

**BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS AND WHITE LIBERALS IN SOUTH AFRICA:
PARADOXICAL ANTI-APARTHEID POLITICS**

by

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ABSTRACT

This research challenges the hypothesis that Biko was anti-liberal and anti-white. Biko's clearly defined condemnation of traditional South African white liberals such as Alan Paton is hypothesised as a strategic move in the liberation struggle designed to neutralise the "gradualism" of traditional white liberalism which believe that racism could be ultimately superseded by continually improving education for blacks. Biko neutralised apartheid racism and traditional white liberalism by affirming all aspects of *blackness* as positive values in themselves, and by locating racism as a white construct with deep roots in European colonialism and pseudo-Darwinian beliefs in white superiority. The research shows that Biko was neither anti-liberal nor anti-white. His own attitudes to the universal rights, dignity, freedom and self-determination of *all* human beings situate him continuously with all major human rights theorists and activists since the Enlightenment. His unique Africanist contribution was to define racist oppression in South Africa as a product of the historical conditioning of blacks to accept their own alleged inferiority. Biko's genius resided in his ability to synthesize his reading of Marxist, Africanist, European and African American into a truly original charter for racial emancipation.

Biko's methodology encouraged blacks to reclaim their rights and pride as a prelude to total emancipation. The following transactions are described in detail: Biko's role in the founding of SASO and Black Consciousness; the paradoxical relations between white liberal theologians, Black Consciousness and Black Theology; the influence on BC of USA Black Power and Black Theology; the role of Black Theologians in South African churches, SACC and WCC; synergic complexities of NUSAS-SASO relations; relations between BC, ANC and PAC; the early involvement of women in BCM; feminist issues in the liberation struggle; Biko's death in detention; world-wide and South African liberal involvement in the inquest and anti-apartheid organisations.

Keywords: Biko, Paton, Mandela, ANC, PAC, National Party, communism, liberalism, Marxism, Black Consciousness, South Africa, racism, colonialism, apartheid, *négritude*, Africanism, Black Power, NUSAS, SASO, Black Theology, SACC, WCC, women, liberation theology, feminism, feminist history, liberation struggle, oppression, psychological liberation

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the following people

My late parents-in-law PHAGANE (MATHOBELA) and NKUTU MAIMELA

The late (Mamogolo) EDNAH RAMATSOBANE MOLABA.

My parents RAMATSIMELE NELLY and LETHAMAGA JONAS MPHAHLELE

My husband HLABIRWA A MAZWI LE BOLEDI

And our four children

GRACIOUS, LEBOGANG, TSHEGOFATSO and MOFENYI

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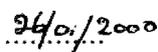


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DECLARATION

I declare that **BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS AND WHITE LIBERALS IN SOUTH AFRICA:
PARADOXICAL ANTI-APARTHEID POLITICS** is my own work and
all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated
and acknowledged by means of complete references.


.....
Mabel R Maimela


.....
Date

ABBREVIATIONS

AICA	African Independent Church Association
ANC	African National Congress
ARM	African Resistance Movement
ASUSA	African Student Union of South Africa
ABJ	Association of Black Journalists
ASSECA	Association for the Educational and Cultural Advancement of African People
ASAMD	Association of the South African Medical and Dental Association
AZAPO	Azanian People's Organization
BC	Black Consciousness
BCM	Black Consciousness Movement
BMC	Black Methodist Consultation
BOSS	South African Bureau of State Security
BPC	Black People's Convention
BTH	Black Theology
BWF	Black Women's Federation
CI	Christian Institute
CPSA	Communist Party of South Africa
DPSC	Detainee Parents Support Committee
FCWU	Food and Canning Worker's Union
FEDSAW	Federation of South African Women
FSAW	Federation of South African Women
IDAF	International Defence and Aid Fund
IDAMASA	Interdenominational African Minister's Association
IUEF	International University Exchange Fund
NAACP	National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
NCAW	National Council of African Women
NCL	National Committee for Liberation
NCWSA	National Council of Women of South Africa
NEUM	Non-European Unity Movement
NP	National Party
NUSAS	National Union of South African Students
PAC	Pan Africanist Congress
PFP	Progressive Federation Party
SAAN	South African Associated Newspapers
SABRA	South African Bureau of Racial Affairs
SACC	South African Council of Churches
SAIRR	South African Institute of Race Relations

SAMDA	South Medical and Dental Association
SASM	South African Student Movement
SASO	South African Student's Organisation
SPOBA	St. Peter's Old Boys Association
SWAPO	South West African People's Organisation
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
UCM	University Christian Movement
UCT	University of Cape Town
UK	United Kingdom
UNISA	University of South Africa
USA	United States of America
WASA	Writer's Association of South Africa
WITS	University of the Witwatersrand
WMA	World Medical Association
WO	Warrant Officer
WUS	World University Services
YMCA	Young Men's Christian Association
YWCA	Young Women's Christian Association

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this thesis is to analyse the contribution made by white liberal institutions and particular individuals in liberal circles to the formation and maintenance of the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM)¹, which was established in the late 1960s. Such an analysis may shed a new light on the real nature of the transactions between BC and white liberals at the time and may provide grounds for a more nuanced understanding of why it was that BC (with some notable exceptions) was apparently so hostile at the time of its inception and its greatest influence (i.e. in the late sixties and the early seventies) towards traditional white liberals and liberal institutions. It is worth noting at the outset that previous researchers, whether sympathizers or opponents of BC, invariably draw attention to this phenomenon more than to any other aspect of their research. Mokgethi Motlhabi and Thomas Ranuga represent those who were supportive of BC.² Gail Gerhart also focuses on BC's hostile policy towards white liberals.³ Among the opponents of BC have been white liberals such as Alan Paton, who was, as is well known, astonished by the ingratitude shown to him and the hostile criticism heaped upon him by the very

¹ Hereinafter in the text, the Black Consciousness Movement will be referred to as "The Black Consciousness Movement" or "Black Consciousness" or "the BCM" or "BCM" (i.e. without the definite article) or "BC". This reflects all the various ways in which it is referred to in the literature and various sources.

² Mokgethi Motlhabi, Black Resistance to Apartheid: A Social-Ethical Analysis (Skotaville, Johannesburg, 1984), pp.21-30 and 106-139; Thomas Kono Ranuga, "Marxism and Black Nationalism in South Africa (Azania): A Comparative and Critical Analysis of the Ideological Conflict and Consensus Between Marxism and Nationalism in the ANC, the PAC and the BCM, 1920-1980", Ph.D. thesis, 1982, Brandeis University, pp.221-294.

³ Gail M. Gerhart, Black Power in South Africa: The Evolution of an Ideology (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1978), pp.221-265.

same black people whom he had hoped to help and benefit.⁴

Hostility to white liberalism (whether direct or implicit) was an integral part of BC policy right from its inception.⁵ The message which BC sent to white liberals was that Africans were ready to take *complete* control of those political activities which affected their lot and their future.⁶ One of the leading personalities in BC and a founding member of the movement, Drake Koka, became an embodiment of this new attitude. His criticism of white liberalism was all the more potent and startling to the old guard of the white liberal establishment since he himself had been a member of the multiracial Liberal Party, which was founded in 1953 and disbanded in 1968 by the common consent of its members. Koka accused the Liberal Party of having failed their black supporters in the party since they had been unable to elect a single black person to parliament.⁷ Koka based his criticism on the fact that there were more black members than white members in the Liberal Party.⁸

It is this kind of black criticism of white liberals and liberal institutions which is often adduced as evidence of a basic hostility and variance of purpose between BC and white liberals. By collating such statements and isolating them from their context and the matrix of events and constraints out

⁴ Alan Paton Centre, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg. Paton to Neville Curtis, 18 January 1971, pc1/9-23.

⁵ Unisa Archive, Centre for African Studies, "Composite Report of the Interim-Executive to the General Students Council, St. Peter' Conference Centre, Hammanskraal, 14-22 July 1973", pp.27-40.

⁶ Karis and Gerhart Collection, Johannesburg. Dr. A.M. Ramphela, "The History of the Black Man's Struggle for Liberation in South Africa and the Role of Black Consciousness", pp.1-13.

⁷ Randolph Vigne, Liberals Against Apartheid: A History of the Liberal Party of South Africa, 1953-68 (London, Macmillan, 1997), p.209.

⁸ Joshua N. Lazerson, Against the Tide: Whites in the Struggle Against Apartheid (UWC, Bellville, Mayibuye Books, 1994), p.60.

of which they arose, it may seem possible to “prove” that BC and white liberals were implacably opposed to each other in strategy, vision and action. Although previous researchers (whose contributions will be noted later) have generated a certain amount of evidence for just such a thesis, this research will propose a more complex thesis, the main contention of which will be that, in many ways, white liberals and their institutions became indispensable to the welfare and maintenance of BC, especially during the difficult years when the key figures in the organisation began to feel the full brunt of the apartheid state’s well-organised apparatus of control and repression.

It must also be stated at the outset that, although my thesis postulates the existence of a positive symbiotic relationship of mutual benefit and dependency between white liberals and liberal institutions and the BC, such a relationship was never obvious, overt, public, conspicuous or explicit. In fact it often seemed to be the case (and indeed often *was* the case) that there existed some degree of hostility and antagonism between white liberals and the BC. But just as there were many different personalities among the proponents of BC, so there were many different kinds of white liberal and (predominantly) white liberal institutions, all with different agendas, purposes and personal histories. The only common factor on both sides (apart from their shared opposition to the racist and white supremacist policies of the apartheid state), was the strained and abnormal circumstances under which everybody lived and worked in the period under consideration. The world of resistance politics was not a place in which scholarly discourse flourished or in which fine distinctions or clarifications could be postulated and examined at leisure. In the abnormal world where surveillance, deportation, banishment, detention, torture and death were ever-present realities, a certain lack of fine gradations of meaning and expression often prevailed in political discourse. It is my contention that many such statements (but by no means all) veiled an often

complex symbiotic reality which was frequently concealed from public view under many rhetorical flourishes of the time.

To put it bluntly, BC was frequently dependent on material support from white liberals for the survival of the organisation while the same liberals in turn benefited from associating with a body which had gained the confidence of the black community and which was directly challenging the authority of the apartheid government. The liberals who supported the cause of BC gained a great deal of transferred prestige and credibility from supporting BC. As for the anti-white-liberal rhetoric of BC, it was without doubt absolutely necessary at that stage of the organisation's existence for BC firmly and unambiguously to divorce itself from the somewhat leisurely, European-orientated and often condescending old-style liberalism represented by figures such as Alan Paton. But even as one makes such a statement, it is necessary to qualify it by drawing attention to the fact that there were a number of heroic white liberals (such as Trevor Huddleston and Helen Joseph)⁹ who never, in any way, represented this style of white liberalism. It is worth noting that white liberalism in South Africa (and the whole colonised world) had for centuries been tainted with a kind of unself-conscious condescension towards the indigenous races that usually dulled the edge of any radical critique of colonial oppression and institutionalised racial supremacy.

Paradoxically, it is not one's enemies who can do one the greatest harm. The experience of black people in Africa has for centuries been that it is not the brutal racists who can do the greatest

⁹ Robin Denniston, Trevor Huddleston: A Life (London, Macmillan, 1999), pp. 10-16; Helen Joseph, Side by Side: The Autobiography of Helen Joseph (Johannesburg, Ad. Donker, 1993), pp. 1-20, 59-103, 122-130.

harm, for they are the obvious enemy. More undermining and disempowering can be the well-meaning, essentially kindly but often confused and fumbling condescension of those who really care (perhaps even passionately) about one's welfare. Anyone who doubts the damage that such well-disposed individuals can do, and have done, to the self-respect and self-esteem of the colonialisised person, should examine, say, the diaries and letters of some of the missionaries who worked at the Lovedale Institution (Alice) towards the end of the last century. Such people were good people, people of the noblest character and moral fibre, by any standards at any time or place, but they were also so inextricably mired in the unquestioned assumptions of their own racial and imperialist experience that they simply could not see that their condescension and their unspoken (perhaps unspeakable) assumptions about the inferiority of indigenous people were fundamentally destructive of African culture, welfare and sanity, and, in addition, deeply and inexpressibly hurtful and repellent to the Africans for whom they had sacrificed their whole lives.

The history of the colonial exploitation of Africa is so complex and so qualified by layer upon layer of paradoxical moral and semantic distortion, that stating an obvious truth can often be deeply hurtful and disturbing to those who believe that their intentions are good. Although white liberal (and Christian) intentions in Africa have often been demonstrably good, Blake's observation about the road to hell has also never been more relevant.

The BC found itself in the awkward situation of simply not having the time to wait for white liberals (of a certain kind) to become sufficiently conscientised to be of any direct use to the struggle for black liberation. As the tides of history swept up and over the continent of Africa, especially after the Second World War, it was *necessary* for certain white liberals to become marginalised and peripheralised in the liberation struggle. As the founders of BC realised, it was

necessary for blacks to free themselves – without waiting for their allies (the white liberals) to take the lead.

“Taking the lead” was precisely what white liberals (if one may speak so broadly of such a varied class of people) had been doing for centuries. And, in many ways, they had been effective (such as in the abolition of slavery). But such enterprises were always essentially white and always, to some extent, part of the agenda of imperial expansion and colonialism. The white experience of how indigenous people felt and thought and lived and dreamed was always (and could never be other than) second-hand, and at many removes from subjective African experience. However kindly and well disposed to indigenous people a white person may have been (and most were not), the African experience was always mediated to white consciousness through the filters of centuries of deeply embedded assumptions about the patent superiority of Western, white religion and civilisation and the obvious inferiority of all things pertaining to the “barbaric native” cultures of the colonial empire, so recently (in the nineteenth century) the supposed beneficiaries of European colonisation.

What may have distorted (from an African point of view) the perceptions of some “old school” liberals may have been the last lingering vestiges of the belief that blacks needed white liberals to take the lead, to exercise control, to define the agenda, and to dictate the pace of change. Again, such generalisations would never have been so blatantly articulated, and, where they were applicable, they were applicable only in degrees and in widely differing circumstances. This research will show that BC’s “anti-white” campaign was (partly) a necessary didactic device designed rapidly to conscientise the great inarticulate masses of South Africa to their true condition, and that it was also part of a deliberate strategy to prevent white liberals from meddling

too closely in BC affairs during a crucial stage in the organisation's history. The BC protagonists of anti-white rhetoric consciously kept their liberal allies at arm's length so that they could design their own programme of action without liberal intervention.¹⁰

Like all fictions, however, the invention often concealed a greater or lesser degree of fact, and the research which follows is designed to show just how exceedingly complex and fluctuating was the symbiosis between ostensible enemies and actual allies. Obviously, it was through trial and error that BC realised the shortcomings and limitations of their policy of racial exclusiveness. While, by clever use of theory and rhetoric, the proponents of BC might succeed in attracting and convincing large numbers of black followers and supporters, the ultimate success of the whole enterprise depended on scarce resources of all kinds which (at the time) only well-disposed white liberals could supply. I therefore contend that, although it was never *official* BC policy, the leaders of the alliance consciously sought and cultivated active cooperation with *progressive* liberal institutions. In the last analysis, BC needed liberal institutions and individual liberal expertise to achieve its aims. The University Christian Movement (UCM), the South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR), the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS) and the Black Sash are examples of liberal institutions on which BC had to rely in times of need. In addition, various liberal publications carried articles and analyses which sympathised with or publicised BC aims and policies at a time when there were no black-controlled publications in South Africa.

BC "rhetoric" also served to alert susceptible white liberals to the fact that there was a new kind

¹⁰ Barney Pitso, "Priorities in Community Development - An Appeal to the Blackman's Compassion", in SASO Newsletter, September 1971, p.13.

of black activism abroad in the land. Part of my thesis seeks to demonstrate that BC's criticism of liberals and their institutions was deliberately designed to educate whites to change their old-fashioned (colonial) approach to black political issues. As the material in chapter three will show, this policy worked. Because BC was unambiguous in its repudiation of the old-style colonialist and patriarchal liberalism, a whole new younger generation within NUSAS became amenable to radical conscientisation and a fundamental change in their outlook.¹¹

Although UCM was another liberal organisation which supported BC, it was different from NUSAS in that it was only established in the late sixties, at almost the same time that BC was founded. Both organisations were therefore direct responses to the radical political currents and revolutionary perceptions of the sixties, at a time when the atmosphere of state repression in South Africa was becoming ever more intensified by apartheid laws and practice. Because UCM was a radical political (and Christian) organisation from the very beginning, the relationship between BC and UCM was both friendly and cooperative. One may attribute UCM's political status to the influence of two of its white liberal Christian leaders, Basil Moore and Colin Collins, about whom more information will be given later in this text. In any event, UCM embodied a political edge which attracted a large number of African followers, who found in UCM a clear and rational voice which echoed their deepest aspirations.¹²

This thesis will attempt to show that both NUSAS and UCM played a substantial role in supporting and cooperating with BC. While NUSAS was opposed at the beginning to the

¹¹ Oppenheimer Centre for African Studies, Cape Town University. President of NUSAS Charles Nupen's letter to Black Campus, 17th June 1974, pp.1-2.

¹² George M. Fredrickson, Black Liberation: A Comparative History of Black Ideologies in the United States and South Africa (New York, Oxford University Press, 1995), p.303.

formation of a new, exclusively black organisation (BC), this opposition eventually gave way to understanding and approval.¹³ A similar change of attitude never developed within UCM. This may be attributable to the fact that some executive members of UCM, Chris Mokoditso, Justice Moloto and Sabelo Ntwasa, for example, were also in close contact with the BC leadership.¹⁴

In general, the term *liberal* might refer to a person or a group of people who are disposed towards democratic and human rights changes of a progressive political nature as opposed to those (conservatives) who are unwilling to make progressive political changes and who are in general dedicated to preserving and maintaining the (usually reactionary) status quo. Because of the racially polarised nature of South African society, however, these two interpretations might take on a slightly different coloration. Randolph Vigne suggests that liberals are those who "plead for fuller knowledge, or more humane consideration, of non-European needs and interests".¹⁵

The black point of view, however, particularly the BC point of view, is effectively rather different. For the BC adherent, *liberal* referred to any white person in South Africa who was seen to be opposing the apartheid system of government, whether or not such a person was radical, moderate or even conservative.¹⁶ By this definition, even supporters of the old United Party were *de facto liberal*. Although the United Party was not very different from the Nationalist Party in their attitude to race relations in the country, and although their opposition to the government was essentially spineless (their long-time leader, Sir de Villiers-Graaf), the mere fact of their

¹³ Fatima Meer, "NUSAS in the seventies", in South African Outlook, September 1970, p.135.

¹⁴ Ellen Kuzwayo, Call Me Woman (Johannesburg, Ravan Writers Series, 1996), pp.185-186.

¹⁵ Vigne, Liberals Against Apartheid, p.ix.

¹⁶ "Introduction to Formation School", in SASO Newsletter, April 1970, pp.1-4.

opposition to total black disenfranchisement allowed the BC to classify them (for the purposes of practical politics) as “liberal”. While both the UP and the NP supported apartheid policies and denounced the international community for criticising the racist apartheid regime, the UP supported the franchise for other (than white) South African population groups in terms of a property qualification. In the event, such good political intentions were never tested in practice,¹⁷ and both the UP and Sir de Villiers-Graaff eventually disappeared into the oblivion they deserved.

The other “liberal” political party, as indicated early in the chapter, was the Liberal Party itself, which was *prima facie* more genuinely liberal than the UP. The Liberal Party recruited a fair number of black members, many of whom were actively involved in promoting the liberal cause. What bothered many blacks, however, was, as mentioned earlier, the Liberal Party’s failure to get a single black person into parliament since its foundation in 1953. Many black people began to suspect that blacks were being included in the party as tokens rather than equal participants, and the suspicion only became greater as time went on. It was partly this kind of frustration at the failure of white Liberal Party members to implement their policies on a national level that caused many former black members of the party to abandon the Liberal Party and play a leading role in the establishment of the Black Consciousness Movement. There is also little doubt that an intimate experience of the high-minded ineptitude of white members of the party made them permanently aware that blacks would have to sponsor their own revolution.

In the early days of the South African Student Organisation (SASO), black political veterans such as William Nkomo, although reluctant to support SASO because of its racial exclusivity, attended

¹⁷ Helen Suzman, In No Uncertain Terms (Johannesburg, Jonathan Ball, 1993), pp.40-41.

the organisation's meetings.¹⁸ Koka and Manasseh Moerane featured prominently in the formation of the Black People's Convention,¹⁹ and Koka was a member of the *ad hoc* committee. Moerane eventually lost interest in the activities of BPC after the general opinion of the founders was that it should be a political party instead of a civic organisation. Although the Progressive Federal Party (PFP) strenuously denounced the apartheid regime inside parliament for its racist policies, it was perceived by many blacks (especially those in BC) as condoning and perpetuating the apartheid system of government on the grounds that, by accepting the role of being an official opposition party in a parliament that had been elected only by white people, it was encouraging a perception overseas that South Africa was to some extent a democracy. Many blacks felt that the PFP was implicitly excluding blacks from the parliamentary process since, by *law*, no black South African was allowed to be a member of parliament.

The term *liberal* was extended in BC thinking to include liberal extra-parliamentary organisations, which happened also to attract mainly liberal English-speaking South Africans. Although these organisations were defined as playing an interim caretaker role until black majority rule could be achieved, they were criticised for taking upon themselves the role of being spokespersons for the

¹⁸ Mabel Maimela, Interview with Radwezi H. Nengwekhulu, University of Pretoria, 26 May 1996.

¹⁹ The Black Peoples' Convention was established in 1972 to accommodate adults who wished to become political activists, but who were not able to join SASO because it was a student organisation. Recruits for the BPC were drawn from members of the Liberal Party, the banned ANC and PC, non-political associations such as the International African Ministers' Association for the Education and Advancement of African People (Idamasa), the Association for the Educational and Cultural Advancement of African People (Asseca), of which Manasseh Moerane was the chair, the African Independent Churches Association (AICA), the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), and St Peter's Old Boys' Association. The latter association consisted of politically radical Catholic priests who received their theological training at St Peter's Seminary in Hammanskraal near Pretoria. (Thomas G. Karis and Gail M. Gerhart, From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa, 1882-1996 (Pretoria, Unisa Press, 1997), vol 5, p.131.)

black majority instead of preparing the oppressed to speak for themselves against the apartheid system. There were also notably a few heroic white Afrikaans South Africans who had early on decided that the whole apartheid system was a crime against humanity and God and who were prepared to pay the price for taking a principled stand against apartheid and expressing their opposition in public. One such Afrikaner was Beyers Naudé, who became head of the Christian Institute in 1963. In the BC's interpretation, such Afrikaans-speaking South Africans were also classified as liberals.

Although it is also true that there were *black* liberals (in the strictly technical sense) before BC, who operated in the period under consideration in this research (in the sense they were either bona fide members of the Liberal Party or else had strong connections with the Liberal Party), the scope of this research is limited only to the role played by white liberals in general. The scope of this research also excludes members of other radical white groups which were silenced during the late sixties and early seventies since most of them were members of the banned Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA) or the African National Congress (ANC). These limitations imply no value judgement.

The term *liberal* in this thesis will therefore be defined and used in the sense that it was defined and interpreted by BC because this research revolves around the role of BC and the symbiotic relationship between members of BC and white liberals in the period under consideration. The term *liberal* therefore will by necessity include a *select* number of all the above-mentioned groups or individuals who, at one stage or another, opposed the supremacist racial policies of the apartheid state – because that is how BC used the term.

BC also from the beginning used the term *black* to designate all members of South African society, namely the blacks, Coloureds and Indians, who, according to the South African legislation of the time, were labelled “non-white” and hence acutely discriminated against in terms of all human rights and all the normal privileges of citizenship. Because this is how BC defined *black*, the term *black* in this thesis will always be used inclusively, i.e. in the sense that it refers to Africans, Coloureds and Indians. The trend since the eighties has been to replace the word *black* with *African*. For this thesis, however, the term *black* will be used in the inclusive sense indicated above (although it is occasionally also used in the latter sense to denote African.). It should also be mentioned that the term "African" is used fairly extensively in later chapters, and that this usage indicates the shift towards a more defined use of the term "African" which is current in Africanist historiography.²⁰

The terms *Black Consciousness* and *Black Consciousness Movement* (as indicated in footnote 1 of this chapter) will be used as synonyms. It should be noted however that the former was used mainly in the early seventies during the period of the establishment of the organisation while the latter term was used in the late seventies and eighties – especially with reference to the movement in exile. Within South Africa itself, BC was organisationally replaced by the Azanian People's Organisation (AZAPO), which was formed after the banning of all BC-related organisations in 1978. It should of course be emphasised that BC transcended all political parties because it was primarily an ideology that fertilised and nourished the thought and actions of the ANC, the PAC, AZAPO, and even Inkatha.

²⁰ Stephen Ellis and Tsepo Sechaba, Comrades Against Apartheid: The ANC and the South African Communist Party in Exile (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1992); Francis Meli, South Africa Belongs to Us (Harare, Zimbabwe Publishing House, 1998).

Reasons for the researcher's interest in the subject

My interest in this field of study in South African History was influenced by my relationships with members of the Black Consciousness Movement who, in one way or another, were active in promoting the interests of BC. Informal discussions with these people motivated me to look more closely into the role played by those white liberals who were the subject of such acute criticism by BC analysts. Among those who stimulated my interest in this subject were Simon Maimela, then a student at the Harvard Divinity School; Mokgethi Motlhabi of Boston University; Thomas Ranuga of Brandeis University; Aggrey Mbere of the Harvard School of Education; Bongajalo Goba of the Chicago Theological Seminary, and Father Buti Tlhagale, who, at the time, was studying at the Gregorian University in Rome. This group was joined in the eighties by Takatso Mofokeng, a senior lecturer in the Department of Theology at the University of South Africa, and David Mosoma, who also worked at the same university and department. In addition, Itumeleng Mosala, a senior lecturer in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Cape Town, played a substantial role in helping the researcher to look critically at the field.

My first intention, as I approached the research, was to expose what I understood to be the hypocrisy and self-interestedness of white liberals and the part they played in attempting to ameliorate the plight of blacks under the apartheid government. The received wisdom in radical black circles at this time was that white liberals tended to *retard* the liberation process because, although they expended a great deal of effort in challenging and criticising apartheid policy, it was always without (so it seemed) in any way compromising their own safety, comfort and security.

This was the thesis that I intended to verify in my research.

However, after I had exposed myself to the variety of reading material that my supervisor required me to read – material that I had not hitherto encountered – I began to realise that the realities of opposition politics as they developed at the time under consideration were far more complex than (until then) I had reason to believe, and that I needed to reconsider and rework my theoretical assumptions (which by then I realised could not account for the historical developments – except in a simplistic and essentially artificial manner). Although I cannot obviously disclaim personal bias in my point of view, I was led to reconsider the issues in a way that has resulted in what I now believe is a much more balanced and nuanced analysis of the relations between white liberals and the blacks who were supporters of BC. By the end of the research, my position is that, although the BC analysis was certainly valid in many ways and although it is even now undeniable that liberals (whether inadvertently or not) retarded the pace of black liberation, white liberals and their institutions also paradoxically contributed a great deal in terms of expertise and human and material resources and that this contribution kept the movement alive under the most difficult circumstances imaginable.

The worst disability which had to be endured by blacks under apartheid was, in the opinion of BC members, that they had to rely on other racial groups to act and speak on their behalf. One may also apply this disability to the South African literature on Black Consciousness. A fair number of articles, dissertations, theses and books about Black Consciousness were written either by white liberals or by African Americans, the only exception being those contributions by Allan Boesak, Thomas Ranuga and Mokgethi Motlhabi – black South Africans who had studied abroad. In fact, the whole topic of Black Consciousness and Black Power was so hedged about with

taboos under the apartheid system that the subject was all but inaccessible to serious researchers. Until very recently in South Africa it was difficult (and often impossible) for researchers to gain access to archival information. It was often easier for foreigners to be granted access to records, and this may explain the paucity of indigenous research in South Africa. (Gail Gerhart, in 1978, was, for example, among the first researchers on the subject.)²¹ This research in fact represents only the second major attempt by a black South African at a South African university to trace in some detail the history of the vicissitudes of the Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa. What made this kind of research possible was the unbanning after February 1990 of Black Consciousness and other liberation movements by the then president of South Africa, F.W. de Klerk. The first thesis to appear was that of Ernest Messina from the University of Western Cape in November 1995. Messina analysed the impact of BC among the Coloureds in the Western Cape.²²

Another important contribution made by this research is an analysis of the role played by women in a male-dominated organisation such as BC. I will argue that women played such a crucial role in the organisation that BC could never have exerted the crucial influence that it did on the history of South Africa if the contribution had been absent. This influence, which will be explored in some detail in a later chapter, was vital to the successful dissemination of BC ideology into all areas of the South African political scene. To give but one example at this point: Anne Hope, a distinguished Catholic layperson who was one of the founders of the Grail movement in the Catholic Church, met Steve Biko when they were both members of SPROCAS (the Study Project

²¹ Gail Gerhart, Black Power in South Africa, pp.257-311.

²² Ernest Messina, "Swartbewustheid in die Wes-Kaap 1970-1984", Ph.D. thesis, University of the Western Cape, December 1995; Mabel Maimela, Interview with Messina at the University of the Western Cape, 13 April 1991.

for Christianity in an Apartheid Society). Hope writes:

In 1972 Steve Biko and Bokwe Mafuna approached me and asked me to teach a group of members of the South African Student's Organisation (SASO) to use the Freire method. In the last half of 1972, I worked with them in workshops to introduce them to the Freirean method and help them to adapt it to their local conditions. I loved working with SASO, as they were one of the most committed and deep-thinking groups I have ever worked with. It was also a tremendous conscientisation for me to work with them. They believed that the churches had betrayed black people, but that there was much truth in what Jesus had taught. In the mean time the South African government was very frightened of the discussion and implementation of Freire's method.²³

Main sources for the research

A number of sources helped me to formulate the terms of my thesis. My main concern at the time was to concentrate on the subject in such a way that I would be able to keep both the liberal and the Black Consciousness points of view in focus at all times – so as ultimately to be able to prove that a complex relationship had indeed existed between the two traditions. Gail M. Gerhart, in her book, Black Power in South Africa: The Evolution of an Ideology, deals fairly comprehensively

²³ Anne Hope's story is narrated by Annalet van Schalkwyk in "Sister, We Bleed and We Sing: Women's Stories, Christian Mission and Shalom in South Africa", D.Th. thesis, Unisa, 1999, p.13.

with both points of view. She analyses the role of the liberals and their institutions as they tried to assist the blacks towards gaining political rights in a racist South Africa. Gerhart contends that although liberals tended to be accepted by many concerned parties as trustees of the black cause before World War II, this position changed dramatically towards the end of the forties.²⁴ Even with the establishment of the ANC Youth League, which promoted the radical programme and with the introduction of the ANC Programme of Action of 1949, there was a reluctance on the part of many liberals to relinquish the role of trustees of the Africans.

Gerhart details the increasing distrust of liberals felt by Africans. She also describes the concrete support which various liberal institutions such as the Congress of Democrats, as part of the body involved in the Defiance Campaign of 1952 and the Freedom Charter of 26 June 1955, gave to the cause of black liberation. She describes the role of the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS), especially in the 1960s, and on the formation in 1960 of the African Resistance Movement by white radicals whose purpose was directly to sabotage the apartheid state.²⁵

Motlhabi's book, The Theory and Practice of Black Resistance to Apartheid, was another book which covered more or less the same ground as did Gerhart, but from a different point of view. While Gerhart maintains a sympathetic attitude towards the liberals, it is obvious from Motlhabi's comments on the material which he examines that he was one of those who was sceptical about the efficacy of the role of liberals as agents of liberation. With hindsight one can justify Motlhabi's scepticism. He was an early BCM activist who played a crucial role in the struggle as the editor

²⁴ Gerhart, Black Power in South Africa: The Evolution of an Ideology, pp.7-12.

²⁵ Ibid, pp.51-72.

of the very first book²⁶ about Black Theology in South Africa – after its first editor, Sabelo Ntwasa, had been banned by the South African government. In Motlhabi's investigation and analysis of the three main black resistance movements in South Africa, namely the ANC, the Pan-African Congress and the BCM, represented by SASO and BPC, liberals are more often than not portrayed as individuals who adopted a double standard while acting as agents of change in the political activities in South Africa.²⁷

While organisations such as the South African Council of Churches (SACC), the UCM and the Christian Institute, as well as liberal denominations such as the Anglican, Methodist and Roman Catholic Churches in Southern Africa, were acknowledged and singled out by Motlhabi for the part they played in exposing the evils of apartheid in South African society as a whole, NUSAS received no such acknowledgment.²⁸ As a student organisation always in the forefront of the conflicts from the 1960s onwards, its shortcomings, rather than its contributions, were more easily identifiable than those of other liberal organisations. It is also highly probable that the unavailability of sources on NUSAS in Boston where he studied could be another reason for Motlhabi being as critical as he was of NUSAS. It is likely that his theological background caused Motlhabi to be more sympathetic and kinder to these religious opponents of apartheid that they deserved.

Another valuable source for my research was the collection entitled, Bounds of Possibility: The Legacy of Steve Biko and Black Consciousness, which, as its title indicates, centred mostly

²⁶ Mokgethi Motlhabi (ed.), Essays of Black Theology in South Africa (Johannesburg, University Christian Movement, 1972).

²⁷ Motlhabi, The Theory and Practice of Black Resistance to Apartheid, pp. xviii-21.

²⁸ Ibid, pp.22-30, 72, 90, 138-139.

around Biko's contribution to the Black Consciousness Movement. A number of the contributors played active roles in the political activities of the 1970s and were hence Biko's contemporaries. While the first part deals with the role played by Biko, the second part analyses the legacy of BCM as a movement of political awakening which embraced the cause of the empowerment of women and Black Theology.²⁹ One of the most important essays for the purposes of this research is that contributed by Geoff Budlender. Budlender was a member of NUSAS who had been actively involved in the organisation's politics and he elucidates what he perceived to be the role of NUSAS and his personal misgivings about the organisation at the time.³⁰ This book was the most valuable source for this research because it was written by former activists in BCM and in NUSAS. As such the contributors were able to provide their own versions of what had taken place during the period under discussion.

Other recent sources, which were given careful consideration and which are important since they balance what might be the subjective bias of the South African contributors, were found in the writings of George M. Fredrickson, Thomas G. Karis, Gail M. Gerhart and Toussaint (whose first name is not recorded in any records). All these sources address the question of the connection that existed between BCM and white liberal organisations in the black liberation movement.

Fredrickson's book, Black Liberation: A Comparative History of Black Ideologies in the United States and South Africa, traces the origins of BCM in terms of what inspired the movement. The independence of a large number of former African colonies and the impact which the civil rights

²⁹ N. Barney Pityana et al, Bounds of Possibility: The Legacy of Steve Biko and Black Consciousness (Cape Town, David Philip, 1991), pp.100-153,

³⁰ Ibid, pp.228-237.

movement made in the United States, encouraged black South Africans to engage in political activity with a view to obtaining their own political rights and freedom.³¹ His most important contribution was to explain in some detail why the BCM tended to be opposed to liberals. He asserts that liberals planned to eliminate racial discrimination and transform South Africa into a kind of Western democracy rather than into a socialist society of either a Marxist or an Africanist kind. He argues in addition that an alliance with liberals and radicals disadvantaged Africans because whites in general tended to assume authority and behave paternalistically – thereby preventing blacks from rising above their conditioned feelings of inferiority.³²

Fredrickson observed the extent to which religious beliefs and associations shaped BCM's ideology and its mode of operation. BCM embraced religious organisations by allowing the leaders from mainstream ecclesiastical organisations to play a leading role in the organisation. He documents the participation of individual white and black clerics such as Basil Moore, Beyers Naudé, Aelred Stubbs, and Smangaliso Mkhathshwa. Most of the black clergy thus involved became prominent advocates of BCM and were widely represented in the leadership of the "adult" wing of the movement.³³

Karis and Gerhart's book, From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa, 1882-1990 (Volume Five), is a recently published work which, to some extent, supports Fredrickson's view of the role of liberals in the political development of South Africa. In this volume the authors make two main original assertions. The first is that BCM was formed

³¹ Fredrickson, pp.298-302.

³² Ibid, pp.298-302.

³³ Ibid, pp.302-303.

by students who were far more radical than their older counterparts in the ANC and the PAC. Their first contact with white radicals was with those liberal students who were members of NUSAS. When the majority of these students reneged on their radicalism, black students lost interest in NUSAS and the revolutionary potential of white liberalism.³⁴ This (they aver) is the reason why BCM went on to become so bitterly critical of liberals and liberal institutions.

Their second assertion is that BCM was ideologically inclusive in that they defined the word "black" to include all the population groups (Coloureds, Indians and Africans) which were discriminated against by the South African government. BCM's critique of liberalism was, as C.R.D. Halisi has pointed out, merely a prelude to their central concern: to consolidate black solidarity among the oppressed in order to expose and neutralise the kind of ethnic-based resistance which the government was trying by all means to encourage.³⁵ This inclusivist use of the word "black" originated in the University of Natal's Non-European Section, in which the above-mentioned "black" groups (blacks, Coloureds and Indians) were all accommodated by the university in one residence – Taylor residence. Using the word "black" in this widely inclusivist way was conceived at Wentworth where group identification was less important.³⁶ In the early stages of BCM, some Africans were reluctant to recognise Coloureds and Indians as "black", but this opposition soon subsided – mainly because the first leaders of BCM (such as Biko and Aubrey Mokwape) were part of the Wentworth group.³⁷

³⁴ Karis and Gerhart, pp. 91-92.

³⁵ C.R.D. Halisi, "Racial proletarianisation and some contemporary dimensions of Black Consciousness thought" in R. Hunt Davis Jr (ed.), *Apartheid Unravels* (Gainesville, University of Florida Press, 1991), p.79.

³⁶ Ibid, p. 98.

³⁷ Karis and Gerhart Collection (Johannesburg). Gail Gerhart, Interview with Steve Biko, Durban, 24 October 1972, pp.14-16.

Toussaint's contribution to the debate lies in his analysis of the involvement of the liberals in the struggle for black liberation. His point of view supports Fredrickson's observation that liberals were concerned about eliminating racial discrimination and transforming South Africa into a Western-style democracy. In addition, Toussaint suggested that BCM opposed liberals because their point of view was selective. Liberals believed that educational reform was the first step in the elimination of racial discrimination. In practice this would have meant that educated Africans would be accommodated in a Western-style democracy while the uneducated would continue to experience discrimination.³⁸

Two other sources which dealt with contemporary attitudes of whites in general and which were useful for this research were Joshua Lazerson's book, Against the Tide, and Randolph Vigne's Liberals against Apartheid. The former traces the involvement of mostly liberal institutions after World War II until the eve of the April 1994 democratic elections in South Africa, as well as the oppositional role played by the Springbok Legion, the Torch Commando, the Defiance Campaign, the Congress of Democrats and other institutions such as NUSAS and various mass media.³⁹ Vigne's book deals with the activities of the Liberal Party, the most genuinely liberal party which had ever existed until that point in the history of South African politics. The reasons why the Liberal Party did not support the Congress of the People (which eventually facilitated the agreement and signing of the Freedom Charter) are explained by Vigne. He also details the contributions of individual members and their interactions with black members in the party. His

³⁸ Toussaint, "Fallen among Liberals: An Ideology of Black Consciousness Examined", in African Communist, no 78, 1979, p.23.

³⁹ Lazerson, Against the Tide: Whites in the Struggle Against Apartheid, pp.53-80, 115-134, 161-220, 246-253.

explanation of the role played by individual members in the activities of various African organisations such as the ANC and PAC is extremely valuable.⁴⁰

It was these sources which helped me to conceptualise my central thesis, namely that liberals and their organisations played a crucial part in the development of political consciousness among Africans and that a complex and paradoxical interaction between liberals and Black Consciousness existed, especially during the late sixties and early seventies. My contention is that while most Africans who became outspoken against the apartheid system were the products of liberal institutions and their association with liberals, a need for the establishment of a radical black organisation such as the BCM became an absolute necessity in the 1970s so that blacks could articulate their political aspirations and also conscientise white liberals in general.

While some researchers prefer to locate the founding paradigms of Black Consciousness in Europe and the United States, the founders of Black Consciousness deliberately focused on Africa rather than on European or American sources. Like the PAC, BC, for a number of varied reasons, looked more to the African continent than anywhere else for political inspiration. Firstly, a number of African countries which had been colonised by European countries had become independent. These countries became a source of encouragement for black South Africans who were still under the yoke of the racist apartheid government. Even more encouraging, some of the leaders of these countries had pledged their unconditional support for the liberation movements of Southern Africa as a whole.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Vigne, *Liberals Against Apartheid*, pp.33-84,90-99,138-151.

⁴¹ See David Howarth, "Complexities of identity/difference: Black Consciousness ideology in South Africa", *Journal of Political Ideologies*, vol 2, no 1, 1997, pp.58-72.

Secondly, a number of African leaders were enthusiastic about the concept of Pan-Africanism (the idea that African states should amalgamate to form a strong confederation so as to prevent foreign control). The leading exponents of this idea included the president of Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah, Tanzania's Julius Nyerere, and Kenneth Kaunda, the president of Zambia. (Nyerere formulated his own African brand of socialism and became one of the major critics of apartheid. It was because of his outspokenness that he was so highly respected among BCM supporters.⁴²) BC theorists were understandably obsessed by the writings of these former leaders of the various liberation movements who had become leaders of independent African states. Another great theorist was the French physician, Frantz Fanon, who lived in a former French colony and who advocated socialism as the form of government capable of solving the economic problems facing Africa as a whole.⁴³ Fanon was highly regarded by BCM members and indeed was a kind of cult figure among anti-establishment figures in the sixties and seventies (his works were all banned in South Africa).⁴⁴ It was logical that African literature was the first and primary focus of BCM since it located the significance of African identity in Africa itself.⁴⁵

Thirdly, BCM activists were inspired by speeches from shortwave radio broadcasts from independent African states. These speeches helped BC members to realise that many Africans all over Africa were by then already in *control* of their own countries. Biko tells how he used to listen attentively to the revolutionary speeches broadcast from Africa, especially those of Hastings

⁴² Gerhart. Interview with Biko, p.13.

⁴³ See Frantz Fanon, Black Skin, White Mask (New York, Grove Press, 1967) and The Wretched of the Earth (Stanford, Hoover Institution Press, 1967).

⁴⁴ Ibid, pp.5-24.

⁴⁵ Godwin Mohlomi, "Black Search for Identity and Dignity", in The World, 15 July 1976, p.2.

Kamuzu Banda, then head of state. (These points will be discussed more fully in chapter four.)

This research will also examine the vital role played by black women in BCM (and the special relations of support and inspiration which existed between white and black American women during that time). There are important similarities between the roles played by American black women role in the civil rights movement in the United States of America and those played by black South African women in the struggle against apartheid. While both groups fought alongside their male counterparts against racism, neither women in Africa nor women in America were afforded the opportunity by their men to compete on an equal basis. This raises the vital question as to whether women, by working alongside their male counterparts, actually compromised their own gender liberation movement.⁴⁶ Kogila Moodley has observed that few women were on the BC executive in the early days of the movement. They had their own organisation (the Black Women's Federation), which they used to make a decisive contribution the the struggle.⁴⁷ These issues will be explored in some detail in chapter five.

In the United States a small number of black women actually joined the white-led feminist movement (in spite of opposition from their men) because they perceived it as being a part of the wider *liberation* movement which they were seeking.⁴⁸ In contrast to this, the majority of black women activists in South Africa conceded to their men's requests not to join any multi-racial

⁴⁶ Gloria T. Hull, Patricia Bell Scott and Barbara Smith (eds), All the Women are White, All the Blacks are Men, but Some of us are Brave: Black Women's Studies (New York, Feminist Press, 1982), pp.7-9.

⁴⁷ Kogila Moodley, "The Continued Impact of Black Consciousness in South Africa", The Journal of Modern Studies, vol 29, no 2, 1991, p.244.

⁴⁸ Gerda Lerner (ed.), Black Women in White America (New York, Vintage Books, 1973), p.585.

feminist movements – so as to avoid any sign of division in the black population. Black American women did not in fact join white American feminist organisations: they formed their own organisations because they perceived their problems and aspirations as being different from those white women.⁴⁹ Thus the working environment of black and white women differed radically: blacks were usually engaged in the lowest-paid employment while white women were often well paid and comfortably off by comparison. White women were also legally protected against sexual abuse while blacks were not. These are but two examples to illustrate how different were the needs of the two groups. This difference has been examined by Angela Davis who has observed that more black women have always worked outside their homes than have their white sisters.⁵⁰ Davis's main point is that white women more frequently have been able to choose comfortable jobs while black women, more often than not, have been forced to take any available job, merely in order to survive.

Because of the many similarities which have existed between the two groups, it is instructive to compare black women in the United States and in South Africa – specifically to determine whether, by actively and obediently participating in political activism during the 1970s *on male terms*, black South African women compromised the possibility of an earlier gender liberation. I shall examine this problem in more detail in chapter five. What is known without any doubt is that there was an important relationship between South African and American women. This was demonstrated (for example) by the fact that the president of the National Council of Negro Women, Dorothy Height, was invited to the annual Conference of the Federal Women

⁴⁹ Audre Lorde, Sister Outsider (New York, The Crossing Press, 1984), p.60.

⁵⁰ Angela Davis, Women, Race and Class (New York, Vintage Books, 1973), p.5.

Organisation (a predominantly black organisation) as the main guest speaker.⁵¹ Details of her visit and speech are reviewed in chapter five.

The format of the research

In each of the following five chapters, various aspects of the contribution made by both groups are stated and analysed. Chapter two traces the role played by some leading clerics, especially those white liberals from the Anglican Church in the 1950s, as they tried to expose the evil of apartheid in a country which prided itself on being 80 per cent "Christian".⁵² Because of this legacy, most of the black priests who eventually became warriors against apartheid were members of the Anglican Church.⁵³ Prominent among these were Leo Rakale, Simeon Nkoane and Desmond Tutu.⁵⁴ Chapter two will also analyse the extra-parliamentary ecclesiastical body, the South African Council of Churches, and how the racist policies of the SACC were effectively challenged and ultimately altered by those Africans within the organisation who had been influenced by BC thinking and by the adoption of Black Theology, a theology which originated among black people in the United States of America.

This chapter also shows how the formation of radical organisations by white liberals such as those of the Christian Institute and the UCM, and the radical changes effected in the SACC, made it

⁵¹ Women's Supplement to The World, 15 September 1977, p.1.

⁵² Mokgethi Motlhabi, "The Historical Origins of Black Theology", in Itumeleng Mosala and Buti Tlhagale (eds), The Unquestionable Right to be Free (New York, Orbis Books, 1986), pp.29-33.

⁵³ Joseph, Side by Side, pp.229, 233.

⁵⁴ "Anglican clerics honoured", Sowetan, 24 April 1998, p.6.

possible for the African point of view to be heard. I will also analyse the pressure exerted by the World Council of Churches (WCC) on the SACC, to which it was affiliated, and how this helped to strengthened the position of anti-apartheid protesters in South Africa.

Chapter three deals with the part which was played by the white liberal student organisation, the National Union of the South African Students (NUSAS), in black politics prior to the formation of the exclusively black students organisation, the South African Student Organisation (SASO), in the late 1960s and early 1970s. With the emergence of SASO in student politics, NUSAS found itself challenged by a truly radical organisation. Although NUSAS at first could not adapt to SASO's criticism, it later accepted the validity of such criticism and began to work cooperatively with SASO wherever possible. This cooperation was most evident during the leadership of Steve Biko and Barney Pityana from SASO and Paul Pretorius and Neville Curtis from NUSAS.⁵⁵ It has often been said that friction between the two bodies was quite common, but, where this happened, it was more a function of dissonances between the personalities of whatever leaders were in office at the time. The converse is also obviously true. This point is clarified in the chapter.

My most important contention in chapter three is that SASO influenced NUSAS to change its policy towards race-related student political issues. The changes implemented included the introduction of three departments in the organisation. The Annual NUSAS Convention of July 1970 established Aquarius, Nuswel and Nused. It was no coincidence that one of these projects was under the directorship of a black student, Ernest Ralekgetho, a seminary student from St

⁵⁵ Karis and Gerhart Collection. Correspondence between Curtis and Biko, 2-4-1970, Pretorius and Pityana, 15-7-1970, 7-9-1970.

Peter's Seminary at Hammanskraal near Pretoria.⁵⁶

Chapter four emphasises the role of the forerunners of BCM in shaping the movement, their critique of white liberals, the inclusion of the outlawed liberation movements and the apartheid government's reaction. It focuses on interpreting the liberal role prior to, during and after the banning of BCM. It also demonstrates how the forerunners of BCM attempted to incorporate some principles of the ANC, PAC and NEUM as a way of trying to elicit support from supporters of these liberation movements. The effects, both positive and negative, of acknowledging and giving credence to these movements by including their principles, are also examined.

Because the dominant nature of South African society is patriarchal and because this has undermined and marginalised women's activities, it is the purpose of chapter five to examine the role played by women in the Black Consciousness Movement. Two particular points will be made in this regard. There were those women who saw and accepted the necessity of joining the organisation after they had been politically influenced by men. These joined the organisation of their own free will. Some, however, were involuntarily drawn into politics because of the activities of their next of kin. The political activities of either children or spouses forced many women to offer their practical support to the liberation struggle and to defy the apartheid government.

Although BC was a short-lived movement, it had an enormous impact that changed the political outlook of the country and shook the strength of the South African apartheid system to its very foundations. Biko's death and the subsequent Inquest into his death not only exposed the most

⁵⁶ "NUSAS in Action 1970: the Generation of War", in Phenomenon, vol 1, no 1, June 1970, p.5.

violently racist and inhumane aspects of the system but it also intensified internal and external pressure on the government to such an extent that the government was forced to adopt certain changes.

Chapter six attempts to analyse the role played by liberals and liberal organisations after the death of Steve Biko in detention on 12 September 1977. It also examines the response of the government and how the inquest into Biko's death was organised. Looking at these events is necessary because Biko's death, more than any other incident, exposed the cruelty of the apartheid system.⁵⁷ Biko's death exposed apartheid's supporters both nationally and internationally to the extent that they could no longer comfortably pretend that there was nothing really wrong. More than anything else, Biko's death drew specific attention to the operation of the South African security laws.⁵⁸ Chapter six will show how the liberal press and the opposition party in parliament were the only ones effectively to criticise the government during the period under discussion (most of the government's critics had been banned on 29 October 1977). The BC and its affiliates, the The World and The Weekend World, the two major newspapers reporting African views, were banned at this time. Because of this, the voices of blacks on relevant issue were hardly ever heard. At the same time, white organisations such as the Christian Institute were banned, along with all the other liberation movements mentioned above. After these bannings, liberal institutions remained the sole critics of the circumstances surrounding Biko's death.

I was particularly interested to establish whether, because of the influence of BC, liberals might have changed their approach to various issues (whether they might, for example, support universal

⁵⁷ "Biko was a 'messiah' – US ambassador," Sowetan, 1 June 1998, p.9.

⁵⁸ "Heavy toll of the 1973 crackdown", Daily Dispatch, 14 March 1978, p.10.

franchise). I also argue that Biko's death and the subsequent commission of enquiry came at an opportune time for the opposition party. The tragic way in which Biko died, and the insensitive manner in which the case was handled by the government, caused a groundswell of support for the Progressive Federal Party (PFP), which then fulfilled the role of arch-critic of the National Party government. For the first time in its existence, the PFP had the (relatively large) number of seventeen members in parliament when parliament reopened in January 1978.

Analysing Biko's death and the inquest involves examining local conditions in the Eastern Cape Province. If Biko had been better known on a national level among liberals and blacks, it would have been inconceivable for the security police to have treated him in the way in which they did. The tragedy of his death (I contend) could only have taken place in the Eastern Cape and in Port Elizabeth in particular. This region was known for being ultra-conservative. Port Elizabeth's Walmer Police Station, the place where Biko was detained, was notorious for the brutal treatment of political detainees. At the same time, the area had a long history of black resistance to racist pressure. During the ANC Defiance Campaign, it was established that the largest number to heed the campaign came from Port Elizabeth (more than 10 000 participants).⁵⁹ Biko therefore became a symbol of the threat to white supremacy in the whole of the Eastern Cape.

Although the security police probably did not plan to kill him, it is highly likely that the police brutalised him as severely as they did in order to make an "example" of him in the eyes of his followers and so frighten them and deter them from involvement in political activism. Police brutality in the region might also have been motivated by the fact that it was a region which was

⁵⁹ Motlhabi, The Theory and Practice of Black Resistance to Apartheid, p.60.

far more highly politicised than other regions of the country. It is likely that the politically reactionary security police were enraged by opposition from Africans who they believed to be participating in acts intended to overthrow democratic government in anticipation of communist rule.

The various international groups which had supported the liberation movements added their pressure to that of their respective governments in order to effect measures against the apartheid government. As a result of their efforts, the South African government was subjected to continuous pressure. Most of these anti-apartheid organisations were based in Europe and in the United States of America.⁶⁰ This point will be discussed in chapter seven.

The final chapter assesses the entire work and proposes reasons why black opinion in general was suspicious of the role played by liberals in black activism. Concrete examples are adduced of how white liberals and the proponents of Black Consciousness compensated for each other on issues of common interest.

Method of research

⁶⁰ R.M. Price, The Apartheid State in Crisis: Political Transformation in South Africa, 1975-1990 (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1991); R.E. Edgar (ed.), Sanctioning Apartheid (Trenton NJ, Africa World Press, 1990).

I accessed most of the primary sources through interviews which I conducted with other researchers on the same subject, This provided me with tapes or written transcripts. I also conducted a few interviews with people who were activists during the period under discussion were conducted. Other sources which I consulted were various newspapers from around the country; private letters and other documents donated to the Archives at the University of South Africa (Unisa) and to the University of the Witwatersrand; documents from the Alan Paton Centre at the University of Natal (Pietermaritzburg), the Centre of African Studies at the University of Cape Town (UCT), and the Mayibuye Centre at the University of the Western Cape (UWC). In addition to these interviews, newspapers and documents from the above-mentioned archives, I consulted a number of works of research in the form of dissertations and theses on the same subject. The availability of such in-depth research made it possible for me either to support or modify my contentions. A hindrance to this research was the unavailability of sources, such as documents which were restricted because they had not yet been classified (as in the case of the Mayibuye Centre). Another hindrance was that other major libraries such as the State Library had little to offer on the subject of black politics.

CHAPTER TWO

BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS, BLACK THEOLOGY OF LIBERATION AND THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

In this chapter I shall describe, firstly, the role which was played by a small group of white liberals, in their capacities as leaders of various religious denominations, in the fight against apartheid at a time when it had become impossible for blacks inside South Africa to speak for themselves. Secondly, I shall also describe how these same white liberals played a role in facilitating the introduction of a Black Theology of liberation into South Africa. Finally, I shall outline relations between Black Theology and Black Consciousness between 1968 and 1977.

I shall also touch on certain problems with regard to the origins of Black Theology in South Africa. Although Black Theology was profoundly influenced by events and currents of thought outside South Africa, it was also shaped by the harsh realities of what was happening inside the country during the apartheid years. It is necessary, in pursuit of an answer to this problem, to examine research conducted by certain seminary students, ministers and theologians so as to expose the double standards of the so-called multi-racial churches that practised a subtle kind of apartheid in their denominations during the apartheid years. This research provides evidence of the ambivalent and equivocal relationships which often existed between white liberals and Black Consciousness.

It has been well documented from contemporary sources¹ that the three major African liberation movements, the African National Congress (ANC), the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC), and the Black Consciousness Movement (BC), but particularly the latter two, objected to the participation of white liberals in the black liberation struggle. Both the constitutions of PAC and BC made this point quite clear. In spite of this, exceptions were made *in practice* to white liberal participation. Thus, for example, white liberal organisations such as the University Christian Movement (UCM) and the Christian Institute (CI), played a vital role to play in assisting the BC materially.²

The role which these two white liberal organizations played in providing material assistance demonstrates that, while BC certainly wished to carry on its own struggle without any assistance whatsoever from white liberal organisations or individuals, it was reduced in practice to accepting a certain amount of assistance. This underscores the paradoxical discrepancy between the rhetoric and the practice of BC, which is one of central themes of this research. Although white liberals have often been severely criticized for interference in African affairs and attempts to "manage" the black struggle (whatever the truth value of such claims may be), it is nevertheless fair to say that a select group of white liberals and white liberal organisations did help to further the aims and the ambitions of BC at a crucial time during the struggle.

I hope in this chapter also to elucidate another point which certain BC protagonists have failed

¹ Sipho Buthelezi, "Emergence of Black Consciousness", in Barney Pityana, Mamphela Ramphele, Malusi Mpumlwana & Lindy Wilson (eds), Bounds of Possibility: the Legacy of Steve Biko and Black Consciousness (Cape Town, David Philip, 1992), pp.112-114.

² William Cullen Library, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, University Christian Movement (UCM) Papers, Biko's correspondence with Colin Collins, December 1969.

to appreciate in their analysis of race relations in South Africa, and that is that progressive white *non-South African* citizens were often much more vociferous in their support of the oppressed majority³ than were white liberal South Africans such as Alan Paton, who was internationally known and respected for his opposition to apartheid and a key member of the South African Liberal Party (which prided itself on its multi-racial membership). Paton was not only less than vigorous in opposing the evils of apartheid: he issued no clear call for universal suffrage within South Africa.⁴

Early African protest against white domination

The Black Theology of liberation first manifested itself in South Africa in the UCM project in March 1970.⁵ Its protagonists were not the first African ecumenical group to challenge both church and government for its segregationist policies. The first group of Africans to break away from mainline churches, were a group of black Methodists in 1880. These Africans were disillusioned, according to Sundkler, by the way in which white mission churches (or the mission arms of white churches) ignored certain important aspects of African religion⁶ while, at the same time, imposing an undilutedly Europeanized form of Christianity on their African adherents.⁷

³ Michael E. Worsnip, Between the Two Fires: The Anglican Church and Apartheid 1948-1957 (Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal Press, 1991), pp. 73-153.

⁴ Archive, Paton Centre, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, (Paton Papers), Pc1/5/1/8, Alan Paton's correspondence with Edgar Brookes, 8 September 1977, pp. 1-2.

⁵ Ngindi Mushete, "The History of Theology in Africa: From Polemics to Critical Irenics", in Kofi Appiah and Sergio Torres (eds), African Theology en Route, (New York, Orbis Books, 1979), p. 31.

⁶ B.G.M. Sundkler, Bantu Prophets in South Africa (London, Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 15.

⁷ Ogbu U. Kalu, "Church Presence in Africa: A Historical Analysis of the Evangelization Process", in Kubi and Torres (eds), African Theology en Route, pp. 13-21.

Christianized Africans were in fact often criticized by European missionaries for maintaining their ties with "the heathen" and for continuing to practise African customs which were unacceptable to missionary ideals of exactly how they thought that black Christians should worship and behave.⁸ When the arrogance of the Western colonial missionary point of view finally became too much to bear, Africans such as Nehemia Tile, an ordained Wesleyan minister, and Kgatlamping, the chief of the Taung, took the initiative and formed their own independent churches.⁹ The essential aim of these new churches was to create space and opportunity for the observance of the uniqueness of an African Christianity. By the time these new churches were founded, it had long since become impossible for blacks in the white-ruled colonial churches to practise their traditionally African religious and social customs (such as traditional African healing, to mention but one).¹⁰

If one looks at the history of white missionary activity in Africa, no matter how progressive and "liberal" one might consider such missionaries to have been, white-dominated Christianity has, for Africans, been one long nightmare of cultural, political, psychological and social humiliation and self-abnegation. For centuries, African self-identity and self-respect have been severely damaged by the explicit and implicit racialism and assumptions of superiority which have been the stock in trade of European Christianity.

⁸ Sundkler, *Bantu Prophets in South Africa*, p.15.

⁹ Victor Wan-Tatah, *Emancipation in African Theology* (New York, Peter Lang, 1988), pp.35-74.

¹⁰ Sabelo Ntwasa, "The Concept of the Church in Black Theology", in Basil Moore (ed.), *The Challenge of Black Theology* (Atlanta, John Knox Press, 1974), pp.102-110.

It was this appreciation of the damage that had been done to African culture and self-esteem that drove Motlhabi Mokgethi to articulate his urgent affirmation of the necessity for a Black Theology of liberation in South Africa which would liberate Africans from the kind of repressive theology which has always (implicitly and explicitly) been the subtext of the racist fantasies and apparatus of oppression sponsored by the apartheid regime.¹¹ The proponents of Black Theology differentiate it from the kind of *African* Theology which arose in most countries in the African continent after they had attained independence. Gabriel Setiloane was one of the few South Africans to remain an exponent of this (African) kind of theology, which focuses mainly on African culture.¹² The difference between the two types of theologies, according to Setiloane, is that African Theology addresses itself to the restoration and the africanisation of Christianity – while Black Theology of liberation deals in the main with the *means* by which blacks may liberate themselves (politically but also in all spheres of life) from the inauthenticity and domination of most white political, religious, cultural and religious culture.¹³ Simon Gqubule also maintains that African Theology is primarily concerned with the africanisation of the Christian religion.¹⁴

There are also slight differences between the concerns and strategies of the African Independent Churches (AICs) and Black Theology. According to Sabelo Ntwasa, a student activist in Black Theology, the independent churches cut themselves off from their dependency on white-controlled

¹¹ Motlhabi Mokgethi, "The Historical Origins of Black Theology", in Itumeleng Mosala and Buti Tlhagale (eds), The Unquestionable Right to be Free (New York, Maryknoll, Orbis Books 1986), pp.29-33.

¹² Gabriel Setiloane, The African Theology (Johannesburg, Skotaville Publishers, 1986), pp.29-33.

¹³ Ibid, pp.34-36.

¹⁴ Bonganjalo Goba, "The Black Consciousness Movement: Its Impact on Black Theology," in Mosala and Tlhagale (eds), The Unquestionable Right to be Free, pp.109-113.

churches.¹⁵ Motlhabi on the other hand avers that it was the enormity of black suffering under European and colonial rule (and, worst of all, the cruelty of the colonial church in tacitly giving consent to racist attitudes and structures) that forced Africans to look for alternatives to remaining in white churches.¹⁶ The only significant difference between the two kinds of African churches was that the AICs, as Simon Maimela has observed, opted to break away from the "mainline" white churches in order to enjoy the kind of religious freedom which was not available to them as perpetual wards of a vitiating white imperial culture. The protagonists of Black Theology, however, remained in the existing colonial churches with the aim of politicising Africans by addressing the political, social and economic imbalances and injustices which were maintained by church and state.¹⁷

White liberal priests and apartheid

Prior to the advent of the Black Theology of liberation, a small number of liberally inclined clergymen who were *not* South African citizens, began to voice their abhorrence of racial discrimination in the country. Among these were Michael Scott, Trevor Huddleston and Ambrose Reeves, each of whom was to play a vital role in challenging the evils of the apartheid system. Because Scott's protests against racial injustice and domination took place in the early 1940s, his period of activity does not fall within the ambit of this research. His contribution, although distinguished and noteworthy, will not be examined. It therefore remains to consider the works of both Huddleston and Reeves, whose contributions are more germane to this research.

¹⁵ Ntwasa, "The Concept of the Church in Black Theology," pp.111-118.

¹⁶ Mokgethi Motlhabi, "The Historical Origins of Black Theology," p.52.

¹⁷ Simon Maimela, "Faith That Does Justice", in The Journal of Black Theology in South Africa, vol 3, no 1, May 1989, p.2.

