Article:
Toth, HG orcid.org/0000-0003-2865-7162 and Nicholls, B orcid.org/0000-0003-3238-7695 (2020) A dialectical literary canon? African Identities, 18 (1-2). pp. 41-63. ISSN 1472-5843

https://doi.org/10.1080/14725843.2020.1773761

A Dialectical Literary Canon?

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A Dialectical Literary Canon?

This article proposes a literary canon founded on dialectical principles, using South Africa as our historical example. In order to do so, we first trace the development of dialectical thought, moving from Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel to Karl Marx to Steve Biko; from Eurocentrism to class consciousness to Black Consciousness. Second, we plot the influence of Hegel and Marx as well as Sartre and Fanon on Biko's elaboration of dialectics for the Black Consciousness Movement. Third, and in response to Marxist critiques of Black Consciousness, we register the *moment* of class consciousness that underpins Biko's politics, especially his critique of institutions. Finally, and based on our exposition of Biko's reading of Hegel via Marx and Sartre, we suggest a 'polythetic' dialectic to rework the post-Apartheid literary canon and to accommodate intersectional complexity within it. The canon, in our model, does not emerge from a settled consensus, but instead re-coalesces on every occasion that it is submitted to contestation or is approached via conflicts in the social. A transitive or dialectical canon might variously retain or negate institutionally-privileged texts while still making them *momentarily* visible via the "popular" traditions of struggle that contest institutional privilege.

Keywords: dialectics; literary canon; Steve Biko; Marx; Hegel; Sartre; Black Consciousness

This article proposes a literary canon founded upon dialectical principles, using South Africa as our historical example. To establish the viability of our proposal, we track the iteration of the dialectic from Hegel, through Marx and Sartre, to Steve Biko's vernacular and avowedly unschematic adoption of these conceptual inheritances within South Africa's Black Consciousness Movement. Our argument proceeds in five stages. First, we address the discomforts and limits of Hegel's representations of Africa and the larger imperial complicities from which these representations arise. Second, we argue that a careful reading of Hegel suggests that his dialectic is many, not one. The dialectical movement, in other words, establishes new thetic premises, from which fresh

dialectical movements proceed. This characteristic connects Hegel and Marx; although, Marx differs in the way he wilfully *puts to work* dialectics, a practice that Steve Biko inherits. Third, we demonstrate how Biko's dialectic is poised between his reception of both Hegel and Sartre (in *Black Orpheus*) as well as Fanon's decolonial idealism, and his disputed claim that he had embraced (Marxist) dialectical materialism. Fourth, we register the critique of Biko's thought (by Mafika Gwala, amongst others): that Black Consciousness was insufficiently Marxist; that it dispensed with rigorous class analysis in favour of the cultural stylings of racial consciousness. We revisit Biko's writing on the Black Consciousness dialectic in order to suggest an alternative understanding: that Biko's project was to ripen black political solidarity while remaining attuned to the ultimate necessity of class struggle. In this sense, Biko's premature death in custody foreshortened the mature, fully-elaborated Marxist development of his thought. Likewise, we assert that the Black Consciousness Movement developed sophisticated institutional critiques of educational segregation, especially via the contributions of Onkgopotse Tiro, Biko's contemporary who was assassinated in 1974, but whose legacy lived on in the Soweto uprising of 1976 and the inception of *Staffrider* magazine in 1978. Finally, and based on these starting points, we suggest a 'polythetic' dialectic to rework the post-Apartheid literary canon and to accommodate intersectional complexity within it. The canon, in our model, does not emerge from a settled consensus, but instead re-coalesces on every occasion that it is submitted to contestation or is approached via conflicts in the social. A transitive or dialectical canon might variously negate institutionally-privileged texts while still making them *momentarily* visible via the "popular" cultural forms and traditions of struggle that contest institutional privilege. In turn, "popular" cultural forms and traditions of struggle are increasingly submitted to gender critique, LGBTQI+ critique, environmentalist critique, among

others. We assert that a polythetic dialectic is sufficiently flexible to manage the complexities of contestation and reaction via which the canon emerges and is (endlessly) revised. In turn, a dialectical canon might comprehend within its movement the transnational political alliances and international cultural affiliations that an increasingly globalised South Africa enters into.

Hegel and "Africa"

We begin with a disclaimer. The dialectic that Marx inherits from Hegel, and which informs Biko's eclectic iteration of the dialectic, is premised on Eurocentrism. Especially in his posthumously published works, Hegel fails to duly critique the way in which his own phenomenological experience and intellectual understanding of the metaphysical world are products of a particular cultural imaginary. In short, Hegel participates in a European epistemological tradition. He promotes his contingent spatially- and culturally-derived imaginary as reality. To apply Hegel's thought beyond its European domestic horizons requires an act of re-imagination, and we suggest that Steve Biko provides one useful example of re-imagined dialectics.

Hegel's critics share concerns about how his cultural and religious ideological position problematically shapes his vision of the world. Scholars rightly accuse him of ethnocentrism, cultural imperialism and even 'systemic racism' (Tibebu, 2011, p. xiv). It has been suggested that Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* (2001 [1837]) 'is based on racist philosophical anthropology' (Tibebu, 2011, p. xi), and that its patent Eurocentrism 'generates a case for colonialism' (Stone, 2017, p. 2). Alison Stone's remarks find validity in Hegel's proposition that living what he perceives as an

uncivilised and uncultured life in Africa is worse than slavery.[1] Hegel places Africa outside of a teleology of world history, establishing an ethno-racial hierarchy that 'depicts Africans as people of the senses, Asians as people of the understanding, and Europeans as people of reason' (Tibebu, 2011, p. xii). But he also divides the continent into three sub-sections: sub-Saharan Africa or 'Africa proper,' Africa 'to the north of the desert — European Africa,' and Africa of 'the river region of the Nile […] which is in connection with Asia' (Hegel, 2001, p. 109). Hegel's overt discrimination between the continent's regions displaces Africans from their history and implicitly sanctions imperialism. Unsurprisingly, it is Africa proper that most suffers an exoticising gaze: it is imagined as 'the land of childhood,' the centre of which is home to 'the most luxuriant vegetation, the especial home of ravenous beasts, snakes of all kinds' and 'whose atmosphere is poisonous to Europeans' (Tibebu, 2011, p. 109). Moreover, Hegel suggests that the geographical conditions of Africa proper are incompatible with human, cultural and philosophical development: 'The Negro […] exhibits the natural man in his completely wild and untamed state' (ibid, p. 111).

For this exotic production of Africa, Hegel draws on 'word of mouth' information and '[t]he travel diaries of missionaries, explorers, and government officials [which] had become a source of popular entertainment among the educated public' (Bernasconi, 1998, pp. 44–45). Hegel's collection of sources (among them, Greek

[1] In *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, Hegel suggests that: 'Negroes are enslaved by Europeans and sold to America. Bad as this may be, their lot in their own land is even worse, since there a slavery quite as absolute exists; for it is the essential principle of slavery, that man has not yet attained a consciousness of his freedom, and consequently sinks down to a mere Thing — an object of no value' (Hegel, 2001, p. 113).

philosopher Herodotus)[2] indicate his position as a consumer and producer of European knowledge and, correspondingly, the extent to which he inherits and perpetuates prejudices about Africa. Yet he does not merely corroborate his theory of world history with oft-sensationalist, exoticising and Eurocentric historical records, but additionally, Hegel manipulates the 'facts' of those sources in order to advance his own argument (see Bernasconi, 1998, p. 45-51). Hegel indiscriminately gathers all documented customs in Africa in order to cumulatively increase the unfamiliarity of the continent, before distorting those 'facts' in order to maximise the effects of othering. To the backdrop of this retelling of history, Hegel unsurprisingly excludes Africa (proper) from history and construes historical development as beginning in the East and terminating in the West with a constitutional monarchy, as in Kaiser Wilhelm I's Prussia in which Hegel lived (Hegel, 2001, p. 121). Africa, we might say, is instrumental to Hegel's domestication of world history.

