

BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS

By the end of 1975 Black Consciousness had become an undeniable force in the Black man's quest for an identity and in his need for a national consciousness. Black Consciousness was at this stage found to be existing in historical perspective and could only be evaluated from within that perspective. The tags had dropped, as far as Blacks were concerned. As a result many social and cultural groups had come to accept Black Consciousness as a way of life.

SASO and BPC continued to act as major voices of the Black Consciousness Movement. Despite bannings and detentions, SASO and BPC managed to spread Black awareness amongst Blacks.

The Political Significations of Black Consciousness

The case against the thirteen SASO and BPC members charged under the Terrorism Act moved into the second year since the group, and others later released, were arrested.

The State maintained its basic stand that the Black Consciousness philosophy was an imported idea taken from the United States Black Power. This stance has failed to convince even the conservative Blacks, as has been seen by the growing number of organisations that have come to adopt the concept of Black Consciousness and identification with the term "Black".

Even within Black Consciousness itself there was an effort to counter 'Black nationalism' and 'racism' attacks against the philosophy. This defence measure had unwittingly shifted emphasis from mere identity to Black solidarity-in-action. In addition it was this solid solidarity-in-action amongst the various groups in the Black community that had wrecked international effect for the Black Consciousness movement particularly in view of differing attitudes on the philosophy. The variant attitudes differed thus:

— There were those who were taking Black consciousness as being chiefly of cultural interest;

— There were those who wanted to transform mere identity into positive support for initiative towards defined socio-political change;

— There had been a danger of the intellectual groups succeeding in creating a reality that would only be available to themselves, a reality that, according to the more militant youth, would in effect be fictitious, since, as one South African Students' Movement (SASM) member put it, "a reality of pretending to be at least free in the ghetto."¹

— As the Black Consciousness organisations were almost succeeding to prise loose the grips of white liberal agencies in social welfare for Blacks, it was seen that the inner and outer contradictions of Black Consciousness were becoming more and more acute. The contradictions of Black Consciousness had thrown focus on the nature of Black Consciousness as understood by those political groups operating on Separate Development platforms such as the CRC Labour Party, the Inkatha Cultural Liberation Movement led by Kwa-Zulu's Chief Gatsha and the Transkeian opposition party, the Democratic Party, led by Mr H. B. Ncokazi.

Black Viewpoint 3, published by Black Community Programmes, continued to probe into matters affecting the Black Community and especially the whole problem of apartheid society. The collection of papers read at a seminar which BCP had sponsored in January 1976 was entitled "Apartheid, Hope or Despair for Blacks?" From the strain of argument in the papers and particularly in comparison with papers read in 1974 at the Black Renaissance Convention, it came out clearly in *Black Viewpoint 3* that debate on the merits and demerits of separatism had exhausted itself.

Even then it was continuously being pointed out by some of the exponents of Black Consciousness that Black Consciousness was not an ideology but an awareness—ideal subject to national consciousness and tribalist degeneracies. As such, Black Consciousness could not be considered as being one with nationalism or any ideology. All that Black Consciousness had done was to emphasize the fact that Blacks had to think of themselves in terms of absolute equality with whites in all human attributes.

BPC threw attention to the overall importance that land played in Black Communalism. This focus, coming from a people who were part of only thirteen per cent of the land, had stimulating outcome on the organisation's approach to the land question regarding the redistribution of this country's wealth. Thus Black Communalism was given a more constructive character, with due stress on the factor that Black could best be defined by the Black themselves and on Black terms of reference.

It came as no surprise therefore in Black circles that at its seminar

held at Mafeking in May 1976 BPC had reached common agreement that the philosophy of sharing (communalism) within the context of industrialized society presupposed technical sharing, ie. it could only be scientific in content. This was contrary to those who held that Black communalism was a primitive concept.

On the other hand controversy arose on the claims made by some leaders of the Inkatha Cultural Liberation Movement that it was a national organisation working for all the black groups. The BPC objection against such claim was based on:

— Whether Inkatha was not a political projection towards single party rule in Kwa-Zulu;

— Whether it was not an elitist tribal chauvinism that made some Kwa-Zulu adherents to claim representation of other Blacks who were also in the same Bantustan trap as Zulus; and

— Whether Inkatha was not steering a tribal direction by its existence being based on a separatist platform.

