

**BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS, BLACK THEOLOGY, STUDENT ACTIVISM,
AND THE SHAPING OF THE NEW SOUTH AFRICA.**

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Let a new earth arise. Let another world
be born. Let a bloody peace be written
in the sky. Let a second generation full
of courage issue forth, let a people
loving freedom come to growth, let a beauty
full of healing and a strength of final
clenching be the pulsing in our spirits
and our blood. Let the martial songs
be written, let the dirges disappear. Let
a race of men rise and take control.

- from "For My People"
by Margaret Walker.

The idea of Black Consciousness reflected a generation of students in our country wrestling with the fundamental questions of human existence. It was a search for answers, answers that each generation must needs ask of itself and of its elders. In some sense these were questions that were never answered definitively because the questions kept arising each time the question was asked.

For our generation of university students in the 1960s in apartheid South Africa we were much aware of the era of repression, and the apparent triumph of the forces of oppression and injustice. We were aware that these forces of white minority rule preceded the onset of apartheid as official policy of the country in 1948, and could be traced back to British colonial policy in the 19th Century. We were aware that there had been wave upon wave of resistance by African people to the onslaught of land dispossession and political exclusion, but that again and again our people lost,

but never surrendered the right to self-determination, to the integrity of their humanity and preservation of their culture, and mores. With each defeat the British and other European settlers consolidated their power culminating in the South African War of roughly two foreign nations fighting among themselves for dominance over our patrimony without our will and participation. The result was the establishment of a white settler pact in 1910; that led inexorably to the Statute of Westminster in 1931 granting what was a dominion colonial state, virtual independence within the Commonwealth.

Behind that brief outline of the historical events, lay intriguing and curious questions for us. Why was it that all the years of resistance throughout the 19th Century never yielded any result that established sovereignty by the indigenous peoples of Africa over their land, resources and humanity? How did it come about that we the Black indigenous people of this Continent appeared to be complicit in our own oppression, and why was it that our life and cultures and destiny appeared to be in the hands of foreign powers?

By the 1960s in South Africa, apartheid had consolidated itself, an Afrikaner republic had been established outside of the Commonwealth and minority rule had been further entrenched as not just rule by the white minority but even further rule by and in favour of the Afrikaner volk. With it the rest of the white community fell into line and was complicit, and the international community seemed powerless to bring this unjust situation to an end. It was the worst of times and the best of times. New efforts at resistance seemed to come to naught. Nelson Mandela, Robert Sobukwe and others were languishing in Robben Island, Oliver Tambo was in exile, all credible political organisations were banned, and communities were gripped and paralysed by fear, and uncertainty and despair were in the air.

In their place we were being asked to recognize as leaders quislings and collaborators with the system who so no need for resistance and acted as agents of disempowerment. The Bantustans were the Big Lie of the apartheid system that

claimed that there was anything like separate but equal, or that there was designated land that belonged to the black people, who had to be divided up into enclaves of despair and abandonment. Gradually, there emerged into this mix of ideologies a strange mix of bedfellows in the name of the English press and the white opposition parties that claimed the mantle of the Cape liberal tradition who were now arguing for an alleviation of the bad aspects of the system, of repressive legislation, in other words who emerged as spokespersons of the oppressed majority.

It is also correct to flag at this early stage that part of the perplexity was fundamentally a matter of faith. It suggested that the culture and history of Africa could not withstand and resist successfully any assault on the personhood of being African. Perhaps for those who professed any faith it was the contrasting ways in which the Christian faith was expressed and the incoherence of a faith that seemed to allow oppression of one by the other, and tolerated the evil that masqueraded as Christian. It was out of this conflict of faith that further articulations of faith emerged.

It was also the best of times because such periods saw the flourishing of ideas and of idealism. It was a time of searching for the authentic and of discovery of the ideal of unity and solidarity. It was also a time of affirming and discovery of Africa and African culture and values. It was a counter-assertion of the right to human dignity.

My memory of that time is that it was a restoration of the ideal of humanity and the assertion of freedom. The question that this paper addresses therefore is how such principles evolved and indeed what could have been their denouement into becoming the foundations of a freedom struggle founded on values, and what was the contribution of Black Consciousness to shaping the democratic South Africa that we know today? This address, however, examines an even deeper and perhaps troubling question for our time, and that is how do young people and students in our time shape their own future today.