It is self-evident that Hegel is racist. It is self-evident that he dismisses or misrecognises or even distorts African historical experience. But another way of looking at Hegel's concerted reliance on sources about Africa and his obsessive need to exaggerate or repudiate their contents is that it contains a subliminal, but strong, identification. The strength of Hegel's ideational violence springs from a place of philosophical attachment to the African detail that he violates. Africa's unstable and contradictory place within Hegel's archive means that Hegel is a philosopher who thinks dialectics without contemplating his own re-formation in a reflexive and

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[2] In *The Invention of Africa* (1988), V. Y. Mudimbe offers a detailed account of Herodotus' influence on later writings about Africa (see Mudimbe, 1988, p. 82–94).

disturbing encounter with “Africa”. Why should Hegel need to subjugate Africa, to see African lifeworlds as equivalent to slavery? One answer might be that Hegel has not himself participated in the dialectic of self-consciousness he theorises. To put this more precisely, Hegel’s thought may extend to an awareness of his first negation in an encounter with “Africa”, but it does not amount to the politically transformative possibilities of a ‘negation of that negation.’ When it comes to Africa, Hegel is insufficiently dialectical. And yet, Hegel’s dialectic is arguably itself an expression of African political agency. Look at Susan Buck-Morss’ stunning grounding of the lord-bondsman dialectic in the Haitian revolution:

> Marxists have interpreted the slave's coming to self-consciousness as a metaphor for the working class's overcoming of false consciousness: the class-in-itself becomes for-itself. But they have criticized Hegel for not taking the next step to revolutionary practice. I am arguing that the slaves of Saint-Domingue were, as Hegel knew, taking that step for him. (2000, p. 848, n84)

Read in this light, the Hegelian dialectic, the Marxist dialectic, and their inheritance – via Sartre and Fanon – by Biko are readable as conceptual derivatives of African decolonial revolution: in Haiti, in Algeria, in South Africa.

Many Dialectics: From Hegel to Marx

Having acknowledged the overt and latent racism of Hegel’s thought, but also the revolutionary agency shaping that thought, we proceed to clarify his theory of dialectics. This will provide the basis for an excavation of Hegel’s thought in Steve Biko’s subsequent elaboration of dialectics for the Black Consciousness Movement. Across his work, Hegel manifests dialectics differently. There is no single dialectic but many. In light of Buck-Morss’ argument that ‘Hegel knew – knew about real slaves revolting successfully against real masters [in Haiti], and he elaborated his dialectic of

lordship and bondage deliberately within this contemporary context (Buck-Morss, 2000, p. 844), we dedicate attention here to Hegel's master-slave dialectic, more accurately construed as the lord-bondsman dialectic. The dialectic is elaborated in Section B. IV. A. of *Phenomenology of Spirit* [*Phänomenologie des Geistes*, 1807], entitled 'Independence and Dependence of Self-Consciousness: Lordship and Bondage.' This essay exemplifies Hegel's sense that ontological categories are self-reflexive and exist negatively, through what they are not. The one invokes itself only to invoke the other and therefore *is* the other. Thus the one and the other's ontological forms are 'momentary'; their fundamental structure is potential, or becoming. Further, Hegel here presents dialectics as both an *external* and an *internal* phenomenon, occurring both *within* ontological categories and *between* them. As we propose in later stages of this section, this latter characteristic differentiates Hegel from Marx, whose work emphasises the willed, external dialectical confrontations between one abstraction and another.

In 'Independence and Dependence of Self-Consciousness: Lordship and Bondage,' Hegel suggests that '[s]elf-consciousness exists in and for itself when, and by the fact that, it so exists for another; that is, it exists only in being acknowledged' (Hegel, 1977, p. 111). The self is only able to develop self-consciousness and self-certainty via the other – and more specifically, only via dialectical phases with the other. In subject and object terms, the subject meets the object and is threatened with becoming the object because it recognises itself in the object. The subject confronts what it must appear like to the object who, of course, also has a subject role. In simple terms, we are always simultaneously a subject that performs actions, and the object of others' actions – including looking. The other's self-consciousness grants the self's self-consciousness an objective existence by initiating the primary self-consciousness'

recognition of its own otherness or objecthood. In other words, during this encounter, self-consciousness is placed both inside and outside itself. Self-consciousness moves from '[being] in itself' to '[being] for itself' (see Hegel, 1977, p. 112; p. 117). When the self overcomes this other in an attempt to take back its self-certainty, it overcomes its own otherness and undertakes 'an ambiguous return *into itself*' (Hegel, 1977, p. 111; original emphasis). The way in which the self has to complete a *return* to selfhood foregrounds how encounters take us beyond ourselves into otherness or objecthood. Objecthood leaves its indelible mark on the subject. Selfhood, we might say, is always something relayed in non-self-adequate ways.

Importantly, this movement of self-consciousness from 'in itself' to 'for itself' 'is indivisibly the action of one as well as the other' (Hegel, 1977, p. 112). This is to say, the self and the other gain self-consciousness through the dialectical phase simultaneously, albeit sometimes unevenly. They achieve 'being for itself' together. Hegel explains this encounter between self-consciousnesses in the following way: 'Each is for the other the middle term, through which each mediates itself with itself and unites with itself; and each is for itself, and for the other' (Hegel, 1977, p. 112). This means that, in order to become themselves, the self and the other mutually undergo a process of transformation.

We might comprehend the subject's transition from '[being] in itself' to '[being] for itself' as the first stage in the development of self-consciousness. For Hegel, the self and (what is its) other must still undertake the importance process 'of rooting-out all immediate being' (Hegel, 1977, p. 113). Instead of overcoming the other (as other) and its own otherness, the self must recognise the other's own immediate being as an individual and not 'an unessential, negatively characterized object' (ibid, p. 113).

Though '[e]ach is indeed certain of itself,' they have yet to recognise their other's own immediacy, 'and therefore [their] own self-certainty still has no truth' (ibid, p. 113). The two individuals can only achieve self-consciousness and self-certainty when 'each is for the other what the other is for it' (ibid, p. 113). The self emerges, in part, from the mutuality of dependent relation. In short, self and other must both identify as simultaneously self and other, and develop 'a consciousness which is not purely for itself but *for another*' (ibid, p. 115; emphasis added).

Hegel's language of lordship and bondsmanship may originate with the Haitian Revolution, but it is also extremely suggestive for how we might conceptualise South Africa's long history of racial antagonism. Even the legislative definitions of racial categories under Apartheid and the social and economic consequences of oppression might be considered as acts of initially antagonistic (and ultimately dependent) white self-definition. White identity-definition was underscored by the reality of enabling black labour. For this reason, Hegel's master-slave dialectic or, in our preferred translation, his lord-bondsman dialectic suggests the scene of Apartheid economic exploitation. While the injustices of this exploitation were – and remain – legion, a dialectical approach to Apartheid history also suggests that the victories of struggle are readable as transforming all of South Africa's social formations, including the most retrograde and recidivist racial formations.

