

**Towards a Transnational and Intercultural Literary Perspective:
Continuity or Discontinuity?**

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Declaration:

Unless specifically indicated to the contrary in the text, this thesis is entirely my own work.

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Abstract

This is a comparative study of Black South African and Afro-American literary and cultural production. Employing Paul Gilroy (1993) and W.E.B. Du Bois' conceptual framework, this study seeks to give new answers to some of the questions that intrigue scholars in the areas of race relations, literary and cultural production. It will show, amongst other things, how, yoked together by the ever-presence of the Afro-American influence and the tyranny of the regime, the Sophiatown generation (the fifties) and the Soweto group of poets (the seventies) could be seen as epitomising the continuity of experience. I will also employ Williams' concept of 'structure of feeling' and Bordieu's concept of 'cultural capital' to argue that what often linked these generations, whether conscious of it or not, was their strife for the much needed cultural capital in an environment which was both racially and politically turbulent.

Chapter One will explore the prior transatlantic connections between the United States and South Africa to show the historical depth and the multiplicity of connections in these ties. I will explore the worlds of Booker T. Washington, John Langalibalele Dube, Pixley kaIsaka Seme. I will also explore other conduits of communication: the impact of music as a force, the arrival of the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) church in South Africa and the tour of the Virginia Jubilee Singers.

In Chapter Two, I will examine the Harlem-Sophiatown renaissance links. In this chapter, I will specifically look at the cultural and the discursive legacies of these generations and how they interacted across the ocean. I will look at the role of jazz music and the socio-political conditions that informed their writing. Most importantly, I will employ Du Bois' concept of 'double-consciousness' (1903) as an explanatory weapon for the worlds of these writers.

Chapter Three extends these connections and explores a more psychoanalytic and political form of connection: the Black Power/Black Consciousness connection. In this chapter, I employ Frantz Fanon's concept of 'psycho-existential complex' to describe the predicament and the ideals of both these movements. I will also show how, in a way, Black Consciousness continues the effort started by the prior generation.

Chapter Four tries to solve the dilemma that has been often associated with the Sophiatown and the Soweto groups: the escapist/extremist dilemma. As an alternative and transnational perspective this study moves beyond the constraints of a nation and use the transatlantic connections as common denominator. It uses it as a common denominator, I will argue, because of its historical depth and the multiplicity of connections that I explore in Chapter One.

Chapter One

The American-South African Connections: A Trans-historical Background

This study seeks to show how the American influence, especially Black, on South African literary and cultural production helped develop its nascent cultural and political consciousness. In doing this, the project seeks to move beyond a narrow nationalist perspective towards one that is transnational and intercultural. The central question that I ask is: Did the American presence help shape and strengthen a continuity of experience in South African cultural and literary movements?

The study draws on two South African cultural, historical and literary periods to illustrate this point of view: the Sophiatown renaissance and the Soweto generation. It shows how these generations were linked together, drawing from the impetus they got from the transatlantic. It will also give a different emphasis and new answers to some of the continuous fascinations that have recurred over the years.

This Chapter explores the multiplicity of connections that prevailed between the United States and South Africa prior to the period under discussion to show, briefly, the historical depth of the links. I seek to achieve a basis and a springboard from which I argue that the ever-presence of these links has helped shape, fortify and strengthen the direction of literary and cultural production in South Africa. One of its main objectives is to present this argument in a form of a continuum. Drawing this continuum, one would start from the earlier transatlantic connections and move towards the latest links to demonstrate this historical depth.

The first section of this chapter analyses Du Bois's (1903) and Paul Gilroy's (1993) concepts, as one regards them as the leading literary figures in the field of transatlantic connections. Separated by eight decades, these concepts showed that black people have been yoked together by the violence of the common foe. Exploring their concepts does not only show the ever-presence of the links, but also suggests the limits of a nationalist project based on a narrow view of regional identity. The arrival of the Jubilee Singers, the AME church and the idea of industrial education, for example are the highlights of some of these earlier links. The music of the Jubilee Singers, pioneered by Orpheus McAdoo, who was himself a former slave, adopted Du Bois's (1903) images of the 'veil', 'minstrelsy'

figures and 'sorrow songs' and performed them in their tour to South Africa.

The second section will explore the connections, briefly starting with the idea of the 'people', 'places', the church and industrial education. The last section will focus on music as a form of connection and 'cultural exchange' (Hughes in Kresh and Klein, n.d.). It explores, mainly the influence of jazz, ragtime and the minstrelsy figures.

History and Criticism

W.E.B. Du Bois, an Afro-American academic and critic at the start of the nineteenth century wrote what later became a point of reference for Afro-American and African authors, The Souls of the Black Folk (1903). The main concepts and issues that he advocated were the concepts of 'double-consciousness' and the idea of the 'veil', the colour problem and sorrow songs. The idea of double-consciousness which he defined in terms of what he called 'spiritual strivings' became popular later with other authors taking it further. How does then the concept fit into the whole Black Atlantic debate? Gilroy himself does give an answer in the opening sentence of the Chapter 'The Black Atlantic as Counter-Culture of Modernity', wherein he says: 'striving to be both European and black requires some specific forms of double-consciousness' (Gilroy, 1993: 1). He also defines the 'Black Atlantic' as:

the stereophonic, bilingual, or bifocal cultural forms originated by, but no longer the exclusive property of, blacks dispersed within the structures of feeling, producing, communicating, and remembering, that I have heuristically called the Black Atlantic world. (Gilroy, 1996: 3)

In addition to Du Bois' notion of two-ness, Gilroy saw one of the biggest challenges for blacks as the establishment of the links and continuities with their past experiences. These links, he contended, would feed into the trans-Atlantic debate, that is, Afro-Americans would not only establish links with their past (in America) but also with their 'motherland', Africa, as he spells them out here:

The challenge for black Americans at the beginning of the new century was therefore to grasp the continuities that linked their present predicament with the special horrors of their past and to connect their contemporary sufferings with the racial subordination inflicted on other peoples of color by a common foe. (Gilroy, 1993: 127)

What one gathers from this excerpt is that these links began as pan-American connections. Afro-

Americans were confronted by the aspiration to their 'motherland' and a great deal of conflict with their past and cultural heritage. Shula Marks illustrates this viewpoint when writing of the Natal based contingent: 'Nowhere was the trans-Atlantic connection more strongly felt than in Natal, where American missionaries had been at work since the 1830's' (Marks,1986:4)

The biggest challenge facing any diasporic author and critic is how that critic reconciles the idea of the Black Atlantic with the different forms of connection that manifested themselves at the start of the new century in South Africa. There was, firstly, the 'partnership' between' Booker T. Washington and John Dube; secondly the religious influences, that is, the influence of the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) and the arrival of the Pentecostal ideas in South Africa. There is one possible way of explaining those dynamics: the predicament of the black folks was often yoked together by the violence of the common foe. Again Gilroy traces these links to the oceans, wherein he says:

The involvement of Marcus Garvey, George Padmore, Claude McKay, and Langston Hughes with ships and sailors lends additional support to Linebaugh's prescient suggestion that "the ship remained perhaps the most important conduit of Pan-African communication before the appearance of the long-playing record". (Gilroy,1993:13)

What one saw later in the writing of the 1950's with the preponderance of the idea of the 'mask' was a continuation of this experience and influence. Bloke Modisane's autobiography addresses his sense of 'two-ness' and 'identity loss' through this image. Therefore this Chapter shows how these earlier links heralded later contacts between black people across the ocean.

Paul Gilroy (1993:29) agrees that employing a narrow nationalist perspective in describing the predicament of black people is inadequate and assumes a certain kind of 'insiderism'. Also echoing this point of view is Ulf Hannerz, who argues that the presence of Afro-American culture helped shape a cosmopolitan culture in black urban South Africa. He says:

While a celebration of American culture could perhaps more generally affirm cosmopolitanism and a sense of freedom, the special connection to black American culture could offer particular cultural resources for the adversary with white South Africans. Obviously this special connection has taken many forms in the history of black South African society, from popular music to church life; and of course, Nakasa suggests that those bookish townspeople were discussing not only (James) Joyce but Langston Hughes as well. (Hannerz,1996:169-170)

Conduit of Communication? The People, the Church and Industrial Education

Hannerz's argument shows that the presence of these multiple connections gave cultural resources to black South Africans in order to forget their woes and the tyranny of place. They also laid a foundation for correspondences and contacts between black South Africans and black Americans. Hence, the idea of the people as another conduit of communication is one of those forms of connection.

Although they overlapped, Dube and Booker T. Washington's ties had close parallels and they were also contemporaries across the sea. This link was strongly a one way traffic in that Dube got much of his momentum from Washington. Dube was born in Natal in 1871 and grew up under missionary education and ethics and what they later called '*kholwa*' doctrines. His father was a reverend at the time when the Zulu chieftancy was under the rule of Dinuzulu ka Cetshwayo. He then went on to attend Amanzimtoti Institute (now Adams College), which was one of the few missionary schools in South Africa for blacks to attend. In 1887, he went to the United States of America in the company of a man called W.C. Wilcox. During the period between 1887 and 1899 he lived in the United States where he attended Tuskegee Institute which was founded after one of Washington's 'self-help campaigns'. In 1899 Dube returned from America to raise funds in order to establish an industrial school with funds from that campaign. In 1901 following the influence of the Tuskegee Institute, he founded his industrial school at Inanda, a few kilometres north of Durban. He called the school Ohlange Institute.

One of the links that one cannot gloss over is the role of the AME Church in the black Atlantic scene. Capturing and analysing the role of missionaries, hence the AME church, Veit Erlmann argues that 'time and again students of the black American experience in South Africa have stressed the role of black American missionaries in shaping nascent African political consciousness' (Erlmann, 1996:48). One of the notable moments about the church was its arrival in South Africa which was paralleled by the return of Dube from America in 1892. The Church did not only bring the idea of black self-improvement which was a Washingtonian philosophy, it also helped build the culture of interaction

(between blacks) across the globe, as Campbell rightfully acknowledges:

In the long run, the church did not live up to the inflated expectations that greeted its arrival, but it did open a lasting institutional channel between black America and South Africa, serving as a conduit through which flowed people, performance styles, political movements, and, inevitably, pedagogical ideas. (Campbell in Greenstein, 1998:111)

The 'partnership' between Washington and Dube flowed through the AME as a conduit of communication. The need for self-improvement amongst blacks both in the United States and South Africa, as influenced by Washington, became a central concern. Washington's philosophy was not only admired by black South Africans, but also by his fellow Afro-Americans, a kind of pan-Americanism, perhaps. Coming back to the Washingtonian 'fanaticism', Dube could be seen as a Washington fanatic in more ways than one, firstly because he proclaimed himself between 1887 and 1892 as 'the Booker T. Washington of South Africa and the future leader of the (Natal) Native Congress'¹, secondly, he regarded Washington as his 'guiding star' and 'patron saint'². Almost all these influential moments owe a great deal of debt to Washington's racial self-reliance philosophy. Moreover, there are close stylistic, religious and ideological parallels to the Washington-Dube 'partnership', as Coplan confirms:

Concurrently, the influence of the African Methodist Episcopal Church (U.S.A.) and "Ethiopianist" movement, the American Board mission schools, gramophone recordings and growing African literacy in English made available a symbolic system seemingly ready-made to express, define and even direct the development of an urban African social order, and a system which could somehow accommodate and mediate the conflicting values of social class differentiation and African nationalism. This system was based on the cultural patterns and aspirations of twentieth century Black America. (Coplan in Bozzoli, 1979:189)

This influence was part of the growing links between South Africa and the United States. It also reminds one of the arrival of the Virginia Jubilee Singers in a tour pioneered by Orpheus McAdoo. According to Veit Erlmann, this tour 'heralded an era of widening transatlantic contacts between white, but especially black, Americans and South Africans' (Erlmann, 1996:23). These contacts helped found, shape and strengthen cultural and political consciousness in South African circles. As a result of

¹ Cell in Greenstein (1998:110) and Shula Marks (1986:45) illustrate this point in their articles, respectively.

² Again Cell in Greenstein (1993:126) demonstrates this fanaticism.

this tour, black South Africans received a rare opportunity to pursue their careers abroad. Hence these links heralded the links between Booker T. Washington, W.E.B Du Bois -who was a strong critic of the latter-, members of the Harlem renaissance and black South Africans such as Pixley kaIsaka Seme, John Langalibalele Dube, Sol Plaatje and others.

Besides the ties between Dube and Washington, there were also another web of intersections that emerged. The influence of the Pentecostal and Zionist philosophies, for examples, strengthened these links. The history of Zionism in South Africa is a rich and evocative one in that it involves many contacts, influences and interactions. Johannes Buchler, a Swiss born priest could be regarded as the major transmitter of the idea of 'Zionism' in South Africa. The whole of Zionism was regarded as a 'theocracy' by Buchler amongst others since it propounded the idea of healing by one priest. This movement began in Zion City in America in the late 1890's; with John Alex Dowie as its founder. The question that is relevant for this Chapter is: how did it touch the South African soil? Bengt Sundkler in his case study of both Buchler and Dowie has the details of the correspondence between these two religious figures. Talking about Buchler, he says:

In 1898 he began to correspond with Dr. Dowie and was soon prepared to start divine healing at a home for Europeans at Jeppestown in Johannesburg. Buchler's influence in South Africa grew. He had a large circle of correspondents and he travelled widely in order to baptise and to pray for the sick. (Sundkler,1976:29)

Buchler's influence continued until the focus shifted and they began to baptise even Africans around Johannesburg and Natal. Between 1902 and 1908, Buchler corresponded with P.L. Le Roux who was regarded as the father of African Zionism and Pentecostal Churches. By this time there was a shift of emphasis from Zionism to Pentecostalism. The slight shift did, however, bring differences between people and the two movements. Yet one commonality between them was their emphasis on theocracy and divine healing. Also Sundkler documented this continuity in his case study of P.L. Le Roux, wherein he concluded:

So now Pentecost hit South Africa. The Pentecostal team of three first preached in a Native Chapel at Doornfontain, Johannesburg, but soon took over the Zion Tabernacle. Here is another indication of that continuity between Zion and Pentecost which we have already noted. Some of the liveliest healing services ever held in Southern Africa were now to follow. (Sundkler,1976:52)

Yet another link between Washington and Pixley Seme emerged in the wake of all these connections. Following Washington's emphasis on racial self-help and self-reliance, Seme wrote him a letter asking for his help in establishing South African based campaigns. His answer was always cool and polite as Campbell points out in the following excerpt:

His replies, unfailingly polite, steered clear of political questions, emphasizing instead 'self-help', the 'dignity' and civilizing influence of labour, and the importance of maintaining strict loyalty to European authorities. Washington's response to Pixley Seme, a young South African who later helped found the South African Native National Congress was representative. (Campbell in Greenstein, 1998:103) .

The links between Seme and Washington were in any event short-lived, though, since Washington died fairly soon after their initial contact (1915). Following the Washingtonian campaigns, both Dube and Seme were amongst the people who, in 1909, were asked to join hands in fighting the Union government that was being planned by the South African regime at the time. They were also involved in struggles that tried to oppose the Land Act of 1913, which was a form of segregation and also exacerbated the colour problem in South Africa. Coming back to the Washingtonian-Seme 'partnership', one could note that in 1912, three years before the death of Washington, Seme was a founding member of the South African Native National Congress (SANNC later to be called African National Congress-ANC). This pro-activity grew out of his involvement with the black improvement campaigns. As a result the founding of the SANNC marked a new direction in black humanity and ideological construction. Both Dube and Seme continued their involvement with the SANNC until later in 1917 when Dube was ousted from the national structures of the organization.

'Cultural Exchange'³: The Influence of Jazz, Ragtime and the Sorrow Songs.

Ragtime and jazz were the prominent performance styles amongst the Afro-American theatrical sector. They were also regarded as the first conduit of musical communication across the Atlantic. They represented what was popularly known in South Africa as the 'way out of bitterness' (Nakasa in Patel, 1975:174,183).

³ For a detailed point of view on culture as a 'two way traffic', listen to Langston Hughes reading his poem 'Cultural Exchange' (n.d.)

The coming of jazz suggested that Afro-Americans did not use ideologies as the only possible solution to the colour problem and the identity crisis, but also sought cultural expression as a way out of the symbolic system. Following the nationalist and ideological influence other forms of connection emerged. The jazz influence was to be the next form of possible influence and conduit of communication between the US and South Africa. The 1920's were the decade of jazz 'madness' and the decline of ragtime in America, but the period of both blues and ragtime in South Africa. As a result of this continuum, both Afro-Americans and Black South Africans saw jazz as both a cultural and emotional 'weapon' as Lemke puts it: '...the affinity between African music and American jazz manifests itself not in formal parallels but in their social function. Jazz and the blues were a means for expressing emotions; they served as 'weapons'(Lemke,1998:61)

Langston Hughes was another prominent figure who put his name on the Black Atlantic frontier. He also inspired African intellectuals through such different media as correspondence and co-editing. He was also one of the contemporary sojourners of the Harlem Renaissance and later the Sophiatown Renaissance⁴. Born in 1902, Langston Hughes became a source of inspiration for young African writers as early as the age of 21. He paid his first visit to Harlem in 1925, Harlem a 'Black Bohemia' that had just emerged after a long struggle for a black suburbia in New York.