Trevor Huddleston

The Church of England sent Father Trevor Huddleston from England to South Africa in 1943 to work as a missionary among Africans. Huddleston, who came from a distinguished British family, was both an ordained priest and a monk who had taken his final monastic vows. He was stationed by his order in Sophiatown, Johannesburg, and it was here that he witnessed at first hand the harshness and cruelty of the life to which Africans were subjected. It was the introduction of the Group Areas Act, and the effects of the forced removal of Africans from their homes and businesses in the 1950s¹⁸ that appalled Huddleston and confirmed what he already knew.

In the great "forced removal" from Sophiatown (it was to be perhaps one of the most notorious of numerous subsequent forced removals all over South Africa), Africans were forcibly ejected by police and municipal authorities from their homes so that the whole area could be demolished prior to the building of the exclusively white suburb of Triomf where Sophiatown had once stood.¹⁹ Huddleston used every means in his power to protest against and challenge the system. He was viewed as one of the most ardent campaigners against the removals and an outspoken critic of the apartheid system.²⁰ He also became one of the first white liberal clerics to call for an international sports boycott against South Africa in the hope that its imposition "would rudely

¹⁸ Abdul Samad Minty, "The Anti-Apartheid Struggle", in Deborah Duncan Honore (ed.), Trevor Huddleston: Essays on his Life and Work (New York, Oxford University Press, 1988), p.191. See also, Robert Denniston, Trevor Huddleston: A Life (London, Macmillan, 1999), pp. 45-66.

¹⁹ Frank Chikane, "Church and State in Apartheid South Africa", in Sechaba, vol 22, no 6. June 1988, p.3.

²⁰ F. Deon Patrick Van Tonder, "Sophiatown: Removals and Protest, 1940-1955", M.A. dissertation, Unisa, 1990, p. 154.

waken the average non-political white voter from the sleep of complacent tacit racism".²¹

According to Nadine Gordimer, Huddleston is known to have conscientised his black congregants not to rely on anybody but take it upon themselves to resist forced removals.²² This idea of (black) self-reliance became the cornerstone of BC ideology, and was expressed in the words of the slogan, "Black man: you are on your own".²³ Huddleston's encouragement of blacks to be agents of change (and not to rely on white help or sympathy) shows how exactly his analysis of the situation at the time coincided with that made by black exponents of BC philosophy. It is for this reason that Shirley du Boulay praises Huddleston as one of the earliest white liberals to have contributed towards the raising of a self-reliant consciousness among Africans²⁴ at a time when it was still acceptable for white liberals to act as "trustees" for Africans.²⁵

In his widely published speech recorded in the Observer and entitled "The Church sleeps on", Huddleston attempted to galvanise support among the international ecumenical community to pressurize their governments (those which still retained diplomatic relations with South Africa) to persuade Pretoria to stop its policies of forced removals.²⁶ Because he was becoming an embarrassment to both the Church of England and the South African government in his criticism of the apartheid system, Huddleston was recalled to England in 1956. This, however, did not deter Huddleston from continuing his struggle against the evils of apartheid. Upon his arrival in

²¹ Nadimer Gordimer, "Huddleston: A Sign", in Honore (ed.), Trevor Huddleston, p.8.

²² Ibid, p 8.

²³ Mosibudi Mangena, On Your Own (Johannesburg, Skotaville Publishers, 1990), pp.5-12.

²⁴ Shirley du Boulay, Tutu: Voice of the Voiceless (London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1988), p.22.

²⁵ Minty, "The Anti-Apartheid Struggle," p.191.

²⁶ Ibid, p.192.

Britain in 1956, his first book, Naught For Your Comfort, which detailed the evils of apartheid, was published. This book subsequently became something of a bestseller and served to make the general public of the United Kingdom more aware of the institutionalised cruelties of apartheid.²⁷

Huddleston was also instrumental in getting some British Anglican congregations to invite young African Anglican priests to their country. Two of the Africans who were invited were Leo Rakale and Simeon Nkoane (the former visited the United Kingdom between 1959 and 1963).²⁸ Nkoane was to follow five years after Rakale.²⁹ These two middle-aged African priests became pioneers in boldly and publicly challenging apartheid policy.³⁰ Living in a British environment must have opened Nkoane and Rakale's eyes because they both became emboldened to be among the first clerics to criticise the apartheid government for restricting members of the community from associating with the banned individuals.³¹ They were among the few clerics who were respected by the black community at large for the role they played by intervening in volatile situations between the agents of the apartheid system, such as the police, and the youth. One such occasion when they acted was during the funeral of Robert Sobukwe, the president of the PAC, on 11 March 1978. An angry mob of young people attempted to attack the chief minister of Zululand, Gatsha Buthelezi.³² These young people did not approve of Buthelezi's presence because he was

²⁷ Francois Piachaud, "Reflection from a London Parish", in Honore, (ed.), Trevor Huddleston, p. 81.

²⁸ Alan Wilkinson, The Community of the Resurrection: A Centenary History (London, SCM Press, 1992), p. 296.

²⁹ Crispin Harison, "Trevor Huddleston was a Mentor of Simeon", in Seek, October 1989, p.11.

³⁰ Mamphela Ramphele, A Life (Cape Town, David Philip, 1995), p.127.

³¹ Du Boulay, Tutu: Voice of Voiceless, p.55; The Star, 27/2/1978, p.1; Natal Witness, 28/3/1978, p.3; Daily Dispatch, 3/3/1978, p.8.

³² Daily Dispatch, 14/3/1978, p.11; Thomas G. Karis and Gail M. Gerhart, From Protest to Challenge (Pretoria, Unisa Press, 1997), vol 5, p.773.

a homeland leader and was hence considered to be a "sellout" – like other homeland leaders.³³ It was only the two clerics who were able to convince the crowd not to harm Buthelezi.

Rakale and Nkoane also had opportunities to visit Mirfield (the mother house of Huddleston's order, the Community of the Resurrection, in Yorkshire) while they were working in Britain. Alan Wilkinson has pointed out that the theology taught at Mirfield encouraged members of the Community of the Resurrection to think along lines that empowered them to condemn as unChristian the ideologies of the apartheid government.³⁴ (Both Scott and Reeves were also monks from the Community of the Resurrection.)

Huddleston was instrumental in organising the first conference on apartheid in Britain, a conference that took place on 26 June 1959, the fourth year after the signing of the Freedom Charter in 1955. The main speaker was the then-president of the ANC, Albert Luthuli. He appealed to the international community to boycott sporting activities with the South African racist regime.³⁵ He had been actively involved in the formation of the Anti-Apartheid Movement in Britain in 1958, and participated in supporting the International Defence and Aid Fund, a body which financially and in other ways assisted the victims of apartheid.³⁶

The results of Huddleston's efforts were two-fold. On the one hand, he was greatly respected and revered by the black community, whom he encouraged in forms of non-violent protest.

³³ Diana E.H. Russell, Living of Courage: Women for a New South Africa (London, Virago Press Limited, 1990), p.134.

³⁴ Wilkinson, The Community of Resurrection, pp.296-304.

³⁵ Minty, "The Anti-Apartheid Struggle", p.192.

³⁶ Shriday R. Ramphal, "Man of Our One World", in Honore (ed.), Trevor Huddleston, p.129.

Distinguished African Anglican priests, such as Desmond Tutu and Nkoane, who were both champions of non-violent forms of protest, are known to have been profoundly influenced by Huddleston. They had participated in non-violent forms of protest during the height of Black Theology of liberation in the 1970s when other protagonists were no longer convinced that non-violent protest was still a viable proposition.³⁷ On the other hand, however, Huddleston's continuing involvement in the struggle for the total liberation of Africans bothered some white liberal individuals who believed that he had overextended himself in his dedication to the struggle for justice in Africa. Paton felt that Huddleston had done more than enough when he expressed his dismay by saying, "I think myself that it is something near tragedy that Trevor, in his declining years, should be devoting himself so largely to protest"³⁸ – suggesting thereby that Huddleston should have been active in affairs other than politics.³⁹

Ambrose Reeves (1949-1960)

Ambrose Reeves, the Bishop of Johannesburg, had been involved in the struggle against social injustice long before he accepted a bishopric in South Africa.⁴⁰ He had served as a secretary for the Student Christian Movement and the World Student Christian Federation during his student

³⁷ Mutlanyane Stanley Mogoba, "From Munsieville to Oslo", in Buti Tlhagale and Itumeleng Mosala (eds), *Hammering Swords into Ploughshares* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, William B. Eerdmans, 1987), pp.23-30; Naomi Tutu (ed.), *The Words of Desmond Tutu*, (New York, New Market Press, 1989), pp.15-16.

³⁸ Archives, Alan Paton Centre, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, Alan Paton, Letter to Diane Collins, Pietermaritzburg, 6/8/84 pc1/5/2/4-38, p.1.

³⁹ Ibid, p.1

⁴⁰ Wilkinson, *The Community of the Resurrection*, p.304.

years.⁴¹ As a parish leader in Liverpool he had been involved with community developments and had played a crucial role in the Liverpool Docker's strike of 1945.⁴² Worsnip suggests that it was because of the experience he had acquired in his own country (the United Kingdom) that he was careful first to assess the situation before becoming politically involved.⁴³ After two years in the country in 1951, he started to challenge the apartheid system, especially after the introduction of the Suppression of Communism Amendment Act No.50 of 1951.⁴⁴

His close working relations with the Africans impelled him to work and strategise in co-operation with them. He openly associated with black politicians, Marxist lawyers and progressive businessmen.⁴⁵ It was because of his every day contacts with Africans that he began to understand their problems better than people like the Archbishop of Cape Town, Geoffrey Clayton, who worked mainly with the white community and who had endless dispute with Reeves.⁴⁶ Reeves protested vigorously against the introduction of the Bantu Education Act, which was implemented in 1955.⁴⁷

He served as the chairperson of a consultative committee which had been set up by fourteen organizations opposed to the apartheid policy.⁴⁸ While this committee consisted of representatives who were opposed in every way to the apartheid form of government, it is puzzling that Reeves

⁴¹ Worsnip, Between the Two Fires, p.118.

⁴² Ibid, p.118.

⁴³ Ibid, p.119.

⁴⁴ Ibid, p.120.

⁴⁵ Wilkinson, The Community of the Resurrection, p.312.

⁴⁶ Chikane, "Church and State", p.3.

⁴⁷ Ambrose Reeves, South Africa: Yesterday and Tomorrow (London, Victor Gollancz, 1962), pp.21-25.

⁴⁸ Ibid, p.21.

was not keen to invite the newly formed PAC in 1959 to be a part of it. His reason for not considering the PAC was that it was a racist group.⁴⁹ His refusal to include the PAC confirmed the accusation made by the Black Consciousness movement at a later stage, namely that liberal institutions tended to undermine Africans potential in their dealings with issues that affected them directly. Had the PAC been included in the committee its input might have made all the difference. In any case, together with Huddleston and a few concerned whites, Reeves negotiated with the authorities at the request of the Africans, during the Alexandra Bus boycott. The government-sponsored bus authorities had raised bus fares at a time when commuters' wages were below the poverty datum line.⁵⁰

Reeves also played a prominent role after the Sharpeville Massacre of 21 March 1960 when 69 African protestors were shot by police as they were running for cover. The bullet wounds in the victims' backs was evidence enough that they had been running away. Immediately after the incident Reeves tried unsuccessfully to contact a local minister, Z.M. Voyi (the telephone lines in the area had been cut).⁵¹ By using the Treason Trial Defence Fund, Reeves retained the services of two lawyers to investigate the case by interviewing and compiling the statements from the victims *before* any government attempts to disseminate disinformation.⁵² The two lawyers whom Reeves retained for the Sharpeville tragedy were John Lang and Ernest Wentzel.⁵³ Wentzel had actively been involved in extra-parliamentary protest as a member of the National Union of the

⁴⁹ Randolph Vigne, Liberals against Apartheid: A History of the Liberal Party of South Africa, 1953-1968 (London, Macmillan, 1997), p. 79.

⁵⁰ Tom Lodge, Black Politics in South Africa Since 1945 (Braamfontein, Ravan Press, 1983), p. 75.

⁵¹ Frank Donald Phillips, "Richard Ambrose Reeves: Bishop of Johannesburg 1949-1961", (M.A. dissertation, History Department, University of South Africa, June 1995), pp. 198-199.

⁵² Reeves, South Africa: Yesterday and Tomorrow, p. 8.

⁵³ Phillips, "Richard Ambrose Reeves, The Bishop of Johannesburg", p. 200.

South African Students (NUSAS), and had been the NUSAS national president in 1957.⁵⁴ Wentzel also later defended the accused in political cases at the time when BC involvement in national politics was at its height.⁵⁵ (The detailed documentation of such political cases appears in chapter three.)

In his book, South Africa: Yesterday and Tomorrow, Reeves reveals how his role in exposing the police and government cover-up of the Sharpeville massacre caused him to be harassed by the agencies of the state such as the South African Special Branch of the police (the so-called security police) who followed his movements and watched him day and night.⁵⁶ He left South Africa through Swaziland on 2 April 1960 after receiving confidential information that his arrest was imminent.⁵⁷ His departure from South Africa was interpreted as a sign of contradiction. A large number of the white community who were opposed to Reeves's anti-Apartheid campaign, such as Archbishop Joost de Blank, Philip Russel and Tom Bishop, criticized Reeves for having abandoned his flock.⁵⁸ They felt that Reeves should have stayed in the country in order to face the consequences. But those who were intimate with the bishop, men such as Reverend A.G. Sidebotham, Archdeacon E. Walls (who drove him to Swaziland), Dean P. Barron, Paton (who paid him a visit while he was in Swaziland), and Oliver Tambo, did not agree with this opinion.⁵⁹ Unfortunately, only the views of one African priest, Jacob Namo, who had worked with Reeves, were recorded.⁶⁰ It would have helped to have known the opinions of a number of the Africans

⁵⁴ "National Union of South African Student", A Brief History 1974, Jamieson Street, Cape Town, p.3.

⁵⁵ Ellen Kuzwayo, Call Me Woman (Johannesburg, Ravan Writers Series, 1996), p.222.

⁵⁶ Reeves, South Africa :Yesterday and Tomorrow, p.18.

⁵⁷ Ibid, p.37.

⁵⁸ Phillips, "Richard Ambrose Reeves, the Bishop of Johannesburg", pp.200-201.

⁵⁹ Ibid, pp.201-202.

⁶⁰ Ibid, p.195.

who had worked with Reeves, in order to ascertain what really happened. John Peart-Binns's opinion, namely that the black community felt betrayed by Reeves when he left South Africa, cannot be based in fact.⁶¹

Reeves simply continued to campaign against apartheid policies by furnishing details about the Sharpeville Massacre to all interested parties while he was in Britain, and this must have agitated the South African government deeply. He returned from a five months' leave of absence from his diocese on 10 September 1960 – only to be deported back to the United Kingdom after two days on 12 September on the authority of a deportation order delivered by Lieutenant-Colonel A.T. Spengler.⁶² He was refused permission to consult his attorney.⁶³ The reason for his deportation, according to the South African government, was that he had accused the police of having used dum-dum bullets during the Sharpeville shootings. According to Phillips, this fact had never been raised by Reeves – but by one of the attorneys, Lang, who represented the victims.⁶⁴ Reeves had been a thorn in the side of the apartheid government and he earned the respect of Africans for his contribution. Chikane praised Reeves as a being "part of a long tradition of church struggle against the evil of apartheid".⁶⁵

In summarising this subsection, one might say the most important contribution made by Huddleston and Reeves was that their approach was different from that of other white liberals who (as the Black Consciousness interpretation emphasises) assumed positions of leadership in

⁶¹ John S. Peart-Binns, Archbishop Joost De Blank: Scourge of Apartheid (London, Muller Blond & White, 1987), p.175.

⁶² Reeves, South Africa: Yesterday and Tomorrow, p.49.

⁶³ Ibid, pp.50-51.

⁶⁴ Phillips, "Richard Ambrose Reeves the Bishop of Johannesburg", p.198.

⁶⁵ Chikane, "Church and State", p.4.

the struggle for black liberation – and so opened themselves to accusations of condescension and patronisation.⁶⁶ By living and working close to Africans, these two men learnt to know them and to understand what their political goals were and how they might be achieved.⁶⁷ This also helps to explain what Wilkinson says about Reeves, namely that he associated with anyone who was against racial segregation – irrespective of the ideology they held.⁶⁸ Their association with secular African organizations made it easy for these clerics to identify the real needs of blacks and to find realistic solutions in consultation with genuine African political leaders like Tambo, a member of the Anglican church, as stated earlier in the chapter, who is reported to have encouraged Reeves to leave for hiding in Swaziland during the state of emergency in 1960.⁶⁹

It is also worth mentioning that many of the clergymen who supported the cause of Black Theology belonged to the Anglican Church, and that both Huddleston and Reeves were pioneers in this regard. In the end, their passionate commitment to the cause of African liberation became an embarrassment to some of their ecclesiastical superiors such as Clayton who, according to Paton, Wilkinson and Worsnip, was a "gradualist" in ideology⁷⁰ – and hence was unlikely to sympathise with the radical approaches advocated by both Huddleston and Reeves. In spite of opposition within the Anglican church to involvement in radical politics, many black priests who were involved in BC and active participants in Black Theology, were members of the Anglican Church (the CPSA). This is a link which can be traced back to the period under review (the 1950s).

⁶⁶ "Soul for Sale", in SASO Newsletter, vol 1, no 1, May 1971, pp.15-20.

⁶⁷ Worsnip, Between the Two Fires, p.74.

⁶⁸ Wilkinson, The Community of the Resurrection, p.304.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, p.308.

⁷⁰ Alan Paton, Apartheid and the Life of the Bishop: The Life and Times of Geoffrey Clayton (Cape Town, David Philip, 1973), p.241.

The criticisms levelled against the liberal priests

Because Huddleston and Reeves and the other more activist liberal priests in the Anglican Church in South Africa (the CPSA) were in the minority, they failed to obtain the support of clergy and congregations to *enforce* multi-racial services in a denomination which was (theoretically) multiracial. This was convenient for most Anglicans who, although opposed to the government, were (in practice) unlikely to be amenable to enforced integration in churches – even as a gesture of defiance against the government.⁷¹ Anglican churches therefore remained racially segregated and integration was not considered to be an important issue. When Black theology was introduced into South Africa in the 1970s, its proponents accused missionaries of supporting church segregation. It was therefore logical that most of the literature on early Black Theology in South Africa (between 1968 and 1977), underscored how the role played by the churches supported the government's perpetuation of racial segregation.⁷²

The main criticism of missionaries and white liberal theologians in general was that they conveniently ignored incorporating African traditions and culture into their Westernised version of the Christian religion. Takatso Mofokeng argues that this emphasis caused converted Africans to lose a sense of their own identity and the self-respect on which it was based.⁷³ Such Africans were much more likely to become manipulated by their churches and by the government. Manas Buthelezi, Charles Nyenbezi and Gedeon Mkhabela, the earliest proponents of Black Theology,

⁷¹ Hans Brandt (ed.), Outside the Camp: A Collection of Writings by Wolfram Kistner (Johannesburg, South African Council of Churches, 1988), p.144.

⁷² J.B. Ngubane, "Theological Roots of the African Indigenous Church and their Challenge to Black Theology", in Mosala and Tlhagale, The Unquestionable Right to be Free, p.76.

⁷³ Takatso Mofokeng, "The Evolution of the Black Struggle and the Role of Black Theology", in Mosala and Tlhagale, The Unquestionable Right to be Free, pp.119-121.

furthermore suggest that the missionaries divided Africans according to the denominational groupings by separating converted Africans from their traditional communities as a way of perpetuating the old European system of divide-and-rule.⁷⁴ The theologians who were most critical of their own denominations, such as (chiefly) Buthelezi, but also Lebamang Sebidi, Ernest Baartman, Allan Boesak and Sol Selepe, questioned the credibility of the so-called multi-racial churches which paid lip-service to the equal treatment of its members while in practice often discriminating against blacks.⁷⁵

The role played by the Black Theology of liberation imported from the United States

Black Power and Black Theology originated in the United States between 1966 and 1969. It was imported into South Africa in March 1970 when the concept of Black Theology was first used in the country by members of the University Christian Movement (UCM), and in particular by Basil Moore.⁷⁶ It is interesting to note that Black Theology in South Africa was introduced by a white liberal at a time when the BC was at the height of its influence and when its proponents were sceptical about the roles played by white liberals in the black political struggle. Moore was acceptable to Black Theologians because he devoted a lot of energy and effort to encouraging blacks to radicalise themselves on their own terms. In doing this he was far removed indeed from

⁷⁴ Manas Buthelezi, "Mutual Acceptance from Black Perspective", in Journal of Theology for Southern Africa, nos 19-23, June 1977-1978, p.73; C.L.S. Nyembezi, "An Address on the Occasion of the Awards Ceremony at the Federal Theological Seminary", in Reality, vol 9, no 1, March 1977, pp.14-15; Gedeon M. Mkhabela, "The Socio-Cultural Dynamics of the Struggle for Liberation and the Coherence of Black Faith", in Journal of Black Theology in South Africa, vol 3, no 1, May 1989), p.24.

⁷⁵ Manas Buthelezi, "Six Theses: Theological Problems of Evangelism in South African Context", in Journal of Theology for Southern Africa, nos 14-18, June 1976-1977, p.7; "Church and Apartheid", in Pro Veritate, 15 October 1971, p.14.

⁷⁶ Bonganjalo Goba, "The Impact of BCM on Black Theology," pp.58-63.

“traditional” paternalistic liberals such as Alan Paton. The fact that Moore was the first white theologian to write about Black Theology, and that his article was published in Pro Veritate, gives some indication of his standing among Black Theologians.

Steve Biko, Barney Pityana and Ntwasa, who were acquaintances of Moore and who trusted his political instincts, immediately saw that Black Theology would be crucial to the whole liberation struggle and they embraced it without any hesitation.⁷⁷ This philosophy found greater support among blacks in South Africa than in any other part of Africa because they found in the exploitation of the African Americans by whites in the United States an instructive parallel to the South African situation. Blacks in South Africa found themselves in the same position as African Americans. They found in it a valid critique of “an imperial western and colonial white theology”⁷⁸ while other countries on the African continent were mainly concerned with the reconstruction of their countries after they had attained independence (to the latter African Theology was preferable to Black Theology). Buthelezi and Kenneth Hughes maintain that Black Power and Black Theology in the United States became a model which South African Black Theology could emulate.⁷⁹

The Black Power movement in the United States took root in 1966 as a way for radical blacks to counteract the civil rights movement led by Martin Luther King Jr. According to Dwight Hopkins, the civil rights movement received both financial and moral support from American

⁷⁷ D.R. Howard, "Black Consciousness in South Africa: Resistance and Identity Formation under Apartheid Domination," Ph.D. thesis, Department of Government, University of Essex, October 1994, p.100.

⁷⁸ Goba, "The Impact of BCM on Black Theology", p.61.

⁷⁹ Kenneth Hughes, "Black Power: USA", in South African Outlook, July 1973, p.110.

white liberals.⁸⁰ Traditional liberals supported it mainly because it advocated a policy of non-violence – which traditional liberals preferred to radical views which seemed to countenance violence. Another reason why passive non-violence had succeeded for almost eleven years – until challenged in 1966 – was because of the character and charisma of its leaders. Since the 1950s, the civil rights movement had been under the control and the influence of moderate African-Americans who usually went out of their way to avoid creating any kind of conflict which might have compromised the financial assistance given by their white liberal backers.⁸¹

When the younger members of the civil rights movement, especially the members of Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), succeeded in radicalising the movement and steering it away from its past policy of non-violent confrontation towards an acceptance of Black Power, this was interpreted as political extremism which changed the entire complexion of the movement.⁸² When this happened, moderate African Americans began to have reservations about their further involvement, and white American businesspeople and liberals withdrew their financial support after they realised that they stood to gain nothing from supporting a radical Black Power Movement.⁸³

Historically speaking, there have been two principal traditions of black resistance in the United

⁸⁰ Dwight N. Hopkins, Black Theology USA and South Africa: Politics, Culture and Liberation (Maryknoll, New York, Orbis Books, 1989), p.9.

⁸¹ Joseph C. Hough Jr., Black Power and White Protestants: A Christian Response to the New Negro Pluralism, (New York, Oxford University Press, 1968), p.72.

⁸² Robert H. Brisbane, Black Activism: Racial Revolution in the United States 1954-1970, (Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, Judson Press, 1974), p.127.

⁸³ Hough Jr., Black Power and White Protestants, pp.77-78.

States: integration or assimilation. These divergent approaches are the product of the African American experience of slavery. W.E.B. Du Bois summed up the African American dilemma (exacerbated by the irreconcilable demands of slavery both before and after the American Civil War and the necessity to live in some degree of cooperation and integration with American whites) in the sentence "What, after all, am I? Am I an American or am I a Negro? Can I be both?"⁸⁴

James Cone has suggested⁸⁵ that these two traditions crystallised around the figures of Martin Luther King and Malcolm X since they respectively represented the polarities on the continuum on which each African American was required to situate his or her attitude to the relationships of race and power that governed all discourse and interaction between white and black Americans. Stokely Carmichael was perhaps even more influential in articulating an African American alternative to the integrationism of Martin Luther King (especially for South African blacks) because his message concentrated more on the psychological and spiritual harm that had been inflicted on blacks by whites.

The two most influential personalities to shape the Black Power ideology which discredited the civil rights movement and its leader Martin Luther King Jr, were Malcolm X and Stokely Carmichael. Malcolm X emerged as one of the most revolutionary black nationalists between 1961 and 1965. He combined a form of Islamic religion, of which he was a minister from 1953 onwards, with a form of black nationalism which had been influenced by Marcus Garvey's return-

⁸⁴ W.E.B. Du Bois (1971:181), quoted by D.R. Howarth, "Black Consciousness in South Africa: Resistance and Identity Formation under Apartheid Domination" (PhD thesis, University of Essex, October 1984).

⁸⁵ Cone (1991), quoted in Howarth, "Black Consciousness in South Africa".

to-Africa ideology.⁸⁶ Malcolm X believed that the enemy of the poor blacks were both racist white Americans *and* the "black bourgeoisie", especially members of the old established National Association for the Advancement of the Colored People (NAACP), who, he claimed, tried to behave like whites.⁸⁷ He was against any form of integration between blacks and whites, for, in his opinion, only a few blacks would ever qualify for integration into white society – while the majority would simply be left out.⁸⁸

Malcolm X was popular mainly with young activist students who were supporters of the civil rights movement. His main antagonist was Martin Luther King Jr. who represented the "black middle-class" that, according to Malcolm X, expected to have a place alongside whites⁸⁹ while the poor, the majority of whom were black, would have no place in any such set-up.⁹⁰ For him, the "dream slogan" used by Martin Luther King Jr was in fact a "nightmare".⁹¹ It was because of his radical criticism of racism and his active campaign for black empowerment that Malcolm X was considered to be one of the pioneers of Black Power philosophy.⁹²

Stokely Carmichael, according to Brisbane, became involved in political activity during his student years at Howard University, at the height of the Civil Rights movement.⁹³ As a member of SNCC,

⁸⁶ Malcolm X, "The Black Revolution", in Douglas A. Hughes (ed.), From a Black Perspective: Contemporary Black Essays (New York, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970), pp.105-115.

⁸⁷ Hough Jr., Black Power and White Protestants, pp.40-42.

⁸⁸ *Ibid*, p.41.

⁸⁹ Malcolm X, "The Black Revolution", pp.107-110.

⁹⁰ *Ibid*, p.113.

⁹¹ William H. Grier and Price M. Cobbs, "Black Rage", in Hughes, From a Black Perspective, p.135.

⁸⁹ LeRoi Jones, "The Legacy of Malcolm X, and the Coming of the Black Nation", in Hughes, From a Black Perspective, pp.121-122.

⁹³ Brisbane, Black Activism, p.126.

he embarked, together with other student members on a voter education programme between 1961 and 1964, which was aimed at educating Southern African Americans, particularly those in Greenwood and Jackson in Mississippi, about the importance of procedures which had to be followed when voting.⁹⁴ These were the years during which Carmichael received his greatest recognition from the black community. He participated in what were called the "Freedom Rides", carefully planned marches that involved intermittent camping along the road.

It was during the second of the Freedom Rides that Carmichael and some of the young members of the SNCC questioned the wisdom and validity of a non-violent march after they had suffered beatings and assaults at Birmingham and Montgomery and had been locked in police cells in Jackson.⁹⁵ Like Malcolm X, Carmichael was opposed to integration because, when two such groups are integrated, he argued, it is inevitable that the white group assumes that they are superior in status, and that the black group is therefore be, by definition, inferior.⁹⁶

Integration, in Carmichael's opinion, would divide the black community because only the "black middle class" would ever benefit from it.⁹⁷ Black students at the time were in general no longer loyal to King's philosophy especially because they alleged that King personally "had avoided any physical participation in these Freedom Rides".⁹⁸ At this time therefore the influence of BC and Black Power had, for many blacks, superseded the ideals of integration and the influence of white liberals.⁹⁹ This new groundswell of support caused Carmichael to replace John Lewis as

⁹⁴ Ibid, p.135.

⁹⁵ Ibid, p.141.

⁹⁶ Stokely Carmichael, "Power and Racism", in Hughes, From a Black Perspective, p.81.

⁹⁷ Ibid, pp.81-82.

⁹⁸ Bribane, Black Activism, p.147.

⁹⁹ Ibid, p.145.

chairman¹⁰⁰ of the SNCC during an election in May 1966. Carmichael's election was an indicator that the student movement at least would follow a different direction – one that espoused Black Consciousness and the new Black Nationalism.

Among such people, Martin Luther King Jr's non-violent movement became an outdated principle and the new philosophy of Black Power continued to attract more and more support, mostly among younger and more radical grassroots activists in the black community.¹⁰¹ The old established black middle-class, together with many white Americans, criticised the new movement, whose chances of survival they thought to be minimal.¹⁰² This attitude was not unique to the American white liberal community: the same kind of criticism was directed against the ideology and approach of Black Consciousness and Black Theology by many white liberals in South Africa.

James Cone, a leading Black Theologian in the United States, maintains that Black Theology originated in the desire to provide a theological justification for Black Consciousness, thus ensuring its survival.¹⁰³ Many of Cone's books such as Black Theology and Black Power (1969), The Spirituals and the Blue: An Interpretation (1972), God of the Oppressed (1975) and A Black Theology of Liberation (1970), which were written at a time when Black Power was gathering

¹⁰⁰ Martin Luther King Jr., Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community? (Boston, Beacon Press, 1968), pp.23-66.

¹⁰¹ Claude M. Lightfoot, "The Struggle For Black Power", in Hughes, From a Black Perspective, p.195.

¹⁰² King Jr., Where Do We Go From Here?, pp.23-66.

¹⁰³ James H. Cone, A Black Theology of Liberation (New York, J.B. Lippincott, 1970), pp.5-6.

momentum in the United States, constituted an attempt to clarify the reasons why Black Consciousness had emerged out of the historical struggle against white oppression and racism.¹⁰⁴

Cone's literature on Black Theology played an influential role in South Africa during the establishment of Black Theology of liberation. It was always extremely difficult (and usually impossible) to obtain access to his books in South Africa, especially those which were critical of the government's racist policy of apartheid, because of the draconian censorship practised by the apartheid regime.¹⁰⁵ Various means were utilised by scholars and activists to obtain Cone's books and tapes without the Nationalist government's knowledge. According to Goba, Cone's second recorded audio taped message entitled "Black Theology and Black Liberation" facilitated most of the discussions and proceedings of the first conference on Black Theology, which was hosted by the University Christian Movement at Wilgespruit Centre near Roodepoort in March 1970.¹⁰⁶

Cone's first recorded message, which had been sent earlier to the UCM offices at the request of its leadership for use at the conference, had been confiscated by the South African Security Police¹⁰⁷ who charged that Cone's books were "undesirable" for the South Africans. The second tape was sent by express post.¹⁰⁸ This method of smuggling in literature which was considered undesirable by the apartheid regime, was used by BC more and more frequently. While they often succeeded in securing such literature on more than one occasion, they were not always so

¹⁰⁴ James H. Cone, A Black Theology of Liberation, Twentieth Anniversary Edition, (Maryknoll, New York, Orbis Books, 1986), p.xi.

¹⁰⁵ James H. Cone, Speaking the Truth, Ecumenism, Liberation and Black Theology (Grand Rapids, Michigan, William B. Eerdmans, 1986), p.157.

¹⁰⁶ Goba, "The Impact of BCM on Black Theology", p.62.

¹⁰⁷ Cone, Speaking the Truth, p.157.

¹⁰⁸ University Christian Movement Newsletter, Second Semester, 1971, p.18.

lucky.¹⁰⁹

Cone's books were used in the resistance underground by black seminary students at various institutions in South Africa. One such student who was attracted by Cone's ideas, was Ntwasa, a theology student at the Federal Seminary at Alice in the Eastern Cape. He was later to become head of the Black Theology project under the UCM.¹¹⁰ Cone's valuable contribution to South African Black Theology forged a strong bond between South African Black Theologians, notably Desmond Tutu and Allan Boesak, and exponents and institutions of Black Theology in the United States.¹¹¹

Because of the deep regard in which Cone was held by South African students, he was twice invited to address the General Annual Conference of the South African Students Organisation (SASO) in July 1975, and also the seminar for black clergy scheduled for 9 to 13 July 1976 by the congress of the South African Council of Churches.¹¹² The government denied Cone a visa to enter South Africa in 1975. In 1976 the visa which he was eventually granted was revoked while he was already travelling to South Africa from Geneva where he had been visiting the World Council of Churches (WCC).¹¹³

The University Christian Movement

¹⁰⁹ Mosibudi Mangena, Quest for the True Humanity: Selected Speeches and Writings (Johannesburg, Bayakha Books, 1996), pp.17-18.

¹¹⁰ Themba Sono, Reflection on the Origins of Black Consciousness in South Africa (Pretoria, HSRC Publishers, 1993), p.50.

¹¹¹ Cone, Speaking the Truth, p.158.

¹¹² Survey of Race Relations in South Africa 1976 (Johannesburg, Institute of Race Relations, 1977), p.109

¹¹³ Cone, Speaking the Truth, p.158.

Black Theology in South Africa had a reputation for being anti-liberal. This point of view was maintained in liberal circles which criticised the nature of a theology that disassociated itself from the liberal Christian Institute. It had somehow been expected that Black Theology would embrace and work more closely with liberal institutions.

When, however, the Black Theology leadership elected to associate itself with the UCM, it was no accident although, by this association, the proponents of Black Theology seemed to be deviating from their principle of being anti-liberal. As I pointed out earlier in the chapter, the founders of UCM were not considered to be "dangerous liberals" – mainly because of their long history of working with Africans in a way that allowed them to take control of their own destinies. (This attitude, as we have seen, was embodied in figures like Huddleston, Reeves and Helen Joseph, and was very different from the kind of gradualist liberalism of Alan Paton and the Liberal Party.) One of the co-founders of UCM, John Davies, was, for example, Anglican chaplain to both the University of the Witwatersrand and the Anglican Student Federation (ASF) when UCM was founded.¹¹⁴ His close association with blacks dated back to his student years when he had been the secretary of the ASF, a multi-racial organisation catering mainly for university students.¹¹⁵ Colin Collins was chaplain to the National Catholic Federation of Students (NCFS) and secretary of the Catholic Education Department for the ten years between 1959 and 1970.¹¹⁶ Because of Collins's long association with the black community, his political ideology was regarded as radical in the South African context because he called for revolutionary changes in

¹¹⁴ William Cullen Library, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, University Christian Movement Papers, Draft Copy of the Constitution, AD/1126/A4, August 1967.

¹¹⁵ Brief History of English/Afrikaans/Non-White Students Relations, Unpublished, The University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, p.2.

¹¹⁶ "How it Really Happened," Unpublished Material, Private Collection, p.6.

the South African political arena.¹¹⁷ Their acceptance by radical blacks was total. As in the case of Huddleston, their early and close contact with blacks facilitated their understanding of the plight of Africans under apartheid – and blacks in turn trusted them.

Basil Moore, an ordained minister of the Methodist church, was considered to be a Marxist by conservative white South Africans.¹¹⁸ While he had no historical associations with Africans, his first encounter with them in 1966 demonstrated that his intentions and those of the other members of the UCM were to work with blacks on a footing of equality and partnership. He stated this eloquently in an article in the UCM journal, One for the Road.¹¹⁹

One of the first UCM Newsletters¹²⁰ spelt out the organisation's dedication to the struggle for the black cause and proved to go beyond the commitment that black students expected from white liberals at the time.¹²¹ They worked together with black students on every possible occasion. When Moore and Collins attended the American UCM Conference held at the Sheraton Hotel in Cleveland, Ohio, in 1967, a South African, Bobo Kgware, who was later to become the director of the UCM for the Transvaal region, accompanied them.¹²² This choice of Kgware as a representative was not purely "window-dressing" because Kgware had a reputation for being one

¹¹⁷ William Cullen Library, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, UCM Minutes, 24/6/68, pp.1-3.

¹¹⁸ Evening Post, 31/8/ 1968, p.1.

¹¹⁹ Basil Moore, "Wide, Wonderful U.S.A.," in One for the Road, June 1968, p.4.

¹²⁰ "In honest discussion, we expose ourselves and own convictions to others — and very often to ourselves in the process. Once we have done this, we are involved in the learning process as our convictions are confirmed by support or modified through the brush with others." Moore, *Ibid*, page 1.

¹²¹ UCM Newsletter, First Semester, 1969, pp.5-7.

¹²² One for the Road, June 1968, p.4; UCM Newsletter, Second Semester, 1971, p.3.

of the most politically outspoken young men of his generation.¹²³ This demonstrates that, from its inception, the UCM was prepared to invite black participation on an equal footing.

An additional factor which created a good working relationship between the white founders of UCM and Africans was that, unlike traditional white liberals who were accustomed to dictating the agenda to Africans, the UCM executive (according to Moore) defined their role in the Black Theology of liberation as only that of facilitators, and they encouraged the building up of self-confidence among blacks so that they might express themselves more effectively.¹²⁴ Moore also pointed out that it was in the interest of the oppressed – and not only of the oppressors – to wage a successful struggle for a true liberation.¹²⁵

The black members were given leadership positions as an expression of the UCM principle of black empowerment. Justice Moloto, one of the first members of UCM, an associate of Black Consciousness founders like Biko and Pityana, and also a member the Black Consciousness Movement,¹²⁶ was twice UCM president (in 1970 and 1971 respectively). He was also elected UCM general secretary in 1972, but because of a banning order he could not perform his duties in this regard.¹²⁷ Chris Mokoditso, also a member of Black Consciousness, became the UCM general secretary in 1972 after the banning of Moloto. Ntwasa, a student at the Federal Seminary, also a member of Black Consciousness, was assigned to the directorship of the Black Theology

¹²³ Ibid, p.3.

¹²⁴ Moore, "South Africa: UCM, Church and Bible", 1973, p.83.

¹²⁵ Ibid, p.84.

¹²⁶ Kuzwayo, Call me Woman, p.46.

¹²⁷ William Cullen Library, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, UCM Material, "Circular announcing the banning of Justice Moloto",

project within the UCM.¹²⁸ Manana Kgware, a former member of the Student Christian Movement at the University of the North, served on the UCM executive, where he represented the Lesotho/Orange Free State region.¹²⁹ The effect of including Africans in leadership positions gave the UCM a unique credibility among liberal organisations.

Under the directorship of Moore, in its early stages, UCM introduced the Formation School programme. This programme organised workshops and seminars in the seven regions of South Africa.¹³⁰ The rationale behind this programme was to introduce Black Theology even to the remotest rural areas of South Africa, where the means of communications are often very poor.¹³¹ The first Formation School was held in March 1970 at Thaba-Nchu. The venue was chosen specifically to be accessible to delegations from Lesotho, the Orange Free State and the Western Transvaal.¹³² It was at this school that the term "Black Theology" was for the first time introduced to a public audience in South Africa.¹³³

Kritzinger suggests that the reaction of the participants to the new terminology was positive because the majority of them supported Black Consciousness.¹³⁴ This policy of electing black leaders in UCM, and the accommodating spirit shown by the founders of UCM, attracted pioneers of the Black Consciousness movement, particularly members of SASO such as Pityana and Biko,

¹²⁸ Mokgethi Motlhabi (ed.), Essays of Black Theology in South Africa (Johannesburg, University Christian Movement, 1972), p.ii.

¹²⁹ UCM Newsletter, Third Semester, 1969, p.2.

¹³⁰ *Ibid*, p.5; UCM Newsletter, Second Semester, 1971, pp.5-6.

¹³¹ Moore, "South Africa: UCM, Church and Bible", p.79.

¹³² UCM Newsletter, First Semester, 1970, p.3.

¹³³ J.N.J.Kritzinger, "Black Theology: Challenge to Mission", D.Th. thesis, Unisa, Pretoria, 1988, p.58.

¹³⁴ *Ibid*, pp.59-60.

who at the time were the first non-theologians to join UCM and support its activities. The effect of this was to facilitate continued contact between the offices of both organizations.¹³⁵

The involvement of both Biko and Pityana in UCM allowed the organisation to play a significant role in the incubation of Black Conscious ideology. The strong bond between UCM and Black Consciousness in general caused the first South African book on Black Theology, Essays on Black Theology in South Africa, edited by Mokgethi Motlhabi, to appear. The three non-theological articles in the book were written by Pityana,¹³⁶ Biko,¹³⁷ and Adam Small.¹³⁸

After it was banned in South Africa in 1972, it re-surfaced under the different title, The Challenge of Black Theology in South Africa, and was edited by Basil Moore while he was in exile in Australia. It was in this publication that two of Ntwasa's articles appeared. In South Africa, Ntwasa could not be quoted because he had been banned.¹³⁹ Because both books were banned in South Africa and so could not be reviewed, David Bosch was only able to review (but not quote from) the volume in Pro Veritate.¹⁴⁰ Bosch sympathetically reviewed the ideals of Black Theology by making two observations. His first was that radical black South African literature was more inclined to be influenced by African American ideas than by those emanating from the

¹³⁵ William Cullen Library, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, UCM Material, (Colin Collins's Correspondence with Steven Biko), 2 July, 1970.

¹³⁶ Barney Pityana, "What is Black Consciousness", in Motlhabi (ed.), Essays of Black Theology in South Africa, pp.28-36.

¹³⁷ Steve Biko, "Black Consciousness and the Quest for a True Humanity", in Motlhabi (ed.), Essays on Black Theology in South Africa, pp.17-27.

¹³⁸ Adam Small, "Blackness versus Nihilism: Black Racism Rejected", in Motlhabi (ed.), Essays on Black Theology in South Africa, pp.11-17.

¹³⁹ Sabelo Ntwasa, "The Concept of the Church in Black Theology"; "The Training of Black Minister Today", in Basil Moore (ed), The Challenge of Black Theology in South Africa (Atlanta, John Knox Press, 1974), pp.109-118; 141-146.

¹⁴⁰ David Bosch, "Essays on Black Theology: The Case for Black Theology," in Pro Veritate, 15 August, 1972, pp.3-9.

northern part of the African continent. He also pointed out that the so-called Coloureds, especially intellectuals, identified themselves more and more with Black Consciousness. This, he argued, would nullify the historical identification between the Coloureds and Afrikaans-speaking white South Africans because politically conscientised Coloureds would identify themselves as "black" (in accordance with Black Consciousness ideology) and repudiate their links with white people. Bosch believed that this revelation would cause shock waves among Afrikaners and in the Nationalist Party, but, in the event, it was received with complacency.¹⁴¹

The strong convictions of Moore and Collins that the churches should play a constructive role in assisting the oppressed to fight apartheid practices, necessitated the establishment of Black Theology in South Africa at the time when it was risky for any organisation to champion black upliftment. Ackerman¹⁴² pointed out that this was as true of extra-parliamentary liberal organizations such as the Black Sash as it was of the National Union of the South African Students (NUSAS),¹⁴³ whose members were constantly intimidated and harassed by having their passports withdrawn and by being served with deportation orders for daring to criticise the government.

Because of the repressive action being taken by the government against these liberal organizations, it was impossible for them officially to incorporate Black Consciousness or Black Theology into their programmes. It was the openly stated policy of BC, enunciated by Biko, to

¹⁴¹ Ibid, p.6.

¹⁴² Denise M. Ackerman, "Liberating Praxis and the Black Sash: A Feminist Theological Perspective", D.Th. thesis, University of South Africa, Pretoria, 1992, p.122.

¹⁴³ Archive, Paton Centre, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, Duncan Innes (Nusas president, 1969) to Alan Paton, PC1/9-9, p.1.

place no trust in white liberals and their institutions.¹⁴⁴ At the same time, however, BC was viewed with abhorrence in white circles – especially among older-style liberals. Gradualist liberals of the old school, such as Leo Marquard¹⁴⁵ and Alan Paton, were relentlessly criticised by Biko for harming rather than helping the cause of black liberation. Part of Biko’s critique of gradualist liberalism was that it predicated the racial problems of South Africa on the condition of *blacks*. In this view, racism would gradually disappear as black people became more civilised (i.e. Westernised) through (gradual) education, modernisation and urbanisation. Because Biko saw with great clarity exactly how convenient and self-serving this analysis was for whites, he firmly placed the blame for racism in the laps of the white people. “There is nothing the matter with blacks. The problem is WHITE RACISM and it rests squarely on the laps of the white society. The sooner the liberals realise this, the better for us blacks.”¹⁴⁶ The subtleties of Biko’s critique were opaque to most South African whites at the time, and his pronouncements caused a great deal of hostility towards Black Consciousness among traditional liberals.¹⁴⁷

Another alternative progressive organisation which might have accommodated Black Theology in South Africa was the Christian Institute, founded in 1963. Its leadership, however, was not ready to accept the Black Consciousness philosophy espoused by the South African Students Organisation (SASO). This was demonstrated by the editor of Pro Veritate, Brucker de Villiers, who protested against BC ideology at the conference of the World Alliance of the Reformed

¹⁴⁴ Steve Biko, "I Write What I Like", in SASO Newsletter, vol 1, no 4, September 1971, p.10.

¹⁴⁵ Leo Marquard, "Black Consciousness", in Reality, vol 5, no 4, September 1973, p.10.

¹⁴⁶ Biko, in "Black Souls in White Skins", SASO Newsletter (August 1970), p. 15, quoted by David Howarth, "Complexities of identity/difference: Black Consciousness ideology in South Africa", in Journal of Political Ideologies (1997), 2(1), p. 60.

¹⁴⁷ Alan Paton, "Black Consciousness", in Reality, vol 4, no 1, March 1972, p.9.

Churches.¹⁴⁸ At this conference, held in Nairobi, the black delegates from South Africa, together with those already in exile, criticized the South African Dutch Reformed Church's policy of racial segregation¹⁴⁹ and supported a motion for the expulsion of the South African Dutch Reformed Church from this world body.¹⁵⁰ This attitude, however, changed two years after the white founders had opened their doors to full black participation by giving material support to the Black Community Programme under the directorship of Ben Khoapa.¹⁵¹ Manas Buthelezi, whose contribution to Black Theology will be discussed below, was employed by the Christian Institute as its director and was based in the Natal region from 1973.¹⁵² This change of attitude by the Christian Institute (CI) was due to the inclusion of blacks in decision-making (executive) positions. It affirms Worsnip's observation that once blacks and whites got to know each other, the stereotypes began to hold less sway, and people began to understand one another and work on a basis of equality.¹⁵³

Blacks become agents of the Black Theology of liberation

It was mentioned earlier in the chapter that Black Theology had received unqualified support in UCM because the majority of its membership comprised black students.¹⁵⁴ Strong bonds also existed between the UCM and SASO and this helped to contribute to a strong interest on the part

¹⁴⁸ The Star, Various clippings, 21-31 Aug 1970.

¹⁴⁹ The Star, 31 Aug 1970, p.3.

¹⁵⁰ The Star, 1 Sep 1970, p.2.

¹⁵¹ Bennie Khoapa, "Black Community Programmes", in Pro Veritate, 15 June 1973, pp.21-22; Thoko Mbanjwa (ed.), Black Review, 1974/1975, (Durban, Black Community Programme, 1975), p.35.

¹⁵² Pro Veritate, July 1975, p.10.

¹⁵³ Worsnip, Between The Two Fires, pp.73-74.

¹⁵⁴ Moore, "South Africa: UCM, Church and the Bible", p.78.

of black students in this semi-ecumenical students' organisation. Once the Black Theology Project had been established and had gained strong support from black students, particularly seminary students, the Black Theology of liberation component became more successful than the other projects of the Black Consciousness Movement. Two main factors provided for the relative success of Black Theology. It attracted an enthusiastic number of the Federal Seminary students at Alice.¹⁵⁵ Because this seminary consisted of nine separate denominational seminaries, a large number of supporters all lived close together. Goba, then a student at the Albert Luthuli Seminary, pointed out that this gave students ample opportunities to hold discussions and devise ways in which Black Theology might contribute to the black liberation movement.¹⁵⁶ It is alleged that Ntwasa became so obsessed with Cone's concept of Black Theology that the other students nicknamed him "Professor Cone".¹⁵⁷ This establishes the link between the USA and South Africa which was demonstrated in the first part of this chapter.

The second great success of the Black Theology as part of Black Consciousness Movement may be attributed to the fact that the executive of SASO encouraged all African churches and related ecumenical organizations to join in the promotion of the Black Theology Project. According to Siphso Buthelezi, SASO realised the historical importance of the Inter-denominational African Ministers' Association of South Africa,¹⁵⁸ which was formed in 1945. It was approached to join in workshops on Black Theology. The invitation to participate was also extended to the African Independent Churches Association, which was an affiliate of the Christian Institute because it was

¹⁵⁵ Goba, "The Impact of BCM on Black Theology", pp.61-62.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid, p.62.

¹⁵⁷ Sono, The Origins and Significance of Black Consciousness in South Africa, p.15.

¹⁵⁸ Buthelezi, "The Emergence of Black Consciousness: A Historical Appraisal", p. 25.

receiving help with theological training from them.¹⁵⁹ In order to include as many influential African denominations as possible, SASO contacted the Zion Christian Church, the largest Christian denomination in Southern Africa, with its head-quarters at Moria, near Pietersburg.¹⁶⁰ Indications show that there might have been some interest at an early stage. It is reported that Ramarumo Barbanus Lekganyane, the presiding Bishop of the church, was present at the "Hero's Week", organised by the University of the North SASO Branch in March 1971.¹⁶¹ However, the Zion Christian Church did not participate in any of the Black Theology Projects because it had a strong relationship with the Nationalist government. Its second bishop, Bishop Edward Lekganyane, is known to have received his theological training from the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk.¹⁶² The ZCC was against the idea of challenging the government on its racial policy simply because its founder, Engenas Lekganyane, had in 1910 purchased the land on which the ZCC headquarters, Moria, stand, from the white farmer.¹⁶³ This may partly explain why the ZCC authorities adopted a neutral political stand towards the oppressors and disassociated itself from progressive organizations.

Black Theology was mostly embraced by African ministers from mainline multi-racial churches. They had a language advantage when compared to the members of the Independent or the Indigenous Churches (as they prefer to be called), who could not readily read or express themselves in English and who, on the whole, did not realise at the time the importance of

¹⁵⁹ Thomas Karis and Gail Gerhart Collection, Johannesburg, "Statement of Dominee Beyers Naudé", p.3.

¹⁶⁰ Mabel Maimela, Interview with Mgwebi Snail (a student at the University of Fort Hare in 1972), Unisa, 15 September 1993.

¹⁶¹ SASO Newsletter, June 1971, p.2.

¹⁶² Rand Daily Mail, 22 Mar 1964.

¹⁶³ PACE, April 1995, p.21.

politicising their churches. Because they had been the victims of unjust treatment as ministers of religion, inflicted both by the apartheid system and white colleagues in mission churches, these ministers from different denominations in South Africa, began to embrace and articulate the Black Theology of liberation by using whatever platforms became available to them – including pulpits.

Black Theology and the Roman Catholic Church

Black Roman Catholic priests founded their own exclusive association, the St. Peter's Old Boys Association (SPOBA), in 1966, as a forum for discussion to address the racial imbalances within the structure of the entire Roman Catholic Church.¹⁶⁴ Within hours of its formation at the July conference of 1966, three recommendations were proposed.¹⁶⁵ The first was that a committee in charge of Biblical and liturgical translators should work with Africans to identify the correct idiomatic expressions. Secondly, composers of music were urged to develop and produce African melodies. Thirdly, they proposed that there be unity among all Catholic priests.¹⁶⁶ The church hierarchy twice rejected these requests in 1966 and 1968.¹⁶⁷ Although the period referred to here was before the era of Black Theology, this group was to play a vital role in exerting pressure on the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church when Black Consciousness and Black Theology became influential. It later changed its name to the "Permanent Black Priests' Solidarity Group" (PBPSG) and adopted the aim of mobilising all black Roman Catholic clergy in Southern Africa.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁴ Sechaba, vol 4, no 2, February 1970, pp.6-8.

¹⁶⁵ J.N.J.Kritzinger, "Black Theology: Challenge to Mission", pp.66-67.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid*, p.67.

¹⁶⁷ Thoko Mbanjwa (ed.), Black Review, 1974/1975, p.134.

¹⁶⁸ J.N.J. Kritzinger, "Black Theology: Challenge to Mission", p.68.

It was this same group that, after its authorities had failed to respond to its requests, sent a memorandum entitled "Our Church Has Let Us Down" to the Rand Daily Mail in January 1970.¹⁶⁹ In addition to the three earlier recommendations sent to the hierarchy in 1966 and 1968, SPOBA protested against the results of the 1969 election to the executive committee of the Roman Catholic Church. It regarded it as unfair that one African from Lesotho and four whites should be delegated to preside over the issues which affected the Africans.¹⁷⁰ This group also criticized the church, the leadership of which comprised a large number of whites and a few number of blacks – while in the membership of the whole church, blacks were in the majority. They also protested the fact that the education of white children received far more attention than that of blacks because a much greater subsidy was allocated to white education.¹⁷¹ It seemed obvious therefore that the Catholic Church was aligning itself with the apartheid policy of segregating people on the grounds of skin colour.

The publication of the memorandum was reported to have embarrassed the church hierarchy – especially since they had a public reputation for being critical of apartheid policy. Thus, for example, Denis Hurley, the Roman Catholic archbishop, disassociated himself from the petition and declined to comment when he was requested to do so by journalists.¹⁷² Because of his long-standing identification with the black struggle, Collins was reported to have been the only white among the church hierarchy to have come out in support of the memorandum.¹⁷³

¹⁶⁴ Sechaba, pp.6-8.

¹⁷⁰ Mbanjwa (ed.), Black Review, 1974/1975, p.135.

¹⁷¹ Sechaba, p.8.

¹⁷² Ibid, p.6.

¹⁷³ Ibid, p.8.

Because SPOBA often coordinated its activities with those of recognised black activists, its protests against church authority were viewed as part of the struggle against the apartheid being practised by the Catholic Church. One of the earliest Black Consciousness activists, Drake Koka, was among the group which supported SPOBA in a protest march against the conference of the South African Roman Catholic Bishops held in Pretoria in September 1971.¹⁷⁴ The memorandum which was handed to the church fathers by Koka emphasised the fact that blacks in the church were being discriminated against. This memorandum embarrassed the Catholic Church – especially since it had been viewed as a progressive institution by other sectors of black society.¹⁷⁵

SPOBA also intervened in an attempt to solve a dispute between the rector of St. Peter's Seminary, Lebamang Sebidi, and the white members of the staff who undermined his authority, especially in the case of the rector's handling of students who were involved with the Black Consciousness Movement.¹⁷⁶ This conflict led to the closure of the seminary at the end of 1977. Conservative Catholic Church authorities still expected the black members to abide by *their* rules and regulations – even though these rules were considered to be unfair and to favour whites. The opinion of the church authorities was that members of the church hierarchy were not expected to be involved in extra-parliamentary protest.¹⁷⁷ When the rector, Lebamang Sebidi, and a fellow lecturer, Buti Tlhagale, took part in a protest march of the clergy to John Vorster Square to

¹⁷⁴ Pro Veritate, vol X, no 6, October 1971, p.14

¹⁷⁵ Survey of Race Relations in South Africa, 1973 (Johannesburg, Institute of Race Relations, 1974), p.46.

¹⁷⁶ Kritzinger, "Black Theology: A Challenge to Mission", p.68.

¹⁷⁷ Anthony Egan, "The National Catholic Federation of Students: A Study of Political Ideas and Activities within a Christian Student Movement, 1960-1987", M.A. dissertation, University of Cape Town, 1990, p.8.

protest against the banning of 19 Black Consciousness organizations in October 1977, the church authorities were outraged – and this contributed to the early closure of the seminary.¹⁷⁸

The conservative approach adopted at this seminary was designed to stop students from being involved politically.¹⁷⁹ One incident which illustrates how the seminary dealt with students who were politically active, occurred when a final-year student, Daniel Mthombeni, was expelled from the seminary by the rector, Dominic Scholten. His offence was never detailed, even though he was then the President of the Student Representative Council.¹⁸⁰ The very procedure of his expulsion was questionable and flawed since it took place during his absence from the seminary: he received the dismissal note while he was attending a practical course which had been arranged by the seminary at Wilgespruit during the June/July holidays of 1971.¹⁸¹ Although this seminary played a substantial role in providing the students with enough education for some of them, such as Motlhabi, Smangaliso Mkhathshwa, Anthony Mabona, Sebidi and Tlhagale, to have emerged as pioneers and scholars in Black Consciousness and Black Theology, the attitudes of the Roman Catholic Church authorities were cited as among the main reasons for BC criticism of white liberals who took it upon themselves to speak on behalf of blacks.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁸ Kritzinger, "Black Theology: A Challenge to Mission", p.68.

¹⁷⁹ Mabel Maimela, Interview with Tom Ranuga (former St. Peter's student in 1970), Atteridgeville, Pretoria, 9 Jan 1995.

¹⁸⁰ Daniel Mthombeni, "The Roman Catholic Has Let Me Down", SASO Newsletter, May/June 1972, p.12

¹⁸¹ Ibid, p.12.

¹⁸² "Position Paper on the Kwa-Natal Bill of Rights and New Liberalism", in Frank Talk, vol 2, September 1987, p.22.

Black Theology and the Methodist Church

A number of black theologians and ministers of the Methodist Church made distinguished contributions to the Black Theology of liberation. Ernest Baartman, who headed the Youth Department of the Methodist Church in the early years of Black Consciousness Philosophy, contributed substantially to the literature of Black Theology. Although his articles were published in liberal journals such as Pro Veritate, Reality, The Journal of Theology in Southern Africa, most appeared, ironically, in the predominantly black publication, SASO Newsletter. His main criticism, echoed by others, focused on the wrong image that the church was projecting to the black community.¹⁸³ He criticized the church's tendency to give preference to white groups over others.

This point concerned Moore so much that one of his papers, entitled "The Death of Multi-Racialism and the Emergence of Black Theology and White Theology",¹⁸⁴ which he read at the meeting of UCM in August 1971, was devoted entirely to the segregationist attitudes of purportedly multi-racial churches. Baartman argued that, while the majority of members were black, whites predominated in leadership roles.¹⁸⁵ This was confirmed by Cedric Mayson, also a Methodist minister, who pointed out that in most cases the presence of the black representatives in church governing bodies constituted mere window dressing.¹⁸⁶ Baartman's criticisms were, however, more generalised and he avoided a direct attack on the Methodist Church. This suggests

¹⁸³ E.N. Baartman, "The Significance of the Development of Black Consciousness for the Church", SASO Newsletter, November/December 1972, pp.15-18.

¹⁸⁴ Basil Moore, "The Death of Multi-Racialism and the Emergence of Black Theology and the White Theology", (Private Collection, K.J.N.Kritzinger, Unisa, Pretoria, August 1971), pp.1-3.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid*, p.16.

¹⁸⁶ Cedric Mayson, "All Is Said But Not Done", Pro Veritate, June 1976, p.11.

that those blacks who operated in white, liberal-dominated institutions could not express themselves freely for fear of offending their colleagues and the authorities. Black members of such institutions were therefore subjected to double harassment – from their churches *and* from the government. This created strong suspicion in the minds of oppressed people that there was a conspiracy between churches and the government to maintain segregationist policies.¹⁸⁷

The main observation of Simon Gqubule, who was a lecturer at Federal Theological Seminary, was that there existed a tacit (or worse) conspiracy between the church and the government when it came to race relations issues. He argued that the Group Area's Act, which divided people according to their racial identity, could not have succeeded *had it not been for the support it received from the churches*. Since the churches allowed their properties to be repossessed by the government and because they agreed to build segregated churches, it was evident that there existed a conspiracy between the white church authorities and the government.¹⁸⁸

Because of the complicity of white Methodist clergy and members, a black counter strategy emerged in the Black Methodist Consultation (BMC).¹⁸⁹ According to Kritzinger, this Consultation was formed because of the impact which the Black Renaissance had had at St. Peter's Seminary near Hammanskraal, a movement sponsored by the South African Council of Churches (SACC), the Christian Institute (CI) and the South African Students Organisation (SASO), in December 1974.¹⁹⁰ The Consultation was formed by a group of Black Methodist ministers in response to the directive of the conference that each denomination should establish

¹⁸⁷ "The Commission on Black Theology", *SASO Newsletter*, August 1971, p.17

¹⁸⁸ Simon Gqubule, "Unity a Priority for Christian", *Seek*, vol 22, no 6, June 1976, p.4.

¹⁸⁹ Kritzinger, "Black Theology: Challenge to Mission", p.71.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid*, p.71.

its own pressure group in order to resist racial discrimination in their respective churches. Kritzinger, however, is of the opinion that the central aim of the Consultation, as agreed by all delegates, was to promote Black Consciousness philosophy in order to conscientise the black members of the Methodist Church.¹⁹¹

This Consultation, together with some concerned white ministers, raised dissatisfactions about the structure of Methodism in South Africa, and criticised its subtle support of apartheid policy. A petition, which was signed by twenty-five Methodist ministers, mostly theologians who taught at universities and seminaries and those who worked in ecumenical organizations such as the CI and SACC, was sent to the conference of the World Methodist Council which was held in Dublin in August 1976.¹⁹²

Black Methodist ministers also sent another letter of protest to their mother body in response to the government's brutal massacre of school pupils which took place first on 16 June 1976, when it started in Soweto and spread throughout the country. These black ministers were appalled by the fact that the church did not take a strong stance on these issues. The petition asked the Council to act on behalf of the black members of the Methodist Church in South Africa, and also asked them to pressurise the various governments which had links with South Africa to ask for the release of detainees and open up the channels for discussions with banned African political organizations.¹⁹³ In response to this, the World Methodist Council resolved to support the twenty-

¹⁹¹ Ibid, p.80. See also, Daryl M. Balia, Black Methodists and White Supremacy in South Africa (Durban, Madiba Publications, 1991), pp.87-89.

¹⁹² "A Letter to the World Methodist Council from 25 South African Methodist Ministers", Pro Veritate, September 1976, p.13.

¹⁹³ Ibid, p.14.

five signatories. In its statement, the Council stated its unqualified endorsement of any form of non-violent action as a means of exerting pressure on the South African government for a peaceful change. This was not the first such action taken by the World Methodist Council. In 1973, it had recommended that the church disinvest its six million rand of investments in firms which traded with South Africa.¹⁹⁴

BC ideology was already incipient within the Black Methodist Consultation. In fact, some members, notably Otto Mbangula and Wesley Mabuza (recently ordained ministers), were Black Theology and BC activists.

