

## Pre-task: Black Consciousness Philosophy

Lefifi Tladi's cosmological influences came from the Pedi, Tswana and Xhosa folklore, stories, songs and dances that he heard growing up in Lady Selborne and Ga-Rankuwa in today's Tshwane. In the late 1960s, Lefifi transformed these influences into anti-colonial, Black Consciousness (BC) and Pan Africanist thoughts, through his collaborative music projects with De-Olympia Club, Malombo Jazzmakers and Dashiki. With their African expression of drums, flutes and voices of the traditional music of baPedi and baTswana, these groups performed to students all over the country from Durban, to Ongoye, Fort Hare, Western Cape, Natal and Turfloop. Lefifi was a member of the Cultural Committee of the BC of the 1970s. He was imprisoned and forced into exile in Botswana for his political work. In 1980 he started to study art in Stockholm, Sweden.

In addition to producing art, Lefifi Tladi, collaborates with the Universities of Stockholm and Stellenbosch, with recording artists and studios in Stockholm, and with a Collage Project in Stockholm. He encourages younger art history students to interpret, to critique, and to develop new theories about his artistic output. He is calling for more Masters and PhD thesis on his work and the works of other S.A. artists like Mashiangwako, Fikile Magadlela, Winston Masekaeng Saodi, and Louis Maqhubela. His multiple projects focus on preservation and include digitisation of his writings, digital photos of his artworks, preparations for book publishing and for exhibitions, and re-prints of Jazz Poetry CDs.

The huge task ahead of us is to re-discover the authentic, sovereign, unifying history, heritage and cultural identities of Africa and its Diaspora: the liberated African Voice. For Lefifi, Black Consciousness brought in a new vision for poetry, music, dance, painting and photography. The focus was the use of the mother tongue, and no imitations of Europe. Black Consciousness does not buy into "this township thing," as Lefifi calls it. The township has always been used by the Apartheid system to limit the perception of African creativity. Township music, township art and all definitions of township have only created a victim mentality, causing artists who come from the townships to complain, lament their township situation and placing their focus on telling the world about their suffering.

But the Black Consciousness movement places importance on creating a uniquely South African art form. Black Consciousness does not tap its roots in the township situation, thereby reflecting the suffering of the township dwellers. Rather, Black Consciousness pushes art towards transcendence. And as a result Black Consciousness artists begin to manifest a new vision of writing poetry, making music, paintings and photography that was very much informed by the indigenous languages, activating a vision and history that came well before the township experience. Black Consciousness offers a larger canvass and experience to draw from, for not only our country, the sub-continent and the continent, but also the whole world.

The role of the artist is to raise the perception of people, so to be able to hear, to smell, to taste and to feel our creative output. That's what art should be all about. It is not a vehicle of complaint. It is a vehicle of enlightenment.

## Pan Africanism

The Black Consciousness movement gained knowledge by reading the important authors of African origins of civilization such as Cheikh Anta Diop; studying the ancient African histories of Egypt, Kush, Meroe, Mali, Ghana, Songhai, Mapungubwe, Great Zimbabwe, and Mbanza Kongo civilisations; and learning from the USA civil rights movement, the Caribbean struggles and the anti-colonial wars in Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Angola and Namibia.

Colonialism sought to colonise people by destroying their spirituality. Colonialism promoted a white God, angels and heaven, and made the devil black. And then once colonialism had destroyed African spirituality, the colonists built schools in an attempt to master these false doctrines. Colonisation deprived Africans of the tools for defining themselves.

And what are the fundamental tools? Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) are the tools inherently used to define ourselves. IKS are ancient, local, experiential and spiritual. IKS includes cosmologies, healing with traditional herbs and incorporating traditional histories and knowledge which are holistic and oral.

## **Building an Afrocentric arts education**

When we realise how enormously Africa contributed towards the development of humanity, we become Afrocentric – which means placing Africa at the centre of global affairs and human experience.

Arts education in South Africa is neo-colonial. Very little has been incorporated in the arts curriculum, in the arts history subject by way of indigenous methods of creating arts in the schools and universities today. The perspective given to students is narrow and one-sided, and cements the Euro-centric traditions in their knowledge base. Creative aspects from South Africa's rural past include the mathematics of keeping count of cattle based on skin colour, the scrutiny of our landscape, the rivers, the fauna, flowers as inspiration for art creativity, and developing a sixth sense of smell. For Instance Lefifi's mother, Nomazizi, when blindfolded and doing the family's laundry, could tell which piece belonged to whom, just by smelling it!

Artists have to be trained to have the intention to observe closer, and not just to look AT. Artists need to learn a lot more about other African artists. Art students should be able to talk about artists in Botswana, Zambia, Mozambique, Malawi, Tanzania, Ethiopia, Sudan, Nigeria, Senegal, Gambia and Ivory Coast. There are 54 African countries and all countries from East, West, North and South need to be in the syllabus.

## **Pre-task: Black Consciousness Philosophy**

1. According to Lefifi, the real issue to consider in developing our talent as a creative artist include is to know where we come from. The contribution of Black Consciousness in the '70s to the poetry, painting, photography, literature, and live performances was huge in expressing African greatness. From the Black Consciousness movement, what are the finest creatives that you have come across – and why?
2. Lefifi makes a powerful discernment between so called Township Art and the Black Consciousness Arts. In the current situation do you find there are any definitions or categories that push you into a victim mentality – and how do you plan to break free of this?
3. The Dutch and British colonialism and Apartheid had a negative impact on the spirituality, the culture and the arts of South Africans. By familiarising ourselves with Pan Africanism and an international movement to find the greatness within, many South Africans were able to find a personal solution for their creative identity. Can you visualise your identity from a Pan Africanist perspective? How will it look like?
4. The Afrocentric approach brings the African artist to the centre. The imperative is being free and expressing ones creativity from a Pan African perspective. How does Afrocentricity inform your approach? What conscious steps do you take to bring your African-ness to the centre of your creative output?