II

Part of the grand design of apartheid ideology was separation. Black people had to be separated from white people not just by mere race characteristics but by the colour of the skin; and black people had to be separated between African, Coloured and Indian; and African people had to be separated into their various ethnic and language groups. There was an amazing fascination about separation as a lore of state.

Well, the separate universities act was enacted in 1959 and came into force in 1960. It created new universities for the various black groups, and excluded them from attendance at not just “white” universities, but also in any universities not of one’s race or group. This process, of course, was met by widespread resistance as the very ideal of a university was under challenge. On the other hand a culture of resistance to the system became entrenched and a subaltern culture was celebrated. That culture was in ideas and their interpretation, in reading into literature and history the true stories of Africa, and there developed an underground railroad of literature that was banned and forbidden to be possessed. It was to that mixture of curiosity, inquisitiveness and daring that Black Consciousness emerged as a new challenge to the apartheid diktat. But there was more.

The mid-1960s marked the coming to fruition of the independence movements in Africa. Nearer home the British protectorates were granted independence in 1966 and one by one the idea of independence was established in Africa. South Africa, therefore, became more of an anomaly in our view. Then there was the civil rights movement in the United States. That produced valuable literature that became the diet of the would-be revolutionaries that we fancied ourselves to be. But more importantly it gave credence to the spirit of resistance in our own situation. Finally, this period also coincided with the Student Revolts in parts of Europe in 1968, as well as the massive resistance to the Vietnam War in the United States, and this gave impetus to students and young people as agents of social change. In South Africa

1968 saw the student activism around the non-appointment of Dr ABM Mafeje as lecturer at the University of Cape Town by reason of the government determination that to do so would be contrary to policy.

III

Looking back in time it interests me that Hegel had become a very influential philosopher and sparring partner for those of us who were seeking answers, and out of which even more questions were raised. The very idea of *consciousness* is very Hegelian. It suggests not just a psychological state of mind but an inner being, a personality who thinks and acts. In other words Hegel offered a ringing denunciation of the apartheid philosophy. In other words, as FG Weiss in his Introduction to *HEGEL Essential Writings* (1974:1) puts it towards the great ideas of one's time there must be no complacency, and that "conceit may be the best way" to approach any great thinkers. But to put it differently it also gave intellectual licence to interrogate and challenge received ideas, resist their hegemony and construct one's own set of ideas and knowledge systems. Perhaps, the reason that Hegel had such influence was not simply that Hegel was not among the banned pieces of literature, but that Marxism beyond the *COMMUNIST MANIFESTO* just did not speak to our experience, and that meant that we could not be Marxian post-Hegelians. The idea was that we had to analyse our human experience and discover and articulate the essence of who we were, "a subject become substance, creating out of itself by transforming itself and canceling within itself a myriad of inadequate forms of its own truth" (1974:1). Hegel also had attraction not simply as a philosopher of consciousness, but also of freedom. Consciousness in the Hegelian construct is freedom, because it raises the capacity of willing the impossible to become possible, to think out of the box and to shape one's destiny. In *LECTURES IN PHILOSOPHY* the following appears:

...the life of God and all the deeds of time are the struggles for Spirit to know itself, to make itself objective to itself, to find itself, be itself, be for itself, and finally unite itself to itself; it is alienated and divided, but only so as to be able

thus to find itself and return to itself. Only in this manner does Spirit attain its freedom, for that is free which is connected with or depended on another.

Intellectual life was therefore about the search for the truth and a challenge to some of the putative truth-claims that were restricting of freedom. For us this was, and Steve Biko was fascinated by this idea of acknowledging of difference and yet differences being fused into the new, the Hegelian syllogism, “an undivided unity of differences, which is enriched rather than dissipated by the multitude of its manifestations” (1974:5). This is sometimes referred to as the principle of the identity of opposites, of knowing and being, a synthesis of opposites (1974:13).