Black Theology and the Dutch Reformed Churches

The Dutch Reformed Church policy of creating four separate autonomous churches for the whites, Coloureds, Indians and blacks was intended to strengthen the National Party government's segregation policy. Ernie Regehr is of the opinion that since the three so-called sister churches, the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa for Africans, the Dutch Reformed Mission Church for Coloureds and the Dutch Reformed Church for Indians, were entirely dependent on the so-called mother church, and that by isolating each of the groups, they prevented any cross-fertilisation of ideas.¹⁹⁵ Any interaction among the members of the four groups took place only at the highest

¹⁹⁴ Survey of Race Relations, 1973, p.51.

¹⁹⁵ Ernie Regehr, Perception of Apartheid: The Church and the Political Change in South Africa (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania, Herald Press, 1979), p.154.

hierarchical level, which was in the Federal Council of the Dutch Reformed Church.¹⁹⁶ In reality all policy was dictated to the three "daughter" churches by the white Dutch Reformed Church.¹⁹⁷

Since all members of the Dutch Reformed Church lived their spiritual lives in isolation from other racial groups in racially segregated churches, serious protest was unheard of until 1962 when some concerned white members, such as C.F. Beyers Naudé and F.E. O'Brien Geldenhuys and others openly questioned the credibility of the policy of the Dutch Reformed Church.¹⁹⁸ According to Naudé, a sizeable number of Dutch Reformed Church members (especially whites) did not believe that the segregationist policy, which was followed by the church, contributed to any kind of racial tension until this was proven on 21 March 1960 when, in Sharpeville and Langa, the South African police shot dead 69 people and wounded hundreds of others as blacks protested in a peaceful march against the government's issuing of "passes" for the black women.¹⁹⁹ This incident was to become known as "the Sharpeville Massacre" because a number of the people who were killed happened to come from Sharpeville near Vereeniging. BC made a point of honouring the dead and commemorating the killings thereafter as Heroes' Day.²⁰⁰

The Sharpeville Massacre opened the eyes of a small group of Dutch Reformed theologians and ministers who felt that white conservatives needed to be educated about the living conditions of the majority of (black) South Africans. The massacre also led to the establishment of Pro Veritate in 1962, an ecumenical magazine supported by a variety of contributors, including the members

¹⁹⁶ Ibid, p.154.

¹⁹⁷ Colleen Ryan, Beyers Naudé: Pilgrimage of Faith (Cape Town, David Philip, 1990), p.67.

¹⁹⁸ Du Boulay, Tutu: Voice of Voiceless, p.123.

¹⁹⁹ Ryan, Beyers Naudé: Pilgrimage of Faith, p.68.

²⁰⁰ Mangena, Quest for True Humanity, p.127.

of the three "sister" Dutch Reformed Churches.²⁰¹ Beyers Naudé was the main founder of Pro Veritate. Nine months after the Sharpeville massacre, members of the SACC, in consultation with its affiliated mother body, the World Council of Churches, called a meeting between 7 and 14 December 1960 at Cottesloe near Johannesburg. The main purpose of the meeting was to discuss what people thought about the terrible and wanton massacre of innocent people. The Transvaal Dutch Reformed Church sent Beyers Naudé, Geldenhuys and A.G. Geysers as their delegates.²⁰² At the end of the consultation, a carefully worded conciliatory statement, which was meant to encourage some form of change in the church (notably attempts to accommodate some degree of multi-racial freedom of worship and a consultation between churches), was released.²⁰³ The Dutch Reformed Church disassociated itself entirely from the statement. The consequence of this statement was that Albert Geysers was tried for heresy because of his uncompromising support for the resolution.²⁰⁴ From then onwards the government deeply distrusted the WCC – especially after this body decided to exert more and more pressure on South Africa.²⁰⁵

The negative response from the Dutch Reformed hierarchy prompted individuals within the denomination, like Beyers Naudé, Geysers, Willie Jonker and Gert Swart, and various laymen, to found the ecumenical journal, Pro Veritate, in 1962.²⁰⁶ The main use of Pro Veritate was that it made accessible for the first time the views of *black* ministers of the Dutch Reformed Church.

²⁰¹ Du Boulay, Tutu: Voice of Voiceless, p.123.

²⁰² Regher, Perception of Apartheid, pp.194-197.

²⁰³ Ibid, p.154.

²⁰⁴ Ibid, p.196.

²⁰⁵ John Webster, Bishop Desmond Tutu: Crying in the Wilderness (Grand Rapids, Michigan, William B. Eerdmans, 1982), p.15.

²⁰⁶ Ryan, Beyers Naudé: Pilgrimage of Faith, p.68.

Some of them, such as Takatso Mofokeng,²⁰⁷ Allan Boesak,²⁰⁸ Sol Selepe,²⁰⁹ Revelation Ntoula,²¹⁰ and Sam Buti²¹¹ were clearly heard for the first time in the pages of this journal. Thus, while for decades the international community and some domestic ecumenical groups had protested on their behalf, black members within the Dutch Reformed Church began to speak out for *themselves* against their own mother church for the first time from the early 1970s. In this protest one can also see the influence of Black Consciousness and the Black Theology of Liberation on people in the "sister" churches of the Dutch Reformed tradition (the first article written by the black member of the Dutch Reformed Church appeared in 1973).²¹² More importantly, Pro Veritate provided a forum and showcase for BC ideas. In so doing, it performed the role of "midwife" to

²⁰⁷ Takatso Mofokeng, "Hammanskraal en N.G. Kerk in Afrika: Blanke moet alternatief vir galled gee", Pro Veritate, vol 13, no 4, August 1974, pp.8-9.

²⁰⁸ Allan Boesak, "Is Apartheid Kerke se Skuld?", Pro Veritate, vol 11, no 10, February 1973, pp.5-7;

"Waarheen wil Swaart Teologie", Pro Veritate, vol 12, no 10, February 1974, pp.5-7;

"Black Consciousness, Black Power and Coloured Politics", Pro Veritate, February 1977, pp.9-12;

"'n Brief Oor 'n Nuwe Verhouding: Wit en Swart Vriende", Pro Veritate, February 1975, pp.11-14.

²⁰⁹ Sol Selepe, "Christelike' Onderdrukking in S.A.", Pro Veritate, vol 11, no 1, May 1972, pp.8-9,

"A Black Reaction to Black Viewpoint", Pro Veritate, vol 11, no 9, January 1973, pp.5-7;

"The DRC and Sydney: Failure in Practice?", Pro Veritate, vol 11, no 10, February 1973, pp.19-20;

"The DRC and Sydney", Pro Veritate, vol 11, no 11, March 1973, p.21;

"The DRC and Sydney: Balance in Society", Pro Veritate, vol 11, no 12, April 1973, p.6;

"The DRC and Sydney: Unity Needed", Pro Veritate, vol 12, no 2, June 1973, p.17;

"The DRC and Sydney: Church Brings Change?", Pro Veritate, vol 12, no 4, August 1974, p.15;

"The DRC and Sydney: Structural Change Instead of Charity", Pro Veritate, vol 12, no 5, September 1973, p.16.

²¹⁰ Revelation Ntoula, "Looking Back on Lausanne", Pro Veritate, vol 13, no 5, September 1974, pp.18-20; "Black Daughter Churches Take Initiative", Pro Veritate, vol 14, no 9, March 1976, p.16.

²¹¹ Sam Buti, "Die Pinkstergees Vernoot Alles: Wit en Swart Saam Een Nuwe Mens", Pro Veritate, vol 14, no 8, December 1975, pp.5-7.

²¹² "A Christian Breakthrough Within The N.G.K. in Africa", Pro Veritate, vol 12, no 7, November 1973, p.1.

the fledgling ideology which was to challenge the so-called mainline churches in South Africa.

The first real protest of the three "daughter" churches of the Dutch Reformed Church occurred when they decided in 1973 to defy the mother church and join the South African Council of Churches.²¹³ This only became possible in 1973 when the position of synod moderator was held for the first time in the history of the Dutch Reformed Church by a black person, E.T.S. Buti²¹⁴ (Buti's son, Sam Buti, was at the same time elected as a scribe).²¹⁵ The synod proposed the re-establishment of *one* synod for the entire Dutch Reformed Church, and the disbanding of the Federal Council of the Dutch Reformed Church, since it was a symbol of apartheid.²¹⁶ The main criticism levelled against the Federal Council was that it possessed ultimate power over the so-called daughter churches.²¹⁷ The press also reported incidents of verbal attacks by the ministers of the Mission Church and the Reformed Church in Africa. These called for the total integration of the church. The most outspoken ministers in this regard were J.J.F. Mettler from the Cape²¹⁸ and Edward Mannikam of the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa.²¹⁹

Sechaba magazine reported in January 1970 that a Malmesbury congregation of about 500 members defied the instructions of the Dutch Reformed authorities who attempted to force black

²¹³ "NGKA Burst Into Songs As It Decides To Join SACC", Pro Veritate, vol 14, no 3, July 1975, 12;

"The Church Crisis on Race Relations", Pro Veritate, vol 12, no 10, February 1974, pp.9-13.

²¹⁴ Ivor Shapiro, "An Historic Moment in the Synod", Pro Veritate, vol 14, no 3, July 1975, p. 11.

²¹⁵ ECUNEWS Bulletin, 2 August 1977, p.3.

²¹⁶ "NGKA Burst Into Songs As It Decides to Join SACC", Pro Veritate, p. 12.

²¹⁷ ECUNEWS Bulletin, 2 August 1977, p.3.

²¹⁸ "Mixed Warship: Call for Mixed Worship by N.G. Coloured Minister", Pro Veritate, vol 12, no 1, May 1973, p.22.

²¹⁹ "Racism in NGK Slated", Pro Veritate, vol 12, no 1, May 1973, p.23.

congregants to recognise white members of the Dutch Reformed Church as their superiors.²²⁰

This incident marked the end of tolerance among members of the various racially defined churches in the Dutch Reformed fold. The power politics that were played out in this religious setting enormously strengthened and clarified the emergence of black resistance and fanned the flame of Black Theology.

In addition to this, a group of African ministers from the three daughter churches formed their own ecumenical association which they called the "belydende kring" in 1974. This "kring" (circle), according to Kritzinger, was established as a result of pressure from the Renaissance Conference in 1974.²²¹ Membership was opened to whites within the Dutch Reformed Church.²²² Some Black Consciousness-related groups were jubilant about what they saw as an enormous victory, but the mother church, at its end of the year synod in December 1974, criticized the formation of the *kring* and resolved to maintain the segregation of its church according to four racial groupings of whites, Coloureds, Indians and Africans.²²³ Its overseas partners, in the Netherlands particularly, regarded the *kring* as the true representative of the Dutch Reformed Church because it attempted to represent all four groups of the South African community.²²⁴ The *kring's* major achievement was that it hosted a meeting attended by the evangelists and the priests of the N.G. Kerk family in February 1976 at the Stofberg Theological School near the University of the North in Pietersburg.²²⁵ All forms of apartheid which were practised by the church and government were

²²⁰ Sechaba, p.8.

²²¹ Kritzinger, "Black Theology: Challenge to Mission", p.67.

²²² Brandt, (ed), Outside the Camp, p. 27.

²²³ Ntola, " Black Daughter Churches Take Initiatives", Pro Veritate, vol 14, no 10, March 1976, p.16

²²⁴ Brandt, (ed.) Outside the Camp, p.27.

²²⁵ Ibid, p.16.

rejected. A proposal was made for the establishment of a new United Reformed Church – even if it meant excluding the white church.²²⁶ This meeting boosted the prestige of the black Dutch Reformed N.G. Church members who had earlier been accused of collaborating with a racially oppressive church.²²⁷

It became an embarrassment to the mother church that the black section of the Dutch Reformed Church identified itself with their fellow oppressed Africans by opting to join the South African Council of Churches and forming their own pressure group within the Dutch Reformed circle (the "belydende kring") – especially when one of them, Sam Buti, was elected president of the South African Council of Churches in 1977.²²⁸ They also joined the SACC after they realised that the World Council of Churches supported the liberation movements in Southern Africa, particularly the ANC and PAC, by granting funds for social and medical supplies.²²⁹

Individual participation

This research shows that a large number of blacks who supported Black Theology and Black Consciousness studied or lived in Europe or the United States of America from the end of the 1960s to the middle of the 1970s – the peak of the Black Consciousness Movement.²³⁰ This does not imply that those who were refused passports by the apartheid authorities to further their

²²⁶ Ibid, p.16.

²²⁷ Mabel Maimela, Interview with Takatso Mofokeng, who attended the Stofberg Meeting (12 December 1992).

²²⁸ ECUNews Bulletin, 2 August 1977, p.3.

²²⁹ Webster, Bishop Desmond Tutu: Crying in the Wilderness, p.15.

²³⁰ Those Black Theologians who received part of their education (and/or worked in Europe) were (notably) Desmond Tutu, Allan Boesak and Stanley Mogoba. Those who studied in the United States were Simon Gqubule and Manas Buthelezi.

studies abroad did not make significant contributions.²³¹ Among these were Ntwasa, one of the pioneers of Black Theology, as was pointed out earlier in this chapter. He became the director of the Project under the auspices of the white liberal-led University Christian Movement. His two articles appeared in the Challenge of Black Theology in South Africa, edited by Moore. Ernest Baartman also contributed to the literature of the Black Theology at the time when such contributions were considered to be dangerously radical. As the head of the multi-racial Youth Department of the Methodist Church, Baartman got to know some liberals who had a vested interest in race relations. It was to liberal ecumenical publications, such as Pro Veritate, that he contributed two articles.²³² One of his articles also appeared in the Journal of Theology in Southern Africa.²³³ Both articles were explicit defences of BC ideas and agendas. They posited political strategies which were carefully justified in religious terms.

Those who had the privilege of studying abroad acquired skills and confidence while they were away from South Africa, which they were able to use when they returned, and some of them became the force behind the Black Theology of liberation.²³⁴ Those who were prominent between 1970 and 1977 were (notably) Manas Buthelezi, Stanley Mogoba, Simon Gqubule, Desmond Tutu and Allan Boesak. They rallied to Black Theology as a manifestation of Black Consciousness because it was the only black liberation organisation which was still allowed to operate legally in South Africa.

²³¹ Mbanjwa (ed.), Black Review, 1974/1975, p.55.

²³² Ernest Baartman, "Black Consciousness", Pro Veritate, vol 11, no 11, March 1973, pp.4-6; "Black Man and Black Church", Pro Veritate, vol 13, no 12, 15 April 1973, pp.3-5.

²³³ Ernest Baartman, "The Significance of Black Consciousness for the Church", Journal of Theology in Southern Africa, no 2, March 1973, pp.18-22.

²³⁴ Mogoba, "From Munsieville to Oslo", Tlhagale and Mosala (eds.), Hammering Swords into Ploughshares, p.26.

For the purpose of this research I shall focus only on two contributors, namely those of Manas Buthelezi and Desmond Tutu. The former represented those who contributed to producing literature on Black Theology, while the latter represented those who became activists in Black Consciousness activities. I have chosen Buthelezi and Tutu to draw attention to the fact that their involvement caused their passports to be withdrawn. This is evidence enough of the importance of their contributions, which, according to Beyers Naudé, were recognised not only by the oppressed African community but also by the whole world.²³⁵

Both Buthelezi and Tutu became internationally well known and, as a result of international pressure from heads of state and influential international organisations, they were both spared the harsh treatment that they might have received had they not been so widely known.

Manas Buthelezi and Black Theology

Historically, it was always a privilege for an African to be a Christian because it opened the door to an education.²³⁶ Buthelezi's father was an evangelist of the Lutheran Church in Natal and it was there that his son received an education, eventually qualifying as a teacher. He eventually left the teaching profession and became a minister of religion in the Lutheran Church. He completed his postgraduate degrees in the United States, where he obtained a Ph.D. in Systematic Theology at Drew University, New Jersey, in 1968. During the period in which he studied in the United States,

²³⁵ Karis Gerhart Collection, Johannesburg, Statement of Dominee Naudé, 24/5/1975, Johannesburg.

²³⁶ Gibson Richard, African Liberation Movements: Contemporary Struggle Against White Minority Rule (London, Oxford University Press, 1972), pp. 30-35.

he was deeply moved by the spirit of national protest among African Americans in the Civil Rights Movement, which was followed in turn by Black Power and the Black Theology of liberation. It became obvious to him that he should use what he had acquired abroad to spread Black Theology in South Africa.

Buthelezi was one of the leading black theologians during the formation of the Black Theology in the 1970s. His writings, which dealt with a variety of topics relating to apartheid policies, were published in liberal ecumenical journals and magazines. The Journal of Theology for Southern Africa published four of his articles between 1973 and 1977.²³⁷ Three articles were also published in Reality in 1973 and 1974,²³⁸ and four articles appeared in the radical ecumenical journal Pro Veritate between 1973 and 1976.²³⁹ Finally, the South African Council of Churches journal, South African Outlook, published a number of his articles in which he criticised the Dutch Reformed Church and the predominantly conservative German Lutheran churches.²⁴⁰

²³⁷ Manas Buthelezi, "Six Theological Problems of Evangelism in South Africa", Journal of Theology in Southern Africa, no 3, June 1973, pp.55-56; "Daring to Live for Christ: By Being Human and by Suffering for Others", Journal of Theology in Southern Africa, no 11, June 1975, pp.7-10; "The Christian Presence in Today's South Africa", Journal Of Theology in Southern Africa, no 16, September 1976, pp.5-8; "Towards a Biblical Faith in South Africa", Journal of Theology in Southern Africa, no 19, June 1977, pp.55-58.

²³⁸ Manas Buthelezi, "Black Christians Must Liberate Whites", Reality, vol 5, no 3, July 1973, pp.3-6; "Marginal Christian Groups in South Africa", Reality, vol 5, no 5, November 1973, pp.16-19;

"Building a Heritage for the Future", Reality, vol 6, no 4, September 1974, pp.14-16.

²³⁹ Manas Buthelezi, "Christianity in South Africa", Pro Veritate, vol 12, no 2, 15 June 1973, pp.4-6.

"Change in the Church", Pro Veritate, vol 12, no 5, 15 September 1973, pp.4-6.

"Black Theology and Le Grange-Schlebusch Commission", Pro Veritate, vol 13, no 6, October 1975, pp.4-6.

"Black Creativity as a Process of Liberation", Pro Veritate, vol 15, no 1, June 1976, pp.16-17.

²⁴⁰ Manas Buthelezi, "The Christian Institute and Black South Africa", South African Outlook, no 1241, October 1974, pp.162-163, "The Relevance of Black Theology", South African Outlook, vol, no 1243, December 1974, pp.198-199,

He also delivered papers at major conferences on Black Theology in South Africa and internationally. In South Africa, two of his outstanding papers were read at the exclusive Conferences on Black Theology, and they created great interest in the subject among Africans. His first paper was called "An African Theology or a Black Theology". This was delivered at a conference hosted by the UCM in Wilgespruit in February 1970. Two years later, the article was included in a book, Essays on Black Theology in South Africa,²⁴¹ together with some articles which he had produced on Black Theology for other conferences. He read another highly commended article, "The Christian Challenge of Black Theology", at the Renaissance Conference held at St. Peter's Seminary near Hammanskraal in December 1974.²⁴²

As the director of the Christian Institute in the Natal region where he was based in Pietermaritzburg from 1973 to 1975, he used his position to act as a spokesperson for the African oppressed. The central purpose in all his writing was to expose the double standards of the South African Christian community as a whole.²⁴³ He was critical of the white community for its support of apartheid policy in spite of its professed Christian beliefs.²⁴⁴ His direct criticisms of the government infuriated the National Party and caused the government to act against him – all the more so because many of the civil servants in the government Department of Bantu

²⁴¹ Manas Buthelezi, "An African Theology or a Black Theology", in Mothlabi (ed.) Essays on Black Theology in South Africa, pp.3-9.

²⁴² "Black Renaissance Convention Book Review", Pro Veritate, vol 14, no 10, June 1976, p14.

²⁴³ Manas Buthelezi, "The Christian Presence in Today's South Africa", Journal of Theology in Southern Africa, no 16, September 1976, p.7.

²⁴⁴ Manas Buthelezi, "Black Christians Must Liberate Whites", Reality, vol 5, no 3, July 1973, p.4.

Administration were Lutherans, the denomination to which Buthelezi belonged.²⁴⁵ (This situation had arisen because German missionaries had lived with Africans on mission stations and so had learned African languages.) Buthelezi and others were resentful of the fact that the descendants of missionaries had become supporters of apartheid.

In December 1973 Buthelezi was banned for "harbouring Communist ideas", according to a report which appeared in Pro Veritate.²⁴⁶ The banning meant that he was prohibited from engaging in public activities such as preaching, teaching, writing and travelling outside South Africa.²⁴⁷ Although this banning was supposed to have been effective for five years, the government had to modify its position because of national and international condemnation of Buthelezi's banning. Some hours after he was banned, his first cousin, the then chief councillor of Kwa-Zulu, Chief Mangosutho Buthelezi, issued a strong warning to the South African government.²⁴⁸ This happened while Mangosutho was away in Addis Ababa attending the Conference on African-American dialogue on 7 December 1973.²⁴⁹ The Christian Institute, the South African Council of Churches,²⁵⁰ and Lutheran Church, through the international Lutheran World Federation based in Geneva, put pressure on the German government to request the South African government to unban Buthelezi. The Journal of Theology for Southern Africa, of which Buthelezi was the chairman of the board, in its editorial for March 1974, joined the chief minister of Kwa-Zulu in condemning the ban. This unexpected pressure caused the South African

²⁴⁵ Brandt, (ed), Outside the Camp, p. 146.

²⁴⁶ "The Unbanning of Manas Buthelezi is Symbolic", Pro Veritate, vol 13, no 3, July 1974, p.3.

²⁴⁷ Pro Veritate, vol 14, no 3, July 1975, p.10.

²⁴⁸ "Prove He's Subversive", Pro Veritate, vol 12, no 11, March 1974, p.22.

²⁴⁹ Ibid, p.22.

²⁵⁰ Pro Veritate, vol 12, no 11, March 1974, p.5.

government to lift its ban on Buthelezi before the expiry date. This sudden lifting of the order shows that while the South Africa government prided itself on resisting pressure from foreign countries, it sometimes acceded to diplomatic intervention. In recognition of his anti-apartheid work, Buthelezi was awarded an honorary degree by the American Lutheran Seminary, the Wardburg Theological Seminary, in Dubuque, Wisconsin, on 8 May 1975.²⁵¹

Buthelezi also had a role in important community activities. His role as one of the pioneers of Black Theology in South Africa caused him to be called as a witness during the trial of various SASO and Black People's Convention (BPC) defendants, which was held in Pretoria in 1976 for their role in organising the VIVA Frelimo Rally planned in 1974.²⁵² The other significant contribution which Buthelezi rendered was his service on the Soweto Committee of Ten, which was founded after the June 1976 Soweto uprising. This committee held ongoing discussions with the government authorities over the education crisis in black schools across the country.²⁵³

Desmond Tutu

Desmond Tutu was brought up in a variety church denominations – Methodist, African Methodist Episcopal and the Anglican²⁵⁴ – and this made him different from the other black political activists

²⁵¹ "Lutherans Ask: Reconsider Dr. Manas Buthelezi's Ban", Pro Veritate, vol 12, no 11, March 1974, p.23.

²⁵² Survey of Race Relations in South Africa, 1976, p.131.

²⁵³ Michael Lobban, White Man's Justice: South African Political Trials in the Black Consciousness Era (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1996), p.244.

²⁵⁴ Shirley Moulder, "A Man for Joy and Justice", South African Outlook, vol 112, no 1328, February 1982, p.19.

in South Africa, especially in the 1970s and 1980s, when blacks tended to be anti-liberal under the influence of the Black Consciousness movement. His moderate approach to conflict resolution is reported to have been influenced by white liberals, and especially by Trevor Huddleston, whose role I already discussed in this chapter.²⁵⁵

Tutu became one of the first Africans to use moderate language in his advocacy of the Black Theology of liberation. Unlike Manas Buthelezi, whose literary contributions were made accessible through publications, Tutu's output was not available to the public between 1970 and 1977. One of the most liberal academic journals, the Journal of Theology for Southern Africa, was able to publish one article which he had written while he was an associate Director for the Theological Education Fund of the World Council of Churches.²⁵⁶ This article was obviously aimed at a European audience because the theme was the role played by missionaries who were deeply critical of African beliefs and culture as they attempted to convert blacks to a Western-style Christianity.²⁵⁷ This shows that even though Tutu was far removed from the Black Theology scene, being stationed as he was in Europe from 1972, he was still inspired by the spirit of African Theology. Simon Gqubule exaggeratedly suggests that Tutu was involved with Black Theology as early as 1961.²⁵⁸

As the Associate Director for the Theological Education Fund, Tutu travelled in many non-

²⁵⁵ Naomi Tutu (ed), The Words of Desmond Tutu (New York, Newmarket Press, 1989), p.19.

²⁵⁶ Desmond Tutu, "Some African Insight and the Old Testament", Journal of Theology in Southern Africa, no 1, December 1972, pp.16-22.

²⁵⁷ Ibid, p.16.

²⁵⁸ T.S.N. Gqubule, "They Hate Him Without a Cause", Tlhagale and Mosala (eds), Hammering Swords into Ploughshares, pp.37-38.

Western Countries and was therefore exposed to the Liberation Theology of Latin America and Black Theology of liberation in the United States. Both concepts, in Shirley du Boulay's observation, built up Desmond Tutu's self-esteem and shaped his own theological and political consciousness.²⁵⁹ When he returned to South Africa in 1975 as the Dean of St Mary's Cathedral in Johannesburg, Tutu began vigorously to support Black Consciousness philosophy and Black Theology. In his speeches and sermons he carefully blended religion and politics and the result was a personally unique Black Theology of liberation in a South African setting. His main criticism of the apartheid government was directed at its notorious removals policies between the late 1950s and the early 1960s, and he made special reference to District Six in Cape Town and to Sophiatown in Johannesburg – where he had once lived.²⁶⁰ The importance of Sophiatown for the Africans who lived there was that they *owned* the land from which they were forcibly removed, and this had had a devastating psychological effect on them since it meant that they were stripped of the basic human right to own property. For Tutu and other members of the Anglican church, Sophiatown was their religious sanctuary because the Community of Resurrection had a house there which was headed by Trevor Huddleston.²⁶¹ Tutu was also highly critical of the government's policy of migratory labour because it broke up African families.²⁶²

While he was gradually drawn to Black Consciousness philosophy, Tutu did not abide by its exclusivist principles. He continued to involve concerned white liberals in the pursuit of solutions to the racial tension which were the underlying cause of apartheid. This attitude sometimes

²⁵⁹ Du Boulay, Tutu: Voice of the Voiceless, pp.98-100.

²⁶⁰ Desmond Tutu, "Tearing People Apart", South African Outlook, vol 110, no 1312, October 1980, p.152.

²⁶¹ Worsnip, Between the two fires, p.95.

²⁶² South African Outlook, vol 107, no 1273, June 1977, p.82

created uncertainty about Tutu's commitment to Black Consciousness philosophy in Black Consciousness circles.²⁶³ In a meeting in January 1976 Tutu addressed the regional group of the South African Institute of Race Relations and cautioned them for having taken a neutral position when racial tensions were about to explode.²⁶⁴ In so doing he was pointing to a greater political radicalism which required more commitment to the anti-apartheid struggle by liberal organisations.

His most distinguished contribution in the area of the struggle for liberation, however, was his engagement in discussions with the government at a time when it was not prepared to debate any issues with members of black communities. One of Tutu's most important initiatives was his letter to the then Prime Minister, B.J. Vorster, on 6 May 1976, a month prior to the 16 June students' uprising which started in Soweto.²⁶⁵ According to Tutu, the situation around the high schools in Soweto was becoming explosive – and he warned the government to act to avoid disaster.²⁶⁶ He felt that the prime minister could have averted a possible revolution by recognising the right of urban blacks to permanent residence in so-called "white" South Africa, by repealing pass laws and calling for a national convention which would include the recognised leaders of the black community.²⁶⁷

Tutu also acted as a spiritual father as he attempted to console and encourage victims of the

²⁶³ Buti Tlhagale, "Desmond Tutu: Priest, Elder, and Prophet", Mthobi Mutloatse (ed.), Hope and Suffering: Sermons and Speeches (Johannesburg, Skotaville Publishers, 1983), p. xiii.

²⁶⁴ Seek, March 1989, p. 2.

²⁶⁵ Desmond Tutu, "Nightmarish Fear", Mutloatse (ed.) Hope and Sufferings, pp. 1-6.

²⁶⁶ Ibid, p. 4.

²⁶⁷ Ibid, p. 5.

apartheid system. He was reported to have been encouraged in this role by liberal colleagues within the Anglican Church, such as Aelred Stubbs, who had known leaders of the Black Consciousness Movement such as Biko.²⁶⁸ In this capacity Tutu encouraged Leo Rakale, an Anglican priest, to travel to the Northern Transvaal to Lenyenye to visit Mamphela Ramphele who had been banished to this rural area by the apartheid government.²⁶⁹ In his desire to keep contact with the banned Africans, Tutu visited their families in defiance of the government's orders. One of these visits was to Winnie Mandela in Brandfort in the Orange Free State. He was reported to have administered holy communion to her in the street.²⁷⁰ It was in the same spirit of defiance and in obedience to his religious beliefs as an Anglican priest that Tutu used to conduct the funerals of victims of the apartheid system for Anglicans such as Biko.²⁷¹ While members of other denominations also made a contribution to the Black Consciousness Movement, evidence shows that members of the Anglican Church, such as Biko, Pityana, Moloto and Ntwasa, made a major contribution.

The South African Council of Churches' and the World Council of Churches' anti-apartheid agencies

One of the major ecumenical bodies consistently to oppose in South Africa abuses of human rights based on theories of racial supremacy was the World Council of Churches (WCC), to which the South African Council of Churches (SACC) was affiliated.²⁷² They first protested most vigorously

²⁶⁸ Du Boulay, Tutu: Voice of the Voiceless, p.102.

²⁶⁹ Seek, June 1981, p.2.

²⁷⁰ Seek, March 1981, p.2.

²⁷¹ Mutloatse, (ed), Hope and Suffering, pp.7-11.

²⁷² Ans. J. van der Bent (ed.), World Council of Churches: Statement and Actions on Racism in 1948-1979 (World Council of Churches, Geneva, 1980), p.2.

in 1960 after Sharpeville when delegates from WCC met at Cottesloe near Johannesburg in December. Several denominations discussed the racist tensions which had caused the senseless shooting of peaceful demonstrators against immoral pass law. From then on, the WCC in collaboration with the internal structure of the SACC and the liberation movements operating in exile, played a leading role in exposing the apartheid system of government.²⁷³ One of the most important resolutions adopted was at the Fourth Consultation held at Uppsala in 1968, where the assembly supported the formation of the Programme to Combat Racism. It was this consultation which agreed to support liberation movements financially in Southern Africa and assist them with humanitarian programmes that provided legal, educational and medical aid.²⁷⁴ A sizeable number of member churches from the Western World, such as Britain and the United States, were opposed to the making these grants because they alleged that the programme would promote violence in the region.²⁷⁵

The overwhelming majority of the member churches in the WCC from African, Asian and South American countries did, however, support the grants²⁷⁶ – a fact which demonstrates how non-Western groups in international forums were emerging to challenge the supremacy of the West. A follow-up consultation on this matter was held in May 1969 at London's Notting Hill and was attended by many of the most influential personalities in the anti-apartheid movement²⁷⁷ – among

²⁷³ Kenneth Sansbury, Combatting Racism: The British Churches and the World Council of Churches Programme to Combat Racism (London, British Council of Churches, 1975), p.3.

²⁷⁴ Clarence W. Hall and Dr. A.H. van den Heuvel, "Controversy: Reader's Digest and WCC Resolution?", Pro Veritate, vol 10, no 11, March 1972, p.3.

²⁷⁵ Sansbury, Combatting Racism, pp.14-19.

²⁷⁶ "Controversy: Reader's Digest and WCC Resolution?", Pro Veritate, p.3.

²⁷⁷ "Controversy Reader's Digest and WCC Resolution?: Clarence W. Hall Debates with Dr. A.H. van den Heuvel", Pro Veritate, vol X, no 12, April 1972, pp.9-11.

them people such as Tambo and Huddleston.²⁷⁸ Abdul Minty, secretary of the London-based anti-apartheid movement (and a South African), and Seretse Choabi, the director of the Luthuli Memorial Foundation based in Botswana, lent weight to the meeting. They were reported to have been among the strongest supporters of the project.²⁷⁹ It is believed that *they* were the ones to suggest that the WCC and its member churches should apply sanctions against corporations and institutions which were doing business in racist South Africa. It was further suggested that should the boycott fail, the churches should support resistance movement.²⁸⁰ The black theologians from the United States who supported the principles of Black Power ideology also played a vital role in convincing the consultation of the importance of the Programme to Combat Racism.²⁸¹

This new concept was discussed again at the meeting of the central committee of WCC held in Ethiopia in January 1971, which endorsed funding of the programme to the tune of five-hundred thousand US dollars from a special fund of the organisation. The project was introduced in 1971 because the United Nations had declared that year to be one of action against racism and the elimination of all forms of segregation.²⁸² In South Africa, just as in Western countries, according to Archbishop Denis Hurley, the SACC protested against the establishment of the Programme to Combat Racism (PCR). The SACC resolved not to send its annual subscriptions to the WCC but decided to retain its membership of the organisation.²⁸³

²⁷⁸ Shridah R. Raphal, "Man of Our One World", Honore, Trevor Huddleston, p.118.

²⁷⁹ Sansbury, Combat Racism, pp.27-28.

²⁸⁰ Pro Veritate, vol X, no 12, April 1972, p.10.

²⁸¹ "Controversy Reader's Digest and WCC Revolution?: Clarence W. Hall Debates with Dr. A.H. Van den Heuvel", Pro Veritate, vol X, no 12, April 1972, p.9.

²⁸² Pro Veritate, vol IX, no 9, January 1971, p.15. See also, Greg Cuthbertson, "Christians and Structural Violence in South Africa in the 1970s", in W.S. Vorster (ed.), Views on Violence (Unisa Press, Pretoria, 1986).

²⁸³ Philip Denis (ed), Facing the Crisis: Selected Texts of Archbishop D.E. Hurley (Pietermaritzburg, Cluster Publications, 1997), p.195.

The SACC was antagonistic to the WCC for two reasons. The leaders of SACC during the period under discussion were conservative white liberals, and, no matter what ideology they held, they were anxious to avoid confrontation with the Nationalist government. The government had been extremely critical of the decision of the WCC to finance liberation movements (even partly). Secondly, according to Wolfram Kistner, a member of the executive of the SACC from the mid 1970s to the late 1980s, the views of African members within the SACC were hardly ever heard because they constituted a minority. It was the rise of Black Consciousness and the Black Theology of liberation in the 1970s that caused a change of mind in the ^{SACC}WCC.²⁸⁴ It has been pointed out that it was indeed BC influence that caused black members within the SACC seriously to reconsider their association with an organisation which they perceived to be supporting apartheid. Blacks were becoming articulate in support of the liberation movement.²⁸⁵

Although it seemed that tension was brewing between the SACC and WCC over this issue, warm relationships continued to exist between *individual* liberals within the organisation and the parent body. But their views were generally suppressed and hardly ever heard. One of them, Edward Crower, the Anglican bishop of Kimberley and Kuruman, called on the church to support guerrilla forces which were operating in Southern Africa. As a result of his call he was expelled from South Africa in 1972.²⁸⁶ A large number of the priests who held South African passports had them withdrawn and non-South African citizens were simply deported. The highest number of deportations occurred in 1971 – a year during which ten priests were deported.²⁸⁷ This happened

²⁸⁴ Brandt (ed), Outside the Camp, p. 7.

²⁸⁵ Pro Veritate, vol 13, no 8, December 1974, p.12.

²⁸⁶ "Call for Support of Guerilla Groups", Pro Veritate, vol XI, no1, May 1972, p.3.

²⁸⁷ Pro Veritate, vol IX, no 9, January 1971, p.2.

mainly because many priests were among the protesters who were angered by the detention of twenty-two blacks for political reasons in April 1970.²⁸⁸

Apart from supporting and giving comfort to individuals, the WCC also encouraged extra-parliamentary organisations such as the Christian Institute, which continued to articulate the plight of blacks living under the apartheid rule.²⁸⁹

The WCC's consistent and unrelenting criticism of the evils of apartheid and their pleas for humanitarian aid to the liberation movements, influenced many members of the SACC to reconsider their attitude to the organisation. The WCC continued (mainly through correspondence and contributions to the SACC's publications such as Weekly EcuNews and the quarterly journal, Kairos) to influence opinion in South Africa through the SACC.²⁹⁰ Sometimes, messages of encouragement and support for the political liberation movements softened the opinion of ecumenical leaders in the country. Thus, for example, in a new year special message, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. Michael Ramsey, praised those organisations which had been courageous enough to support the victims of apartheid. This message was well received, even by John Rees, the general secretary of the SACC, who was known for his opposition to any kind of support for the liberation movements.²⁹¹ Contacts such as these, and the gruesome political realities of the time, forced people to take sides and resulted in a change in the mindset of the

²⁸⁸ Thomas G. Karis and Gail M. Gerhart, From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa, 1882-1990 (Pretoria, Unisa Press, 1997), p.769.

²⁸⁹ Ans J. van der Bent (ed.) Breaking Down the Walls: World Council of Churches Statement and Action on Racism 1948-1985 (Geneva, World Council of Churches, 1986), p.11.

²⁹⁰ A Survey of Race Relations in South Africa 1973, (Johannesburg, Institute of Race Relations, 1974), p.39.

²⁹¹ *Ibid*, p.50.

white liberal-led organisation. New attitudes began to form in the minds of individuals and these began to influence the SACC as a whole. Rather unexpectedly, the SACC sent two of its representatives, Dr Alex Boraine and Rees, together with nine other members from various denominations who were members of the SACC, to attend the WCC Conference that was held between 22 and 29 August 1973.²⁹² The visit benefited both the SACC and the WCC in the sense that while African and Asian members of the WCC were reluctant to accept these South African delegates because only one black person was a member of the delegation, they were recognised as being true representatives of the oppressed after they had unequivocally stated their total opposition to apartheid policy.²⁹³

Another positive consequence of the attendance by the SACC delegation at the WCC Conference was that Dr Lukas Vischer, head of the Faith and Order Commission of the WCC, paid a visit to South Africa in March 1974 for discussions with members of various ecumenical organisations – including the SACC.²⁹⁴ His visit seems to have encouraged the SACC to seek dialogue with important anti-racist organisations. Two months after Vischer's meeting, a delegation of the SACC which comprised both black and white members, attended the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC), held in Zambia. For the first time since the exile of the liberation movements, delegates were able to “dialogue” with the leaders of (what racist South Africans called) “terrorists” in that country.²⁹⁵ This visit also profoundly influenced the views of the white-led liberal ecumenical body. They came to appreciate more and more that whites in South Africa had

²⁹² Rand Daily Mail, 31/7/1973; Pro Veritate, vol 12, no 4, August 1973, p. 21.

²⁹³ Ecunews, 7 September 1973, Pro Veritate, vol 12, no 6, October 1973, p.25.

²⁹⁴ A Survey of Race Relations, 1974, (Johannesburg, Institute of Race Relations, 1975), p.43.

²⁹⁵ Ibid, p.44.

to make radical, credible and irrevocable moves towards racial and human justice (i.e. universal and not whites-only "democracy") if they hoped to avoid serious confrontation with blacks in the future.

The SACC used its annual conference in July 1974 to encourage what was termed "conscientious objection to military service" and denounce (compulsory white) military conscription. The leadership of the SACC challenged the government and condemned it for making national military service compulsory for whites only.²⁹⁶ While this statement was directed at the government, other denominations supported a call for universal military service on the grounds that young white men were being called up to fight their fellow black citizens who had joined the liberation movements as "freedom fighters" (what the apartheid government's propaganda machine called "terrorists"). The SACC received more support on this issue from the black communities as they identified the call as support for the liberation struggle being waged on the country's borders.²⁹⁷ Although a large number of whites in general were either indifferent or openly opposed to the call for conscientious objection to military service, the impact of the statement was overwhelming. In this conference, and in the annual conferences that followed, according to Kistner, discussion about South African racial injustice and institutionalised apartheid, tended to top the agenda.²⁹⁸ From this time onwards, blacks also constituted a majority in the SACC, and it was thus natural for them to focus on issues of racial, religious and political justice.

²⁹⁶ H.J. Simons, Struggles in Southern Africa for Survival and Equality (London, Macmillan, 1997), p.175.

²⁹⁷ Pro Veritate, vol 13, no 8, December 1974, p.12.

²⁹⁸ Brandt, Outside the Camp, p.7.

This chapter has examined the crucial role that was played by white liberal (but non-South African) clergymen in exposing the evils of the apartheid system of government and its racist ideologies. In spite, however, of their outspoken courage, committed action and fervent protests, uncompromising and ruthless reaction from the government and a lack of grass-roots support from ordinary citizens and religious circles within the country ensured that their protests would ultimately be ineffectual in the medium term. The government reacted to all protest by becoming ever more vindictive and decisive in clamping down on what they regarded as a threat to the "security" of South Africa – while ignoring the massive threat to the peace and good governance of the country that their own narrowly based racism was eliciting.²⁹⁹

After Black Consciousness emerged in South Africa in 1968, freedom fighters and ordinary citizens looking for justice looked more and more to the Black Theology of liberation which was being inspired and informed by the ideals and aims of American Black Power and a groundswell of political protest in South Africa. Most African theology students at the various segregated seminaries for blacks were also members of Black Consciousness and these students began to become ever more sophisticated in the obvious connections between white-sponsored racism and the political, social and economic symbiosis between church and state in South Africa. Together with African theologians such as Manas Buthelezi, Desmond Tutu, Simon Gqubule, Ernest Baartman and others refined Black Liberation theology as a means of raising the awareness of the oppressed masses of South Africa. It was thus that the WCC's influence on the individuals within the SACC began to pay dividends. Because of continual pressure from black (and a few outspoken white) members within the council, the SACC was forced to reform itself and show

²⁹⁹ Worsnip, Between the Two Fires, pp.39-72.

that it was sincere and unequivocal in its opposition to the institutionalised racial segregation that had been practised in South Africa for so long.

CHAPTER THREE

THE NATIONAL UNION OF SOUTH AFRICAN STUDENTS AND THE SOUTH AFRICAN STUDENTS ORGANISATION

This chapter will review the protean history of the relationship between the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS) and the South African Students Organisation (SASO), and will show how the failure of NUSAS as an organisation to radicalize its ideology in time to accommodate the realities of the black liberation struggle, led Steve Biko to take the lead in founding SASO after the NUSAS July Congress of 1967. The chapter will also demonstrate how the relationship between individuals in the two organisations and the organisations themselves, were a microcosm of the paradoxical and symbiotic relationship between white liberals and BC – symbiotic because BC was increasingly forced to rely on white liberal support as the apartheid government systematically destroyed BC structures and support bases wherever they could identify them, and paradoxical because it was one the foundations of BC ideology (as articulated by Biko himself) that black people could *only* liberate themselves from centuries-old white domination and suzerainty by *not* relying in any way on white support and solidarity.

This chapter will locate further evidence of the paradoxes of this situation in the transformation which SASO occasioned in NUSAS itself. At first SASO became a mirror in which the self-satisfied complacency of many white students of the 1960s and 1970s was disagreeably reflected back to themselves. Later SASO implicitly and explicitly challenged NUSAS to examine the roots of its own

eurocentric racism and assumptions of cultural and racial superiority. At first this angered many whites, but later, after many false starts and reversals, which this chapter will detail, SASO (and the BC ideology which it embodied) became the means whereby NUSAS was able to rehabilitate itself (in the decade of the 1970s) from the underlying racism that was, and, sadly, still is, in many people, the toxic heritage of the European colonial and imperialising mentality. The ultimate paradox therefore (of which the relations between NUSAS and SASO serve as a prophetic microcosm), is that the despised and maltreated black people of South Africa were able, eventually, to liberate white people (a few to begin with, and many later) from the profound immorality of their own long-acquired attitudes of racism and cultural egocentricity.

The founding of SASO in 1968 reflects the wider failure of white-dominated organisations to accommodate on any meaningful scale the harshness of the realities of the black struggle for liberation from the stranglehold of centuries of European colonisation and imperialisation of the African subcontinent. Biko attended his first NUSAS Congress in July 1966, and it was immediately apparent to him that the NUSAS that he saw at that July congress of 1966 would never be able to act as a vehicle for disseminating the kind of radical black liberationist ideology that would free black people from the iniquities of apartheid rule. By 1966, the National Party government had been in power for eighteen years, and by then it must have been obvious to even the most complacent and ill-informed observer that the severity of oppression of black people in their own country would only increase in scope and magnitude as the years passed. Not only did the government give no sign that they were willing to accommodate genuine black aspirations for freedom and majority rule; as the years passed they deliberately cracked down more and more savagely on any signs of dissent – until their policy of repression and their resistance to any form of black majority rule culminated in the death of Biko himself.

It was Biko himself who realised that black people would never be able to free themselves from the blatantly racist agenda of apartheid if they did not divorce themselves completely from historical white liberal organisations such as NUSAS. It is difficult to realise, even with hindsight, how pivotal Biko's realisation was in the history of the struggle for black liberation. What confused the issue in most people's minds (both black and white) is that the racist attitudes of white colonists who had settled in Southern Africa from 1653 onwards, had always been offset by a small minority of whites who opposed racism in all its forms. Such white liberals raised their voices individually and sometimes collectively against racial and imperial injustice, and even on occasions took part in founding multi-racial and liberal organisations such as the Liberal Party and NUSAS itself.¹

However laudable the aims and intentions of such organisations may have been, it was clear to Biko and to the founders of BCM in South Africa, that they were essentially impotent to either attract large-scale black support or to undermine white resistance in South Africa to the policies of racial domination and white superiority that the National Party government was consolidating ever more efficiently as the years went on. Biko also saw that the majority of white South Africans were too isolated from black suffering, too set in their centuries-old attitudes, and too insulated from the extreme suffering of the great mass of black people (especially those in rural areas), to ever be amenable to any form of revisioning or radicalization. Biko saw that the majority of white people were merely too complacent, too ignorant, and too comfortable to offer black people the kind of radical liberationist ideology that could attract the attention of the black masses. It was this Damascus Road realisation (at the NUSAS annual conference of July 1967) that led Biko to refine his

¹ Aelred Stubbs (ed.) Steve Biko: I Write What I Like (London, Penguin, 1988) pp.34-40.

ideological agenda and to found SASO, the BC student organisation that was dedicated to the BC ideal that black people had to take charge of their own liberation – without intervention or support from white liberals, however well disposed or supportive they might be.

Biko also instinctively realised (and articulated ever more clearly, until the day of his death) that the kind of benign but paternalistic liberalism of an older generation of white liberals such as Alan Paton and Edgar Brookes, which believed in a gradual upliftment of the black majority by means of liberal education based on a liberal European model, would never generate the momentum needed to shake the foundations of white minority rule – let alone attract the attention of the mute, suffering masses of black people. It was this realisation that spurred Biko to refine his Africanist Black Consciousness philosophy, a philosophy that embodied the ideal that blacks should wrest control of their collective destiny from the hands of paternalistic white liberals, and that they – without any white support – should free themselves from white racist domination and control.

These BC ideals, so clearly articulated by Biko, were the spark that ignited the fires within South Africa that ultimately led to the conflagration of civil unrest among blacks that persuaded the South African government, from the mid-1980s onwards, that the indigenous people of South Africa could not be indefinitely controlled on a mass scale by police and military brutality, repression and the techniques of security police surveillance, detention, torture, intimidation and murder. Although Biko himself became the most famous victim of security police brutality when he died from injuries sustained while in police detention, his prophetic insight and intellectual brilliance led him to see through the confusing tangle of white liberal sentiment in organisations such as NUSAS and to define the path ahead. (A subsequent chapter will examine in detail the events and consequences that surrounded Biko's detention, torture, death, and the infamous commission of enquiry into Biko's

death that sparked outrage and indignation around the world.)

This chapter examines in detail the relationship between NUSAS and SASO because NUSAS was the largest and most influential multi-racial liberal students organisation in existence after 1948 (the date of the National Party's accession to power), and because SASO was born out of Biko's disillusionment with the efficacy of white-dominated liberal organisations as instruments for the attainment of black liberation in South Africa. Biko (as did many other black revolutionaries) started his political career in earnest when he became a member of NUSAS and attended the annual congress in July 1967. Since Biko was a student at the time at the Medical School of the University of Natal, he was able to observe at first hand both the (largely paternalistic) liberalism and the (essentially racist) conservatism that characterised the student body of which he was a part, and this led him, in the few years until his death, to become South Africa's leading exponent of the BC agenda.

The intricacies of the contacts and relationships between black and white students, first in NUSAS, and later between NUSAS and SASO, are a microcosm of the larger picture as it developed in the sixties, seventies and eighties, and they are relevant to the central themes of this research because they reflect, often with great clarity, the paradox of the mutual and symbiotic relationship between white and black liberals – in spite of the BC tenet that blacks could only liberate themselves *without white assistance*. The reasons for this paradoxical state of affairs (examined also in detail in other chapters) are perhaps more historical than ideological.

As Biko and others articulated BC ideas ever more clearly, the National Party government felt ever more threatened and compromised, at first locally, but, after Biko's death, by mounting waves of international protest and boycott. As the government felt more threatened, it cracked down ever more

systematically on individual liberals and organisations such as NUSAS and SASO. But while NUSAS, in the 1960s, may not have presented much of a threat to the white minority government's claim to legitimacy and representivity, BC ideals, as embodied in organisations such as SASO and as articulated by Biko, represented more than a threat. SASO and BC, as fearful racist whites were quick to see, were harbingers of the demise of white racist minority rule in South Africa. Majority rule, in the collective mind of the Nationalist Party, was synonymous with a holocaust in which all white people in the subcontinent would be slaughtered – and this, logically, would mean the disappearance of all "civilization" and "civilized values" in South Africa.

In the fear-ridden and apocalyptic imagination of the white racists in South Africa, black majority rule meant the destruction of all whites and the consequent disappearance of all the narrow sectarian values (the "norms") that they held so dear. It would also mean, perhaps more pertinently, the disappearance of the luxurious life style enjoyed by whites and financed for so long by an underclass of black menial labourers who were disenfranchised in the land of their ancestors. When the apparatchiks of the security police began fully to absorb (but not fully understand) Biko's insistence that black people could only liberate themselves, they interpreted this to mean Biko was advocating the destruction of white people and "white" civilisation. (Some of BC's more fanatical followers placed a similar construction on Biko's strategic thinking.) What most racists of all colours failed to appreciate (and some still do) was that Biko's insistence that black people could only liberate themselves was not a racist statement, but rather a far-sighted enunciation of the only possible condition for black liberation at the time. Although Biko was probably about as far removed from being a racist and a fanatic as any human being could be, he was a political strategist of unparalleled insight, intellectual acumen and prophetic vision. It is the purpose of this research to demonstrate that some of the popularizations of BC ideology are not accurate, and that what was really happening was

far more complex and nuanced than populist misinterpretations would have us believe.² SASO was Biko's brainchild, his vehicle for transmitting his vision and methodology to the mute and suffering masses, and since SASO was born out of black student disillusionment with NUSAS's ability to accommodate a workable vision for black liberation, it is to an examination of the often confusing and perplexing relationships between NUSAS and SASO that we will now turn our attention.

When SASO was established in 1968 and inaugurated in 1969 at the University College of the North (Turffloop), one reason for its formation, according to those who helped to found it, was that they were increasingly despondent about multi-racial organisations which were historically dominated by white liberals.³ The proponents of this move argued that, since blacks were usually in the minority and also disadvantaged in the sense that they were often unable to express themselves properly in English, they could not participate fully in such liberal organisations.⁴ This became a major obstacle for those blacks who were attempting to play a full role in these organisations,⁵ and was cited by Biko as the main reason for founding SASO. It is hardly surprising that NUSAS was criticised in this way, for it was the largest multi-racial student organisation in South Africa, and, as such, it was the initial political home of those students who, inspired by Biko, were soon to break away from NUSAS to form their own organisation. It is important to bear in mind that the founders of SASO had previously been members of NUSAS and that it was there that they had acquired a knowledge of the practices

² See, for example, David Howarth, "Complexities of identity/difference: Black Consciousness ideology in South Africa", Journal of Political Ideologies, vol 2, no 1, 1997, pp.55-60.

³ Henry Isaac, "The Emergence and the Impact of the Black Consciousness Movement", in Ikwezi, December 1976, p.10.

⁴ Steve Biko, "Our Strategy for Liberation", in Christianity and Crisis, vol 37, no 22, January 1978, p.329.

⁵ Siphon Buthelezi, "The Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa", in CEAPA Journal, vol 1, no 2, December 1987, p.25; Karis and Gerhart Collection, Johannesburg, "South African Students Organisation", SB/2/70, pp.3-4.

and policy of this liberal students organisation.⁶ Their subsequent disillusionment with NUSAS may also account for much of the tone of acrimony, bitterness, resentment and betrayal that one often senses in the sources which recount the complex contacts between the two organisations.

NUSAS is probably one of the oldest multi-racial students organisations to have initiated, in a spirit of reconciliation, a number of deliberate political campaigns after the end of the Second World War. The most important of these was (ironically, in view of later events) the campaign to end discrimination against blacks.⁷ It was during this period that students who were members of NUSAS, especially a significant number from the University of the Witwatersrand, took up the cause of encouraging blacks to join the organisation.⁸ The group from the University of the Witwatersrand included members such as Brian Bunting and Ruvin Bennun, both of whom were members of the Communist Party of South Africa.

Another organisation which added impetus to this movement was the Federation of Progressive Students, formed from the amalgamation of several students organisations such as the Young Communist League, the Zionist Socialist Youth Party, Hashomer Hatzair, the Youth Section of the Jewish Workers Club, the Progressive Asian Club, and the African Youth League. Ruth First, a leading activist who supported the inclusion of the blacks,⁹ was so active on behalf of these causes that she became one of the earliest white activists to oppose the implementation of apartheid

⁶ Karis and Gerhart Collection, Gail Gerhart's Interview with Steve Biko, Durban, 24 October 1972, pp.1-8.

⁷ Benjamin Kline, "The National Union of South African Students: A Case-Study of the Plight of Liberalism 1924-1977", in The Journal of Modern African Studies, no 23, 1985, pp.144-145.

⁸ Bruce K. Murray, "The Second War and the Student Politics at the University of the Witwatersrand", in South African Historical Journal, no 29, November 1993, p.209.

⁹ *Ibid*, pp.209-288.

principles, and one of few white women to be incarcerated for 117 days in terms of the security legislation which the government had especially designed to imprison political dissidents without trial. Eventually, after much persuasion from family members and close friends, First chose to leave South Africa on an "exit permit" in 1963.¹⁰ The measure of her contribution to the struggle against racism and apartheid may be gauged from her tragic death while in exile in Mocambique: she was killed by a parcel bomb sent from South Africa in September 1982.¹¹ It was only fifteen years later, during an amnesty application by the security policeman, Craig Williamson, that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) finally heard the truth about who had murdered Ruth First. In evidence heard by the commission, Williamson admitted his involvement in planning various acts of sabotage against ANC properties and the murder of members of the ANC in exile. Ruth First was one of his victims.¹²

When NUSAS incorporated African issues and agendas into its programmes, many blacks hoped that NUSAS might carry the banner for their political struggle, and so many of them, as Biko pointed out, were attracted to NUSAS during the 1960s, prior to the establishment of SASO in December 1968.¹³ It was therefore with great disappointment that black students eventually realised that NUSAS was not functioning effectively or convincingly as the vehicle of their political aspirations,¹⁴ and their intense disillusionment was the reason why so many of them criticised NUSAS so persistently in the years which followed.

¹⁰ Helen Suzman, In No Uncertain Terms (Johannesburg, Jonathan Ball Publishers, 1993), pp.76-77.

¹¹ Frances Meli, South Africa Belongs to Us (Harare, Zimbabwe Publishing House, 1988), p.130.

¹² Pretoria News, 3 March 1999, p.2.

¹³ Karis and Gerhart Collection, Interview with Biko, p.2

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p.4.

Among other things, this chapter will analyse the early policies of NUSAS as it opposed National Party-sponsored legislation which institutionalised discrimination against blacks in the 1950s. It is important to begin this analysis in the early 1950s because most of the problems which led to the founding of SASO originated during this period. The discussion will also include NUSAS's early reactions to SASO and the eventual influence of SASO on NUSAS policy.

NUSAS expresses its concerns over black politics

NUSAS's earliest policies were based on a desire to function as an apolitical organisation which would exercise itself in the prosecution of educational affairs, especially those relating to universities. It was therefore primarily designed to be an organisation that campaigned for the achievement of educational freedom.¹⁵ In Benjamin Kline's opinion, NUSAS confined itself to the ideal of educational freedom because the majority of its liberal supporters were reluctant to give moral and financial support to an organisation which might openly and aggressively criticise segregation policies.¹⁶ Support for these narrow aims came from liberals such as Leo Marquard, its founding member and first president, who had a particular interest in constitutional law, as well as from Edgar Brookes, who believed in evolutionary change to real democracy.¹⁷

Inevitably, however, racial issues became the central agenda of the organisation after the 1948 general

¹⁵ William Cullen Library, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, "The Aspiration to a Just Society", A1931/ cb6, pp.1-2.

¹⁶ Kline, "The National Union of South African Students", in The Journal of Modern African Studies, p.140.

¹⁷ Edgar Brookes, "NUSAS", in Reality, vol 7, no 5, November 1975, p.8.

election which brought the Nationalists into power. Students were moved by outrage to defend what they believed was a violation of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights when, in 1953, the National Party introduced segregation into education with the passage through parliament of the Bantu Education Act, the main purpose of which was to introduce segregated schools for blacks.¹⁸ From 1954 onwards, therefore, members of NUSAS protested against the implementation of segregationist laws by sending petitions to the relevant authorities, organising deputations, and by holding demonstrations and initiating protests of various kinds.¹⁹

NUSAS's first significant protest was launched in December 1954 when its executive issued a lengthy statement condemning the government's apartheid policies. This statement, in which NUSAS reiterated its commitment to a policy of integration of white and black students, was released to the press and constituted an important challenge to the government. In it, the organisation expressed its belief that the integration of both racial groups would promote a spirit of understanding between the two student communities.²⁰ Later, in April 1957, the president of NUSAS, Ernest ("Ernie") M. Wentzel, wrote an open letter to the Minister of Education, J.H. Viljoen, in which he protested the introduction of the Separate University Education Bill.²¹ His protest was endorsed by liberal organisations such as the Institute of Race Relations, which worked jointly with NUSAS on some issues,²² and it gave NUSAS a degree of credibility among blacks since it defined NUSAS as part of

¹⁸ Kline, "The National Union of South African Students", in The Journal of Modern African Studies, p.141.

¹⁹ John Daniel, "A History of NUSAS in Action", in South African Outlook, vol 104, no 1232, January 1974, pp.3-9.

²⁰ "The Aspiration to a Just Society", pp.11-12.

²¹ William Cullen Library, University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, Ernie Wentzel's letter to J.H.Viljoen, E7, AD.1158, p.1

²² William Cullen Library, The University of Witwatersrand, E.M. Wentzel to the Editor of Race Relations News, 27/3/1956, E7, AD/1158, p.1

the anti-apartheid and anti-nationalist section of the South African society.²³ One should not, however, conclude from this that it was NUSAS policy to be actively involved in political activities since, at the same time, NUSAS was avoiding any involvement with extra-parliamentary organisations such as the Congress of Democrats and the Charterists. In fact, this very isolation from such progressive African movements caused some sectors of the South African black community to believe that NUSAS was gradually withdrawing and isolating itself, even at that time, from the mainstream of resistance politics.²⁴

Subsequent to Wentzel's letter, six petitions from NUSAS were sent to parliament, and one of these requested that parliament permit itself to be addressed by the chancellors and vice chancellors of the universities of Cape Town and the Witwatersrand, who, in the opinion of the student body, were representative of student concerns.²⁵ These two universities were chosen because their students were generally more inclined towards liberalism and progressive attitudes and were, on the whole, more actively involved in protest than were other South African universities at the time. As a result of demonstrations like this against the Extension of University Education and Transfer of Fort Hare Bill, NUSAS received widespread support from countries in Scandinavia, Europe, North and South America and Africa.²⁶

At this stage, however, NUSAS was not in favour of involving itself fully in political activities.

²³ Kline, "The National Union of South African Students", in The Journal of Modern African Studies, p.141.

²⁴ Reginald Nkosana Dzingwa, "SASO and SASM in Protest Politics 1960-1977", B.A. Honours Paper, Department of History, the University of Fort Hare, 1994, p.3.

²⁵ Daniel, "A History of NUSAS in Action", p.4.

²⁶ The University of Witwatersrand, "A Brief History of Student Action in South Africa", p.2

Instead, it focused on the defence of academic freedom. This decision caused deep disappointment and disillusionment among NUSAS's black members, who had expected NUSAS, logically perhaps, to focus more and more on political issues central to South Africa. It was because of their disappointment, for example, that the Fort Hare University College students disaffiliated themselves from NUSAS between 1954 and 1957.²⁷

The Non-European Unity Movement (NEUM), whose role will be detailed later in this chapter, was the driving force behind the disaffiliation, believing as it did that it was unwise for blacks to be a part of NUSAS since it was part of the fabric of "white imperialism".²⁸ The remaining black colleges, such as Pius XII in Lesotho, Hewat Training College for Coloured Teachers in Cape Town, the Pretoria Bantu Normal College, and the University of Natal Non-European Section, were not affected by the withdrawal of Fort Hare, probably because NEUM was not strongly represented in these centres.²⁹ The withdrawal of Fort Hare from NUSAS between 1954 and 1957 emphasised the attitudes of the various sectors of the student community: while white students felt that their protest should be confined to the issue of academic freedom, black students were appalled by the fact that racial issues were not being adequately addressed. However, as apartheid legislation and practice became more and more repressive, and as pressure from international student organisations became more intense, NUSAS was more or less compelled to become ever more deeply involved in promoting black political aspirations.³⁰

²⁷ Baruch Hirson, Year of Fire, Year of Ash: The Soweto Revolts, Roots of Revolution? (London, Zed Press, 1979), p.65

²⁸ Ibid.p.65.

²⁹ Martin Legassick, The National Union of South African Students: Ethnic Cleavage and Ethnic Integration in the Universities (Los Angeles, African Studies Centre, University of California, 1967), p.48.

³⁰ "National Union of South African Students, NUSAS: A Brief History", 1974, Jameson Street, Cape Town, p.2.

NUSAS and the black struggle between 1960 and 1967

A series of events then took place between the years 1959 and 1960 which propelled NUSAS (whether willingly or unwillingly) to become more deeply involved in wide-ranging political activities – although outwardly it continued to expend most of its time pursuing its original policy of **defending** academic freedom. The Separate University Education Bill of March 1957, the Extension of University Education Bill and the Fort Hare Transfer Bill of 1958 had all passed through the Senate by June 1959 and were signed into law.³¹ As a result, these laws were implemented in January 1960 with the opening of the University College of the North, which was designed to cater for Sotho (Northern Sotho, Southern Sotho and Tswana), Tsonga and Venda speakers. In the same way, the University College of Zululand was for Zulu speakers; Durban-Westville was for Indians, and the University of the Western Cape was for Coloured students.³² In pursuance of the same policy, Fort Hare was taken over as an institution for Xhosa speakers.³³ The students from these newly established colleges affiliated to NUSAS even though they were forbidden to do so by segregationist laws which envisaged that they would form their own separate student organisations.³⁴

It was in the same year, 1960, that two major events, although unrelated to education specifically but significant enough not to be ignored by students, took place. On 21 March 1960, what was quickly to become known as the Sharpeville Massacre occurred and a number of blacks were killed by police.

