

**THE INFLUENCE OF BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS ON POST-COLONIAL PROTEST POETRY: A CONSCIENTISATION IN MTSHALI'S SELECTED POEMS**

by

**PITSI PETRUS PHEME**

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**SUPERVISOR: DR M.J. MOGOBOOYA**

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## DECLARATION

I declare that the Mini-Dissertation hereby submitted to the University of Limpopo, for the degree of **Master of Arts (English Studies)** has not previously been submitted by me for a degree at this or any other university; that it is my work in design and in execution, and that all material contain herein has been duly acknowledged.

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**Surname, Initials (title)**

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**Date**

Email address: phemepitsi@gmail.com

## **DEDICATION**

This study is dedicated to my brothers Phuti, and Ngoako; my sisters, Chokoe and Maggie; my father and mother posthumously, for giving me life; my sister-in-law Mamokgoshi; my mother-in-law Maletjema, my brother-in-law Maropeng and family, my nieces and nephews for giving me the inspiration to persevere and not give up in life.

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## **ABSTRACT**

This mini dissertation examines the influence of the Black Consciousness Philosophy on Oswald Mbuyiseni Mtshali's Post-Colonial protest poetry. This is done in the form of analysing selected poems to highlight the influence that the Black Consciousness Philosophy had on the poems that Mtshali wrote about the experiences of black people under a suppressive apartheid system.

The aim of this study was to explore how Mtshali's poetry exposed the extent to which black people had been socio-economically deprived and misled to a negative and false belief of their inferiority and subservience. The title of the mini dissertation, suggests that Black Consciousness poetry claims to have had an influence on the protest poetry of Oswald Mtshali. The poems were analysed to ascertain this. The poems were examined with the express aim of identifying and understanding their themes and the socio-economic context from which they emanate.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### 1.1. BACKGROUND AND MOTIVATION

Through the world, protest poets have always been regarded as the population's stance of morality. Srestha (2000: 259) states that protest poets have, through antiquity, continuously converted regimes, fallen tyrants and transformed political systems. Furthermore, poets always mirrored society in its innumerable customs, and more than ever, subjugation in all its facets Srestha (2000) further asserts that poets have intensely condemned and held up to disdain the immoralities and immoral practises of the officials in command and have in all intensity, like real advocates, taken up the accountabilities of re-establishing political steadiness, social harmony and above all, the stability of a country.

The seventies and eighties witnessed an intensification of poetry writing by both black and white South African Poets. Nemadzivhanani (1991) argues that the common denominator of the poetry written during this period is an enthusiasm to counter the political agenda and social *existing state of affairs* put in place by the South African apartheid institution. Srestha (2000:260) further demonstrates that protest poets have, at times, been debarred and even restrained for lengthy periods of time under dreadful conditions. Nonetheless, the poets continued their unrelenting combat against the armed forces of malevolent oppressive regime even from the gloom of prison.

Strestha (2000:260) observes that pro-democracy poets prefer to continue to be dissenting voices even in the midst of those who compromised their opinions for positions of power or money. The point of emphasis is on the protests poets to continue to relentlessly throw the gauntlet at injustice and refuse to be moved off their course for people emancipation through bribery (promise of positions of power or money). Srestha (2000) further advances that all the protest poets know is that "they will forever wield their pens and continue to fight the good fight against discrimination, oppression and exploitation of any kind".

Anderson (2003) recaps for us that political pressure during apartheid, forced the development of a plethora of poetries to address the concerns of the black majority. Many of the poems produced in the 60s and 70s were, therefore, overtly and covertly political in context and radical in nature.

Nemadzivhani (1991:1) proclaims that notwithstanding the fact that most of the 70s poetry was militant, Mtshali's poems do not call for the reader to get into fisticuffs with the oppressor, but seems to display strong empathies in the thematic concerns and is, therefore, inclusive.

## **1.2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

This study strives at examining the extent to which Mtshali's selected poems, distributed from the early 70s up to the early 80s, sought to conscientise the underprivileged black majority to a deeper self-consciousness about their impoverishment, socio-politico exploitation, dehumanisation, discrimination and pursuit of religious insincerity against them by the ideologies of the apartheid regime. The study further attempts to accomplish this objective through summoning Black Consciousness ideologies as articulated by Steven Biko.

## **1.3. ROLE OF THEORY IN THE STUDY**

This study is grounded on three literary theories: Marxist Theory, Afrocentric Theory, and Negritude. The researcher has chosen these theoretical foundations in order to give this study academic authenticity and credibility.

### **1.3.1. Marxist Theory**

This study has used the Marxist Theory to analyse Mtshali's selected poems, in order to assess the tussle of the blacks (industrial working class) against the Afrikaners (capitalist class) in their scuffle to replace capitalism with democracy. Mambrol (2016) interprets Marxism as a materialistic philosophy by Karl Marx (1974) which tried to comprehend the black man's world based on the tangible, ordinary world and the culture within which he/she lived.

### **1.3.2. Classical Marxism**

Mambrol (2016:1) explains that according to the Marxists, society development happens through the struggle between opposing forces. Mambrol (2016) advances that it is the struggle between the proletariat and the capitalist class, that leads to social transformation.

The class struggle according to Marxism, originates from the exploitation of the proletariats by the capitalists through antiquity. Mambrol (2016) further advances that the two classes to have common interests. Mambrol (2016) further asserts that the proletariat- capitalist class confrontation finally results in the dominant system being replaced with democracy.

### **1.3.3. Afrocentric Theory**

Asante (1999:1-2, 4), defines Afrocentricity “as a critical corrective to a displaced agency among Africans” by “re-centering African minds”. According to Mogoboya, (2011:30), Afrocentricity is believed to be aimed at correcting the damage inflicted the Europeans on the Africans through Afrocentric means. Appiah (1992) upholds that Afrocentricity serves as an affirmation that Africans are capable of achieving as much as any other person can.

Asante (1999) concurs with Mogoboya’s (2011) thinking that Afrocentricity, like Black Consciousness, conscientises the African to claim his or her space as an agent of progressive change and emancipation of the self from domination, denigration and dehumanisation by the coloniser. This study elucidates how Mtshali’s protest poetry, through the Afrocentric Theory, provides a source for the African from which to draw strength in his fight against all forms of prejudice by the coloniser (apartheid regime).

### **1.3.4. The Black Consciousness Theory**

Hadfield (2017:2) submits that The Black Consciousness Movement became one of the most influential anti-apartheid movements of the 1970s in South Africa.

Hadfield (2017) further contends that the increase in the apartheid subjugation at the time prompted a powerful social, cultural and political re-awakening amongst blacks in South Africa. Pityana (1979:7) regards Black Consciousness Theory as a drive, a campaign which poets commit to, for the apprehension of the black man's value; the proclamation of his human dignity, and promoting the black man's consciousness and self-reliance in his/her community.

According to Pityana (1979), The Black Consciousness Theory is "a re-awakening in the oppressed blacks to spearhead the struggle for 'liberation of the black man' firstly, from self-mental oppression through an inferiority complex, and secondly, from the physical exploitation occurring out of living within a racist white society." More (2014:177), regards Black Consciousness as the black person's coming to the mindfulness of him/herself as a black person. More (2014) debates that Black Consciousness has as its primary attentiveness the addressing of questions arising from the phenomena of 'race' and 'racism'.

Penfold (2017:25) declares that Black Consciousness trusts that the African population has come to accept the truth of the oppressive apartheid discourse and required liberating not just from the white oppressor but from themselves as well. Biko (1978) argues that there is a necessity to address the African's manipulated inferiority and 'pump life back into his empty shell'.

Macqueen (2009:2) specifies Black Consciousness to place vast emphasis on liberation as originating initially from within. Macqueen (2009) further argues that the oppressed need to be freed first of their spiritual and mental oppression to enable them to liberate themselves. Biko (1978) emphasises that "the most important weapon of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed".

The protest poetry of Oswald Mtshali attests to his drive to conscientise the oppressed to move away from co-operating with the oppressor by becoming critically aware of his/her situation and his/her ability to change his/her situation. Sibisi (2013:20) contends that Mtshali uses Black Consciousness in his poetry as a conscientising tool for the empowerment of black communities for self-emancipation.

Macdonald (2010) maintains that Biko (1978) concerted his devotion to countering the resignation that led Black in South Africa into accepting their position of dominance by whites. Pucherova (2009) maintains that Black Consciousness was articulated as a new-found cognisance that the salvage of black people's dignity was an indispensable prerequisite in a multiracial South Africa, in which both blacks and whites could be liberated. Mtshali is one of the Black Consciousness poets.

### 1.3.5. **Negritude Ideology**

According to Onwumere & Egbulonu (2014:148), Negritude “is a defining milestone in the rehabilitation of Africa and the African diaspora’s identity and dignity, and thus, proved to be a unifying and liberating instrument for black Francophone students in the first half of the twentieth century in search of their identity”. Onwumere et.al (2014), further asserts that as a literary movement, Negritude began between the 1930s to 1950s among French-speaking African and Caribbean writers living in Paris, as a form of protest against French colonial rule and the policy of assimilation.

Onwumere et al. (2014:149) further proclaims that according to The Negritude Movement, assimilation was aimed at elevating the African by devaluing his culture; also through stripping him of his cultural self and putting on him a foreign one. The Negritude Movement is believed to have been influenced by “the Harlem Renaissance, a literary and artistic flowering that emerged among a group of black thinkers and artists, especially poets and novelists in the United States, in New York, in the 1920s”, The Negritude Movement was founded by the troika of Leopold Senghor, Leon-Gontran Damas and Aime Cesaire, through the ideology of unified liberation. Cesaire (1947) maintains that the term ‘negritude’ means ‘blackness’. Cesaire (1947) further contends that “it is only the blacks that will write about their history and validate their achievements. He further professes that only blacks will re-establish their lost humility, integrity and subjectivity of their black identity necessary to confront colonialism, racism and western imperialism”.

Cesaire (1947) totally rejects assimilation. Equally, Senghor (1948) conceptualises the Negritude ideology as “that which promotes a quest for the authentic self, knowledge of self, and a discovery of African beliefs, values, institutions and civilization”.



For Leopold Senghor (1948), Negritude “entails the rehabilitation of the black man and the affirmation of African personality”. Together, Marxist Theory, Afrocentric theory, Black Consciousness and Negritude, stand their ground against the oppression, denigration and dehumanisation of the black culture by the colonialists.

#### **1.4. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

##### **1.4.1. Aim of the Study**

The aim of this study is to explore the influence of Black Consciousness on Mtshali’s protest poetry.

##### **1.4.2. Objectives of this study:**

- to examine the role played by protest poetry towards self-awareness, self-determination and emancipation of blacks against oppression.
- to assess the contribution of Afrocentricity, Black Consciousness and Negritude towards Mtshali’s protest poetry towards the black man’s struggle for liberation.
- to explore the extent to which Mtshali’s protest poetry is rooted in the Black Consciousness philosophy.

#### **1.5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This section deals with the research methodology which will be engaged throughout this study and explains how the examination will be conducted and arranged. Emphasis will be placed on the research method and design, data collection, data analysis and quality criteria.

##### **1.5.1. Research Method and Design**

This study concentrates on the qualitative research approach. According to Pitse (2010), “qualitative research is used to answer questions and to make sense about the complex nature of phenomena, often with the purpose of describing and understanding the phenomena from the participant’s point of view”.

According to Denzin & Lincoln (2000), qualitative research approach is a relevant study method in literature, as it stresses the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape the enquiry.

Heyns, (2006) & Nghonyama (2007) state that Research Design is “a set of guidelines and instructions to be followed in order to address the research problem”. Skobi (2016) defines research design as “the blueprint which outlines which approach is to be used to collect data and generally provides information about who, what, when, where and how of the research project”. The approach to be followed in this research will be the analysis of chosen poems (texts) to closely understand the reality of apartheid oppression from Mtshali’s point of view.

### **1.5.2. Data Collection**

Primary poetry texts from Mtshali’s *Sounds of a Cowhide Drum* (1971) and a collection of poems from *FireFlames* (1980) were analysed, for the discernment of textual meaning on socio-economic and political conditions blacks had to contend with under apartheid. This research will focus on poems such as “An Abandoned Bundle” to critically look at the impact of poverty on blacks brought about by economic inequalities during apartheid. “Just a Passer-by” is a poem explicitly uncovering dehumanisation of blacks by the unjust white regime laws.

“Boy on the Swing” looks at the confusion of the African (South African blacks in this study) to retrace his steps to the nucleus of the hero’s past and their bid for a peaceful, welcoming and accommodating Africa (Onoja, 2016:6). Mtshali’s “The Master of the House” takes a sarcastic look at the apartheid system in which the white minority are the masters, and the black majority are servants, doing only humiliating lowly jobs (Okon, 2013:107).

Mtshali’s “Nightfall in Soweto”, is a lamentation of the unholy treatment by man-to-man, and to challenges that the black man confronts at night due to unequal amenities provided by the apartheid for blacks and whites (Ogundokun, 2013:81). Critical works on Mtshali’s poetical work will also be consulted.

### **1.5.3. Data Analysis**

Denvers & Frankel (2000) maintains that a credible qualitative data analysis relies on the ability to locate information and to keep it in perspective. De Vos (2011:397) further reasons that data analysis as “the process of bringing order, structure and meaning to the mass of collected data”. Thematic analysis was used to analyse classifications and to present themes that relate to data (Alhojailan, 2012; Costa, Breda, Pinho, Bakas & Darao, (2016); Javal & Zarea, (2016). Primary sources (poems) were analysed against the Black Consciousness ideology in order to determine the impact they made in revolutionising oppressed blacks in their struggle towards emancipation. All these examined ideas were synthesised to conscientise the oppressed blacks to become radically conscious to their suffering and subjugation and to manage them effectively (Kosiso, 2016:52).

### **1.5.4. Quality Criteria in Research**

La Banca (2010) describes quality criteria research as “a demonstration that the evidence for the results reported is sound and that the argument based on the results is strong”. In this study the researcher employed elements of quality criteria in evaluating the accuracy of qualitative research (Rubin & Babble, (2009). The researcher addressed the following aspects in the study: credibility, dependability, conformability, and transferability

#### **1.5.4.1. Credibility**

Anne, (2014) states that credibility establishes whether or not research findings represent information drawn from current trends and debates in the field of work of prominent scholars, or if it is a correct interpretation. In this study the researcher checked with previous work from other researchers and also required support from the supervisor.

#### **1.5.4.2. Dependability**

To show dependability, the processes in the study were reported in detail, enabling future researchers to repeat the work if not necessarily, to gain the same results (Shenton, (2004); Anney, (2015).

The researcher in this study has outlined both the research design and the data collection methods in detail. Furthermore, the researcher submitted the research work to the supervisor for external examination. The researcher also defended his proposal departmentally at school and faculty levels.

#### **1.5.4.3. Conformability**

Anney (2014) refers to conformability as “the degree to which the results of the research study could be confirmed by other researchers”. Morrow (2005) further testifies conformability to be centred on the perspectives that the integrity of research findings lies in the analysis of data from texts, and further that the researcher must tie together the data from analysed texts in such a way that the reader is able to confirm the adequacy of the findings. In this study, the researcher regularly submitted the research to the supervisor to confirm that the principles and procedures of scientific research such as data collection, data analysis, etc., were properly followed.

#### **1.5.4.4. Transferability**

Shenton (2004) asserts that transferability is concerned with the extent to which the findings of one study can be applied to other situations. The researcher in this study provided a detailed research process and findings that make it possible for the study to be transferable to other situations with similar conditions.

### **1.6. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

The implication of the study is to examine Oswald Mtshali’s poems published in the politically turbulent 70s and early 80s within their social context, with distinctive orientation to the history of Steve Biko and Black Consciousness as its origin. The study is essential in elucidating how Oswald Mtshali’s protest poetry probes the ideologies of apartheid in connection to the ideologies of Black Consciousness. The research also intends to reveal that protest poetry has far greater value than that of entertainment. It is not ‘art-for-art-sake’ kind of poetry. The poetry discussed in this study is characterised by seriousness and purpose to affirm the culture, identity and pride of black people to be of essence.

Furthermore, the study discloses the role Mtshali's poetry plays as a communicative instrument which attempts to establish a psychological liberator creed that will disengage the oppressed from passivity, resignation and belittling or undervaluing oneself.

Nemadzivanani (1991:09) further attests to the genuineness of post-apartheid poets, especially Mtshali, by arguing that the South African poets will produce poetry which will attempt to be as politically and socio-culturally meaningful as possible, and that this meaningfulness attains great intensity first in their society.

## **1.7. Conclusion**

This study is an exploration into the many socio-political topicalities in South African poetry. The study will illuminate how South African protest poetry reflects and responds to political and social realities. In this study dissent is a tool that will be employed in the analysis of Mtshali's selected poems to conscientise South Africans about the social, cultural, political and economic realities of their societies.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **2.1. LITERATURE REVIEW**

De Vos, Strydom, Fouchè and Delport, (2011) refers to Literature review as “a scrutiny of all relevant sources of information”. According to de Vos et al. (2011), thorough scrutiny of literature allows and assists the researcher to learn about the history, origin and scope of the research problem. Literature review in this regard is necessary to have a perfect understanding of the nature and meaning of the problem which has been identified. Moreover, de Vos et al (2011), submits that Literature Review saves time and ensures that there is no unnecessary duplication of what others have already done

In compiling the research proposal, the researcher consulted various scholarly journals, articles, the internet and dissertations imperatively to gain more knowledge and understanding on the topic about the impact of Black Consciousness on Mtshali’s Protest Poetry. There was no research article which the researcher came across in which the topic: “The impact of Black Consciousness on South African Post-Colonial protest poetry: A conscientisation of Mtshali’s selected poems” was conducted.