But there was more to it. It was that the oppressed people must give themselves the freedom to rebel against oppression and to so free themselves and their thinking that they would dare to imagine an Other possibility. In other words the Big Idea was to be the Big Question Mark, one which Giuseppe Fiori expresses well in his biography of *Antonio Gramsci*

.... in the acceptance by the ruled of a 'conception' of the world which belongs to the rulers" those ideas of the world that appear to make common sense, the philosophy of the masses who accept the morality, customs, the institutionaliser rules of behaviour of the society they live in. the problem is to understand HOW the ruling class has managed to win the consent of the subordinate classes.... (Fiori:238)

I also believe that at this time Herbert Marcuse's seminal work *THE ONE-DIMENSIONAL MAN* was persuasive. In it we became aware of the pressures in society through vested interests who controlled the media, the church, and education who viewed society from their own lenses of privilege and power and whose messages reinforced the ideology of privilege and justifications of the status quo. This is how he put it

One-dimensional thought is systematically promoted by the makers of politics and the purveyors of mass information. Their universe of discourse is populated by self-validating hypotheses which necessarily and monopolistically repeated become hypnotic definitions and dictations.

From this we got to understand that what we rejected was not just by a strangeness in our thought processes. We instinctually understood that a one-dimensional view

of the world must be challenged and examined in order to understand its true foundations.

I offer this outline of Hegelian philosophy not because I suggest that we were unreconstructed or new Hegelians, but so that one should understand the intellectual environment that prevailed, and how that environment drew from and sought to analyse and understand the dynamics of our human experience. I also argue that it is difficult to understand Black Consciousness and Steve Biko properly unless one engages with the intellectual sources he tried to make sense of for himself. Much of the studies of Black Consciousness I have come across, in my view miss this dimension that gives power and resilience to Black Consciousness. In other words engagement with philosophy brought into sharp relief the depravity of the environment we sought to challenge. It is very interesting to note that in the struggles for freedom Hegel has a special place. Hegel was, I assume, an interlocutor for Marx, as much as he was for Antonio Gramsci, Martin Luther King Jr and Franz Fanon. It is of interest that Anton Lembede, the founding President of the ANC Youth League in 1948 wrote a masters dissertation on Hegel's Theory of Religion! Those who were threatened by Black Consciousness in the political contestations of the 1970s delighted in presenting Black Consciousness as lacking in revolutionary intent and confining the idea of consciousness to a psychological aberration. To the detractors of Black Consciousness I can only offer this thought from Gramsci once again:

Man is above all else mind, consciousness - that is, he is a product of history, not of nature.... Man has only been able to acquire a sense of his worth bit by bit, in one sector of society aft another... And such awareness was not generated out of brute physiological needs, but out of intelligent reasoning, first of all by a few and later on by entire classes who perceived the causes of certain social facts and understood that there might be ways of converting the structure of repression into one's of rebellion and social reconstruction. This means that every revolution has been preceded by an intense labour of social criticism, of cultural penetration and diffusion.

Nothing could be further from the truth. Indeed, that would not just be a misreading of Steve Biko but a misunderstanding of Hegel. Consciousness is about the truth, about reality. It is concrete and material. It is the ultimate Being.

But this intellectual environment did not begin and end with Hegel. It was taken up in the studies of Franz Fanon's *WRETCHED OF THE EARTH*. (1968). Like Steve Biko and Black Consciousness there is a resurgence of interest in Franz Fanon in South Africa judging by the publications and conferences on Fanon coming out these days. It is also heartening that there is recognition that Franz Fanon in Steve Biko's generation offered a stinging critique of the post-liberation practice in Algeria and elsewhere in Africa. It warned against practices that would undermine the value of the struggle and consign the new Africa into forms of subjugation not much different from those under colonial rule. Fanon was important in our time because he offered a theory of liberation affirming its core values and then offered the analytical tools of understanding when that vision faces betrayal¹.

The psychiatrist from the Caribbean Island of Martinique who participated in the freedom struggle of Algeria and later committed his life to the people of Africa, was not just a Che Guevara, a roving professional revolutionary but an idealist who believed that revolution would have no meaning if it did not have an abiding value for the people who were liberated. Fanon gave Steve Biko the analytical tools to critique the various manifestations of social control and collaborationism that helped Steve Biko to understand the mind of the oppressed and the various stratagems of social control of the oppressive classes. I suggest that Fanon helped Steve Biko with his analysis of the cult of fear among the oppressed, and the truth about Black people participating in their own oppression. It also helped him to expose the role of the liberals in denying the oppressed the duty to be their own liberators. Frankly, nobody had ever done such an analysis before Steve Biko in the various phases of the liberation process in South Africa. What it was that with every

¹ Nigel C Gibson: *FANONIAN Practices in South Africa: From Steve Biko to Abahlali baseMjondolo*; 2011, UKZN Press.

push there was defeat and the ideal of freedom was expressed as a rallying call to action. With it there was an appeal to universal principles of humanity as well as of religious, mainly Christian, anthropology. Steve Biko shoes to address the reasons for the failure to succeed in our collective efforts. That was because we may not have paid sufficient attention to the psychology of oppression.