This theorisation of the lord and bondsman does not merely present a model for understanding racial segregation in Apartheid South Africa, however. Hegel is clear that the lord and the bondsman are to be taken as embodied metaphors for the 'moments' that make up the unity of self-consciousness. The lord is 'the independent consciousness whose essential nature is to be for itself', while the bondsman is 'the dependent

consciousness whose essential nature is simply to live or to be for another' respectively (Hegel, 1977, p. 115).[3] The particular subject-objecthood of both lord and the bondsman are thus immanent, albeit *momentary*, in all forms of consciousness. Furthermore, the lord and the bondsman undermine their own ontologies. To explain, the bondsman is not straightforwardly dependent but, rather, identifies independence in that which he creates, and accordingly learns to identify his own independence (see Hegel, 1977, p. 118–19). In addition, the lord is not straightforwardly independent in as much as he derives his independence from an imagined and narcissistic immediacy: 'the unessential consciousness [of the bondsman] is for the lord the object, which constitutes the *truth* of his certainty of himself. But […] this object does not correspond to its Notion' (Hegel, 1977, p. 116). The lord therefore achieves only a semblance of independence because '[s]elf-certainty must learn that the immediate "this" is not the *truth* of its object, […] that its object is *not* a mere nothing' (Redding, 2008, p. 101). Genuine self-consciousness arises when the self steps outside of itself in order to *subject* itself and its processes of perception to scrutiny. This process sees the self appreciate the other's independence (from which it gains its own independence). By misidentifying the bondsman as an object (only), the lord therefore 'negates the very conditions for his own self-consciousness' (Redding, 2008, p. 108). To evoke the dialectical language of *Phenomenology of Spirit* more broadly, what we have in the lord and the bondsman is an 'abstract' and a 'negation' whose interaction engenders a 'negation of the negation' in the form of self-consciousness. This negation of the negation is itself anticipated by the negation, a term which for Hegel 'covers difference, opposition, and reflection or

[3] Hegel also invokes the chain that binds them as an analogy for self-consciousness (see 1977, p. 116).

relation, [and] is essential to conception and being' (Findlay, 1977, p. ix). The first negation alludes to a relation, and the process of reflection required for the recognition of that relation.

Together, the 'moments' of the lord and the bondman therefore represent genuine self-consciousness: the simultaneity of '[being] for itself' and '[being] for another' that make up the absolute spirit. This particular example exemplifies dialectics as an external and internal affair: the dialectical phase occurs between the one and the other, and through which they perceive their interdependence and arrive at an interstitial positionality of subject-objecthood; but it also takes place between one's own being 'for itself' and 'for another' (between one's simultaneous lordship and bondage), and through which one achieves self-consciousness. We have then identified two, interconnected dialectical phases at work in 'Independence and Dependence of Self-Consciousness: Lordship and Bondage.' First, we have the self, the other, and 'being for itself.' Second, we have 'being for itself' (in the form of the lord), 'being for another' (in the form of the bondsman), and self-consciousness. In other words, the lordly self undergoes a dialectical process of self-certainty in his first encounter with the other (from which he derives his 'being for itself') only to have his 'being for itself' negated by the other's 'being for another' in a second dialectical encounter (that produces interdependent self-consciousnesses). Dialectics therefore give rise to consequent dialectics. The third terms in Hegel's dialectics are not syntheses or end-points. Instead, we ought to understand Hegel's absolutes as the foundation, 'the ultimate truth of which the first and second aspects are but imperfect aspects, and into which they correct

themselves' (Macran, 1929, p. 19).[4] One does not reach the absolute foundation from which all metaphysical categories originate in one dialectical phase. Each of Hegel's dialectics are followed by further dialectics until they arrive at the absolute absolute, or the originary truth of becoming. As Macran explains,

> absolutes, are not absolute absolutes; they are only absolutes for a certain sphere and in a certain reference; for other spheres and in other references they are relatives. The third term of one triad becomes the first term of another. (Macran, 1929, p. 20).

In our example, the third term of the first dialectic between the self and the other ('being for itself') becomes the first term of the second dialectic between 'being for itself' and 'being for another' through which '[t]hey *recognize* themselves as *mutually recognizing* one another' (Hegel, 1977, p. 112). The third term of any dialectical triad – the absolute, or the 'concept' – is therefore a beginning again of dialectical processes, that continues to be animated by its dialectical 'moments.' The culmination of any dialectical progression is what we term a new thetic premise, from which subsequent dialectics proceed. As Hegel proposes in *Science of Logic* 'the whole of science is in itself a circle in which the first [term] becomes also the last, and the last also the first' (Hegel, 2010, p. 49). The cyclical structure of dialectics is implied by the German word *Begriff*, translated into English as 'concept.' Unlike the English term, *Begriff* 'is associated both with the beginnings of a thing and with its climax' (Inwood, 1992, p. 284). The original German text therefore implies that the 'concept' is both the foundation and the end.

Hegel does not devise the dialectical method and henceforth apply it to

[4] Henry S. Macran (1929) submits that misunderstandings circulating around Hegel's absolutes as end-points originate with scholars' misattribution of Johann Gottlieb Fichte's dialectic of *thesis*, *antithesis* and *synthesis* to Hegel.

ontological categories. Instead, he finds in categories the dialectical method that makes it possible to think them. Dialectics are thus the logic through which ideas are themselves. Indeed, it is not Hegel but Karl Marx who most famously popularised the phrase and a practice of a 'dialectical method'. In the 'Afterword to the Second German Edition' of *Capital* [*Das Kapital*], Marx writes: 'My dialectic method is, in its foundations, not only different from the Hegelian, but exactly opposite to it' (Marx, 2008, p. 102). Though Marx here suggests that he disputes Hegel's theorisation of dialectics (albeit through a partial misreading of dialectics as a method), we nonetheless seek to register key continuities between their thinking in order to progress our account of the conceptual development of dialectics.

Marx suggests in the 'Postface to the Second Edition' of *Capital* (1976 [1867]) that Hegel's dialectic 'is standing on its head' and 'must be inverted, in order to discover the rational kernel within the mystical shell' (Marx, 1976, p. 103). His aim is effectively to replace the metaphysical terms at the top of Hegel's various dialectical triads with the material world at large, and hence to enact an inversion of the dialectic. Marx pays attention to the concrete, tracing its concealment through different degrees of abstraction. As Marx and Engels clarify in *The German Ideology*:

> in direct contrast to German philosophy which descends from heaven to earth, here it is a matter of ascending from earth to heaven. That is to say, not of setting out from what men say, imagine, conceive, nor from men as narrated, thought of, imagined, conceived, in order to arrive at men in the flesh; but setting out from real, active men, and on the basis of their real life-process demonstrating the development of the ideological reflexes and echoes of this life process. (Marx and Engels, 1998, p. 42)

If we can say that Hegel's starting point is the ideas through which we think reality, Marx (and Engels) begin with reality itself before turning attention to the way in which

that reality is mediated by the political superstructure.

Marx's dialectical inversion is not a complete repudiation of Hegelian logic, however. Both thinkers' conceptions of (meta)physical reality dispute the certainty of abstractions and render them processual. Hegel and Marx each locate the latent dialectical structure of categories or abstracts, revealing abstractions' momentary, fluctuating and internally-contradictory structures. Second, Marx and Hegel's alternative ways of seeing the world stem from their shared perception that abstractions problematically and inaccurately constitute reality. For example, prior to Marx, the pervasive view of social scientists was that '[h]istory is something that happens to things; it is not part of their nature' (Ollman, 2003, p. 65). Marx, by contrast, incorporates a spatial and temporal aspect in his perceptions of all phenomena. As Bertrand Ollman summarises, 'whatever something is becoming – whether we know what that will be or not – is in some important respects part of what it is along with what it once was' (ibid, p. 65). Phenomena (that are temporally becoming) simultaneously incorporate 'some part of the surrounding conditions that enter into this process' (ibid, p. 67). By way of example, capitalism is a (temporal) moment and (spatial) determination insofar as it really exists. But its temporal and spatial dimensions mean, for Marx, that it incorporates feudalism (as past relation) and communism (as future relation) as well as the stratification of classes, political bodies' labour identities and their cultural identities. To rehearse one of Marx's own examples in *The German Ideology*, we might consider how human individuals, in the activity of reproduction, 'express their life, so they *are*': '[w]hat they are, therefore, coincides with their production, both with *what* they produce and with *how* they produce' (Marx and Engels, 1998, p. 37).