³¹ "The Aspiration to a Just Society", pp.15-16.

³² Daniel, "A History of NUSAS in Action", p.4.

³³ E.M. Beale, "Fort Hare in the 1960s", Perspectives in Education, vol 12, no 1, 1990, p.44.

³⁴ "SASO Historical Background", in SASO Newsletter, June 1971, pp.1-6.

The demonstrations which led to the massacre were organised by the Pan Africanist Congress and were part of a campaign to protest against the issuing of identity documents to black women.³⁵ Because of the ensuing wave of international outrage against the killings and (by implication) against South Africa's racial laws, which had been the proximate cause of the massacre, the Nationalist government decided on a strategy to counteract this criticism. In an attempt to demonstrate how widespread was its internal support among the white electorate, the government called a national referendum to determine whether South Africa should remain within the Commonwealth as a Union, or whether it should become an independent Republic.³⁶

The reaction of NUSAS to these events was dramatic, and it was from this point on that NUSAS began more vigorously to oppose a government which they felt was becoming increasingly repressive. Furthermore, the Union had been outraged by the disturbing events which had taken place at the University College of Fort Hare. When the University College of Fort Hare, an institution with a proud history, was incorporated under the aegis of the Department of Bantu Education, considerable protest erupted, not least on the campus itself. Its Principal, Professor Z.K. Matthews and four other lecturers resigned,³⁷ "rather than submit to a government directive to renounce his allegiance to the African National Congress".³⁸ In addition, six other members of staff and the registrar were all summarily dismissed. Sixteen students were refused readmission, ten of them on the grounds of political activism.³⁹ Moreover, the Student Representative Council (SRC) was dissolved in protest against the new constitution which was imposed by the university's administration without any form

³⁵ Kline, "The National Union of South African Students", The Journal of Modern African Studies, p.141.

³⁶ Suzman, In No Uncertain Terms, p.54.

³⁷ Beale, "Fort Hare in the 1960s", p.43.

³⁸ Daniel, "A History of NUSAS in Action", p.4.

³⁹ "The Aspiration to a Just Society", p.17

of consultation.⁴⁰ Other students (apart from those directly involved in the protests) were also subsequently refused admission because of continuing unrest and protest on the campus. These injustices, combined with the effects of the Sharpeville Massacre, caused NUSAS to look for new ways and means to assist those black students who had been expelled to continue their studies privately. As a means to this end, NUSAS formed the South African Committee for Higher Education (SACHED).⁴¹

The government responded to the events following Sharpeville by introducing a state of emergency in April 1960, and various forms of protests at English-language universities inspired a large number of students, hitherto apathetic, to join NUSAS as members. About 600 students at the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, demonstrated in the streets. This was followed by an organised student march at the University of the Witwatersrand, and demands were made for the release of university students and staff from detention.⁴² In 1960 solidarity began to develop between black and white students as they engaged in joint protest, mainly against the government's implementation of educational segregation. This cooperation at a grassroots level gave newly established black universities the impression that NUSAS was supporting their cause, and so, as Legassick suggests, NUSAS membership by black students increased from 1960.⁴³

Generally, the history of NUSAS involvement in black politics from 1960 to the mid 1960s was interpreted positively from a black perspective. The reason for this was that, after the two major

⁴⁰ H.J. Simons, Struggle in Southern Africa for Survival and Equality (London, Macmillan, 1997), pp.162-163; Frieda Matthews, Remembrances (Bellville, Mayibuye Books, 1995), pp.69-70.

⁴¹ Daniel, "A History of NUSAS in Action", p.2.

⁴² Daniel, "A History of NUSAS in Action", p.2.

⁴³ Legassick, The National Union of South African Students, pp.19-21.

African liberation movements, the African National Congress (ANC) and the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC), had been banned in April 1960, NUSAS was one of the main liberal institutions in South Africa to speak out on behalf of oppressed blacks. When NUSAS therefore celebrated fifty years of its existence, the organisation was applauded for its role in South African political history while the trend among other English-speaking South Africans was increasingly to withdraw from political protest and direct involvement in effective opposition against the apartheid government.⁴⁴ It has also been suggested that NUSAS, because of the radical opinions held by successive presidents such as John Shingler, Adrian Leftwich, Jonty Driver, Maeder Osler and Ian Robertson, became an organisation which could not be ignored.⁴⁵ This research, however, argues that it was during the presidencies of both Adrian Leftwich (1961-1962) and Jonty Driver (1963-1964) that NUSAS's programme was radicalised. Their two successors, Maeder Osler and Ian Robertson, it will be argued, merely followed in the footsteps of their predecessors.

NUSAS under the leadership of Adrian Leftwich (1961-1962)

NUSAS organised numerous demonstrations at its affiliated English-speaking universities and were supported in this by progressive liberal institutions such as the South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR).⁴⁶ Since it was a student organisation, NUSAS's activities tended to be more radical than those of other progressive organisations.⁴⁷ Three weeks into 1961, Adrian Leftwich, in

⁴⁴ "Fifty Years of NUSAS" South African Outlook, p.1.

⁴⁵ "The Aspiration to a Just Society", p.17

⁴⁶ Harry Oppenheimer Centre of African Studies Archives, University of Cape Town, "Report of the NUSAS Representatives to the 31 Annual Council Meeting of the South African Institute of Race Relation held in Cape Town, 17-20 January 1961", pp.1-3.

⁴⁷ Brookes, "NUSAS", p.8.

his capacity as president of NUSAS, delivered a powerful address to a meeting which had been sponsored by the SAIRR. In his speech he presented the results of research which he and his vice-president for international relations, Hugh Lewin,⁴⁸ had conducted in December 1960, to determine the implications of Bantu Education policy for blacks.⁴⁹

Under Leftwich's presidency an attempt was made to establish a close relationship between NUSAS and black tertiary institutions, especially the newly established and totally segregated black universities. Thami Mhlambiso, who was the president of the SRC at the University of Natal Non-European Section, was also the vice-president of NUSAS in 1961 and 1962. The correspondence between Leftwich and Mhlambiso shows that, on issues relating to discrimination against blacks, Leftwich had consulted Mhlambiso and acted on his advice.⁵⁰ Nine years after Leftwich's presidency, this principle of consultation with blacks had become a cornerstone of the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM).⁵¹

During his presidency of NUSAS, Leftwich attempted to bring the newly established black student organisations, the African Students Association (ASA) and the African Students Union of South Africa (ASUSA), which were in conflict because of ideological differences, into the liberal union.⁵²

⁴⁸ Legassick, The National Union of South African Students, p.47.

⁴⁹ Ibid. pp.2-3.

⁵⁰ Harry Oppenheimer Centre of African Studies Archives, Correspondence between Adrian Leftwich and Thami Mhlambiso, 23 March 1961, 28 March 1961, 8 May 1961, 12 May 1961, and 18 September 1961.

⁵¹ Steve Biko, "Black Consciousness and the Quest For True Humanity", in SASO Newsletter, vol 1, no 4, May 1971, pp.17-21.

⁵² Harry Oppenheimer Centre of African Studies Archives, Adrian Leftwich, Correspondence with Mhlambiso, 8 May 1961, p.2.

One section of ASA membership supported affiliation to NUSAS, while the other opposed it.⁵³ This split originated in ASA's association with the ANC, which embraced the policy of multi-racialism that had been adopted at Kliptown, on 26 June 1955, as part of the Freedom Charter.⁵⁴ According to an interpretation from within BCM itself, the group which supported the affiliation represented moderate opinion among students while the other group represented radical opinions within ASA.⁵⁵ ASUSA, the PAC wing, with its radical stance against integration with multi-racial organisations, was strongly opposed to affiliation with NUSAS.⁵⁶ Sometimes conflict erupted on black campuses as these two groups competed for dominance.⁵⁷ When the leadership of NUSAS took the initiative by intervening in the dispute between ASA and ASUSA, some black students began to believe that NUSAS was trying to undermine those black organisations that were not interested in joining it.⁵⁸ These disputes were still being debated in 1963, during the presidency of Jonty Driver, and in later years BCM adopted these views as a standard part of their critique of NUSAS.^{59 60}

Both ASA and ASUSA were active at the Universities of the North and Zululand.⁶¹ While Leftwich recognised the importance of involving blacks in the mainstream of NUSAS activities, he seemed on

⁵³ Harry Oppenheimer Centre of African Studies Archives, Adrian Leftwich, Correspondence with Hugh Lewin", 31 January 1961, p.1

⁵⁴ Nelson Mandela, Long Walk to Freedom (Randburg, Macdonald Purnell, 1994), pp.160-164.

⁵⁵ Stephen Biko, "SASO : A Hope for Black People at Large", in Aspect, March 1971, p.3.

⁵⁶ "SASO Historical Background", SASO Newsletter, June 1971, p.1

⁵⁷ Cape Times, 29 April 1971, p.5.

⁵⁸ Harry Oppenheimer Centre of African Studies Archives, Correspondence between Johannesburg and Salisbury Training Colleges and Kenny, 23 April 1963, pp.1-2.

⁵⁹ Harry Oppenheimer Centre of African Studies Archives, "Confidential, Kenny to Jonty Driver", 29 August 1963, pp.1-4.

⁶⁰ SASO Newsletter, April 1970, p.5.

⁶¹ Harry Oppenheimer Centre of African Studies Archives. Memorandum to Jonty Driver, March 1964, pp.1-3.

occasions to prefer involvement with blacks who were less assertive or aggressive.⁶² He often invited black students who were not members of the SRC to participate in Union activities – provided that their interests did not conflict with those of NUSAS.⁶³ From private correspondence, it has been established that two delegates, Molepo and Marenga from the University of the North, who were not on their respective SRCs,⁶⁴ were often chosen to attend NUSAS annual conferences – although this was in breach of the constitution.⁶⁵ (According to the NUSAS constitution, only a member of an SRC is eligible to participate at a national level.⁶⁶)

Leftwich's choice of the delegates who were to attend the Makerere Seminar held between 29 March and 8 April 1961 tends also to substantiate the perception that he sometimes avoided black student leaders of radical persuasion.⁶⁷ Private correspondence shows that an outspoken student from the University of Natal Non-European Section, one Rajah, whose full identity is unknown but who was perceived as posing a radical threat, was not invited. Leftwich instead invited Thumba Pillay, from the same university, to represent the black students because he was a moderate.⁶⁸ Actions such as these began to discredit Leftwich, the leadership and the Union itself.

⁶² Harry Oppenheimer Centre of African Studies Archives, Adrian Leftwich, Correspondence with Hugh Lewin, 10 June 1961 and 25 June 1961.

⁶³ Harry Oppenheimer Centre of African Studies Archives, Adrian Leftwich, Correspondence with Lewin, 31 January 1961, pp.1-2.

⁶⁴ Their first names do not appear in any available source documents.

⁶⁵ Harry Oppenheimer Centre of African Studies Archives. Adrian Leftwich, Correspondence with Laurie Martin and Lewin, 19 June 1961.

⁶⁶ Legassick, The National Union of South African Students: Ethnic Cleavage and Ethnic Integration in the Universities, p.11.

⁶⁷ Harry Oppenheimer Centre of African Studies Archives, Adrian Leftwich, Correspondence with Martin, 8 March 1961.

⁶⁸ Harry Oppenheimer Centre of African Studies Archives, Adrian Leftwich, Correspondence with Lewin, 31 January 1961.

On a positive note, however, 1961 was characterised by continuous NUSAS protests, and their purpose was to keep reminding the apartheid government of liberal disapproval of its interference in academic freedom.⁶⁹ In the spirit of protest, NUSAS supported the call of the Progressive Party for a National Convention in April 1961. According to Jennifer Scott, the universities of the Witwatersrand, Rhodes, Cape Town and Natal rallied behind a call for a National Convention which would be attended by all population groups in the country.⁷⁰

The passage of the General Laws Amendment Act (the so-called Sabotage Act) in 1962, which, as Helen Suzman has pointed out, gave the government power severely to curtail civil liberties and human rights by placing people under house arrest,⁷¹ triggered various protests in English-speaking universities affiliated to NUSAS, and about 2 000 staff and students from the University of Witwatersrand and 800 from the University of Natal in Durban and Pietermaritzburg participated.⁷² This particular act, which proved to be the cornerstone of the government's repressive legislation, was not only opposed by the students, but also caused concern and anger among progressive groups in Johannesburg, Durban and Cape Town. These protests were widely reported in the English-language press, especially in the Cape Argus and the Sunday Times.⁷³

In the same year, 1962, NUSAS took yet another step which proved its commitment to the cause of black protest. At its July Annual Congress, Chief Albert Luthuli (the President of the ANC) was

⁶⁹ "A Brief History of Student Action in South Africa", p.3.

⁷⁰ Jennifer Scott, "The Black Sash: A Case Study of Liberalism in South Africa 1955-1990", Ph.D. thesis, Oxford University, 1991, p.68.

⁷¹ Suzman, In No Uncertain Terms, p.89.

⁷² Daniel, "A History of NUSAS in Action", p.5.

⁷³ Suzman, In No Uncertain Terms, p.89.

elected as the Honorary President of NUSAS.⁷⁴ He was the only black person ever to be elected to this post, and it was one in which he remained until his death in 1967.⁷⁵ As if to emphasise their support for the black cause and challenge the government's Sabotage Act, the student body at the University of the Witwatersrand elected a banned black student, Dennis Brutus, to the SRC in August 1962.⁷⁶ At the University of Cape Town, Thaele⁷⁷ was elected as head woman student of UCT.⁷⁸

Adrian Leftwich's commitment to African affairs was demonstrated by the fact that he became the first NUSAS president to associate closely with blacks. On one of his visits to the University of the North, he dined with blacks and used the same sleeping accommodation as they did.⁷⁹ In any normal society, this fact would not be worthy of mention, but because racial issues continued to permeate the fabric of South African society, Leftwich's behaviour became a talking point in the student community,⁸⁰ more especially since the white delegates who accompanied Leftwich did not do the same. Leftwich tended to be more accommodating to blacks than the average liberal-minded white person of the time because, as Martin Legassick has observed, he enjoyed the support of a handful of black students in the NUSAS executive, namely Templeton Mdladlana, Kennie Parker, Bala Mudaly and Mhlambiso.⁸¹ Mhlambiso was known to be influential and strongly involved in student political activities and, as a result, had been refused readmission to Fort Hare in 1961.⁸² Although

⁷⁴ Daniel, "A History of NUSAS in Action", p. 5.

⁷⁵ "A Brief History of Student Action in South Africa", p.3; Daniel, "A History of NUSAS in Action", p.5.

⁷⁶ Ibid. p.5.

⁷⁷ Her first name does not appear in the source consulted.

⁷⁸ Legassick, The National Union of South African Students, p.45.

⁷⁹ Themba Sono, Reflections on the Origins of Black Consciousness in South Africa (Pretoria, HSRC Publishers, 1993), p.65. Harry Oppenheimer Centre of African Studies Archives, Adrian Leftwich, Correspondence with Mhlambiso, 8 May 1962, pp 1-2.

⁸⁰ Sono, Reflections on the Origins of Black Consciousness in South Africa, p.65.

⁸¹ Legassick, The National Union of South African Students, p.44.

⁸² Ibid. p.44.

Leftwich's speech earned him great respect from fellow students and other liberals, he was banned by the government and NUSAS continued to become more and more radicalised.⁸³ Also, apart from being a card-carrying member of the Liberal Party, Leftwich was also a member of the African Resistance Movement (ARM), which engaged in acts of sabotage between 1962 and 1964.⁸⁴

A number of NUSAS members such as Hugh Lewin and Baruch Hirson, who was reported to have had some knowledge of explosives, were also active in ARM.⁸⁵ Leftwich was severely criticised, mainly by white liberals, when he agreed to turn state witness during the trial of some members of ARM, including that of John Harris, who was executed for planting a bomb in the corridor of the white section of the Johannesburg railway station.⁸⁶ His involvement in ARM caused Leftwich's dismissal from the Liberal Party in November 1964.⁸⁷ It is interesting to note that criticism of Leftwich came mainly from the white population, who were opposed to ARM because it was committed to the use of violence as a way of achieving political goals.⁸⁸ On the other hand, blacks supported the use of violence as a political means because they were beginning to realise that violence might be the only option left to them if they were ever to obtain their freedom.

⁸³ Harry Oppenheimer Centre of African Studies Archives, NUSAS Assembly Minutes, 1961, p.40.

⁸⁴ Joshua N. Lazerson, Against the Tide: Whites in the Struggle Against Apartheid (UWC Bellville, Mayibuye Books, 1994), p.235.

⁸⁵ Ibid. p.235.

⁸⁶ Ibid. p.237.

⁸⁷ Archives, Alan Paton Centre, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, Adrian Leftwich, Correspondence with Alan Paton, 1 January 1965. PC1/5/4/6-1.

⁸⁸ Karis and Gerhart Collection, Gerhart, Interview with Biko, October 1972, p.2.

NUSAS under the leadership of Jonty Driver (1963-1964)

While the years 1961 and 1962 might be characterised as the period when NUSAS established strong links with the black universities and also accommodated old black members such as Mhlambiso from historically white universities by taking their views seriously, the years 1963 and 1964 may be seen as the period of NUSAS's re-assessment. During this time, its members pondered the problem of what might be done to provide educational alternatives to meet the needs of dispossessed black students.⁸⁹ This kind of transformation was carried out under the leadership of Jonty Driver, the president of NUSAS from 1963. He, with Leftwich's strategy of involving blacks in issues of common concern, was instrumental in radicalising the organisation by pushing for new programmes. He attempted to enlist the cooperation of ASUSA members, especially in its strongholds at the University of the North and the University of Zululand.⁹⁰ Other black campuses with which NUSAS kept contact were the University College of Fort Hare and the University of Natal Non-European Section.⁹¹

The presence of assertive blacks in the NUSAS executive by 1963 was, in Neville Curtis's opinion, a contributory factor which led to a re-assessment process in the Union. Curtis argues that it was some of these black members, people such as Mewa Ramgobin, who exerted pressure on NUSAS to cater for the needs of oppressed Africans.⁹² This then explains why, at the beginning of 1963, NUSAS reported the introduction of new programmes, such as the local and regional leadership

⁸⁹ "The Aspiration to a Just Society", p.14.

⁹⁰ Martin Legassick and John Shingler, "South Africa", in Donald K. Emmerson (ed.), Students and Politics in Developing Countries (New York, Praeger, 1968), p.134.

⁹¹ Harry Oppenheimer Centre of African Studies Archives, Correspondence, Maeder to Driver, 13 March 1963, pp.1-3.

⁹² Karis and Gerhart Collection, Gerhart, Interview with Neville Curtis, Harare, 19 June 1990, p.2.

training programmes, which preceded the National Seminar in April each year.⁹³ These ideas were endorsed by the National Student Association in the United States, which thought that the programme might be more effective than the schedule which had been followed up until then (the annual meeting during the July Congress).⁹⁴ This sentiment was echoed by the NUSAS executive which believed that both the leadership training programme and the national seminar would compensate for any deficiencies in the annual July Congress.⁹⁵

Another reason why NUSAS changed its policy was because of international pressure from overseas students who criticised NUSAS for not playing a more active role in exposing apartheid.⁹⁶ It was also reported that the black students who were associated with NUSAS, but who were studying outside South Africa, or who visited Europe and the United States to represent the Union, such as Lovemore Mutambanengwe, who served as an Assistant Secretary for Africa, and Billy Modise, who was studying in Lund, Sweden, were severely critical of NUSAS's inability or unwillingness to include blacks in its leadership.⁹⁷

By the beginning of 1963, NUSAS was already far more radical in its campaign in defence of educational freedom. This was evident when delegates to the annual NUSAS conference marched with Indian high school students in Johannesburg to protest against the proposed removal of their

⁹³ Karis and Gerhart Collection, Gerhart, Interview with Biko, p.2.

⁹⁴ Martin Legassick, The National Union of South African Students, p.44

⁹⁵ Harry Oppenheimer Centre of African Studies Archives, Report of the Secretary of the Students Services Centre to NUSAS, July 1974, pp.1-12.

⁹⁶ Harry Oppenheimer Centre of African Studies Archives, Correspondence, Driver to Alan, 6 November 1963, pp. 1-2

⁹⁷ Martin Legassick, The National Union of South African Students, p. 28.

school to an area determined according to the racial plan of the government.⁹⁸ Similarly, students at the University of Natal boycotted meals for a number of days when an African clergyman was denied permission to enrol at the university by the Minister of Education.⁹⁹ NUSAS memoranda were sent abroad to expose the kind of education which was being taught in the tribal colleges and in schools under the aegis of Bantu Education.¹⁰⁰

In preparation for Affirmation Day, scheduled for May 1963, NUSAS sought to rally support from liberals who had made a public stand against apartheid policies. In March 1963, Monica Wilson, Edgar Brookes, Edward Roux, Guy Butler, Alan Paton, Helen Suzman and Donald Molteno were informed of NUSAS's intention to fight apartheid. Their request for support was not only confined to those who held liberal opinions. They consulted with the leadership of the ANC, Chief Albert Luthuli and Oliver Tambo, and both of these supported the NUSAS initiative.¹⁰¹ This was followed by NUSAS's first national seminar, which was held at Botha's Hill near Durban in April 1963. The agenda of the seminar was designed to elicit strong anti-government feeling.¹⁰² The idea was born that, in May of each year, NUSAS would sponsor what became known as the Day of Affirmation ceremony, a ceremony during which people could reaffirm their commitment to academic freedom and human rights for all. Archbishop Dennis Hurley, the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Durban and dedicated human rights activist, was the main speaker at this first seminar.¹⁰³

⁹⁸ Harry Oppenheimer Centre of African Studies Archives, NUSAS Assembly Minutes (1963), pp.38 and 44.

⁹⁹ Ibid. p.44.

¹⁰⁰ Martin Legassick, The National Union of South African Students, p.40.

¹⁰¹ Harry Oppenheimer Centre of African Studies Archives, Jonty Driver, Confidential Letter addressed to M. Wilson, Chief A. Luthuli, E. Brookes, A. Paton, H. Suzman, O. Tambo, J. Simons, E. Roux, G. Butler, D. Molteno and B. Bannered, 11 March 1963.

¹⁰² "A Brief History of Student Action in South Africa", p.3.

¹⁰³ Daniel, "A History of NUSAS in Action", p.5.

This kind of protest was a clear threat to the government which, in turn, launched a major attack on NUSAS. In August 1963, the prime minister, John B. Vorster, described NUSAS and its activities as "a cancer in the life of the nation".¹⁰⁴ He further accused NUSAS of being a wing of the African liberation movement.¹⁰⁵ These accusations were given prominence by the pro-government South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), and the combined effect of this counter-attack resulted in the resignation of 200 students from NUSAS at the University of Cape Town.¹⁰⁶ The purpose of this campaign was to split NUSAS and destroy its credibility among students. John Daniel, who was actively involved in the organisation at the time, observed that these attacks on NUSAS contributed to the defeat of a number of NUSAS candidates in SRC elections at English-language universities.¹⁰⁷ The government's attack on NUSAS was so effective that at the University of the Witwatersrand, a campus on which NUSAS enjoyed considerable support, a former Pretoria University student, Roux Wildenboer, who had enrolled at the University of the Witwatersrand at the beginning of 1963, polled more votes, for example, than the well-known liberal candidates, Derek Bostock and Alan Murray.

¹⁰⁸

The effectiveness of Vorster's attack and the undoubted efficacy of a relentless barrage of propaganada from the SABC gave conservative students a reason to believe that they might play a more prominent role in NUSAS. Thus, Gerrit van Zyl from the University of Cape Town, and Reinier Schoeman from the University of Natal in Durban, began to be involved in NUSAS affairs from 1964 onwards.¹⁰⁹ When Biko saw this trend, he divined (correctly) that NUSAS was tilting towards greater

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. p.5.

¹⁰⁵ Martin Legassick, The National Union of South African Students, p.47.

¹⁰⁶ "A Brief History of Students Action in South Africa", p.3.

¹⁰⁷ John Daniel, "NUSAS 1963-73: Ten Years of Conflict", in South African Outlook, vol 104, no 1232, January 1974, p.11.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. p.11.

¹⁰⁹ Daniel, "NUSAS 1963-1983: Ten Years of Conflict", p.11.

conservatism.¹¹⁰ Despite the intimidating and demoralising conservative presence within the Union, pressure from black students and international student organisations forced NUSAS to continue its policy of keeping in contact with black universities. Their efforts were not always fruitful because they were harassed by radical members of ASUSA who strongly believed that NUSAS was causing compromising divisions among black students at universities.¹¹¹

The impact of international pressure on NUSAS continued to affect radical students within the Union. Thus, Jonty Driver, president of NUSAS, delivered a speech in April 1964 which annoyed the essentially white conservative audience to whom it was addressed. Part of his speech reported on the Pan-African Student Seminar held in Dar-es-Salaam in January 1964.¹¹² Delegates from East, Central and Southern Africa criticised NUSAS for retaining its apolitical and conservative membership and failing to engage in revolutionary action.¹¹³ What must have alarmed the white audience, in particular, was Driver's call for NUSAS to operate underground.¹¹⁴ This opinion, which was revealed some years later, originated from the black caucus, notably Mewa Ramgobin.¹¹⁵ Conservative members within the Union roundly condemned what they called an "inflammatory" speech¹¹⁶ and the consequence was the disaffiliation of the University of Natal in Durban in May.¹¹⁷ Driver was also personally censured by the student assembly at the July Congress, and was thereafter detained by the government in

¹¹⁰ Karis and Gerhart Collection, Gerhart, Interview with Biko, p.4.

¹¹¹ Harry Oppenheimer Centre of African Studies Archives, Memo to Jonty on V.P.'s Visit", March 1964, p.13.

¹¹² William Cullen Library, C.J. Driver, "A Paper Delivered to the NUSAS National Seminar 1964", A 1931/cb1, pp.1-16.

¹¹³ Legassick and Shingler, "South Africa", pp.130-131.

¹¹⁴ Ibid. p.12.

¹¹⁵ Karis and Gerhart Collection, Gerhart, Interview with Biko, p.4.

¹¹⁶ Kline, "The National Union of South African Students", p.143.

¹¹⁷ Daniel, "A History of NUSAS in Action", p.6.

August. He left the country in September.¹¹⁸

One of the projects initiated by NUSAS was the introduction of a prison education programme in May 1964.¹¹⁹ This programme was a response to the mass arrests of the 1960s when a sizeable number of school-going students were detained as political prisoners. The relatives of prisoners and concerned individuals in Cape Town helped to organise the scheme, of which NUSAS became the trustee.¹²⁰ Neville Alexander points out that the scheme was never given a chance to function without interference from government authorities.¹²¹ Financial assistance from progressive organisations, such as some churches and Christian Action, of which Canon John Collins was chairperson, was forthcoming. This was Collins's second such project in South Africa. Earlier he had been involved in the International Defence and Fund Aid, which assisted victims and families of the Sharpeville shooting, as well as others who were political prisoners, and their families.¹²²

Since the scheme was under the directorship of some of the older generation of liberals such as Alan Paton, some applications were turned down because there were personal clashes and animosities between some of the applicants and some of the directors.¹²³ Since the government also felt threatened by this scheme (because it was helping activists whom the government wished to destroy),

¹¹⁸ "A Brief History of Student Action in South Africa", p.4.

¹¹⁹ Harry Oppenheimer Centre of African Studies Archives, "National Union of South African Students 1974: A Brief History", p.18.

¹²⁰ William Cullen Library, University of Witwatersrand, Memorandum: The Prison Education Scheme from the National Union of South African Students, A1931/c4, pp.1-14.

¹²¹ Neville Alexander, Robben Island Dossier 1964-1974: Report to the International Community (Cape Town, UCT Printing Department, 1994), p.50.

¹²² Canon L. John Collins, Southern Africa Freedom and Peace: Addresses to the United Nations 1965-1979 (London, International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa, 1980), pp.8-9.

¹²³ Archives, Alan Paton Centre, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, Alan Paton, Correspondence with Diane Collins, 22 February 1968, PCI/5/2/4-19.

they decided to target and harass the administrators of the scheme itself. Two years after the introduction of the Education Scheme, the firm of the attorneys, Hayman and Aronsohn, was raided by the security police and Ruth Hayman was banned.¹²⁴ Furthermore, prison authorities forbade prison students to register for subjects such as political science and history – or any postgraduate studies.¹²⁵ Although the scheme operated under stressful conditions, a number of prominent figures were able to benefit from it. When Robert Sobukwe, the PAC's first president, registered for his law degree at the University of South Africa (Unisa), he received financial assistance from NUSAS's Education Scheme.¹²⁶

The government's attempt to curb NUSAS activities by targeting individual leaders

During the latter part of 1964, and in the two years which followed, the government launched a decisive crack down on NUSAS's leadership and this attack crippled it entirely.¹²⁷ The government justified themselves on the ground that some members of NUSAS were also members of the African Resistance Movement. This was illogical since only four members were also members of ARM (Hugh Lewin, Leftwich, Baruch Hirson and Neville Rubin).¹²⁸ Both Leftwich and Rubin were no longer direct participants as they functioned as honorary presidents for NUSAS. In actual fact, they had been voted out of their posts in NUSAS after it had been ascertained that they were also active members

¹²⁴ William Cullen Library, University of Witwatersrand, Memorandum: The Prison Education Scheme from: the National Union of South African Students, A1931/C4, p.7.

¹²⁵ Alexander, Robben Island Dossier 1964-1974, pp.50-53.

¹²⁶ Benjamin Pogrand, How Can a Man Die Better: The Life of Robert Sobukwe (Johannesburg, Jonathan Ball, 1997), p.67.

¹²⁷ Daniel, "NUSAS Ten Years:1963-1973", p.11.

¹²⁸ Joshua N. Lazerson, Against the Tide: Whites in the Struggle Against Apartheid, p.237.

of ARM.¹²⁹

The following examples illustrate the manner in which NUSAS and its sympathisers became targets of an unceasing campaign of security police harassment, raids and intimidation. One such raid was carried out on 4 July 1964 when David de Keller, an alleged member of ARM,¹³⁰ and a UCT delegate to the NUSAS Congress, was detained while attending the Congress. This action intimidated other congress delegates – precisely the effect that the government intended. Elsewhere, on the same day, Leftwich, Ernie Wentzel, Lewin, John Lloyd and Norman Bromberger were also detained.¹³¹

The South African government did not hesitate to use foreign right-wing governments to obtain help in tracing and arresting its victims. Rubin, for example, was detained by the Portuguese authorities while he was visiting Mozambique. Driver was detained in August just a few hours before his departure from the country.¹³² Some students at Rhodes, Tony Carter, Gillian Cane, David Sobey and Gavin Trevelyan, managed to escape to Swaziland in September.¹³³ Thereafter, their whereabouts remained unknown.

Of all the people detained, only four, namely David Keller, Anthony Trew, Stephanie Kemp and Alan Brookes, were ever charged with sabotage carried out while they had been members of ARM.¹³⁴ These four were sentenced in November 1964. Although no evidence exists to prove that the NUSAS leadership ever engaged in subversive acts, the government nevertheless banned a number of

¹²⁹ Legassick, The National Union of South African Students, p.48.

¹³⁰ Ibid. p.47.

¹³¹ Lazerson, Against the Tide, pp.236-237.

¹³² Daniel, "History of NUSAS in Action", p.6.

¹³³ Ibid. p.6.

¹³⁴ Ibid. p.6.

academics from English-speaking universities in 1965 because they were thought to have supported NUSAS in one way or another.¹³⁵ In addition, NUSAS's legal adviser, Ruth Hayman, was detained in March 1966. Until that point, the government's bannings and detention of NUSAS leaders were carried without being challenged by students in any way. However, after the banning of its president, Ian Robertson, in May,¹³⁶ students were so outraged that a delegation met the minister of justice, Vorster, in an attempt to ascertain the reasons for Robertson's banning.¹³⁷

The government's disruption of the activities of NUSAS through the banning of its leadership was calculated to harm the organisation's programme and they achieved precisely that effect. The only significant contribution made by NUSAS during these difficult years was when, at the annual congress of 1965, the Assembly agreed to invite the American Civil Rights leader, Martin Luther King Jr. and Democratic Senator Robert Kennedy, to the 1966 NUSAS Day of Affirmation of Human Freedom.¹³⁸ Although both accepted the invitation, Martin Luther King Jr. was refused a visa to enter the country. Kennedy, however, did attend, and his visit refurbished, if only for a short while, NUSAS's seriously tarnished image.¹³⁹

It was at this point (May 1966) that the government banned Robertson, the elected president of NUSAS. This banning order was put into effect just a month before Senator Kennedy's arrival in June, and was designed to embarrass Robertson and the NUSAS leadership (the invitation had been issued in Robertson's name). One may deduce from Robertson's banning that the proposed visit by

¹³⁵ Simons, Struggles in Southern Africa for Survival and Equality, p.153.

¹³⁶ Daniel, "A History of NUSAS in Action", p.6.

¹³⁷ Ibid.p.6.

¹³⁸ Ibid, p.36.

¹³⁹ Daniel, "NUSAS 1963-1973: Ten Years of Conflict", p.11; Daniel, "A History of NUSAS in Action", p.6.

Kennedy enraged the government, believing, as they did, that no one, apart from themselves, should ever "meddle in politics" (a favourite phrase of National Party politicians).¹⁴⁰

Kennedy's visit to South Africa was supported by most black communities and was welcomed in liberal circles.¹⁴¹ One of the first groups to have discussions with the senator were the black journalists. The meeting was attended by Lawrence Mayekiso (Rand Daily Mail), Harry Mashabela (The Star), Theo Mthembu and Goodwin Mohlomi (Post), and Leslie Sehume, Manase Moerane and Simon Mogapi (The World).¹⁴² Kennedy's visit to Soweto on 8 June 1966 was interpreted as a sign of solidarity with Africans and he was given a warm welcome.¹⁴³ In his speech in Soweto, Kennedy encouraged the victims of apartheid to resist and strive for change.¹⁴⁴ On the day before his Soweto visit, he paid a visit in Durban to the president of the banned ANC, Chief Albert Luthuli.¹⁴⁵ W.F. Nkomo was, on this occasion, one of the Africans to express his gratitude at Kennedy's visit to Soweto, and he pointed out that the senator was a true democrat who did not discriminate in terms of colour.¹⁴⁶ While Kennedy was able to meet those who were opposed to the policy of apartheid, the government refused to have any contact with him for it believed that his invitation by NUSAS was "defiant and provocative".¹⁴⁷

Although there was an increase in the number of black affiliates to NUSAS between 1962 and 1964,

¹⁴⁰ Legassick, The National Union of South African Students, p.49.

¹⁴¹ Rand Daily Mail, 6 June 1966, p.1.

¹⁴² Rand Daily Mail, 7 June 1966, p.2.

¹⁴³ Rand Daily Mail (Africa Edition), 9 June 1966, p.3.

¹⁴⁴ Challenge, August 1966, p.17.

¹⁴⁵ Daniel, "A History of NUSAS in Action ", p.6.

¹⁴⁶ Dr. W.F. Nkomo, "The Visit of Senator Kennedy", in The Black Sash, vol 10, no 2, May/June 1966, p.8,

¹⁴⁷ Rand Daily Mail, 6 June 1966, p.2.

the pattern changed in 1965. It has also been established that black students began to lose interest and have serious doubts about NUSAS at around about this time, mainly because the Union was tending to become more and more conservative.¹⁴⁸ This was one of the reasons why, in August 1965, the black section of the University of Natal disaffiliated itself from NUSAS, although they re-affiliated three months later.¹⁴⁹

The effect of the breakaway from NUSAS by black students

Black students who were members of NUSAS were at this stage becoming increasingly dissatisfied with what they regarded as the non-committal role which NUSAS played in the liberation struggle for all the black people of South Africa. As early as 1962, Mhlambiso had expressed his doubts about the organisation.¹⁵⁰ According to Paul Pretorius, black students became so profoundly dissatisfied with NUSAS in 1964 and 1965 that they began to make allegations that the Union's leadership had virtually no prospects of ever changing or altering government policy or structure.¹⁵¹ This sentiment was echoed by Neville Curtis when he suggested that the Union commit itself specifically to a policy of ideological liberalism rather than maintain the "open-ended ideology" which was prevalent at the time.¹⁵² This advice could not have been more pertinent to NUSAS in the 1960s as it increasingly fell

¹⁴⁸ Karis and Gerhart Collection, Gerhart, Interview with Biko, p.4.

¹⁴⁹ Sono, Reflections on the Origins of Black Consciousness in South Africa, p.23.

¹⁵⁰ Harry Oppenheimer Centre of African Studies Archives, Mhlambiso, Correspondence with Leftwich, 24 April and 6 May 1962; Leftwich, Correspondence with Mhlambiso, 8 May 1962.

¹⁵¹ Karis and Gerhart Collection, Paul Pretorius, "Where to Now White Students?", Paper presented at the April Seminar, 1972, p.1.

¹⁵² Baruch Hirson, Year of Fire, Year of Ash: The Soweto Revolt, Roots of a Revolution (London, Zed Press, 1979), p.67.

under the spell of both many newly elected conservative leaders at campus and national level, and its own widespread conservatism at a grassroots level. Black students therefore began to be convinced that, while elements within the leadership might continue to show an interest in accommodating black aspirations, conservatives at the national level would ignore such initiatives and ensure that they would fail at both local and regional levels.¹⁵³

What was then obvious to black students was that the Union was regressing towards the right, and they began to realise ever more clearly that the only option left open to them was to break away to form their own organisation. But this could not be done until a leader appeared who combined exceptional intelligence, unusual charisma, unshakeable determination and extraordinary qualities of leadership. All these qualities seem to appear in the person of Steve Biko in the late 1960s.¹⁵⁴ It was after Biko had attended his first NUSAS congress in July 1966 that he was able accurately to diagnose the major problem that beset black students in the NUSAS context.¹⁵⁵ According to Gail Gerhart, Biko was able to see that while the organisation professed the principles of integration, this was anything but the case in reality.¹⁵⁶

If Biko had any doubts about NUSAS's genuine commitment to the principles of "multiracial organisation", these must have been dissipated during the 1967 NUSAS July Congress when white and black members were allocated racially separate sleeping accommodation.¹⁵⁷ Since such racist arrangements were standard practice at NUSAS congresses, the black students decided to use it as

¹⁵³ "The Aspiration to a Just Society", pp.17-18.

¹⁵⁴ Donald Woods, *Biko* (London, Penguin Books, 1987), p.33.

¹⁵⁵ Hirson, *Year of Fire, Year of Ash*, pp.68-69.

¹⁵⁶ Gail M. Gerhart, *Black Power in South Africa: The Evolution of an Ideology* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1978), p.260.

¹⁵⁷ Karis and Gerhart Collection, Gerhart, Interview with Biko, p.5.

the pretext for breaking away from the Union.¹⁵⁸ They caucused among themselves and formed a committed group to attend the non-racial, non-denominational University Christian Movement (UCM) conference, which was scheduled to be held shortly after the NUSAS congress. After the UCM conference, Biko gathered what he called the remnants of ASA and ASUSA to determine what their position was before they formed an exclusively black students organisation.¹⁵⁹

At a conference held at Stutterheim in 1968, black students agreed to form an organisation of their own, one that would accommodate their aspirations and address their problems.¹⁶⁰ After four months, the South African Students Organisation (SASO) was born in December 1968. It was during this year that NUSAS waged a protest against the government's refusal to sanction the appointment of an African, Archie Mafeje, to a senior lectureship at the University of Cape Town.¹⁶¹ The protest comprised students from the Universities of Cape Town, Witwatersrand and Rhodes, and from the newly established University Christian Movement (UCM) under the leadership of Basil Moore.¹⁶² One might interpret this to mean that, while the rift was widening between politically sophisticated black students and NUSAS, the Mafeje issue excited protest because it constituted an interference in the academic freedom of the University of Cape Town.¹⁶³

It may also have been a protest designed to dissuade black students from deserting NUSAS to form their own movement. It is also conceivable that white radical forces, especially within the UCM, were

¹⁵⁸ Ibid. p.7.

¹⁵⁹ Hirson, *Year of Fire, Year of Ash*, p.69.

¹⁶⁰ Siphso Buthelezi, "The Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa", in *CEAPA Journal*, vol 1, no 2, December 1987, p.23.

¹⁶¹ "Deeper Significance of Student Protest: Mafeje Affair Provided Solid Reason for Expressing Resentment", in *Race Relations News, South African Institute of Race Relations*, vol xxx. no10, October 1968, p.2.

¹⁶² Ibid. p.2.

¹⁶³ "A Brief History of Student Action in South Africa", p.5.

extremely concerned that the anti-apartheid campaign would fracture into warring factions, racially divided and therefore politically neutralised.

Tensions between NUSAS and SASO

From the very founding of SASO, serious tensions erupted between NUSAS and SASO, and a hostility evolved between the two students organisations which was to last for about one and half years, especially at grassroots level.¹⁶⁴ This was a difficult time for SASO as a newly established organisation since it tended to work by trial and error in order to prove itself to its followers – from whom it needed unqualified support if it hoped to survive. It was also during this time that SASO radicalised its policies towards NUSAS so as to gain the support of the majority of black students, especially those radical black students formerly represented by the African Students Union of South Africa (ASUSA) and personified in the person of Aubrey Mokoape.¹⁶⁵ It was for this reason that SASO denied that NUSAS had the right to speak on behalf of oppressed groups.¹⁶⁶ Although SASO did not recognise the Union as its mouthpiece, it was careful enough to recognise it as a national students organisation in order not to silence it altogether or inadvertently push it into the arms of conservative forces.

SASO made a tactical decision to recognise NUSAS at this early stage, chiefly so as to ensure its own

¹⁶⁴ Henry Isaac, "The Emergence and Impact of the Black Consciousness Movement", in Ikwezi, December 1976, pp.10-13.

¹⁶⁵ Gerhart, Interview with Biko, p.15.

¹⁶⁶ Ellis Stephen and Tsepo Sechaba, Comrades Against Apartheid: The ANC and the South African Communist Party in Exile (Indiana, Indiana University Press, 1992), p.70.

survival as a viable organisation. By recognising NUSAS, the leadership also hoped to avoid a definite split in black student allegiances since it was known that some black students, especially a number from the University of the North, were loyal supporters of NUSAS and had strong ties with the organisation.¹⁶⁷ It has been pointed out before that one of the most influential personalities in students politics at the University of the North, Pat Machaka, was a close friend of the NUSAS president, Duncan Innes.¹⁶⁸ Innes and his vice-president, Horst Kleinschmidt, planned to maintain ties with the University of the North by admitting Harry Nengwekhulu, a member of SRC and a SASO affiliate, to the NUSAS executive.¹⁶⁹

Curtis also suggests that SASO recognised NUSAS because the presidents of the two student organisations, Biko and Curtis, had consulted and decided some time before it was officially announced that this would take place so as to ensure the survival of NUSAS, which was reported to be dramatically losing popularity when the two presidents conferred.¹⁷⁰ The deal between Biko and Curtis demonstrates that, although a widespread perception existed that the two organisations were implacably opposed to each other, a pragmatic relationship nevertheless existed at the leadership level. However, because of grassroots opposition from SASO members, this agreement did not last for longer than a year. A resolution to withdraw recognition from NUSAS was passed at SASO's annual congress in July 1970.¹⁷¹ This withdrawal of recognition (in spite of a prior agreement at the highest level) shows that the hostility between the two organisations had become irreparable. This point will be discussed in detail later in the chapter.

¹⁶⁷ Gerhart, Interview with Biko, p.14.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid, p.15.

¹⁶⁹ "NUSAS Leaders Will Affiliate Turfloop", The World, 27 May 1969, p.4.

¹⁷⁰ Gerhart, Interview with Curtis, p.8.

¹⁷¹ Karis and Gerhart Collection, "Students Politics: Black Power, New Movements and New Appraisals", p.234.

On the other hand, NUSAS was in a serious dilemma as it tried to come to terms with the idea of having been rejected by the very blacks for whom it felt it had been fighting while other English-speaking liberals had already withdrawn from the fray.¹⁷² NUSAS's official position was reflected in a motion which was passed at the NUSAS Annual Congress in July 1969: as an organisation it refused to recognise the validity of SASO.¹⁷³ This motion had been carried partly because of pressure from notable liberals such as Donald Woods, Alan Paton and Leo Marquard. Woods, who was later to become a close friend of Steve Biko and who made a column available for Black Consciousness (BC) opinion in the Daily Dispatch, the East London-based newspaper of which he was editor, made it clear that the advisory panel would not support NUSAS if it recognised SASO.¹⁷⁴ This seems to suggest that the real aim of the advisory panel was to have some direct control over the organisation rather than merely to serve as advisors. Were it not for this meddling in its affairs, the Union might have been able to recognise SASO shortly after its establishment.¹⁷⁵ It has been pointed out that the natural inclination of the young leadership of NUSAS at the time, as one may deduce from the actions of its president, Innes, was to sympathise with black students and their new philosophy.¹⁷⁶ The main point to note therefore is that SASO's first one and half years of existence was a time when extreme tensions surfaced between itself and NUSAS, a time also when NUSAS repeatedly attempted to undermine SASO. SASO, on the other hand, responded to NUSAS with a degree of vindictiveness which merely widened the breach. Some of these incidents will now be discussed in detail.

¹⁷² Fatima Meer, "NUSAS in the Seventies", in South African Outlook, September 1970, p. 135.

¹⁷³ Karis and Gerhart Collection, Minutes of the SASO Executive Meeting, University of Natal, 3-5 December 1969, p.1.

¹⁷⁴ Karis and Gerhart Collection, Gerhart, Interview with Curtis, p.8.

¹⁷⁵ Karis and Gerhart Collection, SASO Memorandum to SRC Presidents, (English and Afrikaans Medium Universities), National Students Organisations and Overseas Organisations), p.4.

¹⁷⁶ Duncan Innes, "Our Country, Our Responsibility", Rand Daily Mail, 7 May 1969, p.2.

An example of friction occurred when a SASO meeting was hosted by black students at the University of Natal (Non-European Section). What amazed these African students was the appearance at their meeting of four uninvited white students from the university. Halton Cheadle,¹⁷⁷ David Hemson (the local chairman), Jennifer Brown and Veronica Vorster, apparently all members of NUSAS, were ordered to leave the SASO meeting because they were suspected of being spies for the government. This was an embarrassing moment for the president of the SRC, Ben Ngubane, who tried in vain to dissuade the student body from taking this course of action.¹⁷⁸

Confrontations such as these immediately soured the prospect of any cooperation between the two organisations. But SASO's critique of NUSAS was not simply emotive: it was based on certain verifiable observations and deductions. Thus, at SASO's first formation school, held in December 1969, criticism was levelled at NUSAS for using rhetoric instead of action.¹⁷⁹ SASO also circulated an article entitled "Commission on NUSAS Reconstruction" to overseas student organisations as a way of introducing itself to a wider audience.¹⁸⁰ The NUSAS executive reacted to this attack by requesting a copy of the article so that it could examine the critique in detail and so that it could circulate copies to its various affiliated SRC centres.¹⁸¹ It must have been a great disappointment for certain members of NUSAS to realise that SASO's article would subvert whatever might have been gained when NUSAS had earlier circulated an information document of its own to overseas student organisations in April 1969. In this document NUSAS had explained that relations between itself and

¹⁷⁷ His full name was kindly supplied by Professor C. Saunders of UCT.

¹⁷⁸ "Black Power-Students Forced to Leave Meeting", in *Dome*, March 1969, pp.7-8.

¹⁷⁹ Karis and Gerhart Collection, Report on the 1st National Formation School, (Commission on NUSAS Reconstruction), pp.1-3.

¹⁸⁰ Karis and Gerhart Collection, Curtis, Correspondence with Barney Pityana, 15 January 1970.

¹⁸¹ Karis and Gerhart Collection, National Union of South African Students, (Critique on NUSAS by SASO (South African Students Organisation), December 1969, pp.1-3.

SASO were good.¹⁸² In addition to this, NUSAS had asked for financial support in order to fight racism and support black students.¹⁸³ NUSAS was thus acutely embarrassed by the very people whom it sought to benefit and this could not but exacerbate an already tense situation.

Tension between NUSAS and SASO was nevertheless eased in 1970, especially at the executive level of the two organisations, when NUSAS president, Curtis, invited his counterpart, Biko, to a NUSAS national seminar between 23 and 28 April 1970 so that Biko might have an opportunity to explain SASO's strategy and objectives.¹⁸⁴ Biko accepted and thereafter relations and communication between the organisations improved.¹⁸⁵ Curtis and Biko also tried to soften attitudes on both sides by exchanging a number of letters between NUSAS and SASO.¹⁸⁶ Indeed, 1970 may be regarded as the year in which NUSAS, because of the encounter with SASO, gradually began to reassess its mission and purpose in the context of political developments in the country. In a statement, Curtis pointed out that the aim of the seminar at which Biko was a speaker, was to overhaul the structure and examine the objectives of NUSAS as an organisation.¹⁸⁷ For two months after the April 1970 seminar, Curtis and NUSAS vice-president, Paul Pretorius, spent six weeks visiting all NUSAS-affiliated campuses.¹⁸⁸ This was followed by a questionnaire to test the opinion of affiliated campuses with regard to changes envisaged by the national leadership.¹⁸⁹ By the time of the annual congress in

¹⁸² Karis and Gerhart Collection, Duncan Innes, Confidential, Text of the Circular Dated 1st April 1969 From National Union of South African Students To Overseas National Unions, and Overseas Representatives, pp. 1-4.

¹⁸³ Ibid. pp. 3-4.

¹⁸⁴ Karis and Gerhart Collection, Curtis, Correspondence with Biko, 2 April 1970.

¹⁸⁵ Karis and Gerhart Collection, Gerhart, Interview with Curtis, p. 7.

¹⁸⁶ Karis and Gerhart Collection, Correspondence, Curtis with Biko, 9 January 1970; Biko with Curtis, 2 April 1970; Curtis to Biko, 17 June 1970.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid. p. 7.

¹⁸⁸ Karis and Gerhart Collection, NUSAS Press Release 14-5-1970, embargoed until midnight Saturday 16-5-1970, p. 1.

¹⁸⁹ Karis and Gerhart Collection, Curtis, Correspondence to Biko, 17 June 1970.

July 1970, the leadership had acquired enough support to implement changes in the policy of the organisation.¹⁹⁰ It was, furthermore, at this congress that NUSAS invited SASO to attend a congress for the first time: perhaps it needed SASO to validate the changes which it intended to implement.

SASO causes changes in NUSAS

The July 1970 NUSAS Congress was, from the outset, a very special one in the history of the organisation because it was widely known that the Union hoped radically to revise its own policy and structures.¹⁹¹ The mood of the congress was also different, and the delegates elected one of the strongest executives in the history of the Union.¹⁹² Curtis was elected for the second time as president and Paul Pretorius was elected as his deputy.

Additional members elected to the executive were Clive Keegan, Barry Streek, Ernest Ralekgetho, Oliver Schreiner and Rex Heinke. All these new members of the executive were members who had been active participants in the regional and local structures of NUSAS. Another development was that regional directors were elected for the first time in the history of NUSAS for the purpose of consolidating the organisation. These regional directors were Paula Ensor for Natal, Steve Jooste for the Western Cape, Clive Keegan for the Eastern Cape, and Chris Wood for the Transvaal.¹⁹³ For the first time the structure of the Union was divided to take cognisance of university students and

¹⁹⁰ Karis and Gerhart Collection, Curtis, "NUSAS History: A Paper Delivered at the NUSAS Annual Congress July 1970", p.15.

¹⁹¹ "NUSAS in Action, 1970: The Generation of War", in Phenomenon, vol 1, no 1, June 1970, p.5.

¹⁹² The Star, 23 July 1970, p.3.

¹⁹³ Karis and Gerhart Collection, "This is NUSAS", pp.1-3.

students at teacher training colleges, and thereafter each group was required to hold a separate conference to discuss its affairs.¹⁹⁴ Three new organisations within NUSAS were also formed. These were AQUARIUS, to deal with cultural activities, under the leadership of Keegan, and NUSWEL, an organisation for welfare and social work, which appointed Ernest Ralekgetho as its chief executive.

The appointment of Ralekgetho to the executive of the organisation and to the oversight of the new NUSWEL portfolio, signified that NUSAS was serious in its professed policy of recognising and working with SASO. Ralekgetho was regarded as being especially suitable for these two positions because of his active involvement in both SASO and NUSAS.¹⁹⁵ In fact he had been the organisation's second choice. Harry Nengwekhulu was NUSAS's first choice but he declined the offer.¹⁹⁶ Nengwekhulu was undoubtedly the more radical of the two but was opposed to involvement with liberal institutions such as NUSAS. On the other hand, Ralekgetho, who was a student at St. Peter's Seminary near Hammanskraal, had no problem in associating with such organisations.¹⁹⁷ The third portfolio, NUSED, was headed by Streek, and was designed to deal with educational empowerment for all deserving students – irrespective of the colour.¹⁹⁸

In addition to these new developments, the NUSAS executive, according to Geoff Budlender, sought to extend and strengthen its contacts with other overseas student organisations. Previously such contacts had been effected by means of correspondence. Now, however, the executive travelled

¹⁹⁴ Horst Kleinschmidt, "The New NUSAS", in Wits Student, 7 August 1970, p.10.

¹⁹⁵ "NUSAS Picks a Strong Executive", The Star, 23 July 1970, p.3.

¹⁹⁶ "NUSAS Leaders Will Affiliate Turfloop", The World, 27 May 1969, p.4; Mabel Maimela, Interview with Harry Nengwekhulu, University of Pretoria, 22 May 1996.

¹⁹⁷ "NUSAS Picks a Strong Executive", The Star, 23 July 1970, p.3.

¹⁹⁸ " This is NUSAS", pp.1-3.

overseas with the aim of raising sufficient funds to run its projects effectively. During this trip, NUSAS executives made contact with the International University Exchange Fund (IUEF), which had been and was to remain a strong source of income for the Union.¹⁹⁹ Curtis, Nettleton, Kleinschmidt and Pretorius travelled overseas in 1970 and 1971.²⁰⁰ The funds received during these two years were used to introduce radical methods to facilitate changes to the structure of the Union. Some of these funds were also used to organise protest campaigns against the countrywide celebrations which the government organised for the tenth anniversary of Republic Day on 31 May 1971.²⁰¹

It was also at the 1970 congress that NUSAS officially recognised SASO and pledged not to interfere in black universities unless SASO requested it to do so.²⁰² While NUSAS on the one hand had committed itself to work with SASO at the July Congress, SASO had withdrawn its recognition of NUSAS, but nevertheless affirmed that it would cooperate with NUSAS whenever the need arose.²⁰³

It is now clear that commitments made by the General Assembly of NUSAS were not always implemented by students once they returned to their various institutions of learning. Thus, for example, NUSAS leaders failed to abide by the agreement with SASO mentioned above in an incident which involved the Student Representative Councils (SRCs) of the Universities of the Witwatersrand and Stellenbosch.²⁰⁴ NUSAS leaders had earlier extended invitations to the SRCs of the Universities

¹⁹⁹ Sunday Times, 19 October 1980, p.28.

²⁰⁰ Archives, Centre for African Studies, Unisa, Pretoria, Geoff Budlender, "NUSAS and Student Action – A Historical Evaluation", p.5.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.* p.5.

²⁰² SASO Newsletter, vol 3, no 1, May 1971, p.11.

²⁰³ Karis and Gerhart Collection, "Students Politics: Black Power, New Movements and New Appraisals", p.234.

²⁰⁴ SASO Newsletter, p.11.

of Natal (Black Section), Zululand and the North to attend the NUSAS Annual Conference of July 1967, but all these universities had refused the invitation.²⁰⁵ Then, since there had been no SRC at Fort Hare from August 1960 onwards,²⁰⁶ an invitation to attend the congress was extended through the SASO local chairman – an act that was clearly in breach of the agreement referred to above.²⁰⁷ This incident created tension, not only between the SRCs of both SASO- and NUSAS-affiliated centres, but also between executives of both organisations.²⁰⁸ Tremendous political mileage was obtained from these events and the incident was reported three times under different headings in the May 1971 edition of SASO Newsletter²⁰⁹ and in the press.²¹⁰ Friction generated by incidents such as these sometimes created the impression that a major rift had developed between the two student organisations. On the contrary, however, both NUSAS and SASO were trying to understand and tolerate each other. The correspondence between Biko and Curtis, and Barney Pityana and Curtis, for example, reveals that both sides were sincerely trying to establish an understanding and mutually beneficial working relationship.²¹¹ Rumours of antagonism and rifts might have arisen as a consequence of personality clashes between some of the leaders, a situation that in fact became explicit during the presidencies of both Themba Sono and Pretorius.²¹²

²⁰⁵ Ibid, p.11.

²⁰⁶ "A Brief History of Student Action in South Africa", p.2.

²⁰⁷ SASO Newsletter, p.11.

²⁰⁸ Karis and Gerhart Collection, Correspondence, Pityana to Curtis, 10 June 1971; Themba Sono to Paul Pretorius, 12th August 1971; Pretorius to Sono, 18th August 1971.

²⁰⁹ "Editorial"; "Campus News"; "The July Conference of the SRC's – What Gives"; in SASO Newsletter, p.2; pp.3-4; p.11.

²¹⁰ Karis and Gerhart Collection, SASO Press Release: July Conference of SRC, May 1971.

²¹¹ Karis and Gerhart Collection, Correspondence, Biko to Curtis, 27 October 1969; Curtis to Biko, 9 January 1970; Biko to Curtis, 2 April 1970; Curtis to Pityana, 25 March 1971; Curtis to Pityana, 2 November 1971; Curtis to Pityana, 16th November 1971.

²¹² Karis and Gerhart Collection, Correspondence, Sono to Pretorius, 12 August 1971; Pretorius to Sono, 18 August 1971; Sono to Pretorius, 1 September 1971.

The main differences between NUSAS and SASO arose from the administration of the Scholarship Fund which was controlled by NUSAS. The beneficiaries of the fund, according to its constitution, were to be university students. This meant that the only black students who qualified to receive funds were from the University of Natal (Non-European Section). Students from the other five black university colleges of the North, Zululand, Western Cape, Durban-Westville and Fort Hare did not qualify as recipients of grants because their institutions were not full universities.²¹³ This was a patently unjust arrangement and SASO argued that money from the fund should be available to all suitably qualified students for the purposes of tertiary education, whether they were at black university colleges or not.

SASO also argued that the fund should be under black administration and control since black students who came from underprivileged backgrounds and inferior Bantu Administration schools needed financial assistance far more urgently than did white students.²¹⁴ It was alleged that white students used money from the fund for their own personal benefit.²¹⁵ In response to this, NUSAS proposed that the fund be administered jointly by NUSAS and SASO, but SASO firmly rejected this proposal.²¹⁶

The second major point of conflict between the two organisations centred on the issue of representation at foreign meetings. NUSAS was of the opinion that delegates who would represent

²¹³ Karis and Gerhart Collection, NUSAS Circular to the SRC Presidents, National Executive, Local Chairmen and Student Editors, 3 April 1970, p3.

²¹⁴ Karis and Gerhart Collection, Themba Sono, The Presidential Report: July 1972, p.2.

²¹⁵ Karis and Gerhart Collection, Critique of NUSAS by SASO, December 1969, p.2.

²¹⁶ Karis and Gerhart Collection, Correspondence, Curtis to Pityana, 25 March 1971.

the whole student body from South Africa should be chosen from both organisations.²¹⁷ SASO felt that each organisation should send its own separate delegations because of the enormous ideological differences between the two organisations.²¹⁸

The Commonwealth Student Association invited both NUSAS and SASO jointly to attend a meeting in January 1971. SASO refused to attend officially unless it was invited separately. Eventually it decided to appoint Lindiwe Mabandla as its delegate, but only after it had received a separate invitation from the association.²¹⁹ SASO's refusal to go along with arrangements of this kind was based on Steve Biko's contention that multiracial organisations such as NUSAS reflected the historical tendency of white liberals to overlook the particular needs and problems of disadvantaged groups. He argued that, in such situations, blacks were always left behind because of their language deficiencies.²²⁰ SASO therefore needed to be separate from NUSAS so that it could register its independence. Although SASO was opposed to a joint delegation, it nevertheless requested NUSAS to process a passport on behalf of Mabandla, its own delegate.²²¹ Even though SASO was fiercely independent when the need arose, it was not averse to using NUSAS when it needed to. These events took place only two years after the establishment of SASO. Clearly SASO was trying to find its feet, and its tough stance on the delegation issue was an attempt to put into practice its own uncompromising principle of ensuring exclusive black control over problems relating to black students.

²¹⁷ Karis and Gerhart Collection, Correspondence, Barry Streek to Pityana, 5 December 1970; Pityana to Streek, 14 December 1970.

²¹⁸ Karis and Gerhart Collection, Pityana to Streek, 14 December 1970.

²¹⁹ Woods, *Biko*, p. 158.

²²⁰ Karis and Gerhart Collection, Gerhart, Interview with Biko, pp. 2-8.

²²¹ *Ibid.* p. 1.

The Ghana conference, however, gave NUSAS the opportunity to demonstrate its solidarity with those black students who represented NUSAS. The secretary of NUSAS, Streek, attended the conference at which he issued a statement condemning the exploitation of black South Africans by foreign firms. He criticised the British government for arms sales to South Africa and reaffirmed NUSAS's support of sports boycotts.²²² More importantly for NUSAS, this trip further indicated its commitment to the unique problems of the African continent. NUSAS's credentials, however, were rejected by the conference, and hence it was unable to attend the conference in an official capacity.²²³ To make matters worse, liberals in general were opposed to NUSAS's participation in foreign meetings which, they claimed, would land them in trouble. One of those who criticised NUSAS for undertaking this excursion was its honorary president, Alan Paton, who felt offended because NUSAS officials had not consulted him before undertaking the trip.²²⁴ He pointed out that "he did not want to see leading students of NUSAS exposing themselves to grave penalties which might have tremendous consequences for their lives and careers".²²⁵ More specifically, Paton did not approve of Streek's statement in support of the arms embargo and the sports boycott.²²⁶ This might have been the reason why Paton hinted that he would not stand again for the position of honorary president of NUSAS in 1972.²²⁷ Perhaps Paton had hoped that NUSAS would overlook his doubts, but when the post of honorary president was given to Helen Joseph, who was living under banning restrictions,

²²² Daniel, "A History of NUSAS in Action", p.8.

²²³ Ibid. p.8.

²²⁴ Archives, Alan Paton Centre, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, Correspondence, Curtis to Paton, 5 January 1971, pc1/9-22; Paton to Curtis, 18 January 1971, pc1/ 9-23.

²²⁵ Archives, Alan Paton Centre, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, Correspondence, Paton to Curtis, 18 January 1971, pc1/9-23.

²²⁶ Archives, Alan Paton Centre, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, Correspondence, Paton to Curtis, 18 January 1971, PC1/9-23.

²²⁷ Ibid.p.1.