#### **2.1.1. Black Consciousness and its influence on Protest Poetry**

Hadfield (2017) defines Black Consciousness as “an attitude of the mind and a way of life for black people who believed in their potential and value as black people and saw the need for black people to work together for a holistic liberation”. Biko (1978:101) declares that the essence of Black consciousness is to rouse the realisation by the black man of the need to caucus together with his fellow blacks around the cause of their subjugation; the blackness of their skin; and to manoeuvre as a collection to rid themselves of the yoke that binds them to perpetual servitude. Biko (1978:101) further argues that “the most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is in the mind of the oppressed”.

MacDonald (2010) states that Biko (1978) argued in his Black Conscious philosophy that colonialism, missionaries, and apartheid had made the black man “a shell, a shadow of man, completely defeated, drowning in his own misery; a slave, an ox

bearing the yoke of oppression with sheepish timidity". Biko (1978) argues that Black Consciousness activists, thus, worked to modify the black mind set to self-introspect and to build black capability to realize their own deliverance. SASO (South African Students Organisation) also spread Black Consciousness through *SASO Newsletter*, Soweto literary magazines such as *The Classic New Classic*, and *Staff rider*. Literary forms such as poems and plays were also used to conscientise blacks of the dire need to self-emancipate. Biko (1978) states that Black Consciousness used art effectively as a method to trigger black awakening and resistance to white supremacy under an oppressive political climate.

Hadfield (2017) remarks that Mtshali like Serote, Mathera, Gwala and Matthews, also dealt with black oppression and sought to inspire hope in blacks' sovereignty with positive images and themes of resistance and restoration. Onoja (2016) furthermore declares that protest poets have condemned and held up to derision the depravities and unethical applications of agents of supremacy and have even taken up the responsibilities of restoring political stability, social harmony and the rationality of a nation

Mashige (1996:2) asserts that over the years, protest and resistance poetry has come to infer different things for different people, depending upon one's persuasions and political inclinations On the one hand, Royston (1973: 08) hypothesises that to the poetry enthusiasts and poets who advocated a struggle against apartheid, protest and resistance poetry represented poetry which is against:

repressive police activity, the squalor of urban slums,  
the indignities of migrant labour systems and of passes, and  
the more absurd features of racial classification. . .

Chapman (1982: 66) states that to the supporters and instigators of apartheid, protest and resistance poetry may mean, amongst other things, insubordination, ungratefulness, subversive and even "ungodly" propaganda.

Mashige (1996) asserts that the protest and resistance poetry that has emerged in South Africa, particularly in the 60s and 80s, evidences the inclination to use art as a means of social scrutiny and political change.

The urgent message which poets of the apartheid era aim at conveying to the people is characterised by a preference to conscientise the audience to the realities that face the underprivileged blacks in South Africa. This study proposes that the protestation behind the writing of Oswald Mtshali's selected poems is to create awareness in the beleaguered and subjugated blacks about their economic, cultural and socio-political status in South Africa.

### **2.1.2. Protest during the Apartheid Era**

According to Tsambo (1999:9), protest literature refers to “works that address the real social and political issues and expresses objection against them”. Protest literature advocates for change. It is a way and art of expressing emotions, values, concerns and lessons. Protest writing among black South African writers was produced during the period of the struggle against apartheid supremacy, class inequalities and also constraints by suppressive laws. Furthermore, Tsambo (1999) affirms that poetry is the expression of the life experiences and the impact thereof on the poet and on the community.

Narisimulu (1998:196) declares that poetry may be thought of as “a black man's expression of liberalism, poetry of personal response to the operation based on the assumption of justice, right and human dignity”. Sibisi (2013) attests that Mtshali wrote out of the necessity to expose the harsh realities of oppression, exploitation, dehumanisation and Christian hypocrisy blacks endured under the apartheid hegemony. Sibisi (2013) further argues that with the imminent banning of most postcolonial writers, the suffocation and insurrection of all political leaders by the state, Mtshali took the baton to take the struggle forward, becoming the voice of the oppressed towards their liberation through the use of protest poetry.

Mashige (1996) expounds Mtshali's protest poetry to be revolutionary. According to Mashige(1996), protest poetry can be defined as “poetry which aims at the exposure and critique of the psychological and physical effects of a dominant socio-political and economical ideology”. Tembo (2012:1) claims that protest poetry endeavours to provoke in the reader an awareness of the racial incongruities that characterise the system of apartheid, and the detrimental and turbulent effects these imbalances have, predominantly, on the black community.



The quest for complete deliverance which is manifest in postcolonial protest poetry is the launch pad for a deeper understanding of the politico-economic, as well as socio-cultural problems that constrain complete and realistic liberation for blacks in South Africa. Tembo (2012) further declares the problems of the liberation struggle in South Africa to be rooted in the incapacitating racist apartheid environment.

The researcher holds a firm belief that postcolonial protest poets such as Oswald Mtshali believe that the South African condition which is defined by a longing for freedom, must be blamed on the leadership crisis in South Africa, which is fixated on maintaining racism, socio-economic exploitation, dehumanization, discrimination and exclusion of the oppressed black masses from having a say in the running of the country's issues. The study holds that as long as the quest for freedom is conflicting with apartheid domination, overall discharge remains an allegory. This study focuses on how Mtshali's poetry brings out this awakening in blacks to resist oppression to achieve self-emancipation.

Mashige (1996:17) emphasises that the imminent supremacy of the then exclusively Afrikaner Nationalist Party in 1948, entrance in the 1950s of the *Drum* writers into the cultural scene and the political agitation by mass-based organisations (Pan African Congress and African National Congress), had a tremendous impact on the general population

Nemadzivhanani (1991:3) maintains that the poetry of the seventies and eighties is revolutionary He furthermore argues that poets use art as a medium to protest against the dehumanizing apartheid policies in South Africa. Chapman (1984) states in his discussion of Mtshali's poetry that the poet (Mtshali) assumes the role of "poet victim", and functions as a communicative instrument who attempts to establish a psychological literary creed that will disengage the oppressed from the passivity, resignation and self-depression.

Nemadzivanani (1991: 2) argues that poets such as Mtshali, Serote, Sepamla, Brutus, Gwala, are all characterised by an unqualified aspiration to facilitate the establishment of a new dispensation whose primary focus is the creation of a new, just and human-dignified orientated system of government.

The interpretation one draws from this effort by the poets is that the poets' intention is to work collectively and severally towards the creation of a new society; a society whose vision prompts Serote to exclaim "ah/there will be a better time made by us". According to Ndamazivhanani (1991:7), the better part of South African poetry produced in the seventies and eighties displays a distinct inclination towards using art as a medium of social scrutiny. He further asserts that the pressures of the moment, and the desire to establish a vehicle of conscientisation of the people deflected the poets from the philosophy of art-for-art's sake to the art-for-life philosophy.

Commenting about the South African protest poets, Terry Eagleton (1976) says:

These men saw literature as social criticism and analysis, and the artist as a social enlightener; literature should disdain elaborate aesthetics techniques and become an instrument of social development. Art reflects social reality, and must portray its typical features.

South African poets (Mtshali in particular for this study) are determined to reflect their social reality as it is shaped by the political decisions of the authorities. Their concern for the welfare of their people encouraged them to take a stand, and in spite of and perhaps also because of the authoritarian attitude of the government of that time, these poets decided to use verse as a medium of protest (Ndamazivhanani, 1991:8).

Another factor about South African poetry of the seventies and eighties, and in particular, the poetry of Oswald Mtshali covered in this study, is that poetry has been given a blanket characterization of Soweto Poetry or Black Poetry. Sibisi (2013:11) here is disagreeing, however, vis-à-vis the appropriate term to use when referring to black protest poetry of the 70s. The title to Chapman's (1982:23) book entitled *Soweto Poetry* implies that the poetry that the book contains is only about Soweto Township matters.

Gwala (1989:70), however, declines being called a Soweto poet. His denunciation of the name Soweto poet emanates from the fact that he did not even reside in Soweto, thus, could not apprehend why he was linked with Soweto. Gwala (1989) states:

I refuse to be called a Soweto Poet. We all disagreed with the labelling ...  
a good example of liberal patronising. I just cannot consider myself  
in the mould of a Soweto Poet. Living in constant fear and bitter anger  
in this country does not revolve around Soweto alone.

Nemadzivhanani (1991:10) advances that giving South African poetry a blanket characterisation of Soweto Poetry is neither to say that all poets come from Soweto nor that they are all black. It is rather because Soweto has become a symbol of resistance because its existence is a reminder of the wickedness of the Group Areas Act, one of the mainstays of apartheid. Some of the poets may also not even be black, although their poetry is unmistakably nonconformist in nature. Nemadzivanani furthermore stresses that these poets are unified by a desire to depict the condition of the marginalized in South Africa (1991:11).

Kgalane (1996:18) explains that on 21 March 1960, South Africans witnessed the Sharpeville massacre, the banning of the African National Congress and Pan Africanist Congress, and the commencement of the armed struggle through Umkhonto We Sizwe, the military wing of the ANC. He furthermore adds that as the effects of the pass law, forced removals under the Group Areas Act, and other oppressive legislations enacted by the National Party government intensified, numerous writers and poets were banned, or went into exile (1996;18).

Shava (1989:71) asserts that the arrests and bannings that occurred in the wake of Sharpeville massacre, propelled writers in South Africa (Mtshali in particular in this study) to adopt a 'non-militant style that would protect them from banning while at the same time allowing them to critique the injustice of the system'.

Chapman (1982:185) points out that such repression forced black poets to increasingly start writing about what was going on in everyday life in the townships, and felt that through their works they should portray the social realities that prevailed in South Africa.

Hence, Nemadzivhanani (1991:11) claims that Mtshali holds the belief that “black poetry depicts the black man’s life as it is shaped by the laws that govern him. He (the black man) has no hand in the making of these laws, but he must abide by them”. Black poetry is the mirror that reflects the black man’s aspirations, his hopes, his disappointments, his joys and sorrows, his loves and hates.

Srestha (2000: 259) indicates that protest poets through the world (South Africa in this instance) have always been the nation’s expression of morality. Srestha further validates poets to have always reflected society, and, moreover, oppression in its various practices, to try and transformation political systems. Onoja (2016) states that protest poets have always passionately critiqued and held up to derision the immoralities and discriminatory practices of agents of authoritarian systems, and have in all earnestness, like true crusaders, taken up the responsibilities of restoring political steadiness, social harmony, rationality of the nation and above all self-consciousness by the long-suffering and subjugated.

Adebola (2014:279) affirms that poets such as Mtshali are very conscious of their duty in identifying South Africa and the African continent’s social problems, and that they play a critical part in the psychological and physical liberation of the subaltern respectively. Kgalane (1996:18) affirms that protest poetry is characterised by a common focus on protest against the racial injustices and inequalities in South Africa. Onoja (2016) argues that protest poetry shows a deep fascination with the African essence and cultural pride. Onoja (2016) holds a firm belief that protest poetry is aimed at identifying the rich traditional norms and values that are rooted in the African’s life

Srestha (2000) acknowledges that what poets comparable to Mtshali discern is that they will forever brandish their pens and continue to “fight the good fight” against discrimination, racism, oppression, dehumanization, poverty and mistreatment of any kind. Selepe (1993:67) has more recently defined three distinct stages in the development of protest literature:

Firstly, there is what could be called ‘mild protest’, in which an awareness of an undesirable situation is merely registered to restrain offender(s).

There is 'evolutionary protest' which presents the existing conditions to be undesirable and suggests alternatives. There is lastly, 'militant protest' which insists on replacing the existing conditions with alternatives.

According to Selepe (1993) 'mild protest' is seen as initially directed at the white liberal audience. Mtshali's poetry which this study explores was amongst poetry directly written for the educated white audience too. Rive (1977(b):67) also denotes that poetry by blacks was largely intended for white audience, and aimed at drawing their attention to the injustices under which black people suffered under their oppressive system.

Mashige (1996:18) affirms that protest poetry in South Africa (specifically that of Mtshali in this study), was influenced and impacted upon by the intensification of the Black Consciousness Movement. The main focus of the researcher in this study will be to explore the influence that Black Consciousness had on Mtshali's protest poetry. The Black Consciousness Movement saturated Mtshali's poetry with the brilliance and dynamism which gave it a unique imminence and vibrant intimacy in addressing issues of dehumanization, poverty, discrimination and Christian hypocrisy, to name but a few. MacDonald (2010) mutually reasons that organisations such as SASO (South African Students Organisation) and the (BPC) Black People's Convention also continued to agitate for the psychological liberation of the black person from the shackles of apartheid which virtually weakened the white supremacy.

The spur in the organisations was driven by the poets of the Harlem renaissance championed from the works of Fanon and Freire as well as the Negritude ideas of Aime Cesaire. The poetry of Mtshali had coincided with the advent of SASO as the major proponent of Black consciousness (Hadfield, 2017).

The black South African poets had to intensify their struggle for freedom inside the country to be on equal footing with the whole of Africa that was caught in the frenzy and exhilaration of Uhuru (Mashige, 1996:19).

In this new poetry influenced by Black Consciousness, blacks had to self-introspect as opposed to earlier writers who directed their work to a predominantly white audience in the hope that somehow this would bring about a change in the heart of the oppressor (Mashige, 1996: 19-20).

Mashige (1996) further maintains that an essential characteristic worth noting was the desire for blacks to 'introspect' as opposed to the inclination to blame all things and everything on the "system" and whites, while vindicating blacks on all accounts. *Ipsa facto*, this self-critical process had as its ideological background the Black Consciousness Movement's clarion call for the black community to rid itself of, and be emancipated from all forms of psychological and physical slavery encapsulated in Biko's (1978:100) slogan: "Black man you are on your own".

## **2.2. The impact of Black Consciousness on Mtshali's poetry**

Hadfield (2017:2) states that the Black Consciousness Movement became one of the most persuasive anti-apartheid movements of the 1970s in South Africa. Activists within the movement looked for a way to profoundly revolutionise the society. Poets advocated for societal change by targeting the mind of the black people. Hadfield (2017) further emphasises that Black Consciousness was also about instantaneous and appropriate action to be endorsed that would make South Africans self-contained. In other words, Black Consciousness pursued a full liberation of black South Africans by starting at the level of the individual. This exclusively black organization was formed by the likes of Barney Pityana and Steven Biko, to more effectively spread the course of the oppressed in South Africa (Hadfield 2017).

Hadfield (2017:2) argues that Black Consciousness was influenced by innumerable South African student perspectives and their involvement in student politics; a number of philosophers and leaders from the African continent and the African diaspora, who helped shape its thinking. Hadfield (2017) further posits that SASO students studied Frantz Fanon's analysis of the psychological impact of colonialism; Jean Paul Sartre's dialectical analysis; Zambia's Kenneth Kaunda's African humanism, and Tanzania's Julius Nyerere's version of African socialism that accentuate self-sufficiency and expansion for liberation.

More (2017) hypothesises that SASO students also read from the writings of Black American authors, predominantly identifying with the Black Power Movement (to the extent of adopting the raised fist as a gesture of black pride in South Africa). The students also analysed the Black Theology of James Cone, whilst also drawing upon the writings of Brazil's educationist, Paulo Freire, from which they derived the idea "to conscientise" – to awaken the people to a critical awareness of their situation and their ability to change their situation.

Hadfield (2017:3) defines Black Consciousness as "an attitude of the mind" or "a way of life" for oppressed blacks who believed in their potential and value as black people and saw the need for blacks to work together for an all-inclusive liberation". Briefly defined, therefore, Black Consciousness is in essence "the realisation by the black man of the need to demonstrate collectively with his brothers around the cause of the operation - the blackness of their skin – and to operate as a group in order to rid themselves of the shackles that bind them to perpetual servitude".

Biko (1978:53) argues that Black Consciousness seeks to demonstrate the lie that being black is an abnormality from the 'normal', which is being white. It is a manifestation of a new realisation that by seeking to run away from the self through trying to imitate the white man, blacks are insulting the intelligence of whomever (God) created them to be black. According to Biko (1978), Black Consciousness, therefore, takes into cognisance God's measured plan in creating black people black. It seeks to instil the black community with a new-found pride in themselves, their efforts, their values systems, their culture, their religion and their stance on life

For More (2017:40), Black Consciousness becomes particularised, a self-consciousness produced by and forced upon black people by the constant invocation of supremacy of white consciousness. More (2017:42) affirms that Black Consciousness is "a consciousness of one self as a black human being". Nengwekhulu (1976) proclaims that the concept of Black Consciousness, therefore, implies an awareness and pride by Black people in their blackness, which implies that Black people should and must appreciate their value as human beings.

A further hypothesis by Nengwekhulu (1976) is that Black Consciousness conscientises black people to become aware of the significance of their values systems, i.e. their socio-economic, political and cultural values.