Until now the question of Inkatha's national claims has not been answered.

Further significations of Black Consciousness were shown by the formation of three Black bodies whose influence went deep into the roots of the Black community. A self-help organisation, Zimele, was founded at King Williams Town and has established branches at various parts of the country (see Self-help). Zimele aims to help dependents of those who have been subjected to arrest, imprisonment or bannings in the Black community.

Another organisation, the Black Women's Federation, was formed in December 1975 by Black women from all over South Africa. About 210 women attended, representing 41 organisations from all parts of the country. Black members from mixed organisations were allowed to join.

The need for the formation of the Black Women's Federation (BWF) sprang out of the realisation:—

*That Black women are basically responsible for the survival and maintenance of their families and largely the socialization of the youth for the transmission of the Black Cultural Heritage;

*Of the need to present a united front and to redirect the status of motherhood towards the fulfillment of the Black people's social, cultural, economic and political aspirations.

*Of the urgent need to co-ordinate and consolidate the efforts and activities of Black women and Black women's organisations in our country.

Already some members of the BWF have been detained under the General Laws Amendment Act and the Internal Security Act. Those known to have been detained are Mrs Nomzamo Winnie Mandela,

Mrs Fatima Meer, Mrs Jennie Noel and Mrs Jane Phakathi.

The Black Parents' Association was formed in Soweto and immediately received nation-wide acceptance as a body that represents the students who fell victims to disturbances during the recent student-strikes in negotiations with the authorities.

Under the chairmanship of Dr Manas Buthelezi the BPA has tied itself to the problems of black youth. Together with the BPC it has seen the disturbances as a "rejection by Blacks of the whole system of oppression, subjugation and explanation contained in the so-called policy of separate development or apartheid."

Meanwhile the Black People's Convention has asked the Government to meet a full bench of acceptable leaders to grapple with the reasons for the rejection by Black people of the present order.²

The Coloured reaction to the Theron Commission was varied. But a black awareness reaction was registered in almost all Coloured areas. Dr Jakes Gerwel, a "Coloured" authority on Black Consciousness and a lecturer at the University of the Western Cape, expressed total rejection of the Commission and said, "It was poetic that Soweto should so dramatically have preceded the publication of the Theron report;" and went further to say that, "there is to this, suggestion of ethno-racial elitism which is insulting to other Blacks."³

Following growing unrest and possible anti-white resentment after the shootings of school children in Soweto, Coloured students and youth enhanced the philosophy of Black Consciousness and expressed solidarity with other black groups in the country. This was seen as a direct rejection by the Coloured people of the Theron Commission's recommendations which suggested co-option of the Coloured into the white supra-structure.

In Durban, students of the Durban-Westville University for Indians also boycotted classes in solidarity with the African and Coloured students. The student boycott leaders dismissed implied statements that students were either intimidated or threatened from attending lectures. They were reacting to a statement by the head of the Indian Council Mr J. N. Reddy.⁴

Mass arrests and detentions have followed in the train of recent unrests throughout the country. The outstanding character of the arrests is the growing number of women detained. Among those women detained are members of BWF, members of SACC, members of BPA and supporters of BPC. Many SASO female members have also had brushes with the country's internal security laws; some are in detention. Three female members of staff of the Black Community Programmes Limited are in detention at the time of going to press.

There was a sharp rise in the number of plays written by Blacks that got banned. These bannings were most rife on the Reef where the

East and West Rand Bantu Administration Boards have control over the hiring of public halls and social venues. Unperturbed Blacks saw this as a sign of growth in the Black Consciousness philosophy and also as a sign of fear from some quarters that the concept of black awareness had gained full acceptance in the black community.

Economic Significations of Black Consciousness

The denial of the growth of a free labour movement in South Africa and the lack of free political expression in the industrial areas were seen to have brought about certain attitudes which grew and solidified into a black awareness that had fostered some kind of solidarity when certain pressing issues affecting the Blacks flared up. This was demonstrated again when ninety-six Indian and Coloured bus-drivers threw in their solidarity with five hundred of their African colleagues who had gone on strike at the Durban Municipality's central depot.