Paton was astonished²²⁸ and asked the NUSAS leadership why they had nominated Joseph instead of (presumably) himself.²²⁹

The choice of Joseph rather than Paton was appropriate during this period of political change in South Africa. Ideologically, Joseph was far more progressive than most white South African liberals including Paton, who still believed that whites had a special obligation to speak on behalf of blacks.²³⁰ Paton's relationships tended to be with middle class blacks, one of whom was Mangosutho Buthelezi, and both Paton and Buthelezi were convinced advocates of federal government for South Africa.²³¹ Joseph's radical progressive ideology had enabled her to work jointly with other black organisations opposed to apartheid without the elements of condescension which were evident in Paton's personal style. As national secretary of the Federation of South African Women (FSAW), Joseph had been one of the leading delegates to march to the Union Building on 9 August 1956 in protest against the pass laws.²³²

By 1971, it had become clear that the NUSAS leadership was gearing up to radicalise the organisation. The introduction of a new approach in leadership training was evidence enough to prove that it meant to overhaul the whole structure and ideology of NUSAS in order to meet the challenges of the 1970s. The leadership clinched a deal with the Wilgespruit Fellowship Centre in

²²⁸ Archives, Alan Paton Centre, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, Correspondence, Paton to Curtis, 25 November 1971, pc1/9-30.

²²⁹ Archives, Alan Paton Centre, University of Natal, Correspondence, Paton to Streek, pc/9-29; Streek to Paton, pc/9-31.

²³⁰ Archive, Alan Paton Centre, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, Correspondence, Paton to Michael Stent, 11 November 1975, Pc1/9-55.

²³¹ Archives, Alan Paton Centre, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, Correspondence, Paton to Mangosutho Buthelezi, 31-12-1965, Pc1/5/1/10.

²³² Cheryl Walker, Women and Resistance in South Africa (London, Onyx Press, 1982), p.122, pp.189-201.

Roodepoort, which was owned by the South African Council of Churches (SACC), whereby the SACC agreed to help NUSAS to sponsor its members for a radical leadership training programme known as T-Group or sensitivity training.²³³ NUSAS was not the first organisation to use this approach. Both the progressive University Christian Movement (UCM) and the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) are reported to have used the method in the early stages after their establishment.²³⁴

NUSAS signalled its intention to radicalise itself by adopting the same methods that had been used by both the UCM and the BCM. It was an approach that had originated in the United States in the early 1970s and it had proved its efficacy in empowering people to cope with the radical changes that were engulfing society at that time.²³⁵ The programme, known as Personal Responsibility and Organisation Development (PROD), was under the directorship of Eoin O'Leary.²³⁶ Although NUSAS felt that the introduction of this method constituted a step in the right direction, these plans angered the government. The Wilgespruit Fellowship Centre was already in bad odour with the government for associating itself with organisations which were vehemently opposed to government policies, and so the government decided to make NUSAS, UCM and the South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR) the subject of a special commission of inquiry.

The commission began its work in July 1972 and its brief was to examine the role played by liberal extra-parliamentary organisations and decide whether or not their activities were in violation of South

²³³ Karis and Gerhart Collection, "File Wilgespruit: Commission of Inquiry into Certain Organisations: Third Interim Report", pp.1-41.

²³⁴ Ibid, pp.25-36.

²³⁵ One for the Road, September 1967, p.4.

²³⁶ Race Relations News: South African Institute of Race Relations, vol 35, no 10, October 1973, p.3.

African law.²³⁷ In spite of the fact that this commission, later to be known as the as the Schlebusch Commission (after its chairperson, Alwyn Schlebusch),²³⁸ was unable to implicate NUSAS in any wrong doing, restrictions were nevertheless imposed on many liberal organisations including NUSAS. The worst restriction imposed was that NUSAS was forbidden to obtain funds from outside South Africa. In addition, the director of the sensitivity training programme, O'Leary, was summarily deported after he had been living in the country for over thirteen years.²³⁹ Other facilitators of the programme, such as Ann Hope, were initially harassed by the government. Eventually her South African passport was confiscated in August 1972 and she was forced to leave the country on an exit permit and an Irish passport after she had been living in South Africa for a number of years.²⁴⁰

The NUSAS leadership gathered for their regular annual leadership seminar at Howick in Natal between 24 and 28 April 1971. The theme of the seminar was "Students and action in society", and it was addressed by seven speakers who were regarded by the government as politically radical. Each speaker was assigned a specific topic: Curtis (the president) spoke on "Student as rebel: a position paper on student action"; Pretorius (the deputy-president) spoke on "An approach to student power"; Keith Gottschalk (a master's student from Cape Town) spoke on "Economics and race"; Dr Richard Turner (a lecturer from Durban) spoke on "The power of contemporary radical thought"; Ramgobin (Director of Phoenix Settlement and a SASO member) spoke on "Satyagraha and its significance to the youth of South Africa"; Streek (Secretary General of NUSED) spoke on "African socialism"; Ensor (Natal Regional Director) spoke on "Black Power", and Ralekgetho (Secretary General of

²³⁷ Ibid, p.3.

²³⁸ "File Wilgespruit", p.1.

²³⁹ Race Relations News, p.3.

²⁴⁰ Pro Veritate, vol 12, no 1, May 1973, p.19.

NUSWEL) spoke on "Black power in South Africa".²⁴¹

There was a three-fold purpose in the presentation of these seven papers. Firstly, they gave an overview of the historical background of the South African policy of segregation. Secondly, they assessed ways and means of challenging the apartheid system. Lastly, they endorsed the emergence of Black Consciousness philosophy. It now became apparent at the seminar that participants regarded BC as the basis for an alternative method which blacks could use to fight apartheid, and this means that official NUSAS recognition of Black Consciousness can be traced from July 1971. It also means that, from that time on, there was a firm foundation for cooperation between SASO and NUSAS in terms of the sharing of ideas and plans for each organisation. This point is elaborated below.

Members of NUSAS, UCM and SASO thought radical training, introduced during the 1970s, would be a swift and effective means to break down the racial barriers and segregation which had been institutionalised by apartheid rule.²⁴² It was for this reason that the government was absolutely opposed to any form of radical training. In addition, programmes were run by progressive individuals who openly and unapologetically criticised the government.²⁴³ Finally, NUSAS had completely alienated the government by using the Wilgespruit Conference Centre staff to prepare its participants for this particular seminar.²⁴⁴ In spite of government displeasure with anything related to T-Group methodology and practice, NUSAS was taking a step in the right direction. As a result of the radical training method, the NUSAS leadership, and Pretorius in particular, were able to announce at the

²⁴¹ "File Wilgespruit," p.2.

²⁴² Mabel Maimela, Interview with Gail Gerhart, Johannesburg, 16 November 1994.

²⁴³ Karis and Gerhart Collection, "File Wilgespruit: Commission of Inquiry into Certain Organisations", p.27.

²⁴⁴ Ibid, p.4.

beginning of 1972 that NUSAS would employ various means to change its structures and approach.²⁴⁵ In an interview with the Danish Newspaper, Berlingske, Pretorius expressed his wish to move the Union away from white liberal idealism. They were, he said, looking to radical changes in the structure of society and they realised that the country would at some time in the future be ruled by a black majority government.²⁴⁶ NUSAS critics, on the other hand, alleged that the Union was adopting this policy mainly to impress the West, which was pressurising progressives to act against the government.²⁴⁷ In spite of such criticisms, the method continued to be utilised by NUSAS for another two years, until the April Seminar of 1974.²⁴⁸

Radicalism in NUSAS between 1972 and 1977

Relations between NUSAS and SASO in the years between 1972 and 1977 were characterised by a mutual understanding and respect for each other's territory. NUSAS only became involved in what was seen as SASO's sphere of influence after careful consultation in each instance.²⁴⁹ From 1972 onwards, affiliated campuses were regularly asked whether they were practising the new methods which had been introduced at the seminar. Pretorius also visited a number of campuses to recruit new members and to brief them about NUSAS ideology. The main topic discussed during these visits was

²⁴⁵ E.M. Rhodie, "Southern Africa: Analysis: Behind the Student Unrest", in To the Point, 17 June 1972, p.1.

²⁴⁶ Ibid. p.3.

²⁴⁷ Richard Turner, "Black Consciousness and White Liberals", Reality, July 1972, p.21.

²⁴⁸ Harry Oppenheimer Centre of African Studies, University of Cape Town, Charles Nupen, The Activities of NUSAS for 1973 as outlined by the President: Held at University of Natal Pietremaritzburg, 8- 15 July 1974, p.10.

²⁴⁹ Karis and Gerhart Collection, Correspondence, Pretorius to with Sono, 3 April 1972.

the nature of relationships between NUSAS and SASO.²⁵⁰

At the beginning of the same year, a circular letter, which NUSAS requested from SASO, was sent to NUSAS's affiliated centres. This document explained SASO's attitude to NUSAS in some detail.²⁵¹ In a covering letter which accompanied the document, Pretorius explained how, in his view, the emergence and growth of SASO was a direct challenge to white students, and how it was therefore imperative for organisations such as NUSAS to reconsider and reformulate their role in the context of the South African political situation.²⁵² It was because of this that NUSAS tried to educate its members about the tenets of BC at the April seminar of that year. Pretorius delivered a paper entitled, "Where to now, white students?", and in it he traced the history of NUSAS's dilemma and suggested what structural changes might be needed in the organisation.²⁵³

The second paper at the April seminar was read by Nicolette Westcott, and focused on the indoctrination of South African society. Her view was that social integration was a necessary medicine for a polarised society and she explained how the evils of apartheid indoctrination might be undone by racial integration.²⁵⁴ The last paper at the seminar, entitled "Economy of apartheid", was read by David Hemson. In it he criticised the apartheid government for benefiting one section of the South African community economically to the detriment of the majority of citizens. The central message of his paper was how the South African economy had grown and flourished because the exploitation of cheap labour had been built into the system. The wages paid to blacks, he maintained,

²⁵⁰ Karis and Gerhart Collection, "Commission on Fresher Reception", pp. 1-3.

²⁵¹ Karis and Gerhart Collection, NUSAS: Information A Sheet Number 1/1972, pp. 1-6.

²⁵² Ibid. p. 6.

²⁵³ William Cullen Library, Paul Pretorius, "Where to Now White Students?", pp. 1-9.

²⁵⁴ William Cullen Library, Nicolette Westcott, "Indoctrination for Subordinate", pp. 1-6.

were lower than those paid to any of the country's other population groups.²⁵⁵

As a result of these activities, eight members of NUSAS, namely Pretorius, Ensor, Phillippe le Roux, Curtis, Sheila Lapinsky, Keegan, Chris Wood and Turner were served with five-year banning orders on 27 February 1973.²⁵⁶ But the bannings failed to deter the organisation from maintaining solidarity with SASO and with individuals in the black community who were considered to be relevant to the struggle for black liberation. This continued contact was exemplified by the invitation to Stanley Mmutlanyane Mogoba to address the April seminar of 1973. His paper was entitled "The contemporary black movement as it has developed from its forerunners", and in it he traced the development of Black Consciousness from the birth of the Freedom Charter in 1955, when the representatives of the Congress of Democrats, the Indian Congress, the ANC, and the Coloured Peoples Congress, formulated the Charter. Mogoba detailed how a radical group, who were later to form the PAC in 1959, rejected the Kliptown charter because of its multi-racial nature.²⁵⁷ Their point of view was that whites always dominated blacks and that blacks in these organisations were always relegated to a subordinate role. Mogoba pointed out the obvious similarities between the views of the PAC and those of the BCM.²⁵⁸ He suggested that white students, if they wished to assist blacks to liberate themselves, should direct their attention to educating their own fellow whites.²⁵⁹

Not all supporters of NUSAS or SASO were in agreement about these issues. Ernest Wentzel, a

²⁵⁵ William Cullen Library, David Hemson, "Economy of Apartheid", pp.1-7.

²⁵⁶ Race Relation News: South African Institute of Race Relation, vol 35, no 3, March 1973, p.3.

²⁵⁷ Harry Oppenheimer Centre of African Studies, University of Cape Town, Stanley Mogoba, "The Contemporary Black Movement as it Has Developed from its Forerunners", NUSAS Seminar, April 1973, pp.1-2.

²⁵⁸ Ibid, p.2.

²⁵⁹ Ibid, p.2.

former president of NUSAS (1957) who had been detained by the security police for three months,²⁶⁰ and who was one of the lawyers representing victims of the Sharpeville massacre, delivered a paper at the 50th NUSAS Annual Conference in July 1973. In this paper he criticised the NUSAS leadership for being too accommodating of black opinion at the April Seminar. He also criticised the virulence of the SASO attack on NUSAS.²⁶¹ Eventually, however, Wentzel changed his mind about BC ideology and became one of the leading lawyers to defend the accused at BC trials.²⁶² It is also important to note that, four years after his attack on SASO, Wentzel was one of the four lawyers retained by the Biko family to represent their interests at the inquest into the death of the founder of Black Consciousness and SASO, held in the three weeks beginning 14 November 1977.²⁶³ One might speculate about the processes which led Wentzel to change his mind. Firstly, although he was obviously opposed at the time to the hard line taken by the SASO leadership, he must have very quickly become outraged when he became aware of the cruelty of the government onslaught against the SASO leadership. Secondly, he might have become convinced, within the space of a few years, of the validity of the SASO principle that black people alone should be responsible for the prosecution of the struggle for black liberation.

Wentzel's ideas at the time were, however, repudiated at the December 1973 Seminar, and this serves to demonstrate that NUSAS had finally understood the importance of the Black Consciousness critique of the South African political situation at the time. It was at this seminar that a great deal of

²⁶⁰ Sydney Kentridge, "Law and Lawyers in a Changing Society: The First Ernie Wentzel Memorial Lecture", Reality, vol 19, no 6, November 1987, p.11.

²⁶¹ E.M. Wentzel, "The Student Movement Today", in South African Outlook, October 1973, pp.14-17.

²⁶² Ellen Kuzwayo, Call me Woman (Johannesburg, Ravan Writers Series, 1996), pp.222-224.

²⁶³ Woods, Biko, p.232.

attention was given to BC themes. Four executive members of NUSAS, who were politically active and sympathetic to the BC cause, delivered papers which became the basis for extensive discussion. Eddie Webster delivered a paper entitled "Black Consciousness and the white Left".²⁶⁴ His paper analysed three central themes of Black Consciousness philosophy and their implications for the white Left in South Africa. He also provided an historical overview of the course of black protest against white domination. Unlike Mogoba, who traced the roots of BC from 1955, Webster suggested an origin as early as 1920, when the Garveyist slogan of "Africa for Africans" had already become influential. He nevertheless agreed with Mogoba's observation that the refusal to ratify the 1955 Kliptown Freedom Charter was a milestone in the process whereby blacks realised that they needed to take control of their own liberation struggle. Webster saw, however, that BC was different from other earlier black organisations in that its exclusivity principle embraced both the Indian and Coloured communities because they had also been racially defined by the apartheid regime as belonging to those groups which had become the targets of discrimination.²⁶⁵ It was therefore essential, Webster said, for whites to realise the pivotal role that BC was to play in the liberation of both the oppressors and the oppressed. Finally, he outlined the reasons why he believed that BC should take the lead in the struggle for liberation.²⁶⁶

At the same seminar, Geoff Budlender delivered a paper entitled "A historical perspective on student action",²⁶⁷ in which he recognised the contribution made by NUSAS to areas such as medical scholarships, projects, workshops, and campaign action. He made a plea that NUSAS should

²⁶⁴ William Cullen Library, Eddie Webster, "Black Consciousness and the White Left", pp.1-7.

²⁶⁵ Ibid. p.1

²⁶⁶ Ibid. pp.1-2.

²⁶⁷ William Cullen Library, Geoff Budlender, "A historical perspective of student action", pp.1-8.

participate in social and political life beyond campus boundaries,²⁶⁸ and suggested that NUSAS should support radical initiatives such as the sponsorship of non-racial sport, and the right of black workers to strike.²⁶⁹ He also proposed that NUSAS should accept the validity of the role which BC had defined for itself, and he intimated that South Africa should prepare itself for black majority rule.²⁷⁰

The most radical paper of the four was delivered by Karel Tip, and was entitled, "Whites and the dynamic of change".²⁷¹ He encouraged NUSAS to transform itself in an unprecedented way: he suggested that blacks be allowed to take the lead in implementing radical transformation within NUSAS itself.²⁷² He enunciated the idea that whites who were interested in change should undergo a process of transformation that would permit a mutation from liberal consciousness to black consciousness.²⁷³ Tip's challenge was that whites should be shown the deficiencies and dangers of white liberalism. Once this had been done, whites would be able to co-exist with blacks as true equals in a genuinely non-racist society. He observed that liberals were not prepared to commit themselves in practice to the complete elimination of oppression and exploitation from the lives of blacks. Their implicit agenda, he said, was to preserve intact the hard core of inequality and therefore maintain the structures of white domination and repression.²⁷⁴ He believed that the BC Movement would soon be in a position to take a lead in the campaign against apartheid.²⁷⁵ He was also one of the few whites with sufficient prescience to warn South Africans at the time about the dangers inherent in the creation of a black bourgeoisie who might inadvertently become a buffer zone between whites and

²⁶⁸ Ibid. p. 1.

²⁶⁹ Ibid. p. 7.

²⁷⁰ Ibid. p. 8.

²⁷¹ William Cullen Library, Karel Tip, "Whites and the Dynamic of Change", pp. 1-8.

²⁷² Ibid. p. 2.

²⁷³ Ibid. p. 3.

²⁷⁴ Ibid. p. 3.

²⁷⁵ Ibid. p. 3.

the truly dispossessed majority of blacks.²⁷⁶

The last paper of the seminar was delivered by Charles Nupen, president of NUSAS, and it detailed the kinds of action which were envisaged by the leadership for 1974 (the paper was entitled "Guideline to student action in 1974").²⁷⁷ He pledged full support for the BC movement as it fought for a just and open society, and he conceptualised the role of white students to be one of support for those projects which were initiated by progressive black institutions.²⁷⁸ He questioned the integrity of those liberals who became passive when they no longer found themselves in positions of leadership.²⁷⁹

It is important to understand the reasoning which informed the radical stance of NUSAS at this time and the unconditional support which it offered to BC at the end of 1973. The leadership of SASO and other BC activists were either in jail or had been restricted by government banning orders as the apartheid regime tried to undermine the entire black protest movement.²⁸⁰ SASO's records show that 164 of its members were banned by the end of April 1973.²⁸¹ The government, when it eventually fully appreciated the extent of the threat which SASO activities posed to its supremacy and the stability of the apartheid state, began to crack down in earnest on the SASO leadership.²⁸²

Another indication that NUSAS's policy was influenced, whether consciously or not, by SASO

²⁷⁶ Ibid. p.4.

²⁷⁷ William Cullen Library, Charles Nupen, "Guidelines for Student Action for 1974", pp.1-4.

²⁷⁸ Ibid.p.3.

²⁷⁹ Ibid.p.4.

²⁸⁰ SASO Newsletter.

²⁸¹ SASO Newsletter, March/April 1973, p.18.

²⁸² Ibid. p.17.

principles, may be discerned from its accommodation of blacks on the executive of 1974. Students from the University of the Witwatersrand elected a black president, Ian Kitai, from Zola. He was subsequently also elected to the office of chief executive in AQUARIUS (Social and Welfare).²⁸³ Another black, Sindi Sayenda, was elected as secretary of NUSED and she was also the first African to be appointed to oversee the disbursement and administration of funds. The South African Medical Scholarship Trust (SAMST) and South African Students Education Trust (SASET) fell under the jurisdiction of her portfolio.²⁸⁴ These two trusts formed part of the NUSAS scholarship fund, and their rightful administration had been the cause of the disagreement between SASO and NUSAS in 1970 and 1971. That a black should even be appointed to such a position, speaks for the continuing influence that SASO ideology was having on NUSAS.

Further evidence that NUSAS was keen for its members to understand and sympathise with the BC point of view may be deduced from the political affiliations of the speakers who were invited to deliver the opening addresses at their annual congresses. Between 1970 and 1975, all those who delivered opening addresses, apart from Wentzel, were connected in some way to BC.²⁸⁵ Fatima Meer, for example, was invited to the annual congress of July 1970 in Eston, Natal,²⁸⁶ and her paper, entitled "NUSAS in the seventies", acknowledged and confirmed the role played by NUSAS in pursuance and promotion of non-racialism.²⁸⁷ Meer's paper was not uncritical of NUSAS, and she

²⁸³ Harry Oppenheimer Centre of African Studies, Master File, January to December 1974, p.5.

²⁸⁴ Harry Oppenheimer Centre of African Studies, "Report of the Secretary of the Students' Services Centre to NUSAS", p.2.

²⁸⁵ Wentzel, "The Student Movement Today", pp.14-17.

²⁸⁶ Harry Oppenheimer Centre of African Studies, Charles Nupen, "The Activities of NUSAS for 1973 as Outlined by President: Annual Congress Held at University of Natal Pietermaritzburg, 8 -15 July 1974", pp.10.

²⁸⁷ Fatima Meer, "NUSAS in the seventies", in The South African Outlook, September 1970, p. 136.

reprimanded NUSAS for ignoring the most pressing needs of the oppressed people of South Africa. And then, since the paper was read a few days after SASO had withdrawn its recognition from NUSAS at its own congress, she took the opportunity to explain the reason for this withdrawal of recognition.²⁸⁸ David Thebehali, who was involved in the formation of BC, attended the 1971 NUSAS congress which was held in Durban.²⁸⁹ Allan Boesak, known as one of the pioneers of Black Theology in South Africa, was invited to attend in 1972,²⁹⁰ while Manas Buthelezi, also a prominent black theologian, presented a paper in 1974 when the congress was held at the University of Natal in Pietermaritzburg.²⁹¹ In 1975, Bishop Alpheus Zulu, an Anglican priest who was also one of pioneers of Black Theology, was requested to address the 1975 congress but declined because of prior commitments.²⁹² Instead, Beyers Naude, founder member of the Christian Institute (founded in 1963), was able to give an opening address at the 52nd Annual Congress held in Durban.²⁹³

The central theme of all these papers was to clarify the aims and objectives of SASO and the BC movement at large, thereby promoting understanding and good relations between SASO and NUSAS. Between 1974 and 1976, none of NUSAS's activities really devolved on the theme of NUSAS–SASO relations, except that sporadic protests relevant to the wider liberation struggle were

²⁸⁸ Ibid. pp.135-136.

²⁸⁹ Harry Oppenheimer Centre of African Studies, Archives, Minutes of NUSAS Annual Congress, July 1972, p.3.

²⁹⁰ Harry Oppenheimer Centre of African Studies, Archives, Minutes of NUSAS Annual Congress, July 1973, p.4.

²⁹¹ Harry Oppenheimer Centre of African Studies, Archives, Minutes of NUSAS Annual Congress, July 1975, p.3.

²⁹² Harry Oppenheimer Centre of African Studies, Correspondence, Alpheus Zulu to NUSAS President, 24th June 1975.

²⁹³ Harry Oppenheimer Centre of African Studies, "Report of NUSAS President to the 52nd Annual Congress", July 1975, p.14.

undertaken by the Union.²⁹⁴ (This observation does not preclude contacts at the leadership level to improve and maintain contacts between NUSAS and SASO.) For its part, NUSAS continued to use the controversial T-Group method at the 1974 April Seminar.²⁹⁵ At grassroots level, however, NUSAS was at its lowest ebb. The Union's records show that, in 1974, only two affiliated SRCs had paid their yearly subscriptions.²⁹⁶

The 1976 records reveal that students in general were becoming apathetic as they lost interest in NUSAS or succumbed to the blandishments of the widespread and coordinated propaganda onslaught which the government waged against NUSAS.²⁹⁷ It has also been suggested that NUSAS became more and more inactive as its financial problems increased. The overseas organisations, as indicated earlier in this chapter, which hitherto had supplied NUSAS with funds, were no longer in a position to provide assistance. Even worse, NUSAS was declared an "affected organisation" just after the findings of the Schlebusch Commission were released in 1972, together with other liberal organisations such as the South African Council of Churches (SACC), the University Christian Movement (UCM), and the Christian Institute (CI).²⁹⁸ In the opinion of the Geneva-based South African News Agency at the time, NUSAS had become particularly conservative at local and regional levels. A sign of the prevalence of this conservatism was that, when the fortunes of NUSAS were at a particularly low ebb, the white right-wing South African Federation of English Speaking Students

²⁹⁴ Harry Oppenheimer Centre of African Studies, Archives, "Project Activities for NUSAS 1974 and 1975", pp.1-10.

²⁹⁵ Harry Oppenheimer Centre of African Studies, Archives, Charles Nupen, "The Activities of NUSAS for 1973 as Outlined by its President: Annual Congress Held at the University of Natal Pietermaritzburg", 8 -15 July 1974, p. 10.

²⁹⁶ Harry Oppenheimer Centre of African Studies, "NUSAS President's Report: July 1974 Annual Congress", p.12.

²⁹⁷ Harry Oppenheimer Centre of African Studies, Archives, Fink Hayson, "NUSAS President's Opening Address to the 55th Congress 1977", p.2.

²⁹⁸ Karis and Gerhart Collection, Gerhart, Interview with Curtis p.9.

surfaced. This organisation was formed in 1971.²⁹⁹ It was active mostly at the University of the Witwatersrand where it operated a journal called Campus Independent.³⁰⁰ It has been suggested that this group controlled many activities on campus during the period when the university was without a proper SRC. It has also been argued that the same group was sponsored by government agencies, particularly BOSS and the security police.³⁰¹ Others believed, as did the writer of an editorial in Reality, that NUSAS had deliberately opted for a low profile because the state was acting ruthlessly against individuals in the organisation. The case of Breyten Breytenbach, who was sentenced to nine years in jail, was cited as an example.³⁰²

The harassment of NUSAS leadership had been part of a long, ongoing battle between the government and individual members who were thought to be radical. As John Daniel, a former president of NUSAS, observed: the government had succeeded by 1974 in dealing a body blow to nearly all political organisations which either promoted or sympathised with the African liberation struggle.³⁰³ The evidence shows that the government had intensified its harassment and intimidation of influential members of NUSAS from 1973. During that time, eight past and present NUSAS office bearers, including NUSAS Advisory Panel member and University of Natal lecturer, Turner, had been banned. This all happened in February, on the same day that the findings of the Schlebusch Commission of the Enquiry into the activities of NUSAS were released.³⁰⁴

If one is to understand why the government cracked down so ruthlessly at the beginning of 1973, one

²⁹⁹ SASO Newsletter, August 1971, p.5.

³⁰⁰ South African News Agency, 1211 Geneva, 29 April 1977, p.1.

³⁰¹ *Ibid.* p.1.

³⁰² "Breytenbach and NUSAS", in Reality, vol 7, no 6, January 1976, p.5.

³⁰³ Daniel, "NUSAS 1963-1973: Ten Years of Conflict", pp.12-13.

³⁰⁴ Daniel, "A History of NUSAS in Action", p.9.

has to take into account the intensity of NUSAS protest activities carried out in 1972.³⁰⁵ If NUSAS failed to be a significant political player in the quiescent years after 1973, it was probably because its leadership had been effectively paralysed by bannings, deportations and government restrictions, not to mention systematic harassment by the security police.

It was only after the Soweto uprisings of 16 June 1976 in protest against the imposition of Afrikaans as a compulsory medium of instruction in schools when so many black high school students were killed by the South African police, that NUSAS re-emerged in active support of the black cause.³⁰⁶ These brutal events ignited a wave of national and international criticism, especially from liberal and human rights critics of the apartheid regime, and the pressure of events obliged NUSAS to reassess its policies. This reassessment was first discussed at the seminar of December 1976.³⁰⁷ On this occasion NUSAS first introduced the concept "Africanisation", then a new tool for analysing the political situation. The concept was used in two ways. Firstly, the Africanisation policy was used in an attempt to make white students in particular think again about emigrating from South Africa. Many white students were leaving the country because of fear and uncertainty about the future of the country.³⁰⁸ Secondly, the terms "Africanism" and "Africanisation" represented a new way for NUSAS to respond to the challenge of Black Consciousness. Participants in the seminar felt that white students would only really ever understand the full implications of BC philosophy and practice if they were educated and conscientised about all aspects of African life, thought and practice. This process represented an attempt to propagate a new kind of Africanism which transcended the boundaries of

³⁰⁵ NUSAS Newsletter, vol 3, no 24, 9 June 1972, pp.1-6; no 25, 16 June 1972, pp.1-7.

³⁰⁶ South African News Agency, p.2.

³⁰⁷ Harry Oppenheimer Centre of African Studies, Archives, "President's Report: July 1977 Annual Congress", pp.3-4.

³⁰⁸ Harry Oppenheimer Centre of African Studies, Archives, NUSAS, SRC Press, (University of Cape Town), January 1977, p.3.

narrow sectional or political interests for white students who still essentially regarded themselves as Europeans, even after centuries of living in Africa.³⁰⁹

The programme was divided into three parts. Project B would undertake research which would be published by NUSAS. Another aim of this project was to create a data base of relevant reference sources which could be used by researchers.³¹⁰ Two educational programmes were planned to operate between March and August of 1977.³¹¹ From March to May, topics for discussion would focus mainly on the history of the black political struggle in South Africa. Speakers invited to be part of this programme were either supporters and sympathizers of BC, such as Boesak, Beyers Naudé and Peter Randall, who worked for the Christian Institute, or experts in African Studies. Those invited included Martin West, who spoke about African Culture, Hermann Giliomee, who spoke about Political Science, and Frederick van Zyl Slabbert, who spoke about African Law.³¹² From June to August, topics focused on problems endemic to the Southern African region, topics such as "Migrant labour in South Africa", "White Africans in Rhodesia", and "Namibia-Sersfontein/Tjongarero".³¹³ In addition to these proposed programmes, it was agreed that the Africanisation project would be furthered by other activities such as lectures, seminars, films and plays at local and regional levels.³¹⁴

³⁰⁹ Harry Oppenheimer Centre of African Studies, "The Poverty of Africanism", in Work in Progress, no 2, November 1977, p.3.

³¹⁰ Harry Oppenheimer Centre of African Studies, Archives, "The President's Report: NUSAS Annual Congress, July 1977", pp.7-10.

³¹¹ Karis and Gerhart Collection, "The Poverty of Africanism", in Work In Progress, no 2, November 1977, p.2.

³¹² Harry Oppenheimer Centre of African Studies, Archives, "Africanisation: A Programme for 1977", p.1.

³¹³ Ibid. p.1.

³¹⁴ Harry Oppenheimer Centre of African Studies, Archives, "Programme for 1977 Africanisation", p.1.

During the annual July congress in 1977, various reports from affiliated centres confirmed that the campaign for Africanisation had been effective and had also served the purpose of making NUSAS a viable political force again. This was reflected by attendance at the congress, where attendance figures were higher than they had been for years.³¹⁵ Critics of the Africanisation programme felt, however, that it was far too revolutionary. They argued that the programme had been introduced by radical elements whose only interest was to reshape NUSAS ideology so that it would conform to their own ideological premises. They also felt that the white community in South Africa would find it difficult to comprehend (let alone identify and associate itself with) specifically African culture and concerns on the profound level envisaged by the programme.³¹⁶

In conclusion, this chapter has demonstrated that while other liberal institutions in South Africa had been reluctant to transform themselves radically and to oppose the apartheid regime in any way that could make a significant difference, NUSAS, having been spurred into genuine self-criticism by the acerbic yet carefully reasoned and justifiable criticism of SASO over the period of roughly fifteen years (1965 to 1979), had transformed itself into an organisation partly dominated by its conservative (white) support both at grassroots and national level, into an organisation which had made its peace with SASO and which had accepted all the essentials of the SASO critique of the South African political situation. NUSAS had thus in effect been transformed in the long run by Biko himself, who did not live to see his life's work materialise, but who, as the most influential of the founders of SASO, had created the apparatus that spelled doom for the old kind of paternalistic liberal organisation that

³¹⁵ Harry Oppenheimer Centre of African Studies, Archives, "President's Address, Annual Congress July 1977", pp.1-9.

³¹⁶ Work In Progress, no 3, January 1978, pp.1-8.

NUSAS had been when he joined it. Biko had found a NUSAS heavily under the spell of the kind of well-meaning but paternalistic liberalism of old-style liberals such as Paton and Brookes, and he rapidly became convinced that no amount of well-meaning white liberalism could ever effect the changes in the mass mind of South African blacks, that would be necessary if they were ever to obtain their freedom from centuries of colonial and imperial political and cultural domination.

Biko therefore formulated his celebrated BC doctrine of "Black man: you are on your own", and he (and others) created SASO to be the vehicle for attaining black liberation without any white support or involvement whatsoever. But such were the complexities of South African politics at the time that both SASO and BC were more or less compelled to rely on white liberal support in order to survive the harshest days of National Party government repression. This is one of the great paradoxes of South Africa politics – the paradoxical symbiosis between BC theorists such as Biko, the founder of SASO, and mainly white organisations such as NUSAS.

It has been the purpose of this chapter to demonstrate how SASO was born out of dissatisfaction with NUSAS, and how, after many years of sometimes bitter and angry hostility between the two organisations, and many false stops and starts, NUSAS was ultimately transformed into a much more radical organisation.

CHAPTER FOUR

STEVE BIKO AND HIS INFLUENCE ON THE ACTIVITIES OF THE BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS MOVEMENT

When the Black Consciousness Movement (BC) emerged in the late sixties, its increasing success and growing prominence were largely attributable to the efforts, charisma and influence of Steve Biko himself. As the movement continued to grow, it was variously criticised and applauded by supporters and detractors in various quarters.

Firstly, there were those on the political right who felt threatened by the emergence of an ideology propagated by a new generation of African university students who were both articulate and confident about who they were and what they were striving for. It was hardly surprising therefore when members of the Nationalist Party government went out of their way to discredit BC, and it was clear that the government was alarmed by the political momentum of a movement which enjoyed widespread support in black communities.

Jimmy Kruger, then minister of police and prisons, led the attack on BC and slated the organisation for employing a dangerous and destructive ideology which provoked confrontation with whites.¹ Kruger's opinions were received with great seriousness among conservative white South Africans, who viewed the organisation as being both radical and revolutionary. They felt,

¹ "Commentary: What is Black Consciousness?", Pretoria News, 20 Sep 1977, p.12.

furthermore, that BC was communist-inspired and that Biko himself was a communist because he called for radical changes in the economic and the social structure of the country.² Conservatives in the international community, who had an interest in South Africa, also tended to support this particular point of view. One of these was Karl Beyer, a German journalist who had been based on the African continent for over two decades. He believed that Biko was being used as a political football by the American government, and opined that the United States was using Biko as an instrument to destabilise South Africa. He also believed that the United States government was conveniently using Andrew Young, the African American ambassador to the United Nations, to befriend Biko and his associates.³ As I have already mentioned in an earlier chapter, conservative white South Africans were convinced that African-Americans were using their links with BC as a means of imposing their own radical ideology on the South African movement. Such views became the received opinions of the pro-government press, and the newspapers that propagated them were lauded as patriotic by the apartheid government. It was the Citizen that transmitted these interpretations to English-speaking readers, while Beeld performed the same function for Afrikaners.⁴ The government used these newspapers to wage its propaganda war, primarily against BC, but also against other organisations.

The conservative assessment of Biko's political significance by the critics of BC is unsustainable because it contradicts both Biko's clearly articulated views and BC principles. In an interview with Dick Clark, United States Democratic senator and chairperson of the Committee on African Affairs in December 1976, Biko stated categorically that BC opposed American policy towards

² The Star, 5 Jan 1978, p.19.

³ The Citizen, 1 May 1979.

⁴ House of Assembly Debates, vol 74, column 7072, 8 May-16 June 1978.

South Africa because he felt that the United States was too accommodating of the apartheid regime, in that their government had failed to challenge the implications of racial segregation in any way that might have exerted meaningful pressure on the Pretoria regime.⁵

Further evidence that BC policy was not dictated by the United States, as alleged, was contained in the organisation's announcement at its annual general meeting in June 1977. The executive of the Black People's Convention (BPC) issued a statement to the effect that it was opposed to the erroneous impression created by the United States that it spoke on behalf of oppressed South Africans.⁶ BPC was a wing of BC, established in 1972 with the aim of accommodating adults who were interested in political activism, but who could not be affiliated to SASO since the latter was a student organisation. Recruits included members of the banned African National Congress (ANC), the Pan African Congress (PAC), and various non-political associations such as the Interdenominational African Ministers' Association of South Africa (IDAMASA), the Association for the Educational and Cultural Advancement of African People (ASSECA), the African Independent Churches Association (AICA), the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), and the St. Peter's Old Boys' Association.⁷

That Biko was not a puppet of a foreign government may also be deduced from his refusal to take up residence in the United States after the Carter administration had received confidential information that his life was in danger.⁸ Even as Biko declined the invitation, he must have been

⁵ Karis and Gerhart Collection, Johannesburg. Biko's memorandum to Dick Clark, entitled "American Policy towards Azania (South Africa)", 1 Dec 76, pp.1-6.

⁶ Weekend World, 12 June 1977, p.4.

⁷ Thomas G. Karis and Gail M. Gerhart, From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa, 1882-1990, vol 5, (Pretoria, Unisa Press, 1977), p.131.

⁸ The World, 14 July 1977, p.4.

aware that his life was at risk. He knew that he was a prime target of the apartheid regime at a time when many lesser-known activists were being murdered in prison in “accidents” or “suicides” that were cynically reported as factual. His continued presence in South Africa was, he felt, an exemplification of BC’s principled refusal to collaborate with those governments which, directly or indirectly, continued to facilitate the survival of the apartheid regime.⁹ Biko was not the first African leader to have refused an offer of emigration. The president of the ANC, Albert Luthuli, had also turned down a request to settle outside South Africa and remained in South Africa as an expression of his solidarity with the plight of all oppressed Africans.¹⁰

It was generally assumed among the leadership of the Black Consciousness Movement that Biko’s international reputation would cause the apartheid government to refrain from actually threatening his life. They believed, not unrealistically, that Biko’s fame as a key figure in BC made him untouchable.¹¹ Recent revelations by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission¹² now indicate that, had Biko agreed to emigrate at that time, he would not have been murdered.

The second group who reacted to Biko and BC were white liberals in South Africa, who tended on the whole to be sympathetic to the BC cause. Although most were not directly supportive of the organisation (only a few, like David Russell, were), many influential liberals tried to understand what BC stood for, and, because of their long years of association with Biko and other members of BC, tended to sympathise with the organisation. Among those who were particularly

⁹ South African Outlook, vol 107, no 1275, November 1977, p.130.

¹⁰ John Collins, Southern Africa: Freedom and Peace: Address to the United Nations 1965-1979 (London, International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa, 1980), p.32.

¹¹ Ernest Messina private collection: An interview with Musibudi Mangena, Harare, Zimbabwe, 15 Jan 1992, p.6.

¹² "Biko cop knew Vorster and Swart", The Star, 12 Sep 1997, p.3.

appalled by the apartheid government's draconian repression of BC was a group of liberals which included Aelred Stubbs, David Russell and Donald Woods. (Their relations with Biko and BC are discussed later in this chapter.) In their defence of Biko, they disputed the assertion of pro-government apologists that Biko was a communist-inspired radical revolutionary. Instead, they regarded Biko as a moderate in the mould of Albert Luthuli, president of the ANC between 1952 and 1967.¹³

Barry Streek, who had worked closely with Biko in the early 1970s as secretary of the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS), and who therefore knew him well, confirmed from his own experience what these liberals had been saying, namely that Biko was far from being a radical revolutionary. He suggested that Biko differed from other leaders of the liberation movement in that he was politically more sophisticated.¹⁴ After the 1976 Soweto uprising and the death of Biko, this point of view became popular as a critical response to the way in which the government had handled both incidents. This is demonstrated by a number of articles which appeared in the liberal press, especially the South African Outlook, which gave wide coverage to the Black Consciousness Movement for the first time in six years after BC's inception.¹⁵

Another white liberal journalist and political commentator, Denis Beckett, then assistant editor of the predominantly black newspaper, Weekend World,¹⁶ also strongly criticised the government's position on Biko and BC. Beckett's position on a newspaper which reflected the

¹³ Donald Woods, Biko (London, Penguin Books, 1987), pp.62-63.

¹⁴ Barry Streek, "Biko's image goes on growing", Daily Dispatch, 18 Sep 1980, p.6.

¹⁵ South African Outlook, vol 107, no 1269, February 1977, pp.18-32; no 1272, May 1977, pp.66-79; no 1275, September 1977, pp.130-144; no 1277, November 1977, pp.162-176.

¹⁶ Denis Beckett, "The World in Microcosm," in South African Outlook, vol 107, no 1277, November 1977, pp.170-171.

opinions of the African majority, enabled him to understand the African's plight in a way that was incomprehensible to the majority of whites who had had little experience of what black South Africans really thought and felt. His criticisms of the ways in which the government had handled the uprising of 1976, and particularly the death of Biko in detention, as well as the banning on 19 October 1977 of the organisations and publications that supported the ideology of Black Consciousness, were firmly based in fact and experience.

Beckett's criticism of the government's banning might also have been given additional impetus from his personal experience as a journalist when his own newspaper, the Weekend World, was banned. He himself had experienced at first hand the frustration caused by banning. It is also important to note that, by and large, liberals and the liberal press tended to become vociferous in their comments only after the Soweto uprising and the death of Biko. Observations made in this regard by Christopher Merrett tend to confirm his opinion that white liberals, on the whole, largely ignored black opinion until violence erupted.¹⁷

Similarly, Paul Gaston's observation about the relations between white liberals and African Americans in the United States has important resonances in the South African context. He argues that, generally speaking, American white liberals tended to denigrate politically active blacks who took a too radical stance on issues, and he noted their tendency to canonise African Americans in the civil rights movement only once they had been martyred for their cause. He specifically referred to the American liberal perception that Malcolm X was the most radical embodiment of Black Power ideology. After his death, however, the same people who had vilified him respected

¹⁷ Christopher Merrett, A Culture of Censorship: Secrecy and Intellectual Repression in South Africa (Cape Town, David Philip, 1994), p.9.

him as a hero.¹⁸ Biko, in the same way, had been largely ignored by the very liberals who subsequently made capital out of his martyrdom. It was only after his death that he became a hero and a cult figure. Some of these same white liberals were highly critical of BC philosophy during its early years.¹⁹

The South African white press (including the liberal white press) tacitly maintained and endorsed the government's policy of segregation through its association with the South African Society of Journalists, which disallowed black membership.²⁰ It was, however, not only the white liberal press which was reluctant to report on the proceedings of BC while it was still in its infancy. The World, a newspaper which targeted a black audience, also failed to give BC publicity for quite some time after its inception,²¹ although it continued to report events which took place elsewhere in Africa and in the United States.

The World reported in detail events which related to the Black Power Movement and the role played by African Americans in such events. The irony of this situation was that far more momentous developments were taking place at that very time in South Africa than those that were happening abroad. The World was owned by white liberals who failed (for whatever reasons) to appreciate the importance, before Biko's death, of fully understanding and attempting to convey

¹⁸ Conversation with Paul Gaston, University of South Africa, History Department, 25 Sep 1996.

¹⁹ Woods, Biko, pp.54-60.

²⁰ The World, 31 May 1977, p.4.

²¹ Karis and Gerhart Collection, Johannesburg, "SASO letter to Presidents of SRC, National Students Organisations and Overseas Organisations, February, 1970", pp.4-5.

to its readership the political aspirations of South African blacks.²² This newspaper's first report about BC was not directly about the organisation itself. It reported on the annual conference of the South African Institute of Race Relations, which was held in January 1971.²³ The World reacted to a statement made by Rex Heinke, deputy vice-president of NUSAS, on behalf of the organisation, when he attempted to explain the importance and contribution of BC to his liberal audience.²⁴

It was white liberal students, who, in contrast to journalists, were the first group to raise the issue of BC in the press. This is an indication of the collaboration, often behind closed doors, which took place between the two student organisations, NUSAS and SASO (this was analysed in the previous chapter). The importance of this NUSAS conference was later superseded by that organised by the

Abe Bailey Institute for Inter-racial Studies, which was held in Cape Town. (The significance of this latter conference is discussed in detail in the section of this chapter which describes the contribution which Barney Pityana made to BC in general, and to SASO in particular.)

The World first reported its views about Black Consciousness in March 1971 when SASO was invited to a reception to mark the founding of the Donaldson Orlando Community Centre in Soweto.²⁵ On the one hand, the impression was created that The World, under the editorship of Manasse Moerane, a well-known veteran activist, was a newspaper that truly represented the

²² Elias L.Ntloedibe, Here is a Tree: Political Biography of Robert Mangaliso Sobukwe (Pretoria, DB Print Services, 1995), pp.8-9.

²³ The World, 6 Jan 1971, p.4.

²⁴ "Tribal universities could lead to S.A.Black Power – expert", The World, 8 Jan 1971, p.3.

²⁵ Shadrack Kumalo, "Future of Blacks Lies in Learning", The World, 9 March 1971.

opinions of black people. On the other hand, The World was prevented from reporting freely on black political activities as such reportage might have offended both the liberals, who controlled the paper, and the government, which, it was believed, indirectly financed some newspapers but, at the same time, censored the free flow of information.²⁶ There are two other reasons why Moerane was reluctant openly to support BC at this point. Firstly, he had been a member of the ANC when the organisation was still legal in South Africa. Secondly, he was a brother-in-law to Govan Mbeki, one of the most prominent figures in the ANC, who was serving an extended sentence on Robben Island at the time.²⁷ Many members of the ANC were reluctant to join BC because they favoured a multi-racial policy, which they did not see in BC. The press in general was hesitant to support BC during its early years. Percy Qoboza, editor of The World, was a case in point. Later, however, he supported BC so vigorously that he was eventually detained in 1977, when The World and other BC-related organisations were banned.²⁸

The third strand of reaction to Biko and to the BC Movement may be identified in the statements which emanated from its proponents and apologists, people such as Siphso Buthelezi,²⁹ Themba Sono, and others³⁰ who, while defending the radical and revolutionary principles of the movement, attempted to interpret them with clarity and precision to their constituents. They justified the harsh and uncompromising rhetoric of the movement for two main reasons. Firstly, they maintained that BC was directed at black constituents who were the victims of racial segregation.

²⁶ "SASO Memorandum to Presidents of SRC, National Students Organisations, and Overseas Organisations, February 1970", pp.5-6.

²⁷ Ellen Kuzwayo, Call me Woman (Johannesburg, Ravan Writers Series, 1996), p.100.

²⁸ "The World of Percy Qoboza", The World, 4 July 1972, p.4.

²⁹ Siphso Buthelezi, "The Black Consciousness in South Africa", in CEAPA, vol 1, no 1, December 1987, pp.23-26.

³⁰ Temba Sono, "Some Concepts of Negritude and Black Identity", in SASO Newsletter, June 1971, pp.16-19.

It was essential, they felt, for BC to conscientise these people and make them realise that they would have to liberate themselves without relying on assistance from white South Africans, irrespective of ideology or political inclination.³¹ Hence the adoption (later to be explained in detail by Mosibudi Mangena) of the slogan, "Black man, you are on your own".³² Secondly, they specifically addressed the white community in general and liberals in particular when they asserted that blacks were no longer prepared to be oppressed and were, from thenceforth, determined to challenge all forms of discriminatory government.³³

These three kinds of reaction to Biko and to BC tend to confirm that Biko's role was central in the history of the Black Consciousness Movement in this country. The purpose of this chapter is therefore three-fold. The first part deals with Biko as a person and with the factors that influenced him to become involved in the establishment of the BC movement. The following points will all be discussed under this heading: Biko's interpretation of the role of white liberals; his views on group or collective leadership as opposed to individuals running the organisation; the Pan Africanist Congress as a political influence; and the effect of radical literature, which widened Biko's scope of interpretation.

The second section deals with Biko's influence on individuals who were later to play major key roles in the formation and implementation of the Black Consciousness Movement. The

³¹ "I write what I like, by Frank Talk: Fear, An Important Determinant in South African Politics", in SASO Newsletter, vol 1, no 4, September 1971, pp.10-12.

³² Mosibudi Mangena, On Your Own: Evolution of Black Consciousness in South Africa/Azania (Braamfontein, Skottaville, 1990), pp.20-25.

³³ "I write what I like, by Frank Talk", in SASO Newsletter, vol 2, no 1, January and February 1972, pp.9-10.

contributions of Barney Pityana and Harry Ranwedzi Nengwekhulu, both of whom were co-founders of BC and who worked closely with Biko, will be discussed.

Steve Biko and the Black Consciousness Movement: Biko's view of white liberals

One of the most idiosyncratic contributions made by Black Consciousness ideology, as compared to that of the ANC, was its condemnation of the role which was played by those white liberals who often took the leading part in the struggle for black liberation. BC's criticism of the role of white liberals is similar to the criticism levelled against white liberals by the PAC. Both organisations were opposed to white liberal interference in African affairs even though white liberals claimed to be advancing the cause of black liberation.³⁴ They believed that the apartheid system only oppressed and discriminated against blacks. They further believed that because liberals were part of the white community and therefore inadvertently or directly benefited from this discrimination, they were unable completely to understand black suffering or to identify themselves with the black cause.³⁵

There were, however, slight differences of emphasis between the two organisations. BC used the word "black" to signify Africans, Indians and Coloureds.³⁶ The PAC, on the other hand, used the

³⁴ C.R.D. Halisi, "Biko and Black Consciousness Philosophy: An Interpretation", in N. Barney Pityana, Mamphela Ramphele, Malusi Mpumlwana and Lindy Wilson (eds), Bounds of Possibility: The Legacy of Steve Biko and Black Consciousness (Cape Town, David Philip, p.104.

³⁵ Benjamin Pogrand, How Can a Man Die Better: The Life of Robert Sobukwe (Johannesburg, Jonathan Ball Publishers, 1997), p.105; Ntloedibe, Here is a Tree, p.51.

³⁶ Mamphela Ramphele, A Life (Cape Town, David Philip, 1995), p.60.

word "Africanist" to include any group of people who lived in the country and considered themselves African enough to identify with Africa and who consequently disidentified themselves from the exploitative settler mentality.³⁷ Ironically, the PAC failed to attract white support. Only one white man, Patrick Duncan, signed up as a member and worked in collaboration with the organisation.³⁸ When it became clear that the PAC was failing to attract white members, the ANC accused the PAC of collaborating with the Nationalist government. This allegation was based on deductions about the private meeting which was thought to have been held early in 1959 between Robert Sobukwe, president of the PAC and his executive committee, and a Broederbond front organisation, the South African Bureau of Racial Affairs (SABRA).³⁹ The allegation was false and Sobukwe and his executive were reported to have turned down the invitation. The ANC tried to discredit the PAC on a number of occasions, mainly because the latter had broken away from the ANC. Such accusations nevertheless continued to surface from time and time, especially in the period after the schism.

Duncan's membership of the PAC (as the sole white member) has been attributed to the manner in which he threw himself into the struggle for black liberation and his unconditional support for the organisation. As editor of the Cape periodical, Contact, Duncan strongly criticised the establishment of the South African Congress of Democrats. The PAC was opposed to this multiracial organisation because it perceived it to be dominated by white communists. According to David Everatt, Duncan launched an attack on the influential role played by the communists in

³⁷ UNISA Archives, Centre for African Studies, Pretoria, A153, Robert Sobukwe, "The Pan African Congress Venture in Retrospective, September, 1960", pp.6-7; Kogila Moodley, "The Continued Impact of Black Consciousness in South Africa", in The Journal of Modern African Studies, vol 29, 1991, p.240; Ntloedibe, Here is a Tree, pp.51-54.

³⁸ Merrett, A Culture of Censorship, p.44.

³⁹ Ntloedibe, Here is a Tree, p.7.

the formation and signing of the Freedom Charter at Kliptown on 26 June 1955. Everatt also observed that it was because of his anti-charterist opinions that Duncan managed to dissuade the Cape Liberal Party, of which he was a member, from associating with the ANC.⁴⁰

The abiding impression that Biko and BC were virulently anti-liberal, was, however, essentially exaggerated and distorted. Biko's main criticism of the liberals was what he believed that they were (for whatever reason) upholding a double standard. He alleged that they continued to enjoy, while supporting the African liberation struggle, the privileged status inalienably accorded to them as whites by the racist apartheid system. Biko therefore believed that their call for an end to discrimination could not be genuine.⁴¹ This view was endorsed by Philip Frankel who felt that whites could not be involved in the political struggles of blacks since they were *ipso facto* also members of the oppressing class.⁴²

Biko and other protagonists of BC felt that white liberals had missed the opportunity to demonstrate that they were serious in waging war against apartheid so long as they remained members of the exclusively white ruling class. In Biko's opinion, this identification compromised white liberals and opened them to accusations of adhering to a double standard. Having also observed that white liberals had failed to effect concrete changes, they decided on two lines of action. Firstly, they were of the opinion that whites were ignorant about relationships that existed

⁴⁰ David Everatt, "The Politics of Nonracialism: White Opposition to Apartheid, 1945-1960", D.Phil., Oxford University, 1990. pp.258-260.

⁴¹ Steve Biko, "Black Souls in White Skin?", and "White Racism and Black Consciousness", in Aelred Stubbs CR (ed.), Steve Biko: I Write What I Like (London, Penguin Books, 1988), pp.33-40 and pp.75-86.

⁴² Karis and Gerhart Collection, Philip Frankel, "Black Power in South Africa", New Nation, October 1972, p.6.

between racial groups and that they needed to be educated in this regard.⁴³ BC therefore argued that white liberals should embark on a project of educating their own communities, a process which, if it were successful, would contribute positively towards the overall cause of liberation.

Secondly, they decided that whites might be allowed to work in and for black organisations on the condition that they were prepared to serve under black leadership.⁴⁴ Liberals reacted badly to these conditions and believed that they had been unfairly criticised. Such a reaction cannot be dismissed out of hand. For the first time in the history of the struggle, it seemed as if white liberals had been radically rejected by the very people whom they thought they were helping.⁴⁵ In their frustration at being so utterly and completely rejected, white liberals retaliated by accusing BC of being the ugly step-child of the Nationalists.⁴⁶

This reaction serves to demonstrate the extent to which white liberals failed to understand the finer nuances of Biko's views and BC principles. Biko's own opinions were seized upon and misinterpreted. In an interview with Gail Gerhart, Biko reiterated that he bore white liberals no grudges.⁴⁷ He emphasised that he stood for the BC principle of not collaborating with white liberals only because they were retarding the cause of black liberation.⁴⁸ In reality, however, BC depended heavily on white liberal collaboration. Although opinions circulating at the time

⁴³ Steve Biko, "White Racism and Black Consciousness," p.80.

⁴⁴ Strini Moodley, "Black Man You are still on Your Own", Rand Daily Mail, 10 Sep 1982, p.9.

⁴⁵ Archives, Alan Paton Centre, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, Alan Paton, Letter to Gatsha Buthelezi, 5/9/1971, PC1/5/4 6-9.

⁴⁶ Sath Cooper, "Main Address," Azanian People's Organisation, February 1983, p.13.

⁴⁷ Karis and Gerhart Collection, Quoted from Gail Gerhart's interview with Steve Biko, Durban, 24 Oct 1972, pp.20-24.

⁴⁸ Donald Woods, "My friend Steve Biko," Rand Daily Mail, 14 Sep 1977, p.17.

managed to create a lasting impression that both Biko and BC were anti-liberal, the opposite in fact was true.

Nengwekhulu's opinion, for example, was that neither SASO nor BC were anti-liberal in their policy. It remains a fact, however, that the opposite impression was bruited about by certain members of SASO and BC, who were radical and outspoken in the expression of their views.⁴⁹

Nengwekhulu's most telling point was that it was difficult for BC to trust the whites to such an extent that they could be allowed to continue to lead the liberation struggle.⁵⁰ Mgwebi Snail pointed out that, when Biko criticised white liberals, he was merely cautioning them and urging them to make a deeper commitment to the struggle.⁵¹ A similar opinion was expressed by Mangena who observed that the organisation was not against interaction with white organisations as such, but suggested that the thrust of BC was that blacks should be given a chance to organise themselves and be the champions of their own struggle.⁵²

The essentially pragmatic political agenda of BC impelled it (to no lesser extent than other forces ranged against the apartheid regime), to exploit access to liberal media, financial resources and political sympathy in order to promote its own agenda. Even while they criticised white liberals, BC was being helped to popularise its ideology by liberal institutions such as the University

⁴⁹ Private Collection, University of Pretoria, Ranwedzi H. Nengwekhulu, "Black Consciousness: A Philosophy for Unity and Action – Towards the Development of an Ideology," p.10.

⁵⁰ Private Collection, Ranwedzi Nengwekhulu, Black Consciousness Movement of South Africa: To the Assembly of the International University Exchange Fund, Geneva", November 1976, University of Pretoria, p.2.

⁵¹ Mabel Maimela, Interview with Mgwebi Snail, University of South Africa, Department of History, 17 Sep 1994.

⁵² Quoted from Messina's interview with Mangena, Harare, 15 Jan 1992, p.15.

Christian Movement (UCM), the Christian Institute, and the liberal white press.⁵³ (This anomaly was discussed more fully in chapter three where relations with NUSAS are described.)

Although misrepresented as such, Biko himself was clearly not anti-liberal in any simplistic way. His point of view was far more complex and he had a profound respect for the role played by prominent white liberals in the struggle. Mathews Phosa has emphasised the important role that certain white liberals played in Biko's life.⁵⁴ The examples below illustrate Biko's respect for and appreciation of white liberals, and show how he was constantly urging them towards deeper commitment and involvement.

Biko's high expectation of white liberals as a group was a barometer of the extent to which he trusted particular white liberals. Certain liberals had made such a favourable impression on the young Biko that he acknowledged their influence and contribution, even in later years. One such individual was superintendent A.P. Macnamee at Ginsberg where Biko's mother, Alice, worked as a domestic between 1951 and 1955 and where he had played with his mother's employer's children.⁵⁵ This was something which was not common in the South African racial context at the time and these happy memories remained with Biko until his later life. Macnamee's genuine kindness was also evident when he obtained employment for Biko's mother at Grey Hospital when she left his employment at the end of 1955.⁵⁶

⁵³ Karis and Gerhart, *From Protest to Challenge*, pp.71 and 73.

⁵⁴ Mathews Phosa, "Steve Biko's Legacy," *Sowetan*, 9 Sep 1997, p.8.

⁵⁵ Wilson, "Bantu Stephen Biko: A Life", p.18.

⁵⁶ "Alice Biko: Interview by Charles Nqukula", *Daily Dispatch*, 17 Aug 1978, p.4.

Aelred Stubbs, principal of the Federal Theological Seminary in Alice, was another white liberal who met Biko during a difficult period for the family. Biko, his brother Khaya, and a number of young boys in their neighbourhood had been arrested in 1963 because they were suspected of being members of the PAC underground movement, Poqo.⁵⁷ Stubbs played an important role in securing a light sentence for Khaya.⁵⁸ The relationship between Biko and Stubbs was further strengthened through a correspondence initiated by Biko when he was a student at a private Catholic high school in Natal between 1964 and 1965.⁵⁹ Biko's correspondence with Stubbs influenced both men deeply, and, in addition, Stubbs became the mentor for certain Anglican theological students, such as Drake Tshenkeng, Stanley Ntwasa and Rubin Philip. These students, all SASO members, were later to become champions of Black Theology,⁶⁰ and were destined to play important roles in propagating BC at grassroots level once they had been ordained as priests and assigned to parishes. Their precise roles were discussed in chapter two.

Stubbs's role as spiritual father and mentor to Biko was clearly an important influence on the young Biko, but BC also received extensive material assistance and moral support from Stubbs. Stubbs sympathised deeply with the organisation and understood its point of view. For this and other reasons, Stubbs went to great pains after Biko's death and after the banning of BC and its publications, to compile a collection of Biko's most essential articles from among those which had been published in the SASO Newsletter. He edited these articles and they were published, first by Bowerdean Press in 1978, and later by Penguin Books in 1988, under the title, I Write What

⁵⁷ Woods, Biko, p.70.

⁵⁸ Aelred Stubbs, "Martyr of Hope: A Personal Memoir" in Steve Biko, I Write What I Like, pp.174-175.

⁵⁹ Bernard Zylstra, "Steve Biko and Black Consciousness in South Africa", Acta Academica, vol 25, no 3, 1993, p.30, quoted from Biko's interview with Gerhart, p.15.

⁶⁰ Steve Biko, I Write What I Like, p.3, picture 5.

I Like. One of Stubbs's motives for collecting and publishing these articles was to inform the world at large about BC ideology and to give readers the opportunity to decide for themselves whether BC was indeed influenced by communism, as had been alleged by the South African Bureau of State Security (BOSS).⁶¹

David Russell was another white liberal who acted as a mentor to Biko. He was a parish priest in the Anglican Church in King William's Town. He ministered to the residents of Dimbaza, a resettlement area for blacks who had been forcibly removed from areas in and around Middelburg and Burgersdorp near Cape Town so as to create residential areas for whites in 1971. Russell was severely critical of the insufferable conditions endured by these people in his parish, and he tried in vain to negotiate with the government to improve the appalling conditions in which resettled residents were forced to live. When he found that the government was unwilling to help in any way at all, and after he had buried 38 children in the first two months of 1971, Russell embarked on a ninety-hour fast and vigil on the steps of St. George's Cathedral in Cape Town, as a way of drawing attention to the suffering of the black children in Dimbaza (and elsewhere) who were dying of malnutrition.⁶² Two years later, in 1973, he decided, as another form of protest, to attempt to live only on R5 per month for six months in order to test whether it was possible for any human being to survive on such an amount each month.⁶³ At the end of each month, he compiled a report which he sent to the minister of Bantu Administration and Development, in which he detailed how difficult it had been for him to survive on R5 per month.⁶⁴ As a result of

⁶¹ Helen Suzman, In No Uncertain Terms (Johannesburg, Jonathan Ball Publishers, 1993), p.187.

⁶² Jennifer Scott, "The Black Sash: A Case Study of Liberalism in South Africa 1955-1990", D.Phil. thesis, University of Oxford, 1991. p.200.

⁶³ South African Outlook, December 1973, p.26.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p.19.

this imaginative form of protest, the pro-government Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk decided to establish a number of factories to alleviate unemployment in the area.⁶⁵

Black activists were impressed by Russell as he increasingly and personally drew public attention to the iniquities of forced removals and involuntary resettlement. Even before Russell became acquainted with members of BC, his name was familiar among them.⁶⁶ Once the Black Consciousness Movement had been established, it was again Russell who persuaded the Anglican Church (the Church of the Province of South Africa) to allow BC to use an unused Anglican church property at 15a Leopold Street in King William's Town as offices for the organisation in 1973.⁶⁷ Through his intimacy with members of BC and his familiarity with the apartheid bureaucratic mentality, Russell was able to understand how the government and its security apparatus were using various means to sow dissension and disunity among blacks. He was, as a result, one of those white liberals who successfully managed to expose the activities of the police who had been covertly creating rivalry between township residents and hostel dwellers in the Eastern Cape.⁶⁸ This eventually culminated in his arrest on 8 August 1977. He was also prevented from entering any of the squatter camps around Bellville after he had been released on a bail of fifty Rand.⁶⁹ He then, together with other clergymen, issued a pamphlet which exposed the role of the police and which was circulated to progressive members of parliament.⁷⁰ His continual involvement with and sympathy for BC prompted the government to take strong measures in general against Anglican clergy in South Africa. Russell was one of the few white liberals whose

⁶⁵ "Priest praises factories plan for Dimbaza", The World, 5 Sep 1972. p. 2.

⁶⁶ Quoted from Gerhart's interview with Biko, p. 18.

⁶⁷ Wilson, "Bantu Stephen Biko: A Life", p. 42.

⁶⁸ Rand Daily Mail, 18 Feb 1977. p. 3.; 7 June 1977. p. 4.

⁶⁹ The South African Law Reports, vol 1, January-March 1978, p. 224.