Nemgwekhulu (1976) argues that implied in this appreciation of their value systems there is the need by black people to reject imported, unfamiliar value systems which were forced down their throats as part of the apartheid regime's logic of maintaining and perpetrating its brutal system of exploitation and emasculation. Hadfield (2017) furthermore declares that the SASO students' gripe was all about South African apartheid regime's preservation of white racism and the black people's submission to white racism. The students largely felt that black people had capitulated to their inferiority in society (Hadfield, 2017).

Onoja (2016) proclaims that without a confident, inspired sense of the self, black people would not challenge the existing state of affairs. Legendary protest poets like Mtshali became known for their anti-apartheid stance in the struggle. Their protest poetry became a popular genre. Mtshali's poems are narrative in nature giving an exposé of the lives of deprivation of the black, Indian and coloured South Africans. Onoja (2016) attests that Black Consciousness activists and poets such as Mtshali, protested to change the blacks' mind-set, to rouse blacks to self-introspect, and to build black capability to grasp their own freedom.

This effort to change the black man's mind-set was influenced by the deeply held ideology of Biko (1978) that "the most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor [was] the mind of the oppressed". Biko (1978) asserts that colonisation, missionaries through Christianity, and apartheid through white racism have reduced the black man into "a shell, a shadow of man, completely defeated, drowning in his own misery, a slave, an ox bearing the yoke of oppression with sheepish timidity".

.Mtshali's poetry was precisely written to conscientise the black man about his demise under apartheid, and to restore the black man's pride in him/her against the oppressor.



### 2.2.1. Black Consciousness ideology

Snail (2008) states that Garveyism, Black Consciousness in America, African Nationalism in Africa, African personality and Negritude contributed to the rise of the (BCM) Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa. According to Snail (2008), the Black Consciousness Movement became one of the most influential anti-apartheid movements of the 1970s in South Africa. Most liberation movements were banned and operated underground because of their increased repression by the apartheid state. With most political activists arrested, killed or banned, the liberation struggle was left in the hands of the universities and churches which started to speak against the discriminatory government.

South African Students Organisation (SASO) was officially launched in July 1969. Relentless frustration with the limits of white student leadership in multiracial organisations, the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS) and University Christian Movement (UCM) conference in Sutterheim in July 1968 led to segregated black students at the conference forming SASO. It was led by Steven Biko and Barney Pityana to advance the course of the oppressed blacks. Macdonald (2010) proclaims that Steve Biko had become the chief intellectual exponent of South African Black Consciousness, a philosophy which redefined racial politics in South Africa. Moreover, Macdonald (2010) projected Black consciousness as a politics of self-determination by the historically oppressed blacks through which blackness could be forged as an self-directed tool for emancipation in politics.

Hadfield (2017) avers that SASO saw South African people's subjugation problem as twofold: (1) white racism and (2) black submission to white racism. SASO felt that black people had downright given in to their own inferiority in society. Hadfield (2017) further argues that without a confident, ingenious sense of identity, black people would not challenge the *status quo*. Steve Biko (1978: 101) argued that "the most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor [was] the mind of the oppressed". Macdonald (2010) asserts that Biko (1978) in Black Consciousness philosophy, engrossed his attention to neutralising the despondency that led black South Africans to accepting their position of being conquered

Macqueen (2009:5) claims that Black Consciousness activists worked to change the mind-set of the black man, to self-introspect to reinforce the black people's capacity to realize their own liberation. Black Consciousness, therefore, perceived liberation as originating from within. The oppressed needed to be freed first of spiritual and mental oppression. Steve Biko (1978) further argues that colonisation, Christian ministries, and apartheid had turned the black man "a shell, a shadow of man, completely defeated, drowning in his own misery, a slave, an ox bearing the yoke of oppression with sheepish timidity. Onoja (2016) states that activists like Steve Biko were one of those who committed to the struggle of overthrowing the racially prejudiced South African regime. SASO believed in black separation which held that the unity of blacks presented a stronger front to contest against apartheid, a move that other liberal white organisations regarded as black racism.

Hadfield (2017) asserts that SASO embraced a black- only movement that would sustain a truly self-reliant, black society. Hadfield (2017) further claims that SASO spread Black Consciousness through SASO *Newsletter*, Soweto literary magazines such as *The Classic New Classic*, and *Staffrider*; and through literary forms such as poems and plays. Like his fellow poets Wally Serote, Don Mattera, Mafika Gwala, James Matthews and Oswald Mtshali, among others, dealt with black domination and sought to inspire hope in black self-determination with positive images and themes of confrontation and restoration.

Pucherova (2009) maintains that Black Consciousness utilised art effectively as a form of arousing a black awakening in battling white supremacy under an oppressive political climate. Black Consciousness was started as first-hand awareness that the regaining of black people's dignity was an indispensable prerequisite for a multi-racial South Africa, in which both blacks and whites could be free-thinking. The poet most commonly associated with Black consciousness is among others, Oswald Mtshali. This study will focus on how Mtshali's poetry is rooted in The Black Consciousness philosophy, and aims to bring out this awakening in blacks for them to resist oppression towards achieving self- emancipation.

### **2.2.2. Afrocentric ideology**

Mogoboya (2011:30) states Afrocentricity is a word derived from the term centre which originates from the Latin word *centrum*, meaning the mid-point of anything; an axis; it is a point around which things move. Asante (1999:1-2, 4) defines Afrocentricity “as a critical corrective to a displaced agency among Africans” by “re-centering African minds”. Mogoboya (2011:30) proclaims Afrocentricity to be aimed at correcting the damage the Europeans inflicted on the Africans through Afrocentric means.

Karenga (1988:404) further defines Afrocentricity essentially as “a quality of perspective or approach rooted in the cultural image and human interest of the African people”. Asante (1999:4) further declares Afrocentricity to be “a state of being centred on African people”, which supposes that in Afrocentric ideology, everything revolves around the African continent, her people, her customs, knowledge (scientific and technological), politics, cultures and traditions. Mogoboya (2011:31) echoes that Africa is concentrated upon as a centre of dialogue, a milieu of whatever perspective there is to pronounce on. By this Mogoboya (2011) means that Africa becomes a theme of analysis, a point of attention and meditation, that is, the centre of concentration.

Appiah (1992) further attests that Afrocentricity serves as an pronouncement that Africans are proficient of doing any heroic act that whites can do. Mogoboya (2011) attributes the formulation of Afrocentrism, Africology, and Afrocentricity to Asante (1980) and Diop (1974); this they did in order to put Africa at the centre as far as her existence is concerned. Asante (1999) qualifies Mogoboya’s (2011) thinking that Afrocentricity, like Black Consciousness, conscientises the African to claim his or her space as an agent of progressive change and emancipation of self and ‘Others’ from domination and denigration by the coloniser.

This study elucidates how Oswald Mtshali’s protest poetry through Afrocentricity in relationship with Black Consciousness, provides the African a source from which to draw strength in his/her fight against all forms of prejudice by the coloniser (the apartheid regime in this study).

### **2.2.3. Negritude ideology**

Negritude as an ideology according to Onwumere & Egbulonu (2014:148), is pronounced as “a defining milestone in the rehabilitation of Africa and an African diasporic identity and dignity, and thus, provided a unifying and liberating instrument for black Francophone students in the first half of the twentieth century in search of their identity”.

More (2014) affirms that as a literary movement, Negritude originated from the 1930s and sustained to the 1950s among French-speaking African and Caribbean writers living in Paris. It began as a protest against French colonial rule and the policy of assimilation. Additionally, More (2014) proclaims that Negritude recounted the struggle against racism, alienation and dehumanisation against black students in France. Comparable to Negritude, Black Consciousness instigated a student reaction against apartheid (white) racism and its discrediting effects.

Onwumere et al.(2014:149) declares that assimilation was not aimed at elevating the African, but at devaluing his culture, to strip him of his cultural self and put on him a foreign one(culture), against which the African later revolted. Onwumere. et.al. (2014) furthermore proclaims the drive behind the Negritude Movement to have come from the Harlem Renaissance, a literary and artistic blossoming that emerged among a group of black thinkers and artists, especially poets and novelists, in the United States, in New York in the 1920s.

The Negritude Movement was found by the triad of Leopold Sedar Senghor, Leon-Gontran Damas and Aime Cesaire around the ideology of integrated liberty. The term ‘negritude’ means ‘blackness’. Cesaire (1947) argues in his total rejection of assimilation, that “it is only the blacks that will write about their history and validate their achievement; they will restore the lost humility, dignity, integrity and subjectivity of black identity necessary to challenge colonisation, racism and western interventionism”. Equally, Senghor (1948) conceptualises Negritude ideology as “that which promotes a quest for the authentic self, knowledge of self, and a discovery of African beliefs, values, institutions and civilization”. For Senghor (1948), Negritude denotes “the rehabilitation of the black man, the affirmation of African personality”.

According to More (2014:175), Negritude is a preoccupation with the pursuit for black identity and desire for liberation through self-consciousness and self-definition. More (2014:176) further pronounces Negritude not to be only negatively an intellectual reaction to an alienated black consciousness, a struggle against white racism and its degrading effects, but above all to also be positively a pronouncement of the existence of the black person

#### **2.2.4. The epitome of conscientisation in Mtshali's protest poetry**

According to Nengwekhulu (1976), the contest for Black Consciousness for any black man in South Africa is the necessity for a different and perceptive redefinition, re-identification and re-appraisal of the black totality in the context of the capitalist, racist and exploitative South Africa, controlled by a self-appointed white minority.

Nengwekhulu (1976) states that The Black Consciousness philosophy, therefore, is focused on the re-establishment of group pride and determination by black people in South Africa to rise together from the demise of oppression and exploitation. Ndebele (1988:211) endorses that while conscientisation was an important aspect of the liberation struggle, the challenge was to free the entire social imagination of the oppressed from the laws of perception that had characterised the white apartheid humanity. Ndebele's argument was for the South African revolution to come up with new thinking strategies, discernment that would help break down the closed epistemological structures of the oppressive South Africa.

Nengwekhulu (1976) preserves that Black Consciousness calls for a psychological revolution in the black community; which will be an insurgency directed towards the elimination of stereotypes by blacks about themselves. The main reasoning Nengwekhulu (1976) suggests is that integral to Black Consciousness is the certainty that "no man can wage a meaningful war of liberation unless and until he/she has eradicated his/her slave-mentality, and accepted themselves as full human beings who have a role to play in their own redemption".

According to Nengwekhulu (1976), Black consciousness powers black people to see themselves as complete human beings and not as extensions of others. Alvarez-Pereyre (1984:242) affirms the idea of conscientisation by testifying that the mission of writers in the 1970s (Mtshali in this regard) was to liberate people.

Horn (1994:18) confirms that conscientisation was more powerful, more militant than the previous poetry; and that it intended to make people take action about their clampdown by the oppressor. Sibisi (2013:13) further upholds that the 1970s poetry was meant to resist the persecutors and develop the vanquished. Owomoyela (1993:131) affirms Sibisi's (2013) view by proclaiming resistance poetry to be provocative, defiant, and confrontational, a call for the oppressed to propel themselves into action. According to Sibisi (2013:140), the resistance struggle was primarily a struggle to make the voice of the oppressed majority heard ... with freedom of expression being most central in the fight for political change.

#### **2.2.5. Marxist influence on Mtshali's Poetry**

The Marxist Theory is employed in the analysis of Mtshali's literary texts to reflect the impact of the socio-political context on the lives of blacks at the time in which they were written. The study maintains that Mtshali sought to conscientise the readers of the plight of the subjugated blacks by resonating on the socio-political and cultural problems of their time through his poetry.

Sibisi (2013:41) sustains that the earnest echoing of the lived experience of the oppressed black people in South Africa enthused readers into action. Having been stimulated, readers were projected to agree with, and start to view white racism and its effects on black people from the point of view of the poet. The aim was to make the readers more devoted, impervious, rebellious and politically vigorous in handling their socio-political encounters. Marx and Engels (1972) state that Marxist theorists acknowledge that literature can only be properly understood when explained from its socio-political background. According to Marx and Engels (1972: 82), social reality is not an inarticulate experience out of which literature emerges or into which it amalgamates.

Karl Marx (1975) is known for advocating for the Base/Superstructure Theory. According to Marx (1975), the Base or Superstructure of a given social formation is made of forces of production and relations of production. The Base or infrastructure includes everything from technology and raw materials to the social organization of the work place.

It is composed of the exploited working class (subdued South African blacks). The Superstructure is composed of legal processes, art, literature, and values (South African apartheid system). Sibisi (2013:43) claims that the relationship between the Base and Superstructure is one of willpower. The Superstructure hinges on on the Base and cannot subsist without it. If one changes the Base, then the Superstructure will follow. The Superstructure's determination is to stay dominant and, therefore, rich, whilst the Base is determined on working to rid itself of poverty.

The role of the Superstructure is to sustain the dominant class and, therefore, perpetuate its material interest. According to Karl Marx (1975), the society progresses through the struggle between opposing forces. Throughout history, the class struggle originates from the exploitation of one class by another. Karl Marx (1975) proclaims that this confrontation between the opposing forces (the rich and poor) will finally result in replacement of the dominant capitalistic system by socialism. Moreover, Marx (1975) proffers that it is the struggle between opposing classes that result in transformation.

The Marxist theory was used in this study to analyse Oswald Mtshali's selected poems, to assess the struggle between the Afrikaners (capitalist class) and the blacks (industrial working class) in their struggle to replace capitalism (apartheid) with democracy.

#### **2.2.6. Biography of Oswald Mbuyiseni Mtshali**

Oswald Mtshali was born in 1940 in a township called Vryheid in Kwazulu-Natal. He did his primary school education at KwaBhanya Primary School. and matriculated In 1958 at Nkamana High School in Vryheid. At the age of 18 he desired to study at the University of Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, but his admission was turned down because of the apartheid decree.

Nonetheless Mtshali remained a dreamer. He worked as a “scooter emissary” in Soweto. He continued to wage confrontation in his mind against the prejudices of the apartheid system into which he was born. He wrote bilingually (English and Zulu). In 1971 his first volume of poetry called *Sounds of a Cowhide Drum* published, which won the Olive Schreiner Prize for 1974.

On completion of his studies in the United States of America at the University of Iowa and Columbia (New York) respectively, Mtshali returned to South Africa in 1979 and occupied a teaching post at Pace College. His second volume of poetry, *Fireflames* was published in 1980, later to be debarred by the South African apartheid regime since it was purported to be dedicated to the school children in Soweto. The apartheid regime saw it as an obvious reference to the 1976 student uprising in Sharville. Mtshali’s future edition was on the nonfiction work *Give Us a Break: Diaries of a Group of Soweto Children* in 1988.

Mtshali’s poetry focuses on the subsistence of blacks and the expectation that the future will bring. It also mirrors the harsh experiences endured by blacks under the apartheid regime. The poet (Mtshali) observes with a bitter and scornful eye the grubby beer halls, the jam-packed trains, the slum housing, and the unforgiving working conditions that still compose the lot of Black Africans in South Africa. Mtshali’s poetry is usually narrative in nature, giving an exposé on the lives of deprivation of the black South Africans. His poetry is also extraordinary for its expressive metaphors, acid irony and similes that are packed with rich emotional impact. Mtshali used poetry as an intermediate to capture, record, interpret and reflect experiences of the black people in order to stimulate consciousness in the hearts of blacks and whites alike.

### **2.2.7. Conclusion**

The Black Consciousness-motivated poetry of Mtshali depicted the actuality of the exploited, and uncovered the senselessness of many of the apartheid regime’s attempts to validate subjugation on the basis of the inaccurate conception that black people cannot recognise their worth as human beings, and should, therefore, be under the leadership of white people.



Mtshali's protest poetry also dealt with the reality that white hegemony prospered on a black people's subordination complex and their assumed intellect of compliance. Mtshali's poetry aims at bringing up to blacks the realisation that psychological emancipation needed new-fangled political stratagems and first-hand consciousness that would contest the realities of racist society effectively. Black Consciousness stimulated black people to see themselves as comprehensive human beings, and not as mere extensions of the whites.

## CHAPTER THREE

### AN EXPLORATION OF MTSHALI'S POEMS IN: *SOUNDS OF A COWHIDE DRUM AND FIREFLAMES*.

#### 3.1. INTRODUCTION

Mtshali's art can be said to serve an important function through protest statement-making in *Sounds of a Cowhide Drums*, and to spur the reader into active resistance in *Fireflames* (Nemadzivanani, 1991:14). Chapman (1984) maintains that the earlier Mtshali is an "analyst" who does not necessarily inflame his reader into action. Chapman (1982) supports Njabulo Ndebele's corroboration that through *Sounds of a Cowhide Drum* (1971), Mtshali "has merely confirmed the fact of oppression without offering a challenging alternative".

Nemadzivanani (1991:14) argues that Mtshali offers this alternative in *Fireflames*, by radicalizing his approach to the point of encouraging people to take action to improve their condition. The work of Mtshali took impetus initially from the Black Consciousness ideals of the South African Students Congress (SASO). Moreover, Chapman (1982:11) claims that Mtshali's poetry has not only been instrumental in reconstructing a tradition of black South African writing, but also pivotal in promoting serious, often prickly questioning by writers and critics alike, of the implication of and the pertinent responses to literature in a turbulent society.

