

The History of Black Consciousness

Abstract Beginning with its roots in Bantu Education, this chapter sketches the rise and fall of Black Consciousness. Penfold summarises the diverse and complex influences behind this struggle ideology that was led by Steve Biko. Importantly, Penfold suggests that Black Consciousness must be fundamentally understood as a cultural movement. He also questions the suitability of using simplified racial binaries when discussing Black Consciousness ideology. The chapter ends with a discussion of the 1976 Soweto Uprisings. It speculates as to the different ways Black Consciousness remained prominent in South Africa's political and literary psyche after its official banning.

Keywords Black Consciousness · Bantu Education · Steve Biko · Soweto Uprising · Fanon

The rise and fall of Black Consciousness, along with the lives of the generation of writers who shaped its ideology, was inescapably influenced by apartheid education. The community-based Bantu Education Act 1953 was enacted in order to replace the divergent forms of mission education that had previously existed in South Africa. These mission schools had become beset by problems of centralisation and student frustration (Healy 2011; Fleisch 2002). Meanwhile, Bantu Education was meant to provide African students with a renewed appreciation of their culture. Where mission education had previously stressed assimilation into Western society

by offering English-language instruction and relying on an accepted European literary canon (Kallaway 2002), Bantu Education cynically encapsulated some of the founding principles of Afrikaner Nationalism.

These tenets and, indeed, apartheid as a means of political rule were based firmly on a cultural footing (O'Meara 1996). Afrikaner Nationalism stressed a god-willed diversity of people with each fostering a unique cultural identity or *volkseie* (Giliomee 2003; Sanders 2003). Bantu Education thus revolved around a linguistic and cultural agenda and was designed to offer an education suitable for 'natives' as an independent race (Horrell 1968, 4). It promoted the mother tongue as the medium of instruction, chose literature that supported the Afrikaner view of ethno-national separation, and offered a curriculum that prepared Africans for their future occupations serving the white community. The result was a comprehensively sub-standard education that promoted racist stereotypes and failed to equip students with the tools and language skills needed to succeed (Horrell 1968). In the literary terms central to this study, teaching of classical Western poetry and fiction became limited because the English language was regarded as foreign. African-authored material that failed to speak to the principles of Bantu Education—needless to say the majority—was also removed. Meanwhile, there was a profound shortage of textbooks and other published materials that was so severe students were left with little awareness of the literature that was actually allowed through formal structures.

Understandably, anger amongst the African population grew in the wake of these changes. This problem was compounded by the 1959 Extension of University Education Act, which extended Bantu Education into the tertiary domain and bolstered separate development. It became illegal for non-white students to attend white or 'Open' universities. They were instead forced to attend separate college institutions in line with their ethnicity. Belying the rhetoric of 'separate but equal', student life was more regulated than at the white universities. Increasing restrictions were placed on the choice of societies and freedom of speech, while there was a noticeable shortfall in equipment, facilities and general standards (Ramphela 1996). These changes were met with fierce resistance as feelings of frustration and resentment grew. The epicentre of this anger was at the University of Fort Hare, where several demonstrations took place. And these emotions evolved a decade later into a new African politics that crystallised in the universities under the leadership of medical student Steve Biko. Black Consciousness was born.

2.1 THE RISE OF BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS

Black Consciousness entered a vacuum of sorts. Following the banning of the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) and African National Congress (ANC) in the 1960s, those within South Africa who wished to promote African liberation and protest against apartheid policy had limited options. This was compounded in universities where the best means of political representation and criticising Bantu Education remained the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS). Though formed as a non-racial body to advance the interests of all regardless of race, NUSAS had maintained a predominantly white leadership and was concentrated at the four Open Universities. Thus NUSAS leaders largely spoke of white academic concerns much to the anguish of the African student body, which, dismayed by NUSAS's failure to speak about the African experience, pushed for the union to embrace a wider political platform. This dissatisfaction reached its zenith during the annual NUSAS conference at Rhodes University in 1967 when African delegates were told to use segregated facilities. Talks followed between African NUSAS members and colleagues from the Turfloop campus branch of the PAC. At the July 1969 general conference in Turfloop this group splintered and founded the South African Students' Organisation (SASO). Steve Biko became president and initially positioned SASO alongside NUSAS. Indeed, Biko upheld NUSAS as the National Union. However, this apologetic stance quickly changed as SASO leaders began to speak of self-reliance.

This separatist message was combined with hostile criticisms of NUSAS and liberalism. These both became hallmarks of SASO rhetoric and frequent topics in Biko's *I Write What I Like* essays penned under the pseudonym Frank Talk. Liberals' lived experience meant they were unable to relate fully to the African experience. They could not 'represent, however "beautiful" [their] words, the concerns of Blacks' (Sanders 2003, 205). Liberals remained confined within the white experience. All too often they fell back on white privilege and spoke within the roles of established discourse. Africans were accepted as workers supporting white ascendancy and liberal concerns failed to move beyond this notion. Liberals, viewed cynically, just argued for improved conditions for African workers: 'The black person is still a thing, only the thing must be given more oil to function with better efficiency' (Ndebele 1972, 20). Another criticism focused on the liberal ideology's notion of black

assimilation into an already established white society. Most famously Biko wrote, ‘integration is a one way course, with the whites doing all the talking and the blacks doing all the listening’ (1970, 16). ‘Blacks don’t need a go-between’ (1970, 20). Third, Biko criticised liberal politics for dictating how the oppressed should feel and respond to their oppression. It must be recognised that the African has the ‘right and duty to respond to the kick in the way he sees fit’ (Biko 1972, 195).

