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Decolonization and Popular Poetics: From Soweto Poetry to Diasporic Solidarity

To decolonize is first and foremost a creative act.[1] Seizing only the found materials of the known in glimmers of pressured consciousness, the activist tries (once again) to remake the world. The world is not won in a moment, nor indeed is any progressive history wholly superseded by the unguessed arrivals of its future.[2] A comfortable past, we might say, is one that no longer matters. Among some metropolitan literary critics, there is a tendency to assume that African Literature's activist moment has passed.[3] It was a stage in the Seventies, some say, whenever one tries to address or re-examine it. It was essentialist, some suggest, Manichean (as if the world is not still sometimes made this way, as if all that activism ever does is to oppose or react). What is lost in such sureties is the creative act itself, an inventive decolonizing act that, once considered, inspires thought and enlivens practice beyond its time. Periodizing African Literature is not the same thing as historicizing it.[4] Decolonization is the practice of history-making. Periodizing is the taxonomic revision of historical relation. To claim that the contemporary moment in African Literature is somehow more conceptually advanced or indeed more noteworthy than its antecedent formations is tantamount to mystifying the present.

This article identifies a popular theorization of history at work within Soweto Poetry itself. Refusing the critical orthodoxy that Soweto Poetry confined itself to localized, momentary concerns and refuting the initial claims of reviewers and critics that it was insufficiently literary (see Ullyatt 52 and James 22), I assert that these early repudiations mark moments of critical self-interest and ignore disparate institutional access to 'the literary' under Apartheid. Soweto Poetry's literary qualities, I insist, are comprehensible within its status as an improvised community-building performance. The poets' correspondences with

[1] This claim is inspired by Fanon's wonderful theatrical metaphor: '[Decolonization] transforms spectators crushed by their inessentiality into privileged actors, with the grandiose glare of history's footlights upon them.' (28)

[2] Leading on from this, I disagree slightly with Michael Chapman's assertion that "Soweto Poetry has superseded its immediate political purpose. Mongane Serote, Mbuyiseni Mtshali, Sipho Sepamla, Mafika Gwala – the names have entered our literary life, appearing in school and university syllabuses of new South Africans" (*Soweto Poetry* viii-1). In my view, Soweto Poetry built providential capacities into its project from the outset.

[3] Describing a general critical tendency, Monica Popescu observes that "the earlier generation of poets and novelists who had gained an international reputation despite censorship and banning — Mongane Wally Serote, Nadine Gordimer, Alex La Guma, Miriam Tlali, Lewis Nkosi — have slipped away from the international limelight or never reached it to the same extent their compatriot [J. M. Coetzee] did" (unpaginated).

[4] I do not disparage the strategic uses of periodization. For instance, Christine Loflin argues powerfully for periodization as a strategy that "can be used to organize a history of literature which crosses racial boundaries" (217). While I admire Loflin's intention, I view the strategy as incomplete – a halfway house of a sort that is insufficiently emboldened of its decolonizing convictions.

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political activism must be read as a form of vernacular theory, whose grounded observations of demotic, everyday experience are amplified by, and gain conceptual momentum through, inventive, tropological poetic response. In this exploratory movement, I suggest, Soweto Poetry correlates with Steve Biko's formulation of a Black Consciousness dialectic, in which the elements of lived experience become the basis for black political solidarity. This solidarity, in turn, sets in place a dialectic with a strong white racism that aspires beyond its limiting racial foundations to achieve a radically redefined, more-encompassing humanity. Reading Soweto Poetry in the light of Biko's framework, I argue that popular expressive forms help to formulate a dialectical history, in which initial opposition to South African Apartheid was ultimately attuned to the more ambitious transnational goals of pan-African decolonization and solidarity within the wider black diaspora. This dialectic continues, I contend, in post-Apartheid literary texts, in continuing popular dissent over the Marikana massacre and in contemporary global debates over colonial legacies in South African and Euro-American universities. As a series of texts in the world, Soweto Poetry and Black Consciousness offer new possibilities for conceptualizing a South African national literary canon. I offer the conclusion that this new South African canon might be perpetually reconstellated according to multiple, competing dialectics and their occasional intersections.

I find the idea of the popular suggestive – indeed crucial – for what Soweto Poetry sought to do in its time and for how it speaks to ours. The popular unmakes ideas of individual authorship. Specifically, the popular calls into question the cultural ideal of privileged insularity for which literary authorship has long been a conventional alibi. Authorship in Soweto poetry strives beyond the individual maker. Here, we might think of Mtshali's poems "The Roadgang's Cry" and "Pigeons at the Oppenheimer Park" (*Sounds of a Cowhide Drum* 13, 16) remade as Sepamla's "The Work Song" (*The Blues is You in Me* 50-51) and "Oppenheimer Park Revisited" (*Hurry Up To It* 43). The popular makes us consider distributed literary and artistic production. The popular reframes genre and points to the formation of para-institutional textualities. The popular forms theory in public space, in the media and in daily speech. For good or for ill – but mostly for good, because their political interests are widely transacted and adjudicated – all forms of popular belief are theory. My understanding here is informed by what has come to be known as vernacular theory within African and black diasporic thought, encompassing such thinkers such as Alice Walker, Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi, Houston A. Baker, Henry Louis Gates, Thomas McLaughlin,

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Grant Farred,[5] among others. The popular brings diversity to the formulation of knowledge. If we believe in the cultural potentials of the popular, and if our instincts are democratic, then we need to listen seriously to its theorizing acts and precepts.

Vernacular theory relies for its conceptualization upon found sources within the everyday. Its political engagements are conducted in the sphere of the demotic. For this reason, vernacular theory is opportune and adequate to the task of considering the philosophical reach of the popular arts. Vernacular theory demonstrates that quilts, gardens, stories and mami watas theorize a progressive, anti-racist gender politics (Walker, Ogunyemi), demonstrates that the American literary canon is an artefact in which the blues and signifying monkeys visibly reveal the energies of Africana participation (Baker, Gates), demonstrates that a conversation on a train conceptualizes and transacts white working class, gendered and African-American working class intersections (McLaughlin). Vernacular theory is typified by an inventive, responsive tropological energy.[6] Formed outside the academy, and occasionally participating in the academy, vernacular theory moves from figure to figure, gathering together and morphing an agile, flexible tradition as it proceeds. Improvised through a community of thought's metaphorical play, vernacular theory reflects – directly or indirectly – upon its own historical placement and re-placement.

The playful, exploratory aspects of Soweto poetry were not always sufficiently remarked upon during its emergence. Christopher Hope writes in an early review (of Royston's anthology, *To Whom It May Concern*) that "Serote is considerably more successful when he permits his natural didacticism to take a lyric turn" and continues that much black poetry has received "uncritical adulation" (66). There is an immediate contradiction in these views. Serote's poems teach too much through their criticality, but Soweto Poetry's (implicitly white) readers have learned too little of this criticality when they absorb it. The institutional enclosure of the didactic within the Bantu Education system and poetry's critical reception within the enclosure of (mostly white) universities and publications remains unchallenged, as does the idea of an implicitly white readership. To challenge poetry's polarizing conceptual moves is to simply ignore the polarities of institutional production and reception within a racist society. Moreover, in a 1970s South African culture in which access to higher education was restricted by the notorious "Bantu Education" system, the

[5] Farred titles his work on vernacular intellectuals *What's My Name?* (following Muhammad Ali's taunting of Ernie Terrell, whose pre-fight jibes referred to Ali as Cassius Clay). Sepamla deliberately engages with and answers Ali's question in his poem, "My Name Is" (*Hurry Up To It* 44-45).
[6] See Baker 110.

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institutional footprint of theory (in the guise of "practical criticism") operated unexamined exclusions within "the literary."[7] Those critics who took Soweto poetry to task did so from within a literary enclave whose borders they unconsciously sought to shore up. Becoming "literary" amounted to working within a logic of cultural separatism. Literary sophisticates, in other words, were occasionally also political adjudicators.

Jean Marquard comments of Mtshali that "in some of the less successful poems, [the] simplicity of idiom is a limitation and not a strength, tending to lapse into prose description or itemized accounts, where a series of abrupt statements produces a crude rhythm of repetition rather than the intensification of a mood" (69). Stating the obvious in response, we might insist that a "rhythm of repetition" ought to be expected in a collection titled *Sounds of a Cowhide Drum*. Marquard continues that the inelegant fit between form and content means that "Oswald Mtshali's poetry cannot, I think, be classified as great" (69). At stake in this summation is what poetry should be free to express and how it should look. Poetry is policed through a law of genre that requires complex idiom, and a restriction in what can be named or itemized. Poetry is submitted to the necessity for extended statement, and a demand for syncopated rhythms and intense atmospherics. In context, what Marquard seems to desire is a dilution of black poetic expression within a wider political culture of censorship. The distance between the literary critic and the censor narrows uncomfortably here. In policing the poetic, the critic risks policing the political too.

Christopher Hope's review of *Yakhal'inkomo* asks of Serote:

> The question is whether the poet has the right to indulge his rage by giving way to it? There is a danger if he does so. Brutality is indivisible and no matter how severely tempted he may be to paint it literally in black and white, to do so would misrepresent the subtle and steely savagery of the South African way of life. (72)

Serote, then, is somehow too unsubtle, at least when measured against Apartheid's 'subtle savagery." Despite the fact that racism (not Serote) has painted the world "literally in black and white," Hope implies that Apartheid is the truer poet, given its authorship of "the subtle

[7] McClintock argues insightfully:

> Beset by censorship, by strictly curtailed access to commercial publishing channels, by the dangers of identification and subsequent harassment, and inheriting to boot powerful traditions of communal performance, black Soweto poetry began to evince the calculated destruction of the text. (622)

In this analysis, Soweto Poetry sought to unmake the institutions of the literary. By implication, the critics who charged that Soweto Poetry was insufficiently literary sought to shore up ethnocentric mechanisms of exclusion.