Based as we were in Durban with many Gandhian activists in our midst, one must not forget that training in Mahatma Gandhi's *Satyagraha* principles were very important. At Phoenix Settlement originally founded by Gandhi as an ashram for *satyagraha* activists. One must never underestimate the ethical force of Gandhi's seven deadly sins:

Politics without principle;
 Wealth without work;
 Commerce without morality;
 Pleasure without conscience;
 Education without character;
 Science without humanity; and
 Worship without sacrifice.

These suggested a moral practice that was compelling, and a means of providing a critique for a society that acted without morality. Black Consciousness sought to provide society with just such a critique.

Any study of Steve Biko can never be complete without a reference to his approach to religion and the role of the church. What Steve Biko had to say about the church's role in colonization was not new. Neither was his critique of the church during white minority rule and apartheid. It was at best hesitant but most likely implicit. He therefore sought to understand how Black people themselves could overwhelmingly advance a religious consciousness that was undermining their human dignity or that was not able to practice what it teaches. His approach was not a wholesale condemnation of religion and the church. Instead he drew from a long history of Christian resistance by Black post-missionary Christians to the hegemony and

control of the church by European missionaries. For that he had some powerful examples in Nehemiah Tile and the Ethiopian Movement, in the apocalyptic millenarian movements of the Mgijimas and the Nazarites in Bullhoek, in John Colenso and the challenge of cultural interpretation of the Bible among the Zulus, and of the more contemporary mass indigenous churches of Shembe and Lekganyane, even to the manifestations of independent theological thought of the African indigenous churches of the Zionists, charismatic and healing churches.

It was evident that for many Africans the option was not to turn their backs on Christianity but to re-interpret and practice the Christian faith by taking account of African cultures, assert independence to and leadership by Africans and express the freedom to syncretise Christian practices with African culture and rituals. There was, therefore, a view that to attack Christianity especially and the church was bound to be alienating and would be counter-productive. Besides, it was understood that with the demise of the church a whole set of values and ethical positions necessary for constructing an ethic of resistance would be gone. A process of critical reconstruction of religion was then obvious. The effect was to build on the compelling nature of religion, but undergird it with an equally compelling culture that is of the essence of being African. This process produced a sensitive and respectful understanding of the beliefs and practices of others, and drew them into the liberatory circle.

The tool for this examination came in the form of Black Theology. Black Theology brought about a credible theological critique of the traditional theology that Black Consciousness was suspicious of but did not have the theological expertise to dissect, except to criticize its effect in the minds of the people and in Christian practice. Black theology provided a fundamental critical evaluation but it also led to a credible substitution without falling foul of the essential or core fundamentals of the faith. Black Theology made revolutionary action for liberation possible. In a way this was helped by the post Vatican II Liberation Theology and Theology and Culture Movements. A literature became available that truly spoke to the experience of

Christians in situations of oppression. From Latin America the Sandanistas in Nicaragua provided a partnership between the church in revolution and a peoples' movement founded on faith practice.

Finally, it would be remiss of me to end this outline of Black Consciousness practice without a reference to students and their role in development. It was a fundamental principle of Black Consciousness that the students who were to view themselves as agents of social change should never accept the definitions and expectations of others of themselves. As such students had to live the liberatory ethic they espoused, and express their unity with the communities they came from and which they intended to serve. This was a very important principle. It affirmed that students were never by their standard of education ceasing to be who they were. They remained the children of their parents, the boys and girls of their village. They brought with them not just their academic training and expertise, but also their knowledge of their own communities. In other words students should never be separated from their social roots. It was out of that endeavor that the programme of community development was devised. It was a canon of principle that the manner in which the students engaged with communities, however, had to be different. It had to issue out of their liberatory consciousness. It could not be a mere charitable exercise. Development had to result in human development, and had to be a tool of conscientisation. The people were to share with the students in the work, the projects had to be identified by the communities and assessed by them and students made a commitment to serve in the communities.