In reaction the drivers were given five minutes to decide whether to go back to work or face arrest. "Their choice was spelt out simply: back to work or five years in jail (maximum penalty under the Riotous Assemblies Act)."⁵

Meanwhile in Cape Town and the University of Western Cape, Coloureds had demonstrated against the Gugulethu and Nyanga shootings on Blacks. (See Chapter on Riots). All over the country Blacks expressed sympathy with Soweto and the country-wide police swoops. Thus Black Consciousness and solidarity emerged and grew with zealous impact on young Blacks.

Low wages and State non-recognition of Black trade unions made bargaining power hard to come by for Blacks, whereas monopoly capital was moving into the country-side for extraction of profits for its own benefits. As people were being uprooted from their traditional way of life and culture to be made a permanent labour force for border industries, decentralization of industries was actually being seen as an extension of South Africa's cheap labour policy. Moreover the creation of 'townships' such as Madadeni near Newcastle, Nseleni near Richards Bay, Mpumalanga near Hammarsdale, Mdantsane near East London, was being seen as part of a plan to create an urban-type consumer society away from the cities. People who had held free-hold title deeds in some of these 'townships' had lost their properties to governmental expropriation and had been mass-removed and absorbed into 'townships.'

The rural situation was obviously being altered. By 1972 labour and transport strikes had come to these 'border areas'; proving that urban-consumer awareness had been gained.

The operation of the Black Allied Workers' Union (BAWU) was being slightly disturbed by the bannings and detentions of its field

workers. This did not stop BAWU from growing into a strong trade union with growing affiliation.

Cultural Significations of Black Consciousness

As Black Consciousness grew and became part of the black community there was subtle but effective development of an active commitment in almost all the arts. It was a seeking of a vortex point or junction with life in the black community. The blinkered attitudes were falling off on all sides, as one black academic put it.

Arts

Many artists, even those that did not particularly advocate Black Consciousness, found themselves being obliged to give experimental preference to black creativity, and if black creativity presupposed giving social patterns for Blacks to the artists, it also presupposed giving a message to the black situation.

Artists like Percy Sedumedi, Fikile, Nat Mokgosi and others were forced by reality to theme their works 'Black' in the new sense of hope in the black man's future. Artist Jacob Nhlabathi's drawing captioned "Tribute to Courage" was acclaimed as a masterpiece. Art critic Vincent Kunene described the drawing as "a loud long shout that depicts a spit at the million black faces for turning their backs on their own plight and towing the line. Time is ripe for the African to stand tall on his feet. To stand up and do it himself, for no man can better represent what one is than oneself."⁶

Other artists like George Mbhele, Thamie Mnyele, Thsetlo Moleya, by virtue of being more established, were feeding black art with new input of an international dimension. Their works seemed to be taking the direction of original black drawing and sculpture mixed with the styles of prominent world artists living within the country and abroad.

Consequently most of the impressive works by black artists, perhaps dating back to Dumile Feni Khumalo, had inevitably come to be explained within the ambit of Black Consciousness.

Literature Writing

In literature black writers had moved a step further in the natural identification process of Black Consciousness. Black writing was:

- Bringing into focus the complex nature of ghetto life;
- Stimulating an awareness of positive values in indigenous culture which was by no means inferior to the European culture as Zimbabwe, Benin, the Magaliesberg excavation, etc., had shown; and
- Drawing lines between primitive cults of blacks and the decadent white cults such as the Satanic cults, the hippie cult, the emergence of Hell's Angels, etc.

Poets like Mongane Serote, Lefifi Tladi, Mafika Gwala, Mandlenkosi Langa and Zinjiva Nkondo were particularly at home with the first two categories.

There was an up and coming lot of writing from younger writers who, maybe because of contact or generational touch with the hip or modern trends and Afro-American Soul, were proving articulate in writing along tendencies of the third category, but not necessarily admiring the white cults. This factor could be attributed to Black Consciousness. One relatively 'unknown' but potentially brilliant writer is Kanakana Matsena. He has been described as having been "born with a silver microphone in his mouth." This member of the Dashiki group is able to hoist or delete the ideas of Salvador Dali, Leroi Jones, Dylan Thomas, then Zen Buddhists, Ferlenghetti or Allen Ginsberg at the twist of the pen. Black Consciousness was also having its flambuoyant aspects.