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and steely savagery of the South African way of life." We are being invited to infer that at least Apartheid's savagery is nuanced, whereas Serote's expression of brutality is "indivisible." The alignment of sophisticated critical taste with recidivist political interest could not be more marked. Cherry Clayton sustains this bias towards the subtle, when she praises Mafika Gwala's poetry for making "a subtler statement than the rancid, flat accusations in which protest poetry often abounds" (85) and she continues that Gwala's "protests are directed against the "middle class bantu blacks" or the "Black Status Seekers" more than against the white man" (85). If subtlety defines a successful poetic, for Clayton, it also dignifies black self-division and political acquiescence. Poetry, by implication, is best when it introduces white readers to black-on-black accusation. Protest poetry, in sum, is only poetry when it expresses vicarious dissent and criticism-by-proxy. If Apartheid already condemns black South Africans, the critic's need for an equivalently condemnatory poetry enters into unexpected alliances and complicities.

The popular voice, the found poetic, poses limits to such critical cosiness. Mtshali was thought to have an extensive, but mostly white, readership.[8] Nevertheless, his English-medium poems in print do not limit their literary modes of address, nor their black working class counter-signatures. We might think here of the poet contesting the Apartheid "Jim goes to Joburg" literary genre by repeating the roadgang's cry, "Abelungu ngo'dam – Whites are damned / Basibiza ngo Jim – They call us Jim" (Mtshali, *Sounds of a Cowhide Drum* 13). Moreover, Mtshali was alive to the fact that his poetry could be more than a written medium. He commented once that "Poetry, music and drama can be shared with many other people at the same time" (quoted in Alvarez-Pereyre 38). Mtshali is clearly thinking of poetry-in-performance as a popular medium. Performance has the advantage of instantaneous reach. Publication suffers lagged temporalities of distribution, purchase and optional reception (since not all book-buyers read). In fact, in an observation that presages Soweto 1976, Mtshali says of *Sounds of A Cowhide Drum*:

> Readers, mostly white, bought and read the book out of curiosity. [. . .] Other whites bought the book to salve their conscience. Others because they really appreciated poetry. [. . .] I have said very little about my fellow blacks" reaction because it is not in my nature to generalise. The vast majority of my people have been enthusiastic. Many have told me to "keep it up."
> From black youth I have had a varied response. Some have expressed disappointment at the lack of revolutionary fire in the poems. Others have found

[8] See Barnett (100) and Alvarez-Pereyre (185), who cite sales of between 13,000 and 16,000 copies of *Sounds of a Cowhide Drum* in its first year in print. On Mtshali's white readership, see Chapman (*Soweto Poetry* 11).

> them platitudinous: perhaps that is a question of "familiarity breeds contempt." ("Mtshali on Mtshali" 104)

Mtshali discerns between the book-buying readership and a popular black audience, hinting perhaps at the different routes via which poetry may reach the socius. Black audience – never generalizable as Mtshali cautions – is implicitly in discussion with the poet, feeding back its supportive and critical views on his project. Anyone reading this piece (published in 1973) with the benefit of hindsight would see that Mtshali's account of the youth's impatience for revolution would shortly be expressed in the Soweto uprising. Intergenerational critique is implicit within historical struggle, and Mtshali is listening keenly on the cusp of the present to what the incipient future is articulating.[9]

Black South African poetry in the 1970s, I am arguing, has its philosophical roots in popular struggle. A March 1978 editorial in *Staffrider* expressed this clearly: "A feature of the new writing is its "direct line" to the community in which the writer lives. This is a two-way line. The writer is attempting to voice the community's experience ("This is how it is") and his immediate audience is the community ("Am I right?") . . ." (quoted in Ndaba 15). Writer and community are placed on either side of a "two-way" line. The loud-hailer of popular mobilization converts into poetry's telephonic relation. Poetry sounds as if from afar, but it listens and it responds. Poetry, in turn, is responsive to the calls of its listeners. Indeed, Mtshali claimed, "I am convinced that my poetry echoes the feelings, aspirations, hopes, disappointments of many blacks here in South Africa, rural as well as urbanised" (Barnett 102). Moreover, Mongane Serote remembered at the 2004 Ilkley Literature Festival in Yorkshire that his generation had recited poetry on township street corners. On occasion, the performance drew comment from passersby and became transformed into an artful contest of "the dozens." Serote recalled too that spontaneous print runs were reeled off on roneo machines, before being distributed in pamphlet form at organized political and cultural gatherings. Alvarez-Pereyre comments further that "Poetry has the additional advantage that,

[9] Intergenerational critique continues. Within the new student movements, young feminists look with some disdain upon "the uncles." For one example of the youth critiquing the older generation's gate-keeping, see Panashe Chigumadzi's "The Big Read: Your Wisdom Sucks, Old People," in which she claims that "in debates on decolonization in South Africa [we] have not yet understood or modelled 'intergenerational dialogue" (online, unpaginated). In "Why I Call Myself a Coconut to Claim My Place in Post-Apartheid South Africa," republished in the *Guardian*, Chigumadzi provocatively positions Biko in respectful terms as a "radical coconut" (online, unpaginated) – someone who has partially assimilated the codes of whiteness while rejecting its exclusionary axioms. Biko's dialectic of Black Consciousness, in other words, is still active upon him too long after his passing, even as the ideals of Black Consciousness are corrupted and complicated in the "coconut's" radical consciousness of assimilation. I am grateful to Thando Njovane and Carli Coetzee for directing my attention to contemporary intergenerational critique.

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unlike the short story, it can be shared immediately, either by being recited or by being circulated in cyclostyled form" (38). Therefore, to think Soweto Poetry we have to understand that its declarative voice – what Hope calls "didacticism" or Marquard calls 'simplicity of idiom" or Clayton calls "rancid, flat accusations" – is uttered with "immediacy" in mind.[10] Its technologies of distribution reflect its hasty application. In a stunning riposte to his critics, Mtshali draws a direct link between poetic form and political urgency:

> [W]e use [a language of urgency] because we have an urgent message to deliver to anyone who cares to listen to it. We have not got time to embellish this urgent message with unnecessary and cumbersome ornaments like rhyme, iambic pentameter, abstract figures of speech, and an ornate and lofty style. We will indulge in these luxuries . . . at the moment when we are a free people. ("Black Poetry in South Africa" 205)

To measure Soweto Poetry's "achievement," I suggest, we need to understand its idea of literary community as a political community. Literature's possibilities are structured by the political. Further, Sitas asserts that Soweto Poetry is "*performed* poetry; initially performed only among small groups of black militants, it moved in larger and larger concentric circles outwards attempting to reach the black working class" (314).[11] Therefore, in my view, poetry is inseparable from the work of linking the literary intelligentsia with alternatively theorized constituencies. This is poetry that cannot waste time, poetry urged on by the agile enterprise of political community-building, the enterprise of improvising hurried response to a nasty regime's excesses. Poetry creates transformative solidarities by naming shared experiences of transient, but incremental, consciousness.

Poetry is by its nature partial, but Soweto Poetry's relation to wider popular consciousness had a considered philosophical basis. In February 1973, Steve Biko's clarity on the project of Black Consciousness set an exemplary tone:

> 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

[10] Nkondo offers the powerful insight that, if racism leads to "a distorted perception of social reality," then "the problem of the artist is not one of 'telling' at all, but of 'revealing' that which has been concealed by time, by hegemony, by habit and by our trained incapacity to perceive complexity" (53). What I am calling the declarative voice is above all a purposeful, demystifying poetic technique. If this is true, then we might intuit that critics who receive Soweto Poetry as technically unaccomplished are attuned to their own political mystification, and not the poetic or the literary as such.

[11] Tom Penfold observes that performance "not only allowed the poetics of Soweto Poetry to circulate and interact with political discourse, but simultaneously offered the Soweto poets themselves similar personal opportunities" (18).

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> 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. (Ndaba 27)

The subtleties and philosophical clarity of Biko's statement were not completely understood in his own time, at least among many of the white liberals he offended. At stake in this passage is not an essentialism. Biko's speech is nothing less than a project for a new humanity – a project whose ambition can be measured by the centuries of oppression and the full array of white power stacked against it – including liberal subterfuges and inducements. The idea of this new humanity, for Biko, has to be transacted in the gatherings of popular consciousness – which, because they disorder Apartheid space – amount to what Fanon might call "the untidy affirmation of an original idea propounded as an absolute." (31). Spatial untidiness is what allows the new (black) humanity to cohere in the practice of gathering. Black political community institutionalizes social blackness and re-engineers political territories. The philosophy of history and of its making via revolution are re-founded upon the originary necessity of full black humanity.