To assist in this a group of members undertook training in literacy training using Paulo Freire's psycho-social method of adult basic education. The projects were not just about literacy training, but they ranged from clinics, building schools as volunteers and agriculture. Paulo Freire, however, provided valuable tools of reading social phenomena and learning by doing. The result was that it created in the students a strong affinity with the communities and, although, these projects were not necessarily a success in every respect, they did build in the students a

liberatory character. There was another dimension to this building up of a revolutionary cadre. It was that there was a programme of formation schools where training and discussion and debate about issues and theories took place. I suggest that this brought about a vanguard group who became the core of Black Consciousness leadership.

In summary then, Steve Biko and Black Consciousness began from a curiosity about human experience, raised questions that had no answers, and perhaps would never have satisfactory finite answers. Next they had a theoretical foundation for their intellectual quest, and finally they sought a liberatory praxis that gave effect to their ideals. What is clear is that Black Consciousness drew ideas from a wide spectrum of thought and practice: from African culture and traditions to European philosophy and modern revolutionary practice. The radical effect of drawing on the language of consciousness could easily be lost sight of. It was radical in that none of South Africa's liberation formations had used that language even though black consciousness could be traced back to the 1930s. It was radical in that it sought to find explanation for the pathetic state of resignation after conquest that was evident in the early 1960s. It was to give new life to the quest for liberation.

Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze in his book *REASON, MEMORY AND POLITICS*; UNISA: 2008) gives expression to this in a very helpful explanation of WEB du Bois' expression "double consciousness". By that, of course, du Bois was referring to the split personality of the racially oppressed to seek to be both American and African, to seek freedom as human but having to contend with paralysing pathological fear and self-doubt. But du Bois went further. he also believed that redemption and integrity are to be found in the pursuit of a higher self and that this quest could start only when the injustices of slavery and colonisation, and ideologies of racial supremacy and their legacies had been recognised and dismantled (Eze:66). In that sense the Negro rather than become a mere victim becomes a revolutionary subject: a person with second sight - the fruits of wisdom, survival and hope. It is through

self actualisation, and struggle through this double consciousness that one achieves an original, universal compact with provides (Eze:67).

IV

This lecture would not be of much value if it did not serve as a prelude to examining the phenomenon of youth and student activism in South Africa today. I offer my thoughts on this not because I suggest that young people and students today were necessarily continuous with the generation that we were part of. Nothing could be further from the truth. It has to be recognized that young people and students of our time belong to a different past and future. The landscape in South Africa has changed radically from that which our generation and those that came after had to confront. Having said that the dynamics of youth and student consciousness is a necessary subject of study because it may throw light on the kind of society we might face or provide answers to current developments in society.

The first observation to make is that youth and student, organized formations are a mere mirror of the society in which they live. One finds that by and large student and youth formations are reflective of the mother bodies they are hewn from. These are dominated by the ANC Youth League which is often in contention with the South African Students' Congress (SASCO) and the Young Communist League (YCL). All three organisations profess to be affiliated to or in alliance with the ANC. It is of interest, however, that the same organisations are in contention with one another especially at university campuses. In some respects the ANCYL does not trust SASCO or believes that it ought to be under its wing, and the YCL is in ideological contention with the ANCYL. All three organisations represent that they advance the liberatory themes of the liberation movement.

Of no small interest is the YCL that is very voluble in opposition to the ANCYL and in support of the SACP and the leadership of the ANC under President JG Zuma. One then has to ask what is the ideological and principles basis of this? I suggest that

there is none. As a matter of fact the SACP is only communist by name. I am not aware of any Marxist-Leninist Policy it campaigns on and it does not appear to have any aspiration to or a programme of government of its own. What it does is to support not just an ANC agenda but also a discredited leadership. It is in cahoots with probably the most corrupt and backward, conservative ANC that has ever been, and one which has excelled in corruption and misgovernance. The best I can do to understand this is that it is a party that sees itself as a pressure group that does not seek power for itself to transform the political landscape of the country, but to influence the processes of patronage and benefit for the few.