Despite these shared logics, Marx criticises Hegel for professing what we might call the sanctity of the idea over reality. For Marx, philosophical science fails to recognise thought's inhabitation of ideological reality, and the way in which that 'reality' sanctions certain abstractions more than others. As he writes in *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1971), 'The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness' (Marx, 1971, p.20–21). In simple terms, we do not freely socialise and intellectualise, but instead are bound to the superstructure's articulation of the material conditions of our existence, which includes the dominant mode of production at any time. If we can say that Hegel seeks to unearth the metaphysical truth of categories, we might say that Marx attempts to excavate material reality from abstraction.

Although Marx problematises abstraction as a mode of perception, he, too, engages (concrete) abstraction to develop an understanding of the relationship between people, capitalism and the world. He organises phenomena by seven levels of generality, ranging from the subject who is gendered, racialised, pertains to a specific sexuality and assumes a specific nationality, to the natural world with which we share a molecular structure and the laws of physics (see Ollman, 2003, pp. 88–89). Each level of generality offers a different vantage point through which to organise, prioritise and perceive different aspects of reality. Alone, these abstractions are unable to fully represent material existence. Marx's solution is thus to move between levels of generality: 'Aware of the limitations inherent in any single vantage point, even that of production [Marx's preferred ontological lens], Marx frequently alters the angle from which he examines his chosen subject matter' (Ollman, 2003, p. 104). Taken in

combination, Marx's abstractions suggest that our subject positions are inflected with a complex intersectionality, always in multiple dialectics with others, at one and the same moment.[5] Here we locate a key difference between Marx and Hegel's approaches to dialectics. Whereas Hegel finds that dialectics are immanent in categories of thought, Marx effectively advocates for a critical practice of dialectics. Marx puts dialectics *to work*, a characteristic that connects him to Steve Biko's conceptualisation of dialectics for the Black Consciousness Movement.

Biko's Black Consciousness Dialectic

We now turn to the possibilities of Steve Biko's Black Consciousness dialectic for African literary study and canon formation. Biko's Black Consciousness dialectic is a development of Hegelian and Marxist dialectics, but their philosophical influence seems to be inelegantly articulated. Biko did not distinguish sufficiently between the Hegelian and the Marxist dialectics, but conflated the two, proclaiming in 'The Definition of Black Consciousness':

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[5] Kimberlé Crenshaw coins "intersectionality" in 1989 to account for the ways in which black women's marginalisation, exploitation and oppression – their 'intersectional experience" – "is greater than the sum of racism and sexism' (1989, p. 140). The legal system, she argues, currently prioritises either the category of race or gender as a determining factor, and continually focuses on class-privileged black people during court proceedings about discrimination. Though our use of intersectionality here accounts for subject-constitutions beyond the black, female (and working-class) subject, it remains in keeping with Crenshaw's sense that single ontological categories cannot account for the complexity of embodied experience.

> The overall analysis therefore, based on the Hegelian theory of dialectic materialism, is as follows. That since the thesis is a white racism there can only be one valid antithesis, i.e. a solid black unity, to counterbalance the scale. If South Africa is to be a land where black and white live together in harmony without fear of group exploitation, it is only when these two opposites have interplayed and produced a viable synthesis of ideas and modus vivendi. (1971, p. 51).

Marx, of course, is usually associated with dialectical materialism and Hegel with idealism. Since it was Marx, and not Hegel, who coined the term 'dialectical materialism', and since Marx defined dialectical materialism in direct opposition to Hegelian idealism, we must attribute to Biko a slight blurring of his intellectual inheritances. In this regard, note also that Biko regularly misattributes to Hegel the Fichtean terminology of *thesis, antithesis* and *synthesis*. Nevertheless, this blurring is arguably true to the conceptual creativity at the heart of Biko's thought. We might even say that Biko's method is to transform Apartheid's imposition of idealised racial categories (which were not in and of themselves either social or natural) into a new basis for revolutionary community – geared towards an ultimately material '*modus vivendi*.'

We should not fault Biko's philosophical inexactitude when it comes to the Hegelian and Marxist dialectics. Biko sought to modify the dialectic so that it exerted purchase upon the specificities of Apartheid oppression. Does this mean that Biko misunderstood Marxist doctrine, thinking the dialectic through idealistic and mystificatory racial categories, in place of a more robust class analysis? No. This claim would be misplaced for two principal reasons. First, Biko's use of the term 'black' precomprehends a delimited or reworked concept of class. Second, 'Class Theory', as Biko termed Marxism (1978, p. 50), could not be applied straightforwardly to Apartheid's racial stratifications.

We begin with the first assertion: Biko's Black Consciousness dialectic precomprehended a version of class. In his witness testimony during the 1974 'SASO Nine trial', Biko offered an account of blackness as acutely embodied in forms of self-hatred (see Biko, 1978, p.104). He championed the phrase, "Black is Beautiful", coined by Marcus Garvey in the 1920s and associated with the Black Power Movement of the 1960s in the United States (Mgbako, 2009, p. 311). The Black Consciousness Movement may have been influenced by the Black Power Movement (Mgbako, 2009), yet its conception of blackness tended to exceed any ethnoracial identity. This can be seen in the nuances of Biko's early 'The Definition of Black Consciousness' (December 1971), produced for a South African Students Organisation (SASO) training day. Biko is careful to state that 'Being black is not a matter of pigmentation. Being black is a mental attitude' (1978, p. 48). Straightforwardly, blackness is a disposition, a mode of self- and social- consciousness derived from the experience of resisting racism. Blackness is social – gathering in opposition – and is therefore irreducible to skin colour. Secondly, Biko differentiates blackness from 'non-whites.' He defines non-whites variously as those who aspire to whiteness while their pigmentation makes its realisation impossible, those who propose political 'reform' of Apartheid, those who are subservient to white baasmanskap, and those functionaries who serve in Apartheid's repressive state apparatuses such as the police force and security branch. Moreover, blackness is inseparable from political praxis and activism – Biko says that the 'interrelationship between the consciousness of the self and the emancipatory programme is of a paramount importance' (1978, p. 49). Blackness, therefore, like the identities comprehended by Marx, is as much something one does as something one is. Its reality is processual, not innate or legislated; not in itself but for itself and for another.

We proceed to our second assertion: Class Theory or Marxism could not be applied straightforwardly to Apartheid's racial stratifications. For Biko, class solidarity between black and white South African workers was, in his immediate historical moment, a logical impossibility. Biko uses his specialised definition of blackness to problematise orthodox Marxist understandings of the worker. For instance, Biko asserts that there is 'no worker in the classical sense among whites in South Africa, for even the most downtrodden white worker still has a lot [to] lose if the system is changed. He is protected by several laws against competition at work from the majority [for instance, job reservation policies]' (1978, p. 50). In brief, the political interest of the white worker is not the same as that of the 'black' worker (black in the special sense that Biko accords it). The white worker's interest is to support the Apartheid government that reserves jobs for him or her. The black worker's interest is to utterly transform the political status quo in pursuit of the 'envisioned self which is a free self' (1978, p. 49). It is for these reasons that Biko can precomprehend class when using terminology more usually associated with race: 'analysis of our situation in terms of one's colour at once takes care of the greatest single determinant for political action - i.e. colour - while also validly describing the blacks as the only real workers in South Africa' (1978, p. 50).