Mtshali's writing belongs to the early nineteen seventies era which marked the resurfacing of publicised South African black poetry, with *Sounds of a Cowhide Drum* becoming one collection of poems published by Renoster Books in 1971. Nadine Gordimer (1967) argues in her introduction analysis to *Sounds of a Cowhide Drum* that Mtshali's "verbal magic" enables blacks to recognize their fate, provides a revelation for whites of "a world they live in and never know". Gordimer's assertion is considered particularly pertinent, for one of the primary functions of poetry is to inform people or get them to become conscious about their world.

Nemadzivanani (1991:14) maintains that through an interplay of linguistic and stylistic devices, Mtshali reveals things as they are and lays bare the discrepancy between what is (exploitation, dehumanization, prejudice and oppression of blacks,

etc., and what ought to be (equality, freedom and retention of true human dignity and identity for blacks). Shklovsky (1989) submits in "Art as Technique", that "art exists to make one feel things"; a goal that Nemadzivanani (1991:15) declares Mtshali strives towards achieving in *Sounds of the Cowhide Drum*.

Povey (1973) observes themes in Mtshali's poetry which derive inevitably from the deepest and most bitter personal experiences in his life as a messenger in Johannesburg. But the events provoke not the anticipated rage of immediate resentment; but they are absorbed into poetry, distilled from his lines into moods of wry irony, and a curious sustained tender awareness that persists through anger. Povey further shows Mtshali's ingenuity to stem from his ability to artistically fuse his experiences and observation of the black South African into the kind of poetry the reader cannot afford to ignore.

Karasselos (1989:26) confirms that it cannot be disputed that Black Consciousness, of which Mtshali's poetry forms an integral part, informed Soweto poetry, even though it cannot simply be assumed that it informed all Soweto poetry. Some of the poems that are analysed in this study show a quest by Mtshali for a lost identity – a lost Africa (Karasselos (1989). Motlhabi (1972) points out that Mtshali's poetry was essential as conditions of apartheid had to be "fought and removed and black humanity retrieved". Periodical re-awakenings were perhaps essential because prolonged subjugation often creates a tendency of acceptance and resignation and dehumanization.

Sartre (1972) maintains that Black Consciousness writing is more of an inherent awareness of the oppressed position in society, rather than an overt political manifesto. As a corrective to a black man's feeling of inferiority, resignation and lack of self-worth, Black Consciousness took centre stage aimed at making the black man 'come to him/her'. Sartre (1972) avers that this explicates why Black Consciousness found expression in poetry, and not on the political platform. Moreover, Sartre (1972) observes that every age has its own poetry; where in every age the circumstances of history chooses a nation, a race, a class to take up the torch by creating situations that can be expressed or transcended only through poetry.

Karassellos (1989:34) confirms Black Consciousness poetry to reveal a “psychological awareness” focussing on the diverse nature of ghetto life. Mafika Gwala (1979) augments to this quality of Black consciousness poetry, the ability for it to inspire an awareness of positive values in the indigenous culture, which is in no way inferior to European culture if taken within its context. Moreover, Gwala (1979) contends that Black consciousness poetry must have the ability to show concern with racial oppression, but also point out the short-comings of orthodox modern awareness – the inverted idealism in yearning after bourgeois securities, the purposeless desperation of ghetto blacks and (in general) the alienation of the blacks in the apartheid society.

Mtshali is a poet who writes against a harsh background of economic deprivation and racial inequality in South Africa. Mashige (1996:30), avows that where Serote’s resistance poetry openly and actively agitates for change, Mtshali’s protest poetry focuses mainly on the critical observation of the external manifestations of apartheid, and the psychological effects thereof as experienced by blacks

Adey (1976) maintains that one of the fundamental functions of poetry is to make people aware of their immediate environment and what takes place around them. Adey further purports that through his use of conventional poetic forms and devices, Mtshali opens up the South African world to the readers, thereby skilfully making the reader aware of the differences between what is and what should be. Betty (2015:115) asserts that in order to understand the impression of Oswald Mtshali’s poetry in *Sounds of a Cowhide Drum*, it is convenient for one to have a broad understanding of the political and social environment in South Africa.

Hollard (1987) pronounces that Mtshali attempts to produce politically and culturally meaningful poetry. Hollard (1987) further asserts that while such poetry cannot remove all traces of the English literary tradition from South African writing, it does challenge white cultural and political imperialism, and much more, it can produce a new literature committed to the restructuring of the South African society.

Mashige (1996:31) advocates that Mtshali engagingly combines his experience with his observations to come up with a forceful type of poetry that is hard for anybody to simply dismiss. Povey (1973:151) maintains that Mtshali's voice can be persuasive and oratorical "for that is the sound of a cowhide drum/ the voice of Mother Africa."

Povey (1973) further argues that Mtshali equally accepts the implications of his role as a poet, his obligation to strike that cowhide drum so that its aftershocks are true and valid and, therefore, as complex and varied in its tones as human feelings it glorifies. Mtshali is a poet, who also specifically sees himself as an artist; as a truly dedicated artist in his fight for emancipation. Povey further affirms that Mtshali is not easily dampened by challenges from his political milieu and is thus not deterred from exposing his perspectives about the apartheid laws of the government.

This dedication is exclaimed in Mtshali's poem "The Poet", where he describes himself at work:

*Through the night*  
*The typewriter sounded- - -*  
*Clatter - - - clatter - - -clatter*  
*Like the sonorous ring of an auctioneer's bell*

The persona is hard at work, alone at night only to the sound of the clanking of his typing device, but he does not despair. He continues seeing his isolated state as an artist, but his quest to conscientise the black man to discover himself spurs him on.

*Through the whispering of dreamers*  
*The writer wrote and wrote*  
*Deaf to the nocturnal chorus*  
*Of pompous praises and raucous curses*

According to Povey (1973:152) Mtshali openly declares that neither 'curses' nor 'praises' can deflect him from his dedication to his art. He is immune to the detraction of dreamers 'whispering of dreamers' and sounds of the night 'deaf to the nocturnal chorus' that vie for his attention to derail him from his poetry writing through which he wants to emancipate his fellow blacks from the clutches of apartheid.

According to Adebola (2014:279), the African poets (Mtshali in particular) are very conscious of their duty to identify the continent's social problems and the crucial role they play in the physical and psychological liberation of the subjugated blacks. Mtshali's Black Consciousness poetry was specifically written to advocate for change. It was written specifically to express Mtshali's sense of frustration, anger, feeling of betrayal, disappointment and hope for the oppressed blacks to fight for their freedom, restoration of dignity, humanity and pride in the South African society.

## **3.2. Poems that bring out educational and economic exploitation**

### **3.2.1. Introduction**

This study takes a brief look at the South African poetry written by black poets (Mtshali in particular for this study), during the period of apartheid in South Africa from 1948 to 1994. At this juncture, the Afrikaner National Party was committed to preserving Afrikaner interests (Lutchman, 2002:224).

According to Lutchman (2002), the policies of the ruling hegemonic Afrikaners tried to maintain supremacy through human, economic and educational exploitation, rendering the indigenous population victims of cultural and exclusively economic suppression. The theme under scrutiny within the poetry of the political paradigm under discussion is human and economic exploitation and its effects on the black man's freedom. Lutchman (2002:228) argues that the focus on the results of exploitation of blacks in South Africa was visible in the form of nationalism in poetry.

Mtshali's poetry sought to investigate and reflect on the life and experiences of the black working class in South Africa in the apartheid era. The study dwells poignantly on the blacks/workers who are exploited and economically disadvantaged by the whites/employers.

Althusser (1971: 127-128) states that the Marxist theory campaigns for literature that reflects the foundation from which it stems. Moreover, Althusser (1971) affirms that the Superstructure reflects the struggle between the capitalists (haves), and the hthe proletariats/poor (have-nots).

Sibisi (2013:125) asserts that Mtshali's poetry like that of his counterparts Gwala, Brutus and Sepamla, relays that the South African 'bourgeoisie' ruling class owned and controlled the forces of production, whilst the working class were without property; with only their physical labour to bargain with for survival. Sibisi (2013:125) proclaims the Base-Superstructure of a given society to be made up of "forces of production" and "relations of production". In a capitalistic society people communicate with one another according to their relation to prevalent forces of production. Karl Marx (1975) sustains from the economic base emerges a Superstructure which consists of certain definite forms of social consciousness, which Marxism describes as an ideology. According to Karl Marx (1975) main concern of the capitalist is to keep the worker dependent on the employer (black worker on a white employer in this regard) as his means of production, not to equitably share in the gains of production.

Poems engaged in this study are all aimed at conscientising the reader about the exploitation of the majority of the black oppressed masses. Biko (1978) asserts that the sole purpose of apartheid regime was to create some kind of an obstruction between blacks and whites so that the whites could exclusively enjoy the treats of the economy at the expense of the exploited and impoverished black workers, and many whites still feel morally justified to do so.

Sibisi (2013:126) argues that what intensified the problem of human and economic exploitation faced by the black people for Steven Biko was the fact that apartheid was tangled up with white sovereignty, commercial exploitation and deliberate oppression. Biko (1978) proclaims that the reasoning behind the white domination was to prepare black people for a permanent submissive role in South Africa.

Mtshali's poems to be discussed well ahead aim at encouraging black people to challenge their exploitative human, educational, political and economic life and working conditions.

### 3.2.2. Poems that explore Educational and Economic incongruities

Chapman., Gardner, C., and Mphahlele, E. (1992:355) sustains that “An Abandoned Bundle” is one of Oswald Mthali’s most popular Soweto poems, which in many ways is characteristic of his poetry as represented in his poetic collection *Sounds of a Cowhide Drum*:

The morning mist  
and chimney smoke  
of White City Jabavu  
flowed thick yellow  
as pus oozing  
from a gigantic sore.

It smothered our little houses  
like fish caught in a net.  
Scavenging digs  
draped in red bandanas of blood  
fought fiercely  
for a squirming bundle.  
I threw a brick;  
they bared fangs  
flicked velvet tongues of scarlet  
and scurried away,  
leaving a mutilated corpse –  
an infant dumped on a rubbish heap.  
‘Oh! Baby in a manger  
Sleep well  
on human dung.’



Its Mother  
had melted into the rays of the rising sun,  
her face glittering with innocence  
her heart as pure as untrampled dew.

Chapman et al. (1992) states that in “An Abandoned Bundle”, as in many of his other poems, Mtshali’s attack of the problem of exploitation is two-fold. His first attack in the first stanza is directed against the political and economic system of the apartheid regime which produces such physically and morally degrading conditions for the oppressed “it smothered our little houses/ like fish caught in a net (line7 and 8)”, that they are left hopeless of a better future.

The poet’s use of the phrase ‘little houses’, points at the matchbox size houses that were built for blacks in the apartheid era. This is symbolic of the black people’s denial of economic independence to build houses of their desire. The adjective ‘little’ is attributive to the degradation blacks faced of being treated with callousness by the apartheid regime as they were considered not ‘human’ enough to be built houses of the same size as their ‘human’ white counterparts.

Alvarez-Pereyre (1984) proclaims the simile ‘caught like fish in a net’ to be fitting as it highlights the vulnerability of the occupants (blacks) and their ineffective attempts to escape from their socio-economic circumstances. According to Chapman et al. (1992:356), these conditions of entrapment of blacks by the oppressive political system are advocated by the poet’s description of the people as ‘fish caught in a net’, a reference to the manner in which they are ensnared in a situation from which they cannot easily free themselves. The deliberate exclusion of blacks from economic advancement through good education and job offers leaves them at the mercy of the white monopoly capital. Mtshali endeavours to conscientise the oppressed to wake up to the idea Steve Biko (1978: 101) was advocating that ‘the black man was on his own’, and had, therefore, to self-emancipate.

Chapman et al. (1992:356), further pronounces that the social, political and economic loop in which blacks in the townships find themselves, partly explains the desperate act of the mother who innocently dumps her unwanted baby.

This can directly conjure up her low education level, her lack of skills to land a lucrative job to pay her well, enabling her to look after her baby and possibly meet her other family responsibilities. Discriminative laws upheld by the apartheid regime were tantamount to an environment in which blacks lived without life-enhancing amenities.

The poem's environment is also polluted by hefty smoke emission from coal stoves 'chimney smoke of White City Jabavu', 'flowed thick yellow'. Blacks had no electricity and had to endure using coal-run stoves for cooking. The social milieu brought upon them risks of an array of diseases from heavy unfiltered smoke 'ooze[ing] like pus' emitted from the chimneys.

The small-scale version of the story is limited to White City Jabavu and is used to expose the vices that emanate from the township. The poem draws the reader to a system that reduces human beings to rubbish dumps. Right from the onset the persona exposes the irony that is contained in the name of the place (White City Jabavu).

The description of the city as white would prompt one to think of purity and immunity from immorality. A closer look at the events in the poem reveals that there is absolutely nothing white, pure, immoral, or city-like about Jabavu, both in the literal and metaphoric sense of the word. The socio-economic difficulties faced by blacks in the city are characterised by the inexcusable act of throwing away a newly-born baby by the young, probably uneducated, immature and unemployed young mother living in white City Jabavu. Her deed is the antithesis of innocence and morality.

The system drives people to pretence, and leads them to make strenuous efforts to camouflage their real identities (stressful poverty-stricken economic conditions), even at the expense of infanticide (Nemadzhivanani (1991:22)). A whole racial group is reduced to a bundle that is abandoned and is either unwittingly or unwillingly made to abandon itself through its actions.

The poet's ingenious utilization of figurative language is intended to make the apartheid regime aware of the health danger that they are bringing to the doorstep of the black community through distributing facilities biasedly.

The smoke emission is likened to 'pus' that 'oozes' from a 'gigantic sore' explicitly to designate the scale of sicknesses blacks are prone to contract due to the unhealthy environment they are forced to contend with. It also seems to reflect the 'sickness' the apartheid regime imposed on the people on the people living in White City Jabavu.

The poet through this protest literature intended to appeal to the conscience of those who wield power and can exercise the vote in South Africa. Gordimer (1974) claims that while Mtshali indicts structures of power, he also disapproves in a subtle manner of the callous way in which many black people often respond despondently to their calamity. Gordimer (1974) maintains that whether one understands the mother's economic plight or not, the actor abandoning a new-born baby to the mercy of scavenging township crossbreeds is fundamentally a cruel act.

Mtshali's poem "An Abandoned Bundle" passionately interprets human poverty due to exploitation in the following lines:

Scavenging dogs  
Draped in red bandanas of blood  
Fought fiercely  
For a squirming bundle (Mtshali, 1972:60)

Mtshali (1972) asserts the above lines to round off a poem that speaks of the inability of a young woman to take care of the child she gave birth to, due to the economic poverty brought upon her by discriminative apartheid laws. The reasons for the heinous mother's actions are not mentioned; but on close examination of the conditions of her life, it can be safely conjectured that the pressure she anticipated would be brought to bear on her regarding the caring for the child would be overwhelming.

The economic hardship she most likely experiences leaves her without the necessary resources to provide her baby with basic needs. She thus left with no choice but abandon the baby at the dump site. Nemadzhivanani (1991:21) states that she decides to dispose of the baby, partly to save it from hardship, but primarily to liberate herself, as it were.

The poet sees the dumping of the baby as a sacrifice, because of the fact that it dies innocently. Nemadzhivanani (1991) further contends that situations like these were very numerous in South Africa in a system that existed in the 70s and 80s, that selfishly bred immorality and reduced people to nonentities.

In the third stanza the persona immediately evokes in the reader the biblical association with sin with the use of the adjective “red”. The persona hints that throwing away an innocent baby is sinful and also endangers the child which has been entrusted to the parent with the responsibility to care for and protect it. The persona also suggests a situation involving a hunter and the hunted; a situation with a marauder who attacks the helpless and defenceless at any given opportunity. The attackers, “scavengers”, are agents of the oppressive regime whilst the attacked “prey/victims” are the meek helpless black masses. Mashige (1996:46) declares that the adjective “red” besmeared with guilt those that are the architects of and apologists for the situation of exploitation and oppression.

In the third stanza Mtshali is depicted as an active participant in the suffering of his people and not just a passive witness of events. This is observed in his constant use of the first person narrative “I”. The persona is propelled into action and he reacts spontaneously when he realises the dangers of being indifferent to the hostile and unjust situation (Mashige, 1996: 48). The throwing of the brick at the scavenging dogs is not only out of curiosity but a concerned endeavour on the part of the observer to save the child from further mutilation, even though it was overdue as the baby was already dead. The reader’s sense of repulsion culminates at this realisation. It is also unsatisfactory for the persona to realise that he was too late to save the baby from danger.

The persona makes a concerted endeavour to conscientise the reader of the dire need for blacks to stand together to save their own. The last three lines form the climax of the story. The quotation has a biblical undertone which sends spirals of emotions and strong feelings of frustration through the readers (Nemadzhivanani, 1991:24). Nemadzhivanani (1991) further asserts that the poem’s message is nothing but shocking to the reader.

There is an unconcealed reference to Jesus Christ in this biblical insinuation and the mutilated corpse of the infant is likened to Him (baby Jesus). There is sarcastic and subtle irony by Mtshali where the baby is told to “sleep well”. The sarcasm is that the baby Jesus Christ is quoted in the bible to “sleep in the manger” of soft cosy grass in the stall in Bethlehem, whilst the baby in this poem has to “sleep in the manger” on human dung at a dump site. There is nothing cosy and holy for the baby to enjoy in a flea-ridden and disease infested dump site.