Biko's philosophical critique of white liberalism is devastatingly subtle. He implies that an historical dialectic does not work when both thesis and antithesis are contaminated by the same political interest. The thesis of Apartheid privileges white liberalism materially and the antithesis of non-racialism privileges white liberalism ideologically.[12] Established via false axioms, this is a moribund dialectic that prevents revolutionary historical progression.[13] The only genuine dialectic available, Biko asserts, emerges from within the contraries of racism, with their discrepant social outcomes. The dialectic is set to work by political solidarity, in which indivisible black self-assertion becomes the primary basis for history-making without a necessary end or defined goal ("we hope to find some kind of balance," Biko says). The uncertainty of the end is what allows the dialectic to work through history

[12] Edward Powell astutely comments on Black Consciousness politics, "SASO refused to sacrifice racial equality for the sake of cross-racial unity" (6).
[13] Saleem Badat argues incisively that "Political divisions among whites were interpreted as differences over how best to maintain white privilege and political domination" (101).

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until a moment in which the dialectic ceases to function and balance materializes. The aim of the dialectic is to abolish the conditions of inequality that necessitate its emergence. Worked through, therefore, the dialectic of black and white contraries will ultimately be ("one hopes") self-limiting, self-cancelling. The nature of Biko's hope, his absence of guarantee, is in keeping with the logic of the dialectic, in which every historical action remakes the foundations established by previous engagements of the dialectic's contrary terms. In this way, Biko's understanding of his own vision is that it is contingent upon its own soon-to-be-obsolete historical moment – the first law of history is that change happens. Biko offers provisional hope without outcome, because it will be the dialectic's work to formulate and revise any outcomes that it has achieved until the point when the dialectic itself ceases to function.

For Biko, the liberal, false "dialectic" is informed by a vapid Old Testament discourse of Mosaic deliverance (leading the Israelites from Egypt to the land of milk and honey in the Book of Exodus). The implicit material counterpoint to this liberal utopia is the immediate circumstance of comrades in exile. As Biko describes it, white religious ideology contains no serious political threat. Racism seeks not to "prey" on blacks, but to "pray" on them sanctimoniously, and with an ineffective wishfulness. For this reason, Biko's philosophical critique is subtended by wit. He caricatures white claims to divine authority or to piety propped upon privilege. Liberal ideology amounts to an intercessionary ecclesiastical endeavour. Its moral appeal is to the one good (white) man at the top to whom one might pray or beseech.[14] In this critical metaphor, Biko positions the liberal (racist) supplicant as a kneeling, obeisant mediator between black South African solidarity and an abstract, remote or even non-present white overlord. The immateriality of the oppressor is made visible in this metaphor. Against liberal mediation, Biko posits the black community's isolation (it is "on its own," he asserts) and its corresponding sovereign freedom to test possibility without the inhibitory terms of white relation.[15] Biko's thought is not fossilized in Apartheid's artificial racial categories. Instead, it is adventurous and exploratory: "In the process towards answers, we have to evolve our own schemes, forms and strategies to suit the need and situation, all the time keeping in mind our fundamental beliefs and values" (29). This is not

[14] The irony is, of course, that the good white man needs racism in order to abide within his idea of superiority over the bad whites – so the good white benefits from the existence of racism.

[15] Commenting on poetry and audience, Mtshali arrived at a strikingly similar conclusion that the writer is "on his own," or at least must be among his own: "I once thought that I could evangelise and convert whites to give us back our dignity. It is naivete at its highest. I have now turned to inspire my fellow blacks to be proud, to strive, to seek their true identity as a single group." (quoted in Barnett 100).

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Manicheanism, but popular experimentation and mass play. Black Consciousness is, perhaps, as much a poetics of community as it is a politics. This is a vernacular theory of becoming more-than-human, of exceeding the racially-determined terms that might dignify one so as to ultimately dignify ("one hopes") even the erstwhile oppressor, whose very definition of "humanity" is inadequate unto itself. Black Consciousness reaches ambitiously beyond the hidebound limits of liberal (white) humanism and it aims, hopefully, for a greater humanity for all. Revolution is optimistic, Biko implies, because when one makes history the future is always in play.

In line with the adventure of assertion and discovery that Black Consciousness aimed to initiate, it also considered and remarked upon the cultural programme of Black South African Poetry. In 1973, the South African Students' Organization (SASO), the organization Biko founded, issued its statement on Black Poetry and Literature:

> 1. The commission felt it could not stipulate a set of rules which would govern the style poetry should adopt as this could destroy originality.
> 2. It was suggested that CULCOM could only direct the theme of poetry and literature and gear it to changing the system and liberating the people. (Ndaba 15)

SASO's statement gives the lie to the frequent charge that Soweto Poetry is formulaic and "unliterary."[16] In fact, the political here exists precisely in non-prescription. The deliberate freedoms built into poetry are consistent with the wider law-breaking required of political struggle and civil disobedience. If poetry is not subject to rules or governance, if poetry has to prize originality above all, then it is not that far removed from Biko's original proposition of full black humanity, the secondary, related instance of creative (law-breaking) civil disobedience, and the ultimate goal of fully-achieved, politically-enfranchised, humanity. There is a complex interplay or movement between SASO's cultural direction and poetry's originality. Collective purpose (directing the "the theme of poetry and literature") restructures old orders, but conformity risks aggregating the bounds of the possible. The gains of collective consciousness, SASO suggests, might be lost in the very moment that it sets its own imaginative horizons. Poetry's "originality" is not an end in itself, much less an aesthetic end. Instead, literary originality is a strategic necessity to avoid political torpor. Poetry, we might say, continually resets the sights of struggle.

Viewed through these philosophical starting points, Biko's vision tutors our consideration of Soweto Poetry. I am not wholly comfortable with the term "Soweto Poetry."

[16] See McClintock (598).

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In fact, given the operation of Biko's dialectic and its implications for history-making, "Soweto Poetry" is a taxonomic convenience that we should question. Strictly speaking, my reading below examines three key volumes of Black Consciousness Poetry pre-1976 (Oswald Mtshali's *Sounds of a Cowhide Drum*, Mongane Wally Serote's *Yakhal'inkomo* and Sipho Sepamla's *Hurry Up To It*) and two key volumes of Soweto Poetry (Sepamla's *The Blues Is You In Me* and Mafika Gwala's *Jol'iinkomo*). But even this revised taxonomy is inadequate. I offer this temporary, provisional split nomenclature so as to highlight the transitive nature of historical experience. Remarking upon transitivity acknowledges the effect of the popular Soweto uprising upon how we read poetry as a text-in-history. There are obvious artificialities and insufficiencies in any act of taxonomic naming. First, neither Oswald Mtshali, nor Mongane Serote are reducible to Black Consciousness thought or programmes (although Mtshali's observation of inter-generational impatience reinforces my case for a descriptive distinction).[17] Serote, in fact, objected to being labelled a Black Consciousness poet. In an interview in 1980, he states that when *Yakhal'Inkomo* appeared, "I was told that I was a Black Consciousness poet (and those who said that meant reverse-racism)" (Chapman, "Interview" 113). Second, the protections of originality and ungoverned style offered to poetry by the South African Students Organization's Cultural Commission in any case promote the irreducible character of poetry. Poetry is by definition irreducible to taxonomy if it is characterized by a quest for the original. Third, not all of the 'Soweto Poets' write out of or about Soweto (Chapman, *Soweto Poetry* 11). For instance Serote's "Alexandra," Sepamla's "Oppenheimer Park Revisited" and Gwala's "Grey Street" are obvious examples of other township and city spaces contained within 'Soweto' Poetry. Soweto in my view is a marker of historical experience, a staging-post in the steady progress of Biko's Black Consciousness dialectic. Complicating my claim, the post-1976 collections contain poems written and published in preceding years. Again, I insist on viewing the events of Soweto as descriptive and not originary. Black Consciousness and Soweto are events in our analytical understanding of these volumes, but were not always necessarily authorial occasions for writing them.[18] The emergence of Black Consciousness and the events of Soweto 1976 are game-changers – poetry cannot be read in the same way afterwards.

[17] Mtshali subsequently altered his published name to Mbuyiseni Oswald Mtshali.

[18] Here, I agree with Tom Penfold's recent argument that the poetry "was not created by Black Consciousness but helped to create it" (2). I part company with the second element of Penfold's argument - that the poetry "gestured towards Biko's ideas of a national culture" (17). As my reading indicates, I detect wider transnational gestures towards pan-African and diasporic solidarity.

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Let us track Biko's Black Consciousness dialectic through poetry and its sources in the popular and unpopular arts (music, song, sculpture). As an exploratory case study, I read a sequence of texts whose influence upon one another is shaped through their historical emergence and their retrospective reflections. To demonstrate this point, I read poetry against a backdrop in which I include popular music (Makeba, Coltrane, Ngozi), the Sharpeville massacre, the ANC's declaration of armed struggle and the formation of Umkhonto we Sizwe, then the Soweto uprising. Tracked against this history, I argue, we have something like a decolonizing Black Consciousness dialectic, in which every textual utterance remakes its synthetic foundations – foundations established by the previous historical engagements and entanglements of the dialectic's contrary terms. A brief timeline will help us to plot poetry against history.