Black Consciousness had also brought into the fore-ground writers such as Nkathazo kaMnyayiza, Shabbir Banoobai, Leonard Koza, Hazel Johennesse, Christopher van Wyk, Abe Motana. These were poets who had not had to battle against 'whitism' in their writing; and as a result their poems had not had the old protest elements and bitterness that once characterized poetry by Blacks.

In a review of a collection of poems "Hurry Up To It!" by Siphosiphiso Sepamla, the Afrikaans newspaper *Rapport* singled out the growing need for Whites to understand the context of black writing. The review further cited the different styles of poets like Mandlenkosi Langa, Mongane Serote, Mazisi Kunene, Oswald Mtshali, Mafika Gwala and others.⁷

A Cape poet, Ilva McKay, though not widely published within the country, has proved to be one of the most promising poets writing today. Many of her poems, published through 'Blac Publishing House' have been banned. Blac is a publishing house that caters for blacks and is run by well-known black writer James Matthews. A collection of poems 'Black Voices Shout' produced and edited by James Matthews was banned soon after publication. Nevertheless Blacks continued to write as only they as Blacks can. A poem which is not bitter but which could be likened to Nhlabathi's "Tribute to Courage" appeared in the *Ophir* magazine under the title of "The Children of Nonti" and was written by Mafika Gwala.

A new literary magazine the '*New Classic*,' which is a revival of the old '*Classic*' founded by Nat Nakasa, Can Temba and other writers in the hey days of African writing, has done much to high-light up and coming black writers who would otherwise be unknown owing to lack of proper channels in black publications. *New Classic* has introduced prose writers of promise such as Mthobisi Motloase, Bob Leshoai, Roger Knowles, Mbulelo Mzamane and Moteane Melamu. Prose,

especially short story writing and novel writing, has lacked in talent and drive in present day writers.

Ironically one well-known Cape black writer came out blastingly against Black Consciousness. He is Dr Richard Rive who once published novels and short stories of high worth. Mr Rive equated Negritude with Black Consciousness and said that "the Black who abstracts himself and seeks protection within race, no matter how valid his reason, is a racist."⁸

In the March 1975 issues of *Pro Veritate* Dr Rive had said, "Black Consciousness poetry in South Africa is still very new, and is mediocre and insignificant."

Notwithstanding such notions on black awareness another Cape writer, Professor Adam Small, published his anthology of English poems under the title "Black Bronze Beautiful." Adam Small is an accomplished writer in the Afrikaans language. Somewhere he writes:

"Fifty quatrains
for the African road
to a rhythm, new for
Africa's people, as we are growing together,
All of us."

In "Black Bronze Beautiful" Blacks are "urged to expand and relax." A remarkable feature of the poems is their providing a bodily image for the political attitude known as black consciousness⁹

Theatre and Music

In the Winter 1975 issue of *Sketsh*, the black theatre magazine published in Johannesburg, there was an overbearing relevance to the South African situation of the black community.

It was a critique written by Afro-American Xavier Nicholas on an American play by fellow Afro-American Ron Miller. The important points raised by Xavier Nicholas on the play "What the Wine-Sellers Buy", concerning black theatre were:

— That the Black movement now and then had to find itself in an ideological confusion wherein some works of art could be trapped within the "limitations of a narrow black cultural nationalism that does not carry the great leap forward"; and

— That there were elements that distorted black identity to mean black capitalism in the cultural and artistic activities of Blacks.

By the end of 1975 it had become self evident that Blacks were seeking a way out of this moral quagmire. Plays such as Gibson Kente's "Too Late" and "Beyond the Song" carried undeniably overtones of a correct awareness towards problems of the black community. Even Kente had graduated from obvious commercial art.

Another play, "The Train" by Zakes Mafokeng, depicted the crooked leverage in the relationship between African and Coloured—both

Black. There was also another play that was well received by audiences, "Ndancama" written in Xhosa by Sandile Nonxuba. It was a play with a well-intentioned message, unlike a production like "Umabatha" which was said to leave people in a "stamp your feet and romp" state of mind.

"Give Us this Day", a volatile political story based on the killing of student leader Tiro, relayed a message that was well received by the students and youth who witnessed it. This play by Mzwandile Maqina found much support in the townships and amongst protagonists of Black Awareness.