Mtshali is strongly sarcastic about the conditions surrounding the abandoned mutilated baby corpse. The environment is inadequate and unhealthy to bring up a child in. The extremely appalling conditions have been deliberately created and sustained by the apartheid regime to keep blacks as an unresponsive and complacent society (Nemadzivhanani, 1991:24). The poet is also mounts a strong criticism and challenge to a system that is intentionally designed to relegate people to the dumping site.

Shava (1989:80) describes this system as motivated by greed and selfish ideals which become a recipe for “poverty and hence generate dehumanisation and brutalisation amongst blacks”. Shava (1989:80) further emphasises that the frequency with which pointless death occurs in the townships is such that one gets the impression that the life of a black man in the township is discounted. Mtshali’s intention in this instance is to drive the blame away from the mother as an individual, and to hold the entire humanity answerable. Society has the responsibility to ensure that such incapacitating socio-economic conditions do not persist. The deep irony is accentuated by the persona’s insinuation of the baby in the manger (a Christian symbol), which achieves significance from the sharp contrast between a South Africa that advocates Christianity and a South Africa that upholds stark exploitation of the oppressed blacks.

It is in the last stanza of the poem that the poet vindicates the mother for dumping the baby. He lays the blame equally on the community for being complacent in facing their calamity. The poet also strongly criticises the destructive impact of the apartheid society’s laws on black human life.

Nemadzhivanani (1991:265-26) proclaims that it is a society that upholds all kinds of moral inadequacies and gives the other cheek to incompetence; a system that drives people to pretence even when it is brutal and illegitimate. The poet throws down a gauntlet to the regime that applies the racist laws that govern blacks brutally, and still pretend as if all is well when indeed it is not.

Shava (1989) declares that the political system enforced by the oppressive regime is one perforated with moral irrationalities, spiritual corruption, political, educational and economic incongruities, where blacks are denied the chance to have “meaningful role models for the younger members of their society”.

Gordimer (1974) compares Oswald Mtshali to William Blake in her foreword to *Sound of a Cowhide Drum*. She claims Mtshali’s poetry and its ironic twists recall that of Blake. Gordimer believes Mtshali shares Blake’s social concern for the destitute and the underprivileged. Chapman et al., (1992: 256) asserts that Mtshali’s language may be simple, but is also realistic and effective. Chapman further proclaims Mtshali as the master of the understatement, for although disgusted with the grotesque conditions encountered by blacks in South Africa, Mtshali rarely waves his fists, but forcefully makes his point.

As a result of this subtle approach, Oswald Mtshali is regarded by many black decriers as being too fearful in his condemnation of the white power structures; as though bent on proving to his poetical gurus what a restraining influence he was. Chapman et al., (1992; 356), however, argues that a poem such as “An Abandoned Bundle” by Mtshali is a very forbidding, horrifying account of the dehumanisation of oppression. Adebola (2014:282) affirms that poetry written prior to 1994 by Black Consciousness poets like Mtshali, overtly voiced their anger and frustration against apartheid.

In the poem “If You Should Know Me”, Mtshali protests against the fear, prejudice and suspicion imposed upon black people by the apartheid system which hampers an open and meaningful democratic human relationship,- particularly the one between black and white South Africans (Mashige, 1996:31). The persona recognises that life in South Africa, especially the association between black and white people, is dominated and polluted by actions of prejudice, suspicion and fear of

the 'Other' by the oppressor. He further argues that these emotions ultimately breed inferiority and overprotectiveness in both blacks and whites respectively.

Biko (1978) attests that leaders of the white regime had to pass discriminatory laws that would sustain an obstacle between blacks and whites, to expedite that whites would relish all constitutional rights at the detriment of blacks.

Moreover, Biko (1978) claims that whites still find room to provide moral justification for the apparent exploitation that pricked even the hardest of white consciences. The first two stanzas are pervaded by the familiar allusion to evil and how, from a Christian perspective, sin came into the world through the temptation of Eve by the "serpent" to eat the "apple". The powerful message of these two stanzas lies in the revelation by the persona that he, too, is a sinner.

The poem accentuates the degradation of a black man by a white man as sinful, while all humanity is sinful before God. There is divergence in the poem between reality and artificiality. The persona compares the real image of himself representing blacks, with the image of how he is perceived by his misanthropists (whites) in their attempt to justify their ill-treatment of blacks. The distinction reveals itself in the difference between the "concealment" in the first stanza and the "pullet crawling" out to freedom in the last stanza. "Concealment" in the first stanza is indicative of entrapment by blacks through apartheid, whilst the "pullet crawling out to freedom" stresses the success by Mtshali's poetry in conscientising blacks to struggle for self-emancipation. This freedom of the persona (black man) is both literary and artistic in form. It is freedom from fear, hatred, oppression and poverty which will ultimately enable the poet to be at liberty to develop his craft equally against his white counterpart.

Biko (1978) illustrates that the black man attempts on his own to scrutinise his environment, and also assess his visions to make his freedom noticeable by whatever means he reckons fit. Biko (1978) further proclaims that at the core of the philosophy by blacks to chart a route towards self-emancipation lies the apprehension that "the most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is their minds as the oppressed".

Biko's (1978) hypothesis is that if one is free at heart (not fearful), no man-made chains can bind him/her to servitude, however, if one's mind is manipulated and controlled by the oppressor as to make the oppressed believe that he is accountable to the white man, then there will be nothing the oppressed can do to scare his authoritative masters from keeping him/her subjugated. According to Biko (1978), adopting the Black Consciousness ideology motivates the black man to see him/herself as being complete.

The third stanza explodes with deep sardonicism and mockery, where the persona challenges his knockers to: "... come search my soul for non-existent virtues". The persona has a deep-rooted belief in his merits as a black man even though his detractors believe him to have none; if he has any, they are believed to be of inferior quality as a black man is believed to be uncultured and uncivilised.

The persona dares the oppressor to search for his qualities that he (the detractor) will find existent and in abundance. The oppressed black man contends that after searching him, they will not care to make anything out of the virtues because in their eyes his virtues are "outnumbered by vices" (Mashige, 1996:33). The poet highlights a plethora of confidence in the black man that counteracts the detractors' (white man's) attempt to put him down so as to dominate him. Mtshali once more conscientises black people to take pride in their qualities of humanity.

Biko (1978) affirms that the Black Consciousness philosophy instigates pride, and the need for self-determination in the black man. The poet's damnation of his antagonists' attitude in the image of "greenflies" is indicative of the "vices/iniquities" with which he is now accused of (Mashige, 1996:33). The persona by-and-large finds himself deeply lodged in the predicament of poverty and ineptitude because of the selfish attitude of his opponents.

Biko (1978) maintains the apartheid system sustenance from the existence of anti-black attitudes expressed in the white society to be equal to the ones that the whites openly and passionately express against the persona in the poem "If You Should Know Me".



The last stanza of the poem is impregnated with the imagery of hope of the black man's emancipation from the entrapment of subjugation by the apartheid system. Mashige (1996:33) contends that the image of the hatching egg in the last stanza symbolises young virginal life ready to develop maturity and fulfilment. The egg shell's function is two-fold. It serves as a protective cover for the developing embryo, whilst it also ironically symbolises oppression. Literally the egg shell symbolises the apartheid system within which the child (black man) finds himself only to later come to grips with the bitter reality of its suppression.

When the chick hatches it forces the shell to break (and release it) for it needs a new life of innocence. The persona (the chick) pleads his adversaries to judge him innocent (or guilty). He only cherishes freedom and harbours no grudges against any one. The newly-hatched chick symbolises the black man's struggle for political, economic freedom and retention of human dignity in South Africa.

Biko (1978) acknowledges the need for a rigorous Black Consciousness campaign and a committed pursuit for true humanity. By this Biko (1978) signifies that blacks should brave-up and fight for their right to be treated with equality and humanity. They should strive to break out of the shell (socio-economic and political entrapment) quickly to realise their freedom. Mzamane (1992, 356) declares Mtshali to be appealing through this poem for something to be done in order to change the political and economic system which brings untold misery to the large contingent of the country's oppressed population.

In "Nightfall in Soweto", Mtshali comments about the social and psychological sickness of the township life in Soweto. The poet draws the reader's attention to the impact of the Group Areas Act through which most blacks were forcefully moved from their homes (e.g. the renowned forced removals of coloureds from District Six in Cape Town). Industrialisation drew most impoverished blacks to the cities to seek greener pastures.

The township influx led to violence and crime becoming commonplace. The blame for the moral catastrophe caused by crime is put at the door of the apartheid government's political system of the time and the black people themselves.

Nightfall in this poem is projected as an occurrence that inflicts devastation on the residents, instead of a romantic period that should bring relaxation to them after a hard day's work, as shown in the following lines:

Nightfall comes like  
A dreaded disease  
Seeping through the pores  
Of a healthy body  
And ravaging it beyond repair (Mtshali: 1971)

In the above stanza the use of metaphor where nightfall is compared to a “dreaded disease” is proof of the fright that grips people when night falls. Brutal murders by criminally-minded people and the state police targeting freedom fighters, take place under nocturnal concealment. The violence is like a dreaded disease which is incurable. The solution to the violence is not easy to achieve. This is partly because of lack of jobs for blacks and the police who commit the murders incite in-fighting amongst blacks so that they do not stay united in their forged struggle against apartheid.

The visual image of the disease “seeping through the pores”, signifies the fear and sense of helplessness nightfall evokes in blacks. The imagery of the disease ravaging the body beyond repair creates a sense of destruction, destruction of the people's hope of freedom. The poet sees there is anxiety about the fall of the night because it provides concealment for the marauders who brutally pounce upon helpless victims as is evident in the following lines:

A murderer's hand,  
Lurking in the shadows,  
Clasping the dagger,  
Strikes down the helpless victim (Mtshali,1971)

These lines are used by Mtshali to indicate the cold murder of the helpless victims. The phrase “lurking in the shadows” explicitly indicates the risk brought to black people's lives due to non-provision of amenities like electricity to townships to keep the streets and homes illuminated.

The use of the verb “clasping” to indicate the tight grip of the dagger by the murderer shows the evil intention of the murderer to see the victim exterminated without pity. This shows a graphic description of both the victim and the victimiser.

The victim is “slaughtered”, “cornered” by, and becomes “the prey”, “the quarry” of the victimiser. Police officers cornered political activists in the dark of the night and brutally tortured them, possibly to death. The poet uses the first person narrative “I am”, to comprise him as part of the persecution black people experienced in the townships, predominantly in Soweto.

Tenacious persecution and brutal murder of blacks shows how inconsequential black people’s lives were to whites. The word “slaughter” shows the animalistic way in which blacks were killed as they were not considered worthy of being human. Man had lost his values and morals for another man as evident in these lines:

Man has ceased to be man

Man has become beast

Man has become prey

The brutal killing of blacks by the apartheid regime displays that the humanity has become shoddier. The white man has opted to become dreadful as he has lost the courage and will to be democratic (towards blacks). Mtshali has drawn on a situation in which vice has overridden good. The people are at the mercy of criminals and the apartheid police, where even their “match box houses”, cannot “barricade” them from the ruthless policemen who are thirsty for their blood. The police treat black people in a cruel way as shown in the phrase “like a rabid dog/thirsty for my blood”. The police torture people when they are supposed to protect them. This act is indicative of the unbearable circumstances under which black people had to live. In the poems “An Abandoned Bundle” and “Nightfall in Soweto”, The poet refers to the “dog” as the police and their tortured victims as blacks (the baby and the vulnerable blacks respectively).

In “Boy on a Swing”, Mtshali uses an urban setup to highlight the incongruities of township life. Mtshali describes the impact of economic deprivation on the life on an innocent boy.

He describes the geographical disorientation of the young boy “which serves as a figure of his emotional, psychological and social disorientation” (Nemadzivanani, 1991: 16). Mtshali utilizes his poetical ingenuity to arrive at a poem that uncovers the horrible effects of apartheid upon black people in South Africa at the time.

The boy’s economic inequality is seen through the description of his poverty as typified by his “torn” and “tattered” blue shirt. His disorientation is depicted by his “swishing to and fro”, and the “four cardinal points” meeting in his head. This signals the boy’s economic instability in life due to lack of socio-economic provision for his needs in life.

A closer look at the boy’s suffering evokes sympathy in the poet and reader respectively. The political system of the day suppresses the boy’s chances of a stable future through the arrest of his father, rendering him and his mother helpless, and at the mercy of the brutal oppressive system. This is evident in the boy asking unanticipated questions:

Mother!

Where did I come from?

When will I wear long trousers?

Why was my father jailed? (Mtshali:1971)

The boys repeated swishing “to” and “fro” on the swing symbolises his attempt to free himself emotionally, physically, psychologically and socially from the grips of subjugation. The boy is, however, bound to the world symbolised by the swing and being economically dependent on his mother. He is mercilessly deprived of a provider-father through his father’s incarceration by the police. This strips the boy of his paternal identity as evident in, “where did I come from?”, whilst further questing for self-determination “when will I wear long trousers?”, that the mother cannot provide because she is ‘afraid’ of the law.

Nemadzivanani (1991: 35) asserts that through this poem, Mtshali has skilfully and subtly combined his observation and the daily experiences of the black people to protest against a political system that separates families and subjects young children to untold mental anguish, thereby prematurely depriving them of their innocence.

### 3.2.3. Educational deprivation for blacks

In the poem “The Shepherd and His Flock”, Mtshali uses the countryside settlement to explicitly expose the huge economic and educational disparities and deprivations in the life of the black child.

Addey (1976:10) identifies the ingeniousness Mtshali’s poetry in the artistic way in which he employs his “verbal magic to enhance his description of pastoral straightforwardness”.

Mtshali employs witty use of poetry to waylay the reader into assuming the virtuousness of the oppressive apartheid system on the life of the child (blacks). The reader is enticed into the blamelessness of the apartheid system for blacks’ economic and educational disparities by creating a scenario where the shepherd seems to be in harmony with the natural environment. However, as the poem progresses, it becomes apparent to the audience that the persona and environment’s harmony cannot be sustained persistently as it eventually becomes undermined by the shepherd’s frustrations and poverty.

The poem’s deceptive celebration of innocence and the glorification of a harmonious relationship between the shepherd and the natural environment are ironically used by Mtshali to contemptuously critique the incongruity that exists between the shepherd and the farmer’s children. Betty (2015:122) retains that Nadine Gordimer (1974) in her foreword to *Sounds of a Cowhide Drum*, endorses Mtshali to have “verbal magic” – that ability of “naming by experience”, which for fellow black people delivers a “shock of recognition” and in white people, “a revelation of a world they live in and never know”; a world where the whites exploit blacks for their own fortification whilst insensible of their pains of poverty and subjugation.

Betty (2015) further suggests that Mtshali’s writing is, on the face of it, stylistically simple, yet as Nadine Gordimer (1974) points out, is not as simple as it looks. It is balletic and lyrical. His verbal magic – the creation of mood and place - contains a sting, that leaves a burning question or a statement in the mind of the reader (Mtshali, 2007: xv). The evidence is in seen in the poem “The Shepherd and His Flock” which concludes suddenly with a wakefulness into the mind of the boy

greeting the white farmer's children en-route to school, and wondering if he (the Shepherd himself) will ever go to school. This is seen in the lines:

The rays of the sun  
are like a pair of scissors  
cutting the blanket  
of the dawn from the sky ...

O! Wise Sun above,  
Will you ever guide  
Me into school? (Mtshali, 2012: 2, 3).

The emotive simplicity of Mtshali's writing in this poem is pregnant with underlying ironic connotative undertones. On the literal level it simply signifies a child "dreamingly" wishing for an opportunity to go to school. The deep underlying figurative connotation is the irony by which the poet implies that the child is reduced by oppressive laws to a shepherd for a white farmer whilst his (the farmer's children) are allowed to go to school. The sting in the poet's innocent use of words lies in the fact the black child is used to generate wealth that will be used to advance the white child's education whilst the shepherd (black child) benefits nothing out of his toil.

The morning sun holds symbolic virtue of hope for the shepherd as a southern star biblically was a guiding star for the wise men to Bethlehem to give tribute to the birth of the messiah (Jesus Christ). The rising sun showers the poet with hope of emancipation from child labour to a better future. The shepherd burns to go to school.

The pun on "sun" and "son" brings insinuations of hope for the oppressed to be saved from their subjugation as the son (Jesus) saved the world from the grips of sin. The persona implores the sun (the good Shepherd in biblical connotations) to guide him to a better tomorrow devoid of frustration and suffering. Invoking Jesus Christ in his affairs signifies the persona's desperation to be freed from his intense suffering.

The poet exploits biblical inferences to invoke in the reader emotions of sympathy for the shepherd (Mashige, 1996:37). The poet further utilizes biblical connotations mockingly to ridicule the hypocrisy of a South Africa that confesses Christianity, and that in a country in which young black children are confined to child labour (shepherdery) while their white equivalents get an education. This is Mtshali's way of explicitly elucidating educational, economic and political disparities in South Africa. The poem moves from an "ordinary" and "tarnished" event to becoming a stinging critique of the deliberate socio-political deprivation of blacks (Mashige, 1996:38).