Hughes first touched the South African soil at the age of 21, 'an extremely rare event for African Americans of that era, who did not, generally speaking, look to Africa for cultural inspiration'.(Moore, 1996:50). These links developed even further, later, when Hughes 'received, visited, or corresponded' (Moore,1996:51-52) with young African writers such as Es'kia Mphahlele, Bloke Modisane and Peter Abrahams, amongst others. This correspondence made the greatest dream a reality; the coming together of the children of diaspora who had been drifted apart for almost three hundred years.

⁴ Hughes joined the Sophiatown group through his involvement with Drum magazine as both a journalist and a short story writer. He also judged some of the annual short story competitions which started in 1953 with Can Themba, one of the writers I will focus on in this study, winning the first contest through his story 'Mob Passion'.

Conclusion

What I hope to have shown in this brief overview is the multiplicity of the forms of transatlantic connections between the late nineteenth century and the early 20th century. Hence if one were to draw these parallels in the form of a time line, one would start with the missionaries who arrived in South Africa in the 1830's. The second step would be the Washington-Dube 'partnership' which had a short but effective spell (from 1887 to 1910). Thirdly, the early 1910's saw the Washington-Seme 'partnership' which had a shorter spell since Washington died in 1915. Both these partnerships were based on one principle: 'self-help'. Fourthly, Garvey's movement aspired back to the 'motherland'. It did so in the form of the Back-to-Africa slogan, which conscientised Afro-Americans to aspire back to their motherland, Africa, that is. The late 1920's and the early 1930's saw the cross-Atlantic connection between the Harlem Renaissance writers and the black South African authors and critics, the major transmitter was the idea of 'newness' as opposed to 'oldness'. The next form of connection, although distant in time, was the Harlem-Sophiatown Renaissance link. The last form of connection came in the wake of the recognition by blacks of their humanity; the Black Power/Black Consciousness connection.

Chapter Two

“Double Consciousness” and the Harlem-Sophiatown Renaissance Links.

In Chapter One, I showed the multiplicity of connections between black South Africans and black Americans. I used Du Bois's concept of 'double-consciousness' and Gilroy's 'Black Atlantic' as a basis for showing the predicament of black people across the Atlantic. Both these concepts help us understand the different conduits of communication and the historical depth of these connections. I also showed some of these links, starting with the idea of the people, the church and industrial education as part of the earlier web of intersections. This Chapter explores the connections between the Harlem Renaissance and the Sophiatown Renaissance. I will argue that black Harlemites and Black Sophiatowners were always yoked together by the socio-economic conditions and the assaults on their humanity. The major form of influence, I will argue was the transmigration of jazz. Moreover, Nat Nakasa was one of the figures who showed the presence of Harlem in Sophiatown. The same can be said of Langston Hughes who was also through his influence 'part' of the *Drum* school. His presence also showed the presence of Harlem in Sophiatown and vice versa. The first Section of this chapter explores the Harlem Renaissance and its cultural production. It begins with a brief socio-historical background as a basis for the discussion of how Harlem writers responded and reflected on the social predicament of the black Americans, through their writing. The second Section explores the Sophiatown Renaissance. It also begins with a brief outline of the socio-historical context which informed their writing. In doing this it seeks to ask: How did Sophiatown writers represent the culture of the 1950's through their search for a voice?

I will choose a number of leading contemporaries from both generations. The leading figures in the Harlem renaissance were Claude McKay (the self-styled 'rebel sojourner') and Langston Hughes (whom I would term the discursive sojourner). I will also use Du Bois's theory of double consciousness as an explanatory tool for the Negro problem. However, I am aware of the fact that Du Bois's theory comes before the Harlem Renaissance era. Nevertheless it remained a great impetus and influence for young black intellectuals, both in the United States and South Africa. From the Sophiatown Renaissance, I will focus on Can Themba, a self-proclaimed 'might-have-been poet

laureate,'⁵ and Nat Nakasa.

Black Harlem: The Struggle Began.

The struggle for Black Harlem dates back to 1905, when Black Americans gradually moved to white Harlem. The early 1900's marked the influx and movement of black people from 'their places' to a section of New York which was owned by white people. White landlords saw the influx of black population to Harlem as a 'Godsend' - that is, they accepted them with empty apartments and open arms. However, the turn of things came towards the end of the decade, when a huge resistance to the influx emerged from white Harlemites. By then, black people had bought over ten percent of those houses. White Harlemites saw this migration as an invasion, an invasion

of both their economic and their social rights. They felt that Negroes as neighbors not only lowered the values of their property, but also lowered their social status.Their conduct could be compared to that of a community in the Middle Ages fleeing before a epidemic of the black plague. (Anderson, 1982: 53)

By 1914, the battle for Harlem was over; blacks had already occupied and bought property in Harlem. Yet the history of Harlem could not only be seen from the point of property ownership. The other important angle was the rise and fall of Garveyism. Harlem was the most militant community in the black world. Black nationalists led by Marcus Garvey insisted on racial separatism, black pride, sovereignty and self-reliance. Black socialist radicals led by Philip Randolph, Chandler Owen and other black intellectuals disputed the old leadership and urged the masses to join the struggles and pursue the objectives of the trade union movement. Yet the socialist radicals could not gain much support from the masses because the latter had lost trust in any black political movement.

The rejection of black political movements led to the exposition of the 'New Negro' concept. They insisted on a just, progressive and democratic form of American pluralism and a progressive black society with economic empowerment. Randolph's *Messenger* captured the idea of a 'New Negro' in a reply to the question: 'What really is the New Negro?':

⁵ In his obituary to Themba, Lewis Nkosi said: 'This (banning of his work) must have been a considerable blow to a writer who considered himself the 'poet laureate' of the urban township of South Africa or its new vital, literate proletariat'(Nkosi in Patel, 1972: ix-x).

In politics the New Negro, unlike the old Negro, cannot be lulled into a false sense of security with political spoils and patronage. A job is not the price of his vote. He will not continue to accept political promissory notes from a political debtor, who has already had the power, but who had refused to satisfy his political equality.... (in Anderson, 1982:187)

The politics of opposition and 'newness' was not the only factor that determined the lives of Black Harlemites. They invented traditions and cultures that would help them forget their woes. The coming of the jazz era in 1918 marked the turning of the corner for Harlem cultural styles. It also marked an end to ragtime, which was regarded by black Harlemites as a Negro syncopation characterized by different cultural styles.

Always linked with jazz was its irreverence, illegality and lawlessness. Blacks met in public areas to listen and dance to the hottest and the latest notes of jazz and discoursed on various subjects, whilst enjoying their drinking sessions. Jervis Anderson captures this modern sophistication and irreverence, when he argues:

At all events, the jazz age would be far more irreverent- and in matters like drinking downright illegal. Making use of some of the assertions that had characterized the ragtime era, and reflecting some of the psychological aftermaths of the war, jazz age ventured into improvisation and spontaneity - pursuing the unwritten variation in melody, decorating the written statement, capturing new styles on the wing and expressing what was irrepressibly genial in the spirit of the twenties. (Anderson, 1982:130)

Reading his poem 'Cultural Exchange', Hughes said that it captured 'something of the force, determination, humour and the nuance of jazz music'. He also talked about 'the quarters of the Negro/where the wind won't wait for midnight for fun to blow doors down'. Concluding his reading, he described culture as a 'two way traffic'.

The Harlem Renaissance: A Black Literary Generation

The Harlem Renaissance dates back to the early 1920's. The struggle for Harlem took another turn when a group of artists, poets and writers advocated a cultural mouthpiece for their community. The emergence of the Harlem Renaissance provided a platform for young black intellectuals to develop their artistic and creative prowess.

Hughes' poetry captures something of the 'laughter' and the resistance that jazz music possesses. The following poem captures the force and determination to live, despite the suffering and pain inflicted on you:

Because my mouth
Is wide with laughter,
And my throat
Is deep with song,
You do not think
I suffer after
I have held my pain
so long?

Because my mouth
Is wide with laughter,
You do not fear
My inner cry?
Because my feet
Are gay with dancing
You do not know
I die?

(Hughes in Clarke, 1964:78)

The Harlem Renaissance writers did not only expose the cultural production at the time, but also expressed some sense of belonging through their writing. Reflecting on his early days in Harlem, Hughes expressed his nostalgic sense of belonging. He said: 'I had come to New York to enter Columbia College as a freshman, but really what I had come to New York for was to see Harlem. I found it hard a week or so later to tear myself away from Harlem when it came time to move up the hill to the dormitory at Columbia'. (Hughes in Clarke, 1964: 76)

In his attempt to define of the Harlem experience, Hughes expressed the culture of the 1920's in the following manner:

When I came back to New York in 1925 the Negro renaissance was in full swing. Art took heart from Harlem creativity. Jazz filled the night air- but not everyone- and people came from all around after dark to look upon our city within a city, Black Harlem. (Hughes in Clarke, 1964: 77)

The central phrase in relation to all these cultural festivals in Harlem is Nixon's notion of 'the full sense of belonging' (Nixon,1994:40). This excerpt shows Hughes' recognition of art and creativity as a symbol of hope in an environment which was reluctant to give black people a space and a voice. Moreover, Harlem had become a centre where discourses on the politics of race and power were given a full hearing. Black political leaders at the time could not help but give their full support for the Renaissance.

Apart from Hughes' tellingly creative prowess, Claude McKay also contributed to the Harlem Renaissance. Although similar to some extent, McKay differed with Hughes in many ways. He differed in the sense that he was more rebellious than Hughes. His poetry illustrated some aspects of militant stance. 'If We must Die' illustrates this viewpoint with its politically pungent tone:

O kinsmen! We must meet the common foe!
Though far outnumbered let us show us brave,
And for their thousand blows deal one deathblow!
What though before us lies the open grave?
Like men we'll face the murderous cowardly pack,
Pressed to the wall, dying, but fighting back! (McKay in Clarke,1964:256)

This excerpt shows some elements of rebellion, agitation and determination to fight back. It also shows his aspiration to change the perception of the Negro. He wants Americans to change their unconscious attitude towards their colour problem. He continues his awareness campaign when he defines 'colour-consciousness':

Color-consciousness was the fundamental part of restlessness. And it was something with which my fellow-expatriates could sympathize but which they could not altogether understand. For they were not black like me. Not being black and unable to see deep into the profundity of blackness, some even thought that I might have preferred to be white like them. They couldn't imagine that *I had no desire merely to exchange my black problem for their white problem*. For all their knowledge and sophistication, they couldn't understand the instinctive and animal and purely physical pride of a black person resolute in being himself and yet living a simple civilized life like themselves, because their education in their white world had trained them to see a person of color either as an inferior or as an exotic. (McKay,1937:245 emphasis added)

Du Bois's concept of 'double-consciousness' presented a theoretical grounding for the Harlem Renaissance. His definition of the concept is a useful one because it helps us understand the predicament and experience of black people. He defined it as:

A peculiar sensation, [this] sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of measuring one's soul by tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness⁶, -an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being two asunder. (Du Bois, 1990:364-365)

The Harlem Renaissance also epitomized a vibrant and irreverent culture: a culture of jazz, speakeasies, landlords, gangsters. This culture came in the wake of economic revolt in Harlem. Harlemites were facing problems ranging from more basic human needs such as housing to the 'influx control', joblessness and education. Through the Renaissance's articulation of laughter and determination to survive against all odds, people forgot their inner cries. Claude McKay was even closer to the truth when he said that experiencing bitterness is only a direct result of failure, but one can develop out of it. He said that it matters not so much that one has had an experience of bitterness, but rather how one has developed out of it.

Hughes was also aware of the strength that one can gain from suffering. He used the appropriation of music and dancing as the elements of this strength. In the poem, 'Juke Box Love Song', Hughes expressed the symbol of hope that Harlem culture represents. The image of the moon shining over the Harlem roof-tops suggests some hope for light in dark Harlem. Thus he writes:

Take Harlem's heartbeat,
Make a drumbeat,
Put it on a record, let it whirl,
And while we listen to it play,
Dance with you till day.
Dance with you, my sweet brown Harlem girl. (Hughes in Clarke, 1964:246)

This passage demonstrates the culture of improvisation and of optimism in difficult times. It shows how Harlemites could devise life out of darkness, dance out of Harlem's laughter, 'drumbeat' which has been created out of their inner cry, 'heartbeat'. He continues his cultural expression in the poem, 'Harlem Night Song'. The motif of the poem is a female figure as in 'Juke Box Love Song'. It also

6

By contrast, Malcolm X denied one of these 'souls' later in a speech he delivered in Ghana. He argued that he was not an American but a product of the system called Americanism.

expresses the sense of being at home in Harlem, the feeling of laughter alongside bitterness and the spiritual striving. It reads:

Come,
Let us roam the night together
Singing.

Across
The Harlem roof-tops.
Moon is shining.
Night sky is blue
Stars are great drops
Of golden dew.

(Hughes in Clarke, 1964:250)

For Hughes, as is evident from the poem, Harlem is also a symbol of hope for its dwellers. There is a spark of life, symbolized by 'blue sky, shining moon and golden dew' in a hostile American world. There is also a sense of happiness symbolized by a 'shining night'.

Besides his rather rebellious tone, Claude McKay also epitomised the vibrant and cacophonous culture of Harlem. In 'The Harlem Dancer', he shows how Harlemites gathered to dance to music and ease off their woes:

Applauding youths laughed with young prostitutes
And watched her perfect, half-clothed body sway;
Her voice was like the sound of blended flutes
Blown by black players upon a picnic day.
She sang and danced on grace fully and calm,
The light gauze hanging loose about her form;
To me she seemed a proudly-swaying palm
Grown lovelier for passing through a storm.
Upon her swarthy neck black shiny curls
Luxuriant fell; and tossing coins in praise,
The wine-flashed, bold-eyed boys, even the girls,
But looking at her falsely-smiling face,
I knew her self was not in that strange place.
(McKay in Clarke, 1964:255)

This poem shows how 'dancers, boys, girls and prostitutes' easily met and listened to the latest notes of jazz and watched dancers. The phrase 'grown lovelier for passing through a storm' signifies how Harlemites survived against the greatest odds.

Langston Hughes also marked in his poems the unique cosmopolitanism and hybridity that Harlem possessed. Thus he described Harlem as:

Melting pot Harlem -Harlem of honey and chocolate, caramel and rum and vinegar and lemon and lime and gall. Dusky dreams Harlem rumbling into a nightmare tunnel where the subway from the Bronx keeps right on downtown, where the money from the nightclubs goes right on back downtown, where the jazz is drained to Broadway. (Hughes in Clarke, 1964:79)

Another aspect of Du Bois's thought is important to an understanding of the Harlem Renaissance. His definition of the veil defines not only the colour consciousness of Black Americans, but also the psychological underpinnings hidden behind the mask. Du Bois's definition of the veil suggests a 'genealogical' phobia that has been attached to the Negro humanity. Moreover, his definition of the Negro is useful because it shows the elements of double nationalisms:

The Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, gifted with second sight in this American world, - a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. (Du Bois, 1990:364)

Responding to Du Bois's definition, Houston Baker argued that the veil is not a physical mask, but a signifier: 'It signifies a barrier of American racial segregation that keeps Afro-Americans always behind a color line - disoriented - prey to divided aims, dire economic circumstances, haphazard educational opportunities, and frustrated intellectual ambitions'. (Baker, 1987:57)

The poetry of the 1920's also captured the idea of the veil and its psychological underpinnings. McKay's 'Harlem Shadows' expresses the unpleasant experiences of the Negro. The poem also arguably captures Du Bois's idea of 'sorrow songs, weariness and the veil': 'Let us cheer the weary traveler/Along the heavenly way':

I hear the halting footsteps of a lass
In Negro Harlem when the night lets fall
-Its Veil. I see the shapes of girls who pass
To bend and barter at desire's call

Ah, stern harsh world, that in the wretched way
Of poverty, dishonor and disgrace,
Has pushed the timid little feet of clay,
The sacred brown feet of my fallen race!