Thus, Black Consciousness was by definition a mode of revolutionary class solidarity even though its immediate focus was upon enhancing racial solidarity between blacks (which for Biko did not include politically acquiescent 'non-whites,' and did not exclude Coloured and Indian communities). Thus, a Coloured or an Indian comrade could be politically black (blurring Apartheid's racial categorisations and divide-and-rule tactics), while the comprador African elite were by definition 'non-white,' and not black. Biko's critique of whiteness/'whiteness' notwithstanding, white allies played an important role in the Black Consciousness Movement. For example,

teacher and political activist, Rick Turner, who maintained close relationships with black political activists including Biko, was instrumental in driving the popularity of the Black Consciousness Movement among white students in the early 1970s (Macqueen, 2014, p. 513). His testimony at the "SASO Nine trial" also helped to secure the freedom of the nine black activists charged with "violent revolutionary change" (ibid, pp. 521-522). Though Turner could not be considered 'black' in Biko's terms, he cannot be convincingly described as 'white' either. Set out in these clever ways, Black Consciousness is not strictly racial. 'Black' identity flows from social functions (it includes workers, but not white workers; it excludes police, the subservient, Apartheid's comprador beneficiaries and those who 'try for white'). In this sense, 'blackness' is a processual identity adjudicated by its political opposition within a socially-changing and contested reality. 'Blackness' derives from political assertion and its yields and setbacks. Biko also construed his thought as emerging from a unique historical conjunction: 'the Black Consciousness approach would be irrelevant in a colourless and non-exploitative egalitarian society. [...] There is no doubt that the colour question in South African politics was introduced for economic motives' (1986, p. 25). Undoing Apartheid's racial distributions of destiny also undoes exploitative economics.

Insofar as it is involved in dialectical contestation and engaged in the historical process, Black Consciousness precomprehends class-consciousness, using 'black' self-demystification as its nascent mode of political solidarity. The secondary danger to the anti-Apartheid struggle (after a dehumanising racism) was co-option of a black buffer class who might divide black political solidarity along class lines. Alert to this danger, Biko's specialised definition of the marker 'black' was designed to isolate comprador 'non-whites.' Moreover, this specialised definition avoided the co-option of 'black' struggle into insipid 'white liberal' fantasies of racially-harmonious resistance on a

racially-unequal footing. ‘Black’ for Biko was both ‘not white’ but also ‘not non-white.’ ‘Black’ was thus the product of a double negation, and all the while remained the basis for incontrovertible collective self-assertion. This self-assertion, undiluted by white political interest, set in place the basis for a genuine Black Consciousness dialectic.

Admittedly, Biko inherits his dialectic directly from Jean-Paul Sartre’s discussion of Negritude as a dialectic.[6] We begin with Sartre:

> In fact, Negritude appears as the weak stage of a dialectical progression: the theoretical and practical affirmation of white supremacy is the thesis; the position of Negritude as antithetical value is the moment of the negativity. But this negativity is not sufficient in itself and the blacks who employ it well know it; they know that it serves to prepare the way for the synthesis or the realization of the human society without racism. Thus, Negritude is dedicated to its own destruction, it is passage and not objective, means and not the ultimate goal. (1948, pp. 59–60)

We should notice two things about Sartre’s description of Negritude’s place in a dialectic with white supremacy. First, he asserts that ‘it is passage,’ which is to say processual. Secondly, Negritude is not an accomplished state – it exists to supersede itself with the ultimate end of non-racism. Negritude is characterised by its momentariness in its dialectic with white supremacy: it is a negation that anticipates the negation of the negation (relation).

Now let us look at Biko’s adaptation of Sartre to the conditions of late Apartheid.[7] In February 1973, Biko rewrote Sartre’s Negritude dialectic, clarifying the

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[6] As Biko’s friend, Barney Pityana, remembers: ‘He laid his hands on some philosophical writings like Jean-Paul Sartre and made ready use of some philosophical concepts like syllogism in logic and dialectical materialism in Marxist political thought. All this by a young medical student’ (2002, unpaginated).

project of Black Consciousness as a dialectic whose thetic premises pitted black solidarity against white racism:

> The basic problem in South Africa has been analysed by liberal whites to be apartheid. They argue that in order to oppose it we have to form non-racial groups. Between these two extremes, they claim, there lies the land of milk and honey for which we are working. The *thesis*, the *antithesis* and the *synthesis* have been mentioned by some great philosophers as the cardinal points around which any social revolution revolves. For the liberals, the *thesis* is apartheid, the *antithesis* is non-racialism and the *synthesis* very feebly defined. They want to tell the blacks that the integration they see as the solution is the ideal society. Black Consciousness defines the situation differently. The *thesis* is in fact a strong white racism and therefore, *ipso facto*, the *antithesis* to this must be a strong solidarity amongst the blacks on whom this white racism seeks to pray. Out of these two situations, we can therefore hope to reach some kind of balance – a true humanity where power politics will have no place. This analysis spells out the difference between old and new approaches better than any mere words can show. The failure of the liberals is in the fact that their *antithesis* is already a watered down version of the truth whose close proximity to the thesis will nullify the purported balance. (1986, p. 27)

The first thing we should notice is the positioning of Biko's dialectic: it emerges from within the subject-position of Black Consciousness, unlike Sartre's – which editorialises the subject-position of Negritude from outside. Sartre commentates. Biko asserts. In this sense, Biko's thought is already positioned inimically to a chief philosophical influence. Second, Biko's dialectic takes as its object not only white supremacy under Apartheid, but also progressive 'liberal' fellow travellers. By 'liberal' we understand him to mean not only ideologically liberal whites, but also ideologically Marxist whites insofar as they inherit a dialectical tradition in which white self-interest invests in both the thesis

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[7] We are grateful to Aurelie Journo for bringing to our attention the influence of Sartre on Biko.

(racism) and the antithesis (non-racialism), leading to a non-viable synthesis. The white liberal dialectic is a moribund, non-motive dialectic, because does not assume genuine political contradictions at its core. In his advocacy of a strong black solidarity, Biko here dispenses with Marxism in favour of Frantz Fanon's decolonial articulation of Hegelian idealism. Like Fanon, Biko recognises that the dialectical moment of recognition between the lord and bondsman does not take place in a racist context (see Fanon, 2008, pp. 82-83). 'There is no conciliation possible' between the terms "native" and "European" – no possibility of reaching the "human" truth of their relations – when 'one of them [the native] is superfluous' (Fanon, 1963, p.4). Thus, Biko surmises that in order to achieve recognition and the power of negation (to deny whiteness and, ultimately, operations of racialisation), there must be a radical black solidarity that first desires and struggles for its humanity. This is precisely Fanon's conclusion (see 2008, p. 170). 'Blackness,' for Biko, like the category of the 'native' in Fanon, enables the embodiment of one term of the dialectic, setting in place the social action from which contestation and sublation proceed.