1960 Sharpville Massacre (protesting pass laws), ANC and PAC banned
1961 Umkhonto we Sizwe formed (armed wing of the ANC)
1964 Rivonia Treason Trial – ANC leadership imprisoned
1967 Death of John Coltrane
1967 Miriam Makeba releases *Pata Pata* (including "Jolinkomo")
1968 Mankunku Ngozi releases *Yakhal' Inkomo*
1968 SASO formed in a break from NUSAS
1972 Onkgopotse Tiro gives his Turfloop graduation speech
1972 Mongane Wally Serote, *Yakhal'Inkomo*
1974 Onkgopotse Tiro assassinated in Botswana
1975 Sipho Sepamla, *Hurry Up To It*
1976 Soweto uprising
1976 Sipho Sepamla, *The Blues is You in Me*
1977 Biko murdered in custody
1977 Mafika Gwala, *Jol'Iinkomo*

I want to begin with the first text in our historical sequence. This is a popular song, Miriam Makeba's "Jolinkomo" from her 1967 album *Pata Pata*. I argue that Makeba's song responds in artful ways to the declaration of armed struggle post-Sharpeville. Moreover, "Jolinkomo" is one explicit popular cultural origin for the title of Gwala's poetry collection (*Jol'iinkomo*), published a decade later in 1977. I suggest further that Makeba's "Jolinkomo" is an implicit popular cultural intertext, along with Mankunku Ngozi's 1968 jazz album *Yakhal' Inkomo*,

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for Serote's title (*Yakhal'inkomo*).[19] Ngozi's jazz album, in turn, mourns the death of John Coltrane.[20] Already, we have a series of possible relays at work between early 1960s national history (Sharpeville, *Umkhonto we Sizwe*), popular late 1960s music (the later Coltrane, Makeba, Mankunku) and 1970s poetry (Serote, Gwala).

We should consider how carefully Miriam Makeba frames her song, "Jolinkomo" for listeners. Her spoken English introduction is deliberately quaint, touristic and inoffensive. It is designed to avoid censorial scrutiny and it moves into an isiXhosa vernacular as the song progresses:

> Our next song is a South African song, like most of our songs. It comes from Pondoland. In the olden days, the young Xhosa maidens often sang this song in praise of the young Xhosa braves as they would get ready to go out into battle. We call this song "Jolinkomo."
> [Throat singing]
> Aibo! [No!]
> [Three clicks]
> Yeza! [Come!]
> Aibo!
> [Claps or beats]
> Yeza!
> Jol'iNkomo ooJola [exclamatory praise names for the Jola clan, Mpondomise royalty]
> (0:07s – 0:52s)

There are two immediate listenerships as the song is introduced. We have an English-speaking listenership who have the song framed for them in terms of an antiquated Xhosadom. Men went out to war and maidens sang "in the olden days." Political violence is distanced in these lyrics. It is safely positioned as Xhosa ethnic history. Moreover, Makeba internationalizes her listenership. Her diction implicitly establishes forms of address to European ("maidens") or American ("braves") listeners. This song, we are told, "is a South African song," as if listeners are being guided from outside national borders into Pondoland and its history. The word "braves" is stunningly misplaced. It calls up contemporary Western cowboy films and their Native American representations of "braves" (Makeba astutely recasts "squaws" as "maidens"). Makeba's voiceover offers a quaint, remote, safe

[19] As Attwell records, Michael Titlestad was the first to notice Mankunku's influence on Serote's title (212 n.5). Additionally, Nkondo confirms that Serote "has used the melodies of Mankunku Ngozi, no less than those of Miriam Makeba and Nina Simone" (55). I would add here that where I refer to Serote's historical acquaintances, I shall adopt the usages Ngozi and Feni. Where I refer to their textual equivalents, I shall, like Serote, name them Mankunku and Dumile.

[20] The original sleeve notes for Mankunku Ngozi's album translate the title of the track "Yakhal'Inkomo" as "Bellowing Bull" and continue, "The sound of a bull bellowing mournfully at the loss of one of his kind, is one from deep down in his heart. It is with this sound captured musically, that Mankunku expresses his deep grief at the loss of one of the greatest tenor players in the world, Daddy Trane, as he calls John Coltrane."

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ethnography. The framing is more suited to 1960s Hollywood than it is to 19th century Pondoland. Xhosa warriors are, precisely, *screened* as something else, elsewhere. And yet, the moment Makeba switches languages from English to Xhosa, she narrows her implicit listenership to black South Africans in her historical present. Makeba commands her black South African listener into being with an inciting 'push-and-pull' – "Aibo! [No] . . . Yeza! [Come!]." It is as if she is teasing her audience into involvement, refusing and then inviting them into the space of performance.

We need to think about the immediate moment of performance – post-Sharpeville, post-Umkhonto, post-Rivonia. Any black South African listener would instantly have discerned that the performance is urgent and that it departs radically from its safe touristic framing. In fact, we might even argue that Apartheid's ethnic framing of Xhosa tradition is being reworked as explosive modernity in Makeba's deft and powerful vocal. The song is staged as a war song, and it is performed by a beautiful young "maiden" (Makeba) admiring warriors (*UmKhonto we Sizwe*). Put another way, Miriam Makeba sings in IsiXhosa a praise song addressed to those who are about to embark on political violence. In this sense, I agree with Barnes' insightful observation that "Like many of Makeba's songs, this song became one of the battle hymns of the Struggle" (75).

"Jolinkomo's" structuring of incitement and provocation ("Yeza!") might be read through its staged affects of sexualized admiration, and yet, Makeba ultimately refuses advances ("Aibo!"). "Jolinkomo" is not historical kitsch. It is popular anti-Apartheid mobilization. The invocation of the Majola [Jola] clan,[21] through the exclamatory praises "Jolinkomo" and "ooJola," calls the ancestors into the present, collapsing the remote "olden days" into a living lineage (the ancestors are not dead). To understand the complexities of Makeba's framework of reference, we need to consider that her performance alludes to a tradition of popular, communally-performed versions of the song. As a plausible reference point, Barnes cites "one local version" of the song translated by Ncedile Saule:

> Leader
> Jol'inkomo Jola!
> UMaJol'ubuyile, ndisuke ndanexhala
> *Majola has come back, I am suddenly struck by fear*[22]
>
> Chorus

[21] As Barnes explains, Jol'inkomo is "a Xhosa clan name from which the surname Majola (with the abbreviated form Jola) is derived" (74).

[22] I am aware that this translation limits what the song is able to say in English. For instance, a more nuanced translation of "ndanexhala" is "anxiety" (Thando Njovane, personal communication).

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> Ndineengxakangxaka zomzi wam
> *I have complicated issues pertaining to my household*[23] (74)

The first thing to observe is that the performance of "Jol'inkomo" usually assumes the response of a chorus. Makeba's performance, by implication, invites audience response to her song. Through singing, something collective will be transacted and voiced. Secondly, Majola's fear-inspiring return is a form of ancestry come back, but Majola is also often incarnated as a brown mole snake, called Majola. Both the resurrection of the ancestor and his animal transfiguration are in play, as indeed is the return of clan cohesion – Majola (all those named Majola) has come back, presumably to gather and address the complicated issues in the household. As Makeba invokes these names, her spoken framing gives way to a full-throated war cry. I cite Barnes' translation of Makeba's lyrics, but offer one clarifying emendation:

> Jol'inkomo Jola, ajamile amadoda (x2)
> Men (of the Majola clan) staring sternly
> Zijamile iingane Jola, khawujole kaloku (repeat)
> Children [of Majola] staring sternly, be strong! (74-75)

No one, listening to Makeba's opening bars, can miss the power and passion of the vocal. "Jolinkomo" is a call to arms that reaches the black 1960s populace through mass, popular media: vinyl record-players and radio. It is a cry for the resumption of political violence (instituted through its assumption of a chorus among its listenership). This choral performance of violence makes sense only in its historical immediacy post-Sharpeville; not as a touristic delirium of maidens and braves in which an interloper such as John Wayne might, once again, find himself at home and in the saddle. If a cow ("inkomo") is a unit of wealth – and part of the brideprice for a "maiden" no less – then Jola's cattle (Jolinkomo)[24] will perhaps be returned as the rich spoils of war. At stake in the capturing of cattle is the very basis of black ownership of wealth and the cohesion of social blackness through marriage and household. In short, we have a kind of double time happening in Makeba's song. Safely scrambled tradition frames a risky call for political battle that is, in turn, consolidated through

[23] A more idiomatic translation would be something along the lines of "I'm faced with tribulations within my household" (Thando Njovane, personal communication).
[24] I disagree with Lawrie Barnes' claim that "Literally, Jol'iinkomo does not refer to cattle at all" (75). Florence Miya, to whom I express my gratitude here, translated the phrase as "Majola's cows" when I played her Makeba's track.

the conviction and resolve of Makeba's impeccable vocal and her listenership's choral participation via armed struggle.