The ANCYL, once allied to the President and the victorious Polokwane faction of the ANC, has fallen foul of the leadership largely because it pronounced, maybe prematurely, its view that President Zuma was not re-electable. With amazing swiftness the President of the ANCYL was tried in what to me is a kangaroo court and expelled from the organization. With similar urgency he is now facing a criminal charge of money-laundering. One must also state that the ANCYL has been advancing their idea of economic liberation that includes the nationalization of mines and mineral wealth as well as the appropriation of land resources without compensation. It has also been vocal in their idea of trans-generational leadership of the party and government. Frankly a great deal of this has not been thought through and maybe incoherent. One must however grant that there is some serious thinking going on, a critique of leadership, and an analysis of the economic policy choices that the ruling party has advanced. The response of the President of the ANC has been patronizing. Young people must not speak out of turn. They must seek advice of the elders before voicing their opinions. It appears that the youth in the ANC have been silenced and marginalized.

The only campus-based organization among these is SASCO. SASCO has had to navigate a careful path between the extremes of ANCYL and the repressive impulse of the leadership of their party. Where they dominate SRCs and campuses they have

focused improperly on campus disruptions, a campaign for free education, and in an unsavoury interest in tenders and wielding control for resources on campus.

But there are other groups that articulate alternative discourses in this minefield. The South African Union of Students (SAUS) is a federation of SRCs and is not party affiliated. It is under-funded and marginalized. Its focus has been to build leadership capacities among SRCs so that they may represent the interests of the students properly, and build an intellectual class in society. It is worth making the further observation that recent trends suggest that a growing number of students on campuses are voting for the student organisations affiliated to opposition parties, or form independents. It is also important to point out in this survey that there is a movement of students who have no desire to get caught up in this organizational fracas, but would rather engage in critical intellectual projects, associate themselves with progressive ideas about Africa, ethics, leadership and transformation. They are the student leaders who seek mentors outside of the scope of established political formations.

The picture that emerges is no different from studies found in Cameroon and Nigeria post authoritarian rule. In his study Jude Fokwang of Cameroon paints a dismal picture with the students interviewed “at the most ambiguous in their modes of ‘navigating’ a troubled terrain. On the other hand there are those who seek to insinuate themselves into the political bureaucratic lifelines of the regime, including the loyalists thugs who are more than ready to beat up those who do not fall into line. On the other hand there are those who stay out of the ruling party politics (out of principle) but seek to mobilise other networks and lines of patronage, often looking to bribe themselves into the heart of the system, the prestigious schools, the well-connected arenas and institutions that allow them to pursue their expectations of personal advancement...” (2006:5).

Viewed against the backdrop of Steve Biko and Black Consciousness incubated at university campuses during the worst periods of repression what is it that we can read about youth and students today?

First, it is to state that youth and students have a vested interest in the manner in which society is governed, and the manner in which public resources are being used. That is of value not so much because invariably students and youth are affected by corruption and the paucity of ideas to drive the economy in a progressive manner, but also that the moral character of society lays the foundation for a society that values education, offers prospects for advancement, assures professional opportunities, and creates an environment where they may grow their own values and futures. No young person or student would wish to grow up in an environment where there are no prospects of employment or advancement because of the collapse in the economy, or to find that those without any training or education are more valued than those who spent time advancing their education.

Second, and related to this, it becomes important that a Knowledge Society be developed whereby learning and lifelong learning becomes a culture, and that intellectuals can generate innovative ideas and that they could contribute to societal development. In South Africa at present it is fair to suggest that we are in danger of growing a generation of young people without hope of a better future. There is much rhetoric that is mere words, with very little moral leadership and conduct that leads to the realization of declared principles and policy. Young people and students are frustrated from being part of and actors in an argumentative democracy. Instead the political youth and students only bide their time and serve as mouthpieces of a failed leadership who they are expected to keep quiet and listen to. Nothing could more undermine a knowledge paradigm in society. It also translates to the environment at university campuses. Where academic freedom and institutional independence are honoured only in breach, it creates a society of fear and intellectual dishonesty. There cannot be much joy or hope for students and young people in a society that by word or deed undermines the aspirations to education.