⁷⁰ Rand Daily Mail, 30 July 1977, p. 6; Cape Times, 31 March 1977, p. 3.

house and office were raided on the day of the banning of BC and its related organisations on 19 October 1977, and he was banned for five years after the raids.⁷¹ The personal and intimate relationship between Russell and Biko was so strong by this time that, when Biko was banned in March 1973, it was Russell who broke the news to Biko's mother.⁷²

That Biko expected white liberals to make a serious contribution to the political struggle, may be deduced from his collaboration with individuals who made a genuine effort to contribute to the upliftment of Africans and the black liberation struggle. One such white liberal was Anne Hope, a founder of the Grail movement, a lay Catholic women's movement. Hope ran training courses based on Paulo Freire's methods for both SASO and the Christian Institute. She also conducted training courses in Freire's method of the conscientisation of oppressed groups in Johannesburg and Swaziland,⁷³ and, in compliance with a request from Biko, conducted an intensive leadership training for SASO members in the four months between December 1969 and March 1970.⁷⁴

Paulo Freire devised his methodology in South America as a means to combat adult illiteracy, and it was especially favoured by BC because of its suitability for adult education (a priority of the organisation), which had proved that literacy training methods, such as Freire's, stimulated creative and independent thinking while at the same time conscientising people politically.⁷⁵ Once BC leaders had been trained in the method, they successfully applied it in some of BC's literacy

⁷¹ "Editor taken to John Voster Square," Pretoria News, 19 October 1977, p.1.

⁷² Wilson, "Bantu Stephen Biko: A Life," p.42.

⁷³ Quoted from Gerhart's Interview with Biko, p.13.

⁷⁴ Karis and Gerhart Collection, "Memorandum to all SASO students: Confidential", 5/12/1969, pp.1-6.

⁷⁵ Arnold Millard,(ed.), Steve Biko: Black Consciousness in South Africa (New York, Vantage Books, 1979), p.286.

projects. One of these successes was the Winterveld literacy training project which was overseen by Mamphela Ramphele and Mangena during the summer vacation of December 1971.⁷⁶

It is significant that BC chose Winterveld as one of the areas in which to experiment with this method. Although a number of community projects were sponsored by BC in other regions, this was the first of its kind to be conducted in the Transvaal. In addition, Winterveld, an area about thirty kilometres north of Pretoria, was historically important because it had been a dumping ground in the 1950s for the victims of forced removals and was a place in which the inhabitants suffered extreme poverty and degradation and a lack of amenities of any kind. A number of the inhabitants of Winterveld had been removed from areas in and around Pretoria, areas such as Marabastad, Walmansthal and Lady Selborne. Because it had become so overpopulated and the locus of so much poverty and distress, BC deliberately targeted the area in order to teach Africans to be self-reliant in a way that would improve all the conditions of their lives. This purpose informed BC's strategy when recruiting membership in African urban areas. BC policy was thus to entice Africans to participate in community and cultural programmes before they could be recruited into joining politics.⁷⁷

Biko was therefore not simplistically anti-liberal, although it was all too easy to interpret BC's analysis in such a way. Rather, he hoped that white liberals would become more involved in those areas where it was impossible for Africans to uplift themselves on their own. Evidence of this attitude may be found in Biko's relationship with Donald Woods, the editor of the Daily Dispatch,

⁷⁶ Quoted from Messina's interview with Mangena, p. 11.

⁷⁷ Harry Mashabela, "What's Wrong with Black Politics?" , Race Relations News, vol 52, no 1, April 1990, pp.6-7.

a newspaper based in East London. Since his detention in March 1973, it had become virtually impossible for Biko to function normally in Black Consciousness projects. He agreed to Woods's proposal that he [Woods] should request Kruger, the minister of the police, prisons and justice, to relax Biko's banning order in August 1975.⁷⁸ It was hoped that, if the minister agreed, it might be possible for Biko to resume his duties in the organisation.⁷⁹ Although it was naive on the part of both Woods and Biko to imagine that Kruger might in any way agree to their request (he, of course, refused), the attempt demonstrates the extent to which Biko was prepared to rely on help from white liberals in the furtherance of the liberation struggle.

Emphasis on group leadership rather than individual leadership in BC

The other special contribution which is credited to Biko and which is regarded as one of the foundation stones of BC philosophy, was his insistence on group leadership rather than individual leadership or the cult of personality (or personalities).⁸⁰ Biko probably adopted this idea from the ANC, which has always emphasised collective leadership. The difference between the ANC and BC in this regard is that, while the ANC elects its leaders from among all suitably qualified and competent members, BC believed in training as many leaders as possible and in giving to each the opportunity to exercise leadership at the highest level of the organisation. This idea took root in Biko's mind after he had begun to appreciate that political organisations and governments often

⁷⁸ Woods, "My friend Steve Biko," Rand Daily Mail, 14 Sep 1977, p.15.

⁷⁹ Woods, Biko, p. 100.

⁸⁰ Karis and Gerhart Collection, G.N. Abram and Steve Biko, "Memorandum to executive and SASO affiliated branches", 9 Oct 1969.

fail because of a lack of genuine collective leadership. Biko realised that leaders are often corrupted by too much power.⁸¹

Biko knew that the survival of BC in the 1970s was unlikely because the government had a policy of deliberately detaining black opposition leaders and taking them out the mainstream of political activity.⁸² He therefore always emphasised the importance of working in a group so as to avoid the collapse of the movement if its leaders were prevented from functioning. Nengwekhulu has pointed out that Biko believed that group solidarity was vital for the Black Consciousness Movement to survive.⁸³ Because BC adhered strictly to this policy, it was able to survive the worst of the onslaught against it.⁸⁴ It was with this in mind that Biko and Nengwekhulu were directly involved in programmes for leadership training. Immediately after the formation of the South African Students Organisation (SASO), BC's first project was to organise leadership training so that there would be competent leaders within each region. The first formation school, as it was called, was held at the University of Natal in December 1969.⁸⁵

Survival itself depended on having as many potential leaders as possible, and BC wished to avoid repeating the mistakes which had been made by other liberation movements such as the ANC and

⁸¹ Quoted from Gerhart's interview with Biko, p. 48; "South African Students' Organisation: Report on the 1st National Formation School," 1 to 4 Dec 1969, pp.1-15.

⁸² Steve Biko, "South African Students' Organisation: Historical Background", in SASO Newsletter, February 1970, p.5.

⁸³ Ranwedzi Nengwekhulu, "The Meaning of Black Consciousness in the Struggle for Liberation in South Africa," in Dennis L. Cohen and John Daniel, (eds.), Political Economy of Africa: Selected Readings (London, Longman Group Limited, 1981), p. 200.

⁸⁴ Muntu Myeza, "Mobilise and Consolidate the Liberatory Efforts of the Oppressed," in Azania People's Organization, February 1983, p.11.

⁸⁵ Karis and Gerhart Collection, "File Wilgespruit: Private Document into Commission of Inquiry into Certain Organisations", p.36.

(especially) the PAC. After the PAC had been founded and was less than a year old, its eloquent and articulate leaders were all based in the Transvaal, particularly in Johannesburg. The organisation failed to place leaders throughout the country and, in the end, this oversight militated against the success of the organisation. This was evident when the leaders of the PAC, under their president, Sobukwe, marched to Orlando police station to give themselves up for arrest in a campaign against the pass laws. The entire leadership was jailed and the organisation was left without anyone to deliver instructions to its supporters.⁸⁶ As a result of this error of judgement on the part of PAC, the organisation could not function effectively beyond 21 March 1960, and, ever since then, the organisation has failed to recover its early vigour and popularity.⁸⁷ In contrast to this, BC deliberately deployed its leadership in regions throughout the country. Until 1973, SASO leadership was visible in the Southern Transvaal (Johannesburg) and in Durban, Natal. SASO's influence in Natal was immense because influential SASO leaders such as Steve Biko, Barney Pityana, Sath Cooper and Strini Moodley lived in Durban. In 1974 Biko was banished to King William's Town and Pityana to Port Elizabeth in 1973.⁸⁸

A formation school is one way to ensure the presence of capable leaders in each region and this concept was discussed in chapter three. Formation schools did, in fact, train and place SASO leaders in each region. When Biko was called to testify at the trial of SASO and BPC leaders between 3 and 7 May 1976, the accused represented many different regions. For example, Moodley, Cooper and Aubrey Mokoape represented the Natal region. Patrick "Terror" Lekota represented the Orange Free State. The Southern Transvaal was represented by Muntu Myeza and

⁸⁶ Pogrand, How Can A Man Die Better, p.349.

⁸⁷ Buthelezi, "The Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa", in CEAPA, p.27.

⁸⁸ Millard, Steve Biko: Black Consciousness in South Africa, p.281.

Nkwenkwe Vincent Nkomo, while Pandelani Nefolovhodwe and Gilbert "Kaunde" Sedibe, from the University of the North, represented the Northern Transvaal.⁸⁹

In order to train and empower as many leaders as possible, the movement, following Biko's suggestion, adopted a policy of electing its president for only one term.⁹⁰ Biko believed that this policy would enable the organisation to allow as many potential leaders as possible to have the opportunity to practise leadership skills and would, in addition, promote the principle of group leadership.⁹¹ For this reason, it has been alleged that Biko declined to be elected president of SASO for a second term but pushed rather for the nomination of Pityana, who became its president in 1970.⁹² Biko believed that the one-term policy would prevent any one personality from dominating the organisation and that it would therefore ultimately save it from corruption, dictatorship and personality cults.⁹³

PAC ideology and Biko's political influence

Unlike some students who first learn about politics at university, Biko came from a politically active family. His mother confirmed this in later years after his death when she averred that some distant relatives of theirs had been members of PAC when it was still a legal organisation.⁹⁴ There

⁸⁹ Ibid, p.155; Thoko Mbanjwa, (ed.), Black Review 1974/75 (Durban, Black Community Programmes, 1975), p.83.

⁹⁰ Quoted from Gerhart's interview with Biko, pp.23-25.

⁹¹ Millard, Steve Biko: Black Consciousness in South Africa, p.130.

⁹² Aelred Stubbs CR, "The story of Nyameko Barney Pityana", in South African Outlook, vol 111, no 1300, October 1979, p.150.

⁹³ Woods, Biko, p.190.

⁹⁴ "Steve Biko's last goodbye", Daily Dispatch, 17 August 1978. p.4.

are indications that the family remained loyal to the PAC even after it had been banned. Because there were numerous discussions about PAC policy in his home, Biko became familiar with political issues at an early age. He also had access to political literature.⁹⁵ He listened avidly to many political debates and discussions about PAC ideology. Such debates, he later maintained, raised his political awareness.⁹⁶ It was, however, at Lovedale High School that his political interests were sharpened by debates in which topics were invariably dominated by political questions. Although he only studied for a very short while (three months) at Lovedale, the institution served to conscientise him politically.⁹⁷ This has been confirmed by Pityana, who has suggested that Lovedale was the cradle which nurtured Biko's subsequent political involvement.⁹⁸

Later, at the Medical School of the University of Natal, Biko forged strong ties with friends from PAC circles. Mokoape, who was known on campus for being a member of the African Students' Union of South Africa (ASUSA), the student wing of the PAC, became one of Biko's confidantes.⁹⁹ Mokoape had been involved in the PAC since its inception in 1959. According to Progrund, he was (at age of 16) the youngest person among those PAC activists who were arrested on 21 March 1960.¹⁰⁰ Biko was inspired by his conversations with Mokoape about PAC policy, and he found such interchanges both challenging and intellectually stimulating.¹⁰¹ It was this strong bond between Biko and ex-members of PAC that enabled prominent former members of PAC to play a prominent role in the organisation when the Black People's Convention emerged.

⁹⁵ Wilson, "Bantu Stephen Biko: A Life", p.18.

⁹⁶ Quoted from Gerhart's interview with Biko, p.16.

⁹⁷ Ibid, p.16.

⁹⁸ N. Barney Pityana, "Introduction: Bantu Stephen Biko: In perspective", in Aelred Stubbs CR, (ed.), Steve Biko: I Write What I Like, p.4.

⁹⁹ Quoted from Gerhart's interview with Biko. pp.2-4.

¹⁰⁰ Progrund, How Can a Man Die Better, p.134.

¹⁰¹ Ramphele, A Life, p.60.

According to Sipho Buthelezi, Paul Tsotetsi, the first chairperson of the Johannesburg Central Branch of the BPC, was a hard-core cadre of the PAC before it was outlawed in 1960. He further pointed out that Zeph Mothopeng was active in the organisation until it was banned in 1977.¹⁰² Although a staunch member of PAC, Mothopeng showed his sympathy with Black Consciousness philosophy by accepting an invitation to the 7th SASO General Students' Council in July 1975, where he read a paper entitled, "Imperialist penetration into African universities". In this paper he proposed the then revolutionary concept that blacks should be in charge of the administration of black universities.¹⁰³

Because it seemed as though there were some strong similarities between the PAC and BC, one group of exiled PAC members identified itself with the development of the Black Peoples; Convention. It claimed to have had a direct influence on and control of the organisation. The group, nicknamed "the Sobukwe executive", was based in London under the leadership of Nana Mahomo and Matthew Nkoana.¹⁰⁴ Mahomo was a prominent member of the PAC, together with Philip Kgosana, and they organised demonstrations immediately after the Sharpeville shootings.¹⁰⁵

Biko's intellectual precedents in PAC ideology did not, however, mean that he was not open minded enough to accommodate contributions made by other black political organisations. On the contrary, he was reported to have consulted supporters of the ANC¹⁰⁶ and of the Non-European Unity Movement (NEUM).¹⁰⁷ Biko was able to accommodate both of these African

¹⁰² Buthelezi, "The Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa in the late 1960s ", p.30.

¹⁰³ SASO Newsletter, July/August 1975. vol 5, no 2, p.4.

¹⁰⁴ Buthelezi, "The Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa in the late 1960s ", p.31.

¹⁰⁵ Quoted from Gerhart's interview with Biko, p.41.

¹⁰⁶ Pityana, "Introduction: Bantu Stephen Biko", p.11.

¹⁰⁷ Halisi, "Biko and Black Consciousness Philosophy", p.101.

organisations because he was essentially open-minded and had had the opportunity of working with individuals with an ANC background, people such as Pityana.¹⁰⁸ Because BC was basically in harmony with the wider aims of the ANC, PAC and NEUM, the organisation received support from the remnants of these organisations who remained in the country. They were able to identify themselves with BC to the extent that it embodied some of the elements of their own banned organisations.¹⁰⁹

While former PAC members were actively involved in BC, former ANC members, such as Nthato Motlana, who served as one of the Board of Directors of Black Community Programmes, one of the BC projects between 1973 to 1976, were also involved.¹¹⁰ His activism during the 1970s and 1980s resulted in Motlana's detention. This was received with disbelief and condemnation because Motlana was viewed as a moderate by liberal establishment organisations when compared to members of the Black Consciousness Movement.¹¹¹ Similarly, Winnie Mandela, known to have been associated with the ANC because her jailed husband was one of its leading members, played a substantial role in the formation of the Black Women's Federation (BWF) in December 1975, and was subsequently detained because of her activities in the BWF.¹¹²

¹⁰⁸ Maimela, Interview with Nengwekhulu, University of Pretoria, Department of Public Administration, 20 May 1996.

¹⁰⁹ Halisi, "Biko and Black Consciousness Philosophy", p.101.

¹¹⁰ Archives Unisa, Centre for African Studies, Black Community Programmes 1976 Report, #AAS 167, p.2.

¹¹¹ Joyce Harris, "A letter to the PM ", Rand Daily Mail, 4 August 1976, p.16; Post, 18 October 1979, p.7.

¹¹² Asha Rambally, (ed.), Black Review 1975-76 (Durban, Black Community Programmes, 1977), p. 110.

It has been claimed that members of the exiled ANC, especially those who held Africanist principles, were behind the formation of the BPC.¹¹³ Whether or not this was the case, it is true that, since BC attempted to embrace elements from the ideologies of other African political organisations, it was easy for those in exile to claim that they had made a contribution to the establishment of black organisations. This explains why Neville Alexander, known to have been an ex-supporter of NEUM, was also a supporter of BC after his release from Robben Island.¹¹⁴ Because he was a banned person, Alexander was allowed only severely restricted contact with others. He nevertheless wrote articles on BC which were published internationally. One of these articles circulated in South Africa only after the unbanning of the black liberation movements in 1990.¹¹⁵ Alexander, however, had remained in secret contact with BC leadership, and with Biko in particular. The nature of their contact is discussed in a later chapter.

BC's policy of accommodating, wherever possible, the policies of other African and liberationist ideologies, and of acknowledging as authentic those contributions made by banned organisations and their leaders, who were either in exile and in prison, inspired ordinary people to support its tenets.¹¹⁶ This principle of acknowledging the contribution of banned African organisations, was part and parcel of Biko's policy. Before his death in detention in 1977, he held that the role of the BC Movement, as it was still operating legally in the country, should be to unify all authentic African liberation organisations (by which he meant mainly the ANC and PAC).¹¹⁷ The same

¹¹³ Buthelezi, "The Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa in the late 1960", p.32.

¹¹⁴ Wilson, "Bantu Stephen Biko: A Life", pp.66-67.

¹¹⁵ Neville Alexander, "Black Consciousness: A Reactionary Tendency?", in Pityana et al, Bounds of Possibility, pp.238-251.

¹¹⁶ Pityana, "Introduction: Bantu Stephen Biko", p.11.

¹¹⁷ "Steve Biko speaks: Our strategy for liberation", Christianity and Crisis, vol 37, no 22, p. 331; The Argus, 26 June 1980, p.25; Daily Dispatch, 22 April 1982, p.2.

opinions were held by members of the ANC, especially those in exile. They had accepted the fact that BC was a force with which it had to negotiate since it was the only legitimate organisation which was allowed to operate in the country at that time.¹¹⁸ This might have been the reason why Biko pursued this particular principle. It was later alleged, on the day when Biko was arrested with Peter Jones, who was the head of Black Community Programme in the Eastern Cape region,¹¹⁹ that Biko was heading to Grahamstown and that the purpose of the visit was to have confidential discussions with both members of BPC and with Alexander.¹²⁰

At this time, Biko was gathering relevant information and opinions as he examined the viability of making a strategic trip overseas. The former director of the International University Exchange Fund based in Geneva, Switzerland, Lars Gunnar Erikson, has disclosed that Biko's visit abroad was intended to discuss the viability of forming a United Front of the BC, the ANC and the PAC.¹²¹ The plan, however, was unsuccessful as it was intercepted by agents of the South African government security apparatus, possibly the Bureau of State Security (BOSS).¹²² Evidence of Biko's secret plan to leave South Africa was used by the government as a justification for Biko's arrest.

Furthermore, the government cited Biko's alleged involvement in plans to overthrow the Nationalist government as their reason for Biko's August 1977 arrest.¹²³ Another unconfirmed

¹¹⁸ Govan Mbeki, Sunset at Midday: Latshoni Lang emnini! (Nolwazi Educational Publishers, 1996), p.36.

¹¹⁹ The Star, 27 Feb 1979, p.26.

¹²⁰ Unisa Archives, The Biko Inquest, vol 4, November 1977, p.161.

¹²¹ The Argus, 26 Feb 1980, p.25.

¹²² Maimela, Interview with Nengwekhulu.

¹²³ "Commentary: What is Black Consciousness?", Pretoria News, 20 Sep 1977, p.12; Rand Daily Mail, 9 Feb 1979, p.13; Weekend World, 18 Sep 1977, p.5; Phil Mtimkulu, "When

and speculative report, which was heard at the United States Senate terrorism hearings by the South African exile Nokonono Kave, stated that the ANC had conspired with the government in Biko's arrest.¹²⁴ She argued that his distinguished leadership and the ever-increasing popularity which BC was gaining among the rank and file of ordinary people would jeopardise the extent of ANC support in the country.¹²⁵ The Kave statement, however, was categorically denied by both the ANC and the Biko family.¹²⁶ Her reasons for attempting to implicate the ANC in a plot to arrest Biko was that, since she had been in exile and was then in the process of returning to South Africa, it suited her to try to discredit the ANC. She was apparently attempting some kind of secret agreement with the South African government, an agreement which would have guaranteed her immunity from harassment in the South African satellite homeland of the Ciskei.¹²⁷ One might have expected that this incident would have been elucidated in the current Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings. Since, however, the Biko family is opposed to the TRC process, the circumstances which led to his arrest continue to remain a mystery.

Another opinion about how the government came to know about Biko's secret plans to leave the country was proposed by Biko's former secretary, Hester Joseph, when she suggested that one of the board members of the Black Community Programme in Natal was a government informer and that he had divulged the plan.¹²⁸ The BC also gained politically from having to some extent incorporated the ideas of other prominent African political organisations when, in later years, it

Kruger Raised Laughs", Weekend World, 18 Sep 1977, p.5.

¹²⁴ Daily Dispatch, 22 April 1982, p.2.

¹²⁵ Ibid, p.2.

¹²⁶ Ibid, p.3.

¹²⁷ "Strange story of Miss Kave", Eastern Province Herald, 14 April 1982, p.8.

¹²⁸ Private Collection. Quoted from Messina's interview with Hester Joseph, Durban, 11 July 1992, p.8.

became easier for the victims of June 1976 uprising (mostly obvious products of BC thinking) to be accommodated in the ANC and the PAC while in exile.¹²⁹ It has been suggested that quite a number of the students from that time later trained in ANC military training camps.¹³⁰

The reason why more exiles joined the ANC rather than the PAC (even though BC's ideology was in many ways closer to the latter than it was to the former), was that the PAC was portrayed by many Western countries as being far more radical than the ANC. As a result, PAC became unpopular and received far less material support. The only country which actively supported the PAC was the People's Republic of China, which only offered military training.¹³¹ On the whole, therefore, the PAC received funding which was inadequate to support a large number of recruits and so, as a result, few of the 1976 students joined the PAC.

How Biko's interest in literature broadened his political views

Biko was a gifted child and his exposure in early childhood to politics evoked in him a strong desire to enrich and expand his knowledge of politics. By the time he entered university, he was therefore already politically sophisticated to an unusual degree, and his knowledge of political, economic and social ideas enabled him to give definite shape and direction to Black Consciousness philosophy. BC members were notable for their interest in political literature and even when in prison they attempted to lay their hands on banned texts, especially those of Karl

¹²⁹ Kogila Moodley, "The Continued Impact of Black Consciousness in South Africa", in The Journal of Modern African Studies, vol 29, no 2, 1991, p.250.

¹³⁰ The World, 30 Dec 1976, p.1.

¹³¹ "South Africa: Trouble for PAC", Africa Confidential, vol 19, no 9, 28 April, 1978, p.3.

Marx.¹³² Biko took it upon himself to analyse texts for their suitability and relevance to BC ideals. Such texts originated mainly from three geographical areas and they were concerned chiefly with the analysis and criticism of the phenomenon of racism.

African literature was the first and primary focus of Biko's investigations because he was concerned to locate the significance of African identity in Africa itself.¹³³ The 1960s was also the decade during which African countries were obtaining independence from their erstwhile colonial rulers, and so the literature which was being produced before and during this period was relevant to the historic colonial enslavement of black South Africans and the general conditions in which blacks found themselves in South Africa. Such literature, of course, tended to be extremely radical and it concentrated its critique against the colonial powers and their apparatus of oppression.¹³⁴ Biko made the point that articles which were chosen for discussion evoked favourable responses from members.¹³⁵ He pointed out that his favourite African authors were Senghor, Diop and Fanon.¹³⁶ It has been suggested that Frantz Fanon's writings influenced Biko to use the blanket term "oppressors" to refer to whites and that white liberals were included in the class of oppressors. The oppressed were only blacks, but "blacks" in Black Consciousness interpretation included Africans, Coloureds and Indians.¹³⁷ Fanon's writings could not fail to exert a powerful influence since their central themes were an analysis and critique of colonialism, capitalism and

¹³² Quoted from Messina's interview with Mangena, p.4.

¹³³ Quoted from Gerhart's interview with Biko, p.11; Godwin Mohlomi, "Black search for identity and dignity", The World, 15 July 1976, p.2.

¹³⁴ Quoted from Gerhart's interview with Biko, p.11.

¹³⁵ Ibid, p.11.

¹³⁶ Ibid, p.11.

¹³⁷ Millard, Steve Biko: Black Consciousness in South Africa, p.xxv.

racist ideology.¹³⁸ His work was widely influential. While it shaped BC thinking, it was also crucial in informing analyses of political conditions in the West and the rest of the world.

Another African author who influenced Biko was Aimé Césaire. His literature dealt mainly with racial issues and so was invaluable to Biko as he tried to understand and unravel the complexities of the South African racial, political, social and economic situation.¹³⁹ Biko kept himself abreast with political developments in Africa by reading literature written by the heads of African countries. In his writings, he frequently quoted excerpts from speeches and writings of Ghana's Kwame Nkrumah, Zambia's Kenneth Kaunda and Tanzania's Julius Nyerere. The latter had formulated his own African brand of socialism and was a major critic of the apartheid regime.¹⁴⁰ Similarly, Malawi's president, Hastings Kamuzu Banda, was one of Biko's favourites on account of the militancy of his views during the early years of his presidency.¹⁴¹ Biko's main focus of interest at the time was on news of political developments from the rest of the continent,¹⁴² and, because of his interest in the literature and news from the African continent, his followers in BC became similarly absorbed.¹⁴³

A book which Biko found helpful for analysing and understanding the government's philosophy about racial segregation¹⁴⁴ was the South African book which was banned at the time but which was available through underground connections: it was Edward Roux's Time Longer than Rope:

¹³⁸ Halisi, "Biko and Black Consciousness Philosophy", p.109.

¹³⁹ Biko, "White Racism and Black Consciousness", p.75.

¹⁴⁰ Quoted from Gerhart's interview with Biko, p.13.

¹⁴¹ Biko, "White Racism and Black Consciousness", p.83.

¹⁴² Quoted from Gerhart's interview with Biko, p.35.

¹⁴³ Private Collection, Ranwedzi Nengwekhulu, "Black Consciousness: A Philosophy For Unity and Action Towards the Development of an Ideology", p.5.

¹⁴⁴ Quoted from Gerhart's Interview with Biko, p.20.

the Black Man's Struggle for Freedom in South Africa.¹⁴⁵ African American literature also played a substantial role in shaping Biko's BC philosophy in South Africa. Terms such as "black", "pride", "self-determination" and "psychological liberation", which were the main contributions made by BC philosophy to attaining total liberation, were reported to have originated in African American literature.¹⁴⁶

Biko, however, and other forerunners of the Black Consciousness Movement, such as Mangena, categorically denied the allegation which was constantly levelled by the government and other critics of BC that BC was a mindless replication of the radicalism of African American Black Power.¹⁴⁷ The oppression suffered by the two communities was different in kind. They argued that, on the one hand, American oppression developed out of slavery while, on the other hand, South African oppression had developed from the consequences of colonisation.¹⁴⁸ Government critics merely attempted to undermine BC in crude political ways and so in the end failed to learn whatever useful lessons they might have learned from accepting the existence of BC and meeting the challenge which it offered.

When Biko found articles challenging and thought-provoking, he circulated them among SASO members who held radical opinions.¹⁴⁹ Among such articles were some by Stokely Carmichael, the 1966 leader of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee. Also circulated was

¹⁴⁵ Edward Roux, Time Longer Than Rope: The Black Man's Struggle for Freedom in South Africa (New York, Madison, 1966).

¹⁴⁶ George M. Fredrickson, Black Liberation: A Comparative History of Black Ideologies in the United States and South Africa (New York, Oxford University Press, 1995), pp.278, 302.

¹⁴⁷ Quoted from Gerhart's interview with Biko, pp.11-12.

¹⁴⁸ Quoted from Messina's interview with Mangena, p.10.

¹⁴⁹ Quoted from Gerhart's interview with Biko, pp.11 and 21.

Carmichael and Charles Hamilton's book, Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America.¹⁵⁰

Pityana reports that works by personalities influential in the Black Power and Civil Rights movements, writers such as Eldridge Cleaver, Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr., were also often read and discussed.¹⁵¹

Some articles were utilised specifically for the way in which they answered to the current political dilemmas in which students found themselves. For example, one of the articles, "The Black University", discussed problems frequently encountered by black students when coping with a European-orientated curriculum.¹⁵² The main way in which radical African American literature seems to have been useful was that it helped people to learn to fend for themselves without reliance on white liberals. This was the main emphasis in the writings of Malcolm X and Stokely Carmichael.

It is also interesting to note that once SASO had been established, the organisation had access to the radical literature published by Panaf, and that these included titles by Kwame Nkrumah, Mao Tsetung, Malcolm X and Stokely Carmichael. One of these articles, "The Spectre of Black Power", postulated that Africans were exploited by Europeans all over the world, irrespective of

¹⁵⁰ Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton, Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America (New York, Random House, 1967), p.198.

¹⁵¹ Karis and Gerhart Collection, Nyameko Pityana, "Afro-American Influences on the Black Consciousness Movement: A paper read to the conference on Afro-American Interrelationships with Southern Africa", 27-29 May 1979, pp.16-21.

¹⁵² Archives, Unisa, Documentation for African Studies, J. Vince, "The Black University", Accession 153, pp.156-164.

geographical locality. The article suggested alternative ways of challenging such racial exploitation.¹⁵³

Although liberals acclaimed Biko's distinguished contribution to poetical theory and revolutionary strategy after his death, the South African government never relented in its campaign to discredit him. A major attempt to blacken his reputation posthumously and to distort his contribution to BC appeared in the form of a mysterious (but suspicious) book entitled, Steve Biko: Martyr of the Revolution. In an attempt to simulate verisimilitude, the supposed African author, "James Mbabane", claimed to have been Biko's intimate friend.¹⁵⁴ It is fairly clear now that the government's intention in sponsoring these fraudulent memoirs was to try to create scepticism about the authenticity and accuracy of Donald Woods's book, Biko, which was circulating widely throughout Europe and the United States and which depicted apartheid as the brutal system it actually was. However, intensive investigation on the part of both European and South African journalists eventually proved that "James Mbabane" was unknown to either members of Biko's family or members of his political circle.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵³ Kwame Nkrumah, The Spectre of Black Power (London, Panaf Publications Limited, 1968), p.15

¹⁵⁴ The Star, 21 July 1978, p.7; Evening Post, 26 July 1978, p.5; Rand Daily Mail, 29 July 1978, p.2.

¹⁵⁵ Rand Daily Mail, 29 July 1978, p.2.

Biko's influence and the spread of the Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa

A number of individuals played a prominent role and made a substantial contribution in the early stages after the founding of BC. Those who contributed most had been Biko's close associates before the movement gained popularity. To a large extent, their contact with him encouraged them to be involved in politics and venture into political activism. Two close associates of Biko who were especially committed to the struggle in the early days, and who will therefore be examined in this subsection, are Pityana and Nengwekhulu. The former played a key role in the early growth of the organisation, while the latter's contribution was made mainly in the development of international connections.

Nyameko Barney Pityana and Black Consciousness

Pityana got involved with the Black Consciousness Movement by joining SASO. He had known Biko since they were both at high school in Lovedale, and had both been expelled, along with other students, because they participated in a strike in 1963. Pityana's greatest contribution to the organisation was made when BC was still being built up. A strong friendship based on common political goals began in the winter holiday of 1967, when Biko visited Pityana at New Brighton in Port Elizabeth, after the former had just returned from the annual congress of NUSAS at Rhodes University, Grahamstown.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁶ Pityana, "Introduction: Bantu Stephen Biko", pp.4-5.

By then he was at Fort Hare University and Biko was a student at the University of Natal Medical School. Pityana was the first member of BC to have been associated with a multi-racial organisation before the formation of SASO in 1966. In 1968 he was elected president of the Anglican Students Federation (ASF), a multi-racial religious organisation.¹⁵⁷ Blacks were not happy in these multiracial gatherings because they were dominated by the whites who always tenanted the leadership, but it was in these very institutions that they equipped themselves with the necessary skills to lead. As a result of his participation in multi-racial gatherings, Pityana became an asset to the organisation once it had been founded, as he was one of those to give SASO a firm foundation and a sound direction.¹⁵⁸

The 1967 meeting was followed by another one a year later during the winter holidays of 1968. The two men had agreed to introduce political activities at Fort Hare University where Pityana would be in a position to coordinate such activities. Immediately after the re-opening of the university, a meeting of the students was called, which was chaired by Pityana. One of the issues raised was student dissatisfaction with the general running of the administration.¹⁵⁹ The meeting resolved to address these problems with the university authorities. There was, however, a strike before the meeting could take place. As a result, the university authorities expelled twenty-one students, including Pityana, Justice Moloto, Chris Mokoditso and Hlaku Rachidi.¹⁶⁰ All of those who were expelled from the Fort Hare University in 1968 were subsequently involved in the Black Consciousness Movement until the banning of the organisation in October 1977. Both Moloto

¹⁵⁷ Aelred Stubbs, "The Story of Nyameko Barney Pityana", in South Africa Outlook, October 1979, p.150.

¹⁵⁸ Quoted from Gerhart's interview with Biko, p.18.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid*, p.50.

¹⁶⁰ Post, 22 Jan 1979, p.5.

and Mokoditsoa were on the University Christian Movement (UCM) executive between 1969 until its closure in 1972, while Rachidi was the last president of the Black People's Convention (BPC). This has been discussed earlier in the thesis.

After Pityana's expulsion from Fort Hare, he based himself at New Brighton, Port Elizabeth. When SASO was formed he was the regional representative and worked with students from Fort Hare, such as Ben Langa and Jeff Baqwa.¹⁶¹ Biko was elected SASO president at its inauguration in July 1969 at the University of the North, and Pityana later succeeded him as its president in July 1970 at the second annual congress.¹⁶² As the second president of SASO, Pityana continued to build SASO on the foundations which Biko had laid. One of the problems which Pityana had to confront was how to maintain balanced and constructive relations between SASO and NUSAS, especially because the former suspected the latter of interfering in black student activities. One such incident occurred when the SRCs of the Universities of Stellenbosch and the Witwatersrand invited the black universities of Fort Hare, Natal (black division), Zululand and Turfloop to celebrate with them the tenth anniversary of Republic Day on 31 May 1971.¹⁶³

Because of the uncertainty surrounding SASO's future as a black student movement, a number of the students were not yet sufficiently convinced of its viability to support it. Pityana, in his capacity as its president, played a major role in persuading wavering black students to throw in their lot with SASO. He embarked on a national tour to recruit new students to the organisation. His greatest success occurred on a trip to Fort Hare in March 1971, when he helped students

¹⁶¹ "Notes on the contributors", in Ben Langa, (ed.), Creativity and Black Development (Durban, SASO Publication, April 1973), p.iv.

¹⁶² Stubbs, "The Story of Nyameko Barney Pityana", p.150.

¹⁶³ SASO Newsletter, vol 1, no 1, May 1971, p.3.

there to establish an SRC that would support founding a branch of SASO on the campus.¹⁶⁴ He also visited the University of the Western Cape in March 1971. So many students were impressed by his persuasive and eloquent appeal that a large number of them joined SASO immediately. This was followed by the formal establishment of a branch in May.¹⁶⁵

Pityana also kept in contact with non-students who were interested in the organisation. He once read a paper which explained the philosophy and the objectives of BC at a conference held at the Donaldson Orlando Community Centre in Soweto in March 1971.¹⁶⁶ In order to encourage and support student activities there, Pityana attended the SASO week organised by the University of the North's local committee of SASO, where he delivered an opening address entitled, "The Challenge of the 70s".¹⁶⁷

SASO leaders realised that Pityana's contribution to the growth and development of the organisation was so vital that the executive requested permission from the University of Natal to allocate them an office from which Pityana could operate in a full-time capacity as the general secretary of SASO.¹⁶⁸ He was then given an office by the university in Taylor Residence. He subsequently moved to Durban in 1971, whereupon he and Biko together purchased a four-roomed house in one of the local townships where the two families lived together until February 1973, when Biko was banished to King William's Town and Pityana to Port Elizabeth. These were the first two banning orders imposed on members of Black Consciousness.¹⁶⁹ As with most of the

¹⁶⁴ SASO Newsletter, vol 1, no 2, June 1971, p.5.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid*, p.5.

¹⁶⁶ Shadrack Kumalo, "Future of Blacks Lies in Learning," The World, 9 March 1971, p.3.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid*, p.4.

¹⁶⁸ Quoted from Gerhart's interview with Biko, p. 39.

¹⁶⁹ Stubbs, Steve Biko: I Write What I Like, p.181.

executive and organising members of BC, Pityana's active role was terminated by continued bannings and detentions by the racist government between 1973 and 1979, and these continued until he left the country and went into exile.¹⁷⁰

Randwedzi Harry Nengwekhulu and Black Consciousness

Another contemporary of Steve Biko who played a leading role in the formation of SASO and the BC Movement was Randwedzi Nengwekhulu. Most ordinary Africans living in the rural areas where there is little or no access to media such as newspapers and radio were often unaware of the ferment of new and radical ideas among the oppressed blacks of South Africa. Nengwekhulu was such a person. He lived in Vendale, where he attended high school until 1966. Since he paid regular visits to his father who had a house in Chiawelo in Soweto, he eventually became politically aware, a fact attributable to his exposure to newspapers which he found in his father's house. His reading made a profound impression on Nengwekhulu, who, until then, had been politically illiterate. As a result of these holiday visits and his early politicisation, he became one of the few students at a rural high school in the northern part of the country to become involved in student politics at an early age.¹⁷¹ Nengwekhulu reached political maturity when he enrolled at the University of the North in 1967. SASO was the first student organisation in which he became a full member and participant. He was even more radical than either Biko and Pityana.¹⁷² Nengwekhulu's radicalism became the subject of criticism among adult white liberals who were

¹⁷⁰ Stubbs, "The Story of Nyameko Barney Pityana", p. 150.

¹⁷¹ Maimela, Interview with Nengwekhulu, University of Pretoria, 25 May 1996.

¹⁷² Woods, Biko, pp. 197, 200.

uncomfortable with his uncompromising style when approaching issues. His style was often offensive to white liberals but, in reality, he had never had any opportunity (in rural Vendlan and the Northern Transvaal) to learn the kind of personal trust and interactive skills which might have enabled him to be less abrasive towards white liberals.

Liberal students, however, felt differently about Nengwekhulu. They saw and appreciated his sound leadership potential. NUSAS, through its president Duncan Innes and vice-president Horst Kleinschmidt, offered Nengwekhulu an executive post within the organisation as part of their strategy to keep the University of the North as a member of NUSAS.¹⁷³ When Nengwekhulu declined the offer, it was accepted by Ernest Ralekgetho, a student from St. Peter's Seminary,¹⁷⁴ who took over the new portfolio of Nuswel, which was responsible for welfare activities and which had been created in 1970.¹⁷⁵

Nengwekhulu, like Biko, may be considered one of the architects and builders of the BC Movement. He was one of that first group to develop a political outlook of their own, a world view which was embodied in the philosophy of BC.¹⁷⁶ According to Ramphele, Nengwekhulu and Biko were the first facilitators of the leadership training programme (manifested in formation schools), which played such an important part in building up the strength of BC.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷³ "NUSAS leaders will affiliate Turfloop," The World, 27 May 1969, p.4.

¹⁷⁴ "NUSAS Picks a strong executive", Star, 23 July 1970, p.3.

¹⁷⁵ Maimela, Interview with Nengwekhulu, University of Pretoria, 25 May 1996.

¹⁷⁶ "Thami Zami, Publicity Secretary of the Black People's Convention, Outlines the History and the Philosophy of Black Consciousness", Daily Dispatch, 14 March 1977, p.3.

¹⁷⁷ Mamphela Ramphele, "Black Consciousness and Development", in Pityana et al, Bounds of Possibility, p.164.

Nengwekhulu played an active role in the launch of SASO in 1969. He also led SASO delegations to the first and the second conferences held in Bloemfontein on 24 April 1971 and at the Jabulani Amphitheatre in Soweto between 17 and 19 December 1971, where an attempt was made to launch a new broader black political organisation: the Black People Convention (BPC).¹⁷⁸ The need to establish such an organisation arose out of the fact that SASO was intended only for students. The Black People Convention was therefore launched in 1972 to cater for the political aspirations of those who were not students, but it continued to maintain strong links with SASO and was profoundly influenced by BC ideology.

Nengwekhulu's strong political convictions and some of the statements he issued in interviews and speeches made him quite unpopular as early as 1971.¹⁷⁹ One such incident was his address during the commemoration of Sharpeville in March 1971, when he described whites as people with violent attitudes and a "strange people with their strange logic".¹⁸⁰ On this occasion Biko warned Nengwekhulu against the use of inflammatory appeals which might incite audiences to dangerous action.¹⁸¹ Together with Themba Sono, the SASO president, and Pityana, the general secretary, Nengwekhulu represented SASO to plead with the university council for the readmission of expelled students at the University of the North, after the Tiro affair.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁸ Ben Khoapa, (ed.), Black Review 1972 (Durban, Black Community Programme, 1973), p.9.

¹⁷⁹ Larry McDonald, "The Steve Biko Case: Has Our Government Backed Another African Terrorist Movement?", in Congressional Record - Extension of Remarks, E 6510, 21 October 1977, p.2.

¹⁸⁰ Millard, Steve Biko: Black Consciousness in South Africa, p.185; Woods, Biko, pp.200-201.

¹⁸¹ Quoted from Gerhart's interview with Biko, p. 19.

¹⁸² "Turfloop may get white support," The World, 9 May 1972, pp.1, 16.

Supporting the reinstatement of these students at the university was of crucial importance for SASO. The University of the North was SASO's stronghold. Abram Tiro was the president of the SRC which had affiliated to SASO. He was expelled from the university after he had delivered a speech at the graduation ceremony on 29 April 1972. In his speech he had criticised, in a general way, the systematic cruelties and atrocities of Bantu Education. Tiro accused the university authorities of perpetuating racism, even at graduation ceremonies, by giving preferential seating to white guests who had little stake in what was taking place, while black parents who had accompanied their own children were either seated in the back rows or had to stand outside the hall because there was no accommodation for them.¹⁸³ Tiro's speech contained political expressions which were commonly used in SASO gatherings.

At the Annual General Student Council which was held between 2 and 9 July 1972, Nengwekhulu was elected as a permanent organiser for SASO. This post was to last for three years. Then, when he was banned the following year, Tiro had to fill the vacancy.¹⁸⁴

Nengwekhulu's main responsibility was to facilitate communication between the national, regional and branch levels of SASO. He first travelled between Johannesburg and Durban since the main centre of SASO activity was Durban. Nengwekhulu's main priority was to involve high school students in protest activities. He strongly supported the idea of involving the youth in politics.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸³ Onkgopotse Ramothibi Tiro, "Bantu Education", in South African Outlook, vol 102, June/July, 1972, pp.99, 102.

¹⁸⁴ Siphon Buthelezi, "The Emergence of Black Consciousness: A Historical Appraisal", in Pityana et al, Bounds of Possibility, p. 114.

¹⁸⁵ "Minutes of Executive Council Meeting held at Edendale Lay Ecumenical Centre, Pietermaritzburg, 1-3 Dec 1972, pp.4-5.

This explains his establishment of a number of student organisations in the Transvaal region.¹⁸⁶ His presence was reported at the launching of the foundation of the Africa Students' Movement, the Springs Students' Association, and the Nigel Student Association in August 1972.¹⁸⁷

Nengwekhulu supported the introduction of literacy projects in areas where there was a high incidence of illiteracy. Subsequently, he moved a motion in support of fully-fledged and semi-independent literacy projects which would be run by SASO.¹⁸⁸ He was one of the first members of SASO to be arrested in 1972 by the security police for being "an idle or undesirable Bantu", and was charged for having been in Johannesburg illegally.¹⁸⁹ This shows the extent to which his political activities as SASO's permanent organiser angered and annoyed the government. Although he was perceived as radical from a white point of view, he managed nevertheless to work together with white liberals in their organisations which offered financial benefits to SASO. He represented SASO in the University Christian Movement and on the Christian Scholarship Fund as a committee member.¹⁹⁰ He addressed a conference hosted by the South African Institute of Race Relations. In his address he attempted to explain the policy and philosophy of the BC Movement and suggested the role which the white community, and especially white liberal organisations, might play in the strategy of political liberation for Africans.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁶ Nozipho J Diseko, "The origins and development of the South African Student's Movement (SASM): 1968-1976", in Journal of South African Studies, vol 18, no 1, March 1991, p.57.

¹⁸⁷ Archives, Unisa, Centre for African Studies, "Reports Presented at the 3rd General Students' Council," A153, p.22.

¹⁸⁸ "Minutes of the proceedings of the 3rd General Students Council of SASO," St. Peters' Seminary, Hammanskraal, 2-9 July 1972, p.23.

¹⁸⁹ SASO Newsletter, September-October 1972, p.2.

¹⁹⁰ "Reports presented at the third General Students Council," 2-9 July 1972, p.13.

¹⁹¹ "Link between Blacks and Whites worsening", The World, 19 March 1971. p.4.

The post of permanent organiser of SASO exposed Nengwekhulu to the international community. After his banning in February 1973, and while banished in Sibasa, he was a contact person between individual students and international organisations that were keen to offer funds for the benefit of Africans. It was reported that he enjoyed an intimate relationship with Lars-Gunnar Eriksson, the Swedish director of the International University Exchange Fund (IUEF) based in Geneva.¹⁹²

The relationship between BC and the Swedish Fund was established through Aubrey Mokoape who visited Scandinavia immediately after the formation of SASO.¹⁹³ It was through such initiatives taken by Mokoape that it was possible for Nengwekhulu, as the first permanent organiser, to have contact with the IUEF. The BC self-help projects were funded mainly by the IUEF, under the supervision of Nengwekhulu.¹⁹⁴ These funds were first used in 1972 to assist those students who had become the victims of the University of the North (Turfloop) expulsion.¹⁹⁵ The reason why the IUEF became interested in SASO was that it was competing to secure dominance over SASO. The IUEF recognised the importance of the emergence of such a radical organisation, something which the international community had been watching with interest and anticipation.¹⁹⁶

There is some evidence to support the belief that IUEF was interested in having influence over SASO. The director of IUEF, Eriksson, was not prepared to admit that funding oppressed

¹⁹² Ken Owen, "War in the shadows: How the ANC took control", Sunday Times, 19 October 1980, p.28.

¹⁹³ Maimela, Interview with Nengwekhulu, University of Pretoria, 25 May 1996.

¹⁹⁴ "Pay the piper, call the tune", Sunday Times, 19 October 1980, p. 28

¹⁹⁵ "Report presented at the third General Students Council," 2-9 July 1972, p.16.

¹⁹⁶ "IUEF now battling to stave off liquidation," The Star, 3 Nov 1980, p.2.

students benefited them, and maintained that the organisation's interest in student organisations such as SASO was merely to provide them with the funds for education and training programmes.¹⁹⁷ Ken Owen in the Sunday Times suggested that it was because of his strong links with members of IUEF that Nengwekhulu was able to receive funds via old friends in NUSAS and that, because of this assistance, he managed to flee the country and settle in Botswana on 18 September 1973.¹⁹⁸ Nengwekhulu's version, however, differs from Owen's and he maintains that he left the country of his own accord.¹⁹⁹ Owen twisted these facts so that it might appear that both NUSAS and BC were being funded at the time by radical organisations with the aim of destabilising the country. Owen was trying to compare the role played by the former NUSAS member, Craig Williamson, who worked for the IUEF but who was also a spy for the South African government, with that of Nengwekhulu, who was a mediator between the IUEF and BC. When Nengwekhulu fled to Botswana in 1973, he became the movement's most senior member (second only to Tiro) to settle and establish a strong power base there.²⁰⁰ He played the role of external affairs director of the Black People's Convention and acted as a link between the organisation in South Africa and the exiles, and international community.²⁰¹

One of the international organisations with which radical blacks were most involved was the IUEF. Nengwekhulu therefore became the IUEF coordinator after he had fled to Botswana. He organised scholarships for needy black students (mainly within South Africa) who belonged to

¹⁹⁷ Nengwekhulu's Private Collection. Lars-Gunnar Eriksson, "Education and Training Programmes", Paper delivered at the International Conference of Experts for the Support of Victims of Colonialism and Apartheid in Southern Africa, Oslo, Norway, 9-14 April 1973, p.19.

¹⁹⁸ Sunday Times, 19 October 1980, p.28.

¹⁹⁹ Maimela, Interview with Nengwekhulu, University of Pretoria, 25 May 1996.

²⁰⁰ "No kiss of life for black radicals in political exile", Evening Post, 9 June 1980, p.7.

²⁰¹ *Ibid*, p.7.

BC.²⁰² Because of Nengwekhulu's involvement, it has been suggested that, between 1975 and 1977, the IUEF made substantial grants towards BC programmes. However, apart from the funding discussed above, the IUEF sponsored students and defended them after the Soweto uprising of 1976 by means of the Zimele Trust Fund. However, the IUEF was not the only funding institution which provided financial assistance to this trust. According to Ramphele, a large amount was donated by Mondragon, a company in Spain.²⁰³ Zimele Trust's initial success was shortlived because the first administrator, Mapetla Mohapi, was killed while in detention on 5 August 1976. He was succeeded by Pumzile Majeke, who was also subsequently detained.²⁰⁴ The Union of Black Journalists, the Ginsberg Education Fund and Ithuseng Centre also received funds from the IUEF.²⁰⁵ The Ithuseng Centre was founded by Ramphele after she had been forcefully removed from King William's Town in May 1977, where she had worked as the superintendent at the Zanempilo Clinic, before being banished to Tzaneen.²⁰⁶

Nengwekhulu became one of the few members in exile to act as a link between the IUEF and BC activists and BC projects. For example, the Soweto Action Committee, the Youth Centre in Umtata, the Ipopeng Clinics in the Northern Transvaal and Winterveld near Pretoria, all survived because of financial assistance from the IUEF.²⁰⁷ Other international bodies which extended their financial assistance were the Board of Methodist Church, predominantly a black organisation based in New York, and the World University Services (WUS). The latter was reluctant to

²⁰² Maimela, Interview with Nengwekhulu, University of Pretoria, 25 May 1996.

²⁰³ Mamphela Ramphele, "Empowerment and Symbols of Hope: Black Consciousness and Community Development", in Pityana et al, Bounds of Possibility, p.169.

²⁰⁴ Ibid, pp.168-169.

²⁰⁵ Sunday Times, 19 October 1980, p. 28.

²⁰⁶ "US honour for Dr. Ramphele", Daily Dispatch, 16 May 1983, p.3.

²⁰⁷ Sunday Times, 19 October 1980. p. 28.

support SASO at the beginning when it was requested to do so because of SASO's resistance to cooperation with NUSAS.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁸ Maimela, Interview with Nengwekhulu.

CHAPTER FIVE

WOMEN AND THE BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS MOVEMENT

The aim of this chapter is to describe the contribution which black women made to BCM, and how, during the difficult days of the heyday the apartheid regime, various individual white liberal women, such as Helen Joseph, Hetty du Preez and Josie Palmer, and white liberal women's organisations, such as the South African Federation of Women (SAFW), helped black women activists to keep the flame of political protest alive. This was imperative since those men who were the natural leaders of the BCM, were either dead or in detention. Others were in hiding and on the run from the apartheid regime's security police, or had taken refuge in foreign countries – to await the day when they might return to claim what was justly their own. The role that women played in BCM at this time was part of that wider symbiotic (but paradoxical) relationship between white liberals and BC activists in the 1960s and 1970s, that is central to the topic of this research. There is another aim too. My research challenges the patriarchy of BC by showing that the ideology and movement was sustained by women as well as men and that a more gendered interpretation is important in defining the nature of BC.¹

Although the contribution which women have made to social justice and the political liberation of South Africa is a vast topic (a topic which, in many ways, has scarcely been touched upon by researchers and analysts), my (more narrow) focus in this chapter will be on how a few selected

¹ Kogila Moodley, "The Continued Impact of Black Consciousness in South Africa", Journal of Modern African Studies 29 (2) 1991, pp.237-251.

women (and I have not been comprehensive) laid the foundations for the realisation of political and social justice, and how specific women in the BCM later built that edifice into an enduring monument that even now forms a part of the political and ideological landscape of South Africa. It is my opinion that no comprehensive treatment of the history and contribution of BCM can ignore the role played specifically by women. What makes this contribution unique is that black women had so many more obstacles – impediments historically unique to women – which they had to overcome before their dreams of social, economic and political justice could be realised.

For the purposes of clarification, I shall emphasise three points. The first is that a particular group of women were drawn into the struggle, not because they had freely chosen a political career, but because the involvement and suffering of their male partners, their husbands, sons and relatives, forced them into situations in which they had no choice but to become involved in all the hazards of the political struggle. These women played a decisive role in defending, preserving and propagating the ideals of BCM. The second point is that there was a group of women who became BCM activists because of their spouses' involvement in the organisation. They became active in BCM out of a sense of solidarity with their husbands. The third point is that while, in most liberation movements, women often became politically prominent merely because they happen to be the wives of male activists, there was an influential group of South African women (married, unmarried, with and without partners), who joined the movement and worked successfully and prominently alongside their male counterparts as equals in the struggle..

In spite of the substantial role which African women played in South African history, African women have been largely marginalised in political literature – even though they have frequently played more important roles in the struggle against apartheid than either their black or white

male counterparts. It has often been pointed out that black women have been politically active throughout the liberation struggle in South Africa. Their militancy was particularly reflected in the education campaign and in various protest marches.² They protested for example against forced removals in well-documented demonstrations against the compulsory issuing of identity documents to (black) women.³

Many black women (unlike their white counterparts) became involved in political activism as a result of circumstances that left them very little choice. Circumstances such as poverty and discrimination forced many black women into the kind of political activism which inevitably compromised their family commitments and the patriarchal expectations of many African communities. Few white women engaged in political activism at the time in South Africa could have understood the enormity of the sacrifices their black counterparts were compelled to make in their fight for freedom.⁴ Because of the stark racism of the police and security apparatus at the time, white women activists were, on the whole, not subjected to the extremes of danger, inconvenience and deprivation that were the daily lot of black women in general, and women activists in particular.

The political activism of black women in South Africa may be defined by the fact that a black woman in the South African context is oppressed in three ways: in terms of race, class and

² Diana E.H. Russell, Lives of Courage: Women for New South Africa (London, Virago Press, 1990), p.24.

³ Julia C. Wells, We Now Demand: The History of Women's Resistance to Pass Laws in South Africa (Johannesburg, Witwatersrand University Press, 1993), pp.105-129.

⁴ Russell, Lives of Courage, p.83.

gender.⁵

Firstly, the South African legal system, as it evolved over three centuries, created all kinds of legal disabilities for women in general, and black women in particular. This process, which gathered impetus after 1948, the date of the National Party's accession to power, defined Africans as inferior to Europeans.

Secondly, European women in general regarded African women as inferior – a perception that was part of the racist legacy of imperial ideologies and the colonisation of Southern Africa by Europeans. During the three centuries after the settlement of the Cape by whites, even the poorest white women in Southern Africa became accustomed to having black women in their houses as domestic workers. The colonisation of Africa and other parts of the world, which gathered momentum during the latter half of the nineteenth century, made the dissemination of spurious theories of the racial superiority of Europeans a growing preoccupation among Europeans. These intellectually compromised and noxious theories, which grew up wherever Europeans settled and colonised indigenous people, provided an urgently needed rationale and alibi for the imperial and colonial agenda and choked relations between European settlers and the indigenous people whom they were quick to exploit.

A conscious historical assumption of racial and cultural superiority on the part of Europeans helped to soothe any disagreeable qualms of conscience which more sensitive and thoughtful white settlers might have had about the racial cruelties and injustices perpetrated on indigenous

⁵ Denise Ackermann, Jonathan A. Draper and Emma Mashinini (eds), Women Hold up Half the Sky (Hilton, Cluster, 1991), pp.25, 132.

people. It also made it easy, and somehow natural, for many white people to regard blacks (and black women in particular) as members of an inferior race of human beings. Because huge numbers of black women were constantly exposed to the racist attitudes of their employers in the intimate circumstances of domestic labour, they often bore the brunt of European racism. The good nature and respectful attitudes of black women domestic servants to their employees were regarded as proof of their essentially inferior nature as a race – a bizarre and malignant attitude that was to find its fullest and most grotesque expression in the institutionalised racism of apartheid after 1948.

Although no female domestic worker could hope to keep her job unless she were utterly obedient, respectful and subservient (in addition to being punctilious in the performance of her menial duties), most black women were, by nature and custom, respectful and obedient. Many even endured the most appalling abuses of their human rights and the violation of their dignity and integrity without murmur or complaint. It must have seemed to many whites that the supposed inferiority of blacks was more than evident from what they could empirically observe. While many whites could "prove" (if they cared to) the inferiority of the black races by quoting texts from the Bible, most felt no compulsion to justify what must have seemed obvious. Thus, although blacks in general were regarded as racially and culturally inferior to whites, black women had to bear the additional stigma of being women.

Thirdly, black men also treated African women as inferiors because their own self-respect and self-esteem had already been ravaged by the brutality inflicted by an occupying race bent of

reducing indigenous people to total servitude, both physical, psychological and spiritual.⁶

As has already been mentioned, South African law did not, until comparatively recently, accord to women the same rights and privileges as men. These legal disabilities merely formalised and emphasised the complacent perception among white racists that black people were indeed racially and culturally inferior to whites. Black women therefore bore a double burden: they were black *and* they were women. Their lives were governed both by white laws and indigenous customs. Not least, the extreme suffering, poverty and deprivation of many black families, left no margin for kindness in human relations, and black men who had been brutalised and abused by their white male employers were likely to take out their frustrations on their womenfolk – the only people (under the circumstances) whom they could abuse with impunity. Thus the cruelties and inequities of institutionalised racism and colonialism poisoned even the most intimate circumstances of black family life and relations among black people, even when they were temporarily absent from the defining surveillance of whites. Given the vigilance of hostile white observers and the magnitude of self-censorship internalised by black women, it is scarcely surprising that the literature which describes the role played by black women in political activism has been sparse.

Gugu Hlongwane supports this point of view.⁷ She explains the absence of writing about women by women in terms of the creative environment needed for autobiography and biography. Writing

⁶ Hilda Bernstein, For Their Triumphs and for Their Tears: Women in Apartheid South Africa (London, International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa, 1985), pp.22, 28-34.

⁷ Gugu Dawn Hlongwane, "Autobiographies of Three Transitional Women: Ellen Kuzwayo, Emma Mashinini and Sindiwe Magona", M.A. dissertation, University of Canada, 1995, p.3.

is a creative act that presupposes some degree of self-esteem. It is also almost impossible to write coherently and meaningfully in the absence of a stable social and economic context. Writing is an act of faith in oneself that implies the existence of some kind of continuity between the self (the writer) and sympathetic other selves (readers). Historically, black women have had very little control over their circumstances and their environments. Although they have suffered acutely from the effects of illiteracy and restrictive patriarchal attitudes, even in traditional society, some have found within themselves the necessary courage, self-esteem and determination to document and comment on their own history – even in the most discouraging and degrading circumstances. In the 1980s, material assistance and encouragement from various white women writers enabled texts by African women to become more generally available. One of the first *black* women to write specifically about women's issues, Christine Qunta, included references in her writing to the contribution made by Southern African women in Botswana, Zimbabwe, Lesotho, Namibia and South Africa.⁸ Since Qunta was in exile when she wrote the book and since she had no access to relevant documentary sources and archives, the book understandably fails to focus in any depth on the role played by South African black women.

Another writer to investigate and report on women issues in South Africa in the 1980s and 1990s was Cheryl Walker, who became one of the first white women historians to write about women's issues.⁹ Her book focuses on the role and contribution of women in South African society. Other important literature on women appeared in the later 1980s. Among what was written at this time (texts which are among the most important sources for this research) are texts by Hilda

⁸ Christine Qunta, Women in Southern Africa (Johannesburg, Skotaville, 1987).

⁹ Cheryl Walker, Women Resistance in South Africa, 2nd edition (Cape Town, David Philip, 1991).

Bernstein,¹⁰ Diana E.H. Russell,¹¹ Denise Ackermann, Jonathan Draper and Emma Mashinini,¹² Julia Wells,¹³ and Ingrid Obey.¹⁴ It is worth noting that their five books, which were written mainly by white women, were based on interviews with black women who were active in the struggle for political and gender liberation. Although it would obviously have been preferable for African women had been able to write their own stories, it is significant that it was liberal white women who helped oppressed black women to explain the role they had played in the liberation struggle – another instance of the ambivalent relationship between white liberals and those who espoused the ideals of BC. Given the restricted circumstances in which black people lived during the apartheid era, it was almost impossible for black women to write explicitly about their experiences or find an audience for their writings.

Bernstein explains the conditions in which women found themselves under the apartheid system. Russell's book is based on interviews which she conducted with various women who were actively involved in politics. Her account carries particular authority because she interviewed women both in South Africa and in exile and contrasted the experience of these two groups. Both Bernstein and Russell were once resident in South Africa. White women were moved to write about the lot of black women under apartheid because of their own observation of the extreme cruelty perpetrated on the black community – a cruelty that affected every citizen in South Africa. Russell decided to do research on women precisely because she felt that not enough had been

¹⁰ Bernstein, For Their Triumphs and for Their Tears: Women in Apartheid South Africa.

¹¹ Russell, Lives of Courage.

¹² Ackermann, Draper and Mashinini, (eds), Women Hold Up.

¹³ Wells, Now We Demand, pp.105-140.

¹⁴ Ingrid Obey (ed.), Vukani Makhosikazi: South African Women Speak (London, Catholic Institute for International Relations, 1985), p.266.

written about the contribution of women to politics.¹⁵ The only hindrance, as Russell pointed out, was that she was unable to interview women from the rural areas as she was not conversant with any of the African languages.¹⁶ Russell's point tends to underline my view that in-depth research of this kind cannot be properly conducted by researchers who are not conversant with the relevant African languages.

Ackermann's book mainly elaborates the role played by women in various churches. Her edited book is a landmark in South African women's studies because six of the contributors were African women who described their experiences of oppression in the churches. Some of the information recorded might not have been reported had the researcher been a man, for they pertained specifically to women's issues. Thus, for example, the denial of ordination to women (because they were women), and the reluctance of the congregation to receive holy communion because the minister was pregnant, were fully reported.¹⁷

Wells reported on the efforts of African women, especially members of the Federation of the South African Women between 1955 and the 1960s, to conscientize women in general, including those in rural areas and small towns. The book also reported what was happening in remote areas which were normally overlooked by researchers.¹⁸ Obey's book describes the activism of black women in labour, trade unions, under forced removals and in politics.

¹⁵ Russell, Lives of Courage, p.14.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.23.

¹⁷ Roxanne Jordaan, "The Emergence of Black Theology in South Africa", in Ackermann et al, Women Hold Up Half the Sky, p.126.

¹⁸ Wells, We Now Demand, pp.105-114.

It is important to examine the role played by women before the formation of BCM for two reasons. Firstly, it is necessary to demonstrate that the failure to recognise the contribution of BCM women was not unique to that particular group, and that this kind of oversight and omission was universal in all racial and political groups in South Africa where male domination was traditional. Secondly, it is equally important to acknowledge the role played by women prior to the founding of BCM because they were able to keep the flame of political activism and protest alive during the difficult times when the African liberation movements were banned in the 1960s, through the medium of non-political organisations which were run by women and which had no overt political agenda. The implication of these two propositions is that any description of what constituted the beliefs and praxis of the BCM at the time defined by this research, would be incomplete and therefore misleading without a proper examination of the role played by women, both before and after the founding of BCM. Many of the streams of earlier African women's protest found expression in the role of women in BCM.