The poet uses the poem to vent his anger, pain and frustration against a socio-economic system that relegates black children to shepherdery to the advantage of their educated white counterparts. Mtshali also strongly protests against the abuse of black children as child labour. Becoming a shepherd is not something black children can take out of their own volition, but it is a situation that the apartheid system imposed upon them. The poet highlights the fact that if blacks do not take a stand against subjugation, their children will graduate as shepherds whilst the white children progress to higher levels of education.

A black child reduced to a child labourer career will become economically and intellectually dependent on the farmer (white man) for the rest of his natural life. The poet wants to conscientise the readers to the problem of socio-economic deprivation facing them so that they may rise up and act against it.

#### **3.2.4. Conclusion**

The main intention of Mtshali, through the above poems, is to conscientise the politically, culturally and socio-economically deprived blacks to realise their predicament of subjugation and strive towards eliminating it. Mzamane (1992:356) elucidates that Mtshali's poetry is an attempt to appeal to the "consciousness of those who brandish power and could exercise the vote" to do something in order to change the political and economic system which brings untold misery to the majority of the country's population. Mtshali's poetry in this study serves as a tool of mass mobilisation against the socio-economic exploitation of blacks by the white apartheid administration pre-1994.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **THE EXPLOITATION OF BLACKS AS HUMAN LABOURERS**

#### **4.1. INTRODUCTION**

The poems discussed in this section aim at conscientising the reader that many black people were exploited during the apartheid era by a system that reduced them to being capable of only offering physical labour. The real artist in the world is human labour. It is human labour which has created the social environment out of the natural environment. All the modern technology and science and the arts are a product of human labour. When the product of that social human labour becomes the property of the idle few, can the artist be said to be free? ... The liberation of human labour is the only condition for the true liberation of the human being, the artist (Ngugi, 1983:67).

Benjamin (1970:256) avows that the class struggle is a fight for the basic material things without which no superior and spiritual things could exist. Marxists argue that the motivation for apartheid was economic exploitation, with racial oppression playing a significant role in the formation of classes. Narisimulu (1998:13) affirms that given the composition of the South African society, its history of colonisation and white minority domination, the poor working class has been largely diagnosed as black

Biko (1978: 97) further avers that the political power struggle during the apartheid era was strategically orchestrated for economic reasons. Sibisi (2013:125-126) upholds that the Nationalist party leaders intentionally empowered whites economically over blacks so that whites could reap reimbursements and civil liberties at the expense of blacks. The moral intention of the poems to be discussed is to conscientise the reader of the challenges the workers (mainly blacks) had in their working conditions and the workers' commitment for to argue with their exploitative employers to change the conditions around.



## 4.2. ANALYSIS OF POEMS

Challenges of exploitation faced by workers were not only confined to the farms. In the poem “Going to Work”, Mtshali critically looks at the discomfort that the South African black workers suffered (and still do) when they travel from their urban slums to their work places in the city.

Blacks were not permitted to live in the city to enable them to be next to their work places. Under apartheid laws, black were compelled to live under squalid conditions of the township. Mashige (1996:38) affirms that blacks were “permitted” to live close by in townships to be able to administer to the socio-economic needs of their white employers.

The black man’s survival struggle was also evident in the deliberate long distances they were forced to travel at exorbitant travel fares. Transport was also in dire shortage, forcing the workers to be crammed in a few trains like sardines; conditions intentionally created for the depersonalisation of the black humanity. A “thousand black bodies” are packed in coaches like objects. The dehumanization is reinforced by the metaphoric use of the phrase “encased in eleven coaches” which illustrates the degree of discomfort the workers travelled under (Mashige, 1996:39).

Going to work becomes a struggle for survival for black workers because of the limited transport facilities which force workers to travel in overloaded trains. This is seen in the lines:

encased in eleven coaches  
that hurtle through stations  
into the red ribbon of dawn  
city skyscrapers (Mtshali:1971)

The trains move at a high speed, “hurtle” through stations making it more uncomfortable for the crammed passengers. The use of irony in this stanza further exacerbates the trauma the workers have to deal with in their lives. The irony of the whole discomfort the white man creates for the worker is that he expects him to work “productively” after travelling under a lot of discomfort.

The oppressor's underhand methods to harm and hurt the black worker are reduced to a sham as the train always arrives safely at its destinations. Under normal circumstances the phrase "red ribbon" would have romantic connotations where one would watch the sun set relaxed, marvelling at its beautiful horizon. The irony is that the conditions of discomfort under which the workers travel to work would not proffer anything romantic.

Instead of being a presentiment of hope and the beginning of a new life, the conditions become a symbol of wretchedness. The workers sweat to build the skyscrapers that they ironically cannot occupy, to be closer to their work. The workers cannot become part of the community that enjoys the facilities they have produced as they are black. The Group Areas Act segregates them to the doldrums on the periphery of the city skyscrapers' glittering lights. They are only allowed to be in the vicinity of the skyscrapers when they have to do repairs or otherwise attend to the domestic needs of the white community.

The poem elucidates that the workers do not take the exploitation hands down though. In the long run the suppression activates them to start revolting. In the second stanza the poet asserts:

A commuter mumbles  
like a dreamer muffled  
by a brandy nightcap

The persona confirms that "a commuter mumbles" of the torturous life he has to endure. The mumbling is an attempt to incapacitate the system that inflicts suppressive laws on him. He arrives home late from work and has to wake up early to catch a train to work after having slept insufficiently. He supplements his lack of sleep by trying to catch a nap in the discomfort of the congested train without any success.

The use of the simile "like a dreamer muffled" is indicative of the attempt by the persona to challenge the oppressive laws. It is unconscious or indirect because the complainant is afraid of the brutality of the pervading power of the system.

This is also indicative of the permanence of the suffering of the workers under the exploitative conditions. The worker “muffles” is indicative of the tiredness or lack of energy by the worker after the long train ride after working all day. It may probably also be due to meagre wages he receives that makes it impossible for him to provide for his rent, train fares and even basic needs for his family back home in the rural areas from where he has migrated. In a nutshell the mumbling represents the anger the anger of a black man in a South Africa that is wealthy but still has an overwhelming number of its black people teetering on the brink of poverty (Mashige, 1996:40).

In the second stanza the persona indicates the continued misery and plight of the workers when he emphasizes:

I'm a cog in Mr, Jobstein's wheel.  
and Mr Jobstein is a big wheel  
rolling under Mr de Wiel's ox wagon (Mtshali:1971)

The three lines in the stanza indicate Mtshali's eloquent use of metaphor to drive home the message of the workers' plight to the reader. The persona describes himself as a “cog” to indicate how insignificant he is to the employer. Ironically Mr. Jobstein does not appear to be an important part of the gradient as he claims to be “Mr Jobstein is a big wheel rolling under Mr de Wiel's ox wagon”. He appears to be the master but it is revealed that he is also under the control of the bigger master. The reader is drawn to the powerless employee - powerful employer position the worker is juxtaposed in. The worker is indispensable for both Mr. Jobstein and Mr. de Wiel. He, therefore, needs to be well taken care of. The irony is that the absence of the insignificant cog will lead to the failure of the wheel to roll and subsequently, the wagon of Mr. de Wiel to move.

Simply put, it means without the cog (worker) there will be no production, without Mr, Jobstein, no supervision, and without Mr, de Wiel's ox wagon, no marketing and selling of the finished product. Mashige (1996:41) pronounces that through the use of metaphor and irony the persona highlights to the reader (and the uncaring employers) that insignificant as the workers seem to be to the employers (white bosses), they are an obligatory part of the economic machinery of the country and,

therefore, must be treated better. Chapman (1982:174) further upholds the poem as evidence of Mtshali's ability to meticulously and artistically employ the use of metaphor and irony, to combine his experiences and observations to confirm the black worker's entrapment in a socio-economic system which has been deliberately designed to suppress him.

The poem highlights the harsh conditions of life black workers have to wrangle with. The persona submits that it would have been human and considerate for the employer to provide the worker with good facilities to enable good productivity.

Mtshali further shows his deep understanding of the harsh township experiences he and other township workers had to contend with under the uncaring repressive apartheid system. Through all the harsh experiences of life he interrogates a racially divided and incongruent country polarised across the colour line. Mtshali does not disentangle himself, but integrates himself as part of the victim's world.

His ingenuity is observed through his ability to display not only anger and bitterness, but also wry humour and compassion despite all the hardships that are part and parcel of his daily life that he exposes. Although much of Mtshali's light is cast upon exposing the hardships imposed by the apartheid regime on blacks, he also moans the submissive and complacent role blacks play as victims within the system. Mashige (1996:42) reasons that as much as Mtshali attributes blame on the architects of apartheid, he is also able to recognise how destructive the moral renunciation of blacks to the system can be.

Mtshali dedicates the poem "The Washerwoman's Prayer" to his mother-in-law. Through the poem the persona reflects on how a maid is overworked under an apartheid economic system without incentives to look back at. The woman is overworked doing washing for the white man with little remuneration. This exploitation results in extreme physical damage to the woman's body as expressed in the phrase "look at her hands raw, knobbly and calloused".

Mtshali overtly brings the direct impression of the physical strain on the woman's body through these lines:

Look at her hands  
raw, knobbly and calloused.  
look at her face  
like a bean skin soaked in brine (Mtshali,1971:5)

The poet's choice of diction immediately draws the reader's attention to washer woman's physical strain from too much work, to summon their empathy for the persona. The term "raw" insinuates that her hands are hardened, rough and scratched from the hard washing she did over the years. Further damage done to her hands is indicated through the words "knobbly" and "calloused", suggesting that they have been hardened thick by hard labouring.

The woman's labour-battered body is clearly brought out through the use of the simile "like a bean soaked in brine". Her incessant contact with soapy water has made her hands shrivel like beans that have been soaked in salt water overnight. Her hands are no longer supple and soft. This indicates the damage that constant contact with water does to her. The poet wants to criticize the white master's inconsideration towards their employee, where improving her working facilities (buying a washing machine) could ease her working conditions.

The use of the word "toiled" in the second stanza further indicates the extent to which the washerwoman is overworked. She is looking too tired from being encumbered with work. The poet wants to conscientise the reader to the fact that the woman is being exploited to the level of a slave. The woman cannot revolt against the authority of her "master" as she is afraid of the repercussions. The woman has become resigned to the position of incapacitation which she has been reduced to economically by the apartheid system.

Biko (1978:30) emphasises that black people have acknowledged their positions of prejudice as inevitable. He proclaims that blacks are traumatised by the white power structure to a conceding position.

Biko (1978) asserts that it does not matter what circumstances black people are exposed to, black people are not cognisant enough to take a hard standpoint to fight against exploitation. Biko's (1978) assertion that blacks did hard work and hardly complained is evident in the lines below:

In frost-freckled mornings  
In sun-scorched afternoons  
She has drudged murmurless  
(Mtshali 1971:51)

Biko (1978) advocates for the black man's counterattack against the white man's wielding of his power over him/her. Biko (1978:30, 31) argues that it is wrong for black people to condemn the white regime in private only, but in the presence of the police or their white employers, become the first to praise the repressive regime.

In the stanza above, the washerwoman experiences cold working conditions "frost-freckled mornings" and the hard scorching weather "sun-scorching afternoons", without lodging any complaint against her employer. The evidence is her going on with her work despite its heaviness and harsh weather conditions "she has drudged murmurless". For Biko(1978) and Mtshali (1971) this was a sign of complacency by blacks as represented in this poem by the washer woman.

The use of the word "drudge" by the poet emphasises the degree of struggle the woman goes through in her work. The load may be heavy for her weather-battered body from the frost and sun. She complains to the Lord instead of taking the matter into her own hands. The poet does not directly put the blame on the shoulders of the woman though. He also blames the suppressive system which exploits blacks into submissiveness through hiding under the cover of religion. This resorting to God's intervention by the washerwoman is established by following lines in her prayer:

Good Lord! Dear Lord!' she shouted  
'Why am I so tormented?  
How long have I lamented?  
Tell me Lord, tell me, O Lord.'(Mtshali 1971:5)

The washer woman no longer considers prayer to be beneficial as it does not immediately come to her aid “how long have I lamented?”. The speaker is asking God why he is not punishing white people for exploiting her for years. Alvarez-Pereyre (1984:178) argues with bitter irony that the church helps to perpetuate the existing situation by teaching resignation. He criticises the Church for encouraging people to turn the other cheek when lashed instead of meeting fire head-on with fire.

Alvarez-Pereyre (1984) further reveals that behind the image of the washerwoman who has worked hard all her life without complaining to accomplish the dehumanising tasks set to her by the suppressive master, it is difficult not to discern the symbolic representation of the black people kept in bondage for so long, at least in part through religion. Biko (1978:34) cautions against people’s capitulating to the white man’s preaching, as they exploit the Bible for their own gain.

He advances that the Bible’s message needs to be redefined to suit the struggling black masses. Biko (1978) recommends that the Bible should illustrate that it is a sin for people allow themselves to be exploited. Moreover, Biko (1978) advances that the Bible should preach against the wrongly-spread propaganda to Christians that the white man’s authority is constituted in heaven. The poet tries to charge the washerwoman with sin in this poem for allowing herself to be exploited by not claiming equal, dignified and humane treatment by the master as purported in the Bible that all people are to love one another and treat each other as equals

The answer that the washerwoman receives sinks her deeper into resignation of exploitation:

‘My child! Dear child’, she heard,  
‘suffer for those who live in gilded sin,  
Toil for those who swim in a bowl of pink gin’

The answer clearly indicates that the washerwoman defines the bible message through the ideology of white people. For the woman the message is submit to suppression with the belief that she will find joy in heaven. The woman has been brainwashed to be subservient, an ideology Biko (1978) encourages blacks to

dismantle. Her response to God's answer is proof enough of the washerwoman's nonparticipation:

'Thank you Lord! Thank you Lord.

Never again will I ask

Why must I carry this task,'

(Mtshali 1971:5)

The last stanza concludes the persona's total acquiescence to exploitation. She is conditioned into compliance with the system. She resists within the limitations of the apartheid system instead of counterattacking beyond its boundaries to be free from subjugation. She is frightened of retaliating against the system to be set free as shown through the phrase "never again will I ask why I must carry this task".

Alvarez-Pereyre (1984:178-179) emphasises that the poem's concluding stanza expresses quite unambiguously the fact that the washerwoman's patience is at an end and that Christ's arguments, seem flawed to her. Narisimulu (1998:133) states that workers in South Africa (most dominantly women) have been systematically oppressed. They have had starvation wages and harsh working and living conditions. Chapman (1982:182-3) avers that it is the absence of alternatives that leaves women most vulnerable to exploitation.

Mtshali (1982:167) through this and other poems criticises the hypocrisy and inhumanity of the employers and "their" God. He maintains that not only is the system of labour rejected, but the system of religion that naturalises the authority of the dominant group (whites) is rejected too.

Through the poem titled "The Miner", Mtshali arouses the audience to the impact of exploitation on a man who works in a mine. Sibisi (2013:147) states that the miner's adverse work condition is important to Mtshali as his aspiration is to appeal to the white employers to eradicate the harsh conditions under which black people work. The readers' attention is drawn to the entrapment of workers in harsh economic conditions enforced by the apartheid system. The miner in this poem is presented as being overworked like the domestic worker in "The Washerwoman's Prayer".



In line two the poet describes his discomfort at work by saying that “he pops out of the shaft” instead of saying he came out from the mine. The use of the simile to compare the miner’s movement to “a fast moving bullet”, is proof that he was quick to leave the mine shaft; an indication that he did not enjoy being at work. The miner becomes happy when it is time to knock off to leave the exploitative working conditions behind. He does not enjoy being a miner, but is chained to his job due to having been deprived of a good education by the apartheid system.

The miner drags his feet when he walks from work which suggests he is exhausted from being overworked. His feet are probably tired and aching from pushing the cocopan the whole day. The poet uses irony through mentioning that the “miner will relax his strained limbs on a coil-mattress bed”. After a hard day’s work the miner is expected to have a good night’s rest. The “coil mattress”, however, is not ideal to give one tired miner a soothing sleep. The poet invokes feelings of empathy from the reader to the miner, whilst in contrast the employer is ridiculed for his uncaring attitudes towards meeting his workers’ needs.

The poem illustrates the economic conditions of the miner, and his unfavourable work environment. He is probably paid low wages so that he cannot afford a comfortable bed; nor can he afford a decent house as he lives in a compound. Mine workers were restricted by the discriminatory Group Areas Act to be confined to harsh living in compounds owned by the mine. They were denied visits by their families or venture outside the compounds; this shows the highest exploitation of man power. The exploitation of the miner is shown through lines:

With gnarled hands  
Daubed with gold-tinted ochre  
To wash a face  
And armpits mouldy with sweat of pushing a coco pan  
Down the rails into the ore-crushing mills  
(Mtshali 1971:35)

In line 6 the miner's hands are described as "gnarled" because of hard work inflicted on the miner. The hands might be bruised due to lack of provision of protective gloves for workers, leading to them becoming rough and twisted. In line 7 the hands are described as spattered with dirt "daubed with gold-tinted ochre". The dirty hands symbolise the degraded life of poverty where the miner lives in dirt because his meagre wages prevent him from looking after his hygiene. The irony is that the miners are tinted with gold-ochre (gold dust) in line 6: the dust from the gold owned by the white employers. They get richer whilst the real gold diggers get poorer.