Ah, heart of me, the weary, weary feet
In Harlem wandering from street to street. (McKay in Clarke, 1964:255-256)

The symbol of the veil also manifests itself in Hughes' poem 'I, Too'. The poem echoes the metaphor of the veil and the image of the 'weary traveler in the streets of Harlem'. It does not only describe the minstrelsy figure, but also defines the psychological connotation of such experience. He says:

I, too, sing America
I am the darker brother.
They send me to eat in the kitchen
When company comes,
But I laugh,
And eat well
And grow strong

—
Besides
They'll see how beautiful I am
And be ashamed
I, too, am America. (Hughes in Clarke, 1964:251-252)

This poem could be seen in many ways as a revelatory and gradual step towards self-realization and self-assertiveness. It can also be seen as a move to escape the inferiority-complex. Hughes shows this 'double-consciousness' dilemma through the ideas of sameness, 'I too, am American' and otherness, 'the other darker brother'.

Apart from his concern with cultural production and the psychological underpinnings of Black Americans, Langston Hughes also wrote about macro-political issues. He wrote tellingly about the unpleasant experience of Black people under the horrors and terrors inflicted on them by a group of white men who called themselves the 'Klu Klux'. This group caught and tortured black people at the time. Hughes' poem, 'Klu Klux' explores these terrors and shows the tough defiance of the 'victim' who will not submit mentally to his oppressors:

They took me out
To some lonesome place.
They said, "Do you believe
In the great white race?"

—
I said, "Master,
To tell you the truth,

I'd believe in anything
If you'd just turn me loose".

They hit me in the head
And knocked me down
A then they kicked me
On the ground

A Klansman said, 'Nigger,
Look me in the face-
And tell me you believe in
The great white race"

(Hughes in Clarke, 1964:251)

Therefore the Harlem Renaissance provided a useful grounding for black artistic, creative and intellectual development. It showed how one can survive against all odds. Hence one can view the Harlem Renaissance according to what Baker calls 'the changing same of American expression' (Baker, 1987:14) and as a period of awakening. Almost four decades later, Black Power was born as a continuous assertion of the black man's existence. It also tried to diagnose and cure the 'double-consciousness' trauma. Therefore the Du Boisian theory laid a foundation for more Marxist and psychoanalytic movements.

The Sophiatown Renaissance: 'A Subtle Protest Literature'.

Cultural production was the key element of the web of contacts between the Harlem Renaissance and the Sophiatown Renaissance. Both Afro-Americans and Sophiatowners found their voice through cultural expression. More specifically, jazz became for the cosmopolitan Sophiatowners a way of establishing transatlantic contacts. In addition, the writing of a figure such as Langston Hughes had a presence within the later South African urban culture.

Yet, before one can consider exploring the Sophiatown Renaissance, one needs to give a brief socio-historical context of the period. This historical context will act as a springboard for arriving at a conclusion about the consciousness of the writer and his people as a central theme of this study. The questions that intrigue me about their world are: What room was there for their consciousness to

manoeuvre? How did they survive in such a uncanny state of living? Was their audience narrow and classist? Could one judge their largely apolitical stance as a key to our understanding of their works? Mphahlele has more to say as an answer to some of the questions:

Although we (Drum writers) were not at school in the 1950's, although we had diverse and intellectual pursuits, even as journalists, we shared this much in common: *we had found a voice*. And because urban blacks in South Africa have so much in common with urban Afro-Americans, almost to a man the writers of the fifties had more than just a dip into American culture: journalism, imaginative literature, jazz, innovative prose styles. There was in our styles a racy, concrete, nervously impressionistic idiom often incorporating the grand Shakespearean image. (Mphahlele in Daymond [et.al], 1984:78-79).

Sophiatown: 'A symbol of injustice and vindictiveness'

The story of Kofifi starts as early as the late 19th Century. In 1897, an investor named Herman Tiobansky bought 237 acres of land four and half miles west of Johannesburg. His intention was to develop an attractive white suburb on the site. He then named the suburb after his wife and the streets after his daughters; Edith, Ray and Gerty. Suddenly, the Johannesburg City Council destroyed his dream when it decided to build sewage disposal facilities in an area next to the suburb and white South Africans lost interest in buying plots near such facilities.

The wicked spell over Sof'town came a little more than half a century later, when the suburb was demolished at gunpoint. The real story of Sophiatown started in 1954, when the Nationalists Government, which had taken over the governance of South Africa in 1948, passed the Native Resettlement and the Group Areas Acts. These Acts created and promoted ethnic and racial segregation, which led to forced relocation of blacks according to their ethnicity and groupings. As early as 1952, Sophiatown had been identified as 'the black spot' and was scheduled for removals. Those removal schemes failed as people gave wrong addresses and names. In 1954, the Government put a Resettlement Board in place to pursue its move. The Board then sent short notices from household to household notifying them in terms of the Resettlement Act of 1954, to vacate the premises in which they resided. There was huge resistance from residents; gangsters, political activists, landlords, shebeen queens and other parties were all involved. The greatest fear was the possible loss of freehold rights for landlords, the vibrancy of township life and the intellectual 'set' that had developed. Slogans were displayed around the community expressing the wider resistance

from residents. Adding to that resistance was the ANC's move to form an M-plan which would mobilize people to resist the removals. The M-plan proved to fail later when the Government eventually insisted on its move.

The fifties was a decade of strong political opposition, where being black was 'illegal' (Nat Nakasa). It was a decade full of shadows that were a grimace that crows you. All these socio-political conditions coincided with the growing in strength of the Sophiatown Renaissance. Yet most post-Sharpeville critics see the Sophiatown Renaissance as a failure on grounds of its political naivete, its petit-bourgeoisie aspirations, its narrowness and its ineffectual liberalism.

Drum Magazine: A search for Audience and Cultural Expression

In 1951, [*African*] *Drum* emerged as an alternative press. It started in Cape Town with its inventor, Bob Crisp. When it moved to Johannesburg in 1952, Crisp resigned stating that Jim Bailey, the proprietor, had 'Johannesburged' the magazine. Bailey was a younger son of Abe Bailey, a millionaire and race horse owner. Anthony Sampson who was amongst a series of editors and had been with Jim Bailey in London, succeeded Bob Crisp. The magazine for 'non-Europeans' as it was known, covered a wide range of issues. It featured columns on journalistic reportage, beauty queens, boxing news, advertisements, pin-up girls, the Sis'Dolly column and for a number of years, a short story competition.

The Neurosis in the Minds of the Writers: Two Sophiatown Renaissance 'sojourners': Nat Nakasa and Can Themba.

The psychological trauma caused and intensified by the Government laws and institutions had enormous bearing on the mind sets of the Sophiatown writers. However, I have chosen Nat Nakasa and Can Themba as the representative figures for my study. These two figures have been at times harshly criticized for admiring white liberals, for being apolitical and for being escapist and 'throwing cheap pot-boilers and annoyingly shiftless' (Nkosi, 1983)

Before one shows how the Government and its legalities caused the bitterness these writers faced, I explore the memory that other writers had of Sophiatown so as to give a sense of their world. Don

Mattera was amongst those writers who expressed their depression and a sense of loss for Sophiatown. A street urchin, a gangster and a writer, Don Mattera was amongst those writers who did not go to exile under the banning orders. He remembers:

Flashes of that day when the first removals started in Sophiatown crossed my mind. Sophiatown, the trouble-spot and 'nest of communist agitators', where the oppressed didn't take things lying down and where cheeky 'kaffirs', 'Boesmans' and 'Coolies' retaliated against police brutality and aggression. It was one township that had offered resistance to the apartheid system and lie that had the darker, and therefore lesser creatures of God to salvation and civilization. (Mattera, 1987:18)

This resistance that Don Mattera describes in this passage had 'gone with the twilight'. The banning orders on the Sophiatown writers destroyed one of the greatest dreams that black South African literature had ever had. Writers such as Es'kia Mphahlele, Can Themba and Nat Nakasa had opted for bitter exile. Also reflecting on the 'flashes of that day', Mphahlele said:

The tyranny of place, the tyranny of time.... grassroots. The muck, the smell, the fortitude, despair, endurance. Always the sounds begin again. Experience and the place that contains..... The politics of education, the campaigning, the voices of protest. As reporter and fiction editor on *Drum* magazine in the mid-Fifties, I had found myself striving towards a sense of balance- indeed compromise- between writing as self-expression and writing as objective reporting of the social scene. (1983:20)

The ambivalences and contradictions that Mphahlele faced as evident from the extract tormented most of the Sophiatown writers. They had what Du Bois called 'spiritual strivings'. Their souls were searching for one-ness, for a 'sense of balance' and self-expression. Mphahlele's idea of 'striving towards a sense of balance' gives us a sense of their world, 'where the worst and the best of times shared the same bed'. *Drum* as a cultural voice and alternative press for the Sophiatown writers also published a report on the last demolishing of Sophiatown in 1959. It reads:

Sophiatown, the city that was within a city, the Gay Paris of Johannesburg, the notorious gang den, the shebeeniest of all, Sophiatown is now breathing for the last time. (*Drum* no.105, 1959:44)

Bloke Modisane who was also a 'temporary sojourner' in the Sophiatown Renaissance, expressed a feeling of bitterness and nostalgia for the demolition of Sophiatown. He also expressed a loss of belonging, as he says:

I was a free man, but the salt of the bitterness was still in my mouth.... Sophiatown belonged to me; when we were not shaking hands or chasing the same girl or sharing a bottle of brandy, we were sticking knives into each other's backs.... Whatever else Sophiatown was, it was home; we made the desert bloom ; made alterations, converted half-verandas into kitchens, decorated the houses and filled them with music. (Modisane,1986:5,15,16)

The symbol of hope and belonging was shattered at gunpoint and still flashed in Modisane's memory. This brief testimonial from the Sophiatown Renaissance writers paves the way for a more socio-historical and contextualized examination of the works of Can Themba and Nat Nakasa.

Can Themba: The 'Poet Laureate' of the Sophiatown Renaissance.

Despite his suffering from 'self-corrosive cynicism' - a psychological poisoning which proved to be more venomous than mere chemical poisoning, Can Themba epitomised the vibrancy and the violence of black urban South Africa. He wrote about the American lingo, the South African version of jazz, Afro-American sophistication and produced subtle protest literature in the sense that it was the document of the black man's social predicament. He epitomized the culture of lawlessness, speakeasies, shebeen queens, gangsters, *tsotsis* (the South African version of 'zoot suits'), ethnic conflicts, 'nice-time girls' and drinking. He also expressed his memory of Sophiatown. Lastly, he documented pieces of experimental writing which left a discursive legacy to black South African writing. However, one major weakness and drawback to Themba's talent was the self-acclaimed 'insouciant attitude to matters of weight' and his 'self-corrosive cynicism'(Themba in Patel,1975:236). Nevertheless, we could attribute such cynicism to 'the unreal reality of his world' (Gready:1990). Themba was torn between two worlds: the world of response to the call of his conscience and the world of objective reporting of the social scene.

Themba's reportage contained stories on terrors in the trains, ethnic conflict in township hostels and discrimination in white churches. 'The Dube Train' is a report on many incidents that he witnessed during his visits to different trains. Although the story might seem directly apolitical, one cannot isolate it from the politics of superiority and inferiority complexes. The Nationalist Government played a direct and menacing role in degrading humanity that Themba describes in this story:

[The Dube Train]... filled with sour smelling humanity, did not improve my impression of a hostile life directing its malevolence plumb at me. Despairing thoughts of every kind darted through my mind: the lateness of the trains, the showing savagery of the cowards, the grey

aspect around me. (Themba in Patel, 1972:33)

Themba also wrote a piece where he investigated the cause and effects of terror in the trains. He witnessed *tsotsis*, pick-pickers, gangsters terrorizing the commuters. It also transpired from his findings that the government had a rather caustically direct impact and bearing on those terrors. Themba was a protestor, standing between hope and despair. This is evident from the piece, as he states:

The situation has been aggravated, according to many people, *by the policy of ethnic grouping*, which led the more tribal among us to think of other tribes as foreigners, enemies. We are not allowed to learn to live together in peace. (Themba in Patel, 1972:115 emphasis added)

It is apparent from this passage that segregation policies intensified ethnic stereotyping even further. It created and aggravated xenophobia amongst the people of different ethnic groups. In this piece, Themba explicitly indicted the government policies for their intentional aggravation of the living conditions of Africans and their attempts to sabotage possible pan-ethnic unities.

The story 'Mob Passion' expresses this ironic tone, and criticism of such divisive policies. It tells the story of a sudden ethnic conflict between the Basothos and a Batabele boy. This explodes out of a love relationship across ethnic lines. People had been so colonized and indoctrinated by the ethnic stereotyping that they had become themselves trapped. He expresses this psychological entrapment and the uneasy collective unconscious in the following way:

Everyone there were white policemen, heavily armed. The situation was 'under control', but everyone knew that in the soul of almost every being in this area raved a seething madness, wild and passionate, with the causes lying deep. No cursory measures could remedy; no superficial explanation could illuminate. These jovial faces that could change into masks of bloodlust and destruction without warning, with the smallest provocation! (Themba in Patel, 1975:10)

He continues his condemnation of the government system in, 'Inside Dube Hostel'. He reports how people lived under the fear of *tsotsis*⁷, who used the ethnic conflict as a hiding place for terrorizing hostel dwellers. He pictures Dube Hostel as

⁷ A South African version of the American phrase, 'zoot suits'.

a little colony of hall-like buildings fenced in by wire netting. The different tribes are separated. The bane of the situation was that ethnic grouping kept the tribes so apart they could not get together and see through the tsotsis' ruse- even though they lived in the same hostel. (Themba in Patel,1972:117)

Themba used these stories and reportage as stepping stones for his indictment of the evils of the socio-political conditions. The train and hostel pieces were not the only way to carve his niche. He also wrote church pieces for *Drum* where he had investigated the color-bar problem in white churches.

The Immorality Act of 1950 which was amended in 1953 to include Coloureds, was also one of the government's attempts to demarcate, restrict and separate the population of the country. Again, as a cultural worker, Themba found a way to condemn what the Act tried to achieve. His story, 'Forbidden Love' is a subtle protest story in the sense that it attempts to subvert what this Act.

Equally important to any understanding of Themba's position is his avowed apolitical stance. He confessed in many instances that he had temporarily left the political arena and had chosen heavy drinking, women and sophistication. The socio-political turbulence proved to have an indirect bearing on his 'insouciant attitude to matters of weight' and his withdrawal from macro-politics. The following excerpt demonstrates the contrition of his soul:

The conflict between the opposing forces seems inevitable: the (roughly) white nationalism poised before the (not too roughly) black nationalism. The dilemma is so complete! As I brood over these things, I, with my insouciant attitude to matters of weight, I feel a sickly despair which the most potent bottle of brandy cannot wash away. What can I do? (Themba in Patel,1972:236)

Themba faced despair, contradictions and some kind of psychosis later in his career. He was haunted, tormented and affected by this despair until he realized that he had corroded himself. This sickly despair also manifested itself in his nostalgic and hodgepodge memory of Sophiatown. He states: 'Inside me, I have long stopped arguing the injustice, the vindictiveness, the strong arm authority of which prostrate Sophiatown is a conspicuous symbol'. (Themba in Patel,1972:238)

In his story, 'Crepuscle' Themba is even closer to the true reflection of his mental attitude and his critique of the white man's will, when he says:

It is a crepuscular, shadow-life in which we wander as spectres seeking meaning for ourselves. And even the local little legalities we invent are frowned upon. The whole atmosphere is charged with the white man's general disapproval, and where he does not have a law for it, he certainly has a grimace that cows you. (Themba, 1972:8)

Despite his seemingly uncaring attitude to matters of weight, Themba's journalistic pieces and short stories documented black urban life with energy and insight. The tone of jazz and its cool resistance mark one of the links into the earlier restless vibrance of Harlem and its black urban culture. David Coplan echoes this viewpoint in , In Township Tonight, when he says:

To appropriate jazz was a mark of urban sophistication and social status, even among *tsotsis* and gangsters; and by the late 1950's a genuine appropriation of the new styles had taken hold. By then, however, the Modern Jazz Club was dying along with Sophiatown. (Coplan, 1985:164)

Almost all the Sophiatown writers would agree with Coplan's conception of their lives. Can Themba would even call himself and his fellows, a 'sophisticated group of urban Africans who play jazz, live jazz and speak the township transmigrations of American slang' (Themba in Patel, 1972:229).

Themba's writing suggests that he had been drawn heavily to 'the swarming cacophonous, strutting, brawling vibrating life of the Sophiatown that was' (Themba in Patel, 1972:239). Sophiatown had been part of his successes and failures. Can Themba, as Nkosi testifies, might have been 'a poet laureate' of the Sophiatown Renaissance, but he drank himself to death. Most of his pieces show how he surrendered his life to heavy drinking which led to thrombosis. The bitterness he felt in his heart hypnotized him and dragged him to death. 'The Will to Die', 'Crepuscle', 'The Bottom of the Bottle' capture this corrosiveness.