Winston Ntshona and John Kani also brought in a new play "The Island" which they first acted out whilst overseas. It was a worthy follow-up to their "Sizwe Banzi is Dead" whose popularity has led it to its banning in the Cape.

Mbaqanga music received wider support amongst the youth in the black community as jazz and soul delved deeper into the African forms of expression. Groups such as the Batsumi and the Jazz Ministers brought out new recordings. The Jazz Ministers were invited to the Newport Jazz Festival 1976 in New York. It is hoped some of their overseas jazz experiences will spill over for the other artists to pick up.

Phillip Tabane, now generally regarded as a jazz wizard for the many instruments he is able to master besides being guitarist of world acclaim, was also back from an American tour. Accompanied by drummer Gabriel Thobejane the two artists brought back new vitality to their versatile Malombo beat. Already a new record of theirs is due for release.

The most committed group for the Black Consciousness cause, the Dashiki, engaged further in their non-commercial contributions to jazz.

A new record by Jo'burger Mike Makhamele proved beyond doubt that jazz had taken its firm roots on the African continent. Makhamele has added another output, "The Peacemaker" to his earlier effort. There were also African jazz recordings by Johnny Windemere, Kippie Moketsi, Dollar Brand. Dollar Brand was later accompanied by famous jazz artist, Blue Mitchell, towards an LP recorded in Swaziland. South Africa was experiencing a Jazz Revival.

Brilliant productions kept pouring in from Miriam Makeba, Hugh Masekela, Letta Mbuli, Jimmy Cliff, etc. In the Cape several coloured singers had captured the white record market and their recordings, light as they are, prove further how far blacks can go—given the chance.

Soul groups, for example "The Movers" and "The All Rounders", were observed to be graduating into African jazz, a more matured music form.

SASO's Cultural Committee (CULCOM) continued unabated to play an influential part in organizing shows for entertainment of Blacks

by Blacks through their own artistic forms of expression.

S'cathamiya, which has its origin in the Dixey Beat of the thirties, did not stop drawing support and articulation. Olive Masinga of the Inkspots days added to the liveliness of S'cathamiya to join its greats Selby Mkhize and the Black Mambazo.

Thus the blending of the old marabi and mbaqanga expressions in jazz could only be appreciated in the light of encouragement, as a booster to greater progress. A broader outlook had taken root amongst blacks.

White Reaction to Black Consciousness

Reactions to Black Consciousness from various white groups and individuals bore the common split pattern as blacks took initiative in resolving their problems.

In the religious sphere the Churches made bold attempts to reconcile existing differences between Blacks and Whites, despite incessant talks of a possible white backlash.

Diakonia, a joint project of Christian Churches, was formed in Durban following such moves in Johannesburg and Cape Town. It was established to help the churches in the greater Durban area towards the implementing of effective dealings in social situations amongst the different race groups. The project came into existence in March 1976. The project was based on an understanding:

— That different groups in our society have very different views of what future South Africa will look like;

— That there was pressing need for Christians to try to reconcile these different views of the future;

— That there was also need for Christians to face the future with Christian hope; and

— That there was need to undertake those actions which would genuinely help to secure the future.

At the Catholic Synod 1976 there was "need for new endeavours in the fields of development, formation and mission." The Archbishop, Dennis Hurley, called for the execution of the South African Council of Churches' resolution whereby the churches were urged to move towards a potentially vital role in the peace/war alternatives facing South Africa.

The Churches were called on:

(a) to make earnest attempt at reconciling the Black Church and the White Church;

(b) to reconsider wages and conditions of service of domestic workers and employees;

(c) to attempt to break down the racial barriers and petty prejudices that have been created during 300 years of separation; and

(d) to realize that as Christians all people are equal and should be treated as such.

Christian Churches re-iterated recommendations made in 1974 on the wages paid to domestic workers.”¹⁰

The year also saw the increase in the number of leadership positions being given to the Black clergy. The first black bishop of Zululand was consecrated for the Catholic diocese. He is Rt. Rev. Biyase who took over from a white bishop of the Benedictine Order. Another Catholic bishop, Peter Buthelezi O.M.I., was put in charge of the diocese of Umtata in the Transkei. The Rt. Rev. L. Zulu was consecrated Anglican Bishop of Zululand.