The workers' poor hygiene maintenance is further highlighted by "armpits mouldy with sweat". The workers work long hours without time to bathe themselves. They probably cannot afford toiletries to cleanse themselves. The miner is overworked to the level of not having time to bath due to exhaustion. The inhumane treatment of workers to the level of slaves is accentuated in lines 9 and 10, where miners are said to "push a cocopan down the rails into the ore-crushing mill". A miner pushing a cocopan full of rocks down the hill runs the risk of being crushed; something the employer does not care about because the black worker is believed to be subservient and expendable and not human.

Like the woman in "The Washerwoman's Prayer", the miner is resigned to be subservient as he is aware of his harsh travelling, working and living conditions, but can do nothing to free himself from them. He travels in congested trains, works long hours, lacks proper provision of working, bath or accommodation facilities. He is resigned to accepting conditions as they are as he feels that they were inescapable for a black man. He is resolute and gratified to execute his tasks as prescribed by his white master without questioning why. According to Biko (1978), black people had acceded to being powerless; they thought that their reduction was preordained under the white power structure, which to a conscientised observer, was shocking.

The miner in this poem concedes to the belief that the white master is mentally superior to him. This is evidenced by the rhyme: "brawn" and "brain". He says he is the brute force, the muscle whilst the white man is the brain. The man comforts himself from the pain of his dominance by drinking "he shakes a plastic skal at the beer hall and gulps down the beer".

The miner has given in to exploitation and is hopeless of ever shaking off the harsh life. This submission to subjugation is evidenced in the following lines:

He shakes a plastic skal in noisy beer hall  
And gulps down the beer and strikes the chest  
A victory over a day's work:  
'Hurray, I'm a brawn-  
And you're the brain (Mtshali, 1971:35)

The choice of the word "skal" is typical of a township set-up where blacks drink beer at beer halls out of a one litre glass bottle called a "skal", in typical township compromise language or 'fanagalo'. The blacks reminisce about the rural life back home, where they would freely enjoy drinking beer. The poet describes that the miner "gulps" instead of saying he drinks in huge amounts. These immense gulps are a sign that he tries to drown some sort of pressure he is under.

His frustration from an overwhelmingly suppressive life at the mine reduces him to behaving unreasonably. He does not drink to enjoy the beer but overdose to forget about the suffering at the hands of the uncaring master. Engels (1892:122) asserts that the miner is frustrated by this inhuman treatment of the workers by their bosses when the working men are pronounced as follows:

"The lucky to work are deprived of all enjoyments except sexual indulgence and drunkenness; are worked hard every day to the point of complete exhaustion of their mental and physical energies, and are thus spurred on the maddest excess in the only two enjoyments at their command." All this Mtshali illustrates through his poetry to reflect the white man's intention to dominate blacks into servitude.

### **4.3. CONCLUSION**

The chapter analyses a selection of poems on the exploitation of workers to make the reader conscious about the socio-economic challenges faced by black people in a suppressive, capitalistic apartheid regime. The workers work extremely long hours, under unhygienic and potentially dangerous conditions. The workers are separated from their families with possibilities of a family breakdown.

Muvundi (2014) maintains that the black workers' conditions of work to be the same throughout the world. Engels (1892:61) says the following about the worker in the eighteenth century, which equally applied and still applies to the South African blacks' working conditions. Engels (1982) designated it as thus:

For the poor man, no man has the slightest concern. Cast into the whirlpool, he must struggle through as well as he can. If he is so happy as to find work, i.e., if the bourgeois does him the favour to enrich himself by means of him, wages await him which scarecely suffice to keep him body and soul together.

The intention of Mtshali through this poem is to conscientise those who are maligned to realise their predicament so that they can organise and rise against the exploiter/oppressor. The main aim of this chapter is to condemn the apartheid regime for its well-orchestrated exploitation of the black man.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **POEMS THAT EXPOSE POVERTY AND DEMAND CHRISTIANS' ACCOUNTABILITY**

#### **5.1. INTRODUCTION**

Mtshali's poems are intended for the fringe of the English speaking white population that reads poetry. But although this public may be educated, it is no less ignorant of the real conditions of poverty of the African with whom it rubs shoulders without seeing the evidence on a daily basis (Alvarez-Pereyre, 1984:172). Alvarez-Pereyre (1984) further argues that although Mtshali never presents the communities in a position of conflict; although he always adopts a restrained albeit firm tone; although he plays at being naïve the better to attack, he nonetheless fulfils his role as the revealer of the truth, in other words, as a man of protest.

#### **5.2. ANALYSIS OF THE POEMS**

##### **5.2.1. POEMS ON POVERTY AND HUNGER**

Mtshali introduces the themes of poverty and hunger in his poems through children. The intention is to stimulate in the reader feelings of compassion for the greater majority of Africans who live below the poverty line or even to show the future adult in the suffering child (Pereyre, 1979:173). Black children are commonly the first victims of malnutrition.

The poet tries to highlight the brutality of the apartheid system's orchestrated desire to keep the black people economically dependent on the white people. Mtshali exposes the impact of hunger on Africans through a child in the poem "The Face of Hunger"

I counted ribs on his concertina chest:  
Bones protruding as if chiselled,  
By a sculptor's hand of famine (Mtshali, 1971).

The poet utilises the first person narrative "I" to indicate that he is directly affected by the poverty. The economic deprivation of the bread winners through low wages afflicts their children adversely.

The severity of the poverty is illustrated through the poet being able to “count the ribs” of the child. The use of the noun “concertina” to describe the child’s thin bony chest shows the extremity of the malnutrition. One can see bones outlined “protruding” through the skin.

The use of personification “chiselled by a sculptor’s hand of famine” where famine is given qualities of a sculptor is important to show how famine (as a result of the apartheid system not nature) decides to sculpt (give miserable education and economic opportunities) blacks to disable them to meet the needs of their children. The malnutrition is further heightened by the use of the simile in describing the child’s skin in the following lines:

The skin was pale and taut

Like a glove on a doctor’s hand (Mtshali, 1971)

The child’s body has used up all the fat stored in the body to augment the child’s hunger. It looks thin “like a glove on a doctor’s hand”. The skin has been stretched dry because of poor nutrition or lack of it. The poet also evokes the reader’s compassion through the simile, “his tongue darted in and out like a chameleon’s snatching a confetti of flies”, to indicate the hungry child’s desperation for any type of food to satiate his hunger. The poet evokes sympathy in the reader for the child and criticism for the apartheid system for depriving the parent of the economic independence to enable him/her to feed the child.

The ending of the poem is thought-provoking: a comparison of the rumbling of the child’s stomach with a den of lions which enables the poet to introduce a metaphor of the roaring lions to create the extent of the child’s hunger. The metaphor is also used to warn the system or oppressor that they could also be attacked or eaten by lions (the people with courage like lions could fight back).The child’s extreme hunger represents the extent to which black people were impoverished. Blacks were in eternal dire-straits of poverty, “roaring day and night”.

In "A Brazier in the Street" (1972:19), Mtshali draws the reader's attention to four urchins huddled together around a brazier. They try to forget their cold and hunger by "smoking cigarette stubs and swopping stories/ like seamen telling tales over a bottle of rum". (Mtshali, 2012:42). Mtshali (2012) further attests that the confession by one of them by mumbling that he "once ate a loaf of bread with nothing", betrays their theme, but goes a mile to showcase the blacks' degree of lack/poverty. Whilst white people enjoy a variety of fulfilling dishes, blacks "eat bread with nothing".

When a woman comes out of a nearby house and fetches the brazier to prepare her meal due to the falling night, the urchins are left "gulped down" by a "starless night". The use of personification where the night is compared to a monster that swallows the urchins whole, "gulped down", indicates the dangers the children are pitted against at nightfall; the common challenge being of children going to sleep hungry. They may also be assaulted by marauding night gangs; they may freeze to death without anyone realising their plight and coming to their rescue. The description of the night as "starless" darkens the struggle that the homeless children go through every night. The "stars" represent hope, whilst the "starless night" depicts hopelessness for the children. There seems to be no light in the dark in the lives of the children but hopelessness. For blacks there seem to be no light at the end of the tunnel.

The poet's excellent use of the noun "starless" is deliberate and shows the hopelessness of the children in ever overcoming their suffering in life. The "smoking of cigarette stubs" by the children indicates the loss of morals by the children due to their lack of parental guidance. The urchins/homeless kids represent children who have to provide for their families at a young age (instead of the normal way where adults provide for their children) due to the economic challenges their families face.

The poet relates to the reader the pitiless situation in which the homeless children "urchins" find themselves. They are left temporarily to the warm care of the brazier, which when later appropriated, leaves them "gulped down" by a "starless night". He takes the reader closer to the children's predicament caused by poverty due their parents' economic deprivation by the oppressive apartheid regime.

In the poem “A Brazier in the Street”, Mtshali uses child-like imagery to portray the cold and hunger experienced by street children:

The wintry air nipped their navels  
as a calf would suck a nipple  
the starless night gaped  
and gulped down the foursome.  
(Mtshali ,1972:19).

Mtshali uses climatic conditions preying upon the children ““wintry air nipped their navels” to indicate the effect of the hunger and cold upon the children. There is irony in the simile ... ‘a calf sucks at the nipple’. A calf sucks at the nipple and receives nourishment, whereas the children receive nothing – they are instead swallowed ‘gulped’ by the night. The poet suggests the plight of the homeless children in a disinterested society (Narisimulu, 1978:41).

#### **5.2.2. THE POEMS THAT EXPOSE AND DEMAND CHRISTIANS’ ACCOUNTABILITY**

The motive behind the theme of the Christian’s accountability is to conscientise the reader that Christianity is supposed to be responsible for advocating justice amongst all races, a responsibility that was consciously disregarded by Christianity in the apartheid South Africa). Mtshali most critically hungers to conscientise the black people that they have their own culture that they could call their own and be proud of.

Biko (1978:102) states that the Christians were the vanguard of the colonialist movement which in their view was to “civilise and educate the savages and familiarise them with the Christian values”. Biko (1978) further proclaims that the missionaries understood black people to be barbarians who had no religion of their own and, therefore, needed to be civilised. Biko (1978:49) rebuts the belief that Africans had no religion of their own with, emphasising that Africans “are a deeply religious people”. Sibisi (2013:105) concurs with Biko’s assertion when he states that “Africans believed in the existence of God; and had their own community of saints, angels and ancestors that they communicated with”.



After taking a very critical view of Christianity; Biko (1978) resolved that it was irrelevant for black people as it had no message for them. He argues that preachers constantly urged black people to blame themselves for their oppression, which distracted blacks from focusing on the struggle for emancipation they were involved with.

Sibisi (2013:105) concurs with Biko's contention that black people needed to redefine the message in the Bible to make it relevant to them as the struggling masses. Biko (1978:61) criticises Christianity for operating like an ideal religion to facilitate the annexation of people. Still, Biko (1978) pronounces that during the apartheid period it was this ideal religion that endorsed the subjugation of black people. It is from this diagnosis that Black Consciousness advocated for Black Theology. According to Biko (1978:34), Black Theology differed with the idea that black people were spiritually poor, and also conflicted with the assumption that black people's interaction with the ancestors was a superstition, whilst Christianity was advocated as a scientific religion.

Sibisi (2013:106) proclaims Black Theology as important as it sought to talk to black people in their own language, which they could understand and adapt to. Mtshali's Black consciousness poetry strived to make the reader identify the urgency of the re-awakening of the sleeping black masses about their own original beliefs and religion. Through this chapter, Mtshali intended to educate black people on how Christianity was not an ideal religion the way it was advocated by the missionaries of the Christian religion.

In his poem "A Voice from the Dead", Mtshali (1971:17) informs the reader of the dialogue between the persona and his mother. The persona's mother speaks to him from beyond the grave. The poem centres on the theme of the absence of love and its consequences (Alvarez-Pereyre, 1979:176). Mtshali (1971) in his poem "Walls" lists the famous walls (hatred, oppression, evil) that keep people apart. However, Mtshali affirms that the one wall that cannot be scaled is the one that encircles the heart and in whose moat the water of fear stagnates. Mtshali (1971) indicates this wall to be love that flows amid people of all races.

Betty (2015:129) states that many times, Mtshali grapples with the trappings of Christianity and exposes the failure of orthodox religion to give support to the oppressed. Nevertheless, he does not turn away from the Christianity heard, ironically not from the pulpit, but from the voice of his mother in “A voice from the dead”, where his mother says:

“Hell is the hate flickering in your eyes”

The above phrase echoes Biko’s (1978) assertion that black people are a religious people who do not know hell; and that they do not have nor harbour hate. They assimilated hate from the one that has “hate flickering in his heart”, which is the white man; the architect of hell. From the poem “A Voice from the Dead”, Mtshali (1971:17), educates the reader about the black people’s traditional religion, where there is connection between man and his ancestors. The black man is made aware of his traditional religion that is different from the Christian religion. The poet informs the black man that his god loves him and could not have created him only to allow him to suffer under the dominance of the white man.

The poet through this poem casts off the belief that heaven only exists in the universe. Mtshali (1971) proclaims heaven to exist in the heart of a person. The poet’s perception is evidenced in the lines:

Yes, Heaven is in your heart.

God Is no picture

With a snow-white beard.

What!

Yes, God is

That crippled beggar

sprawling at the street corner.

There is no hell burning

with sulphur and brimstone.

What!

Yes, Hell is

The hate flickering

In your eye.(Mtshali 1971:17).

Mtshali criticises the Christian's belief that God is a snow-white bearded being. This is because God is in the image of a black man too. The poet analyses God to be close to those who are suffering from hunger and strife.

God is seen to be manifesting himself in the form of a beggar in this poem as illustrated in the phrase, "Yes, God is that crippled beggar sprawling in the street". Beggars in this poem represent the black man. God (love) is also manifested in the poor (black) people and not always in white people. Mtshali wants to conscientise the black people to redefine themselves and find themselves as God is with them. The poet also criticises the belief of hell spread by the missionaries and black preachers to black people. Fear of hell is a tool used to keep people submissive. Mtshali points out that hell is the hate that people harbour in their hearts. It instigates oppression in white people, whilst in black people it instigates resignation.

Mtshali encourages the reader to review the belief that he holds about heaven, hell and God. The poem deconstructs the view that black people must suffer on earth with the belief of gaining happiness in heaven, because heaven (happiness) is here on earth. It is attained through harbouring love for others. Biko (1978:61) disputes that Christianity operated as an 'idyllic' religion, for during the apartheid era it was not embraced to advocate for justice across all races; it was used for the subjugation of black people.

In the poem "Just a Passer-by", Mtshali (1971:56), condemns hypocrisy between "brothers" and "neighbours" who live under the same "roof", meaning in the same country. He reflects on the hypocrisy shown by whites to blacks with whom they reside in South Africa. Mtshali criticizes Christianity for enhancing subjugation when it is supposed to uphold and advocate for justice. Biko (1978:108) insists that one of the fundamental canons of Black Consciousness to be the totality of black people's involvement in the struggle for self-emancipation.

This poet throws sarcasm at the helplessness of the suppressed blacks in South Africa under the apartheid regime. The poet admits to witnessing the clubbing of a man with a “knobkerrie”, although he does not come to his rescue. He instead runs into a church to pray. The poet declares that it was hypocritical for the persona to hide behind his religion when he is expected to utilise his faith to promote fairness and justice in the liberation of his fellow-blacks. He uses the word “clobber” (line 1) instead of “hit” as it has a more connotative and emotive meaning. To clobber means to hit someone savagely with the intention to do grievous bodily harm or even kill. The poet wants to illustrate by means of this brutal attack of an innocent man, the violence that happens in black townships.

What worries the poet is that no one talks about it. In line 2 and 3 the persona is said to “scream like a victim of slaughter” instead of “crying” (which might not attract attention as a scream would) to indicate the severity of the pain the victim experiences from the beating. Its severity leads him to “bleed from the nostrils” (line 5). The bleeding represents the blood shed by all political activists and ordinary black people who were slaughtered by police in the apartheid struggle in South Africa. In stanza 2, the persona ironically just passes by without helping the victim and goes into the church. He is not moved to helping the victim. The irony rests in the fact that the clobbered man happens to be his brother.

Biko (1978) maintains that as a Christian the persona is expected to defend justice by showing sympathy and piety for the “clobbered” man. The cowardly act of selfish virtue in the persona reflects the total failure and passivity that apartheid era religion offers towards the rights of the blacks. For Biko (1978), religion is a way for Christians to escape from reality, and under its camouflage the persona (also a Christian) can proudly testify:

‘Lord! I love you  
I also love my neighbour. Amen.’

The poets' declaration of love for the victim is a contradiction of what he feels inside. He feels rage and detestation for being afraid to stand by his brother, but he plays about his feelings in church when he pretentiously declares ... "I also love my neighbour. Amen"(line 10).

The poet is in denial of the truth that he was supposed to stand by the neighbour. The poet exposes the kind of hypocrisy that dominated South Africa in the apartheid era. Biko (1978) pronounces that most Christians were impervious to the suffering and entrapment of the black people by repressive laws of the system of the apartheid era. They hid behind Christianity as a diversion or escapism to appease their guilty conscience of being apathetic to the harsh life faced by blacks.

