which was apartheid. This function existed independently of questions of the quality of the writing itself. Before issues of the "literary merit" of the writing in Staffrider can be dealt with, it is valuable to conceive of Staffrider as a praxis which facilitated a space for the textual experimentation necessary for the "ascendant spirit" to "write" itself into

"history". To write is to make the visible, tangible marks by which the colonising cultures had been able to define their mark on history as that of "civilisation", indeed of being History itself. From the point of view of the colonising culture, "History" only existed for those cultures which could lay claim to a tradition of the written recording and artistic expression thereof, and hence their claims to the concept of "civilisation". It is in relation to this point that the interpellative value of Staffrider was the "writing" (in the most literal sense) of the "black" into the History which, from the point of view of back South Africans, had to be contested.

Staffrider also exists as a subversive account of "literariness" despite the fact that the practice of writing and publication (and the medium of English itself) is appropriated from "white" culture. The codes of European discourse embodied in what Mike Kirkwood terms, the "cultural perimeters of apartheid", are dismantled and the domination of cultural production by Europeans is subverted. Thus the "becoming" of "historical subjects" as represented in the writing of Staffrider and black consciousness more generally, is characterised by the double move of being counterpoised to the dominant colonial culture but deriving this oppositional status only to the extent that the discourse can find an expression within that dominant culture. The point is that a discourse cannot be oppositional if it is not heard or recognised by the dominant power as such, and concomitantly the oppositional and empowering status of a discourse depends

on the knowledge of the participants therein that it is perceived as such. Hence the discourse's status as being both oppositional and interpellating.

## CONCLUSION

Peter Jones pays tribute to the influence of the black consciousness movement when he argues that it is a "terrible misconception" to believe that the African National Congress was the "only saviour" because "the whole movement inspired people greatly...[and] opened up a new dimension in the way that people saw themselves, the way they saw their role within the world..." (Video Interview).

This thesis has attempted to document the dimensions of the process of conceptualising a "role within the world". It has sought to demonstrate how the discourse of black consciousness was an integral part of the re-definition of self necessary for black South Africans to resist apartheid. I have argued that part of this re-definition demanded both a "re-recovery" of History on the part of black South Africans, as well as a "re-invention" which allowed black South Africans to conceive of themselves as possible participants within modernity. In many ways, the cultural and political expressions of black consciousness demonstrated features not dissimilar to comparable moments in European modernism. In this sense black consciousness, although it would not have conceived of itself in this way, could be described as an *avant-garde* interrogation of the self.

My analysis of Serote's To Every Birth it's Blood and Staffrider has attempted to demonstrate how the cultural production of black consciousness was oppositional to apartheid. However, my analysis has also attempted to show

how black consciousness nevertheless shared crucial tropes with European Modernism: the self, the subverting of received aesthetic standards and oppositionality more generally. In this sense, the black consciousness movement could be said to have constituted a "discourse of two worlds". While the participation of identitarian politics in the recreation of a self-knowing subject is complicit in the project of Enlightenment and historical rationalism, the emphasis of black consciousness on the preservation of a cultural memory and a reliance on "pre-modern" symbolic language creates a position which is paradoxical, yet nevertheless interesting.

While giving evidence at the SASO/BPC Trial in May 1976, Biko argues strongly in favour of a "one man, one vote" democratic framework and, in this way, embraces the traditions of enlightenment characterising the unconditional extension of political and civil liberties. The appropriation of "human rights discourse" against the South African justice system, in order to expose the essential limitations of such a system, demonstrates the efficacy of a strategy which appropriates the universal claim to justice as a means of ultimately challenging and transforming it. The possibilities for creating a "new" position on this basis are, significantly, most aptly expressed by Biko himself:

I'm black and I'm proud. This is fast becoming our modern culture. A culture of defiance, self-assertion and group pride and solidarity...This is the new modern black culture to which we have given a major contribution. This is the modern black culture that is responsible for the restoration of our faith in ourselves and therefore offers us hope in the direction we are taking from here (46).

## NOTES

1. These words are taken from an interview with Biko - from a video entitled Biko: The Spirit Lives screened on NNTV, June 1995.
2. I am indebted for these ideas to Professor David Attwell. Although applying these ideas to the philosophy of Negritude in particular, I believe that Attwell's understanding of the development of Negritude also contains many insights for black consciousness.
3. It is interesting that Biko himself makes this point when he argues, against the accusation of reverse racism, that "one cannot be a racist unless he has the power to subjugate" (25).
4. Peter Jones was apprehended with Steve Biko while travelling back from Cape Town. It was this particular arrest which led to Biko's detention and his death. Jones was later released. His comments are taken from the video Biko: The Spirit Lives.
5. The "quest" is, however, carried out in very different circumstances to that of the European intellectual. Tsi's recognised position as an intellectual in the Alexandra Community is articulated by Aunt Miriam's daughter, Kgoli, who jokingly declines to be Tsi's wife because he is "the educated type", the kind who "end up on Robben Island" (36). Tsi is thus already inscribed within the discourse of western academia and critical thinking. The means by which to challenge apartheid from this position of "double consciousness" (Gilroy) takes on a more complicated aspect.
6. Black Students Organisation - affiliate of the black consciousness movement.
7. "The Marvellous Responsibility of the Unseen", Arthur Ravenscroft Memorial Lecture, University of Leeds, 17 March 1994, cited in Boehmer, page 4.

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