Further new appointments of auxiliary bishops were made for the Catholic Church in South Africa. It was expected that by virtue of congregational majority and existent problems crucially facing the black community, most of these elects would be black.

Some members of the South African Government however expressed different views. The Minister of Police and Justice, Mr Jimmy Kruger, said that Blacks and Whites in South Africa had known each other for 300 years. The Black man “knows his place and if not I’ll tell him...”¹¹

Following the wave of serious unrest in the country Mr Kruger suggested that blacks “be given enough to make them believe in separate development and want to protect what they have against agitators.” He went on to say that he was in favour of Black Nationalism but against what he called the Black Power Movement, which he believed was leading to black/white confrontation.¹²

He has also pleaded for tribal law to be brought back in areas like Soweto because of the laws and traditions in which the Blacks believe.¹³

In the first August issue of *South African Digest* in 1975 the then State President was reported to have said that the Indians had played an important part in South African affairs, and he and the government valued their efforts and contribution to the country’s prosperity.¹⁴ Yet almost a year after that, one of the important spokes-women for the suffering Indian groups, Mrs Fatima Meer, had been detained by the government.

The Editor of the *Daily Dispatch*, Mr Donald Woods, believed that colour consciousness had been started by the very official system of separatism that opposed Black Consciousness. Posing questions on official statements he pointed out that, “if you encourage Black Separation how do you stop it from developing into Black Consciousness which in turn develops into Black Power?”¹⁵

South Africa could crush unrest with an “iron fist or jak boot” but could not continue to live with unease between the White and Black communities. This was the opinion sounded by a white delegate at a conference in Durban.¹⁶

The Transvaal Chamber of Commerce had observed:

- that 70% of economically active people in the South African economy were Blacks;
- that about 17 areas of legislation which discriminated against Blacks had contributed to their discontent;
- that movement upwards in the occupational ladder was pathetically slow, in fact not more than one percent improvement a year; and
- that there was resentment by Blacks of the unrestricted freedom of movement and job opportunities in industries which Blacks had served for years at subservient level.

The following recommendations were then made to the Government:

- Urban Blacks should be recognized as permanent urban dwellers since industry needs the Blacks on a permanent basis;
- More should be spent on land for private housing schemes and improved houses should be erected;
- Expenditure on Black education should be increased at the rate of 15,42 per cent a year for a budget of R328 100 000 by 1980;
- There should be greater job mobility for Africans and for this there was need to create “a central co-ordinated manpower planning policy” which would cater for manpower utilisation of all groups and widen skills training;
- There should be immediate phasing in of free education for Africans and an improvement in standards and salaries for African teachers;
- A new appraisal of the conduct of Government officials and “bureaucracy, red tape and unsymptomatic administrations” was long overdue.¹⁷

The variance of the definition of and attitude toward poverty was markedly illustrated by the Prime Minister's remarks in reference to Black accessibility to material resources consistent with their productive capacity in national input and basic social necessities. As if in answer to a statement made by Lebowa's Chief Minister, Dr Phatudi—who had said that regardless of colour or race, South Africans had a common future and isolation of Whites and Blacks was a grave mistake—the Prime Minister, Mr Vorster, re-instated the opinion that South Africa could not afford to slip on to the path towards a welfare state “because the end of that path is communism”.¹⁸

REFERENCES

¹*Weekend World* 15.8.76

²*Ibid*

³*Drum* September 1976

⁴*Daily News* 18.8.76

⁵*Daily News* 3.9.76

⁶*Sketsh Summer* 1975

⁷*Rapport* 14.9.75

⁸*New Classic* No. 2, 1975

⁹*Reality* May 1976

¹⁰*Bonisanani* No. 2 August 1976

¹¹*Rand Daily Mail* 20.8.76

¹²*Rand Daily Mail* 14.8.76

¹³*Cape Herald* 23.6.76

¹⁴*South African Digest* 1.8.76

¹⁵*Rand Daily Mail* 25.6.76

¹⁶*Mercury* 13.8.76

¹⁷*Rand Daily Mail* 20.8.76

¹⁸*South African Digest* 3.10.75