Themba seems to have based at least some of his work on realist writers such as Dickens and Hugo both of whom, capture life at a moment of cultural and historical instability and at a moment where 'the best and the worst of times of urban life were bedfellows' (Gready, 1990:140). At one point, he expresses these social contradictions in an explicit echo of Charles Dickens' A Tale of Two Cities which pictures Paris after the 1789 Revolution. Thus he writes:

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times; it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness; it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness; it was the spring of hope,

it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us; we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way. (Themba, 1972:6)

The last stages of Themba's tormented life came later in his Sophiatown days when he wrote his biographical stories, 'Crepuscle' and 'The Will to Die'. Themba makes a confession about his destructed self when he says:

I have also heard that certain snakes can hypnotize their victim, a rat, a frog or a rabbit, not only so that it can not flee to safety in the overwhelming urge for survival, but so that it is even attracted towards its doom. I have often wondered if there is not some mesmeric power that Fate employs to engage some men deliberately, with macabre relish, to seek their destruction and plunge into it. (Themba, 1972:45)

Nathaniel Ndazana Nakasa: 'Looking for a Place under the Sun'

Nat Nakasa could well be described in terms of Du Bois's concept of double-consciousness. He strove, through his journalism and short stories, for one soul. He was living somewhere between the white and the black worlds. Unlike Themba, Nakasa felt this 'two-ness' in his quest for true identity. His world could be seen through Du Bois's line of conceptualization:

In those sombre forests of his striving his own soul rose before him, and he saw himself, - darkly as through a *veil*; and yet he saw in himself some faint revelation of his power, of his mission. He began to have a dim feeling that, to attain his place in the world, he must be himself, and not another. For the first time he sought to analyze the burden he bore upon his back, that dead-weight of social degradation partially masked behind a half-named Negro problem. (Du Bois, 1986:368)

Nakasa felt these spiritual strivings throughout his life span in the South African literary stage. This spiritual striving manifests itself almost throughout his pieces, especially the ones that stand somewhere between South Africa and New York. He saw himself and 'his people' as finding it difficult to 'decide their identity'. He uses the trans-Atlantic connection as a way of showing the common sufferings with their American brethren and emphasises the Harlem-Sophiatown connection.. Thus he writes:

A lot of Harlem's battles and preoccupations are no different from mine. The people here are still *fighting for a place in the sun, just like me....* Somewhere, somehow, all these organizations as well as many others, find a common focal point where most of their pressure converges, all in the business of *finding a place in the sun* for black America. (Nakasa in Patel, 1975:174, 183 emphasis added)

This 'soul searching' and 'spiritual striving' are the chief approaches to understanding the world of Nakasa. Nakasa did not only search for a place spiritually, but he also searched for a place in the cosmopolitan life of Johannesburg. The piece, 'Between Two Worlds' illustrates this point through the conversation between Nakasa and the Nationalist painter (see this chapter, p35).

Despite those identity crises, Nakasa had his ways of confronting and dealing with the unpleasant experiences most black people felt in South Africa. 'Trying to Avoid Bitterness' was part of his philosophy. For him, avoidance served two purposes: to question the regime and to deal with his people's predicament. He writes:

I have never been able to call whites 'baas' or 'missus'. I could do it easily if I wished to mock and despise white people, and I would know all the time that I was playing the fool. (Nakasa in Patel, 1975:163)

Despite his tendency to respect white people, Nakasa was also conscious of their callous ways of treating the black man. He was also aware of the phobia that black people felt in their response to white supremacy. Thus he came up with a solution to the predicament of the black souls:

Unpleasant things that go on in this country might be eliminated if white South Africa could be made to give even a casual thought to them....I believe this partly because I don't think white South Africans are evil people who spend their time contemplating new and more effective ways of making scars on black skin. And I believe a little action, more than words, could get white South Africa to stop and think. (Nakasa in Patel, 1975:155)

Diplomatic as he was, Nakasa tried to interrogate the place of black and white writers in South Africa, in his address on 'Writing in South Africa' at the University of Witwatersrand. The question that he asked was: Could the white writer write tellingly and feelingly about the predicament of black folks in township in a racially turbulent society? The only answer to the question is the desire to transcend and 'be damned'. He stated the reasons why the Sophiatown group aspired emulate non-South African writing rather than the local texts:

I like to think that this was because with us, virtually everything South African was always synonymous with mediocrity. This blinding prejudice on our part was the direct result of a sense of grievance, a feeling of rejection by the powerful hierarchy of the country's culture. We were barred and still are from the white theatres where important plays are put on. The South African white writers save for the exceptions, belonged to another camp, as it were, to a closed hostile world. (Patel, 1975:188-189)

Nakasa was aware of the bitter and unpleasant experiences that black Africans faced in South Africa at the time. His contribution as a writer and journalist was diplomatic, subtle, ironic and humble. His identification of the moral assault on black humanity, yet his failure to face the common enemy was typical of his Martin Luther King non-violent stance. The piece, 'Breaking Down the Old Superman Image' illustrates this point, as he writes: 'It is simply not possible to be forever overawed by people who are afraid to compete with us on the open labour market, and who seem to fear so much else besides as Africa begins to awaken'. (Nakasa in Patel, 1972:152)

Nakasa's soul was not only preoccupied with these broodings, but also with his search for identity. The question of identity and belonging haunted his spiritual broodings. He was caught between the hostile world and his ideas about 'his people'. He contested the idea of 'his people' in his writing. The pieces, 'It's Difficult to Decide My Identity', 'Mr Nakasa Goes To Harlem' and 'Between Two Worlds', create a picture of a black writer who had immense 'spiritual strivings.' Moreover, the cultural weight and presence of Harlem in his mind is clearly present. The piece, 'It's Difficult to Decide my Identity' illustrates this identity crisis:

To my mind, the importance of this discussion is that all the questions asked relate to the question of my identity. Who am I? Where do I belong in the South African scheme of things? Who are my people? Negroes in Harlem are asking themselves the same question. Some have tried to answer it by forming 'Back to Africa' movements. Others have formed organizations like the Black Muslims. (Nakasa in Patel, 1972:158)

Nakasa had to adopt a mask as a way of fighting his inner cry. Avoidance and mockery were part of his approach to the pathology he was facing. As a result of this theory of avoidance, he wrote a series of articles and journalistic pieces which expressed this condition. In the piece, 'Trying to Avoid Bitterness', he expressed this inner cry: 'If I should leave this country and decide not to come back, it will be because of a desire to avoid perishing in my own bitterness - a bitterness born of being reduced to a second class citizen' (Nakasa in Patel, 1975:163). Ironically, he could not avoid bitterness in New York City and decided to throw himself out of the skyscraper building in July 14, 1965.

The journalistic piece, 'A Native of Nowhere' shows his total surrender. He saw himself as young, reckless and 'ready to squander and gamble (his) youth away' (Nakasa in Patel, 1972:169). He was

well aware that choosing exile was a difficult choice.

Denying 'too much self-pity' was part of his inquisitive mind. He argued that 'too much self-pity' was spiteful and venomous to his soul and mind. He explained:

This is a weakness I have constantly tried to escape without, I'm afraid, complete success. It is a weakness that affects a lot of people in situations similar to mine-Negroes, for example, and the rest of the non-white world. These people tend to make a song and dance about 'how we was robbed', as if they were under an anaesthetic when they were robbed. (Nakasa in Patel, 1975:165)

Evident from Nakasa's words is the fact that he had refused to oversimplify the complexities of resistance and oppression. Yet often he does call the Nationalist Government to account for all this 'mental corrosion'. In, 'Mental Corrosion', he sees the Bantu Laws Amendment Bill as the agent of human suffering, as he states firmly:

The Government appears to be unaware of the human being beneath the black skin in its dealings with Africans. The tendency to treat Africans as labour and not as individuals, human beings with human sentiments and desires is devastating. (Nakasa in Patel, 1975:35)

In 'Must We Ride... to Disaster?', he documents the unpleasant experiences of black people in the trains. He poses one of his inquisitive statements about the state of affairs: 'What could happen if a train like 'the five-to-seven' were ever to be in an accident' (Nakasa in Patel, 1975:27)

Serote saw this bitterness as the cause of his suicidal trauma, as he testifies:

It is essential that a black writer be above hatred and bitterness; that is rather too much to ask of a human being, as the world has proved. Nat as an artist was saved from being destroyed by hatred and bitterness by his subtle humour and the black bitterness in his heart was an impetus that made him look for and gave him the will to find truth in a whole network of lies woven by whites. (Serote in Patel, 1975:xxix)

Despite his quasi-political indictment, Nakasa epitomized the black urban South African culture of the 1950's. Singing and listening to jazz, playing and watching gramophone and saxophone were part of urban sophistication. Through jazz, lawlessness, shebeens, black urbanites found the cultural capital they needed to resist a kind of annihilation. Nakasa, as an artist, contributed to this cultural expression. The piece, 'So the Shebeen Lives On...' describes shebeens as 'noble institutions, hospitable homes,

often run by solid housewives (like Modisane's mother⁸) and respectable men.' (Nakasa in Patel, 1975:15) As institutions, shebeens hosted black intellectuals, nurses, teachers, police and many other educated 'situations'⁹

Since jazz was a source of urban sophistication and a way out of misery, Nakasa could not divorce his writing from such music. He saw it as the mysterious and powerful form of music, as he proclaims:

How long will the black men on the fringes hold out against the insults and police hounding which often costs a house, a job or the freedom to live without tension. These are the questions that drag the jazz hunters into political talk, however apolitical they may wish to be. Legislation for the separation of people according to racial or color groups makes life nearly impossible on the fringes. (Nakasa in Patel, 1975:12)

These are the kinds of passages that recall Serote's words quoted above: 'A black writer should be above hatred and bitterness'. Nakasa wanted to confront the Government, but was too scared to stand insults and police hounding. He expressed this phobia in, 'Living With My Private Thoughts'.

Despite all spirited resistance to state racism, Nakasa admired the white world. He could not reject white liberals from his world. He was caught between his inter-racial aspirations and the search for his 'people'. However, apolitical as he seemed and might have seemed, 'his spirit shall not die in this country' (Zindela, 1990:29).

The Harlem-Sophiatown Connection: A Trans-Atlantic and Trans-national Analysis.

Having shown how the socio-political contexts of their worlds informed and channelled the Harlem-Sophiatown writers' works, this section identifies the commonalities and influences that took shape. One of the major influences was Hughes' involvement with the *Drum* school. His involvement gave momentum to their writing. However there are notable differences that one can identify. The major difference between these literary generations is that the Harlem Renaissance in many instances used poetry and the Sophiatown Renaissance used largely used prose and journalistic pieces as their

⁸ My own addition.

⁹ 'Situation' was a term referring to the educated elites in the wake of *Drum's* column which featured advertisements of jobs exclusively for the educated Africans.

respective cultural voices.

Most critiques have looked at the Sophiatown Renaissance as a mere literary period of awakening. However, a political and ideological analysis also stands besides those discursive realities. Analyzing the Harlem influence, Nixon agrees that culture (is) an immense surrogate force for social change.

Excluded from political engagement, the Harlem Renaissance writers created culture as a weapon for social change. Anderson captures this cultural weapon in his modern perspective of the Harlem Renaissance, when he says:

At all the events, the jazz age would be far more irreverent- and in matters like drinking down right illegal. Making use of some of the assertions that had characterized the ragtime era, and reflecting some of the psychological aftermaths of the war, the jazz age ventured into improvisation and spontaneity- pursuing the unwritten variation in melody, decorating the written statement, capturing new styles on the wing and expressing what was the irrepressibly genial in the spirit of the twenties. (Anderson, 1982:130)

The Harlem Renaissance writers such as Hughes and Locke transferred the notes of jazz into their writing. This cultural production crossed the Atlantic three decades later, to South Africa. The Sophiatown Renaissance was born out of such influence. They appropriated the irreverence and sophistication that went with jazz.

Can Themba as an 'intellectual *tsotsi*' also epitomized this cultural vibrance and irreverence. The irreverence was to some extent a result of the transmigration of American slang. These ideas manifest themselves quite clearly in Can Themba's discursive pieces, like the following excerpt:

I think the rest of African society looked upon us as an excrescence. Neither were we *tsotsis* in the classical sense of the term, though the *tsotsis* saw us as their cousins. We were not 'cats', either; just that *sophisticated group of Africans who play jazz, live jazz and speak the transmigrations of American slang*. (Themba, 1972:110 emphasis added)

The Sophiatown writers saw themselves as part of a wider African-American community. However, apolitical as he was, Themba, 'heard more and more politics: bitter, heady, virulent stuff' (Themba in Patel, 1972:232)

Despite the primary influence, jazz also served another purpose: it helped the 'wretched of the earth' to forget the bitterness of their worlds. Both Nakasa and Themba, in a different way, questioned the treatment of the African people by the Nationalists. He used some of his white 'liberal' counterparts to show up the inconsistencies of their position. One of the scenes expressed in deep irony comes from a conversation between Nakasa and one of his liberal counterparts:

Nakasa: But what kind of Nationalist are you?

Painter: But why?

Nakasa: How can you vote for apartheid and then come and drink brandy with me?

Painter: But there's nothing wrong in drinking with you. I would like to drink with you anywhere. At my place or yours, for that matter.

Nakasa: What if I told you *I have no place*?

Painter: What do you mean?

Nakasa: Just that, *I have no place* and that's because of the laws you vote for.

Painter: What? Where are going to sleep tonight, for instance?

Nakasa: I do not know. I may sleep here; wherever I can find a bed tonight. (Nakasa in Patel, 1975: 8 emphasis added)

This passage unravels lies that were rolled under the tongues of white South Africans. The idea of 'a place' in this passage transcends its literal meaning, 'shelter or a place to sleep': it moves towards a spiritual striving. This is a very evocative conversation. The idea of a 'place under the sun' also moves towards some sense of identity negotiation. Not only did Nakasa strive for a place in the city Johannesburg, but he also strove for existence and identity discovery. His tone in most of his pieces is very ironical and provocative. It also shows some elements of commonality between Sophiatown and Harlem. He says:

Before coming here (Harlem), I had read stories by Langston Hughes and powerful essays by James Baldwin. They often made Harlem sound like one of the townships in Johannesburg. When Baldwin spoke of the ghetto, *I likened Harlem to Sophiatown...A lot of Harlem's battles and preoccupations are no different from mine*. My relationship with Harlem is largely what Joe Louis meant to me when *he rocked the myth of white supremacy in the ring*. (Nakasa in Patel, 1975: 173, 181 emphasis added).

All these short extracts demonstrates Nakasa's 'relationship with Harlem'. They also show how his prior image of Harlem changed as he met black intellectuals and artists. By this time Nakasa had also gained intellectual influence from reading W.E.B Du Bois's influential writing.

I have attempted to show that the links between the Harlem Renaissance and the Sophiatown

Renaissance took different forms. The major point of connection was the culture of jazz and the idea of resistance that went with that culture. Besides the culture of jazz, identity negotiation, the concept of 'two-ness' also bound the social predicament of black South Africans and Afro-Americans. Moreover, I argue, one of the figures who showed most clearly the presence of Harlem in Sophiatown is Nat Nakasa.

In concluding the continuity of experience and influence between these two literary generations, Peter Abrahams's rather transnational book, Tell Freedom(1954) gives some answers to some of these connections. The influence manifested itself through intellectual borrowing as well. His distinction between the experience of 'his people' and black Americans constitutes a strong concluding point for this chapter, when he says:

For all the thousands of miles, for all the ocean, between the land and people of whom he wrote and my land, Du Bois might have been writing about my land and people. The mood and feeling he described was native to me. I recognized the people as those among whom I lived. The only difference was that there was no laughter in this book. Here in our land, in the midst of our miseries, we had moments of laughter, moments of playing. But for all that Du Bois had given me a key to the understanding of my world. The Negro is not free.... (Abrahams, 1954: 193-194)

Chapter Three extends this American-South African connection to a more political and explicit indictment: the Black Power-Black Consciousness connection.

Chapter Three

From Black Power to Black Consciousness: 'A Psycho-existential Connection'¹⁰

In their search for ideology, direction and answers, the eloquence with which black Americans writers had articulated the condition of racism in the USA, and their experience of fighting it, became, for a while, a point of reference. (Serote, 1990:8)

In Chapter Two I demonstrated how, yoked by the violence of the common denominator, black South African writers tried to avoid bitterness and pity, and searched for a space and a voice. I also showed how the cultural presence of the black Americans helped fortify this urge. This Chapter develops from that line of thought. The thrust of the chapter lies in the connection between Black Power (BP) and Black Consciousness (BC), wherein I show how the presence of black Americans became, as Serote says 'for a while, a point of reference'. However, I want to maintain that the presence of black Americans in black writing had been strong long before this self-acclaimed resurgence and insurgency. Also I will show how this link helped to fortify a kind of continuity of intellectual experience in black South African writing. Also I will show how those ideals gave the impetus to Raymond Williams's notion of a 'structure of feeling' and Bordieu's 'cultural capital' that the post-Sharpeville group sought to reproduce.