In stanza 4 the persona leaves the church "strutting". To "strut" means to walk proudly with your head held high; to walk with a kingly self-confidence and haughty carelessness as though he had not witnessed a man being brutally beaten... "heart as light as an angel's kiss/ on the cheek of a saintly soul..." (lines,12-13). She walks past the spot where the black man was killed without looking on, and walks home. This kind of reaction shows that in the apartheid era the death of a black man meant very little. Survival outweighs sympathy. Pretending not to see was better than seeing and reacting because one would not feel the pinch (clobbering and possibly the arrest) while fighting for what was right. Most of the blacks lacked total involvement and commitment in the struggle for self-emancipation.

Christians adopted a self-justifying set-up and pretended as if they were not aware about the subjugation of blacks, when in fact they recognised everything as seen in the lines (18-19):

'Have you heard? They've killed your brother.'

'O! No! I heard nothing. I have been to church.'

The poet is shocked in line 19 to hear of the death of his brother. He had hoped that as a Christian subjugation would not affect him, but to no avail. Christianity was a camouflage through which oppression was strengthened whilst the black Christians were taught resignation. Mtshali is a master at exposing to the reader the horror of apartheid under the cloak of Christian hypocrisy.

### **5.2.3. Conclusion**

This chapter explores the educational and religious conditions designated for the black man by the South African establishment in order to subjugate him/her to render him/her eternally subservient to the white man. In this chapter a selection of poems has been analysed to conscientise blacks about their educational deprivation and the essence to thwart supremacy to rid themselves of economic dependence on white people. It also examined poems that criticised the Christian religion and conscientised the brainwashed black Christians of their own religion, so that they could re-define it to make it relevant to them, for it to be used to solve their socio-political problems.

## CHAPTER 6

### 6.1 POEMS THAT EXPOSE RACIALIST ATTITUDES

#### 6.1.1. INTRODUCTION

More (2017:128) defines racism as “the attitudes, feelings and beliefs or doctrines that one group of people with common physiological characteristics (referred to as race) is biologically, morally, intellectually and/or culturally intrinsically inferior to another race; this presumed inferiority justifies and prescribes domination, oppression, unfair treatment or exclusionary practices of one racial group by another which wields the power to carry these actions out”. Moreover, More (2017:129) declares that racism is individual, institutional, overt or covert.

This chapter concentrates on institutional racism, which More (2017:129), explicitly defines as attitudes and beliefs that are codified and formulated into legislation or laws governing the political, social, economic, organisational and even religious relations of different racial groups in a given society. One might say that the society is governed by a ‘radical ideology’. Boesak (1983:3) defines radical ideology as “a radical domination that incorporates beliefs in a particular race’s cultural/or inherent biological inferiority”. Boesak (1983) further asserts that radical ideology uses such beliefs to justify and prescribe unequal treatment of another group... it is not merely a vague feeling of racial superiority; it is a system of *domination* with structures of domination – social, political and economic.

From a close analysis of the above definition one notices that racism becomes an ideology when as a set of beliefs or ideas, it is connected to the power structure and power relations of a given society. More (2017:129) affirms that Biko’s thought on racism was influenced by the racist social and political milieu during apartheid. Through his antiracist philosophy of Black Consciousness, Biko (1978) strived to affect the socio-political milieu by opposing it. More (2017:135) further proclaims that what is discriminatory about racism is that apart from dehumanising the racial object, it fundamentally rejects the humanity of other groups of human beings.

Racism is positioned as a form of oppression since it is aimed at dehumanisation of blacks. Racism in this chapter is discussed from the context of apartheid and the existent power relations between blacks and whites within the oppressive apartheid system.

Taken from the apartheid context, Biko's definition restricts all acts or expressions of racism towards black people. According to More (2017;135) racism, therefore, is not discrimination or simple prejudice alone, but also the imposition of one's power on the lives of those one regards as inferior. Analysis of the poems in this chapter shows that the motive behind the protest poetry of Mtshali was to conscientise black people that their subjugation problem was not just apartheid, but also white racism.

### **6.1.2. ANALYSIS OF SELECTED POEMS**

In the poem "Always a Suspect", Mtshali reveals the predicament of the black man living on the periphery of the "white" city of Johannesburg:

I trudge the city pavements  
side by side with 'madam'  
she shifts her handbag  
from my side to the other,  
and looks at me with eyes that say\

'Ha! Ha! I know who you are;  
beneath those fine clothes  
ticks the heart of a thief.'

Labelled "criminal" by the white "madam" the black man in Johannesburg is forced to endure such dehumanising insults to his personal integrity. The poet alerts the readers to the impact of white racism on the black man in from inferior society. Wherever black people go they are viewed with suspicion because of their pigmentation (blackness).



Neither his decent and fashionable dress code nor his high education can change the white man's stereotypical label of the black man as a wolf disguised in sheep's clothing as evidenced in the phrase, "Ha! Ha! I know who you are; beneath those fine clothes ticks the heart of a thief". Racism is utilised as a way of dehumanising the oppressed black man. According to Alvarez-Pereyre (1984:175), in "Always a Suspect", the poet gives the reader a close up of the double profanity under which the African lives: the biological one, which emanates from the colour of his skin, and the social one, which makes him a suspect as soon he dresses in clothes (a suit) other than those of the employee or the labourer (overalls).

Mtshali uses the word "trudge" to indicate the persona's slow walk with heavy steps, typically due to exhaustion or harsh conditions when walking around the whites-only demarcated streets of South Africa because of the stereotypes that white people held about blacks. The word "madam" is used to indicate how the restrictive apartheid era laws disallowed black men to mix with white women. The poet touches on the punitive experiences of a black man faced with prejudice. He describes how he dresses in a smart suit for work in the morning and yet still encounters humiliation from a white madam whilst going to work. The humiliation makes him "trudge"- not to walk with a spring in his step which he would if he was confident and happy at what he has achieved. Mtshali brings home in a satirical way, the personal experience and humiliation of being subjected to prejudice and suppression as a black man.

Chapman (2007:70) states that the irony of the situation stems from the perceived discrepancy between commonly accepted notions of human dignity, and the peculiar indignities heaped on black people by the apartheid regime. Reference by the "madam" to the speaker having "the heart of a thief" depicts the racist attitude that the white woman (representing the majority of whites) is harbouring in her heart towards blacks. The overall view of black people by white people is that black people are naturally bad (thieves to be particular).

In the poem “The Chimney Sweepers”, Mtshali rouses the readers to the racial pigeon-hole that exists between blacks and whites in the apartheid South Africa. This affliction of racial prejudice is evident in lines 5-11 in the poem:

They came out  
And wiped their faces  
And one said to the other  
I'm white and  
I'll always stay so  
You're black  
You'll remain so!  
(Mtshali 1971:37)

Lines 5-11 are overflowing with a racist undertone where the white man feels superior and misconstrues blacks to be always inferior as expressed in the phrase “I'm white and I'll always stay so, you're black, you'll remain so!” Chapman (2007) contends that the two groups have a misconception that black and white identities have an essence. According to Althusser (1984:36), there is nothing essential about people's subjective identity because radical ideology provides individuals (especially whites) with imaginary images of themselves with which they are invited to identify, and by which their subjectivity is founded.

Biko (1978:97) debates that white people despise black people not out of need to reinforce their attitude and to justify their position of privilege, but purely due to their acceptance as true that blacks are inferior and depraved, while they (whites) are perceived as superior and worthy. There is a strained relationship between the conqueror and the conquered; with the former denying the equality of the latter and only acknowledging him as an inferior, “you're black and you will remain so (line 10-11)”, and, therefore, contemptible.

Alvarez-Pereyre (1984:176) states that in all of Mtshali's poetic collection dealing with the relationships between blacks and whites, we only hear the voices of whites giving dictatorial orders.

Since the roles have been allocated once and for all, the relationship between white and black is indeed predetermined. According to Biko (1978), this radical ideology is what makes the South African white society racist.

### **6.1.3. CONCLUSION**

The poems analysed in this chapter revealed Mtshali's effort to conscientise the reader about the challenges the blacks faced in South Africa were not only apartheid but also white racism. Apartheid was the principal creation of white racism.

Biko (1978:85) asserts that apartheid regime was to blame for inaugurating racism against blacks since they had the proficiency to stop apartheid if they did not approve of what was happening to blacks. The poems explore the racial attitudes that blacks and whites held against each other because of the radical ideology of racism instituted by whites on blacks.

Biko (1978:55) maintains that since the apartheid regime's proposition was white racism, there was only one valid antithesis, i.e., a solid black unity to balance the scale. Moreover, Biko (1978) believed the strategy of a strong black unity was vital since black people could not wage a struggle against white racism without offering a strong counterweight against the white race that had effectively infiltrated the black society.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### POEMS THAT EXPOSE BLACK IDENTITY

#### 7.1. INTRODUCTION

Sono (1983:114) proclaims Black Consciousness to define black people as “those who are subjugated politically, exploited economically, discriminated against socially, and constrained educationally”. According to Sono (1983), black people in South Africa are still stigmatized and excluded from the mainstream of rights and opportunities. Sibisi (2013:77) asserts that Sono uses the term ‘blackness’ to exclude white participation in the black man’s strife for freedom as ‘blackness’ was conceived under Black Consciousness as a logical extension of Africanism.

This chapter focuses on the attempt to preserve the traditional and radical identity of black people who were oppressed in South Africa. The study seeks to conscientise black people about the need to work in unison around the cause of their oppression (particularly in those years that are the context of these poems – the 1970s and 80s, and currently where the attitudes have not changed) to purge themselves of the restraints that bound them to never-ending suppression

Alvarez-Pereyre (1984:171) argues that one of the motives behind Mtshali’s poetry seems to be the desire to acquire a face and a voice, both of which are denied him by the white man. To the colonizer, in fact, the colonized person has no face: it is smooth and transparent; he does not even have a name, or rather it is the name the colonizer has given him once and for all so as to make his own life easier. Alvarez-Pereyre affirms that the simplification of names is closely linked with the psychological blindness of the colonizer: it is equivalent to denying the existence of the “Other” (1984:171).

Mtshali (1971) argues that the white man reneges from renouncing his blindness because if he begins to see, his revolt has in fact begun. Indeed, if the “Other” exists, then his suffering and his poverty begins to exist too, as well as the injustice with which he is treated. In denying the existence of the colonized person, the colonizer casts him out into limbo so that he (the white man) can enjoy his privileges without qualms.

Mtshali's poetry is a tool used to refer to the way the colonized person, in this case the black, needs to become aware of the white man's blindness.

## 7.2. ANALYSES OF THE POEMS THAT EXPOSE BLACK IDENTITY

In "The Master of the House" (Mtshali, 1972:55), the poet takes a humorous look at the apartheid system in which the whites are the masters while the blacks are the servants, doing degrading menial jobs. Alvarez-Pereyre (1984:171) declares that Mtshali best expresses the suffering of the man without a name or a face. He asserts that he does it with the dignity and the simplicity of the slave who is unknown to his master and who at last leaves the shadow and dares to speak:

Master, I am a stranger to you  
but will you hear my confession?  
I am a faceless man  
who lives in the backyard of your house  
I share your table/so heavily heaped with  
Bread, meat and fruit/huffs like a horse  
Drawing a coal cart (Mtshali, 1972:55).

Mtshali draws the reader's attention to the absurdity and inhumanity of the colonizer's laws, the inequalities they have created in society, the misery and calamity they have caused the Africans. The poem does not only tell of the anonymity into which the blindness of the whites has cast the black man, but in it, Mtshali also exposes the inferior status of the black population ("in the backyard of your house"). The economic inequality between blacks and whites is also elaborated upon "As the rich man and Lazarus/bread crumbs are swept to my lap". Blacks identify with "Lazarus" whose poverty sees him depending on leftovers from the rich man's table "bread crumbs are swept on my lap".

The poet addresses the deeper problems that have characterised black people in the apartheid society, the collusion of black labourers with inhumane laws; the abject status of poverty of domestic workers/servants, many of whom have received meagre wages and food coupled with long working hours with little resting hours.

Mtshali (1972) exposes the dehumanisation of millions of poor people, who are legitimate claimants to the land where they have been reduced to servants, whilst whites who were supposed to rent, are masters.

The images of a “faceless man” and a “nocturnal animal” suggest the degradation experience by the partner of the domestic worker where he has to “steal” into the woman’s quarters to see her at night and “flee” before dawn to avoid detection by the white employer. He avoids to be “run down by hounds”. This line indicates that blacks were under strict supervision of the police who patrolled with vicious hounds at night during the apartheid era. Laws restricting families living together reduces blacks to the level of animals that have to secretly see each other at night. The speaker avoids confronting his employer about the inhumane treatment, lest he gets fired. This is evidenced in the lines:

Sweetie! Eat and be satisfied now,  
Tomorrow we shall be gone.

Blacks’ quarters are frequently raided by the police at night and transgressors would be locked up. Blacks are killed by the police without being considered as human “tomorrow we shall be gone”. This shows that blacks were easily expendable for the apartheid regime. The speaker’s partner is, however, ready to confront the employer, signaling his willingness to get the situation to change. The poem evokes sympathy for the speaker’s inhumane treatment and subjugation by the system.

### **7.3. CONCLUSION**

The poem analysis in this chapter stimulates blacks to rally in unison to fight suppression and prejudice to preserve their identity as blacks. One of the motives behind Mtshali’s poetry seems to be the desire to acquire a face and a voice (identity), both of which are denied him by the apartheid system. To the coloniser the colonised person is faceless. His face is smooth and transparent. The colonised man is not free to move about as he pleases, to choose a profession, a wage and his place of work, to live where he wants, together with his family.

Mtshali realises that to speak out is a major step on the part of the colonized. The analysis has shown that the poems of the poet conscientise the reader that black people had to discern strategies to discharge blacks from the restraints of apartheid that bound them to eternal subjugation.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### 8.1. CONCLUSION

Analyses of the different examples of protest poetry in this study have supported the impression that there is interdependence between South African protest poetry and Black Consciousness. The selected poems in this study expose Mtshali's poetry as an emancipatory discourse. The poet (Mtshali) has succeeded in utilizing his poetry to conscientise the black people towards a process of self-identification and a means by which the oppressed can move from passivity to assertiveness to "Black Power".

The poems help to enhance the memory of the historical past for all South Africans to enable all (both blacks and whites) to better understand the past, and present, in order to sustain a free and democratic future. Mtshali's poetry has successfully awakened the people to signs of the quest for a lost identity- a lost Africa that had to be regained through a forged struggle.

Mtshali's protest poetry is regarded as integral to the biological intellectuals of the BCM (Black Consciousness Movement, and in general, to the avant-garde movements in South Africa. It is manifest in his poetic content and the technique in which he discusses the post-mortem issues of: (1) education and socio-economic deprivation (2) human labour exploitation (3) poverty and demand for Christian accountability (4) racist attitudes and (5) black identity.

The study is aimed at exposing the connection between Mtshali's poetry, Black Consciousness ideology, and the apartheid system's radical ideology. The study also exposed Mtshali's poetry to be intended at awakening the audience to the reality that conditions of apartheid had to be wrestled and eliminated for black people's freedom, and thus, humanity to be reclaimed. Biko (1978) also purported that periodical re-awakenings were perhaps essential because prolonged subjugation often created a tendency of acceptance and resignation, leading to a people's complicity to their own exploitation and dehumanization.



Mtshali has overtly or covertly persuaded the readers to embrace the Black Conscious ideology as imperative to the liberation of the black people from total subjugation. It has also become evident in this study that Mtshali's protest poetry finds contemporary relevance by expressing the needs of the people in a context in which most of the aspects of human life are directed to by political realities. This study reveals the impact the protest poetry of Mtshali had in convincing the readers to retaliate against the policies of the ruling powers in South Africa, which tried to maintain supremacy through economic exploitation, rendering the indigenous population victims of cultural and especially socio-economic suppression.

This study succeeds in revealing that only good art can effectively contribute towards the awakening of the resigned consciousness of the oppressed, thus assisting towards liberating their humanity by instilling in them the determination to struggle towards the realisation of a liberated life. The study also exposes the black man's suffering under a system of apartheid that reduces him to subservience, poverty, infant mortality and family disintegration. The study further posits that racism is still a fundamental part of our social reality and that the problem endures in "Post-Apartheid" "Post-racial" South Africa (More, 2017:1).

This study exposes Mtshali's intent to depict the real state of affairs regarding the condition of those who bear the brunt of apartheid oppression. Mtshali's poetry informs and exhorts, and encourages people not only to know their world, but to initiate and direct the course of events in their struggle towards their emancipation. Mtshali has succeeded in combining the two mainstreams that feed black literature in South Africa: Black Consciousness and the struggle for freedom.

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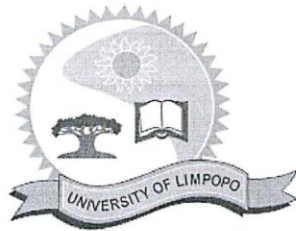
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**School of Languages and Communication Studies**  
**Department of Languages**  
**University of Limpopo**  
Private Bag X1106, Sovenga, 0727, South Africa  
Tel: (015) 268 2586, Fax: (015) 268 2868, Email: Rose-marie.Mccabe@ul.ac.za

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26 November 2018

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This is to certify that I, Dr Rose-marie McCabe, proofread and edited the following mini-dissertation entitled:

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I suggested certain changes and corrections to language usage and style which I trust will be effected to meet the required academic-language conventions.

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