The importance of the role of women in the liberation struggle is confirmed by the now legendary saying which was later widely used as a slogan: "You struck a women. You have struck a rock."¹⁹ Because many of the women who were also involved in political activism in BCM brought a particular point of view to the organisation, it is essential to understand their contribution before one can appreciate how different kinds of activism and protest developed and were maintained.

¹⁹ Obery, Vukani Makhosikazi, p.233.

The role of women prior to the Black Consciousness Movement

Prior to the formation of BCM, women played crucial roles in (1) political liberation organisations which were dominated by black men, (2) exclusively women's organisations, and (3) non-political organisations. These select few were the ones who prepared the way for women's participation in community political and social activities in the 1960s and 1970s. The examples cited below will illustrate the efforts which some of them made. They took the lead in protest activism such as the campaign against pass-laws; they fought for their rights in informal settlements, and they vigorously resisted unfair treatment in employment practice as early as in the 1940s.²⁰ Their pioneering protests galvanised African women under apartheid and informed the activism of women who embraced the ideas and strategies and ideas of BC.

The trade unionist and member of the ANC, Elizabeth Mafekeng, was actively involved as a member of both organisations and became one of the first female activists to be ruthlessly harassed by the apartheid regime. This form of intimidation was intensified when she was banished from Paarl to Vryburg in 1959. Eventually, since she could no longer endure the pressure, she escaped to Lesotho with her eleven children. Lilian Ngoyi, widowed at a young age, spent most of her life as an activist from the 1940s until her death in the early 1980s. She became a national figure, and often participated in political and social gatherings as a keynote speaker, inspiring a whole generation of later activists. She was the first African to hold an executive

²⁰ Tom Lodge, Black Politics in South Africa since 1945 (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1983), pp.13-20 and 279.

position as the national president of South African Federation of Women (SAFW), a multi-racial organisation.²¹ Because of her continuous bannings, she became unemployed and struggled to earn money by sewing in her tiny house.²² Her passionate involvement in politics and dedication to her ideals made a lasting impression on the women pioneers in the BCM. She was often quoted in speeches made by BC women as they canvassed support for a new, confident self-image among blacks. Moodley, who made a distinguished contribution in her capacity as the president of the Food and Canning Worker's Union (FCWU), also played a conscientising role in BC. She was instrumental in organising workers to protest against the unfair labour practices of their employers, and, in the process, she politicized many workers, especially women.²³ Even after the banning of the ANC in 1960, she played a substantial role in the emerging BCM of the late 1960s and early 1970s.²⁴

It is a major contention of this research that those liberal white women in South Africa, who were involved in one way or another in political activism, were usually more progressive and far-sighted than their male counterparts when it came to preparing African women to assume leadership positions. Women like Hetty du Preez, who played an important role in organising women's participation in the Garment Worker's Union (GWU), and Josie Palmer of the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA), were instrumental in identifying talented African women and teaching them leadership skills.²⁵ The most notable white liberal woman in this regard

²¹ Christopher Merrett, A Culture of Censorship: Secrecy and Intellectual Repression in South Africa (Cape Town, David Philip, 1994), pp.27 and 101.

²² Bernstein, For their Triumphs and for their Tears, p.113.

²³ Ibid, p. 79.

²⁴ Helen Joseph, Side by Side: The Autobiography of Helen Joseph (Johannesburg, Ad. Donker, 1986), p.197.

²⁵ Walker, Women Resistance in South Africa, pp.98, 129 and 135.

was Helen Joseph. She became a political activist in the late 1940s after having spent some years in India as a teacher. She was a member of the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA) and the ANC, and was a leading member of the SAFW. Joseph was particularly effective in teaching leadership skills and strategies to African women. She also taught them how to communicate with their constituents at grassroots level and she provided them with an intellectual critique of the apparatus of state oppression: its inherent racism; its institutionalised poverty; and its social, economic and gender discrimination.²⁶ Joseph's greatest triumph was her mentoring of Lilian Ngoyi, the first African woman to address a crowd at the International Women's Day in 1955, a day to celebrate the role of women in the world.

Although Joseph and Ngoyi continued to work together, Joseph insisted on playing only a supportive and secondary role. An example of how successful this mentoring relationship was, may be seen in the events of 9 August 1956 when Ngoyi was the main speaker at a march organised by the SAFW. Ngoyi, who was president of the organisation, led a protest march to the Union Buildings against the government's policy of forcing African women to carry identity documents. At this protest march, the famous slogan "Wathint' abafazi Wathint' imbokodo, Uzokufa" (You have tampered with the women; you have struck a rock; you will be destroyed) was uttered for the first time. Thereafter it was adopted as *the* slogan for women organisations.²⁷

Ngoyi's exceptional courage in leading the organisation may be partly attributed to the encouragement she received when in 1955 she attended the meetings of the International

²⁶ Joseph, Side by Side, p.52-53; Katryn Spinks, Black Sash (London, Methuen, 1991), p.241.

²⁷ Julie Frederikse, They Fought for Freedom: Helen Joseph (Cape Town, Maskew Miller Longman, 1995), p.21.

Congress of Women which were held in Lausanne (Switzerland), East Germany, China, the USSR and England in that year.²⁸ Ngoyi was inspired to meet women who were able to argue authoritatively and convincingly against oppression, and doubtless their example challenged her to do the same in South Africa. Ngoyi, Joseph and Dorothy Nyembe, as leaders of the protest movement, all burned their identity documents during the 1956 march and asked the police to arrest them.²⁹ Nyembe pointed out that, as a woman, she was encouraged by the president of the ANC, Chief Albert Luthuli, who had said that "men and women are equal and it all depends on one's dedication".³⁰ It was because of this principle, which she took to heart, that Nyembe never felt inferior to men or was in any way intimidated by politics.

Nyembe also played a vital role as an activist when she entered politics in the mid 1950s.³¹ As a result of her activities she was arrested on a number of occasions between 1956 and 1969. In 1969 she was sentenced to a long term of imprisonment – fifteen years – under the provisions of the terrorism act.³² What happened to her during her imprisonment tends to confirm the suggestion that women prisoners were treated far worse than men. She alleged that she was not allowed to study, she was denied newspapers, and visits from her family were forbidden. In the first years of her detention, she was not allowed to receive the letters which her family had sent to her because they had been written (naturally enough) in Zulu – and not in English or Afrikaans.³³

²⁸ Walker, Women and Resistance in South Africa, p.168.

²⁹ Kirstin Olsen, Chronology of Women's History (London, Greenwood Press, 1994), p.285.

³⁰ Julie Fredrikse, The Unbreakable Thread: Non-Racialism in South Africa (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1990), p.54.

³¹ Obery, Vukani Makhosikazi, p.259.

³² Prisoners of Apartheid: A Biographical List of Political Prisoners and Banned Persons in South Africa (London, International Defence and Aid Fund, 1978), p.91.

³³ Berstein, For Their Triumphs and for Their Tears, p.101.

The fact that white liberal women were preparing African women to take leadership roles long before this became one of the major concerns of BCM, shows that liberal women had a much greater sensitivity than their male counterparts to both the immediate and the long-term needs of the political struggle against apartheid. A few white liberal women had realised the importance of having the victims of apartheid themselves act as executives of their own fate in the forefront of the battle against oppression. They instinctively realised that African women would be far better able to articulate their plight because they themselves were most directly affected by the remorseless brutality of apartheid laws and intentionally oppressive and discriminatory state structures. The mentoring role of white liberal women proved to be an important part of black women's armoury when BC began to speak for Africans during the exile of the ANC and PAC.

The contribution made by non-political women's organisations

Non-political women's organisations played an important role by incorporating political issues into their agendas for discussion, particularly after the 1960s when all liberation movements were banned. Since these organisations accommodated women who were politically inclined, the same group of women became leading political activists during the early 1970s when BCM was in its formative stage.³⁴ Non-political organisations therefore that nurtured and prepared women who were to assume leadership positions in BCM once the movement became coherent in its political philosophy. The importance of this research is that it shows how some leading BCM women were actually the products of these organisations. In addition, these agencies exposed many

³⁴ "Building a Nation: Black Women Power", in SASO Newsletter, vol 5, no 2, July/August 1975, p.7.

women to practical politics for the very first time.

Two such non-political organisations are the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) and the National Council of African Women (NCAW). Because these organisations functioned in tandem, their origins, objectives and operational strategies were almost identical. This therefore meant that, while, in theory, they were supposed to have been non-political organisations, in practice they grappled with political issues. Although the YWCA's initial objectives were to identify and attempt to solve the common problems which were unique to the African community, the organisation soon became highly politicised. The YWCA deviated from its initial objectives because of the country's racial composition. Because it was impossible in the South African apartheid context to separate social activities from political ones, the YWCA had no choice but to tackle both social and political issues since both equally affect the well-being of all Africans. The organisation was fortunate to be led by women who were both politically aware and orientated to practical action. The distinguished Ellen Kuzwayo was its general secretary between 1963 and 1976, and was influential in deciding on the type of the people who would be invited to address their meetings.³⁵ Meetings held in urban areas in particular were often addressed by ANC political activists who were Kuzwayo's close associates.³⁶

Africans in urban areas were more politicised than those in the rural areas because they bore the brunt of the evils and cruelties of the apartheid system on a daily basis. William Frederick Nkomo, an ANC veteran, educationist and a former president of the liberal South African

³⁵ Ellen Kuzwayo, Call me Woman (Johannesburg, Ravan Writers Series, 1996), pp.160-179.

³⁶ The World, 19 November 1971, p.7.

Institute of Race Relations, was often invited to address their meetings.³⁷ Manasseh Moerane, the first African editor of The World, a black newspaper, also occasionally delivered political addresses at YWCA meetings.³⁸ In the rural areas, however, meetings usually focused on the general welfare of communities and their struggle against poverty.

The National Council of African Women (NCAW) was an affiliated sister body of the exclusively white liberal organisation, the National Council of Women of South Africa (NCWSA). The NCAW became a haven for the political activities of Africans during the 1960s and 1970s. Because it avoided taking an openly political stance and because it publicised its continued and close association with the NCWSA, it was not perceived as a threat to the government. (Other organisations were not as successful as the NCAW in keeping a low political profile.) The NCWSA even managed to avoid banning during the 1960s, although it was a forum for political activity. It has been reported that the NCAW maintained a strong relationship with the NCWSA, and that the NCWSA's leaders, such as Edith Rheinalt and Dr Thelma Gutsche, were frequent visitors at NCAW annual conferences. The advantages that the NCAW were able to preserve by means of this relationship, illustrate how important the link with liberal organisations could sometimes be for African organisations during a time of unprecedented state repression.³⁹ This did not necessarily mean that the NCAW disassociated itself entirely from political topics. Occasionally the organisation invited Africans to address meetings on current affairs and these topics were inevitably politically relevant to the position and conditions of blacks in South Africa. At its annual conference in December 1971 the NCAW, for example, invited Barney Pitjana,

³⁷ The World, 10 July 1969, p.3; 23 November 1969, p.6.

³⁸ The World, 17 Dec 1971, p.3.

³⁹ Rhoda Tshikane's Private Collection, Atteridgeville, "National Council of African Women 1937-1958: Come of Age Conference", pp.9 and 15.

president of SASO, to address the conference. Pityana's address so influenced the delegates that they voted a special grant to SASO.⁴⁰ It was during the same conference that Drake Koka, a founding member of both SASO and the Black People's Convention (BPC), also spoke about the concerns and vision of BCM.⁴¹

The role played by BCM women

Although much BCM literature describes the role played by male activists, far less has been written about the women who were to become as influential in many ways as their male comrades. Perhaps the predominantly male orientation of BCM literature can be attributed to the fact that more men than women in the organisation were writers and researchers, and that these men generally tended to begin to write at an earlier age than did their women comrades. Whether they made a conscious decision about it or not, it became convenient for BCM men to ignore the influence and contribution of women.⁴² A few examples might suffice to illustrate this point. Vuyelwa Mashalaba, one of the co-founders and a prominent member of SASO, was Steve Biko's classmate at the University of Natal's medical school. She played a major role in recruiting women into the organisation. She also headed the SASO Publication Commission as early as 1969.⁴³ Mamphela Ramphele was also a medical student at the same university, and found herself,

⁴⁰ "National Conference Could be the Biggest of Black Organisations", The World, 15 Dec 1971, p.3.

⁴¹ "Nkomo Urges All to Meet in Covenant of Life at Prayer Day", The World, 17 Dec 1971, p.5.

⁴² Moodley, "The continued impact of Black Consciousness in South Africa", p.244.

⁴³ Archives, Unisa Centre for African Studies, "The Minutes of SASO General Students Council 9-15 July 1970", A 153, p.5.

in her capacity as SASO chairperson at the University of Natal branch in 1970, staying overnight with Biko at the Beatrice Street head office of SASO, to help him compile articles which were required for publication in the SASO Newsletter.⁴⁴ Thoko Mbanjwa was editor of a SASO publication for two years. The importance of such contributions by women has failed to be adequately acknowledged.⁴⁵

Women became actively involved in the activities of BCM in many different ways. Their involvement was designed to further the cause of the emancipation of the entire oppressed South African nation. Thus, while they were indeed aware that black women were specifically oppressed in terms of their colour, class and gender, their most immediate concern was to challenge discriminatory laws based on race. Sam Moodley, who was one of the BCM women activists, emphasised this point of view when she observed that many women supported the primary liberation struggle out of their own free will – without diverting any available resources toward women's issues.⁴⁶ This heroic self-denial of women's immediate interests was a conscious choice and strategy made by individual black South African women activists. Ruth Mompati, who became a member of the ANC's National Executive in the 1960s, made exactly the same point about the role of women in women's liberation. Her point was that, while she recognized the seriousness of the problems of sexism and discrimination with which women were forced to grapple, she believed that the national struggle should be accorded priority at that time.⁴⁷ A vital factor to consider here is that most black women in BCM and their predecessors were generally

⁴⁴ Mabel Maimela, Interview with Mamphela Ramphele, Midrand, 26 Jan 1996.

⁴⁵ Thoko Mbanjwa (ed.), Black Review 1974/1975 (Durban, Black Community Programmes, 1975).

⁴⁶ Private Collection, Ernest Messina, University of the Western Cape, Cape Town, "Ernest Messina: Interview with Sam Moodley, Durban", 9 July 1992, p.3.

⁴⁷ Russell, Living of Courage, p.108.

uninterested in feminism because they viewed it as being the particular preserve of white women academics. Because of this supposition, they probably failed to appreciate the relevance of women's issues to the struggle for black liberation in a racist South Africa.⁴⁸

Such attitudes were not unique to BCM women. Among white liberal South African women, a similar opinion prevailed. Thus, when Kathryn Spink interviewed officials of the Black Sash about women issues, their response was that, in general, South African women believed that "the struggle for women's rights should be left out of the present phase and attended to after liberation", and they urged women to throw in their lot with the common struggle.⁴⁹ This attitude of members of the Black Sash might have been based on their daily experience of working in the advice offices which they had created to help the victims of apartheid laws. In encounters with black women in these offices, they swiftly perceived that most of the suffering of black people was not related specifically to gender discrimination, but was rather a consequence of the discriminatory laws that affected the lives of all black people. They therefore felt that racial segregation should be eradicated before other forms of discrimination could be addressed.

Another factor that influenced attitudes related to the widespread censorship of information which was practised by the apartheid government. Also, since feminist literature was very rarely available in this country, South African women were not, on the whole, at that time, well informed about or strongly drawn to feminist issues. It is, therefore, important to bear in mind that the all-embracing nature of the struggle against racism and oppression tended to overshadow all other concerns. Black women (if they thought about it at all) were of the opinion that

⁴⁸ Ibid, p.257.

⁴⁹ Spink, Black Sash, p.18.

feminism was an ideology designed for white women – which meant that feminism itself was racially defined. Had sufficient (particularly black) feminist literature been available at the time, black women would have known that feminism is of universal concern to all women, and indeed to all human beings. But at the time, black women gave everything they had to support their male comrades who were in the forefront of BCM activities.⁵⁰

Such assertions leave one with a nagging feeling that not everything has been satisfactorily explained. Admittedly, feminist literature was scarce in South Africa at the time. But there must have been many who were interested in the subject – especially since, by the 1970s, the women's rights movement had become international in scope. It seems implausible to suggest that South African women were totally uninterested in their fundamental rights and freedoms as part of the liberation package. It seems much more likely that pressure from male comrades more or less forced women to deny their feminist agenda and focus exclusively on the struggle for liberation. This assertion is even more believable when one remembers that a number of liberation movements in some neighbouring countries of Southern Africa were reported to have encouraged women comrades to support a total liberation struggle rather than focus (even peripherally) on the attainment of women's rights⁵¹ – a fact that confirms my scepticism about any rather too neat explanation of what all black women purportedly thought and believed at the time.

SASO literature often emphasised that women fought in the struggle for complete liberation and

⁵⁰ Mamphela Ramphele, "The Dynamics of Gender within Black Consciousness Organisation: A Personal View", in N. Barney Pitso, Mamphela Ramphele, Malusi Mpumlwana and Lindy Wilson (eds), Bounds of Possibilities: The Legacy of Steve Biko and Black Consciousness (Cape Town, David Philip, 1991), p.215.

⁵¹ Stephanie Urdang, "Women in National Liberation", in Margaret Jean Hay and Sharon Stichter (eds), African Women South of Sahara (London, Longman, 1984), pp.156-169.

that they were not seduced into diverting their energy towards women's liberation, which was usually characterised as a tainted ideological product of white society.⁵² The attitude of BCM women seems therefore to suggest that they were expected to take part in the liberation struggle – while no hint was ever given that they were thereby ultimately jeopardising their own liberation by deferring to an exclusively male-generated agenda that accorded no special importance to women's issues. It would have been far wiser if BCM women had insisted at the time that the cause of total liberation could never be divorced from a recognition of the universal importance of women rights and issues.

The women who participated in the activities of the organisation were attracted to BCM for many different reasons. Some of them, such as Hester Joseph, became involved because of her work. She served as Biko's secretary at the Beatrice Street headquarters in Durban.⁵³ It was only after she had been in this job for quite sometime that she applied for membership of BCM. The same is true of Nobuhle Haye. She later married Mapetla Mohapi, a prominent figure in the organisation. She was employed by the Eastern Cape branch of the Black Community Programme as Biko's secretary in King William's Town after she had been retrenched from teaching.⁵⁴ Her prominent involvement in BCM surfaced more because of a personal tragedy. Her husband was killed while in detention on 5 August 1976. She, her family and BCM as a whole did not accept the government's complacent "explanation" that Mohapi had committed suicide. She decided, with the help of the organisation, to sue the minister of police for damages arising

⁵² "Building a Nation: Black Women Power", SASO Newsletter, vol 5, no 2, July/August 1975, p.7.

⁵³ Mabel Maimela, Conversation with Ernest Messina, University of the Western Cape, Cape Town, 13 April 1996.

⁵⁴ The Weekend World, 7 August 1977, p.4; Ramphele, A Life, p.84.

from Mohapi's death. She challenged, in court, the claim that the alleged suicide note written on toilet paper had in fact been written by her husband at all. In order to arrive at the truth, SASO sponsored two handwriting experts, Dr Julius Grant from Great Britain and Professor Clarence Bohn from the United States of America, as expert witnesses for the plaintiffs.⁵⁵ While these two international experts were of the opinion that the writing on the note was not Mohapi's, the counsel for the government, Colonel J.F. Fourie and Sergeant K.F.C. Landman, both swore under the oath that the note was genuine.⁵⁶ By opposing the state so openly, Mohapi inevitably became a high-profile enemy of the apartheid state. It was therefore hardly surprising when she was detained at the same time as Biko in Port Elizabeth. The security police were looking for any information they could find to implicate Biko in charges of attempting to overthrow the government.⁵⁷ As a result of this and other political activities, Mohapi was kept in detention for six months and released only in March 1978.⁵⁸

The second category of women to become BCM activists were the spouses of the activists themselves. These women were reported to have become involved out of solidarity with their husbands or partners. This gesture of affirming solidarity was not unique to BCM women. Such commitments have already been noted before: the willingness of women to support their partners even at the risk of their own lives. For example, the National Committee for Liberation (NCL), later known as the African Resistance Movement (ARM), was a white radical underground

⁵⁵ "Mohapi-funding for minister", The Argus, 3 March 1980, p.1; "Court Finds Mohapi Suicide Note Genuine", The Cape Times, 4 July 1980, p.2.

⁵⁶ "Widow's Case Against Minister of Justice: Mohapi Judgement Tomorrow", Post, 2 July 1980, p.2.

⁵⁷ The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South African Report (Cape Town, Juta, 1998), vol 3, p.65.

⁵⁸ "Detainees Freed: Rachidi and Nine Others Released From Section 10", Post, 29 October 1978, p.1.

movement which had been established in 1962 and which remained operational until 1964. In the ARM, Myrtle Berman supported her husband Monty, who was a founder member, and she herself became active to the extent that they hid explosives in their house, thus putting themselves at risk should the police ever have found out.⁵⁹ Similarly, Mary Turok, the wife of Ben Turok, was actively involved as a member of the Congress of Democrats. Both of them were banned, as a result, in 1962.⁶⁰

Wendy Woods, wife of the former editor of the East London Daily Dispatch, became personally involved in BCM matters through her husband's acquaintance with BCM members. When Donald Woods was banned in October 1977, she attended Biko's inquest, which was held in Pretoria in November and December of the same year.⁶¹ After the Woods family had fled the country, Wendy continued to support her husband. As a banned person in South Africa, Donald was not allowed to write in or be quoted in any South African newspapers. It was Wendy therefore who responded to criticisms of her husband which appeared in the South African Afrikaans newspapers, Beeld and Burger, while they were in exile in Britain.⁶²

While some BCM wives and partners were independently willing to take up the political challenges, others were forced by circumstances to support the organisation. A few examples will suffice. Nontsikelelo Biko, widow of Steve Biko, is a clear example of a wife who was not

⁵⁹ Joshua N. Lazerson, Against the Tide: Whites in the Struggle Against Apartheid (UWC, Bellville, Mayibuye Books, 1994), p.235.

⁶⁰ Merrett, A Culture of Censorship, p.50.

⁶¹ Donald Woods, Biko (London, Penguin Books, 1987), p.232.

⁶² "Mrs Woods Challenges", The Cape Times, 23 Sep 1978, p.3; "Nats Papers Challenged to Let Woods Reply", Daily Dispatch, 23 Sep 1978, p.19.

particularly interested in politics.⁶³ After her husband's death in detention on 12 September 1977, she found herself in the eye of the storm as numerous BCM activists assisted her at her husband's inquest. She was therefore thrust into the limelight and her name became synonymous with that of her celebrated husband in the eyes of the world.

Then there was Joseph Mdluli's widow, Lydia, who felt the need compelled publicly to identify herself with BCM activities. She also became the centre of attention in an inquest into her husband's bizarre death while he was in police custody in March 1976. Mdluli had been detained because it was alleged that he was organising a terrorist army.⁶⁴ Ultimately the government had to pay Lydia Mdluli an out-of-court settlement of R15 000.⁶⁵ This kind of settlement by the government was a tacit admission of guilt, particularly so because even the government's own pathologist had contradicted the security police's derisory claim that Mdluli's death had been caused by "force" applied to his neck as a result of "falling over a chair".⁶⁶

Gwen Mokoape's husband, Aubrey, was Biko's political confidant, and although she was not actively involved in BCM politics, she had to support her family alone,⁶⁷ and was known to give hospitality to a number of activists, even while her husband was in detention.⁶⁸ Her case is another example of the many unsung and unknown wives and partners and mothers of political

⁶³ Mandla Tyala, "What Biko's Wife Tells Their Sons", Eastern Province Herald, 11 April 1983, p.7.

⁶⁴ Archbishop Dennis Hurley, "Memorial Service for All Who Died in Detention", Diakonia News, November 1977, p.9.

⁶⁵ Rand Daily Mail, 20 March 1979, p.2.

⁶⁶ "Death In Detention", Diakonia News, November 1977, p.10.

⁶⁷ Rand Daily Mail, 16 Dec 1976, p.2.

⁶⁸ Mabel Maimela. Conversation with Ernest Messina, University of Western Cape, Cape Town, 13 April 1996.

activists in detention. These women endured the hardship of keeping families going on their own.⁶⁹

Pityana's wife, Nosidima (Dimza), was ostracized by hospital authorities because of her husband's political activities. She had been retrenched as a nurse in the Livingstone Hospital at the end of 1973,⁷⁰ and, although no reason was given, it is likely that her sacking was motivated by her husband's political involvement. Actions such as these were common in South Africa. The apartheid authorities intimidated the partners of the activists in the hope that they would quit their political activities. Furthermore, treatment such as that meted out to Pityana's wife, including the harassment and intimidation of close members of the activist's family to discourage activism altogether, often paradoxically compelled wives into a far more committed sphere of political action. This explains why political activism in South Africa, particularly in the black community, often remained in the family. Pityana's younger brother, Siphso, was politically active in student politics to the point where he wisely fled the country. The Mandela, Sisulu, Mbeki and Biko families also confirm the truth that political activism runs in certain black families.⁷¹

Dimza was later employed by the Institute of Race Relations in the Eastern Cape region to run a youth programme in Port Elizabeth in 1975. Because of her detention in 1976, which resulted in her losing her job at the Institute, she subsequently found a job with the Eastern Cape Council of Churches.⁷² Her employment by these organisations shows that while the government actively

⁶⁹ SASO Bulletin, vol 1, no1, June 1977, p.6.

⁷⁰ Aelred Stubbs CR, "The Story of Nyameko Barney Pityana", in South African Outlook, vol 111, no1300, October 1979, p.150.

⁷¹ Shelagh Gastrow, Who's Who in South African Politics, no 3, (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1990), pp.158-165; 186-192; 306-313.

⁷² Stubbs, "The Story of Nyameko Barney Pityana", p.150.

persecuted political activists, liberal institutions often went out of their way to assist those who were victims of discrimination.

Another category of women who espoused BCM political activism came from those parents whose children were politically active. In many of these cases, parents initially opposed their children's involvement in political activities but, in the end, came to support and defend their offspring with all the resources they had. Parents were especially moved to action when they saw the extent to which the security police harassed and tortured their children as they attempted to test their democratic rights. Parents of activists sometimes found themselves involuntarily participating in activism.⁷³ This explains Mamphela's opinion that parents contributed to the liberation struggle even when it was an unconscious participation.⁷⁴ A typical example was Biko's mother, Alice, who was initially opposed to her son's involvement in politics. She even sent him a Bible in a vain attempt to dissuade him from involvement in political activism while he was at the University of Natal.⁷⁵ Her attitude, however, changed when her son was banned in March 1973 and restricted to Ginsberg. Her home was thereafter reported to have been the "headquarters" of the Black Consciousness Movement. She provided them with accommodation and supplied them with food.⁷⁶ Those who were regular visitors at Biko's family house recalled that Alice liked to prepare them *Umngqusho*, a staple dish among Xhosa people.⁷⁷

Finally, there were those women who, although not influenced by their partners, freely chose to

⁷³ Truth and Reconciliation, vol 3, p.46.

⁷⁴ Mamphela Ramphela, "The Dynamics of Gender Within Black Organisations: A Personal View", in N. Barney Pitso et al, Bounds of Possibility, p.216.

⁷⁵ "Steve Biko's Last Goodbye", Daily Dispatch, 17 August 1978, p.4.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p.4.

⁷⁷ Kuzwayo, Call me Woman, p. 46.

share the political lives of the men in the political struggle. One of the earliest women to be initiated into student politics, according to Biko, was his fellow medical student, Vuyelwa Mashalaba.⁷⁸ It is also reported that those women who subsequently played leading roles in BCM were often associated with Biko in one way or another. These women included professionals: nurses, particularly in the Natal region, social workers, teachers, medical doctors and ministers' wives (the women's wing of the Inter-Denominational African Ministers' Association of South Africa).⁷⁹ As one of the earliest woman who participated in the political activities of BCM, Mashalaba recruited many fellow women students into politics. She also played a prominent role in the formation of SASO. As she seemed to have been the only woman who had a clear grasp of the complexities of student politics at the time, she was elected to the national executive of SASO, thus becoming the only woman among its five members.⁸⁰ Because of her experience in recruitment, she was assigned to oversee a number of projects.⁸¹ It is significant to this research that Mashalaba was elected to head the publication commission, while her deputy was Andy Chetty.⁸² The point to be made is that she was appointed to the chairmanship of the commission over a man because of her ability and commitment.

The objective of the publication commission was to facilitate communication between black people employed by the liberal press. The aim of this exercise was to persuade people of the validity of BC ideology so that they could report events in black politics from a BCM rather than

⁷⁸ Karis and Gerhart Collection, Johannesburg. Gail Gerhart: Interview with Steve Biko, 24 October 1972, Durban. p.14.

⁷⁹ Ramphele, "The Dynamics of Gender within Black Consciousness Organisation", p.215.

⁸⁰ Archives, Unisa Centre for African Studies, "Minutes of SASO Executive Meeting, University of Natal (Black Section), 3rd-5th December 1969", pp.3-4.

⁸¹ Ibid., pp.3-4.

⁸² Karis and Gerhart Collection, "SASO 1st General Students Council", p.5.

from a liberal point of view. The publication project failed to achieve this goal because it had insufficient material and financial support to implement its training programme.⁸³ Had it been successful, BCM would have managed to introduce an African interpretation into journalism and literature in South African politics. Another aim of the commission was to encourage students from the black campuses to engage in BCM-orientated journalism by supplying them with articles for publication.⁸⁴ Once BCM was banned, the idea of encouraging students from the black campuses to write articles became futile. It is regrettable that this project failed because it was a cornerstone of BCM principles.

Mashalaba was often encouraged to recruit women students to affiliate themselves to the organisation. On one occasion, in her capacity as a member of the executive, she was assigned to give a talk to the students at University of Fort Hare, accompanied by Pityana, in May 1971. It was later reported that she had profoundly impressed a number of students, especially women who had hitherto felt neglected and overlooked in politics.⁸⁵ It was also Mashalaba who influenced Ramphele to join her in student politics. Ramphele, unlike Mashalaba, had no reservations about confronting BC men. She treated men as equals and expected in turn to be treated as an equal by them.⁸⁶ In the end, Ramphele predictably became the only woman in SASO and in BCM to have her contribution acknowledged – although such acknowledgement was only grudgingly given in some BC circles. Although she confessed her ignorance of politics prior to

⁸³ "Private Collections, Harry Ranwedzi Nengwekhulu, University of Pretoria", "Community Development Proposal", April 1971, pp.1-3.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p.3.

⁸⁵ *SASO Newsletter*, vol 1, no 2, June 1971, p.5.

⁸⁶ Ramphele, *A Life*, p.66.

her entrance to medical school in 1968,⁸⁷ she adapted so quickly that by 1970 she had been elected as chairperson of the University of Natal branch of SASO.⁸⁸ By then she was already deeply involved and had joined other SASO students in running a clinic to help the poor at the Alan Taylor Residence.⁸⁹ In December 1971, she had been assigned to lead a student work camp to Winterveld to test the viability of setting up a community health centre.⁹⁰ In the following year (1972), she spent extra hours at the organisation's head office at 86 Beatrice Street in Durban, where she assisted in the editing of SASO articles which were being prepared for publication.⁹¹ After working for a while in a government hospital, she was employed as the medical officer in charge at Zanempilo Community Health Centre when it was officially opened in January 1975.⁹²

The security police frequently attempted to isolate members of BCM by banishing them to various communities which were believed to be their places of origin. Ramphele became a victim of this tactic when, in May 1977, she was banned and transported from King William's Town and banished to Lenyenye township near Tzaneen, an area to which she was actually a stranger.⁹³ But even there, weighed down by financial difficulties, harassed and intimidated by agents of the government, she managed to build confidence in the community to which she had been banished. She turned out to be an asset to the community and became the first doctor ever to practise in

⁸⁷ Ramphele, "The Dynamics of Gender within Black Consciousness Organisation: A Personal View", p.214.

⁸⁸ Mabel Maimela, Interview with Ramphele, 26 January 1996.

⁸⁹ Ramphele, *A Life*, p.61.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.63.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p.68.

⁹² Mamphela Ramphele, "Empowerment and Symbol of Hope: Black Consciousness and Community Development", in Pityana et al, *Bounds of Possibility*, pp.164-165.

⁹³ *Daily Dispatch*, 29 April 1980, p.17.

Lenyenye.⁹⁴ Ramphela eventually managed to build a community health centre, Ithuseng, reported to be the first of its kind in the then Northern Transvaal.⁹⁵ Her banishment to Lenyenye therefore eventually benefited SASO and BCM rather than the government, which had aimed to isolate her from the rest of BCM community. This remote area received a number of visits from foreign journalists, diplomats and members of BCM, all of whom all visited Ramphela.⁹⁶ Projects which she introduced enabled members of Lenyenye community to accept her as one of them. She in turn used opportunities to politicise those who consulted her at the centre. This kind of practice was widely used in BCM circles. The rationale was that once people had been contacted in the community through some or other project, they could then be introduced to political ideas.⁹⁷

During Ramphela's banishment to Lenyenye she maintained contact with exiled members of BCM who acted as couriers of financial aid from foreign organisations such as the International University Exchange Fund (IUEF). This project was organised by Ranwezi Nengwekhulu, who had already made contact with the IUEF when he went into exile in Botswana on 18 September 1973.⁹⁸ The IUEF was interested in BCM at this time because it was competing to secure the control of BCM. The IUEF had appreciated the importance of BCM as a resistance movement which could challenge the whole apartheid system – provided it was given enough financial support.⁹⁹

⁹⁴ Zwelakhe Sisulu, "In Naphuno This Doctor is Just Nurse", Rand Daily Mail, 5 May 1978, p.8.

⁹⁵ Daily Dispatch, 16 May 1983, p.3.

⁹⁶ Rand Daily Mail, 5 May 1978, p.8.

⁹⁷ Ranwedzi Nengwekhulu, "The Meaning of Black Consciousness in the Struggle for Liberation in South Africa", in Dennis L. Cohen and John Daniel (eds), Political Economy of Africa: Selected Readings (London, Longman Group Limited, 1981), pp. 199-201.

⁹⁸ Sunday Times, 19 October 1980, p.28.

⁹⁹ "IUEF Now Battling to Stave off Liquidation", The Star, 3 November 1980, p.2.

As someone who had had prior experience of community health work in Taylor Residence, the Winterveld Self-Help Project and the Zanempilo Health Care Centre (as superintendent), Ramphele managed to subvert the government's intention to neutralise her influence.¹⁰⁰ As funds became available, the Ithuseng Health Centre in Lenyenye became a vital part of the community and it came to be respected as a project that was owned and managed by black people. Ramphele needed to prove to herself that she could single-handedly make a success of the Ithuseng Health Centre – and this she did. Contributions such as hers emphasise the fact that BCM women used whatever opportunities they could find to advance the cause of the organisation. Such contributions have only been noted by women writers – a fact that illustrates the androcentrism of BCM.

Another woman who was actively involved in the early development of SASO and the entire BCM, was Manana Kgware.¹⁰¹ At the time she entered student politics she was a student at the University of the North and a close associate of Pat Machaka, co-founder of SASO. She was also a contemporary of Onkgopotse Ramothibi Tiro and Nengwekhulu.¹⁰² Tiro was the SRC president of the University of the North, who was acclaimed and criticised (depending on one's point of view) when he delivered a powerful speech at the graduation ceremony on 29 April 1972 in which he chastised the university authorities for allocating seats to the parents of black graduands at the back of the hall. In the same speech he lashed out at "Bantu education", which had been designed to provide an inferior education for black students.¹⁰³ Since she was an associate of the founder

¹⁰⁰ Ramphele, Empowerment and Symbols of Hope, pp.155-169.

¹⁰¹ Gerhart, Interview with Biko, p. 14.

¹⁰² Mafika Pascal Gwala, Black Review 1973 (Durban, Black Community Programs, 1974), p.94.

¹⁰³ Onkgopotse Ramothibi Tiro, "Bantu Education"; South African Outlook, vol 102, no 1213/4, pp.99 and 102.

members of SASO, Kgware participated in a number of planning sessions with Biko and others at the University of the North, between January and June 1969, in preparation of the anticipated launch of SASO in July 1969 at the same venue.¹⁰⁴ These facts explain why, according to Ramphele, Kgware was among the four women students (three from Natal), who played key roles in the launching of SASO. The other three were Thembi Nkabinde (née Sibisi) from the University of Zululand, and Mashalaba and Ramphele from the University of Natal (Black Section).¹⁰⁵ As one of the pioneers of SASO, Kgware worked together with her male counterparts in managing the newly established organisation.

Kgware was appointed to SASO's Commission of National Relations, and also worked as Biko's assistant during the preparations for the first General Students Council of SASO, which was held in July 1970.¹⁰⁶ Once she was no longer connected to the University of the North as a student, she continued to be actively involved in extra-parliamentary politics. This deepening of political commitment after university was not typical of how most activists' careers evolved. Most students, after having been in student politics at university, tended to scale down their activism on entering their careers. Kgware's life took a different course. Having left university, she served as an executive member of SASO in the Orange Free State, and made a vital contribution to the formation school which trained leaders. She also served on the executive of the Lesotho/Orange Free State region of the UCM.¹⁰⁷ Kgware opted to continue with a full-time political career because politics was, on her mother's side at least, a family tradition. Although her father was not

¹⁰⁴ Gerhart, Interview with Biko, p.4.

¹⁰⁵ Ramphele, "The Dynamics of Gender within Black Consciousness: A Personal View", p.216.

¹⁰⁶ Karis and Gerhart Collection, "SASO General Students Council Circular No.6", p.1.

¹⁰⁷ UCM Newsletter, Second Semester, 1971, p.4.

very interested in politics, both her brother and mother were keen activists. Her brother Bobo was one of the executive members of the University Christian Movement (UCM) – which again demonstrates the link between BCM and white liberals.¹⁰⁸ He was the only African to accompany the founders of UCM, Basil Moore and Gerald Ray, to the international students' conference on Christian movements for the UCM, which was held in Ohio in the United States of America in December 1967.¹⁰⁹ Furthermore, Manana's mother, Motlalepula, was known during her student years to have been politically active.¹¹⁰

Years after her involvement as a student, Motlalepula Kgware again became part of the liberation struggle during the 1970s. She became one of the most important middle-aged women to make a contribution to BCM activities.¹¹¹ She joined in student politics because her husband was a professor of Comparative Education at the University of the North, the cradle of BCM. She was one of the few older black women to speak out courageously against the iniquitous system of "Bantu education" – more especially as it was practised at university level.¹¹² Her close contact with radical students and their activities led her to appreciate and understand the plight of students. She was the only person connected to the university to criticise it for expelling Tiro from the university because of his 29 April 1972 speech at the graduation ceremony.¹¹³ A former pupil of hers, Malegapuru William Makgoba, reports that, as a school teacher at one of the prestigious black high schools in the Northern Transvaal (Hwiti High School), Kgware converted a number

¹⁰⁸ University Christian Movement Newsletter, First Semester 1971, p.2.

¹⁰⁹ Ernest A. Messina, "Swartbewustheid in die Wes-Kaap 1970-1984", Ph.D. thesis, University of the Western Cape, December 1995, p.37.

¹¹⁰ Kuzwayo, Call me Woman, p.99.

¹¹¹ "Veteran Activist Kgware is Laid to Rest", Sowetan, 12 October 1998, p.6.

¹¹² "Activist Leaves a Legacy of Struggle", Sowetan, 8 October 1998, p.11.

¹¹³ "Prof's Wife Supports Students", The World, 15 June 1972, p.2.

of young students to BCM ideology.¹¹⁴ She was one of the few women activists at the time to oppose investment by foreign companies in apartheid South Africa.¹¹⁵

Because Motlalepula Kgware was deeply respected and admired as an older person of profound political acumen, she was elected the first president of Black People's Convention in December 1972.¹¹⁶ She was also elected president of BPC because the organisation appreciated her political contribution and had confidence in her leadership skills – in spite of the fact that she was a woman. Ramphele fills in this picture by suggesting that Kgware's maturity and ability to reach out to both young and old were appreciated¹¹⁷ – making her an obvious choice for the position of president. Her responsibilities were on other occasions exaggerated by some men in the organisation, who claimed that her appointment as the president contradicted the perception that, as early as the beginning of the 1970s, blacks in general and BCM in particular, disregarded feminist principles and underestimated women's roles in BCM and the liberation struggle.

Debora Matshoba was another woman who made a valuable and sustained contribution to BCM. Her political activism dated back to the 1960s, when, as a member of Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), she was elected as chairperson of the Youth Department in 1964. When SASO was founded in 1969, Matshoba, while still a student at the University of Zululand, rushed to join so that she could participate in student politics. Her experience in the YWCA made it easy for her to contribute frequently and authoritatively to discussions relating to student and current

¹¹⁴ Malegapuru William Makgoba, Mokoko: The Makgoba Affair: A Reflection on Transformation (Florida, Vivlia Publishers, 1997), p.31.

¹¹⁵ "SA Mourns Struggle Stalwart Kgware", Sowetan, 8 October 1998, p.5.

¹¹⁶ Mabel Maimela, Interview with Nengwekhulu, University of Pretoria, 20 May 1996.

¹¹⁷ Ramphele, "The Dynamics of Gender within Black Consciousness Organisations", p.216.

politics. She was noted as one of a few women in SASO conferences who publicly challenged men when it was necessary to do so. She never failed either to support the most radical motions at conferences.¹¹⁸ Matshoba's outspokenness, particularly in radical politics, earned her the respect and trust of men in the movement. It did not come as a surprise when she was the only woman nominated to attend the Paulo Freire Method on Literacy, conducted by another woman, Ann Hope, in Johannesburg.¹¹⁹ (Hope's influence on BC training was discussed earlier in this thesis to underscore the cross-fertilisation of white liberal and BC ideas.)

As a student, Matshoba blocked the establishment of the exchange programme initiated by the SRC of the University of the Orange Free State in 1974. It had hoped that the exchange programme would facilitate the establishment of social relations between the two SRCs and, ultimately, the two universities.¹²⁰ Matshoba felt that the time was not ripe for oppressed black students to engage in amicable social relations with white students who were part of the oppressing group, and that such an arrangement could easily undermine the force of the liberation struggle.¹²¹

At the end of 1974, Matshoba gave her full support in the General Students Council to the establishment of what was to be called the Socio-Political Education Programme. The purpose of this programme was to conscientize the black community at large against participating in

¹¹⁸ Archives, Unisa Centre for African Studies, "Reports Presented at the 3rd General Students' Council", A153, p.18.

¹¹⁹ Ernest Messina, Interview with Musibudi Mangena, Harare, Zimbabwe, 15 January 1992, p.12.

¹²⁰ Karis and Gerhart Collection, "Minutes of the Proceedings of the 6th General Students' Council of the South African Students' Organisation", St. Ansgar's Fellowship Centre, Roodepoort, 30 June-6th July 1974, p.14.

¹²¹ Ibid., p.15.

government-sponsored projects.¹²² As an alternative to these governmental projects, SASO set up its own projects, beginning in Upper Gqumashe and Mpheko.¹²³ Because these programmes were so successful, others were established to serve the needs and interests of the black population.¹²⁴

Like other women dedicated to the struggle, Matshoba's main concern was to initiate women into political participation because she realised that the "nation's political maturity was measured by the political awareness of its women".¹²⁵ She was a most powerful and convincing advocate of women's involvement in politics, and she compared the political participation of South African women to that of women in the liberation struggle in Angola, Mozambique and Namibia. It was precisely because of her devoted work in student activism and other political areas that she was almost continuously banned by the government.

The extent of Matshoba's influence became clear when the government detained and subsequently imprisoned her at Modder Bee prison near Benoni, together with a number of BCM activists on 19 October 1977. When other detainees were released early in 1978, Matshoba was kept in prison and was made to serve an additional six months of political detention.¹²⁶ This may be seen as a measure of her personal political effectiveness among black students and other oppressed people of South Africa. After her release she was banned for five more years and restricted to the district

¹²² Karis and Gerhart Collection, "The Minutes of the General Students Council held at St. Peter's Seminary, Hammanskraal, 14-19 January 1974", p.1.

¹²³ Karis and Gerhart Collection, "Minutes of the Proceedings of the 6th General Students Council", p.23.

¹²⁴ Ramphela, "Empowerment and Symbols of Hope", pp.157-160.

¹²⁵ SASO Newsletter, vol 3, no 1, March/April 1973, pp.5-6.

¹²⁶ Post, 29 October 1978, p.1.

of Krugersdorp. This last restriction devastated her family life even more since she was now separated, by the requirements of the banning order, from her husband.¹²⁷ It was widely and plausibly believed among activists that the apartheid government had deliberately broken up the family and other relationships among activists in the hope that they would become personally demoralised, dispirited and weakened, and thus rendered politically ineffectual.

Nomsisi Kraai also played a leading role in the establishment of SASO. She emphasised the importance of the leadership training courses at national, regional and local/branch levels.¹²⁸ She, Matshoba and Ramphele constituted a formidable team of women who had heated exchanges with the men during the annual general meetings of students councils which were usually held during the July school holidays.¹²⁹ Apart from her duties on the executive of SASO in the Transvaal region, Kraai was often selected to give talks at formation schools. Like Mashalaba and Matshoba, she directed her speeches at women as she tried to persuade them to become involved in political activities.¹³⁰ She contributed to the formation of the Soweto Cultural Association (SCA), Shigomo, which was founded shortly after the death of Mtuli Shezi in December 1972.¹³¹ Shigomo was dedicated to memorialise Shezi and keep alive the memory of his brutal killing. Shezi had just been elected as the first vice-president of BPC in early December. He was the first member of BCM to be martyred for his ideology. He died of injuries sustained after having been

¹²⁷ Truth and Reconciliation Commission, vol 4, p.310.

¹²⁸ "Minutes of the Proceedings of the 6th General Students Council", p.11.

¹²⁹ Interview with Ramphele, 26 January 1996; Ramphele, "The Dynamics of Gender within Black Consciousness Organisation", p.220.

¹³⁰ SASO Newsletter, vol 3, no 1, April 1973, p.2.

¹³¹ Archives, Unisa Centre for African Studies, "Composite Report of the Interim-Executive to the 4th General Students Council, St.Peter's Conference Centre, Hammanskraal, 14-22 July 1973", A153, p.1.

pushed into the path of a moving train by an employee of the railways in Germiston.¹³² The dedication of this cultural association was fitting in the sense that BCM was acknowledging the role he had played in making cultural regeneration an important part of the organisation's agenda.¹³³ Shigomo was later merged with the Lenasia Cultural Group to form the People's Experimental Theatre (PET), and Kraai served as its first secretary.¹³⁴ She wrote a number of articles in which she recorded the historical background of black theatre.¹³⁵

Another woman in BCM who played a leading role in the male-dominated organisation was Thenjiwe Mtintso, a very close friend of Ramphele. Mtintso joined SASO at the University of Fort Hare in 1972 where she had enrolled for the bachelor of science degree. She was among the students who organised a strike during 1972 and 1973, which led to her banning from the campus. She became involved in the BPC in King William's Town where she was directly influenced in her political thinking by Biko himself.¹³⁶ Her first employment was at the Dependents Conference of the Border Council of Churches, which materially and psychologically supported ex-political prisoners and detainees.¹³⁷

Mtintso contributed to the advancement of the BCM mainly through the medium of her journalism. She joined the Daily Dispatch in East London as a reporter in August 1975,¹³⁸ after Biko had requested its editor, Woods, to employ her on the grounds (quite apart from her natural

¹³² Ibid., p.1.

¹³³ Mbulelo Vizikhungo Mzamane, "The Impact of Black Consciousness on Culture", in Pityana et al, Bounds of Possibility, pp.186-187.

¹³⁴ PET Newsletter, vol 1, no 1, September/November 1973, p.1.

¹³⁵ Ibid., pp.11-12.

¹³⁶ Gastrow, Who's Who in South African Politics, p.212.

¹³⁷ Ibid., p.212.

¹³⁸ The Cape Times, 23 February 1978, p.3.

ability) that she was a person of political sophistication who enjoyed a wide range of contacts in the black community.¹³⁹ In a way, this was an attempt to realise BCM's strategic principle (mentioned earlier in the chapter) of infiltrating liberal newspapers so that BCM journalists might report black issues from a BCM and not a "Bantustan" point of view. Her employment meant that she would join other black male journalists employed by white liberal newspapers.¹⁴⁰ At this time there were hardly any black women journalists reporting political issues in major liberal newspapers. This is not surprising since there were few male black journalists in the first place. The Daily Dispatch had Leslie Xinxwa in addition to Mtintso.¹⁴¹ A few of the others who worked for the white liberal press and who were pro-BCM were Jan Tugwana (Rand Daily Mail),¹⁴² Enoch Duma (Sunday Times), Wiseman Kuzwayo (Daily News, Durban), Qurash Patel (Daily News, Durban), Mateu Mononyane (Rand Daily Mail) and Nat Serache (Rand Daily Mail).¹⁴³ Mtintso was a leading member of the Association of Black Journalists, and the Writers' Association of South Africa (WASA) – an organisation that propagated BCM principles.¹⁴⁴

Apart from reporting daily events in the Daily Dispatch from a BCM point of view (a different perspective from other reporters employed by the newspaper), Mtintso continued to play her part in the broader political liberation struggle. It was because of her continuous involvement in politics that she experienced most forms of detention permitted by the government's security legislation in both South Africa and the Transkei. Prison experiences toughened her to a point that

¹³⁹ Gastrow, Who's Who in South Africa Politics, p.213.

¹⁴⁰ Pretoria News, 5 October 1977, p.14.

¹⁴¹ Daily Dispatch, 29 September 1978. p.14.

¹⁴² John Kane-Berman, Soweto: Black Revolt, White Reaction (Johannesburg, Ravan, 1978), p.32.

¹⁴³ Daily Dispatch, 6 February 1978. p.8.

¹⁴⁴ The Citizen, 7 July 1978, p.2.

she became one of the few BCM women who was completely fearless in her opposition to the apartheid government.¹⁴⁵ For example, she was a key witness in the case of her fellow BCM member, Mapetla Mohapi, who was murdered (as was mentioned earlier) on 5 August 1976, while in detention at the Kei Road police station near King William's Town.¹⁴⁶ Her evidence was vital in the case since she was the last person to see Mohapi alive when they were both being held in custody at the Kei Road police station.¹⁴⁷ Her evidence was also crucial because she was able to reveal that her interrogators had hinted that, if she continued to be uncooperative, she would die in the same way as Mohapi.¹⁴⁸ This vital information, revealed by Mtintso, strongly suggests that the security police had murdered Mohapi. This evidence was given by Mtintso before she went into exile in Lesotho in 1978 – thereby obtaining some relief from the continuous harassment which she had to endure at the hands of agents of apartheid.¹⁴⁹

Finally, the most notable collective achievement of the women of BCM was the founding and establishment of the Black Women's Federation (BWF) in Durban in December 1975.¹⁵⁰ The BWF acted as an umbrella body for organisations of black women from all walks of life.¹⁵¹ Its objective was to work for solidarity among black women and their organisations.¹⁵² Its first president was a leading South African scholar and activist, Fatima Meer, who helped to give the organisation

¹⁴⁵ Kuzwayo, Call me Woman, pp.210-211.

¹⁴⁶ Post, 15 October 1979, p.1; Eastern Province Herald, 17 January 1980, p.9; Post, 4 July 1980, p.4.

¹⁴⁷ The Friend, 12 January 1980, p.8.

¹⁴⁸ "Exile Says She Was Throttled", The Argus, 18 January 1980, p.3.

¹⁴⁹ The Friend, p.8.

¹⁵⁰ "The Black Consciousness Movement", A People's History. Resistance in South Africa (Cape Town, NUSAS Publication, 1980), p.30.

¹⁵¹ Ramphela, "The Dynamics of Gender within Black Consciousness Organisation", p.216.

¹⁵² Maimela, Interview with Ranwedzi Nengwekhulu, University of Pretoria, Department of Public Administration, 20 May 1996.

proper direction.¹⁵³ Meer was an obvious choice as the BWF's first president because she had had extensive experience in running women's organisations. She had served in the Executive of the Federation of the South African Women (FSAW) in 1954¹⁵⁴ and had always been at the epicentre of the political struggle. Meer, together with Nokuthula Luthuli and some women from Natal, also led the fasting and prayers on 31 May 1960 as a sign of solidarity with the political prisoners who had been arrested in the wake of Sharpeville.¹⁵⁵ She was an obvious choice to be the first president of the BWF – not least because she was not easily deterred by the techniques which the apartheid government or the security police used to harass, intimidate and frighten activists.¹⁵⁶

The BWF geared itself to working in more practical ways than most of the existing liberation organisations. Less than a year after its establishment, there followed the landmark 16 June 1976 uprisings in which students in Soweto were shot and killed by the police during a peaceful demonstration against the introduction of Afrikaans as a medium of teaching in their schools. Members of the BWF went into the thick of the fighting to help the families and relatives find and identify those who had been killed.¹⁵⁷

The BWF's second most important challenge occurred the following year when a group comprising members of the BWF and many members of the YWCA confronted police on 24 October 1977. On this occasion, a number of activists had gathered at the YWCA centre in Dube to undertake a trip to King William's Town for the burial of Biko. The security police's plan was

¹⁵³ Olsen, Chronology of Women's History, p.336.

¹⁵⁴ Walker, Women and Resistance in South Africa, p.155.

¹⁵⁵ Mary Benson, South Africa: The Struggle for a Birthright (London, International Defence and Aid Fund, 1985), p.227.

¹⁵⁶ Truth and Reconciliation Commission, vol 4, p.306.

¹⁵⁷ Bernstein, For Their Triumphs and for Their Tears, p.103.

to prevent the journey from taking place by intimidating those who hoped to go. These women, however, confronted the police so bravely that the police eventually abandoned their cowardly attempt to prevent Biko's friends and comrades from attending his funeral.¹⁵⁸ Such interventions in volatile and dangerous situations by members of the BWF confirm that its members were willing to put their lives at risk by engaging in physical confrontation with the ruthless operatives (whether security police or others) of apartheid.

But political activism was only one facet of the BWF agenda. Wherever it could, it moved to uplift standards of living, especially in the rural areas, by introducing literacy projects and nutrition and health classes. It also compiled, printed and distributed a booklet which informed women about their legal rights.¹⁵⁹ Perhaps the BWF's greatest achievement, realised two years after it had been founded, was the organisation of the ground-breaking conference at the St Ansgar's College in Roodepoort between 6 and 8 September 1977. The theme of this second BWF annual conference was "The inefficiency of Bantu Education", and a number of experts in the field of education, including Oscar Dhlomo and Nomatamba Sithole, facilitated the discussion. The keynote address of the conference was delivered by Dorothy Height, national president of the National Council of Negro Women in the United States of America, who was known to have opposed the involvement of African-American women in the white American women's liberation movement.¹⁶⁰ During the conference, Height spoke at length about the role of women during the civil rights struggle in the USA.¹⁶¹ Her invitation to address the black South African women's organisation underscored the fact that black South Africans identified themselves more with the

¹⁵⁸ Kuzwayo, Call me Woman, pp.48-50.

¹⁵⁹ Bernstein, For Their Triumphs and for Their Tears, p.105.

¹⁶⁰ Lerna, Black Women in White America, p.589.

¹⁶¹ Women's Supplement to the World, 15 September 1977, p.1.

African Americans than with Africans on their own continent because of the similarity in the nature of their oppression in both societies.

The aim of this chapter has been to describe the distinctive contribution which black women made to BCM, and how, in the period when BC was being systematically repressed by the apartheid state, various individual white liberal women worked actively to help black women activists to become leaders in their own right. The role that many black women played in BCM at this time was sometimes an outcome of that wider, symbiotic but paradoxical relationship between white liberals and BC activists in the 1960s and 1970s, that is central to the topic of this research. In pursuance of this aim, this chapter has demonstrated that women specifically played a central role in the national liberation struggle and placed themselves in the forefront of the battle. They worked hardest in conscientizing blacks to join BCM. Participants such as Mashalaba recruited a number of her female colleagues into politics. Ramphele made a distinguished contribution as the first superintendent of the Zanimpilo Community Centre. Her experience in King William's Town enabled her to establish another community health centre in Lenyenye near Tzaneen, the place to which she was banished. Motlalepula Kgware became the first president of the Black People's Convention when it officially established in 1972. Kraai was able to head the cultural organisation of BCM, while Mtintso worked as a journalist to implement BCM strategy among other journalists. It is essential to recognise the contribution of these and other women to the liberation struggle in South Africa so that further research in gender studies and other disciplines may be done.

This chapter has also shown that while, in earlier days, women's political organisations were led and dominated by the wives, mothers and partners of those organisations, this was not always the

case with BCM. Many members of BCM were independent women who expected to be treated as the equals of their male counterparts and who took the lead in the founding, running and maintenance of the movement. They did not, however, realise the importance of insisting on the inclusion of women's issues on the political agenda early on in the liberation struggle in South Africa. In spite of this, these women exemplified the attitudes of a new generation of black women who were no longer prepared to exercise leadership as second-class revolutionaries in exclusively female organisations devoted to trivia or secondary support. They demanded to be at the centre of decision making and praxis in the entire BCM and the force of their intellect and personalities and the quality of their courage and dedication made it impossible for anyone to deny them their legitimate aspirations – especially in the late 1970s when feminism was spreading as a force to be reckoned with throughout the world.

CHAPTER SIX

BIKO'S DEATH AND THE INQUEST

The significance of the deeply flawed and suspect inquest that followed Biko's death, was that it represented a climax in the symbiotic and cooperative relationship between white liberals (both local and international) and the man who had been the founder of the Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa. As a person of action and a distinguished intellectual whose whole life and vision were focused on ways and means of freeing South Africans from inhumane and brutal institutionalised racism, it is unlikely that Biko ever envisioned himself as a martyr. And yet, if need be, he was the kind of person who would have given his life for the accomplishment of his cause.

Although the first truly democratic election was held in South Africa in 1994, Biko himself might have been pleased to know that the events which followed his death in many ways signalled the beginning of the end of apartheid and white power in South Africa. Although Biko himself had enunciated the Black Consciousness doctrine that *only* black people (without the aid or assistance of white liberals) could liberate themselves from the burden and yolk of apartheid, the drama that played itself out in the inquest was one in which the actors were either white liberals or whites who supported, either tacitly or aggressively, the maintenance of the apartheid state and the belief that black aspirations for ordinary democratic human rights in the lands of their ancestors was tantamount to "communism" and a desire for "a violent overthrow of the state".

One of the many ironies of the inquest that followed Biko's death was, for example, that there was fundamental disagreement between the two white liberal pathologists (who maintained that Biko had sustained multiple blows to the head) and the state pathologists (who maintained that Biko had sustained one massive blow to the head – the blow which (they maintained) had ultimately led to his death. It was exactly such disagreements, as well as numerous evasions, lies and half-truths, many of which only emerged during the persistent and arduous cross-examination of witnesses by the white liberal advocates whom the Biko family retained to represent their interests, that made it evident, right from the beginning, that the inquest was a cover-up, and an ultimately futile exercise in what today is called "damage control" by the deeply compromised servants of the apartheid state.

If it had not been for the part played by white liberals, white liberal organisations, white liberal newspapers, the murder of one of South Africa's most distinguished political activists might have been swept under the carpet and the liberation for which Biko had lived, fought and died, might have been indefinitely retarded. When it became apparent to the international community that the inquest was designed to obscure rather than to elucidate what had really happened to Biko, international outrage and disgust on a scale hitherto unprecedented in South Africa broke over the heads of the apartheid government. Although the minister of police and prisons, Jimmy Kruger, had uttered the infamous words, "It leaves me cold" when he heard of Biko's death in police detention, he was soon afterwards made to eat his words as a storm of protest, anger and disbelief swept around the world. Paradoxically, much of this anger emanated from white liberal sources, both local and international. And yet, the involvement of white liberals, organisations and institutions as players and auxiliaries in the struggle for black political freedom, neither contradicted nor invalidated Biko's central belief that only black people (without white assistance)

could and would eventually liberate themselves.

This research examines the central paradox of the BC position, namely that although Biko called on Africans to liberate themselves, Biko himself, and his organisation, for reasons beyond their control, were profoundly dependent on the support of a whole range of white liberals who chose, each in his or her own way, to become involved in the struggle of black people that was the central aim of Black Consciousness. As government measures against black organisations and individuals became ever more draconian and brutal, white liberal support of BC in many ways helped to keep the flame of protest burning. The paradox is that although Biko's realisation that black people could not depend for their liberation on the old-style white liberalism represented by people such as Alan Paton, it became ever more necessary, as individual BC and other black leaders were detained, killed or removed from the scene, for *someone* to keep protest against government oppression and apartheid alive. In the abnormal circumstances of the times, the only people in South Africa who had sufficient freedom and means to oppose the government and support the BC agenda, either directly or indirectly, were white liberals and the organisations that they represented.

To accept such a proposition is not to invalidate the truth of Biko's perception that it was necessary for black people (without white interference) to take charge of their own destiny. The central thesis of this research is that, in spite of the existence of such an ideal, there existed a necessary synergy and symbiosis between BC and white liberal individuals and organisations, which was caused by the unequal circumstances of the times, and without which the struggle for black liberation might have been retarded for many more years. The central drama of these years (the late 1960s and the 1970s) was Biko's death and the passion, fear, bigotry, cruelty and fury

which it aroused on both sides of the political spectrum – and among people of all colours and political persuasions. It is to this event, and its repercussions, that we now shall turn.

When Biko died in mysterious circumstances on 12 September 1977 in police custody in Pretoria, he was the forty-sixth political activist to have been killed since 1963. In spite of this, no police or government authority had ever accepted responsibility for any of these deaths. The first detainee who had died had been Bellington Mampe. He had died on 1 September 1963, and the cause of his death had never been disclosed.¹ In most cases where detainees died in detention, the police routinely attributed the cause to "suicide", although few African people were deceived by such pronouncements. Inquiries into the probable causes of death were held in fewer than ten of the 46 cases. Between 1976 and 1977, only four inquests were widely reported in white liberal media such as newspapers, journals and in the circulars of liberal organisations.²

There are two related reasons why these particular inquests were publicised and reported during those two years. Firstly, more political activists had been killed during those two years than at any other time. Thirteen people were reported to have been killed in 1976 and fourteen were killed in 1977.³ Secondly, BC was already widespread and flourishing in the 1970s, and had the support of a sizeable number of black communities. The government hoped to suppress BC activities by detaining the BC leadership and therefore intimidating the masses who looked to them for freedom. In pursuance of this aim, the government neglected to supervise the activities of the

¹ Francis Meli, South Africa Belongs to Us: A History of the ANC (Harare, Zimbabwe Publishing House, 1988), p.177.

² Unisa Archives, Centre for African Studies, Diakonia News, (Durban, St Andrew's Centre), November 1977, p.10.

³ Prisoners of Apartheid: A Biographical List of Political Prisoners and Banned Persons in South Africa (International Aid and Defence Fund, London, 1978), p.177.

security police, thus giving them a free hand to detain and maltreat the leadership of BC without any of the usual democratic or legal safeguards accorded to prisoners. In fact, the government believed that the security police were helping to undermine and ultimately abolish Black Power, which they deemed to be ideologically Marxist.⁴ The first inquests were those of Joseph Mdluli, who died on 19 March 1976 in Durban,⁵ and Mapetla Mohapi, an active member in BC circles, particularly in the Eastern Cape region, who died on 5 August 1976 at the Kei Police Station in King William's Town.⁶

Mamphela Ramphela was one of the two doctors who represented the family at the autopsies. Ironically Biko himself had agitated for an inquest into the death of Mohapi, little knowing that he himself would soon die in similar circumstances in police custody. The third inquest was into the death of Phakamile Mabija, who had died on 7 July 1977 when he allegedly fell from the sixth floor window of the Transvaal Road Police Station in Kimberley.⁷

The fourth person to die was Steve Biko and his death, with all its subsequent ramifications, provide the main focus of this chapter. Biko's death and inquest generated an enormous amount of publicity and were widely reported in national and international media. It was **this that** prompted Hilda Bernstein to note that the inquest was a high drama, filmed by television cameras and attended by reporters, experts and interested parties from many countries.⁸ There are a

⁴ House of Assembly Debates, vol 74, columns 7033-7034.