Although Williams pioneered the concept of 'structure of feeling' referring to theatre and drama, there are analogous expressions and parallels that one can draw to suit poetry. Nevertheless, adopting this concept, Ian Steadman has argued that 'it is significant that numerous commentators on popular arts use analogous expressions in talking about the ways in which popular artists 'touch a cord', or articulate 'something' which is related to the 'needs' or 'aspirations' or 'feelings' of their audiences' (Steadman in Gunner, 1994:13). Even though one acknowledges the fact that poetry of the seventies did 'touch the chord', one does have reservations as Mance Williams puts it: 'the Black poets of the sixties, whether they were conscious of it or not, were merely continuing a trend toward the development of a Black

¹⁰ Defining this concept, Fanon argued that by 'psychocxistential complex' he means a 'juxtaposition of the white and black races' (Fanon, 1967:35). Also analysing the color problem, Fanon argued that 'only a psychoanalytic interpretation of the Black problem can lay bare the anomalies of affect that are responsible for the structure of the complex' (Ibid)

aesthetic in literature that began as early as the 1920's' (Williams, 1981:17). It is this kind of continuity of experience that kept black South African writing going.

Most commentators on black South African writing, I have emphasized throughout this study, have tended to argue for a lack of continuity between the Sophiatown generation and the 'post-Sharpeville' group¹¹. In taking this line of thought and point of view, they have tended to overlook the role of the transatlantic links that have yoked black South Africans together. However, I will discuss this debate in depth in Chapter Four where I will show how the American presence gave momentum to Black writing in South Africa.

In spite of the above outline, the most important determinant to the later generation is how the past informed their present, that is, how one could use the 'gap' between them and the *Drum* decade as a way of forging a continuity of experience and commitment. Mongane Serote, one of the prominent figures of the Black Consciousness (BC) period, expresses, in his first collection of poetry the importance of bridging the 'gap', abandoning non-existence and breaking the silence. He does this through the images of shadows, the horizon, the sunset, dawn and the contrast between darkness and light. This follows an acknowledgment of the fact that there had been a lull in black writing in South Africa. It is this lull that one can use as an explanatory tool for the continuity of experience that one pursues. Hence a brief historical analysis will help show some of the challenges and difficulties that led to this lull. This 'gap' emanated from a number of events most notably the Government actions that reduced black writing to mediocrity. This followed, amongst other things, the banning orders exercised and pitted against these writers. The 1950's, according to Lewis Nkosi's widely quoted phrase, was a 'fabulous decade', but a decade which saw the Group Areas Act, Immorality Act deciding the fate of black people, not only in Sophiatown, but in South Africa as a whole. This decade also saw the dismantling and demolition of the symbol of hope, belonging, and what could be called 'a promised renaissance'. Reflecting on the 'unreal reality of their (*Drum* writers') worlds', Paul Gready points out: 'Exiled authors have been isolated further by censorship laws within South Africa. The 1963

¹¹ Amongst Kelwyn Sole, Njabulo Ndebele, Mongane Serote and Nick Visser were amongst these critics who saw the Renaissance as a failure. They used different theoretical positions to argue their cases.

Publication and Entertainment Act and 1966 Amendment of the Suppression of Communism Act (which banned Themba, Matshikiza, Modisane, Nkosi and Mphahlele) led to the loss of the nucleus of emergent black writers, who ceased to exist on the printed page in South Africa.' (Gready, 1990:160)

Following a proposal by the Government to start removals in Sophiatown between 1954 and 1959, there was huge resistance from the community. This was evident from the number of protests that came at the wake of that move. Yet another memorable and shocking moment was when 69 black people were shot by the police following a protest against pass laws. This 'watershed' took place in Sharpeville on the 21st of March 1960. Following this bloodshed, the Government tightened its screws even more with the Sabotage Act passed in 1962. This Act allowed police to arrest the opponents of the Government and extended bannings of all kinds.

In 1963, the year in which Can Themba voluntarily chose bitter exile in Manzini (Swaziland), the Nationalist government passed the General Law Amendment Act. This law allowed, amongst other things, detention without trial and arrest without search warrants. The year 1964 was also a historical one since the Rivonia Trial, which had dragged on for a long time eventually came to an end. The presiding judge on the day passed a verdict of life sentence on all black leaders defined under the Suppression of Communism Act. The list of these leaders included Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela, Walter Sisulu, Govan Mbeki and others. On the 1st of April 1966, a list of ten black writers appeared on the Government Gazette Extraordinary. These writers appeared following the banning orders which stipulated that there shall be no further reading, publication and documentation of their works. This meant, amongst other things, that 'for the next four years black writing in South Africa lay in stunned disarray'. (Rive in *Staffrider*, 1989:51). It is in the light of this temporary 'stunned disarray' that we see the 'gap' between the *Drum* group and the later generation.

Therefore this historical analysis shows the causes and effects of the 'gap' and how contemporary critics should, in some ways view the whole debate: the continuist/discontinuist debate. Forced into bitter exile and illegal exit, the Sophiatown group left a 'gap' which could only be filled later by the 'rejuvenation with [sic] the publication of Oswald Mtshali's Sounds of a Cowhide Drum which gave impetus to the poetry of Wally Serote and Sipho Sephamla' (Rive in *Staffrider*, 1989:51). This

rejuvenation enforced and strengthened the continuity of intellectual commitment amongst black writers. However, in spite of all these historical happenings, the American presence informed much of the writing at the time, as it had already informed the Sophiatown group. The presence of jazz music, Hollywood movies, dressing and popular culture manifested itself in both generations. This shows how the continuous fascination with American writing style and popular culture helped fortify a link between Sophiatown and Soweto.

As I have stated, the critical tools that I use to define this period are the concepts of 'cultural capital', experimentation, improvisation and 'the structure of feeling.' Both generations to varying extents, had an urge towards producing the structure of feeling, to a varying extent, in that the Sophiatown group did this through discursive documentation of the predicament of the black people and the Soweto group did it through cultural and political activism. The Soweto group manipulated the English language, inspired by the feelings of the people, of course, to suit their imaginative literary generation.

Arguably the Sophiatown Renaissance laid a literary and cultural basis for the later generation, the Soweto group. The 'gap', with the help of Afro-American cultural nationalism, helped to set a basis for the re-emergence of the politics of opposition in the seventies. Therefore this Chapter traces these trans-Atlantic connections as a way of showing how they shaped the commonalities that prevailed in South African literary history. I draw these links between the Black Consciousness and the Black Power movements, wherein I show that although the taste seems South African, but the recipe of BCM remained American. Moreover, I strengthen these links with a discussion of some of the literary productions that informed the political scene, both in South Africa and the US.

The history of Black Power dates back to 1966, which paralleled the banning orders in South Africa posed on any literature written by the exiled writers. The emergence of this cultural nationalism took place following the 'James Meredith March Against Fear' where he expressed his deep dissatisfaction about the slow legal and legislative progress in America. The Meredith march left a legacy and a challenge to young Afro-American activists and students who accepted the challenge and started chanting, through Carmichael as the mouthpiece, the slogan of 'Black Power'.

Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton advocated the slogan of 'black power' which mobilized most Afro-Americans to free themselves from the psychological shackles of servitude. Carmichael called for all Afro-Americans to chant this slogan in a speech entitled 'What We Want?', wherein he exclaimed:

'The only way we gonna stop them white man from whuppin' us is to take over. We been saying freedom for six years and we ain't got nothin'. What we gonna start saying now is, Black Power! There has been only a civil rights movement, whose voice was adapted to an audience of liberal whites. It served a sort of buffer zone between them and angry young blacks'. (Carmichael in Carson et al, 1981:281-282)

This slogan laid to rest the legacy of the civil rights movements which emphasized inter-racial alliance and integration. For him, as for his fellow compatriots, the concept had grown out of anguish, anger and agitation and was exclusively for those 'who do not attach the fears of white America to their questions about it' and had 'grown out of the ferment of agitation' (Carmichael in Carson et al, 1981:283)

Carmichael and Hamilton in their book Black Power: Towards a Politics of Liberation in America (1969) defined the concept, wherein they argued that 'The concept of Black Power rests on a fundamental premise. Before a group can enter the open society, it must first close ranks'. They critiqued all those features associated with white supremacy, the concepts of integration, acceptance and interracial alliance. These, they felt, were part of the indirect dominance that white Americans stood for and exercised. There they stood on one ground, that is, they dismissed 'white liberals' from their nationalism, as in the following excerpt:

I have said that most liberal whites react to "black power" with the question What about me?, [sic] rather than saying: Tell me what you want me to do and I'll see if I can do it. There are answers to the right question. One of the most disturbing things about almost all white supporters of the movement has been that they are afraid to go to their own communities - which is where the racism exists- and work to get rid of it. (Carmichael in Carson et al, 1981: 285)

It is clear from this extract that he (Carmichael) rejected an interracial alliance which the 'powers that be' used as their paternalistic strategy. Carson and James Baldwin, amongst others, took up some of Carmichael's positions in their critical works as they saw it as auguring for new direction in Afr-

American thinking. Hence Carson contended:

Stokely Carmichael's popularization of the black power slogan began a new stage in the transformation of Afro-American political consciousness. Shattering the fragile alliance of civil rights forces, the black power upsurge challenged the assumptions underlying previous interracial efforts to achieve national civil rights reforms. Only after Carmichael attracted national attention as an advocate of Black Power did he begin to construct an intellectual rationale for what initially was an inchoate statement of conclusions drawn from SNCC's work. (Carson, 1981:215)

The psychotherapeutic nature of the concept in itself augured for a new direction in Afro-American political consciousness. Therefore one can sum up sixties America as the period of re-awakening, the period as Malcolm X puts it, 'freed from the psychological entrapment of these pathologies (the conventional Black/White obsessions) the black man had time to review the events of his whole life' (X in Carew, 1994: 45). Following Carson and X's points of view, John White also picked up on the variety of receptions and connotations that the concept got when it first came out. Rejection from 'white liberals' as racist was one of these connotations, as he reflects on it here:

As a black nationalist ideology, Black Power came to acquire a variety of connotations. It was obviously a reaction against persistent white racism and paternalism, which viewed integration as either 'tokenism' or 'assimilationism' (White, 1985: 175)

Another literary figure to comment on Black Power *vis-a-vis* the predicament of the black people was James Baldwin. Baldwin described the predicament of black people in one phrase, one phrase only 'white supremacy'. Hence he concluded: 'I want to leave you with one thing... one thing only. We are the victims and we are the result of a doctrine called WHITE SUPREMACY' (Usher, 1971:128). This outburst passed on a simple message that 'black power' was a result of a response to this doctrine and the 'the ferment of agitation' which Carmichael proclaimed.

This concept did not only come as an answer to this doctrine, but also came as psychotherapeutic. Nevertheless, five years later it touched the South African soil; it touched it in the form of Black Consciousness Movement (BCM). Young black South African students with Steve Biko, a medical student, at the helm, took up the concept and gave it a South African taste. Although the movement was

rendered separationist by the dominant ideology, it broke the silence that existed as a result of the banning orders exercised on the exiled writers and activists.

This resurgent political and cultural opposition took different shapes and forms. It came in the form of protests, resistant literature, political revolts, and demonstrations. However, our main focus in this study is a literary analysis and study, therefore we will analyse the literature of the time and see how it affected the BCM values. Adding to this impetus was the 'Soweto Poetry' as it was popularly known, which was the cultural product that (re)presented the values of BCM.

Black Consciousness: Resurgence of the Politics of Opposition.

In chapter two, we showed how Themba and Nakasa adopted the avoidance theory and 'self-corrosive cynicism', respectively, as a way out of bitterness, which marked one of the differences that existed between the 1950's renaissance and the Black Consciousness period. Now we will show how Wally Serote and Mafika Gwala helped shape the ideals of Black Consciousness in their creative and critical works. However, we will begin by a brief analysis of the Black Consciousness period and its philosophy.

Similar to Black Power as we have shown, Black Consciousness came to acquire a variety of connotations. The most dominant view was the fact that Black Consciousness constituted a new form of racism: reverse racism. This fear predominantly came from those who responded with the question: 'What about me?' The adherents of the whole movement adopted and inherited most of the definitions that Black Power stood for. It came from the premise that 'before a group could enter the open society, it has to close ranks' as did the Black Power doctrines. Hence for this study I chose Steve Biko's definitions which proved to carry the essence of BC values and maxims. Biko and others were at the helm of black student politics and SASO, the dominant student organization at the time. The SASO congresses and conferences stressed the importance of black pride, black consciousness and true humanity. Though it had a South African taste, it did borrow much of its ingredients from the American 'mother concept'.

The 1974 Hammarskraal conference laid a foundation for more writings on black consciousness. These writings came from all over the country including Durban circles where Steve Biko was a medical student. Also Mafika Gwala, a Verulam-born poet and scholar emphasized a drive towards a national culture, theatre and consciousness. Sadly, Biko was brutally killed by the regime (September, 1977) whilst his activism was at its height, but left a 'legacy' in his collection of essays, I Write What I like (1978) from which I extract most of the dominant definitions of Black Consciousness.

In his definitions of Black Consciousness, Biko stressed a number of things that constituted the ideas of the movement. Nevertheless the defining term for all those forms of manifestations was national consciousness. He used the 'fact of blackness', self-realization, the sense of brotherhood and black pride as defining features of Black Consciousness. Hence he saw it as (a):

realization by the black man of the need to rally together with his brothers around the cause of their oppression - the blackness of their skin - and to operate as a group in order to rid themselves of the shackles that bind them to servitude. It seeks to infuse the black community with a new-found pride in themselves, their efforts, their value systems, their religion and their outlook to life. (Biko in Mangena, 1989:153)

Despite this definition of Black Consciousness, the concept stood on a number of grounds. Firstly, Biko and company believed that to be 'Black', amongst other things, meant a full participation in Black Consciousness activities. Part of what they excluded from their definition of Black Consciousness were the concepts of 'liberalism' and 'integration'. They adopted their definition from Frantz Fanon's idea of 'Black Souls, White Skins'. His conceptual framework continued when he showed his uneasiness about the concept of 'integration' which had been indoctrinated into the minds of the people as a way of defining and preserving political and cultural domination. He expressed the grounds from which he criticized the concept such as the following:

Does this mean that I am against integration? If by integration you understand a breakthrough into white society by blacks, as an assimilation and acceptance of blacks into already established set of norms and code of behaviour set up by and maintained by whites, then YES I am against it. I am against the superiority-inferiority white-black stratification that makes the white a perpetual teacher and the black a perpetual pupil. (Biko in Mangena, 1989:28)

Just like his Black Consciousness compatriots, Biko criticized middle class blacks who aspired to the white world ; blacks who saw the concept of interracial alliance , integration and acceptance as fit for true humanity. They called these blacks, 'non-whites' as we will see when we discuss the poetry of Gwala and Serote. He saw them as equivalent to those whites who say that 'they have black souls wrapped up in white skins'.

Black Consciousness and Literary Production

The emergence of Black Consciousness and the resurgence of black politics of opposition in South Africa brought a new 'momentum in South African writing'¹² therefore Mafika Gwala and Mongane Serote (now an MP) were amongst the writers and critics who translated BC ideals into imaginative poetry and theatre¹³. Gwala's theme in his dealing with issues of BC into poetry was a drive towards a 'national literature'. One can therefore see how Biko's article ' Black Souls in White Skins?' adopted from Fanon's book describes this imaginative literature in terms of what he calls 'a response to consciousness manoeuvre' and 'dictates of the inner soul'. Their poetry carried all the characteristics and features associated with Black Consciousness, ranging from the discussion of his concept of integration, acceptance, black middle class obsessions to more psychological concepts such as 'Negro-phobogenesis'¹⁴ , 'inferiority and superiority complexes'. However Biko again laid a foundation from which these writers translated and tackled these issues. His definition of 'Black' was full of vigour, verve and determination as in the following excerpt:

... the fact we are all not white does not necessarily mean that we are all *black*. Non-whites do exist and will continue to exist for quite a long time. If one's aspiration is whiteness but his pigmentation makes attainment of this impossible,

¹² Margaret Daymond et al titled their collection essays including Mafika Gwala's writing, Momentum: on Recent South African Writing (1984), as way of showing these dimensions of the writing during the Black Consciousness period.