This attitude and Black Consciousness’s hostility to white liberalism caused the movement to receive criticism from both sides of the racial divide. Many felt Black Consciousness toed the line of Nationalist policy and continued to promote racism. Indeed, the governing Afrikaner Nationalist Party (NP) initially felt that Black Consciousness could not be considered a threat such was the overlap in their policies. It was even briefly encouraged (O’Meara 1996, 170). This underestimation was intensified by the NP’s ultra-conservative wing, led by A.P. Treurnicht, who dismissed the effectiveness of Black Consciousness’s message of black unity on the mistaken grounds of incompatibility between the different ethnic groups involved. However, Biko frequently defended his ideology from these charges. He claimed racism was based on the desire to subjugate, which his demographic was incapable of because of their situation. SASO member Bennie Khoapa offered a comprehensive reanalysis of the situation in *Black Viewpoint*, a Black Consciousness-affiliated journal. He wrote that what is defined as separatism is actually the process of ‘regroupment’ necessary because of ‘the paradox of integration’. He stated:

The fact that blacks must sing black *and* black *together* before they can sing black *and* white *together* [...] the fact that blacks must unite before they can separate and must separate before they can unite [...] History has charged us with the cruel responsibility of going to the very gate of racism in order to destroy racism—to the gate not further. (1972, 64)

2.2 THE BINARY OF BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS

Daniel Magaziner’s commentary is one of few that seeks to unpack this paradox of integration. He, like me, refuses to position Black Consciousness within a simple racial binary. Yes, the ideology was based on a degree of separation between white and black; however, this neglects the associations that existed between these groups during

the 1970s. Moreover, there were also several conflicts within these two discrete racial categories.

Michael Lobban notes that many responses towards Black Consciousness during the 1970s tended to judge it against a 'white' view of society that 'simply did not exist' (1996, 18). The NP had, since the 1950s, been split between those with *verligte* and *verkrampte* tendencies. The Nationalist's previously united imaginings of the nation were beginning to rub against each other as disagreements arose concerning the primacy of race over culture. President Verwoerd's more careful formulations during his premiership about this longstanding issue repeatedly spoke of the centrality of culture (Pelzer 1966). Yet, from the 1970s, the apartheid state increasingly re-constructed the *volk* as purely all white. This led to the coloured population being excluded from the hegemony despite being in many ways 'culturally Afrikaner' (Moodie 2009, 10). It also led the NP to pursue allegiances with the English-speaking constituency. This white alliance meant the oppressor could be portrayed as a Western bloc—not just as an Afrikaans population—that could be challenged in literature through the appropriation of a singular European literary tradition. However, Sanders argues that Biko also fractured this imagined white national unity. Black Consciousness rallied against the Afrikaner and white liberals 'to a different range of affect [...] The Afrikaner represents dominion over the body; the Liberal, control of the mind' (2003, 192). Different forms of freedom needed to be won from each.

Black Consciousness's emergence also renewed several serious concerns that had long dogged South Africa's faltering liberal movement. The Liberal Party had been founded in 1953 and was voluntarily dissolved in 1968 following the Prohibition of Improper Interference Act that forbade political parties having multi-racial memberships. Throughout this 15-year period, internal disagreements and a persistent ethnic, social and economic imbalance had persisted within its membership. These divisions originated at the outset when independent regional groups merged, somewhat uneasily, into a national political party. Chiefly, the older and more conservative groups united under the leadership of Margaret Ballinger remained loyal to the general principles of Cape Liberalism. This doctrine 'became synonymous with the rule of law, an independent judiciary, freedom of speech and a colour-blind, though qualified franchise' (Reed 1999, 145). However, it was sharply opposed by younger members mainly concentrated in the Transvaal and

Natal. Their more radical liberalism, which was also receptive to other liberation parties despite the increasingly communist tone of African politics, was in steadfast support of complete universal franchise and was more willing to embrace extra-parliamentary and extra-legal activities where necessary. Randolph Vigne (1997) comprehensively sketches how the Liberal Party's policies evolved significantly during its lifetime but these initial tensions persisted and repeatedly scuppered its possible appeal to the African population. H. Selby Msimang, who had helped found the ANC before joining the Liberals, notes how these constant ruptures prevented the party from developing 'a dynamic programme with which we could captivate an African interest' (quoted in Vigne 1997, 228). Its platform lacked unity and an emotional bond or shared experience with which to appeal with complete success to the African population. To put Msimang's views simply, and with overtones of Black Consciousness rhetoric, liberalism spoke well but not well enough.