Biko's critique of Marxist white fellow travellers and his appropriation of a decolonial idealism notwithstanding, his sense of dialectics as a wilful strategy of resistance is consistent with Marx's own deployment of dialectics as a critical praxis capable of resisting ideological influence. For Biko, race under Apartheid is all but class. Therefore, black solidarity must be theorised and practised in genuine opposition to its socially-opposing corollary: white privilege in all of its forms. Biko operates Fanon's anti-racist humanism to this end. But he also inherits Sartre's idea of Negritude as passage, as both momentary and transient. Black Consciousness will, in the dialectical phase with white supremacy, 'hope to reach some kind of balance – a true humanity where power politics will have no place.' This is hope without guarantee,

because Biko is aware that any genuine dialectic would exceed its founding propositions and play out in terms of a succession of new, unpredictable thetic premises. In this sense, Biko has to withhold the strategic outcomes of his thought and has to cede predictive power to the tactical contingencies of struggle (and, sadly, to the vicissitudes of counter-revolution). In effect, Biko's dialectic allows for its own critical refashioning within the processual conflicts of anti-Apartheid revolution.

This refashioning is consistent with Marx's outline of the dialectic's expression through changing social forms:

> In its rational form [the dialectic] is a scandal and abomination to bourgeoisdom and its doctrinaire professors, because it includes in its comprehension and affirmative recognition of the existing state of things, at the same time also, the recognition of the negation of that state, of its inevitable breaking up; because it regards every historically developed social form as in fluid movement, and therefore takes into account its transient nature not less than its momentary existence; because it lets nothing impose upon it, and is in its essence critical and revolutionary. (Marx, 2008, p. 34)

Read in terms of Marx, Black Consciousness is a momentary stage in a transient development towards class (and race) revolution. Biko's own refusal of the predictive power of his dialectic, which aims at nothing more precise than 'some kind of balance' is eminently Marxist. This remains the case even though Biko seems to engage with Marxism only indirectly, through the ideas of Hegel, Sartre and Fanon.

Marxist Critiques of Black Consciousness

Notwithstanding the subtleties of Black Consciousness thought, it was on occasion charged with being insufficiently attentive to class. Mafika Gwala's eulogy for Biko states, 'There was a time when I deeply felt that Steve was not following what was to be

a natural development towards class identity within the struggle' (1986, p. 62). Admittedly, Gwala was writing some years after Biko's death, and his views were designed in part to address the contemporary moment of the struggle. That said, Gwala's eulogy is especially scathing about self-promoting activists on the make who were already, by Biko's definition, no longer politically black:

> I have seen many a young man walking up the escalator of Black Consciousness; their lifestyle – snobbery; their practice – collecting jazz and dashikis for boasts; their goal – bourgeois status; their sentiment – black identity.
> There was such a lack of socio-ideological lay-out that one couldn't attend parties and gumbas and not end up bored.
> [. . .]
> Also, in the name of Black Consciousness certain individuals and groups were riding on affluence and smiling all the way to the bank. (1986, pp. 60, 62)

The key dissatisfaction with Black Consciousness in this passage is that its collective politics of self-redefinition collapses too easily into facile individual self-styling. Moreover, the aspirational qualities of Biko's quest for a new humanity could too easily be co-opted by capitalist incentives, within broader Apartheid strategies of political containment. In July 1976, SASO President Diliza Mji went further and argued that the struggle had to be waged 'not only in terms of colour interests but also in terms of class interests' (quoted in Badat 2016, p. 102) on the basis that the Apartheid state was seeking to cultivate a black middle-class whose own enmeshment within capitalism was already furthering oppression.

However, there are two possible category mistakes at work in the critique offered of Black Consciousness. The first category mistake is to assume that Black

Consciousness was not class-oriented in its premises. We have already seen that it was.[8] Second, if Apartheid sought to create sell-outs by incentivising limited comprador collaboration, this does not logically presume that class-consciousness would be a more effective orientation of struggle than Black Consciousness. Gwala slides too easily into both assumptions: '[Black Consciousness] was a path leading to National Consciousness with class identity as alternative to the flippant middle-class oriented separatist line. Anyone who tried to contain the natural development of Black Consciousness ended on the other side of the fence. With the sell-outs' (1986, p. 61). Gwala is both correct and mistaken in these assertions. He is correct that the dialectical movement of Black Consciousness meant that it was a stage in the development of struggle, and that any dialectical movement would supersede its momentary instances of historical expression. However, he is wrong to assume that Black Consciousness was either 'separatist' or 'middle-class oriented,' or indeed that the ultimate expression of

[8] In fact, in a rare interview with German television that is widely available online, Biko recognizes that Black Consciousness will be superseded by socialist economics: 'We believe it is the duty of the vanguard political movement which brings about change to educate people's outlooks. I mean in the same way in which blacks have never lived in a socialist economic system, they have got to learn to live in one. In the same way that they have always lived in a racially-divided society, they have got to learn to live in a non-racial society. They have got many things to learn. And all this must be brought to them by the vanguard movement which is leading the revolution' (Biko Foundation 2011). The flaw in Biko's thought here is that a vanguard political movement should initiate class consciousness in the masses, but Biko's presumptions about how non-racial class consciousness may be taught do not invalidate his understanding that Black Consciousness only existed so that it might one day be replaced by socialist economics.

the dialectic was 'National Consciousness.' In fact, as Gwala is aware elsewhere, Black Consciousness can be read with the benefit of hindsight, as setting in place diasporic identifications with the 1970s African-American Black Power movement and with decolonising African states.[9] These diasporic identifications, though artificial and unpersuasive in Gwala's moment, have returned with new political currency in our moment – via the transnational Fallist movements and Black Lives Matter, for instance. Gwala sees with clarity the historical synthesis created out of a strong black solidarity. Struggle devolves to all via the Soweto uprising and this leads indeed to 'National Consciousness.' But while recognising the historical synthesis, Gwala misses the abiding 'moments' that compile it, including diasporic identification. Black Consciousness' racial solidarity primes the struggle to exceed national borders. Influential in the philosophical orientation of the Fallist movements, Black Consciousness and diasporic identification, have returned for new times.[10]

Part of the power of Black Consciousness thought was its critique of institutions, including the banking sector, the church, primary healthcare and education and its development of community development programmes. Biko was advocating black economic self-organisation as early as 1973:

> Needless to say therefore we need to take another look at how best to use our economic power, little as it seems. We must seriously examine the possibilities of establishing business co-operatives whose interests shall be ploughed back into

[9] For a recent article linking Soweto Poetry to diaspora, see Nicholls (2018).

[10] Booysen identifies Biko's influence on #RhodesMustFall (2016, p. 34), and Everatt sees his thought at work in the #FeesMustFall movement (2016, p. 135). Mpofu-Walsh asserts the influence of Black Consciousness in 'Must Fall' campaigns in Euro-American universities (2016, p. 82).

> community development programmes. We should think along such lines as the 'buy black' campaign once suggested in Johannesburg and to establish our own banks for the benefit of the community. (1986, pp. 33-34)

Here, social entrepreneurship is designed to erode South Africa's white monopoly capital and to provide investments in community development which Apartheid itself calculately avoided. Additionally, Black Consciousness sought to create its own para-statal institutions. Biko argued openly for a Black Theology (1986, p. 31). This move challenged the English-speaking churches' complicity with colonialism, but it also formed a new ideological front against the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk (Dutch Reformed Church) that provided opportunistic biblical justifications for Apartheid. Biko's Black People's Convention also led in the establishment of primary healthcare initiatives (for instance, Zanempilo Clinic in the Eastern Cape).