¹³ Césaire one of the founders of Negritude, an intellectual movement on cultural nationalism argues that 'in this literature, the preoccupation with the black experience which has provided a common ground base for the imaginative expression of black writers developing with a romantic myth of Africa' (Césaire in Irele, 1990:68)

¹⁴ This concept owes much of its impetus to Frantz Fanon's psychoanalytic book, Black Skins, White Masks (1967). In his analysis of the Negro problem, he saw him as genetically phobic, 'a stimulus to anxiety'. All these characteristics he alludes them to what he calls "Negro-phobogenesis"

then that person is a non-white. Any man who calls a white man, 'Baas', any man who serves in the police force or Security is *ipso facto* a non-white. Black people - real black people - are those who can manage to hold their heads high in defiance rather than willingly surrender their souls to the white man. (Biko in Mangena, 1989:154)

This buoyant and vigorous definition shows a clear distinctive factor between "real blacks" who can 'manage to hold heads high in defiance' and 'non-whites' who 'willingly surrender their souls to the white man'. Therefore as cultural articulators, Gwala and Serote translated these ideals into their poetry¹⁵.

Therefore literature of the time reflected the current socio-political context in which most BC adherents found themselves. It depicted the contradictions and conceptual frameworks that collections such as I Write What I Like (1978) foregrounded. Mafika Gwala's Jol'iinkomo(1977) and Wally Serote's Yakhal'inkomo (1972) can be seen as representative of the literary material and tools from the period. They reflect all the values that Black Consciousness (and Biko in particular) stood for. Excerpts from different poems and the testimonies from their critical works will illustrate this point of view.

Serote's poetry could be seen in the light of what Gwala calls 'imaginative poetry', poetry of improvisation and poetry of experimentation. A typical post-Sharpeville poetry, Serote's poetry manipulated the English language to produce a language of his people, a language with which people could identify with. It also drew from the maxims and doctrines of BC. Hence he critiques integration, interracial alliance, acceptance of liberal humanism¹⁶, 'whitism' and 'non-whitism.'

Thus all these BC ideals were part of the cultural production at the time; the culture of a striving towards national consciousness, and 'cultural activism' which 'challenges the social forces as well as the anti-freedoms' (Gwala,1989:74). Hence the first poem in his collection, Yakhal'inkomo (1972)

¹⁵ In an interview with Serote (in Staffrider, April/May 1981,pp30-32), Serote admitted that there was a form of networking going on in the circles of BC and 'Soweto Poetry'.

¹⁶ In an interview with Thengamehlo Ngwenya, Gwala proclaimed that 'liberal humanism detaches itself from the conflict and merely comments on it' (Gwala in Staffrider,1989)

broke the silence¹⁷. This silence manifests itself through the lack of dialogue that was prevalent between black and white in South Africa. Even Chinua Achebe would agree with Serote that there was a lack of dialogue. His definition of a dialogue which differs, of course with the way 'the powers that be defines it' carries a connotation of consciousness and unmasking as he says (it is): '*the necessity of cultural exchange in a spirit of partnership between North and South*' (Achebe, 1988:15). It is in the spirit of this definition that he questions the existence of a 'partnership' and a 'dialogue' between black and white, as he says:

In confronting the black man, the white man has a simple choice: either to accept the black man's humanity and equality that flows from it; or to reject it and see him as a beast of burden. No middle course exists except as an intellectual quibble. For centuries Europe has chosen the beastly alternative which automatically has ruled out the possibility of a dialogue. You may talk to a horse but you don't wait for a reply" (Achebe, 1988:15)

This excerpt depicts the 'impediments to dialogue' that have been characteristic of the history of interaction between black and white since the slave tradition. Hence Serote illustrates this dialogue in poetry as in 'The Actual Dialogue':

Do not fear Baas
It's just that I appeared
And our faces met
In this Black night that's like me. (Serote, 1972:1)

This poem, apart from its direct comment on the lack of dialogue, also shows the actual peripheral zone in which black and white meet without really talking to one another. They are both victims of fear. This also draws on what Frantz Fanon calls the 'psycho-existential complex' - hence resulting in a pathology called 'Negrophobogenesis'¹⁸. His reference to fear and threat in this poem draws much on his comment where he says: 'the b.c. [sic] propounders were an extreme threat to the white public who to a very

Serote refers to the notion of silence in most of his writing through the images of 'darkness' and 'light'.

¹⁸ Mafika Gwala adopted this concept and gave it a South African taste; hence he refers to 'Kaffirphobia'

large extent owned the means to exposure for writers'. (Serote,1981:30)

The networking process that took place around the circles of BC made it possible for poets and critics to share similar views and take the same stands. Mafika Gwala, amongst others, took the same approach as Serote's about the stimulus-response of the black reinstatement of ideals in his article 'Towards a National Theatre'. He demonstrates the phobia and hostility with which liberal humanists responded to BC's 'extreme' position. Referring to theatre, he said: 'Why should the black apologise to anyone for his blackness? Why should the black, in reinstating his blackness feel he is hurting some white?' (Gwala, 1973:132). This subtle protest point of view is also relevant for an analysis of Serote's 'The Actual Dialogue' in that it shows the phobogenesis that Fanon and of course Serote point out.

In his critical works, Serote acknowledged some of those socio-political pressures. He argued that just because he had the will to represent 'his people' he transcended those political boundaries. He acknowledged these impediments in relation to the publication of his first collection of poetry as in the following excerpt:

When Yakhal'inkomo was published, I was dead scared. I was keenly aware of the violence the South African Government had in store for us. I have always wanted to be guided in my writing by the aspirations of my people. However, in none of my poetry collections so far do I fully understand this collective creativity. (Serote in Chapman, 1982: 113)

Therefore one could see that these Government atrocities and brutalities did not prevent 'the aspiration of his people' from guiding him. As a result of such aspirations, his poetry carried the themes of Government brutality, township atrocities, curse, and derogatory terms such as 'whitey', 'ofay' and 'bullshit'. In the last poem of Yakhal'inkomo (1972) he saw white people as agents of township violence and also 'impediments to dialogue'. He shows these impediments through the images of 'fuel' and the juxtaposition of 'listening' and 'talking', he proclaimed:

White people are white people,
They are burning the world.
Black people are black people'
They are the fuel.
White people are white people

They must learn to listen
Black people are black people
They must learn to talk (Serote,1972:50-51)

Serote did not only blame 'whitey' for such agency, but he also blamed the black perpetrators themselves. He saw what one might call, in Anthony Sampson's phrase, a 'white hand'¹⁹ as the agent of 'women and child' abuse. Hence he expresses:

My brothers in the streets,
Who booze and listen to records,
Who have tasted rape of mothers and sisters,
Who take alms from white hands,
Who grab bread from black mouths, (Serote,1972:19)

The criticism of these atrocities is not the only role he plays as a cultural worker, he also cursed 'whitey' as a way of expressing his agitation and a will to free himself and 'his people' from the psychological servitude as he points out:

Trying to get out
Words. Words. By Whitey.
No. No. No. By Whitey
I know I'm trapped (Serote,1972:52)

These poems address some of the themes that are central to his philosophy. Part of his philosophy is his concern for old people, mothers, fathers and children. He believes that part of the African way of life circulates around the idea of the family. Therefore atrocities and violence killed that spark. As a result of these atrocities, 'between the mother and daughter develops the question of rape. Between a father and his son there is fear and shame'. (Serote,1981:31) Hence he argues that the 'mother' is used both literally and metaphorically. Every person is very close to a mother. Our social life has been structured like that' (Serote,1981:31). These issues manifest themselves in poems such as 'Ofay-Old People', 'Manchild Talking to the Night' and others. Again his commitment and inspiration to produce the 'structure of feeling' tempted him to utter derogatory terms. This stuttering language suggests a voice searching for a language and an attempt to re-implement the sense of identity and self-esteem. Hence he

¹⁹ In his second Chapter of the autobiography, Sampson detected what he called a 'white hand' in 'liberal' and black magazines such as Drum magazine.

writes:

I'm learning to pronounce this 'Shit' well,
since the other day,
At the pass office,
When I went to get employment,
The officer there endorsed me to Middleburg,
So I said, hard and with all my might, 'Shit!' (Serote,1972:8)

The Government brutality was the agent of hatred and bitterness as he confesses in the following excerpt:

I look at what happened
When jails are becoming necessary homes for people
Like death comes out of disease.
To talk for myself
I hate to hate,
But how often has it been
I could not hate enough (That's not my wish) (Serote,1972:47)

Apart from these issues, Serote also drew from a number of sensitive issues such as the ideas of existence-hence striving for 'the will to live', breaking silence-hence abandoning anonymity, searching for humanity and identity. He uses contrasts and contradictions to show that something good can come out of bitterness and despair. The contrasts between 'darkness and light', 'sunset and sunrise', 'day and night', 'shadows of the day and shadows of the night' breed some form of consciousness, awakening, and renewal. In 'Hell, Well, Heaven', he uses the image of the bitter and dark past that determines his future trajectories. He shows how his past silence, despair and fear inform his assertiveness, hope and courage. He says: "Hell! Where I was I cried *silently*/ Hell! My soul aches like a body that has been beaten,/I have *fear* so strong like the whirlwind/ Hell my mind throbs like a heart beat, there's no peace;/ To have *despair* so deep and deep and deep'. Yet there is light at the end of the tunnel; yet 'I know I'm coming/ I sat there until now/I *endured* till now./ I have a *voice* like lightning-thunder over the mountains' . (Serote,1972:16-17 emphasis added).

He also pursues the image of renewal through contrasts in his poems, 'Lost or Found World', 'Waking Up. The Sun. The Body', 'Movement-Moulding, Moment' and 'Motivated to Death'. In "Lost or Found

World' he shows how these contrasts produce a sense of newness, as when he says:

Old wishes are present deeds
Bright with blinding for the old
Dark with wonder for the new- (Serote,1972:21)

He uses the contrast between the light and darkness to produce 'dawn'- a sense of optimism, in his poem, 'Movement-Moulding, Moment'. He does this too in his poem, ' Waking Up. The Sun. The Body': 'Hope pumped on and on somewhere in me/Waking up. The Sun. The Body'.(Serote,1972:27) In the last poem I select from his collection, 'Motivated to Death', he draws back to his desire to transcend; his desire to abandon his anonymity and break the silence caused by a lack of dialogue between black and white, hence he says: 'His black miseries to the core of silence' ('Motivated to Death')

Therefore one can summarise Serote's position through his critical reflection on his 'narrow cultural nationalism' when he was a part of BCM. Now a senior member of the African National Congress and the Member of Parliament, Serote looked critically at his stand wherein he reflected on the features of their writing which relied on their predicament at the time. Thus he reflected in 1990:

The writing of that period relied heavily on anger, bitterness, and at times, cynicism and frustration. It was in those days that expletives such as 'fuckoff' and 'shit' became poetical terms. In other ways, through its narrow cultural nationalism, BC had a degenerative influence on cultural expression, particularly writing. While it was positive for the BCM to unite the oppressed blacks, and hence to isolate the apartheid regime, its ideology became negative at the point where potential participants in nation-building and cultural expression, or outside allies, were judged exclusively by skin color. A people's history, and thus their cultural expression, depends on their material life, and not on their skin. (Serote, 1990:9)

Certainly he felt a kind of compulsion to (re)present the culture and the feelings of the people. He shows this urge through his reflection on the narrowness of his earlier position.

Like Serote, Gwala was also guided by the inspiration of his people to produce the structure of feeling and achieve the much needed cultural capital through his creative prowess. His first collection of

poetry, Jol'iinkomo (1977) which he contends could have come out before Serote's Yakhal'inkomo (1972), demonstrated this desire to transcend the political boundaries. Reflecting on the role he played when he was part of BCM, like Serote, Gwala saw 'the life of a people' as the inspiration for his work. He expressed this feeling in his essay, 'Writing as a Cultural Weapon':

My first collection of poems only came out in 1977 although it could have been out the year after Yakhal'inkomo. The thing about it was that BC tempted me, rightly, to want to be wary; and, perhaps erroneously, to want to calculate my impact. I do not regret the stance I took at that time. It was the correct one. My premise is based on the assumption that the chief South African theme has always been that of SOCIAL CONFLICT. For literature can not be divorced from the life of a people. (Gwala in Daymond et al, 1984:45-46)

The poems in this collection carried out the ideals and values of BCM as had been defined by its advocates. Gwala through his poetry epitomised the cultural nationalism that BCM stood for, it also promulgated the psychotherapeutic themes that BCM stood for, themes of black pride, self-realization, national consciousness, etc. In one of his epic poems which appeared in this collection, he demonstrated most of these ideals. He came from the premise that the apartheid regime exercised paternalistic hegemony as in the following excerpt:

---- when you get off the ride.
Black is point of self-realization
Black is point of new reason
Black is point of: NO NATIONAL DECEPTION!
Black is point of determined stand.
Black is point of TO BE OR NOT TO BE²⁰ for blacks
Black is point of RIGHT ON !
Black is energetic release from the shackles of Kaffir, Bantu, non-white.
(Gwala, 1977:67)

Gwala's definition of black in this excerpt is equivalent to Biko's definition wherein he argues that black is a point of freeing oneself from shackles of servitude. The image of the ride is equivalent to the pathological nature of the regime. Hence Biko contends:

²⁰ This line is inter-textual. It suggests that Gwala was moved by the second soliloquy of Shakespeare's Hamlet, when Hamlet the character meditated on the possible revenge for the assassination of his father, the King of Denmark.

1. Being Black is not a matter of pigmentation- being black is a reflection of a mental attitude.
2. Merely by describing yourself as black you have started on a road towards emancipation, you have committed yourself to fight against all forces that seek to use your blackness as a stamp that marks you as a subservient being. (Biko in Mangena, 1989: 153)

This line of thought could be translated to Gwala's poetry and one could say that his stand is a reflection of a mental attitude. These maxims and doctrines of BCM migrated and found their momentum in his poetry. Also this poem expresses and demonstrates the dangers involved in one 'getting off the ride' in a society which is politically and racially prejudiced and turbulent. He also expresses his contemptuous attitude to 'NATIONAL DECEPTION' that prevailed in the country at the time. Finally, he conscientises his people to move towards a new rationality; towards a point of self-realisation and self-consciousness.

Like most BC adherents, Gwala was also critical of the middle class blacks who had 'black faces (wrapped) behind white masks'. These blacks, 'non-whites' as they called them, were not guided by the life of a people as he puts it in his poem, 'Black Status Seekers':

You
Blacks with so called class
You
You non-whites, you.
Your non-white women
rouge themselves
redder than Jesus' blood
When you can't love Black
then you wish to be white
Non-whites.
Non-whites you have become
a fuck burden to Blacks
Bullshit! (Gwala, 1977:33)

Derogatory terms such as 'bullshit' and 'fuck burden' owe their cultural and poetic invention to Serote as Gwala himself admits in the opening lines of the poem. However, this stuttering language, as was the case with Serote, was part of the cultural production at the time. Moreover, the role of 'non-whites' in anything to do with Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) was a curious one. The images of 'rouge'

and 'non-white' show the artificiality of their souls and inspiration. Again Gwala expresses his feelings with anguish, agitation and hatred. The imagery and thought in this poem are typical of his political, poetic and cultural prowess. Therefore Gwala is very critical of class distinctions in black society and of middle class blacks who do not identify with 'the people' and so undercut a broader black unity. This is evident in his poem, 'No Mirth for Bantus':

Middle class Bantu blacks
roll into black wedding parties.
with a clumsy gait
just in case
the ever so casual
common blacks
should get their noses mugged
and pulloff
their gadgeteering masks
of white brow etiquette. (Gwala, 1977:24)

Therefore the image of the 'mask' dominated the values of what BC propagators stood against. Hence one can summarise Serote and Gwala's poetry in terms of what Chapman and Dangor (1982) call 'uncompromising poetry of resistance'. This poetry captured the values and norms of BCM as Chapman and Dangor conclude:

Initially Soweto Poetry was directed in protest at a predominantly white 'liberal' readership. By the time of the Soweto disturbances in 1976, however, the emphasis had shifted with the BC voices particularly of Serote ('No Baby Must Weep') and Gwala ('Getting off the Ride') finding power in an uncompromising poetry of resistance- a mobilizing rhetoric to a black audience a message of consciousness-raising and race-pride. (Chapman and Dangor, 1982:15)

Phrases such as 'liberal readership' demonstrate the trend and legacy of the prior generation, the legacy of 'white hands and white liberal' readership. Apart from the predominantly resistance motif in the 'Soweto Poetry', the motif of the 'mother as a source of power' (van Niekerk, 1982:36) also dominated the poetry of the seventies. Although the ingredients are South African, the recipe of the 'black power' slogan remained and owed its impetus to the Afro-American 'partner'. Hence, this transmigration of Afro-American cultural production helped to fortify a South African cultural and literary connection. This conceptual and literary perspective came in the wake of the strong criticism laid on the prior generation on grounds of 'escapist potboilers' (Lewis Nkosi), 'deeply dismal' and black faccs behind

white masks' (Wally Serote). Therefore, the challenge is: how does one come up with a literary and cultural perspective that describes these differences. This perspective will help one argue that this trans-Atlantic connection strengthened the cultural and literary links of the two periods under discussion.