With those within the Liberal Party coming to similar conclusions, it is unsurprising that Black Consciousness took the route it did. This apparent necessity was enhanced in the late 1960s. Younger liberals, like John Brown, who were more radical and more inclined to seek alliance with African movements, were banned and forced into exile. In response, the dying Liberal Party turned again to its older members. Thus the Party lacked a coherent political base that spoke adequately to the new revolutionary energy of the moment. The conservative rhetoric that accompanied this return of past liberal stalwarts was sharply at odds with Black Consciousness. For Paul Rich, 'the rhetoric of liberalism increasingly took on the mantle of a charade, full of sound and fury but signifying very little' (1984, 133). Across South Africa, questions were asked over what direction liberalism should take and where it would fit in the new liberation struggle, especially since it was no longer a political party. Alan Paton, writing in 1973, went as far in his own private correspondence to reveal fears that Africans exposed to the Black Consciousness message would never again feel whites were capable of telling the truth. On the other hand, Neville Curtis, the NUSAS President in 1972, acknowledged and accepted the reasons behind SASO's formation. He heralded the need for a fundamental restructuring and reassessment of the liberal student union he led. This expression of support meant the government-initiated Schlebusch Commission into Certain Organisations accused NUSAS of promoting Black Consciousness. There was limited evidence for these findings but they do show that the

NUSAS/SASO break was ‘more organisational than ideological’ (Hirson 1979, 114).

It is largely impossible to see a complete division anywhere between SASO and white liberalism despite the rhetoric. Biko in particular maintained links with NUSAS figures and entered into constant communication with Donald Woods, editor of the liberal *Daily Dispatch* (Woods 1978). This friendship placed Woods outside the law and caused him to suffer threats of violence (Hutmacher 1980). Moreover, the activities of SASO and the Black People’s Convention (BPC)—the community wing of Black Consciousness—reflected much liberal policy. This is also hardly surprising since people like Drake Koka, who had been a Transvaal Liberal official, were instrumental along with Biko in establishing the BPC in 1972 (Vigne 1997). Instances of these similarities include the educational and clinical programmes both advocated. The Black Consciousness Home Education campaign, for example, hoped to provide home students with tuition manuals and worked closely with Turret College, the correspondence arm of the white-liberal-run South African Committee for Higher Education (SACHED). Such was the intimacy that the Minutes of the SASO Executive Council Meeting on 2 January 1973 reveal the deep dissatisfaction some members felt over the scheme. SASO’s leadership was forced to announce that the links ‘must not be considered as official co-operation with Turret and that all finances be directed to SASO’.

These documents hint at yet another division caused by Black Consciousness. SASO’s rhetoric and policy caused friction not only within the organisation but also the wider African community. Despite the use of black to include all oppressed peoples regardless of ethnicity, the label did not reflect a harmonious homogeneity. Magaziner quotes the *World* journalist Percy Qoboza, who argued that SASO needed to stop discriminating between ‘relevant black men and irrelevant black men’ (2010, 145). These two categories closely reflect those proposed by Gail Gerhart when she speaks of African Nationalism in terms of ‘rebels’ and ‘realists’ (1978, 39). Black Consciousness represented the younger intellectual rebel movement that vehemently argued against the realist African politicians who chose to work within the apartheid state’s Bantustan policies and arguably thus became complicit actors in the status quo. Black Consciousness’s cynicism towards the white establishment’s concessionary political offerings saw them dismiss realists—those who chose to use the few opportunities offered them as a platform for

change—as irrelevant in Black Consciousness’s battle for liberation. This is despite such realism giving the African population a degree of expression during the silence of the 1960s. SASO rhetoric instead painted realists as abandoning their people and ‘selling out’. Such criticism borders on ironic given another split in the African population, briefly mentioned above, that saw Black Consciousness charged as a racist belief itself furthering apartheid’s aims. Proponents of non-racialism, ANC communists and Trotskyists outside the Congress personified by Hirson’s critical tone in *Year of Fire, Year of Ash*, frequently united in dismissing Black Consciousness and adopted sceptical and occasionally confrontational attitudes towards it (Gibson 2004, 1). Tensions between these groups have arguably never completely ceased. They have had a profound impact on current South African literature and national culture as later chapters demonstrate.

Black Consciousness also opened up cleavages around class and gender. Mamphela Ramphele has recounted her struggles to advance the female cause within a Black Consciousness movement that was very much founded on conceptions of manhood (Magaziner 2010, 33–36). Feminism was a struggle that remained secondary to the racial struggle. Female Africans were black first and women second, a tension that has consistently been illustrated in Black Consciousness literature. Similarly, the (ir)relevancy of the class struggle was questioned. In 1976, the SASO President Diliza Mji appeared to accept the need to ‘start interpreting our situation from an economic point of view’ (Mji 1977) when he gave the Presidential address during SASO’s 8th General Student Council. Before this, however, class was frequently missing from Black Consciousness literature. Indeed, Alan Brooks and Jeremy Brickhill note that the economy is often the last thing to be mentioned in Steve Biko’s essays (1980, 77).

Clearly Black Consciousness divided the population it sought to unite—along lines of gender, class, and political persuasion. The generational divide also became more pronounced because the movement mobilised a student demographic that newly questioned the role of their forebears in struggle history. Mandla Seleane’s view was common: ‘I reasoned that if my parents had done a little more towards its realisation, it [liberation] might not be quite so distant, and the vision might be a little clearer’ (2007, 73). But, despite these cleavages, Black Consciousness was able to achieve great popularity and spread beyond the apparent confines of the universities and the petit-bourgeoisie.