Of course, Mafika Gwala published two eponymous poems and a collection, *Jol'iinkomo*, with the same title as Makeba's song. Between Makeba's founding intertext and Gwala's collection, there is a decade-long gap. Precisely at the mid-point, Mongane Serote published his collection titled *Yakhal'inkomo*. It too contains an eponymous (prose) poem prefacing the collection. It is self-evident that Gwala was inspired by, and repeated with a difference, Serote's motif and preface format. Interestingly, however, Serote's prose poem does not at first appear to contain a call to arms. It is initially a poem of sadness, or even a lament, because the title, "Yakhal'inkomo," means "the cow is crying" (or even, "you are crying, cow"):

> Yakhal'inkomo – the cry of the cattle at the slaughterhouse,
>
> Dumile, the sculptor, told me that once in the country he saw a cow being killed. In the kraal cattle were looking on. They were crying for their like, dying at the hands of human beings. Yakhal'inkomo. Dumile held the left side of his chest and said that is where the cry of the cattle hit him . . . Yakhal'inkomo. The cattle raged and fought, they became a terror to themselves; the twisted poles of the kraal rattled and shook. The cattle saw blood flow into the ground.
>
> I once saw Mankunku Ngozi blowing his saxophone. Yakhal'inkomo. His face was inflated like a balloon, it was wet with sweat, his eyes huge and red. He grew tall, shrank, coiled into himself, uncoiled and the cry came out of his horn.
>
> This is the meaning of Yakhal'inkomo. (6)

Serote's prose poem purports to be a translation explaining the term "Yakhal'inkomo." Taking stock, the poem concludes "This is the meaning of Yakhal'inkomo." And yet, Serote's translation only works as a translation of the mechanism of translation itself – "Yakhal'inkomo" has moved from cows and Dumile to poet, and via Coltrane to Mankunku to poet, only to be gathered into provisional and contingent, temporary sense. I agree with David Attwell's insightful assessment that "Serote's cry, 'yakhal'inkomo,' is a kind of multi-disciplinary modernism" but the very presence of Coltrane in the formulation of Mankunku's cry means that Attwell is slightly wide of the mark in insisting that it is "of a fierce and fiercely local kind" (146). Serote's final line gathers together in "the meaning of Yakhal'inkomo" the sounds of the cow crying as it witnesses slaughter, the empathic

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response of Dumile, and the jazz performance of Mankunku lamenting Coltrane,[25] and finally even the articulation of Serote's poem itself. These are the meanings of "Yakhal'inkomo."

"Yakhal'inkomo" is iterated multiply, variably. It is in the movement between instances that its real meaning is to be found. We might reflect upon this dynamic, moving and reiterative sense of "Yakhal'inkomo" as constituting the very operation of Biko's ever-renewing Black Consciousness dialectic. While some die (Coltrane, cows, black South Africans) and are mourned, the dialectic accumulates across its sites and instances as a perpetually movable call to the living, who bear witness not merely to the moment of death or suffering, but to transhistorical lineages of political engagement.

In the kraal, a rural space, the cows are crying because they are witnessing the suffering of their own kind and possibly also because they are being slaughtered. The source of their cry is split between and spliced together in "crying for their like [and] dying at the hands of human beings." Dumile's empathic response is felt, not uttered. His holding of his chest is also an act of responsive self-sculpting. "Yakhal'inkomo" is then relayed in auditory, aestheticized form by Mankunku in the city, a distant space. The poet, in the audience, then transcribes the cry into the poem, in which its repetition ("Yakhal'inkomo") is re-measured in prosaic lines. The poet feels in listening to Mankunku what Dumile felt in witnessing the cattle suffer.

There is a very different texture to Serote's poem than we find in one of its source texts, Makeba's "Jolinkomo." For a start, Serote's is a poem of sadness, since the cows are crying. This sadness has historical precedents. Lucy Graham observes fleetingly that "there is no doubt that [Dumile] Feni's words about 'Yakhal'inkomo' take on chilling resonance in the light of the 1856-1857 cattle killing" (850). Serote remarks on political reversals in the early 1970s via the precedent of a major political reversal in the 19th century – the killing of cattle by the Xhosa people following Nongqawuse's prophecy, in a futile attempt to banish the settler colonial presence. By symbolic implication, in "Yakhal'inkomo" the people who Makeba's warriors are supposed to protect are suffering on a scale comparable to 19th century famine and wholesale military defeat. In other words, for Serote, the warriors who Makeba sings about are not quite succeeding in accomplishing victory, nor returning the cows safely to the kraal. The warriors are either not fighting, or are not winning the fight. So from

[25] Attwell is aware of Mankunku's lament for Coltrane (212 n.5). Dumile Feni was, by the time the poem was published, in exile (I am grateful to the anonymous reader for pointing this out). This means that even Dumile is plausibly speaking from afar in the poem. We have, then, a telescoped aesthetic, a relay of sound and sight and sense.

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Makeba's war-cry, we move into Serote's poem of disappointment that I am almost certain is referencing her song, but is observing the reversals of struggle too.

As we have seen, Serote changes the mood to sadness and disappointment. But then there is a shift towards the end of the poem. Let us look at how Serote turns towards the popular arts to shape this change in mood. The cry of the saxophone repeats the scene of violence and slaughter that Dumile has witnessed elsewhere. Expressing Dumile's feeling transforms the jazz musician, Mankunku. Mankunku's face inflates, he grows tall then shrinks. The jazz-man becomes snake-like in his coilings and uncoilings. By implication, the poetic speaker – that other artist in the sequence, sculptor, musician poet – is transformed by repeating, re-calling, "Yakhal'inkomo" in a new, written medium. So we have a strange double movement in the poem, which is transforming suffering into community. The cows suffer, Dumile suffers by feeling their suffering, the speaker recognizes the same feeling in the jazz saxophonist, Mankunku (whose cry comes out of his 'horn'). Like the saxophone, the horn is a brass wind instrument, and Serote uses a little poetic licence to land the conceit. Cows, too, have horns that they use to gore their like in the scene that founds the poem. Arguably, the cry at the end of the poem is turned not towards a moment of suffering, but towards a moment of goring, of committing retributive political injury. All of the artist figures in the poem are working on a common theme or thread and they build a motif into the basis of solidarity, taking in both rural kraal and urban jazz club. Serote gathers a sensory environment in the sculptor's art, in music, in the poet's voice. The plasticity of popular artistic forms becomes the basis for a transformation in affective response. Regardless of distinctions in its medium of expression, "Yakhal'inkomo" voices a common experience, a common project or aesthetic, across the varieties of black artistic expression in South Africa (and beyond, wherever Coltrane or Ngozi or Makeba sound, wherever Feni shapes). The three artist figures are linked together as examples of how a community of sense gathers around a common experience. The stronger insight of the poem is not that suffering is intensifying, but that solidarity is strengthening. Solidarity is not simply realised synchronically in the present. Mankunku's performance of "Yakhal'inkomo" in music is accompanied by a performance of "Jolinkomo" in his embodiment of a snake as he "coiled into himself, uncoiled." This snake-like performance recalls Majola, the brown mole snake who is a conduit between the Jola clan and their ancestors. Majola appears when a woman conceives, and the snake visits the male descendents of the clan and averts setbacks for the

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Mpondomise royalty.[26] Mankunku, therefore, embodies living memory through two simultaneous performances – the literal "Yakhal'inkomo" and the figurative "Jolinkomo." Majola, who has returned fearfully in Serote's Mankunku, had also, we remember, returned in the folksong referenced by Makeba's popular hit. Mankunku's therianthropic transformation from musician to snake allows Serote's poem to make the affective transition from sadness to political assertion.[27] Majola, we might say, has returned to address complicated issues in the household. The line back to Makeba's address of the Jola clan ("JoliNkomo ooJola") is faint, but it is present.

Again, this layering of reference means that we should probably nuance Attwell's equivocal assessment of the poem:

> To summarise, it would be reasonable to assert that Serote's gut wrenching sound-image, "yakhal'inkomo," puts a local pain into the lyric tradition. Or, to put it the other way round, Serote's cry is a striking local appropriation of the lyrical voice. Is this move a reflection of Serote's proximity to an oral culture? That interpretation is certainly possible, but it is also the case that there is no reference here to the genres, codes and conventions of oral poetry, that is to say, to the institutionality of the oral tradition. It is not the oral poet who interprets the cry of the cattle, it is the sculptor, and his empathy would be recognizable in any culture broadly sharing the Romantic and modernist sensibility. (146-147)

I would suggest that the institutions of oral performance are present in Serote's poem, but they are being reworked. In an inversion of artistic call-and-response, it is now the artist who responds to another's call, following the sequence cattle-Dumile-Mankunku-poet. The very cry of the cattle, the basis of "Yakhal'inkomo" as empathic reception, invokes Makeba's call of "Jol'inkomo," in which warriors are incited to reclaim cattle, which is to say to reclaim wealth, or in Serote's version, to reclaim those who are suffering. In this way, "Yakhal'inkomo" is a modernist pretext for institutionalizing its oral "pre-text," "Jol'inkomo." The snake, Majola, is an incarnation of ancestry – it announces itself to each male descendent of the Jola lineage. As an act of annunciation, Mankunku's therianthropic coilings and uncoilings invite the institution of oral performance by female members of the (Majola) lineage. This inverted temporality, in which modernism invokes or occasions orality, is perfectly consistent with the broader logics of reclamation that Serote is entering into.

[26] Scheub is a very useful source on Majola (243-245).
[27] This bears out Nkondo's general observation that Serote's technique transfigures its object (52).