Despite these BC ideals, there is another element that was part of the 'cultural capital' of the Soweto Poetry; the appropriation and influence of jazz on their poetry. The proliferation of jazz was part of the continuity of experience that emerged as early as the 1920's in the wake of the Harlem Renaissance.

Helen Richman echoes this viewpoint in her forthcoming article when she says:

...the agenda of jazz was always that of expressing the identity and deeply-felt emotions of the people in this way. This quality also characterised the jazz music popular in the South African townships of the '50's and '60's. But the cradle of jazz was always America, where it had a direct influence on literature, inspiring the Black Consciousness poets of the Harlem renaissance. Its rise to prominence in America during the twenties coincided with a new wave of artistic expression as black Americans began to unite around a shared cultural identity and history of suffering, influenced by the Black Consciousness politics of Garvey and Césaire. The cadence and patois of the work of Harlem Renaissance poets such as Langston Hughes, Claude McKay and Countee Cullen draw heavily on the theme and forms of jazz as expressions of an authentic black experience. (Richman, forthcoming, 2001:2)

Conclusion

One could sum up the poetry of the seventies by arguing that whether they were conscious of it or not, the writers and poets at the time continued to produce the 'structure of feeling' which had begun as early as the 1930's. This structure of feeling began with the theatre of the 'adversary tradition' as Steadman puts it and the 'New African' era. This earlier period saw the insurgence of writers such as H.I.E. Dhlomo, Benedict Wallet Vilakazi and Sol Plaatje. This, one could see as a foundation for the late generations, especially the two generations under scrutiny in this study.

Gwala called for a move towards a national literature, which could well be seen as part of what Serote with hindsight called the narrow cultural nationalism of the literature at the time. I have attempted to show in this chapter that such a narrow view of regional identity is rendered inadequate in the wake of the transatlantic connections. Therefore Chapter Four draws these connections and shows how they lay basis for a trans-Atlantic (national) literary perspective. Also this will demonstrate how this South African-American link unified the South African literary generations.

Chapter Four

The Escapist/Extremist Expression Dilemma: Continuity or Discontinuity?

In Chapter Three I showed that the connections between the BPM and the BCM could best be defined in terms of a psychoanalytic perspective. I also showed that one of the dangers of any intellectual movement of cultural nationalism is the tendency to duplicate the narcissist ideals and the values of the system and ideology of the regime it seeks to subvert and transcend. I went on to argue that this tendency creates a paradoxical stance which renders that nationalism narrow and utopian. The relationship between the Sophiatown Renaissance and the Soweto group could be defined in those terms. It could be defined this way, firstly because it has been characterised by harsh criticism thrown at the earlier generation on basis of elitism, narrowness, naivety and escapist tendencies. One of the fundamental principles of the Soweto poetry was to subvert and transcend the 'liberal readership' which often characterised prior intellectual movements. They also wanted to continue the effort and legacy left by the *Drum* school. The tendency to overlook the role of the Afro-American-South African connection in black South African literature somewhat rendered them narrow and nationalist. It also seeks to come up with new answers to the questions that often affected most critics in this area. I will also use Williams's notion of 'structure of feeling', Nixon's idea of 'the full weight of belonging' and Baker's concepts of 'deformation of mastery' and 'mastery of form' as explanatory tools for the standpoint that I seek to take.

I argue that the ever-presence of the trans-Atlantic connections yoked black South African writers together. I also suggest that most contemporary critics in this area have ignored the role of this connection in their quest to describe the African intellectual struggle. Nevertheless, there are a few critics who saw this continuity of experience between prior intellectual movements and the writing of the seventies. I will argue my case using the work of Rob Nixon and Houston Baker. Through this argument, I conclude that a nationalist perspective is inadequate for any analysis of the Black man's problem across the globe. This recalls what Serote called 'a narrow cultural nationalism' as he reflected on the BCM period. Through this comparative analysis, we will transcend mere nationalist perspectives and move towards a transnational and intercultural literary perspective.

One can trace the 'Black Atlantic' debate as early as the 18th Century as I have shown in Chapter 1. This frontier has always been part of the transmigration of American cultural production to South Africa. This could be drawn as early as Booker T. Washington's era. Ntongela Masilela illustrates these 'partnerships clearly in his article when he traces links between: 'Miles Davies, Hugh Masekela, Peter Abrahams and Richard Wright, Abdullar [sic] Ibrahim, Duke Ellington, Miriam Makeba and Sarah Vaughan, Langston Hughes and Ezekiel Mphahlele, Lewis Nkosi and James Baldwin, Alain Locke and Pixley ka Isaka Seme (founder of the ANC in 1912)' (Masilela, 1996:88)

It is from such links that one bases one's argument about the continuity of experience between the 'Sophiatown renaissance and the Soweto Poetry group. Both these groups relied, whether consciously or not, on the American presence for their 'success'. However, one should concede that they did this in different contexts, both characterised by political turbulence and the violence of a common foe, namely the pressures of the apartheid regime. The earlier, on one hand, was a 'subtle protest literature..... in the sense that it was a social document of the predicament of the Black man' (Masaghor in Zell, Bundy and Coulon, 1983:218). The later, on the other hand, was a psychoanalytic literature in the sense that it expressed the psychodynamics of the black man's world and notably said little about the black woman's world.

Even though they seemed to happen in different socioeconomic and political contexts, they had one thing in common; they were victims of a system called APARTHEID. Apart from these similarities in conditions of existence, both these groups had a number of things. They both relied on experimentation and political indictment. The slight difference though is that the Sophiatown group relied on its discursive legacy, which I will explain when I explore Nixon's analysis. The Soweto group, on the other hand, relied on improvisation and manipulation of language through poetry (and theatre), to suit their pressing needs.

Having outlined some of the commonalities and differences that existed between the two groups, one needs to show the subtle way in which different commentators pointed out the notion of discontinuity.

Following that brief account, I will suggest an alternative way of looking at this debate without employing the nationalist conceptualisation. That alternative perspective will be what Paul Gilroy calls 'the desire to transcend mere national particularity'.

The relationship between the Sophiatown Renaissance and the Soweto group has been a difficult one in the sense that it has been characterised by criticism thrown at the face of the Sophiatown 'set'. The questions that intrigue me about this divide are: Why can we not use Anthony Giddens's theory on postmodernity as an analogy for such criticism? Giddens argued that 'to speak of postmodernity as superceding modernity appears to invoke that very thing which is declared (now) to be impossible' (Giddens, 1990:36). Are they not creating a new kind of 'metaphysical Utopia' (Bauman:1991)?

There are two schools of thought that converse over the continuity/discontinuity dichotomy of the Sophiatown/Soweto debate. There are those who belong to the discontinuist school of thought, those who rendered the Sophiatown Renaissance a 'failure'. There are also those who belong to the continuist school of thought, who alluded the failure to the oppressive conditions. Under the earlier school, I classify critics such as Njabulo Ndebele, Kelywn Sole, Lewis Nkosi, Nick Visser and Mongane Serote. Under the continuist school on the other hand, I could classify critics such as David Maughan-Brown and Jacques Alvarez-Peyrere. However, there are those who belong to neither of these schools; those I want to ally with to establish a more continuist school of thought. This school of thought will acknowledge the presence of the American influence in black South African literary tradition. These writers are Rob Nixon and Houston Baker.

Nixon and Baker adopted a slightly different perspective to account for the causes of their worlds. They employed a transatlantic analysis approach as their explanatory tool. It is through engaging with these two critics that I will arrive at a conclusion about this debate. Houston Baker, on the one other hand, used his notions of 'deformation of mastery' and 'mastery of form' to describe what he calls 'the changing same of American literary history'. Adopting Baker's line of thought, Nixon uses the phrase 'the full weight of belonging' to describe the 'changing same' of black South African literature. He does not only employ this conceptual framework to a nationally particular approach, but he also uses it

to show how the American presence defines this changing same and cement his concept of 'belonging'.

However, there are two theorists who first invoked this line of thought. These theorists are Paul Gilroy (1996) and W.E.B Du Bois (1903). They could be seen, in many ways as the canonic figures of black intellectual development.

Following his analysis of Du Bois's definition of the black man's colour problem, Gilroy advocated the concept of the 'Black Atlantic'. Since Du Bois saw the black man as facing a 'double-consciousness' paradox, Gilroy adopted that idea to describe the Black Atlantic. Hence he says: '(What I want to call) the black [sic] Atlantic can be defined, on one level, through *this desire to transcend* both the structures of the nation state and the constraints of ethnicity and national particularity. These desires are relevant to understanding political organizing and cultural criticism' (Gilroy, 1996:19 emphasis added) This 'desire to transcend' the constraints of national particularity parallels Serote's notion of 'narrow cultural nationalism' which he saw in his reflection on the BCM period.

The challenge facing contemporary critics is how they transcend 'national particularity' and move towards a transnational literary perspective. This could be done through a comparative study of the black South African literary 'sojourners' and Afro-American sojourners. It is in the spirit of this 'partnership' that I hope to arrive at a continuist perspective between the Sophiatown set and the Soweto group.

The barriers were the agents of the divide between the writing of the fifties and the poetry of the seventies. The critics of the school of discontinuity tended to be somewhat harsh at times, declaring the Sophiatown Renaissance a failure. Therefore it is through questioning these narrow received views that one can lay a ground for a non-Utopian perspective. Serote's account and critique of Nakasa for example, in his obituary illustrates this harsh gesture:

Nat tommed. He tommed while we were rat-racing for survival; he had the time and energy to say to us 'There must be humans on the other side of the fence; it is only we haven't learned how to talk'. We replied 'Humans? Not enough'. One may further ask: 'Have your humans

learned our language Nat? You soon found their language, did you find humans? (Serote in Patel, 1975:xxxi)

Serote's reaction to Nakasa's position is clearly harsh in this excerpt. His words suggest that Nakasa respected the white world more than his role as cultural expressionist. His journalistic piece, 'The Cruelty of Closed Eyes' would suggest an exactly opposite view to Serote's conception. However, Nakasa himself confessed that he was facing an identity crisis. He died negotiating his own identity. He also admitted that it was 'difficult to decide that identity'. This two-ness manifests itself quite frequently in his writing. His mind was preoccupied with the negotiation of his two-ness and the Africans 'out there' whose 'identities are largely hazy in (his) mind' (Nakasa in Patel,1975:193)

Serote was not the only BC poet and critic to take that position. Gwala also used his BC feelings to deem Nakasa, a 'non-white' who was 'a symbol of hope on the side of whiteness'. Yet I still hold that Nakasa aspired to the white world, rather as a symbol of defiance and a way of avoiding 'perishing in his own bitterness' and trying to unravel the lies wrapped under the white tongues. His conversation with the white painter-cum- Afrikaner Nationalist in his piece, 'Between Two Worlds' is an appeal to the conscience of the white liberal. The only way to explain his world is to say that the bitterness of his world brought this desire to transcend the Bohemian border-lines.

The positions of Gwala and Serote came out of agitation and the 'temptation to be wary' Yet there are stronger Marxist standpoints, those of Sole, Visser and Ndebele. Perhaps one needs to explore Ndebele's position first. He uses two distinctive concepts to draw the dividing line between the Fifties and the Seventies. He distinguishes between a 'spectacular literature' and a literature of 'the ordinary': the fifties being the 'spectacular' and the latter being the 'ordinary'. He lashes out at the spectacular in the following manner:

It ['50s] indicts implicitly; it is demonstrative, preferring exteriority to interiority; it keeps the larger issues of society in our minds, obliterating the details; it provokes identification through recognition and feeling rather than through observation and analytical thought; it calls for emotion rather than conviction; it establishes a vast sense of presence without offering intimate knowledge; it confirms without necessarily offering a challenge. It is the literature of the powerless identifying the key factor responsible for their powerlessness. *Nothing beyond this*

can be expected of it. (Ndebele, 1986:46 emphasis added)

However, Ndebele modifies his stance in the last phrase 'Nothing beyond this can be expected of it' when he says later, 'Some of these literary deficiencies can be attributed to the intellectually stunting effects of apartheid and Bantu education. These writers have however, made *superhuman efforts* to explore life *beyond the narrow focus of oppressive education.*' (Ndebele, 1986:56 emphasis added)

His stance is paradoxical, and contradictory. He uses 'beyond' in two contradictory ways. Yet another limitation of his stance is the fusing of both dispositional and situational attributes in one argument. On the one hand, he attributes the failure to the 'stunting effects of apartheid and Bantu education'. On the other hand he attributes it to the inner dispositions of the writers, 'it calls for emotions rather than conviction'.

Another tool he uses to critique the *Drum* generation is the idea of the 'ordinary'. By contrast he defines the ordinary as, 'sobering rationality; (it is) the forcing of attention on necessary detail. Paying attention to the ordinary and its methods will result in a *significant growth of consciousness.* (Ndebele, 1986:50 emphasis added). Yet for any critic in his/her 'sobering rationality', for a 'significant growth of consciousness' to be achieved, a sense of belonging needs to lay a foundation for that kind of consciousness. The question that intrigued my thinking about Ndebele's concept is: Have they as South Africans (creative writers) over the intervening decades, 're-discovered the ordinary' at its roots?

In my viewpoint, there is '*something* beyond that can be expected of the *Drum* decade'. The culture of belonging, the culture of lawlessness, the culture of sophistication was their 'cultural capital' as granted by the way they turned it into a symbolic capital. The era was a 'just-before-the-battle' phase of development where the social contradictions, cultural expressions and traumas laid a foundation for the 'fighting stage', the seventies, that is. Writers such as Themba and Nakasa surrendered from the 'conflicting forces' and were hypnotized by drinking, women, 'the will to die' and 'the desire to transcend'. The 'Crepuscle' pictures this 'shadowy life', as it stands:

But I do want to say that those of us who have detribalized and caught in the characterless world of belonging nowhere, have a bitter sense of loss. The culture that we have shed may not be

particularly valuable in a content sense, but it was something that the psyche could attach itself to, and its absence is painfully felt in this Whiteman's world where *everything significant is forbidden*, or 'Not for thee'. My race believes in the quick shaft of anger, or of love or hate or laughter *the perpetual emotional commitment is foreign to us*. (Themba, 1972:8-9 emphasis added)

It is as though this short story was written in response to Ndebele's call, 'it calls for emotion rather than conviction' and 'nothing (significant) beyond this can be expected of it'. Also responding to Ndebele's viewpoint, David Maughan-Brown challenged the notion of 'political disengagement'. He questioned Ndebele's (amongst others') received view that Sophiatown writers' failure could be attributed to their 'apolitical' stance. He argued that 'neutrality' is somewhat impossible in an environment which is politically turbulent and suppressive. Hence he said:

The attitudes that stories on non-political themes reinforce often have political dimensions. The fact that, as Njahulo Ndebele (1986:145) (amongst others) points out, "the vast majority of these stories in *Drum* show an almost total lack of interest in the directly political issues of the time" does not of course, mean that they are politically innocent. (Maughan-Brown in Lenta et al., 1989:8)

Another position that regards the Sophiatown Renaissance as a failure is Nick Visser's. Although attributing this failure to a legislative and oppressive present, Visser argues for a complete failure. He critiques writers such as Themba and Nakasa for squandering their talents by surrendering to the deteriorating state of psychosis, self-corrosive cynicism and excessive drinking. Thus he says:

The promised renaissance has clearly faltered. The story of what happened to the South African literary renaissance of the fifties and the sixties is a grim one that did not stop with legislation and bannings, awful as those were. The writers who risked so much risked in the end perhaps too much. Others, blacks especially, have been scarred by their experiences in ways no outsider can adequately imagine. That the need to write to create, is a strong one is witnessed not only by the fact that many of them carried on but also that a new generation of black writers has already emerged to continue the effort. (Visser, 1976: 56)

Unlike Ndebele, Visser does attribute their failure to the banning orders thrown at them. Ironically, he argues that the new generation emerged to 'continue the effort', which contradicts his view that the earlier group was a failure. Following his criticism, Michael Chapman questioned the narcissist stance

of the Soweto group. He questioned the particularly of its implementation of a certain kind of 'metaphysical Utopia'. He viewed its project as, at times narcissistic in that 'it has made its rejection of mainstream Western literary and cultural continuities almost a moral and stylistic imperative', yet 'what seems to 'date' most black South African writing prior to Soweto Poetry is its ability to draw extensively on received English literary and linguistic conventions'. (Chapman, 1984:197) Although I agree with Chapman that they created this Utopia, I would argue that they tried to subvert those orthodox and conventional traditions in order to achieve their 'structure of feeling'.