2.3 CULTURE, POLITICS, PSYCHOLOGY?

The key to Black Consciousness's burgeoning popularity was attributable to the fact that it prioritised culture. As the following chapters make clear, this choice allowed fluid dialogue with a wide-range of audiences and allowed the ideology to constantly evolve. The movement's cultural material was not only influenced by Black Consciousness but influenced it in turn too. Therefore different publics could shape a place for themselves within it. Moreover, it was through culture that Black Consciousness could best imagine their desires of a multi-racial South Africa that sang black and white together; the end-point on a long road to freedom.

Many historians seemingly ignore this cultural thrust and concentrate on establishing Black Consciousness as a political movement. I, however, suggest that its desire to prioritise culture and redefine the very terms on which the liberation struggle was conducted was unavoidably evident. When expanding on a declaration uttered by Biko in *I Write What I Like*, Magaziner suggests, "blacks are tired of standing on the touchlines to witness a game they should be playing". They would rather ignore the game altogether' (2010, 30). For Magaziner, this quote references the political battles between the NP and white liberal progressives. However, aside from advocating a wish to ignore the ideological debates within the white population, I feel this statement must be understood as expressing ambivalence to the political game altogether. Biko is alternatively advocating the need to adopt a cultural standpoint and to assert a new black identity and pride.

Black Consciousness believed the African population had come to accept the truth of South Africa's oppressive discourse and required liberating not just from the white oppressor but from themselves. Biko (n.d., 29) announced the need to address the Africans' felt inferiority and 'pump life back into his empty shell'. This individual and internal process would then, as most historians have it, lead into a wider political project that would create a new South African society with racial equality. This struggle has been defined as 'psycho-political' by Derek Hook (2004). However, this future, continually referred to by historians who seek to analyse cause and effect, was rarely articulated by Black Consciousness leaders themselves. The political end was so distant on the horizon that it was largely incomprehensible. 'Until [the] goal [of individual mental liberation] was achieved, the future was unthinkable'

(Magaziner 2010, 51). Instead, Black Consciousness chose to position itself as apolitical in the immediate timeframe, something which led to its being labelled as ‘superficial’ and dismissed as sounding ‘like a course in group psycho-therapy’ (Hirson 1979, 297). This stance can be seen in the movement’s initial membership, which included ANC and PAC activists alongside each other, and its public utterances that discouraged violence and suggested a scepticism towards marches, rallies and other typical tools of political expression.

Muting its political thrust, Black Consciousness was not protesting against the situation but thinking through and presenting a challenging alternative. Thus the movement ‘publicly emphasised its more cultural and intellectual side’ (Gerhart 1978, 291). In 1972, the second SASO Conference was focused on ‘Black Creativity and Development’; a year later Black Community Programmes led the National Arts week at Turfloop. Moreover, many of Biko’s earliest interventions chose to concentrate on the cultural battles that had to be won first. This is best explained in his 1971 paper ‘Some African Cultural Concepts’. In this paper Biko refused to accept a pre-Van Riebeeck African culture that had been distorted and compared unfavourably with imposed colonial cultures. Instead he spoke of ‘modern African culture’. This culture was not caught in the colonial binary of inferiority but rather continued to recognise cultural hybridisation and be expressed alongside Western cultural forms:

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

This intervention therefore acknowledged the role culture, and by extension language, had played in the oppression of black people. From this point forward, it announced culture as a new weapon in the struggle.

This new threat was quickly recognised by the NP itself, perhaps unsurprisingly given the stages of their own history. In 1975–1976, the state moved to undermine Black Consciousness by placing culture on trial. Becoming concerned with Black Consciousness’s militant language, the state tried nine SASO members under the Terrorism Act in what became known as *State vs. Cooper*. Comprehensively discussed by

Lobban, this became a ‘trial of ideas and culture’ (1996, 45). The third charge, Lobban notes, rested exclusively on cultural matters by citing five literary works which, for the state, sought ‘to denigrate the whites and represent them as inhuman oppressors’ (Lobban 1996, 49). Aside from attesting to Black Consciousness as a cultural movement rather than a specifically political force, this charge highlighted the importance of culture to apartheid power relations. It also raised an important third consideration because it formed part of the first indictment that was quashed and replaced during June 1976. The subsequent indictment saw the removal of explicit cultural matters that ‘henceforth [...] were to be anchored to the hard facts of rallies’ (Lobban 1996, 50). Thus culture was discussed within a political framework. The distinction between the categories was removed and culture was accepted by both sides as being deeply embedded within South African politics. This is an important fact given the tendency to criticise literary output during this period for abandoning aesthetic standards in favour of the political.

The trial represented an attempt to devalue and destabilise the power of Black Consciousness rhetoric and cultural action. In reality, it only succeeded in providing the movement with an opportunity to explore, perform and promote Black Consciousness culture. During the 136-day court hearing, symbolic cultural traits were consistently displayed inside and outside the courtroom. The crowds that gathered to witness proceedings frequently sang freedom songs, recited verse and gave the Black Power salute—the raised clenched fist—adopted by Black Consciousness. Literature’s function in the liberation battle was also discussed and ultimately embraced. The trial explicitly questioned art’s purpose and hinted towards a more political function. Consider, for example, the prosecution’s exchange with expert witness Gessler Nkondo. When asked whether poetry was merely a setting forth of ideas, Nkondo’s reply of no prompted the prosecution to consider, ‘What is the poem then? The function of a poem and poetry?’ (Lobban 1996, 63).