Black Consciousness offered by far the biggest institutional challenges in the sphere of education. Biko's contemporary, Onkgopotse Tiro, challenged the University of the North's administration in his 'Turfloop Testimony' of 29 April 1972. In addition to a coruscating condemnation of Apartheid's Bantu Education system, he championed a greater role for black academics in university governance, and advocated the tendering of external bookshop and catering contracts to black businesses. Tiro's speech led to his expulsion from the university. Between 1972 and 1973, Tiro was 'recruited for a job teaching history at the Morris Isaacson High School in Orlando West, Soweto, from which leaders such as Tsietsi Mashinini emerged' (Sosibo 2017, unpaginated). Mashinini would have been 14 or 15 when Tiro arrived at Morris Isaacson and may have encountered Tiro's critique of Apartheid's prescribed history syllabus. Tiro, in other words, is germane to the project of questioning educational canons. Mobilisation of high school students was an active recruiting ground for the Black People's

Convention and the South African Students' Movement (see Lebelo, quoted in Sosibo 2017, unpaginated). Though Tiro was assassinated by parcel bomb while exiled in Botswana in 1974, two years later, Tsietsi Mashinini (aged 19) was among the leaders of the Soweto 1976 uprising. In turn, Tiro's assassination prompted the major literary debate at the 'Poetry '74' festival between the Marxist Mike Kirkwood, who, post-Soweto, was to become the editor of Ravan Press and *Staffrider* magazine, and the liberal literary establishment figure of Guy Butler, Professor of English at Rhodes University and champion of English-language South African literature.[11] The 1976 Soweto uprisings' public challenge to the Afrikaans Medium Decree was sustained by Ravan Press' *Staffrider*, which, from its inception in 1978, 'flouted almost every decorum of sacerdotal authority', operating '[a] fierce rebuttal of white poetic standards' through 'an aesthetics of calculated defiance and collectivity' (McClintock, 1987, p. 599).[12] The magazine's generic eclecticism and targeting of black readerships, together with its support of non-"standard" Englishes, 'challenge[d] the prestige of the "literary,"' and white aesthetics (ibid, p. 599). Unlike *Drum* magazine (founded in the 1950s), which was solely written in English and which sought to express continental black Africans' experiences of oppression (Odhiambo, 2006, p. 158), *Staffrider* sought to intervene in systems of linguistic and literary value, and to inspire political

[11] Attwell provides the best account of this event, and the impact of Tiro's assassination on literary culture (2005, pp. 137-140).

[12] Not everyone agreed that Ravan Press empowered black South African writers. Author Miriam Tlali resented their editorial and pricing decisions around *Muriel at Metropolitan*. She went on to found Skotaville Publishers alongside Mothobi Mutloatse, ensuring black writers were under the control of black publishers (le Roux, 2018).

mobilisation through cultural production. Effectively, the multiracial ambitions of *Drum* magazine's "Sophiatown period" in the mid-1950s were revived as Black Consciousness in Soweto in the 1970s, a transformation which intimately tracks the destruction of Sophiatown and the forced eviction of its artists, politicians and other community members to Soweto – in other words, the *negation* of liberal (multiracial) politics. In short, we have direct genealogy running from Black Consciousness, through Tiro's attempts to transform universities in his 'Turfloop Testimony,' through to Mike Kirkwood and *Staffrider*'s contestation of the South African literary canon, and from the Soweto Uprising's questioning of Bantu education to the Fallist movements' challenge to universities.

Between Tiro's early challenge to the University of the North and the Fallist movements contemporary with the moment of writing, and following Mike Kirkwood's challenge to Guy Butler that was exactly contemporary with Tiro's assassination, English Literature syllabi in elite South African universities frequently insisted that South African, and especially African Literature, should develop 'separately.' For example, in the early 1990s, the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal Department of English reserved core course African Literature for third year study. Even after 1994, the University of Cape Town still retained a strong focus on Shakespeare in the English Literature second year curriculum, while diverting predominantly black (or international) students to an entirely separate African Literature second year syllabus.[13] For years, the University of the Witwatersrand has maintained separate African Literature and English departments, even while it integrated African Literature into the

[13] One spurious rationale for retaining this separatist curriculum, was that 'if an Africanized syllabus were allowed, the integrity of the English department would be undermined by a faculty invasion of francophone and germanophone African literature courses' (Nicholls 2012, p. 135 n. 2).

English Literature syllabus. It is obvious that, on aggregate, and despite the laudable efforts of progressive academics, such institutional arrangements have risked foregrounding a foreign, white, and antiquarian canon over local, black, contemporary texts.

A Dialectical Literary Canon

We do not see Biko's dialectic as a completed movement. Nor do we see Onkgopotse Tiro's and the Soweto uprising's critiques of education as a completed movement. To do so would be insufficiently dialectical. Instead, the Fallist movements evidence that education remains a site of *institutional* struggle, notwithstanding *constitutional* democratic change. We believe that dialectics offers an agile and responsive approach to social and political contestation. Accordingly, we propose a South African literary canon modelled on a dialectical understanding – although we would not in principle confine our claims to any single national setting.[14] Within any dialectical understanding, it follows that the first thetic moment (for instance, institutionally privileged texts and the academic exclusions that they operate) may be placed in a negating relation by the second anti-thetical moment (for instance, socially-privileged texts and the conceptual and experiential inclusions that they operate) without being erased. Like Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, we therefore understand the canon as 'not a body of texts per se, but rather a set of reading practices' (2002, p. 186). Yet, by contrast, we locate the

[14] Chapman (2016) has contemplated Soweto Poetry in relation to Biko's dialectic and literary production in the Global North. He sees the dialectic as remaining bound in the second stage. By contrast, we see it as being always at work.

reading practices that participate in canon-formation not only 'in institutional structures, such as education curricula and publishing networks' (ibid, p. 186), but also in extra-institutional practices – including "popular" readings, writings and translations,[15] book piracy, and protest – some of which come to be institutionalised through dialectical encounters with institutionally-privileged practices and texts. Our notion of the dialectical canon challenges both conservative approaches to literary/cultural value which prize tradition, and liberal approaches which conspicuously welcome diversity while systematically denying counter-hegemonic expression. We offer seven provocations, seven intellectual yields of our argument:

First, we necessarily define texts expansively and without guarantees. Our notion of texts includes oral traditions, as well as "popular" or non-"literary" genres. We also include in our contemplation literary piracy and illegal street-vending, and the virtual world of the internet, smartphones and social media as texts. These texts occasion new technologies of reading and writing like "flash fiction", apps and mobi readers. As Ashleigh Harris has argued 'the published book is an unsustainable form for Africa's literary future' given the relatively exorbitant price of legally-printed books (and, consequently, the ubiquity and popularity of pirate copies) and the availability of free, legally-produced digital copies (Harris, 2019, p. 2). A dialectical canon would not only 'move away from the book as the primary site of the literary' (Harris, 2019, p. 11),

[15] NGO, African Story Book hosts children's stories in various African languages online while also allowing readers to write their own stories and to translate existing stories. Ashleigh Harris has emphasised that while such platforms have the potential to sustain endangered African languages and consecrate African-language literatures, they also exploit users' creative labour (see 2019, pp. 10-11).

but would also radically innovate our conception of the literary by identifying genre as a site of dialectical contestation. Genres emerge negatively through what they are not, and contextually through associated presses, readerships and prizes. They also originate with 'print culture and its affiliates: librarianship (where they orchestrate the Dewey classification system), publishing (with its separate "lists") and the kinds of bookselling in which different subjects are laid out in dedicated "sections"' (Fraser, 2008, p. 166). Genre therefore does not adequately account for oral traditions, or the ways in which readers instrumentalise texts in different ways than imagined at the site of production/circulation (consider Biko's adaptive reading of Hegel). Nor does genre reflect the ways in which readers on online platforms operate by highly-specific notions of genre. For example, South African NGO FunDza, which makes books freely available online in a range of African languages and offers writing courses, has innovated its own genre, "chattalogues", denoting short plays/dialogues intended to be acted out with friends. Meanwhile, Goodreads users globally are encouraged to 'organiz[e] books around a temporality of consumption [through the virtual bookshelves of "read", "currently-reading", and "to read"] rather than genre, nation, electronic or analog form, or language' (Nakamura, 2013, p. 240). The dialectical canon is therefore attentive to the dynamism of textual culture, but also the provisionality of textual categories and associated cultural formations/value regimes. It advisedly identifies "popular" texts or "popular" traditions of struggle, for example, in recognition that "popularity" is provisional: it is the first term in a dialectic with the institutionally-prized.