Now let us look at the final text in the sequence, "Jol'iinkomo" by Mafika Gwala. Gwala's poem is published after Soweto, 1976. The newly enlivened political struggle has now been assumed by schoolchildren. This is possibly why Gwala uses the Makeba title instead of the Serote title. The prosaic quality of the lines is indebted to Serote:

> Up from the river near Lusikisiki
> the Mpondo maidens would sing
> this song: Jol'iinkomo!
> Down near the Umtamvuma River
> children waiting anxiously
> for sunset: Jol'iinkomo!
>
> Jol'iinkomo means bringing
> the cattle home to the safety
> of the kraal and the village elders.
> Jol'iinkomo is also to say
> I should bring some lines home
> to the kraal of my Black experience. (5)

Gwala renews Makeba's call to violence,[28] but his poem nuances it in keeping with Gwala's post-Soweto political moment.[29] Gwala returns to echo Makeba's framing of her song – this is the war cry that the Mpondo maidens would sing, but he adds too that this is the experience of children when night is falling. Obviously, night is the time at which the cattle need to be brought home safely,[30] hence the anxiety about waiting for sunset. But beyond this, we commence in a mood of anxiety that is also, of course, a heightened state of political anxiety too. Notice how Gwala has reintroduced the element of children into the lineage of Makeba's "Jol'inkomo" and Serote's "Yakhal'inkomo" (like Serote's, Gwala's poem concludes by explaining the meaning of its title). Gwala has reintroduced the element of children formerly present in Makeba's song (in her reference to "children of Jola"), because the Soweto uprising was conducted largely by schoolchildren.[31] The poet joins a movement refreshed by

[28] Gwala's "Getting Off the Ride" directly acknowledges the influence of Makeba's "Jolinkomo" (66).
[29] Sibongile Mkhabela recalls that as children left Naledi High School on 16 June 1976, "Sizobadubula ngemvhy'mbhayi, a song by Miriam Makeba, was one of the most popular songs on that morning" (60).
[30] Lawrie Barnes may be technically correct when he claims that "There is a popular misconception that the title literally means 'bringing the cattle home to the kraal' (75). However, Gwala's translation here is not merely linguistically literal. It is also politically contextualized and poetically allusive. Gwala's emphasis upon returning the cattle "to the safety of the kraal" is set up in dialogue with Serote's earlier "Yakhal'Inkomo," in which the cattle are dying and are, precisely, not safe.
[31] One *cassus belli* for the Soweto Uprising was the Afrikaans Medium Decree of 1974, which held that schoolchildren should receive 50% of their education, including the subject of mathematics, in the medium of Afrikaans. However, this measure was already commonplace in Higher Education, as Onkgopotse Tiro's Black Consciousness seminal Black Consciousness graduation speech, "the Turfloop Testimony" describes: "In theory Bantu Education gives our parents a say in our education but in practice the opposite is true. At this University, U. E D [University Education Diploma] students are forced to study Philosophy of Education through the medium of Afrikaans. When we want to know why, we are told that the Senate has decided so" (unpaginated).

this new political generation of the youth. Gwala recognizes that the poet has to learn Soweto's lessons. The poet inverts the usual order of learning – here, children teach adults.[32] The poet has to bring home some poetic lines to his Black experience, joining the struggle being waged at all levels of society (from children to elders). For Gwala, the poet is positioned as akin to a warrior who symbolically brings cattle home safely. Notice too Gwala's "Black experience" as a marker here. The increasing influence of black historical assertion after Soweto is unmistakably visible within the poem.

What we see in this sequence of texts is the amplification of the human – from Makeba's quaint olden day braves to modern nationalist warriors, from Serote's suffering cattle to snake-like, growing and shrinking jazzmen, from Gwala's children experiencing the moods of war to the poet bringing the lines of his learning home to his experience. In each text and across the sequence, black humanity grows in stature and scope as it articulates itself in improvised, layered performance.

This amplification of humanity and of political event is characteristic of Soweto Poetry more generally. In its more ambitious moments, it seeks to broaden struggle to Pan-African or diasporic theatres. Witness Mtshali's eponymous "Sounds of a Cowhide Drum:"

> Boom! Boom! Boom!
> I hear it far in the northern skies –
> a rumble and a roar as of thunder
> [. . .]
> Boom! Boom! Boom!
> As it rolls nearer
> and nearer to the southern sky
> it holds my heart,
> my hopes soaring high into the eagle's throne. (68)

The refrain "Boom! Boom! Boom!" repeats the first line of "Riding on the Rainbow" in which the speaker's very first poetry reading is accompanied by a jazz ensemble, "The

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[32] Here, Gwala has internalised Onkgopotse Tiro's "Turfloop Testimony," which argued:

> We Black graduates, by virtue of our age and academic standing are being called upon to bear greater responsibilities in the liberation of our people. Our so-called leaders have become the bolts of the same machine which is crushing us as a nation. We have to go back to them and educate them. (See Tiro, unpaginated)

Tiro's consequent expulsion from Turfloop University led to him teaching at Morris Isaacson High School in Soweto. After Tiro's assassination by parcel bomb in Botswana in 1974, a former pupil at Morris Isaacson, Teboho "Tsietsi" MacDonald Mashinini, led the Soweto Uprising on 16 June 1976. Gwala's indebtedness to and shrewd appreciation of popular, demotic and intergenerational lineages is unmistakeable. As David Attwell records, Gwala telephoned Tiro on the day of his assassination to seek advice about whether or not to attend the "Poetry 74" Festival (139). Incidentally, Serote is also a former pupil of Morris Isaacson High School (Penfold 3).

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Giants" (27). Together, poet and musicians deliver a message of amplified humanity: "Men, Brothers, Giants!" Music and poetry collaborate, build artistic affinity into affiliation ("Brothers"), and finally offer a more ambitious enhancement of human stature ("Giants!"). There is a creative contest between poet and jazz ensemble:

> And off I go
> streaking across the sky like a David's slingshot
> hitting "The Giants"
> into the rainbow's face. (27)

The stanza cites a Biblical example of unmatchedness in combat that has a direct equivalence in Apartheid society. The overcoming of human limitations and the performers' supercession to the position of the more-than-human "Giants" is readable within Biko's dialectics of struggle. Oppression inhibits human possibility. Collective endeavour surmounts the inhibiting terms of racially-predetermined humanity itself. In turn, the sounds of Mtshali's cowhide drum are transcontinental. He hears the sounds, from further north, of African decolonization. The message is something received, not given, and it emboldens the hope of assuming power on the eagle's throne. Mtshali's poetry, once accused of indulging in a "crude rhythm of repetition" (Marquard 69), is designed according to an echoic principle, not a harmonic one.

Mafika Gwala, in direct response to "Sounds of a Cowhide Drum," reverses Mtshali's southerly transcontinental movement. Gwala's poetry is not the passive recipient of hope, like Mtshali's, but instead transmits the gains of Soweto further north. We see this in Gwala's (second) eponymous poem, "Jol'iinkomo," which ends his collection just as its namesake began the collection. This poem claims that the cattle shall have returned to the ancestral homestead:

> When Muhammad Ali is more
> and far greater than just
> the people's champion,
> but carrier of the Great Black Hope
> in world athletic achievement;
> When in class pupils
> get the itch to give proud khuzas [commands]
> to braves Jacob Morenga
> Hendrik Witbooi
> Samuel Maherero (70)

This passage adumbrates the global ambition of Gwala's "Great Black Hope." Ali grows even further in stature. The lessons of Soweto are imparted anew by Namibian

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schoolchildren, who retrospectively give commands to the historical 19th century and early 20th century generals of Namibian resistance. The speaker of the first "Jol'iinkomo" that prefaces the collection, has learned from the school children in Soweto. The speaker of the second "Jol'iinkomo" anticipates the lesson being imparted once again by Namibian schoolchildren to dead anti-colonial heroes. Revolution's movement enlivens new geographically-displaced futures. Revolution revises and augments the received pasts of struggle, even if these Namibian pasts at first seem removed from Soweto's inaugurating moment. Gwala's *Jol'Iinkomo* is not a parochial scene of maidens and cowherds as it at first pretends, but instead grows to a transcontinental, transhistorical and planetary call that "Africa shall have one Soul. / Jol'iinkomo!" (71). Gwala is reaching beyond South Africa's borders to the African continent and to the black diaspora, refashioning a unified 'soul" that exceeds its best instances of localised expression. In addition to being an expression of Makeba and the folksong of the Amampondomise, Gwala's "Jol'iinkomo" is already a localised expression of Serote's "Yakhal'Inkomo," which is already an expression of Dumile Feni's exilic empathy, which already anticipates Mankunku Ngozi's "Yakhal' Inkomo," which is already a mourning of Coltrane. Localised expression, in short, is already diasporic. This, too, is the meaning of "Jol'iinkomo."

The sequencing of call and response across the poets' collections is a persistent feature of Soweto Poetry. Allusions to and rewritings of precursor poems call into question ideas of literary origination. At stake is not literary imitation, much less plagiarism, but instead a participatory imagination geared towards the aesthetics and politics of collective struggle. As each poet glosses his influences, he also remakes them for his times, accenting history via the contours of purposeful citation. The speaker of Mtshali's "Pigeons at the Oppenheimer Park," for example, berates pigeons for "trespassing on private property" (*Sounds of a Cowhide Drum* 16). In this instance, the public commons, a park, is imagined as being privately owned by the Oppenheimer mining magnates who are proxies for generalized white private property – a metonym for white seizure of the land. The speaker's disdain displaces his own exclusion from white privatisation of the commons onto "insolent birds" (16). The speaker, we might say, assumes the place of the lawgiver in order to possess the "common" law that repudiates him in the first place. The speaker, in other words, usurps white racism by claiming a white position of articulation. The pigeons, "making love in full view of madams," offer a transgressive social comment, in which their watchers are both white female bosses ("madams") and lowbrow streetwalkers ("madams"). In short, Mtshali's poem plays with the interchangeability of social positions via the displacing mechanisms of

address and articulation. In a second poem, "Keep off the Grass," Mtshali returns to pigeons who are showered by the park fountain, and adjoins them to a "Madam's" Pekinese, which urinates on a "Keep off the Grass" sign (30). Sepamla's "Oppenheimer Park Revisited" repopulates both scenes. Mtshali's "defying" and "tresspassing" are vaguely echoed in Sepamla's more flagrant formulation of "pissing defiantly" (*Hurry Up To It* 43). Hoboes and beggars – the inhabitants of the park – "tossed about on the grass" (43). Where Mtshali's park is a space of prohibition, Sepamla's park is a space assumed and possessed by the disadvantaged. A beggar's hand holds out a "beret" (43). The gesture is no doubt a sign of going "cap in hand" to the speaker, but it is also, perhaps, a sign of incipient militarisation. Watching a flock of pigeons rise "in stately formation / And in a march past" (43), the speaker identifies a corollary in the human representatives of disadvantaged. Like the pigeons, they are gathered, even if they exhibit "loneliness" and are "insulated" from their environment (43). This leads to the exultant conclusion, in which the speaker understands that "Humanity sits crammed all over the world" and that its coherence is the basis for "love abundant abroad" (43). Therefore, the poet converts the military pomp of the pigeons' "stately formation" and "march past" into a marshalling of abundantly gathered and loving humanity. In short, the signs of the repressive state apparatus inspire a disinhibited human relation – love.