Furthermore this trial explored the relevance of the English language. The state’s case rested on proving the intensity and implicit violence of language in Black Consciousness publications. Faced with the prosecution’s assertion that certain lexical choices and passages increased hostility towards the state and threatened the maintenance of law and order, Biko argued that the language used was commonplace

in townships and suggested true African feeling. The claims were also flawed by the prosecution's being 'merely interested in the language' whilst Biko insisted 'you have got to take it in context' (1976, 158). The crux lay in language choice. Biko defiantly argued—with such passion that he at times appeared to be the interrogator—that mis-readings occurred because English, the language of the texts, looked analytically at word choice. It often 'doesn't accommodate a very honest expression sometimes of basic feeling' (1976, 104). African languages, meanwhile, see 'the emotion behind the word' (1976, 194). They have a different idiom. Consequently, some words do not appear as strong as they do in English, which admits a problem of translation where the idiom cannot be reconfigured accurately. However, Biko maintained SASO English's language choice was not a problem. Both speaker and audience were African and therefore similarly understood the context and meaning. Secondly, as I mentioned at the outset of this study, English was a necessity as a the situation. It had an established economic and intellectual capital and was the only viable means of communicating between different ethnic and linguistic groups. Indeed, because of education policy, African languages enshrined the very apartheid divisions that needed overcoming. Unlike Afrikaner Nationalists, who embraced language as the ultimate expression of identity and group unity, Black Consciousness recognised it as only one of many. Much as Anderson has written in another context:

It is always a mistake to treat languages in a way that certain nationalist ideologues treat them [...] Much the more important aspect of language is 'its capacity for generating imagined communities, building in effect *particular solidarities*'. (quoted in May 2008, 131)

For Black Consciousness, then, the answer lay in establishing a version of English that could carry the weight of African experience.

2.4 BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS'S INFLUENCES

Interestingly, this view of language and the hybrid cultural expressions Black Consciousness sought to promote reflected Black Consciousness's approach to the intellectual traditions that shaped its ideology. This approach celebrated African and African Diasporic thought alongside intellectual thinking from the West and Latin America.

Frantz Fanon was arguably the largest influence on Black Consciousness. His *Black Skin, White Masks* (1968) is directly alluded to in Biko's famous essay 'Black Souls in White Skins?' Fanon's thought is present in the recognition of the psychological battle, the need for polarisation in the race struggle as a means of change, and the mistrust of bourgeois blacks who are determined to work within and alongside the oppressor. Moreover, Fanon's four-stage identification of literary development—colonial, national, fighting, postcolonial—that is contained within *The Wretched of the Earth* (1965) provides a schematic to roughly order the different constructions of the nation made in Black Consciousness literature. Colonial literature is shaped by the European tradition and disregards the vitality of native culture in favour of imagining the centre over the periphery. This is followed by a national stage where writers pen accounts of their own people's past that are 'steeped in humour and allegory' (1965, 159). However, these accounts continue to reflect a borrowed European aesthetic, and the writers themselves are unable to establish an active presence. Third, art—now written by those who had never previously considered writing but have since decided to join the struggle—becomes a fighting literature. This stage transcends the lament and instead calls for revolt and a new reality. Finally, there emerges a postcolonial literature that announces the death of the colonial man and offers total change that is represented by a refreshing return of colour and imagination. This literature looks critically at both traditional culture and modernity. It also places an emphasis on the individual through decentralisation away from the elites and the petty bourgeoisie. Admittedly, much African-language literature in South Africa questions the applicability of the colonial phase while some English-language literature remains fiercely ambivalent towards European culture. Yet, this said, certain interesting parallels deserve to be drawn between Fanon's guide and the material discussed in the following chapters.

Despite these borrowings, there are large ruptures between Black Consciousness thought and Fanonian theory. Principally, the theorists of Black Consciousness, unlike Fanon, did not use the notion of self-inspection to trigger a single mass eruption of violence. Moreover, and again deviating from Fanon, liberation evidently did not begin with the stirrings of the proletariat, whose unique situation was initially ignored. Rather, the intellectuals represented the start of the ideology, the very same 'products of the universities' Fanon viewed with 'suspicion' (Hirson 1979, 112). There are also incompatibilities between Fanon

and Negritude, though Black Consciousness readily used them both. Indeed, Black Consciousness's Africanist approach can be seen as a direct response to Negritude. Both were dedicated to the affirmation of African values and culture and to Africans' identifying their position in society and beginning to proclaim their blackness. Meanwhile, Biko 'employed dialectics remarkably similar to Sartre's [and Negritude]' (Magaziner 2010, 42) when attempting to posit Black Consciousness as the antithesis to white supremacy. This was a tendency Fanon frequently bemoaned. Yet differences still remain. Snail (2008) observes that Negritude desired the complete revival of indigenous culture and the assimilation of Africans into the norms of white society. Such statements are in stark contrast to Black Consciousness that, as aforementioned, wished to create a new society and did not readily accept cultural influences coming from fixed groupings. These differences are, though, only clear if you fail to follow Senghorian Negritude, a particular strand of Negritude that dismissed claims of integration and one-way assimilation in favour of a process of duality with 'each one having at the same time to adapt himself to the nature and habits of the associate' (Senghor 1965, 52). Assimilation in this sense did afford equal respect for black and white values, much like Biko's joint culture. Interestingly, this view is also congruent with that of Amilcar Cabral (1980), who similarly spoke against binary models and advocated against the blind acceptance of indigenous culture in the new dispensation.