Another figure who was a strong critic and a poet during the seventies was Kelwyn Sole. Sole attributed the failure of the Sophiatown Renaissance to two factors. He attributed it to the banning orders and the lack of a 'structure of feeling' in the writing of the fifties. Hence he argues:

The alacrity with which some writers choose exile is, in some cases, disturbing: while the fact that the banning of their works effectively cuts off their influence suggests something, not only about the oppression they faced in the early sixties, but also about the ephemeral nature of literature without mass roots and confined to the printed page. (Sole in Bozzoli, 1979:164)

I differ with Sole on one point: both these groups relied on experimentation, language manipulation, improvisation and the American presence. These commonalities show a kind of disagreement with such a narrow view of the Sophiatown Renaissance. Also they were both unconscious of the American presence which yoked them together.

Despite this discontinuist analysis, Sole ends his argument with an awareness of the 'oppressive society' which informed not only their writing but also their worlds. Hence he concludes:

It [this brief glimpse] has shown, I hope, some of the general problems faced by an intellectual petty-bourgeoisie in a specific political and social situation in Africa, problems which face it with regard to political organization, heterogeneity, etc. Although placed in a changing situation, *elements of continuity with the previous black literature and aspects of ideology are apparent*: At the same time the black writer gradually becomes conscious of his position and preoccupations as a writer; of the need for the writer to articulate the grievances of his people in a repressive society. At the same time that black literature is changing because of its own dynamics; its internal *continuity is disrupted* after 1948 in a noticeable way as a result of a change in external factors. (Sole in Bozzoli, 1979:166 emphasis added)

Nevertheless, I want to move away from that constricting analysis towards a viewpoint, that seeks to transcend 'national literature'. Despite these critics who belong to the discontinuist school of thought, there are also those who belong to the school of thought, Rob Nixon and Houston Baker.

Baker's continuist position is significant for two reasons: one, it is an American perspective on the black literary position. In other words, it explains this trans-Atlantic commonality and connection. Secondly, it also helps put some theoretical flavour into one's continuist stance. Baker's main argument in his, Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance rests on what he calls 'the changing same of black American expression' (Baker, 1987:14). Baker sees this form of re-conceptualization as part of the remedy. He took this stance following Nathan Huggins, David Lewis and James Johnson's 'discontinuist' positions. For Huggins, 'Afro-Americans are fundamentally bone of the bone -if not flesh of the flesh- of the American people, and both the intricacies of minstrelsy and the aberrations are misguided...' (Baker, 1987:10). Hence Huggins, Lewis and Johnson attacked the Harlem Renaissance on grounds of narrowness, provinciality, ambitions and 'delusional striving on the part of Renaissance intellectuals' (Ibid). Baker uses Amiri Baraka's concept of the 'changing same' as a stepping stone for arriving at his own version of the phrase, 'mastery of form' and 'the deformation of mastery'. For him, instead of arguing for a failure, Negro intellectuals and critics should take these strategies as coming 'most decisively to the foreground of black intellectual history with the emergence of Booker T. Washington....' (Baker, 1987:15). Hence the emergence of Washington brought changes in the existential and essential predicament of the black people. In the South African context Nixon came to explore these continuities. His ideas came as a result of what he perceived as the harsh political legacy of Sophiatown writers. Their bitter world made him argue that there is no great failure. The focal points of Nixon's argument are the notions of 'discursive legacy' and 'the full weight of belonging' that the Sophiatown Renaissance possessed. Questioning the position of the seventies set, Nixon argues:, 'When the 70's set did gain a belated, piecemeal familiarity with Themba and company their judgements tended to be harsh, as in Mongane Serote's reproach of Nakasa'. (Nixon, 1994:39)

Drawing from Baker's position and applying his ideas to the South African context, Nixon argues: 'Questioning the received view of the Harlem Renaissance as a failure, Houston Baker has urged us to

weigh its political shortcomings against its discursive legacy; to take, that is a longer view of what he calls 'deformation of mastery' and 'the mastery of form' (Nixon, 1990:40)

Baker's approach to the notion of failure is a good model for explaining the two worlds. It illustrates two important elements of this debate. Firstly it demonstrates and puts into perspective the notion of continuity. Such an approach shows the limit of any narrow cultural and literary criticism. It shows how looking at the political stance versus political disengagement to declare failure is inadequate for explaining the links between the 1950's and the 1970's. Such a stance, from my point of view, does not sufficiently bring into play the role of the Afro-American connection.

Following Baker's questioning of these views, Rob Nixon takes a similar approach to the Sophiatown renaissance. He goes beyond national boundaries towards a transatlantic analysis. He takes Baker's ideas as springboards for developing his conceptual framework. He summarises the world of the *Drum* decade through what he calls 'the full weight of belonging'. As Baker pleaded, Nixon weighs their 'political shortcomings against their discursive legacy'. Thus he says: 'Yet its literature helped fortify urban identities that were incontestable achievements well past petitioning. For whatever infirmities it manifests, Sophiatown writing did possess *the full weight of belonging*' (Nixon, 1990:40 emphasis added)

Nixon is even closer to the truth when he takes the sense of belonging as a chief characteristics of their worlds. Despite their political shortcomings the Sophiatown writers created a cosmopolitan life. However, Gwala would argue that 'psychic poisoning is more venomous and more corrosive than sheer chemical poison' (Gwala, 1971:177) Hence he does not agree that Nakasa's destruction could be attributed more to the physical destruction of "the den Paris of Johannesburg" than to their mental corrosion.

Questioning the received view of the Sophiatown renaissance as a mere failure, one needs to take Baker and Nixon's stance as a stepping stone into using Bordieu's concept of 'cultural capital' as an explanatory tool for their worlds. Even though one does not excuse the Sophiatown writers for their

political disengagement, their achievement in creating a culture of belonging needs to be heralded, sung and applauded.

Nixon's notion of 'belonging' lays a very useful theoretical basis for one to argue that both these generations were about searching for this 'full weight of belonging', struggling for a place and an energy to situate themselves. However, one can concede the fact that they searched for this place in different contexts and ways. The Sophiatown group used its cacophonous, violent and vibrant black urban culture to achieve that full weight of belonging. The Soweto group used the culture of jazz, poetry reading and theatre to achieve this much needed 'cultural capital'. However, the unreal reality of the *Drum* decade intensified the difficult predicament of the writers, who faced contradictions and ambivalences. Most of these writers faced contradictions in that they were sophisticated black urban intellectuals who were neither part of the tribal lifestyle nor part of the part of the white 'Bohemia', as Gready points out: 'White liberal domination and inter-racial cultural exploits, then as now, reflect the contradictions of the social circles they represent, and subconsciously mirror apartheid's racial hierarchy which they seek to transcend'. (Gready,1990:150)

The Soweto group faced a similar challenge slightly differently, though in the sense that they sought to transcend this liberal domination while asserting a utopian and narrow nationalism informed by very Western expressions. Both groups, whether conscious of it or not, sought to transcend the shackles of the regime; its racial hierarchy and its interracial frontier.

Apart from Nixon's theoretical framework, Gready also described the predicament of the Sophiatown writers using the same notion of belonging. He argued that despite the unreal conditions, these writers had found that sense of belonging; Sophiatown had become the symbol of belonging for them. Thus he says: 'Theirs is an attempt to preserve what has disappeared, describe a culture, evoke a community and reaffirm a sense of belonging' (Gready,1990:160)

From Sophiatown to Soweto: 'The changing same' of black South African writing.

Linked to the 'full weight of belonging' and 'the deformation of mastery' is the 'culture of belonging'.

Striving to achieve that 'cultural capital' was part of the Sophiatown Renaissance. This brings us to the commonalities and differences between the culture of subtle protest and the culture of explicit indictment. Due to the banning orders on black political organizations, after the Sharpeville massacre, blacks were left with no political mouthpiece. Also shortly after the 1950's, political activists such as Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela, and Tiro were caught under detention without trial. Also these banning orders pinched were corrosive to black intellectuals. This then leads us to the first commonalities between the fifties and the seventies. Both these generations fought for identity and a way out of bitterness intensified by the oppressing present.

The Sophiatown writers adopted a common way of avoiding the bitterness of the 'shadowy-life' that they led. They adopted masks (in the case of Bloke Modisane), heavy drinking and women (in the case of the Can Themba and others), comics and women (in the case of Casey Motsisi), jazz and women (in the case of Todd Matshikiza), and drinking and liberalism (in the case of Ndazana Nakasa). Nakasa's short pieces, 'Between Two Worlds', 'Trying to Avoid Bitterness' demonstrate this common pattern. For him, 'If I could leave this country and decide not to come back, it will be because of a desire to avoid perishing in my own bitterness'. (Nakasa in Patel, 1975:163)

Nakasa had innovative and brilliant ideas about a way out of bitterness, but eventually it haunted and tormented him. He became a victim of mental depression and alienation, until he finally threw himself out of the New York skyscraper building. This suicide contradicted his statement: 'Life abroad lacks the challenges that face us in South Africa' (Nakasa in Patel, 1975:168) He died in 1965 having not 'burst out and said everything he wished to say- in a loud and thunderous voice' (Nakasa in Patel, 1975:151) He suppressed that other voice which could not appear in his work. Nonetheless, one can blame the banning orders for exacerbating the inner trauma, fear of aberration and the fear of being an illegal citizen that he felt. The question that remains to be asked (following his piece, 'Living With My Private Thoughts') is: What is it that he concealed for the benefit of his audience?

Nakasa was not the only writer to be haunted by his world. Themba also lived with his private thoughts. The development of his writing suggests that he started as a protestor living behind good and evil and

ended up being a characterless 'native of nowhere'. These haunting and devastating living conditions did not end with the first generation, they continued their tormenting spree even for the seventies generation. The banning orders on political leaders and political organizations left the later generation with no source of impetus, until later when BP, SASO, Black NUSAS and other student organizations emerged.

Mafika Gwala's poem, 'The Jive' illustrates how they used to forget their inner cries. The 'blues' of the late Simon 'Mahlathini' Nkabinde, Thekwane and Miriam Makeba made them live with those inner cries, the cries of detention without trial of Nelson Mandela and other prominent political figures. Listening to these blues was a source of inspiration to speak, act and awaken, as he puts it:

Mahlathini blues
plus Bra Thekwane's Movers
on a Tau Special
we jive through our problems
all that is left
of the black miseries jive
Mandela off'd to Robben Island
Boy Faraday off'd to Heaven or Hell ('The Jive')

BC was not the only source of inspiration, laughter and consciousness for the Soweto Poets, but music was an alternative source of the cultural capital they needed. The blues and soul were part of their cultural expression.

Of Serote a similar account can be applied. His poem, 'Beerhall Queen'²¹ demonstrates how people sought forgetfulness in drinking. He states:

Round the tin that's on her head
Bubbling the bitter brown beer

That keeps men and husbands
Away from this troublous world,

²¹ These figures who sometimes owned lucrative businesses, had a variety of names. They started off as 'skokiaan queens' and later achieved the status of "shebeen queens". Now as in Serote's poem, referred to as 'Beerhall Queens'

Together in her warm homely house. ('Beerhall Queen')

Serote pictures the shebeen and the shebeen queens as the centre for discoursing about the 'national deception'; where people seek laughter in a 'troubled world'. Therefore, the 'troubled world' is what bound and yoked the Sophiatown and the Soweto generations together. The culture of jazz, blues, *umbhaqanga*, shebeen queens, also shebeens linked these literary generations.

The major source of internal continuities was the trans-Atlantic connection that transcends the borders of South African literary tradition. Testimonies from both generations suggest that this link bound the 'New African intellectuals of the 1930's (whose source of influence was Alain Locke's idea of the 'New Negro') with the Sophiatown Renaissance. The argument that the emergence of the later generation superseded the efforts by the earlier generation suggest that very thing which is impossible. For both the Sophiatown group and the Soweto propagators, Afro-American writers became, 'for a while, a point of reference' (Serote, 1990:8). This testimony also appeared from the earlier generation. The relationships between individual authors also shed some light into this point.

This trans-Atlantic influence extended beyond a mere link between individual authors towards an ideological and conceptual level. Firstly, Locke's idea of the 'New Negro' crossed the Atlantic and was given a South African version, the 'New African'. Secondly, the idea of a literary Renaissance crossed the ocean and was given a South African version-the Sophiatown Renaissance. Lastly, the psychoanalytic and political movement, 'Black Power' touched the South African soil in the form of Black Consciousness. This suggests that blacks, internationally, had been yoked together by white violence on their humanity.

The conceptual framework of this connection does not end with Alain Locke's 'New Negro' ideals, it extends to other black intellectuals. Evidence from both the Soweto generation and the Sophiatown group shows the writers from both generations read their Afro-American compatriots. Gwala's poem, 'Jo!iinkomo', for example, responds to W.E.B. Du Bois's concept of 'double consciousness'. He writes:

The cattle shall have herded home

to our ancestral kraal
Jol'iinkomo!
Africa shall be one in her past.
Jol'iinkomo!
Africa shall have *one Soul*
Jol'iinkomo! (emphasis added)

This poem is a response to Du Bois's call 'the history of the American Negro is the history of longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer identity'. (Du Bois, 1986:365) This longing also tormented the 'Sophtown' writers. He wanted to decide his true identity. But the hybridity of his experience made the attainment of this soul a myth. He always questioned his 'people'. He belonged somewhere between the white liberal world and the black world. He was a native of nowhere. In his soul searching days, he wished neither of the older selves to be lost. The warring ideals and differences between the two generations were reconciled and linked (from being torn asunder) together by the Afro-American influence.

However, before I can come to a conclusion about the political disengagement versus the discursive legacy of the *Drum* school, I have to point out that their effort, their imaginative and literary achievement should not be readily dismissed because 'the unrealness of Sophtown was both their creation and a reflection of its often unlikely actual reality' (Gready, 1990:161-162).

Furthermore, these two generations have also been yoked together by their 'desperate search for an identity' (Ellison, 1953:297) and 'quest for a true humanity' (Biko, 1978). Although different in their approach to white racism, Biko and Nakasa had one thing in common, 'a search for a place under the sun (in the case of Nakasa)' and 'a quest for true humanity (in the case of Biko)'. Biko wanted to create a society where people are not treated like 'perpetual under-16's'. Nakasa searched for answers to the questions: Who am I? What am I? Why am I? And Where? (Ellison, 1953:297). Through his search for a true humanity, Biko was to provide a remedy for that identity crisis. The great dream manifests itself quite frequently in his articles, as in the following extracts:

These (liberals) are the people who claim that they too feel the oppression just as acutely as the blacks and therefore should be jointly involved in the black man's *struggle for a place under the sun*. In short, these are the people who say that they have black souls wrapped up in white skins.... 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....* Granted that it may be more attractive and even safer to join the system, we must still recognize that in doing so we are well *on the way towards selling our souls....The great gift* has to come from Africa -giving the world *a more human face*. (Biko,1978:20,98,39,47 emphasis added)

This philosophy shows that part of what black people in South Africa and the US attempted was to subvert some of the received stereotypes about their humanity. They wanted to carve a niche and 'struggle for a place under the sun' in an 'unthinking environment' (Nkosi, 1983:11). As Biko points out, 'they had set out on a quest for true humanity'. In this quest they tried to transcend and subvert some barriers such as masquerading, liberalism and white supremacy. There is one thing that strikes me about the whole debacle: if the later generation knew that they both searched for a place under the sun, why could they not join hands and see through the ruse of the regime?

This study has attempted to explore the dilemma that prevailed for both the *Drum* school and the Soweto poets. Although they differed in some respects, they had a great deal in common: searching for a place under the sun in a politically turbulent society was part of their commonalities. Also yoked together by the presence of the Afro-American popular culture, they strove for true humanity. Therefore, one would argue and suggest that for contemporary criticism, the main focus should be on this 'Black Atlantic' frontier. Adopting such a theoretical framework and stance will help resolve some of these dilemmas, hence achieving a continuity of experience.

Abbreviations

Abbreviations that have been frequently used in this study are explained as follows:

AME	African Methodist Episcopal
BC	Black Consciousness
BCM	Black Consciousness Movement
BP	Black Power
BPC	Black People Convention
BPM	Black Power Movement
MP	Member of Parliament
NAACP	National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People
NUSAS	National Union of South African Students
SANNC	South African Native National Congress (now African National Congress)
SAO	South African Outlook
SASO	South African Student Organization
SNCC	Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee

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