Soweto Poetry's formal innovations can be thought of as experiments in the decolonization of the psyche. Poetry relies for its effect upon its own internal operations, including its formal arrangements. In this sense, poetry is an institution unto itself and it recasts worldly institutions according to an alternative regime of sense. To the extent that it delegates meaning-making beyond its own edifice, poetry encourages a wider, decolonizing poetic among its listeners, readers and respondents. Perhaps the most illustrative case in point is Mafika Gwala's "Perspectives." The poem is arranged in three sections and it is composed as a field on the page. Each line typically presents two or three metonymic nouns removed typographically from one another so as to suggest proximate elements of the everyday whose linking logic is not immediately apparent. We find everyday objects in the first section. Three representative lines are:

dompas workpermit nightpass
[. . .]
hairstretches complexionlotions deodorants
[. . .]
sunday's beach saccharine tranquilizers (10)

The reader or listener is encouraged to position these metonyms in relation to the larger, latent classes of referent of which they are part. The reader or listener is also invited to formulate a metaphoric linkage between metonyms so as to arrive at an analysis of the lived experience of the everyday. However, the playful paradox is that these metonyms point to movable referents. For instance, we might at first assume that "complexionlotions" indicate the straightforward treatment of blocked pores, only to have the portmanteau word revert our attention to the composite complexes of racial "complexion" under Apartheid. Accordingly, beautification becomes recast as the erasure of identity by skin-whitening creams, hair-stretching and the like.

The poem's internal spatial logic is initiated by and counterpointed to Apartheid society's regulation of space via the *dompas* (the despised Apartheid passbook). Requiring of its reader a negotiation of space on the page, "Perspectives" encourages readerly questions such as "If my departure point is the Apartheid *dompas*, what is the ordering law of this composed poetic field that I am entering?" If the space of the poem is entered via the racist *dompas*, then the lingering determinants of racism might be felt in the experiences of the everyday offered by the poem. For instance, "sunday's beach," reserved for whites only, calls into question the Sabbath as an ordained day of rest for black labour. Religion and its institutions of rest therefore offer "saccharine" ideals when measured against black socioeconomic realities. In lines like these, the poem transforms Apartheid space via the affinities and gatherings of black daily experience – even the taking of tea or coffee might become politicised for some readers (the commonality of saccharine sweeteners highlights starker black and white choices). In other words, "Perspectives" is an exercise in reconstructing the solidarity of found or lived daily images, with obvious correlatives in the experiential techniques of popular struggle.

The second section of the poem offers proper nouns as metonyms of black historical and transnational experience. Deceased South African Drum Generation writers are placed in successive affinity with pacifist and militant leaders of decolonizing struggle:

gandhi nat nakasa luther king
lumumba malcolm x can themba
castrobeard guevarasmile trotskygoatee (10)

Here, deaths of South African writers in exile – Nakasa's by suicide and Themba's by alcoholism – are equated with the political assassinations of Gandhi, King, Lumumba and Malcolm X. The sequence from pacifist to militant contexts locates decolonization in a

phased historical progression, which culminates in the humanizing iconography of revolution. Political struggle resolves into the facial lineaments of its chief actors (Castro, Guevara and Trotsky). This triad of lines relies upon the found poetic of assonance for its internal sense – Lumumba and Luther King are held in relation due to the similar initial letters in their names, as are Can Themba and Castro. The stepped progression from pacifism to militancy to embodiment in these three lines allows "Perspectives" to establish a comparable reading of African-American popular culture and politics in the following triad:

little richard floyd patterson sammy davis
muhammad ali huey newton eldridge cleaver
jomo kenyatta banda lebua jonathan (10)

In the first line, African-American icons of the 1950s are linked by their contemporaneity (Little Richard's first chart successes and Patterson's boxing world title were achieved in the mid-1950s). Patterson's boxing career and Ali's contiguous status as a boxing legend then allow the second line to contemplate the movement from pre-Civil Rights black accomplishment, through the pivotal metonym of Ali, to the more militant Black Power phase of African-American politics in the 1970s. In short, the first triad of the section, moving from pacifism to militancy, establishes an analytic for interpreting African American history in the fourth and fifth lines. The sixth line follows the logic of the third. Like the embodied presence of the "castrobeard" and the "guevarasmile," Kenyatta, Banda and Jonathan are the embodied representatives of an accomplished African decolonization (the fact that history may speak them differently now would be consistent with the transience of social forms within the operation of the dialectic). The movement in the second section of "Perspectives" is accomplished by a dialectic of sense. The transitory and incidental relation between Nakasa, Gandhi, Luther King, Lumumba, Malcolm X and Can Themba is consolidated into a reading of three decades of African-American history, sublating the seemingly ephemeral and circumstantial "poetic" connections of the first triad into a plausible historicizing act. This act might vary for individual readers – for instance, an entirely different history might be founded upon the latent relationship between Lumumba and Ali, via Mobutu Sese Seko and the Rumble in the Jungle. In its vernacular theorization, poetry becomes the basis of history, inverting the usual priority accorded to these categories. For this reason, the contiguous figures of Kenyatta, Jonathan and Banda are apt resolutions of the second triad – they are near historical contemporaries of Newton, Ali and Cleaver.

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Additionally, they are local, African instances of black historical struggle and political engagement who, like Nakasa and Themba, can be placed in a wider framework of relation.

The final section of "Perspectives" (10-11) moves through metonymies of historical event ("hiroshima," "sharpeville," "my lai") and metonymies of psychic and physical affliction ("thalidomide," "dracula," "junk and the gutter," "prison and death"). The poem's resolution is discovered in an embodied black unity (the precedent for which is established in the embodiments we have just examined in the second section):

lurking in the darkness:
boss
and
cia
until
black magic hands
rise
in
the
darkness. (11)

This resolution involves a reclamation of the darkness previously occupied by the forces of repression – the South African Bureau of State Security and the American Central Intelligence agency. The black magic hands reclaim, in their visible emergence, the darkness that has previously obscured them, reversing the sequential progression of reading in a conclusion that moves from right to left across the page. This is the assertion of a culminating point in black history, a regathering of collective purpose and action across the diaspora. "Perspectives" has moved its readers far beyond the parochial oppression of the dompas, towards the ambition of global black unity forged through a poetic of imagistic affinity.[33] The diaspora, the poem suggests, will be decolonized through improvised conceptualisation and found aesthetics of reconnection.

If poems like "Perspectives" aspire beyond their historical moment and situation, then it is unsurprising that Soweto Poetry contains unanticipated post-Apartheid heirs, who adjoin themselves to its tradition. The snake, Majola, who we saw personified in Serote's Mankunku, reappears in Zakes Mda's *The Heart of Redness* (2000) as a sign of good fortune for the protagonist, Camagu (112). Furthermore, Mda resumes Serote's and Sepamla's[34]

[33] Glen Retief makes the suggestive claim that imagistic technique reaches the Soweto Poets via the literary influence of African-American poets (45-46).
[34] See Sepamla's "To Makana and Nongqawuse," in which Nongqawuse's millenarian cattle-killing prophecy is converted into the activist's longstanding patience, and in which the spirit of prophecy is encountered in the street wisdom of everyday acquaintances on street corners (*The Blues is You in Me* 23).

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focus on Nongqawuse's prophecies and the Xhosa cattle killing of 1856-1857. Mtshali's pigeons in Oppenheimer Park (16) and Sepamla's pigeons in *The Blues Is You In Me* ("Pigeonholes" 24) are rejected possible selves, indexing racial categorization and separate amenities in public space. Sepamla's seagulls and pigeons in *Hurry Up To It* (18-19, 43) function as selves spoken differently, selves which transcend spatial categorization. These motifs are reprised in K. Sello Duiker's *Thirteen Cents* (2000). Azure's phobia of pigeons and identification with seagulls (5, 63-65) spring from a fear of adults converting children into birds as a means of carceral control. As in Sepamla, Duiker's seagull is a self spoken differently (it is transcendent and territorially unbound). As in Sepamla and Mtshali, Duiker's pigeons are an unwanted self – a self that the child might become if he or she is transformed under the malign influence of adults.