The African Diaspora was also a central component of Black Consciousness. The movement was, in many ways, modelled on the Black Power phenomenon that had swept America a decade earlier. While Gerhart's *Black Power in South Africa* (1978) prevents the need for a wide discussion of these linkages, writings by influential African-Americans, including Eldridge Cleaver, Malcolm X, James Cone and Stokely Carmichael, all appear inter-textually in Black Consciousness literature. Meanwhile, African-American jazz continued a long line of musical exchanges between the two countries (Willan 1982). Initially becoming an important touchstone for South Africa's *Drum* generation, jazz rhythms continue to feature heavily in South African poetry to this day, not least that with which is Black Consciousness aligned.

Black Power's biggest influence was in the form of slogans and language. Apartheid and the white power structure were newly referred to as 'the system', while terms such as 'relevance' and 'power structure' proliferated (Gerhart 1978, 277). These terms, abounding in Black Power

rhetoric, had not previously appeared in the South African struggle. Slogans were also borrowed, including 'Black is Beautiful'. So too was the word that came to define the generation. 'Black', used as an alternative to Negro in America, replaced terms such as African and Bantu in South African discourse. Defined as 'status-more-than-colour' (Gerhart 1978, 277), black was employed to unite all oppressed peoples—African, Indian or Coloured—regardless of their ethnicity. Unlike the case of Negritude, where blackness 'connoted the pigmentation of one's skin' (Snail 2008, 55), for Black Consciousness, black was more than colour; it was a history of associated pasts to which cultural practices were integral. Rather than having an ethnic aspect, 'Black culture [implied a] freedom on our part to innovate without recourse to white values' (Biko 1973, 96). It was a shared culture defined outside the norms of colonial discourse in which artists could include aspects of all cultures without prominence. And, although the term was resisted until 1970 as SASO was forced to remain 'non-white', black became increasingly favoured as the Black Consciousness ideology extended its appeal to the Indian and Coloured populations who originally resisted the grouping. The NP even increasingly accepted black over their original term Bantu. Black allowed a positivity to be attached to identity. The oppressed were no longer defined in the white image. And such was the attraction of this authoritative step, black retained a place in liberation discourse even away from the SASO mainstream. For example, *The Star* on 20 December 1974 reported the Black Renaissance Convention meeting in Hammanskraal earlier that month had decided to move away from SASO/BPC yet retain blackness as central to its message.

The unity suggested by the deployment of blackness did not immediately allow Black Consciousness to spread its message away from its university heartlands. This was attempted through an array of BPC literacy projects established within local communities with the aim of raising consciousness. These struggled to succeed due to problems in training volunteers and establishing attendance (Lobban 1996, 25). Yet they do reflect another instance of ideological borrowing. The Brazilian educationalist Paulo Freire had previously promoted education that foregrounded a sense of community and saw literacy imply not only learning to read but students exploring their own reality and discussing it critically with others (Reyhner 2012). Similarly, the Black Consciousness Home Education Scheme removed the idea of individual education in favour of a community aspect where students and teachers would work together

and listen to one another. The emphasis was on achieving a joint social utility, an environment where students were ‘not to be made aware but [made] oneself aware’ (Magaziner 2010, 129). However, again, the parallel between Black Consciousness and the original idea was not straightforward. C.A. Bowers has written of Freire’s tendency to use Western education assumptions ‘that undermine indigenous knowledge systems’, while his ideas in practice suggest the ‘colonizing nature of the cultural assumptions underlying his pedagogy’ (2004, vii). These were the very education practices Black Consciousness was reacting to. Furthermore, Freire argued for independent thinkers, while, for Magaziner, Black Consciousness literacy attempted to push individuals in a certain direction: acceptance of the conclusions already realised by Biko.

Finally, Black Consciousness contained Western intellectual references. Black Consciousness was based on entering into critical debates on past and present ideas; synthesising competing ideologies in order to promote subtlety in intellectual discourse; and re-imagining the future. Magaziner feels the method ‘of individuals critiquing, shifting, and thinking forward into the future’ was ‘very much a product of the Western academic tradition’ (2010, 41). However, his continued analysis reveals a fundamental corruption of this Western method. Black Consciousness did not work with the complete thought but only selected passages. Ideas were unashamedly borrowed and, by ‘not exactly respecting copyright, [they] violated modernist [and importantly enshrined Western] notions of intellectual property’ (2010, 48, 49). Black Consciousness was, therefore, a collection—possibly even a corruption—of a vast depository of material. Literature from across Africa, its diaspora, and the West were rephrased and reconsidered in the creation of a composite ideology. The creation of Black Consciousness was also its aim: to discuss and place together, with equality, ideas from a wide range of intellectual cultures. And the links across the globe established by this intellectual hybridity were all maintained in the cultural output born from it.