Second, we include, by way of mutual negation, African languages and Afrikaans alongside English in our conception of literary canon formation. Apposite cases in point would be the relation between Sepedi euphemism and *Jude the Obscure*

in Phaswane Mpe's *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*, or between isiXhosa and Conrad in Zakes Mda's *The Heart of Redness*. Nor would we restrict our dialectic to South Africa's official languages. Arguably, a vast array of languages including Yiddish, Cantonese, chiShona, Greek, French, Latin, Gujarati, Malay, and Yoruba remain both formative and dynamic within South African literary culture.

Third, Biko's improvised and technically inaccurate use of the dialectic is a vernacular theory. It works despite, and because of, being improvised both within and outside of institutional knowledge-formation. For this very reason, Black Consciousness thought is not wholly hijacked in advance by the institutional power regimes with which it engages. Vernacular theory is deregulated critique – which is exactly what would be needed to genuinely contest the canon's institutional formation. Black Consciousness as a vernacular theory evidences the dialectical canon at work insofar as its logic is inscribed by the thought of Hegel, Marx, Sartre and Fanon despite the lack of a committed practice of citation or a wilful "writing back" on Biko's part. Contrariwise, Biko's dialectic is, via his and Tiro's critique of the university (and sustained, too, in the moment of their extra-judicial executions), already immanent within any discussion of canon formation. In other words, the Black Consciousness movement is the third term in a dialectic whose political moments are the injustices of Apartheid and liberalism, and the third term in a dialectic whose epistemic moments are European and South African. But it is also the first term in a dialectic which is negated by institutionalised knowledge and finds synthesis in contemporary critiques of the canon.

Fourth, Biko's dialectic must be submitted to new lineages of critique and new intersections of struggle. The dialectical canon ensures this process of contestation and renewal. Witness Koleka Putuma's condemnation of the sexist and homophobic terms of black solidarity in the Fallist era:

3. • How come your revolution always wants to go rummaging through my underwear?

[. . .]

5. • You call us sellouts and feminazis when we exhume the fungus from your politics
   - How come references to your revolution are only limited to biko, fanon and malcolm?
   - Do you read? (2017, p. 80)

Putuma's intellectual and spiritual answer to these questions is posed in the 'poem' 'Lifeline,' an itemised lineage of feminist community, including intellectuals and community activists such as Kimberlé Crenshaw, Pumla Dineo Gqola, Miriam Tlali, Funeka Soldaat and Danai Mupotsa. Putuma's question, 'Do you read?' might equally be posed to the elite minority of readers who aggregate the literary canon.

Fifth, the dialectic is many, not one – the product of multiple conflicts within the social (the "literary" versus the "popular", or feminism versus #MustFall, for instance). If we think along these lines, we may contemplate a fluctuating, 'polythetic' dialectic to rework the literary canon and to build intersectional complexities into it. The canon in our view is not a settled consensus, but something that re-coalesces each time it is submitted to contestation and each time it is approached after conflicts in the social. That movable status makes dialectics useful for thinking past, for example, encoded traditions of white privilege in the South African literary canon. We may negate formerly-privileged texts (T. S. Eliot or Coetzee, or Schreiner or whoever) while still making them visible through the textual and "popular" traditions of struggle that contest institutional privilege. By definition, a dialectical canon would need to incorporate "popular" cultural texts and modes – including the lived cultures of the masses, including too the demands and manifestoes of student movements as they reshape the institutional ground of universities, including too the global virtual community platforms. Moreover, even the texts of struggle and aftermath (Biko or Tiro or Tlali or

Mda or Mpe or Putuma or whoever) might be submitted to gender critique, LGBTQI+ critique, class critique, environmental critique among others. A polythetic dialectic is an opportune mode because it allows us to contemplate the complexities and unevenness of contestation via which the canon emerges and is (endlessly) revised.

Sixth, a dialectical canon may be improvised as social and cultural formations change. It may even omit certain authors or texts without wholly eliminating their representations – for the reason that the sublative mechanism of the dialectic retains traces of its prior thetic moments. In dialectics, the negation of the negation is a form of retention. Taken to its most radical implications, the dialectical canon might become a web of intertextual (non)references. Moreover, omission from the canon would not mean erasure, since old texts (say, the Hegel's dialectic) may be repurposed for new occasions (say, contemporary discussion placing the Haitian revolution as a driver of modernity). Therefore, pedagogically speaking, our participation in the dialectical canon may necessitate engaging with "popular" readings of canonical works like Nadine Gordimer's *Burger's Daughter*, an approach that recalls Apartheid censorship, and counter-traditions of book piracy and covert reading/dissemination.[16] And it may involve recognising that any reading of Gordimer (or Duiker or Mpe) is also, by way of negation, a reading of J. M. Coetzee, which is, again by way of negation, already a reading of Cavafy and Schreiner and Daniel Defoe. The immanent dialectics of the canon (and of literary culture more broadly) foreground intellectual lineage while contesting ideas of epistemic purity. Black Consciousness' European and South African epistemic moments are precisely what lend it historical viability.

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[16] On Apartheid censorship's effects on print culture, reading and other forms of literary culture (e.g. oral literatures/poetry) in South Africa, see Matteau-Matsha (2013).

Seventh, we understand the contestation of the canon in the widest possible sense. Contestation emerges through the publication and ascension of new authors or texts. Contestation emerges through social transformations: such as the end of Apartheid or the consequent rise of neoliberal economics or the realities of globalisation and the new South African diaspora. Contestation emerges through the processes of institutionalisation, in which both academics and insurgent student movements participate. Universities, of course, respond to what the market produces – occasionally championing 'airport literature,' or 'trauma fiction,' or the child soldier novel; or sourcing new markets to champion (literature produced outside of secure institutional settings or widespread distribution networks). Institutional codification, in turn, is subject to the interruptions of progressive struggle – the #MustFall movements, or campaigns like #YouthStrike4Climate – and the consequent revaluing of where a literary canon might be situated and whose political interests it might serve.

Our challenge to the canon is that it should live as fast as our accelerated times, becoming polyphonic instead of stentorian. A polythetic dialectic is flexible enough to work within and beyond South African national borders, adjudicating between global and local forces and flows, and between the instantaneous imaginaries of our global media and the long history of global modernity. Our conclusion is in keeping with the Black Consciousness movement, which both bespeaks in its conceptual development and overtly advocates in its politics a conceptualisation of the canon as a polythetic dialectic. And insofar as it registers the eclectic practices of reading that influence the production of knowledge (Hegel reading colonial discourse *and* Haiti, and Biko reading Hegel *and* Sartre *and* Fanon *and* Marx, for example), the dialectical canon is highly apposite for the development of post- or extra-institutional thinking.

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