To express this in the language of Cornel West, it is a case of nihilism, “the lived experiences of coping with a life of horrifying meaninglessness, hopelessness, and (most important) lovelessness” (Redd:2002;457).

Nanan Anyidoho argues that failure to recognize the pernicious effect such conditions in society have on scholarship would be prejudicial. For her radical scholarship must be grounded in the life conditions of people as an insider-outsider. It means that we need to understand clearly the Archimedes’ Principle and where we stand in order to move the world. Without that radical awareness it is never likely that scholars can produce any scholarship of change and that will better the lives of people. Scholarship ethics and integrity, of course, affects the students and researchers one works with. She concludes that research by its nature is about taking a stand, and to do so is to be political. One understands that one cannot allow one’s intellectual pursuits to be programmed by considerations outside of one’s scholarly activities.

Third, control of public resources means that so many young people and students aspire not so much for education at the highest level they can achieve, but to become millionaires through tenderpreneurship and not by innovation, entrepreneur and opportunity. This then means that young people shadow their elders and work towards patronage as that would be the only lifeline to change their condition.

Students and youth in such circumstances could, says Bjorn Beckman (2006:117) is needed also to “to give voice to popular grievances rooted in the aspirations and struggles for national liberation. It acted as a trustee, a custodian and a mouthpiece of such popular democratic aspirations.” What, arguably, has happened in South Africa is that youth and students of this generation have been caught up in the toxic atmosphere of the national politics that undermine their ability to become the voice for an alternative political culture. The best they can hope to become is to end up swiftly in ministerial offices, or senior government positions with minimal

competence for the jobs they do or spouting spin-doctoring for corrupt leaders, or benefiting from patronage in terms of tenders or other party privileges. In a recent speech, University of Free State Vice Chancellor Jonathan Jansen, an educationist, was bemoaning the fact that exemplars and role models for our young people are uneducated people powerful in political life of the nation, and others who have amassed wealth without any need for educational achievement.

For all these reasons, public discourse has become stultified in non-debate about non-issues. That is not because there are no life-and-death issues if one has regard to the lamentable state of the economy, resulting high unemployment. This is due to failed, ineffectual and inappropriate economic policies that have been adopted that continue to cause what maybe an uncontrollable social inequalities. Meanwhile, we have a government that does not appear to have any sense of the crisis in its hands and that is bound to explode any moment. Again and again, we are reminded by flashpoints of xenophobic violence and persistent racism that we are a nation divided by race and that social cohesion is not just something one pronounces, but a governmental and transformative programme to be pursued.

The President says that there is no problem. All is well! That, just as unprecedented wildcat strikes in the mining industry have shut down production, and the transport strike has meant that the economy is under squeeze; and at a time when the education system by general acceptance is in crisis, and when unemployment is at its highest level. No wonder, that he can afford to have the state pay millions of rand for the upgrade of his private residence, and to spend unprecedented amounts of upgrades of official residences. With that there is a lamentable marginalization of the voices of reason, and a government that pretends that it can hop along on one leg and get somewhere fast, while a large number of South Africans at home, and the many other patriots who have left their homeland in utter despair to ply their professions in Europe, the Americas and Australia, or the large army of expatriates in our land who are not valued and drawn into the national development project in sufficient numbers.

VI

Taking a leaf out of Biko it is fair to suggest that young people and students will be taking charge of shaping their own future. They will need to do so once they are infused with idealism for a better world. They will have to state to themselves that what we have will not produce for them and future generations' well-being and a better life. This is an intellectual exercise. For that we need more young people staying longer at school, and students who qualify in their studies and remain to undertake graduate studies. It also requires young people and students who are rooted in the experience of their communities and avoid the lure of instant riches and the prestige of office. It means a critical approach to life and a sense of freedom by which they live their lives. It means that they abjure expediency for principle. That is what Steve Biko achieved in his lifetime, a life of sacrifice that today shapes the thinking of many for a better world. I dare to end with the reflections from Cornel West who suggests that nihilism in the Black experience can only be defeated and subverted through leadership that "exemplifies moral character, integrity and democratic statesmanship within itself and its organisations" (2002:461). This he terms the politics of conversion that "stays on the ground among the toiling everyday people, ushering forth humble freedom fighters – both followers and leaders – who have the audacity to take the nihilistic threat by the neck and turn back its deadly assaults" (2002:461).

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