2.5 THE END OF BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS?

On 16 June 1976, several thousand high-school students marched towards Orlando Stadium in Soweto to protest against recent changes in school language policy. They were met with police aggression and live ammunition. Violence escalated and triggered a widespread revolt that spread throughout the country, lasted several months, and has been

widely cited as marking the beginning of the end for apartheid. While these events themselves require little attention here (see Hirson 1979; Brooks and Brickhill 1980), they raised important questions concerning language and announced the end of Black Consciousness as a movement.

The initial reasons for the uprising have been much debated. The official inquiry conducted by The Cille Commission blamed a recent government ruling that introduced Afrikaans as the medium of instruction in 50% of school subjects. Many historians have since interpreted this as meaning Soweto was a revolt against Afrikaans. I, however, follow Jacob Dlamini (2009) in questioning this interpretation. Afrikaans had been an integral black language and means of poetic expression both before and after Soweto. Indeed, it seems odd to blame a language which could be used so poignantly by African writers to criticise a system that invested so much in Afrikaans and language as markers of separation. Alternatively, I suggest the uprising was a rebellion against the *imposition* of Afrikaans. For Alan Brooks and Jeremy Brickhill, this ruling occurred as an imperative reaction to Black Consciousness and the growing self-assertiveness of African youths who were beginning to challenge the cultural hegemony (1980, 46). It was an educational ploy to dent a liberation ideology that had education at its heart (Lodge 1983). My reading is supported by Black Consciousness literature after 1976 that increasingly used Soweto and Afrikaans to explore the state's attempts to limit the ability of Africans to self-define. Black Consciousness writers, instead, sought to define new methods of overcoming the heavily policed landscape of linguistic expression.

The explicit role of Black Consciousness in the Soweto Uprisings has also been deeply contested within African liberation circles. The revolt was situated within a malaise of student discontent over the overcrowding, high costs, and poor standards of Bantu Education; it featured a generational alliance between students, teachers and parents that had been fused by Black Consciousness; a majority of marchers were from Morris Isaacson High, dubbed Black Consciousness's 'cradle of resistance', or linked to the South African Students' Movement (SASM) that had long maintained links to the ideology; students gave the Black Power salute throughout the march. Yet still Black Consciousness's presence was doubted. Alternative accounts dispute the uprising's Black Consciousness motivations and draw on the very tactic of marching. They argue, as previously noted, that such resistance was not generally accepted under Biko's leadership. It was instead the ANC who

repeatedly called for the struggle to be taken to the streets. The SASM leaders, they continue to posit, had become disaffected with Black Consciousness in the period between 1972 and 1976. Consequently, SASM explored links with the ANC underground which had been facilitated by the release of prominent ANC members from Robben Island (South African 2010).

These claims were supported by figures such as Winnie Mandela, who asserted that Soweto ‘cannot be attributed to Black Consciousness as such’ (quoted in Hirson 1979, 196). She instead declared Black Consciousness’s lead role an unproven myth. In support of the ANC’s argument is the fact that the aftermath of Soweto permeated all demographics of black society, yet Black Consciousness had struggled to spread away from universities to working-class movements with any great durability. The precise attribution of the uprisings remains difficult to corroborate. Though the movement may have struggled to establish a physical presence off-campus, the ideology itself—especially given its cultural focus and constant performance—could not have failed to spread into the consciousness of the wider African population. Either way the tensions that surfaced between Black Consciousness and ANC supporters during 1976 have had a profound effect. Relations remain strained, an acrimony that is now best expressed in literature. In a bid to win symbolic political capital and continually re-legitimise their rule, the ANC is criticised for attempting to ‘claim’ struggle history and erase the presence of other liberation groups. The reasons behind the Soweto Uprising may remain too complex for simple explanation but the aftermath profoundly affected the style of future resistance.

The ability to claim the history of Black Consciousness arguably increased with the decline of the movement itself. Indeed, the Soweto Uprisings marked the ultimate end of Black Consciousness. The movement was banned within 18 months, Steve Biko was killed in detention, and numerous other SASO leaders were forced into exile. Yet, its ideology lived on. Julian Brown has warned against Soweto representing a clear break in protest against apartheid, viewing it instead as a ‘catalyst, not a new start’ (2009, 343). But a more violent and active phase of resistance did begin that was led by a newly determined youth who ‘wedded suffering and death to hope and victory’ (Magaziner 2010, 126). The Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s report suggested Soweto represented a complete transformation of protest from ‘peaceful march

into a violent confrontation' (1998, 559). The same can be said of the struggle as a whole. The youth adopted 'whatever means might be at hand—including notably violent means' (Brown 2009, 343). In many instances they could be accused of actively courting violence. Poems contained in the SASO archives at the University of the Witwatersrand provide clear examples of language that had, unquestionably, evolved into a call for confrontation:

Time to grab arms
And aim them at
The blue-eyed enemy
Lurking in the bushes

God up above
[...]
has also decreed
that we must now KILL (l. 24–35).