Imraan Coovadia's recent novel, *The Institute for Taxi Poetry* (2012), signals the influence of Soweto Poetry by adopting lines from Serote's "The City Johannesburg" as its epigraph. Likewise, Lesego Rampolokeng's highly experimental performance poem, "Writing the Ungovernable, cites both Sepamla (94) and Gwala (98), before measuring the speaker's identifications with Gwala and Serote:

> Liberation blues 1974, mourning of Onkgopotse Tiro parcel-bombed up in the murder-church service of the god of pigmentation (& yessah, I realized then that 'me listening to jazz is not leisure / it is a soul operation' & I knew then that I had to choose between Jol'inkomo (that is, in his words 'bringing lines home to the kraal of my black experience' or Yakhal'inkomo, to OUTCRY with Mutabaruka . . . to bawl the anguish like a cow being slain . . . & decided there was nothing bovine about me . . . & so . . . I took to Staffriding . . . all the way from Phefeni to HERE. (99)

For Rampolokeng, the choice between Gwala's "Jol'Iinkomo" and Serote's "Yakhal'Inkomo" is falsely framed – each exhibits the common feature of bovine metaphor. Rampolokeng refuses Serote's plaintive poetry, opting instead for "Staffriding." This is a complex identification, because "staffriding" suggests being published in the progressive literary magazine, *Staffrider*, whose name derives from township slang for catching a ride on an overcrowded commuter train by hanging on the outside of the moving carriage. Rampolokeng rejects the disempowering metaphors of Soweto Poetry, only to participate in its institutional status as an itinerant literature.

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More recently, artist Ayanda Mabulu has critiqued Jacob Zuma for the Marikana massacre in a 2013 painting titled "Yakhal'Inkomo – Black Man's Cry" – featuring Zuma's dog attacking a fallen miner whose head is horned. Ayanda's outrage resumes Serote's empathic cry and repurposes it towards a decolonizing politics of the occasionally unliberated post-Apartheid present. As Lucy Graham observes, the subtitle ("Black Man's Cry") references the title of a Fela Kuti album. Therefore, Mabulu's painting aligns itself with a "Pan-Africanist tradition" (Graham 847) of anti-neocolonial, decolonizing critique.

The energies of educational critique begun by Biko and Tiro live on in the #RhodesMustFall[35] and #FeesMustFall[36] movements – movements whose call to decolonize education reverberate globally in the question "Why is my curriculum white?" Biko's Black Consciousness dialectic lives on to contest entrenched white legacies and the subterfuges of neoliberal economics as they play out on South African futures, but also as they play out in Euro-American universities.[37] Global capitalism may be totalizing, may shock economies into marketizing opportunity and outcome, but lineages of resistance never quite disappear. They recur, refashioned for new times. 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 unpaginated)

Read in this way, Soweto Poetry is a staging post whose momentary existence bespeaks its sublation. In line with the mechanism of the dialectic, it is negated only to be preserved at higher, successive levels. The same might be said for the institutionalized Apartheid racism that Soweto Poetry opposed, whose legacies linger on and survive in practice, requiring new engagements.

On this note, my emphasis on Makeba as a foundational (female) proto-poet invites a contemplation of feminist intersectional dialectics. We might trace a divergent,

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[35] For the influence of Biko on #RhodesMustFall, see Booysen 34.

[36] For the influence of Biko on #FeesMustFall, see Everatt 135. Chapman has also recently drawn this connection ("The Old New" 143-145). Moreover, Chapman is notable for having engaged seriously with Biko's dialectic in his reading of Soweto Poetry.

[37] For the influence of Black Consciousness on "Must Fall" campaigns in Euro-American universities, see Mpofu-Walsh 82.

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companionate, line of women's poetry emerging alongside (and occasionally within) Soweto Poetry. Beginning with Makeba's militant flirtations, we might, for instance, move through Lindiwe Mabuza's wonderful "Dream Cloud" (written 5 July 1976, but invariably ignored when Soweto Poetry is discussed), in which history itself is a child, an "ancient infant" (Chipasula and Chipasula 199). Here, political struggle is submitted to the dynamics of motherly nurture, and curated until the speaker's own daughter is recast as a "foundling . . . growing to relay the burning torch" (199). Motherhood's originating force is extinguished in the arrival of the foundling, just as the dialectic continually negates and sublates its successive thetic premises. Mabuza holds women's reproductive and nurturing capacities in tension with the claims of struggle, allowing cherished sites of femininity to morph within a painful but finally freeing history. Freedom here is also freedom from gender codes and their established mechanics. In "Death to the Gold Mine!" – occasioned by South African police shooting twelve striking miners at Carletonville Mine in September 1973 – Mabuza thinks about how the heirs of struggle will distil lineages of blood sacrifice into cleansing rains (Chipasula and Chipasula 199).[38] Generational sacrifice is thus absolved in the moment that its transformative and transhistorical effects are realised. Given the motherly persona in "Dream Cloud," itself adjusting to and measuring the losses of the Soweto uprising, Mabuza makes us consider political struggle beyond the terminal destinies of the child, which she terms "miscarriages of time" (198). Alongside Mabuza, we might consider Winnie Morolo's 1978 lullaby, "Thula Sana Lwam!" (Ndaba 73), in which a mother sings her child to sleep with details of an extended family scattered or killed by Apartheid's impacts. She contemplates a long dreamed-for family reunion, which may ultimately be achievable only in death. The lullaby sets in play not only the infant's sleep, but also its comparable states – political peace or death itself. These were sometimes also, let us never forget, the committed anti-Apartheid activist's choices too. We might follow our dialectic to Zindzi Mandela's "I Waited for You Last Night," in which conventional imagery of the neglected and possibly deflowered lover ("I lay there in my bed / Like a plucked flower" (Chipasula and Chipasula 202-203)) tips rapidly into a language of family uprootedness. In turn, the poem's convention of a private address to an absent lover bifurcates into the unique circumstance of a daughter's public address to her jailed and long-awaited father, Madiba. Mabuza, Morolo and Mandela remake womanhood, reproduction, child-rearing, love and loyalty by placing the family in

[38] "Death to the Gold Mine!" might be contemplated in its telescopic relation to Marikana, almost 30 years before the fact.

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productive and disruptive relation to the political. It is self-evident that these poets offer gender-political ripostes to the mother Africa figures, and the beerhall queens, and the sexualised passersby that we find in Soweto Poetry. Nevertheless, Mabuza's, Morolo's and Mandela's poetry remains structured by heterosexual conventions. With this in mind, we might trace the next stage of our intersectional feminist dialectic via Koleka Putuma's stunning critique of both heteronormative assumptions and patriarchal authority in "No Easter Sunday For Queers."[39] The poem proceeds by establishing a dialectic between spaces – the Northern suburbs of a pastor father's Christianity and the Southern suburbs of a daughter's political education. Both alternatives repudiate the speaker's lesbian identity – via condemnation to Hell or via homophobic murder – "In both spaces, my body is at the mercy of men" (27). In this poem, sexual subjectivity is only possible in the secret interstices of the gay scene or in movement between sites of negation: "Two womxn humping in the back of a cab ride from a club in Green Point to res" (26). In such moments, Putuma brings sharply into focus that neither political protest (contemporary with #RhodesMustFall at the University of Cape Town), nor family structures will accommodate her womxn speaker and the Muslim womxn she loves. Expressed synecdochically, the aggregate identity of the Rainbow Nation repudiates the singularity of LGBTIQ+ rainbow identities. This is why the speaker declares "I don't want to be spotted in a selfie with a rainbow behind it" (27). The foregrounding of the self is a fraught exercise, given that all signs of self begin to slide into risks of exposure. To this end, the bullet points throughout the poem link the persona's itemised experience to the ever-present threat of death.

If we listen intently to the supposedly "unpoetic" vernacular poetry of Mtshali, Serote, Sepamla and Gwala, we may observe its work across multiple popular traditions (the Romantics, John Coltrane, Miriam Makeba, AmaMpondomise songs, Dumile Feni, Mankunku Ngozi, Onkgopotse Tiro, post-Apartheid literature, Muhammad Ali, Lumumba, K. Sello Duiker, Zakes Mda, Nongqawuse, Ayanda Mabulu) and plural sites (townships, kraals, Durban, Marikana, boxing world title fights, universities, the African continent, the diaspora). En route, we may discover intersectional dialectics (Makeba, Mabuza, Morolo, Mandela, Putuma). Biko's dialectic offers South African literary history a way of thinking a genuinely multi-racial, transnational canon via the polarizing realities of historical segregation, literary exclusion, political struggle, exile, democratic victory, diaspora and

[39] Although her project and orientation differs markedly, Mabuza's "Super-Women (Grown by Apartheid)" denaturalizes patriarchy by adopting a gritty and pragmatic gender-fluidity: "without a man / i am a man." (Kgalane 126).

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neoliberal capitalist reversals. The "literary," in this view, would not emerge from a settled consensus about the qualificatory terms of inclusion. Instead, it would emerge from a consideration of wider patterns of social conflict, competition, complicity, collaboration and co-operation. Within that larger consideration, we might recognize that Biko's dialectic is one of many. We might intuit that any genuinely historical consciousness would necessitate working with uneven, occasionally integral or intersecting, polythetic dialectics. A canon of this sort would be able to adapt its perspectives to progressive disruption. Moreover, a canon of this sort would be meaningless if it ignored the popular, seemingly non-literary arts, with their living, engaged vernaculars and their eclectic lineages of thought. But beyond the situational specifics of a national literary history, we might see in the unfolding of Soweto's popular poetic an eventual unbinding of poetry itself, and hear poetry's formulations iterated in new aesthetic forms and in new revolutionary gatherings.

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