Such violence and continued protest was not performed *ad hoc*. The students continued to operate within an organisational framework. Those Black Consciousness supporters who left in exile largely found themselves integrated within the ANC movement, for example Barney Pitso. Many others, including Mongane Serote, chose to join Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK), the underground armed struggle. Despite the PAC in exile seemingly being the natural destination because of its similar desire to create a cultural identity for black Africans, the organisation was beset by division and ineffective organisation (Lodge 1983, 316). Alternatively the ANC had a long-established tradition of a united and relatively strong exile movement. That said, integration was not a straightforward process (Tambo 1987). However, the possible tensions between existing ANC exiles and those young activists fleeing post-Soweto South Africa were eased to some degree by Black Consciousness's stance as a cultural and community-based movement—a loose political ideology that could be flexibly accommodated into other organisations. Moreover, the emphasis on community equality prevented the formation of a firm hierarchy and meant questions of authority did not cause undue problems. And during this post-1976 period the ANC's activities increased, most notably with a return of the sabotage campaign. Meanwhile the wide-ranging literary and artistic movements within the

camps continued to grow as leading, previously Black Consciousness-affiliated writers merged into the ANC's cultural wing. Both of these occurrences had a profound effect on literature's future direction.

Within South Africa the picture was more complex. In April 1978 the Azanian People's Organisation (AZAPO) was founded. This was perceived as the natural home for Black Consciousness because it continued the Africanist message and became popular in the 'home' of Black Consciousness, the University of the North in Turfloop. It also appealed to the young township population when its message was promoted by *The Post* and *The Sowetan* (Lodge 1991, 25). The most notable member was Saths Cooper, a central figure through the past decade. Cooper's political move, when compared to that of fellow Black Consciousness leader Pityana, who joined the ANC abroad, clearly exemplifies Black Consciousness's flexibility. AZAPO recognised a narrowness in Black Consciousness and shifted the ideology from the community and the primacy of racial unity towards a socialist outlook that recognised class analysis. This was a necessary move in the 1980s when trade unionism and the working-class struggle became the focal point of resistance within South Africa. But AZAPO was weakened by its failure to achieve popular appeal with the working classes (Lodge 1983).

AZAPO's socialist stance frequently brought it into conflict with the other political body to rise after Soweto, the United Democratic Front (UDF). Established by student leaders in the aftermath of Soweto, it initially comprised small 'study groups' often led by the ANC. However, owing to their student focus, these study groups continued to work within Black Consciousness structures, feature prominent Black Consciousness figures, and share their language (Seekings 2000). Although the UDF came to adopt a non-racial doctrine in line with the ANC and drew on ANC symbolism, imagery, discourse, and tradition (Seekings 2000, 23), it also exhibited an 'ideologically ambiguous' (Lodge 1991, 35) language and sought to be all-encompassing. Black Consciousness had a central place. Most of the national and regional secretaries had originated from Black Consciousness, which shared an emphasis on community and infusion from below. Indeed, the local aspect was so prominent that the UDF was criticised for its lack of national coordination. As such, many local individuals and groups were able to maintain their autonomy and primary concerns. For example, individuals could continue a more explicitly Black Consciousness-styled

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

The UDF promoted beliefs that corresponded with Black Consciousness and later AZAPO, despite not sharing the centrality of Africanism. The UDF was popular and, introducing schemes that reached out to ordinary people, placed community at the centre of the ideology. Moreover, students continued to exert great influence; and, like AZAPO, 'a class-consciousness was the essential motivating force among a large number of its rank-and-file' (Lodge 1991, 29). Several trade unions joined the UDF and, although the Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU) did not officially join the Front, there was cooperation and several discussions about the possibility of a merger that were described as 'very thought provoking' (Seekings 2000, 64). However, the UDF's attempts to embrace all aspects of the struggle meant new association with whites. These are exemplified by the UDF's links to the multi-racial Congress of South African Students. The white student voice returned despite SASO's struggles to remove it a decade earlier. Additionally, the UDF had apparent links to the middle classes and capitalism, which led to confrontation with AZAPO. The visit of Edward Kennedy sparked a violent clash between the two and saw the entrenching of divisions within the African population. There was a degree of reconciliation between Black Consciousness and the ANC but splits were emerging. Nomavenda Mathiane commented in *The World* (1989):

It is not like 1976. [Now] the main conflict is between people who used to be friends and allies. In 1976 nearly all the activists were Black Consciousness, but now some [...] are with AZAPO and others [are] UDF. The fight between the two is wreaking more devastation than the fight with the System.

The UDF provides a convenient bridge through which to trace the influence of Black Consciousness ideology in liberation struggle culture. The Front was integral to the techniques of mobilisation discussed in Chap. 5 and had links to the trade-union movement, which lay at the centre of the new struggle poetry. Though the individual writers discussed may not have direct links to Black Consciousness, the very nature of the ideology suggests there would be an inescapable awareness that comes through in their written work. Moreover, this widening

of the struggle saw a political hybridity of the sort in line with Black Consciousness's ultimate aim. Ethnic politics became simply struggle politics (Mufson 1991). This range of new alliances demanded a new form of address. It meant that writers once again had to change their conceptions of the nation.

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