⁵ "Death in detention", Diakonia News, 1977, p.10.

⁶ "Family of Mohape is suing Minister", Eastern Province Herald, 18 Aug 79. See also "Police caused husband's death, says wife", Cape Argus, 16 Oct 79.

⁷ Tony Saddington, "Phakamile Mabija", South African Outlook, vol 107, 1977, p.139.

⁸ Hilda Bernstein, no. 46 Steve Biko (London, International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa, 1978), p.29.

number of reasons why Biko's case received such attention. After Biko's death, the government had been dismissive of an inquest. Then, two months after his death, it changed its mind and called for an inquest. Their political motivation was that an inquest would prove beyond doubt that the organisation which Biko had led was indeed revolutionary.

These events were taking place during the build-up to a national election in South Africa, and the National Party confidently expected to attract a majority of votes from those who supported the hard line which they had adopted with regard to the detention and treatment of detainees. The official opposition party, liberal in its policies and outlook, also used the inquest to its own advantage, as will be discussed later in this chapter. Some of these liberals, who outspokenly criticised the police when the revelations of the Biko inquest became public, had known Biko either as a companion or a co-worker.⁹ More importantly, Biko had had international connections. Before his death he had acted as a spokesperson when he had willingly granted numerous interviews to foreign non-governmental and governmental organisations which opposed apartheid. He had been outspoken in these interviews in spite of knowing that he would attract the hostile attention of the South African government and its operatives. For example, in December 1976 Biko was interviewed by the American Democratic senator, Dick Clark, who, in his capacity as the chairperson of the Senate Committee on African Affairs, interviewed Biko about the role of the United States in South Africa.¹⁰⁰ It was therefore logical that Clark would be among the first prominent people from overseas to query the official version of Biko's death. Clark himself hoped that the inquest into Biko's death would get to the bottom of the matter, and his role in the events

⁹ "Steve Biko and Frankenstein", *Reality*, vol 9, 1977, pp.2-3.

¹⁰ "Memorandum from B.S. Biko to General Dick Clark on American policy towards Azania (South Africa)", 1976, pp.1-6.

that followed is discussed in detail when reference is made to the role that the international community played in reaction to Biko's death. Also included will be a discussion of how the liberal press, the liberal opposition and the international community reacted to the findings of the commission.

About a month before his death, Biko had allowed himself to be interviewed by Bernard Zylstra of the Canadian Institute for Christian Studies. The text of the interview was published only after Biko's death as the group felt that earlier publication might have jeopardised Biko's life at the hands of the South African government.

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the inquest. Because of the connections and relationships which Biko had established and nurtured with foreign individuals and organisations during his lifetime, there was, after his death, immediate pressure on the South African government to establish an impartial board of inquiry. One of the first to ask for such an inquest was Clark, two days after Biko's death.¹¹

Then follows a description of the inquest into the cause of Biko's death, with special reference to how it was organised and the role that white liberals (such as counsel who represented the Biko family) played. The main participants in the commission will be named and the responsibilities which were allocated to them will be described. Because most of the main participants supported the apartheid government and opposed everything that Biko stood for, it was more or less inevitable (barring any unforeseen but unlikely mistakes made by pro-state witnesses under cross-

¹¹ The World, 15 Sept 1977, p.6.

examination) that the verdict would go the way that it did. In describing the proceedings of the commission, emphasis will be laid on the way in which (white liberal) counsel for the Biko family extracted crucial evidence from uncooperative witnesses – and very nearly managed to derail the rehearsed cover-up that the authorities had clearly hoped the commission would be. Lastly, under this category, an analysis of the most important evidence which emerged will be attempted to show what that evidence revealed about Biko's death at the time and about others who died in detention in similar circumstances.

How the commission was organised

Before one goes into detail about how the commission was constituted, it is interesting to note the importance of the venue that was chosen for the sittings. The Old Synagogue in the centre of Pretoria (a national monument long decommissioned as a Jewish place of worship) was already a familiar place for hearing political cases involving anti-apartheid dissidents. While the November 1977 case was mainly a case about BCM, the building had been used for the infamous Treason Trials held between 1956 and 1961. When Winnie Mandela and 21 activists were tried in 1969, that trial also took place in the synagogue. Thus the ANC faced its accusers in this building, as did the South West African People's Organisation (SWAPO), some of whose members were tried there in the late 1960s.¹²

¹² George Bizos, No One to Blame? In Pursuit of Justice in South Africa (Cape Town, David Philip, 1998), p.58. The significance of this trial was that it was the first trial to be held under the Terrorism Act. Also Sam C. Nolutshungu, South Africa in Africa: A Study in Ideology and Foreign Policy (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1975), pp.155-161; Prisoners of Apartheid, pp.167-175.

Because the commission consisted mainly of state employees, it was hardly surprising that the findings and verdict of the commission exonerated, to the greatest possible degree, both the security police and doctors who had been involved with Biko while he had been in detention. The state-appointed M.J. Prins, the chief magistrate of Pretoria, presided over the proceedings. Because Biko had been severely injured and traumatised while in detention, and because of the alleged negligence of the doctors who had attended him in their official capacity as state employees, it was, from the outset, obvious that expert medical evidence would be required. Professors Isador Gordon and J.A. Olivier were therefore appointed as assessors with specialised medical knowledge. The three government departments whose employees were also implicated in the case, were legally represented. Advocate K. von Lieres and T.D. Reeds represented the state. The police were represented by Advocates P.R. van Rooyen and J.M.C. Smit, while W.H. Heath represented the Department of Prisons. The Department of Health had no legal representation but the state's legal representative, Advocate B. de V. Pickard, represented the medical practitioners in question. P.J. Erasmus represented the Law Society of the Transvaal. Since all the legal representatives mentioned above were either directly or indirectly state or semi-state employees or else were involved in some way or another with the ruling establishment and its institutions, it was to be expected that the commission would find in favour of the government.

The Law Society of the Transvaal invited two international legal experts from Britain and the United States, Sir David Napley from the United Kingdom and Louis Pollack from the USA, to attend as observers. It seems as if these two observers were only invited because there had been some concern among liberal members of the South African Law Society that the proceedings of the commission would be biased. It was felt, in these quarters, that there should at least be a few

neutral observers who might be in a position to judge the proceedings with some degree of objectivity. In the long run these observers favoured the white liberal establishment because their reports, published overseas, portrayed white liberals as defenders of the African majority who were the main victims of the racist apartheid laws. Another consequence of the attendance of these two observers was that the Black Consciousness Movement, of which Biko had been the symbol, received positive recognition. Both observers viewed BC as a legitimate organisation which operated within the legal parameters of South African society, and hence they could find no justification for the brutal detention and murder of its followers.¹³

Their reports were valuable sources of information about the inquest, unlike those of journalists who reported events on a daily basis. Napley and Pollack successfully documented the proceedings from the first sitting to the last. In the United States a number of civil rights organisations disseminated these reports. Pollack reported to various media, while Napley's views were taken up by anti-apartheid organisations, including the London-based International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa.¹⁴

Biko's family was represented by a team of three leading liberal advocates who had already defended a number of political activists, the majority of whom were black. They were Sydney W. Kentridge, Ernest Wentzel and George Bizos. The latter had been involved in the early 1960s in the ANC Rivonia trial and had eventually become Nelson Mandela's family lawyer.¹⁵

¹³ Sir David Napley, "A view from the old synagogue", Sunday Times, 1 Jan 1978.

¹⁴ Berstein, no. 46 Steve Biko, pp.137-140. Appendix A: "Report by Sir David Napley, British Law Society, invited as an independent observer by the Association of Law Society in South Africa, Steven Biko Inquest."

¹⁵ Karis and Gerhart Collection, Johannesburg. Quoted from transcript of Gerhart's interview with George Bizos, 30 Oct 1989, New York.

Kentridge had appeared on behalf of the defendants in the case which had arisen as a result of the Sharpeville Massacre of 21 March 1960,¹⁶ and had also appeared for the defendants from the Black Consciousness Movement who had been charged for being involved in illegal gatherings when they had held rallies around South Africa to celebrate the liberation of Mozambique from Portuguese rule.¹⁷ He was well known as a defence advocate for defendants in BCM political trials.¹⁸ Wentzel was one of those who represented the families of Sharpeville victims with the assistance of the International Defence and Aid Fund, which was under the management of Anglican Bishop Ambrose Reeves.¹⁹ Wentzel also served as legal advisor to Robert Sobukwe, president of the Pan Africanist Congress.²⁰

This then was the team of advocates which was instructed by S. Chetty's BC firm of lawyers to represent Biko's family. The very fact that Chetty's firm instructed these three white liberal lawyers suggests that there existed a trusting relationship between BC and Kentridge, Wentzel and Bizo. What was most striking about this case was that, although it was a political case, counsel for the Biko family refrained from raising political issues but rather restricted itself to proving legal and procedural irregularities which would implicate the state in Biko's murder.

¹⁶ Ambrose Reeves, Shooting at Sharpeville: The Agony of South Africa (London, Victor Gollancz, 1960), pp.111-141.

¹⁷ Arnold Millard (ed), Steve Biko: Black Consciousness in South Africa (New York, Vantage Books, 1979), pp.281-286.

¹⁸ Michael Lobban, White Man's Justice: South African Political Trials in the Black Consciousness Era (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1966), p.133.

¹⁹ Frank Philip, "Richard Ambrose Reeves: Bishop of Johannesburg 1949-1961". MA dissertation, Unisa, 1995, p.181.

²⁰ Benjamin Pogrand, How Can a Man Die Better: The Life of Robert Sobukwe (Johannesburg, Jonathan Ball, 1997), p.45.

The other group which was subpoenaed to appear before the commission as witnesses were state employees who had been involved with Biko in the last twenty-three days of his life. Eight security guards were among these witnesses, five of whom comprised the morning shift. Major Harold Snyman had been in command of this group, while Captain W.P. (Petrus) Siebert, Sergeant Gideon Niewoudt, and Warrant Officers Ruben Max and J.J. (Jacob) Beneke had also been involved as security policemen of rank. It was alleged during the inquest that the morning shift had consisted of five members because two of them were able to speak Xhosa, Biko's mother tongue.²¹ This seems to imply that, from the outset, the aim of the security police interrogation of Biko was to degrade and humiliate him, imagining, as they might have, that he would have had difficulty in understanding any questions posed to him in English. Such an arrangement also served to bring home to Biko the importance which his captors attached to Afrikaans, as opposed to English. The night shift was commanded by Lieutenant Winston Eric Wilkens and included Warrant Officers Coetzee²² and Henry Fouche.²³ All security police who testified were based in Port Elizabeth. There was, however, a Major Richard Hansen from King William's Town. He was subpoenaed to give evidence to the effect that Biko and BC were committed to violence and were indeed violent in their actions. This was clearly demonstrated under cross-examination when Hansen claimed that Biko had assaulted Warrant Officer Hattingh in 1975 at King William' Town.²⁴

The three medical doctors, based in Port Elizabeth, Ivor Lang, the district surgeon, Benjamin

²¹ Inquest, vol 2, p.86. Also Inquest, vol 4, p.257.

²² The author has been unable trace Warrant Officer Coetzee's full name either from the records of the Inquest or from the records of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

²³ Donald Woods, Biko (London, Penguin Books, 1979), p.291.

²⁴ Woods, Biko, pp.255-156. See also Inquest, vol 5, pp.288-294.

Tucker, the chief district surgeon, and Colin Hersch, a specialist, as well as the newly appointed Andre van Zyl from Pretoria, all gave evidence. The pathologists who performed the post-mortem on Biko's corpse were also involved in the commission. Initially the team consisted of three members. Two of these were the eminent South African pathologists, Professor Johan David Loubser of Pretoria,²⁵ and Professor Ian Simson, then head of the Department of Anatomical Pathology at the University of Pretoria.²⁶ Biko's family was represented by Dr Jonathan Gluckman, a liberal, who was then the press officer for the Southern Transvaal branch of the South African Medical and Dental Association.²⁷ It is now believed that counsel for the Biko family had requested Dr Gluckman, because of his liberal political persuasion, to act on behalf of the family. They hoped thereby to obtain a more objective joint pathologists' report than might have been the case if no liberal had been present.²⁸ However, because of the complexity of the whole post-mortem procedure, Gluckman realised that they in fact needed another person who was an expert in the field. This resulted in requesting the services of Professor Neville Sydney Proctor, an anatomical pathologist at the University of Witwatersrand, who joined the team on the second day of the post-mortem.

It is worth noting that, although the four pathologists performed the post-mortem jointly and agreed on its findings, namely that Biko had died as a result of head injuries, there appeared to be differences of opinion as to how such injuries might have been sustained. The two liberal pathologists acting on behalf of the family, Gluckman and Proctor, pointed out that more than one blow to Biko's head was the cause of his head injury. With hindsight this suggests that repeated

²⁵ Inquest, vol 16, p.1140.

²⁶ Inquest, vol 22, p.1566.

²⁷ Sunday Express, 27 Apr 1980.

²⁸ Helen Suzman, In No Uncertain Terms (Johannesburg, Jonathan Ball, 1993), p.225.

violent blows to Biko's head, inflicted by security policemen, were the proximate cause of his death. On the other hand, however, the state pathologists, Johan Loubser and Ian Simson, were of the opinion that only one heavy blow had been inflicted to Biko's head and that this had caused the head injuries which were identified by the pathologists.²⁹ It is now clear that the two state pathologists were attempting to support the accounts of events given in evidence by the security police, namely that Biko had sustained a single head injury on the morning of 7 September 1977 when he had "become aggressive" (according to state evidence) after he had been confronted by information that implicated him and Peter Jones in the distribution of pamphlets in black townships around Port Elizabeth.³⁰

The family pathologists, especially Gluckman, were eager to reveal the results of the post-mortem before the government announced them since these results constituted a *prima facie* case against the authorities, suggesting, as they did, serious and culpable negligence in the handling and care of political detainees. Gluckman was the first to share the results with Helen Suzman, a prominent member of the opposition in parliament.³¹ This was clearly a deliberate move on Gluckman's part since Suzman's portfolio was that of law and order, and Gluckman must have perceived the importance of this information for Suzman and the world at large.

In contrast to Gluckman's eagerness to make the findings public, the two government pathologists were hesitant, aware of the implied criticism of the *modus operandi* of the government and, more especially, their servants, the security police. Loubser especially must be singled out for blame in this regard. He had studied and lived overseas, in Britain and the United States. It might have

²⁹ *Inquest*, vol 18, pp.1281-1320.

³⁰ *Inquest*, vol 5, pp.119-133; pp.133-286.

³¹ Suzman, *In No Uncertain Terms*, p.225.

been expected that a professional such as Loubser would have been able to follow the dictates of professional ethics and comment objectively on the obvious implications of the forensic evidence without regard for any personal or political allegiances he might have had.³² Perhaps in the end Loubser was too much a product of his environment. He was based and worked in the heartland of conservative pro-government Pretoria as chief pathological anatomist at the two segregated local hospitals, H.F. Verwoerd (for whites and coloureds only) and Kalafong (for Africans only). In the end Loubser steadfastly opted to bias the evidence so as to support the version of events which seemed to exonerate the security police.³³

The government on the other hand had ensured that it was difficult, especially for foreign correspondents and other interested persons, to have free access to the information and to follow with ease and understanding the court proceedings. Napley, for example, was unable to follow the proceedings when they were conducted in Afrikaans.³⁴ The state tried by all means possible to conduct the inquiry in Afrikaans. The reason for this, according to the court, was to accommodate the security police, who, the court claimed, were more easily able to give evidence in Afrikaans than in English.³⁵ Kentridge, however, appealed for the proceedings to be conducted in English since his clients could not understand Afrikaans. He refused Von Lieres's suggestion that Biko's family should be provided with an interpreter.³⁶ As a result of Kentridge's protest, three quarters of the proceedings were conducted in English. This hardly solved the problem for

³² Inquest, vol 20, p.1461.

³³ Inquest, vol 22, p.1566.

³⁴ Sunday Times, 1 Jan 1978, p.9.

³⁵ Woods, Biko, p.229.

³⁶ Inquest, vol 1, pp.11-13.

those who did not understand Afrikaans since key witnesses from the security police continued to testify in Afrikaans. The doctors, however, all testified in English.

Another indication that the state was less than keen to make information readily available was the fact that there was no sound system in the court. Although a large national and international media contingent was present throughout the proceedings, no sound system was provided. When media representatives realised what was happening, they signed a petition requesting the installation of a sound system which they offered to finance themselves. The fact that the magistrate turned down this request seems to indicate the invisible but ever-present guiding hand of the government on the whole trial enterprise.³⁷ It seems as if the state was convinced all along that it would be difficult to prove that the security police and the local state surgeons in Port Elizabeth had deliberately conspired to murder Biko. State-biased witnesses had the advantage of a period of two months before the commencement of the commission to conceal and rehearse evidence which might otherwise have incriminated both the security police and the doctors. It therefore fell to the Biko family counsel (who were liberals) and to the two liberal pathologists in the team to somehow extract information from uncooperative security police and doctors in order to incriminate them.

³⁷ Woods, Biko, p.229.

The proceedings of the commission

The inquest lasted for about two weeks. Before intensive cross-examination began in the courtroom, a selection of items allegedly used by the security police to interrogate Biko while he was in detention in Room 619 of the Sanlam Building in Port Elizabeth, were exhibited in court. Also, a selection of gruesome photographs taken during the post-mortem, indicating the injured areas of Biko's head, were conspicuously labelled and handed in as part of the evidence.³⁸

The commission commenced with an announcement of the names of all the participants. Thereafter the chief state pathologist gave the results of the post-mortem which served to show that an injury (or injuries) to Biko's head had been the cause of his death. The first six days of the inquiry were occupied by intensive cross-examination of the security police, particularly Colonel Johannes Goosen, officer in charge of Eastern Cape police headquarters. Also cross-examined were Major Snyman, leader of the morning team which had interrogated Biko, and Wilken who had headed the evening team. Siebert, who was a member of Snyman's team, was cross-examined in order to determine what role he had played when he accompanied Biko as he was driven to Pretoria in the back of a Land Rover during the night of 11 September 1977.³⁹

The second group to take the witness stand were the four medical doctors who had treated Biko while he had been in detention. It took Kentridge three and half days to establish that the doctors involved had deliberately neglected Biko's welfare because they had accepted security police

³⁸ Inquest, vol 1, pp.4-6.

³⁹ Woods, Biko, pp.233-302.

advice that Biko was not really ill but was merely shamming illness. Both Lang and Tucker became the focus of Kentridge's intensive cross-examination, mainly because both seemed to have been grossly negligent in their capacity as doctors while caring for Biko, and because it also seemed that they had conspired with the police to prohibit Biko any access to the outside world.⁴⁰ The pathologist, Dr J.D. Loubser, was called by Biko's family counsel to clarify how it might be possible for a qualified physician to misdiagnose the condition of a seriously ill patient.⁴¹ The fourth doctor, Andries van Zyl, was called to give evidence regarding the patient's condition upon his arrival in Pretoria.⁴²

Gluckman seems to have been a controversial figure amongst the participants in the commission. Both Van Rooyen and Von Lieres opposed a request by Kentridge to allow Gluckman to give the court his personal opinions about the results of the post-mortem examination. It was only after a lengthy argument during which Kentridge convinced the court about the importance of Gluckman's evidence, that the magistrate ruled in favour of Kentridge's request.⁴³ Gluckman's evidence is discussed in the section below. As though intending to undermine Gluckman's evidence, Van Rooyen, Von Lieres, Pickard and Heath requested that Dr Simson, one of the state pathologists, be given an opportunity to clarify some statements made by Gluckman.⁴⁴ Van Rooyen was the only person to question Simson. The last three to be called in conclusion of evidence were Goosen, Fouche, and Beneke.⁴⁵ On the day prior to the announcement of the

⁴⁰ *Inquest*, vols 9-15.

⁴¹ *Inquest*, vol 16, pp.1140-1200. Also *Inquest*, vol 16, pp.1140-1200.

⁴² *Inquest*, vol 20, p.1449-1456. Also Barney Pityana, Mamphela Ramphele, Malusi Mpumlwana and Lindy Wilson, *Bounds of Possibility: The Legacy of Steve Biko and Black Consciousness* (Cape Town, David Philip, 1991), pp.82-83.

⁴³ *Inquest*, vol 20, pp.1461-1471; pp.1477-1565.

⁴⁴ *Inquest*, vol 22, pp.1624-1662.

⁴⁵ *Inquest*, vol 23, pp.1663-1680; pp.1686-1714; 1716-1723.

verdict, Kentridge, on behalf of the Biko family counsel, gave some reasons why the security police might plausibly be charged for the death of Biko while he had been in their custody.⁴⁶ Opposing this, Van Rooyen, Von Lieris and Heath suggested that there was insufficient evidence to incriminate the police.⁴⁷

On the final day, 2 December 1977, the magistrate, in his verdict, exonerated both the police and the doctors as he claimed that there was no substantial evidence which indicated negligence on the part of the doctors concerned. The magistrate however indicated that he was sending copies of relevant documents to the Association of the South African Medical and Dental Council, which might further investigate the conduct of the doctors.⁴⁸ This step might have been due to the influence of Professor Isidor Gordon, one of the assessors, who evidently remained less than convinced by the evidence given by the doctors.⁴⁹

An evaluation of all the proceedings makes it clear that it was the government's intention to protect the security police from any responsibility for Biko's brutal treatment and subsequent death while he had been in their custody. However they probed, Biko's family counsel had been unable to extract the incriminating evidence which they required, and both the state doctors and the police had been consistently evasive under cross-examination. On occasions it was even obvious that they were lying. This was evident, for example, when the police, especially high-ranking officers such as Colonel Goosen and Major Snyman, contradicted themselves. As a result

⁴⁶ Inquest, vol 24, pp.1746-1830.

⁴⁷ Inquest, vol 25, pp.1746-1926.

⁴⁸ H.J. Simons, Struggle in Southern Africa for Survival and Equality (London, Macmillan Press, 1997), pp.209-211.

⁴⁹ Inquest, vol 21, pp.1481-1541.

they were called more than once to testify. The same evasiveness and contradictions were evident in the testimony of the doctors, leaving the magistrate with no alternative but, as has already been pointed out, to send documents for further assessment to the South African Medical and Dental Council.

Furthermore, the long delay (two months) before the commencement of the inquest suggests that those responsible for Biko's death needed time to collaborate in fabricating or concealing evidence and rehearsing testimony which would exonerate them from blame while proving that Biko himself was a dangerous revolutionary and a threat to the safety and welfare of the apartheid state. To prove their point, the court was provided with copies of affidavits alleged to have been made by Biko's associates such as Peter Jones, Patrick Titi and Nohle Mohapi, confirming that Biko had been involved in the distribution of pamphlets around black townships in Port Elizabeth. It was established, during cross-examination by Kentridge, that the affidavits had been written after Biko's death, and that they were therefore part of a wider tissue of lies and fabrication.

A last observation about the proceedings must refer to the role played by Gluckman, the only liberal to have had an opportunity to take the witness stand. He was the only one, amongst all those to give evidence, to cooperate with Biko's family counsel in supplying vital information from the pathological findings. Gluckman gave crucial information about the Biko blood sample which had been taken to a medical research laboratory.⁵⁰ This point is discussed fully in the next subsection. It was unfortunate, to say the least, that the police failed to appoint an independent body to investigate the case prior to the commencement of the commission. A lot of vital

⁵⁰ Inquest, vol 21, p.1553.

information could have been uncovered by unbiased experts if the government had decided to follow such a route. Although the government twisted every way it could to conceal important evidence, some crucial and damning evidence was eventually brought to light.

The most important evidence and revelations about Biko

Since the evidence of the commission comprises twenty six volumes, justice could only be done to both Biko and the Black Consciousness Movement if this entire thesis were exclusively concerned with the commission itself. Since the evidence of the commission is relevant only to one section of this chapter, I shall apply myself only to essential evidence which supports the contention of my thesis, and that concerns the role played by white liberals in assisting members of the Black Consciousness Movement and its activities. This section therefore deals with three points of evidence which were extracted by the team of liberal advocates acting on behalf of the family. The first point is the attempt made by the police to cover up the fact that Biko had been murdered, thereby exonerating themselves from blame. The second point addresses the conspiracy between the security police and the three doctors who treated Biko while in detention. The third point analyses the attempt made by the apartheid regime apparatchiks to humiliate and discredit Biko, thereby intending to discredit all resistance movements in general, but BC in particular.

On the day after Biko died, police headquarters in Pretoria requested Colonel Goosen to present a report elaborating the circumstances and events which led to Biko's death. This report was sent by telex and explained in full how and at what time Biko's head injuries had been inflicted. The report also explained that, because of these injuries, Biko's condition had deteriorated to such an

extent that he was in a semi-coma, and that Goosen had decided, with the approval of the doctor, to send Biko to Pretoria on 11 September 1977.⁵¹ What makes this telexed report so crucial (apart from its content), is that it seems almost certain that it was intended only for the eyes of the relevant authorities at police headquarters. Given how momentous this report was, it would certainly have constituted a vital piece of evidence, and should therefore have been on exhibit with other items of evidence. But the telexed report was never adduced or exhibited as evidence and it seems that Goosen confidently expected that its contents would remain forever off the public record. In fact, Goosen, under cross-examination by Kentridge, denied that he had sent any other information to head office except the affidavits which were part of the exhibit.⁵² He eventually conceded, under intense cross-examination by Kentridge, that such a report existed. Kentridge then requested Brigadier Zietsman⁵³ to produce the telex.⁵⁴ Upon examination, it was discovered that the contents of the telex differed from the substance of the affidavits which had been produced under oath by every person who had been involved with Biko during this critical time.

None of the affidavits had made any mention of Biko's head injuries, whereas Goosen's telexed report had ascribed Biko's head injuries to the fact that Biko had, during the course of his aggressive behaviour, injured himself by bumping his head against a wall.⁵⁵ The fact that Biko had any injuries at all was initially what no policeman concerned was willing to admit, and this shows that there had been an intention among those concerned to perpetrate a cover-up. Even after the post-mortem had shown that Biko had sustained one or more violent head injuries, no policeman

⁵¹ Inquest, vol 24, p.1785.

⁵² Inquest, vol 5, p.343.

⁵³ The author could not trace Zietsman's first names in any of the available sources.

⁵⁴ Inquest, vol 24, p.1785; p.1785.

⁵⁵ Inquest, vol 24, pp.1783-1785. Also Inquest, vol 6, p.498.

admitted to any knowledge of how these injuries might have been sustained until Warrant Officer Beneke agreed, under pressure of cross-examination by Kentridge, that Biko had hit his head on a wall on 7 September 1977.⁵⁶

Records reveal that, when Biko's condition began to deteriorate on 7 September, Dr Lang was requested to examine him. As a result of this examination, Lang gave Biko a clean bill of health. Police regulations require that this conclusion should have been inscribed immediately in the occurrence book. This was never done. It was only on 8 September, after Major Snyman had realised that Biko's condition was becoming serious, that an entry was made.⁵⁷ During cross-examination Snyman pointed out that, since Lang had assured them that Biko was in good health, he had seen no reason to record this fact in the occurrence book. They had known that Biko had been a medical student for four years and hence assumed that he was expert in shamming sickness. The police found it necessary to say that Biko was feigning illness because he had already been seriously assaulted on 7 September during interrogation. Kentridge suggested that the police concerned needed to assert that Biko had been feigning sickness because he had in fact already been seriously assaulted on 7 September, and their assertion was required in order to effect an eventual cover-up. Police statements about Biko's wild behaviour were a necessary part of the conspiracy to conceal the evidence and protect themselves against any later accusations by Biko himself. Kentridge also argued that the police, knowing that Biko was a law student, feared that, if released, he might have pressed charges against them. It was with this in view, Kentridge averred, that the police entered the accusations of wild behaviour in the occurrence book: they were anticipating the day when they might have to defend themselves against charges arising from

⁵⁶ Inquest, vol 6, pp.497-498.

⁵⁷ Inquest, vol 3, pp.126-127.

the consequences of Biko's extremely serious injuries. The occurrence book, Kentridge argued, would have been proper evidence to discredit Biko's claim.⁵⁸ This proved to be the case because the occurrence book was adduced as evidence by the police. The occurrence book, however, deliberately omits any record of the later allegations that Biko was feigning illness, and it only mentions that he stubbornly refused to answer questions.⁵⁹

Another aspect of police cover-up occurred when they took Biko to Sydenham Hospital at night. Drs Lang and Tucker had examined him during the day and had suggested that he be sent to Sydenham Hospital for examination by Dr Hersch, a specialist.⁶⁰ It was only Kentridge's cross-examination that established why Biko was taken to hospital that night even though Lang and Tucker had examined him and made their recommendation about further specialist examination in the afternoon – a step to which Goosen had agreed that same afternoon. Goosen testified under oath that he had made the decision to have Biko taken to hospital under cover of darkness so that he would not be seen by any of the black employees at the hospital. Goosen felt that these employees might divulge information about Biko's condition to the media and to members of Biko's family.⁶¹ In order to conceal Biko's injuries as much as possible, only white members of the security force were permitted to attend to him.⁶² Two black security police, however, did see Biko. They were Constables Khotlele and Mozwani⁶³, who helped Biko to balance himself in the ward while the white security policeman, Beneke, merely looked on.⁶⁴

⁵⁸ Inquest, vol 3, pp.127-132.

⁵⁹ Inquest, vol 3, p.128.

⁶⁰ "Room 619", Frank Talk, vol 1, no 4, September/October 1984, p.1.

⁶¹ Inquest, vol 6, p.384.

⁶² Inquest, vol 6, pp.384-386.

⁶³ The researcher was unable to locate the first names of these men in available records.

⁶⁴ Inquest, vol 23, p.1726.

There is further evidence that attempts were made to keep Biko's identity and condition secret when the specialist ordered a sample of Biko's blood to be tested at the Institute of Medical Research in order to determine whether he suffered from any form of physiological abnormality.⁶⁵ The name on Biko's blood sample was changed to "Stephen Njelo". The Biko family counsel discovered this only a day before the medical doctors were to appear in court to be questioned about the authenticity of the blood sample. It was found that the name "Biko" had been deleted from the blood sample and the name "Njelo" had been written in its place.⁶⁶ The only explanation for this is that one of the security police, Goosen in all probability, had written a fictitious name to conceal Biko's true identity from any of the staff at the Institute of Medical Research. It was at this juncture in the trial that Professor Gordon, one of the learned assessors, registered his reservations about the ethical probity of the medical doctors who had treated Biko.⁶⁷

This was not the first time that the South African government had concealed the identity of top activists while they had been under medical treatment. Robert Sobukwe was treated in the same way when he had been admitted to the Karl Bremer Hospital in Belville, near Cape Town, for the removal of his prostate gland on 1 February 1967. His identity was only revealed after he had been discharged.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Inquest, vol 14, p.1033; pp.1100-1105; p.1100.

⁶⁶ Inquest, vol 14, p.1100.

⁶⁷ Inquest, vol 22, pp.1615-1619. Although Goosen had hoped that the information about Biko's condition would be concealed, speculation implicating the police was rife. (Daily Dispatch, 13 Sept 1977, p.3). Suspicions were also raised by Pityana who commented that the doctors were influenced by the police when they decided not to pursue the full truth about Biko's death. The doctors were struck off the medical roll about eight years afterwards when the Truth and Reconciliation Commission investigated the matter in full. (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report, (Cape Town, Juta, 1998), vol 4, pp.109-114.

⁶⁸ Pogrand, How Can a Man Die Better, pp.35-40.

There is further evidence of an attempt by the police to veil the truth in the announcement, soon after Biko's death, of the minister of police that Biko had refused food for a number of days prior to his death and that this had caused his death. It was obvious that the minister's announcement had been based on information supplied by the security police. This fabrication was yet another attempt to protect the security police proactively against any possible blame for Biko's death. Even that evidence which was made available for public examination underscores the falsity of the minister's assertion since photographs of Biko taken immediately after his death show that no dehydration of the prisoner had taken place.⁶⁹ Similarly, police testimony that Biko had not eaten since 5 September was a lie in view of the evidence that later came to light, namely that warders saw Biko on a number of occasions struggling to feed himself as his condition worsened and he became weaker and weaker.⁷⁰

While the "hunger strike" issue demonstrated the heartlessness of the justice system, the fact that the security police were able to inflict ultimately fatal injuries on a prisoner in detention and then extensively cover their tracks, demonstrates the absolute power which (with the approval of the authorities) the security police wielded over political prisoners in detention. Also, the prevarication of the authorities in trying to explain Biko's death seriously damaged South Africa's international image as they attributed the cause of Biko's death, firstly to an alleged hunger strike and then, after the post-mortem, to brain injuries.⁷¹ The police were not unsupported in their

⁶⁹ Woods, Biko, Plates 32 and 33.

⁷⁰ Woods, Biko, p.289.

⁷¹ "Kruger on Biko: Transcript from a tape recording of the account of the imprisonment, treatment and death of Steve Biko given by the Minister of Justice, Mr Kruger, to the Congress of National Party last Wednesday" Daily Dispatch, 21/09/77 in the South African Outlook, Volume 107, September 1977 pp.142-143.

attempts to cover their tracks after Biko's death. They implicated the doctors who dealt with Biko in their cover-up, and the relationship between the police and doctors is the subject of the following subsection.

Conspiracy between the police and the doctors

A certain amount of chilling evidence exists which suggests that the long-standing relationship that existed between the security police and medical doctors who cared for political detainees was so close that the latter ignored their professional ethics and obligations towards patients in their dealings with detainees – Biko in particular. Because of this state of affairs, conspiracy between security and state doctors became inevitable.⁷² The following points substantiate the existence of collusion and conspiracy between medical practitioner and police and they explain why Biko died partly as a result of gross medical negligence and the unethical behaviour of the physicians who were primarily responsible for his well-being .

As the police began to realise that Biko was acting abnormally, as a result of the head injury, they summoned the district surgeon, Dr Lang, to examine him. Instead of allowing Lang independently to reach his own conclusions about Biko's condition, Goosen intervened with medically irrelevant perceptions of his own about Biko's condition. He emphasised to Lang the fact that Biko had been a medical student for four years and was therefore expert in feigning illness.⁷³ In Goosen's view, as expressed to Lang, Biko's extremely grave condition was only a figment of the prisoner's imagination and nothing other than pretence. Goosen also told Lang that Biko was a political

⁷² Inquest, vol 5, pp.313-314.

⁷³ Inquest, vol 10, pp.707-708. See also, Bizos, No One to Blame, p.64.

activist who was liable to become aggressive when confronted with the suggestion that he had been implicated in subversive acts. It is clear that Goosen's unwarranted and emphatic interference in the doctor-patient relationship was deliberately intended to intimidate Lang into believing that Biko was undeserving of proper medical attention at the very moment when Biko was most critically in need of proper medical care.⁷⁴

Biko was thus degraded to subhuman status by agreement between a policeman and a doctor. Under these circumstances, it is not surprising that Lang permitted himself to examine Biko in an ordinary clerical office and not in a medical consulting room. Lang examined Biko in Room 619 in the Sanlam Building – the same room in which the interrogations of Biko had taken place. Lang examined Biko on a mat, the same mat which served as Biko's bed.⁷⁵ Furthermore, Biko was examined in the presence of Goosen, thus negating the privacy and confidentiality which is an indispensable part of the doctor-patient relationship. But Goosen's presence was quite deliberate, for, if he had left the office during the examination, it is highly probable that Biko would have told Lang about how he had been assaulted during interrogation, just as he had told the magistrate on 2 September about the unfair treatment he had been subjected to at Walmer police station.⁷⁶

Conspiracy between Goosen and Lang is further demonstrated by the fact that Goosen requested Lang to issue the certificate on 7 September. The certificate itself was a tissue of lies and evasions. In his examination, Lang noticed that Biko's ankles and wrists were swollen, that part of his lip was cut and that his chest was bruised, but no mention of these conditions were made

⁷⁴ Inquest, vol 10, p.718. Also Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report, vol 4, pp.111-116.

⁷⁵ Inquest, vol 10, p.717.

⁷⁶ Inquest, vol 1, p.49.

in the certificate.⁷⁷ Moreover, the certificate indicated that the doctor was called to check on the patient who refused to talk, whereas the affidavit which was prepared after Biko's death indicated that Goosen called Lang to treat Biko because he suspected that Biko might have suffered a stroke.⁷⁸ It is thus clear that the issuing of a certificate was intended only to be used to exonerate the police from all blame for Biko's death. If the certificate had reflected the truth about Biko's condition, then the security police who detained him (Goosen chief among them) could not have been accused of torturing and assaulting Biko while he was in detention.⁷⁹

The police feared that Biko would bring charges of torture against them if he ever managed to get out of detention alive. In such an eventuality, Dr Lang's certificate would have constituted acceptable evidence against such claims and would have helped to refute all charges against them. Even the fact that Biko's blood sample was free to be tampered with (as was related earlier in this chapter), suggests that Lang and Tucker preferred to turn the blind eye, thus allowing Goosen's point of view to prevail in all situations where an ordinary doctor would have taken responsibility. That the name was able to be falsified on Biko's blood sample also demonstrates the extent of conspiracy between Biko's doctors and the security police⁸⁰ – which is exactly what BCM activists (Hlaku Rachidi⁸¹ in particular) had believed all along, and which they had emphasised at Biko's funeral. Biko's blood sample was not accompanied by the required medical signature, which suggests that even the doctors hoped that they might, in the event of trouble, escape from

⁷⁷ Pityana, *Bounds of Possibility*, p.82.

⁷⁸ *Inquest*, vol 10, p.705.

⁷⁹ Berstein, *no. 46 Steve Biko*, p.77. Also *Inquest*, vol 10, p.703.

⁸⁰ *House of Assembly Debates*, vol 74, columns 7081-7096.

⁸¹ Unisa Archives, Documentation Centre for African Studies, Hlaku Kenneth Rachidi, "Tribute to Steve Biko – King Williamstown, 22-9-77", pp.1-3.

being held responsible for their actions.⁸² Gluckman's opinion is that the security police had even infiltrated the laboratory where Biko's blood specimen was kept, without Hersch's knowledge. (Gluckman passed this information on to Helen Suzman, a member of the Progressive Party, which was vehemently opposed to the National Party.)⁸³

Tucker allowed himself to be used by police when he agreed to permit Biko, who by then was in a semi-coma and medically in an extremely grave situation, to be transported from Port Elizabeth to Pretoria in the back of a Land Rover without any normal amenities or facilities for someone in a critical condition. Initially, Goosen had promised that Biko would be transported by ambulance after he had failed to secure military transport.⁸⁴ Even more disturbing was the fact that Biko was given blankets for his bed and another blanket for a pillow. In addition the doctor in charge did not ensure that the patient was accompanied by a medical report. Instead Tucker instructed the policeman, Major Fischer, to ask the district surgeon in Pretoria to telephone him. This action confirms the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's later findings that when a patient was a detainee, he or she was not accorded the same rights and consideration as were other prisoners, since detainees were regarded as enemies of the state.⁸⁵ The absence of a medical report made it difficult for the district surgeon in Pretoria to diagnose Biko's condition. As a result, he had to rely on information given to him by the security policemen, Wilkens, Siebert and Fouche, who had accompanied Biko on the long trip from Port Elizabeth. They told him that Biko was on

⁸² Inquest, vol 20, pp.1472-1473.

⁸³ Inquest, vol 21, p.1504. Also Helen Suzman, In No Uncertain Terms, p.225. Gluckman knew that Suzman would raise this explosive information in parliament to expose the torture and murder of detainees in prisons. Gluckman's act particularly angered the minister of police, Jimmy Kruger.

⁸⁴ Inquest, vol 13, pp.915-927; p.933; p.388.

⁸⁵ Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report, vol 4, p.115.

a hunger strike.⁸⁶ On the grounds of this information, Biko was administered vitamin B complex and was put on a drip.⁸⁷

If the doctor had acted independently of police influence and pressure, then he would have insisted that Biko be transferred to the Port Elizabeth provincial hospital where there were sufficient facilities. Under cross-examination, both Lang and Tucker pointed out that Goosen had emphasised the importance of taking Biko to the military hospital because he was a security risk. This policy was applied to many prisoners in detention.⁸⁸ The real reason why Biko was transferred to Pretoria, and not treated in the Port Elizabeth provincial hospital or in a local private hospital in Port Elizabeth, was that the police knew that Biko was an eminent figure in the Eastern Cape and was therefore easily identifiable, whereas fewer people would recognise him instantly in Pretoria. This move was therefore designed to conceal his identity.

All available evidence thus points to extreme negligence and dereliction of duty on the part of the doctors as they willingly deferred to and conspired with the police. The extent of their negligence is probably better documented than is that of the police because of the willingness of Gluckman to reveal information which damaged the reputation of the doctors and because Professor Gordon was able to ask technically relevant medical questions which no ordinary lay person could have asked. It was because of this revelation of irregularities and negligence that an appeal to investigate the matter further was made. Because of this outcry, the magistrate, Marthinus Prins,

⁸⁶ Inquest, vol 23, pp.1704-1709.

⁸⁷ Inquest, vol 20, p.1449.

⁸⁸ Inquest, vol 13, pp.919-991. Also, Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report, vol 5, pp.250-251.

referred portions of the inquest record to the South African Medical and Dental Council (SAMDC).⁸⁹

A team, chaired by the then president of the SAMDC, was appointed to investigate these allegations of misconduct.⁹⁰ Initially, the liberal establishment expected that the investigating team would be impartial in getting to the truth of the matter since the SAMDC was a statutory body theoretically independent of government pressure and intervention.⁹¹ Liberals became suspicious when the team seemed to be delaying investigations. Finally it was established that all members of the investigating team, except one Pieter Schutte, were government appointees.⁹² Because government appointees were investigating the case, it took many years before it was finally resolved. The liberal press of the time records that the investigating team failed to act with any expedition, even though they were pressured by the World Medical Association, because the government interfered to protect the team.⁹³ Also, the importance of the magistrate's decision to send portions of the record of the inquest to the SAMDC was reflected by the way in which this move on Prins's part was well received by members of the South African medical profession, some of whom joined in the chorus of criticism of the doctors involved. They called for further investigation into the doctors' conduct.⁹⁴ A number of individuals and groups within the medical

⁸⁹ "Magistrate acts on Biko doctors", Rand Daily Mail, 7 Jan 1978. See also Sunday Times, 15 July 1979.

⁹⁰ "Action against Biko's doctors?", Cape Argus, 2 May 1978, p.1.

⁹¹ "Probe on Biko's doctors", Cape Argus, 15 April 1980, p.3.

⁹² "Angry Medical men ask: How did this finding get out? Biko doctors: Blazing row looms", Sunday Express, 27 April 1980, p.1.

⁹³ "State may take legal action if medical men pursue inquiry" in Sunday Tribute, 29 October 1978, p.3.

⁹⁴ "Biko: old wounds re-opened", The Daily News, 1 May 1980, p.27.

profession, in and around Johannesburg in particular, proposed the expulsion of the doctors concerned.⁹⁵

The most prominent organisation to react to the conduct of the doctors, as it was revealed by the inquest, was the South African Council of Churches (SACC). The SACC was the first liberal organisation to register its concern and pleaded with the South African Medical and Dental Council to speed up the investigation. In fact, the ombudsman for the SACC, Eugene Roelofse, pursued the matter by following the progress of the Council's investigation.⁹⁶ Apart from the fact that the SACC was a progressive organisation, and hence was interested in Biko's case (as it had been in previous related cases where the violation of human rights had taken place), there were also other reasons why this organisation prioritised this issue.⁹⁷ By 1977 the SACC had a number of influential Africans, some of them in leadership positions, in its ranks. Some of these Africans were associates of Biko, and had shared the same platform with him during conferences hosted by the Black Consciousness Movement. Their presence as members of the SACC had given the organisation a direction which differed slightly from the direction which it had previously had. The SACC had tended to be more politically oriented after the mid 1970s.⁹⁸ It was more interested in political issues and less in ecclesiastical ones as it realised that the racial divisions imposed by churches were in line with the government's political policies.

⁹⁵ "Action against Biko's doctors?", Cape Argus, 2 May 1978, p.1.

⁹⁶ "Man of Mostert's calibre needed in Biko inquiry – Roelofse", Cape Times, 16 Nov 1978, p.5.

⁹⁷ Hans Brandt (ed.), Outside the Camp: A Collection of Writings by Wolfram Kristner (Johannesburg, South African Council of Churches), p.145.

⁹⁸ Philippe Denis (ed.), Facing the Crisis: Selected Texts of Archbishop D.E. Hurley (Pietermaritzburg, Cluster Publications, 1997), pp.192-197. See also Cuthbertson, Greg, "Christians and Structural Violence in South Africa in the 1970s", in Vorster, W.S. (ed.), Views on Violence (Pretoria, Unisa Press, 1986).

Finally, the conduct of the doctors in particular prompted a radical response from Amnesty International, which criticised all the proceedings. This organisation sent a threatening letter to Professor Gordon, South Africa's chief state pathologist, who had been an important assessor during the inquest. He was held responsible for the acquittal of the doctors. It was Amnesty International's expectation that Gordon would lead all cross-examination related to medical questions, a normal requirement of international law.⁹⁹

In conclusion, one should note that there was no proper response in spite of all the protests against the conduct of the doctors. The protests, however, did serve to keep the Biko issue alive for decades to come, both in South Africa and internationally.

The campaign to discredit Biko

Most of the evidence led by the state was intended to demonstrate that Biko was a violent man at the head of an organisation committed to the violent overthrow of the state. It was for this reason that Biko, together with Peter Jones, was arrested at a road block on their return to the Eastern Cape from Cape Town on 18 August 1977. A great deal of evidence given by police who interrogated Biko in detention testified that he had been involved in planning and writing a pamphlet which was being distributed around the black townships of Port Elizabeth on the very day that he was arrested.¹⁰⁰ It was alleged that Biko had confessed to being responsible for the

⁹⁹ "Torture allegations scandalous - Kruger. Last word on Biko - nobody criminally responsible", Citizen, 18 May 1978.

¹⁰⁰ Inquest, vol 5, pp.229-230.

pamphlet after he had been confronted with written statements from his associates, Patrick Titi and Jones, who were also implicated in the planning and distribution of the pamphlet.¹⁰¹ However, it was only much later, during the court proceedings, that it became evident that Biko could not have made any such confession concerning the pamphlet. The alleged statements were in fact written *after* Biko's death. Titi was forced to write an affidavit on 16 September 1977 while Jones was forced to write one on 20 September 1977.¹⁰² The truth of the matter emerged under oath when Warrant Officer W.O. Beneke testified, under pressure from the Biko family counsel, that the security police had invented the story that Biko had actually confessed to writing and disseminating the pamphlet¹⁰³

The Cape Town visit was unrelated to the matter of the pamphlet. Chapter four has already analysed in detail the reason for Biko's Cape Town visit: he was attempting to resolve a dispute between members of BC and a non-aligned group. The allegation that Jones had written an affidavit implicating Biko was also untrue. After his release from detention in February 1979, Jones revealed that Biko had had no knowledge of the pamphlet. The only event which could have been connected to the pamphlet was that 18 August was the first anniversary of the student uprising in the townships of Port Elizabeth. The pamphlet might have been issued by students or by unidentified operatives of the state who worked with the South African Security Police (BOSS), which was, at that time, infiltrating BC by planting spies in the organisation.¹⁰⁴ Asha Moodley was another close associate of Biko who disputed that the pamphlet originated from BC. Since Moodley worked in the printing department, she would have known if the organisation had

¹⁰¹ "Biko riot men still not charged", Sunday Express, 13 Aug 1978, p.7.

¹⁰² Inquest, vol 4, pp171-172.

¹⁰³ Inquest, vol 24, pp. 1973-1973.

¹⁰⁴ Woods, Biko, pp.377-398.

printed such a pamphlet.¹⁰⁵ The pamphlet episode serves to demonstrate the extent to which the police were prepared to go to discredit Biko and the Black Consciousness Movement.

Calling Major Hansen of King William's Town to testify during the inquest shows the extent to which the authorities were prepared to go to depict Biko as a violent man dedicated to revolutionary action. The state's argument continually emphasised that Biko was a violent person and that his violence manifested itself when he was under pressure.¹⁰⁶ Hansen related a story in which he alleged that, while Biko was detained at King William's Town in 1975, he assaulted Warrant Officer Hattingh without any provocation. He also related a series of events which allegedly took place between 1975 and 1977. The thrust of these allegations was that Biko had behaved violently towards police authorities.¹⁰⁷ Hansen's evidence supported police allegations that Biko had assaulted Warrant Officer Beneke on the 7 September 1977 during an interrogation. Overall, however, his testimony did not prove that Biko was a habitually violent man. The counsel for the Biko family was more plausible in its assertion that the police conducted a deliberate campaign over a long period to smear Biko's name and caricature him as a violent individual. Even so, one cannot rule out the possibility that there had been an exchange of blows between the security police and Biko in Room 619 in the Sanlam Building in Port Elizabeth during the interrogation process.

It is highly probable that either Biko was unresponsive to police questions or that (being as intelligent as he was) he ran circles around his interrogators and that either or both of these factors

¹⁰⁵ Ernest Messina, Private Collection, University of the Western Cape. Quoted from Messina's transcript interview with Asha Moodley (Durban, 10 July 1992), p.22.

¹⁰⁶ Inquest, vol 5, p.294.

¹⁰⁷ Inquest, vol 5, pp.288-293.

infuriated them to such an extent that they attacked him physically in various ways and that he responded in kind. Clearly the police were not used to an African who was able to answer all their questions with a lucidity and reasonableness which they themselves could not muster. Also, they were completely unaccustomed to an African who “answered back”. Wood argues that Biko’s brilliance and the power of his personality must have so humiliated and angered the police that, out of sheer frustration, they more or less lost whatever self-control they might have possessed and assaulted him gravely – without realising the gravity of the consequences that might ensue for themselves.¹⁰⁸

The extent of the police campaign, and of Goosen’s campaign in particular, to discredit Biko was such that they had minutely detailed Biko’s alleged personal history and an account of his political activities to the doctors with the purpose of co-opting the doctors into cooperating with their purposes. In this they were successful. They discredited Biko to such an extent in the eyes of the doctors that they thereafter regarded Biko as some kind of dangerous subhuman creature, undeserving of ordinary human compassion. Thus it was that the doctors failed to note Biko’s earlier injuries, including the swelling caused by the chains on his wrists and ankles. They were clearly not appalled when they noticed that Biko’s urine had soaked into his blankets and trousers. Nor did they challenge police testimony that Biko had sat in a bath of water with his clothes on.¹⁰⁹

This catalogue of cumulative negligence demonstrates that the doctors collaborated to such an extent with the police that they lost or willingly surrendered all independent judgement. They, like

¹⁰⁸ Donald Woods, “No matter who beat Biko to death, Kruger and Vorster were to blame”, Sunday Independent, 12 September 1977, p.11.

¹⁰⁹ Inquest, vol 24, p.1756.

the security police with whom they conspired, regarded Biko as an enemy of the state, as a terrorist who did not deserve to be treated like a patient. They had realised that, should they succeed in breaking him down and discrediting him, they might succeed in their larger aim of destroying the entire Black Consciousness Movement. If they had succeeded in breaking his spirit, they might have been able to use him for propaganda purposes in attempting to demoralise other activists who were still engaged in political activities.

Thus the main aim of Biko's torture and interrogation was to humiliate and discredit him, and so break his determination and resolve. When they failed in that, they attempted to use the inquest to discredit Biko after his death by portraying him as a violent and unstable man. They also used this state-generated fantasy as the pretext for banning a number of individuals, organisations and publications a month after Biko's death and three weeks before the commencement of the inquest on 14 November 1977. Those banned in this way on 19 October 1977 were the entire Black Consciousness Movement; its associate organisations, the liberal Christian Institute together with its magazine Pro Veritate; prominent members of BC; the members of the Soweto Committee of Ten; some executive members of the Black Journalists; the editor of the World, including the newspaper itself; and the Weekend World.

What have I tried to demonstrate in this chapter is that the inquest that followed Biko's death represented a climax in the symbiotic and cooperative relationship between white liberals (both local and international) and the man who had been the founder of the Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa. It was Biko's death in detention and the subsequent inquest (unsatisfactory though it was) that brought the harsh realities of racial suppression in South Africa

to the attention of the whole world for the first time in way that it was impossible to ignore. My main contention in this chapter has been that if it not been for the part played by white liberals, white liberal organisations, white liberal newspapers, the murder of one of South Africa's most distinguished political activists and thinkers might have remained forever obscured by the suppressive security apparatus of the apartheid government. If that had happened, the liberation struggle for which Biko lived and died might have been indefinitely retarded.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE LIBERAL REACTION TO THE BIKO INQUEST

In this chapter, the role played by the white liberal press and the white liberal opposition in parliament will be analysed in detail, and the outrage, indignation and protest of the international community as it reacted to the findings of the inquest, will be discussed.

While the press in general voiced various opinions about the revelations issuing from the inquest, callous remarks made by minister of justice, police and prisons, Jimmy Kruger, about the circumstances which led to Biko's death and verdict itself echoed around the world. Some newspapers of the time, such as the Citizen¹, received financial assistance from the government, and the pro-establishment Afrikaans newspapers such as Beeld and Rapport, which routinely supported and defended government policies, found themselves in something of a dilemma when faced with the issues surrounding Biko. It was clear enough to anyone that evidence given during the court proceedings implicated employees of the government. If the South African press subscribed to a culture of editorial independence then, irrespective of where their party loyalties lay, they would have had to have been critical of the government. Far from being independent, pro-government newspapers attempted either to take a neutral stand or to denounce members of the liberal establishment whom, they felt, were insufficiently patriotic to protect South Africa

¹ Elspeth Rosemary McKenzie, "The relationship between the Progressive Federal Party, the English language press and business, with special reference to the 1983 referendum", MA dissertation. (Pretoria, University of South Africa, November 1992), p.161.

against international criticism.² Ironically, however, these very newspapers contributed to keeping the discussion alive because, the more they defended the government's position, the more appalled were the liberal press which, in turn, searched for more and more information to discredit such a defence.³

The entire Biko issue was kept alive by consistent reporting by members of the liberal English-speaking press throughout the country. Their criticisms were mainly directed against the government, its inability or unwillingness to take action against the police in whose custody Biko had died, the manner in which evidence was concealed in order to avoid the prosecution of those who might have been implicated, and their refusal to probe more deeply into the whole affair.⁴ Liberal extra-parliamentary organisations such as the Black Sash, the South African Institute of Race Relations and the South African Council of Churches, rallied together to challenge the government with regard to the role which it had played. These organisations were supported in their efforts by the official opposition party in the House of Assembly, the Progressive Federal Party.

Before attempting to delineate the role played by the liberal English-speaking press, I shall first describe the circumstances in which the liberal press found itself to be solely responsible for the coverage of the Biko saga within South Africa. When the two popular newspapers for black readers, the World and the Weekend World, were banned on 19 October 1977, only the liberal

² Citizen, 2 Feb 1978, p.6. See also Citizen, 3 Feb 1978.

³ "World won't forget Biko – Suzman", Cape Argus, 18 May 1978, p.1.

⁴ Rand Daily Mail, 1 Feb 1978, pp.1-3. See also Post, 7 Feb 1978.

press was left to report those issues for which these two newspapers had been banned. It is important to remember at this stage that, because of the monopoly of two newspaper publishing companies, the Argus Group and South African Associated Newspapers (SAAN), there existed no black press in South Africa in terms of black ownership and staff. Both the World and the Weekend World were usually referred to as “black” newspapers. This was because the staff of these papers each included Africans who were assigned to report issues of interest and relevance to a black readership. Because their content pertained to relevant black issues, African patronage of the two newspapers increased, and they became even more popular when reporting critical political events began to supersede the space allocated to sport and crime from about the early 1970s. This trend was given momentum when Percy Qoboza replaced Manas Moerane as its editor. Because of the pervasive influence of the Black Consciousness Movement, which dominated the interpretation of politics among black South Africans, Qoboza, as a BC sympathiser, was ideally suited to be the editor of both the World and the Weekend World. It was because of Qoboza’s influence that the style and content of reporting in the two newspapers changed. Political reporting occupied more and more space in the columns of these newspapers, and circulation improved to a point where, when they were finally banned altogether, they had the second largest circulation in South Africa, namely about 146 000 readers per day.⁵

When the crackdown on the BCM finally came on 19 October 1977, a large number of activists were detained. A total of 62 detainees were held under section ten of the security act. This meant that the state believed that it was necessary to detain them so as to avoid the spread of violence in the country.⁶ Most of these detainees were not even members of the BCM. The majority were

⁵ Carolyn Dempstar. “Ideological unity is far from dead.” Star, 19 Sept 1981, p.21.

⁶ “The 62 who are held”, Daily Dispatch, 20 Feb 1978, p.7.

members of cultural, welfare, charitable and church groups who were outspoken against apartheid.⁷ Included among these was Ellen Kuzwayo, who headed the charitable organisation, the Young Women Christian Association, for some years. By the time of her arrest she was a member of the Soweto Committee of Ten.⁸ The remainder of the detainees, estimated at between 700 and 800, were detained under the various acts which had been designed to control the black population, including the notorious section of the security act which denied detainees access to any legal representative, a family physician, or visits from family members.⁹

Since all influential black opinion had been deliberately silenced by government crackdown, African reaction to Biko's inquest was virtually non-existent. Africans who might have been available to comment were either intimidated by the government crackdown or else they were in hiding and so the press had no knowledge of their whereabouts. It is for these reasons that reaction to the inquest was reported solely from the point of view of the liberal press who, through their special township editors, became, to some extent, surrogate reporters on matters of vital interest to black readers.

The two most important South African newspapers to report the Biko affair were the East London-based Daily Dispatch and the Johannesburg Rand Daily Mail. The reasons for this were as follows. Both papers had had liberal-minded editors in the late 1960s. The Rand Daily Mail had Benjamin Pogrand and Alister Sparks, while the Daily Dispatch was edited by Donald Woods

⁷ Francis Meli, South Africa Belongs to Us: A History of the ANC (Harare, Zimbabwe Publishing House, 1988), p.180.

⁸ Ellen Kuzwayo, Call Me Woman (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1986), p.222.

⁹ "Biko Confession: – no charges against two detainees", Sunday Express, 20 Apr 1978, p.3.

until he was forced to quit his position because of his banning on 19 October 1997.¹⁰ These editors could not have failed to realise the importance of including African political events in their coverage as African resistance during this period was gaining momentum.

A second reason was the relationship which existed at the time between the respective editors of the two newspapers and leading black activists – relationships which could not but have influenced the two editors. As a reporter in the early 1960s, Benjamin Pogrund was a personal friend of the founder member and first president of the Pan Africanist Congress, Robert Sobukwe. From the contents of Sobukwe's biography, which was written by Pogrund, one notices that the latter was naive about the effects of apartheid on Africans until he met Sobukwe. It was also because of his friendship with Sobukwe that Pogrund started to challenge the apartheid laws, using legal procedures such as the writing of letters to the minister of justice.¹¹ Similar circumstances affected Donald Woods. In 1973 he was introduced to Steve Biko by Mamphela Ramphele who insisted that Woods, as editor, should give the BCM its own column to enable the organisation to propagate its own point of view. Until then only homeland leaders had had the opportunity to disseminate their opinions through the medium of the newspaper.¹² As Pogrund had written Sobukwe's biography, so Woods published a biography of Steve Biko in 1978.

It is worth noting that, although the two pairs were devoted and friendly, each pair nevertheless had its own agenda. The activists used the advantage of such relationships to disseminate their

¹⁰ Elaine Potter, The Press as Opposition: The Political Role of South African Newspapers (Totowa, New Jersey, Rowman and Littlefield, 1975), p.158.

¹¹ Benjamin Pogrund, How Can a Man Die Better: The Life of Robert Sobukwe (Johannesburg, Jonathan Ball, 1997), p.117.

¹² Donald Woods, Biko (London, Penguin Books, 1987), p.65.

views as widely as possible. On the other hand, by reporting African issues at the time when such reporting was rare in most papers, both editors were ultimately recognised for the part they played. More importantly the editors represented the white liberal press as the group which reported black aspirations.

The two newspapers took the lead in employing blacks with radical views, either BC sympathisers – as in the case of Zwelakhe Sisulu, employed by the Rand Daily Mail, and Thenjiwe Mtintso, who was a member of BC before it was banned. The latter had worked for the Daily Dispatch since the mid 1970s.¹³ Other black radicals who followed her on the staff of the Daily Dispatch were Leslie Xinwa and Wellington Sangotsha.¹⁴ The Johannesburg-based newspaper, the Post, was the third largest paper to attract black readers. After the banning of the World and the Weekend World, the Post filled the gap for many black readers. The Argus Group introduced a new editor for African readers on 30 October 1977.¹⁵ It was logical, therefore, that the Post should employ remaining staff members, such as Joe Latakomo, who had been employees of the two banned newspapers.¹⁶ Furthermore, both Percy Qoboza and Phil Mthimkhulu, were employed by the Post after having served five months in detention.¹⁷ It seems that blacks were attracted to the Post because its style of reporting from 30 October 1977 was similar to that of both the World and the Weekend World.

¹³ Daily Dispatch, 3 Mar 1978, p.8.

¹⁴ Daily Dispatch, 15 Aug 1979, p.9.

¹⁵ Les Switzer and Donna Switzer, The Black Press in South Africa and Lesotho: A Descriptive Bibliographical Guide to African, Coloured and Indian Newspapers, Newsletter and Magazines 1836–1976 (Boston, Massachusetts, G.K. Holl, 1979), p.116.

¹⁶ William A. Hachten and Anthony C. Gifford, Total Onslaught: The South African Press under Attack (Braamfontein, MacMillan Publishers, 1984), p.132.

¹⁷ Post, 9 Nov 1979, p.2.

The Star was the fourth liberal newspaper to report the Biko affair. The rest of the liberal newspapers in South Africa, such as The Natal Witness, The Natal Mercury, and The Eastern Cape Herald, reported matters relating to Biko rather perfunctorily. On the whole, the liberal press benefited from the banning of the two black newspapers because African readers countrywide boosted its circulation figures.¹⁸

What follows is a discussion of the four main areas in which journalists from the liberal press made a contribution towards reporting and keeping the Biko affair alive. Firstly, they focused their attention on reporting parliamentary debates in which Biko figured in some way or another. There was a legal reason for this. Because of the censorship of information relating to detainees, parliament was the only place in which uncensored discussion about the condition of detainees could take place. Journalists used this loophole to evade prosecution, and disseminated information by simply quoting from the parliamentary record.¹⁹ Secondly, outside parliament, the liberal press attempted to keep abreast of developments affecting political detainees in general, particularly those who were detained under section six of the terrorism act. They especially targeted this group for surveillance because these detainees were denied various basic human rights such as visits from next of kin, legal representative or even a family physician. Also, there had been a long history of detainees under this act dying in mysterious and unexplained circumstances. Biko himself had died while being detained under section six of the security act. Journalists merely reported without comment what members of the opposition in parliament said about all matters relating to detainees under section six. The third area which was investigated and

¹⁸ House of Assembly Debates, vol 72, p.329.

¹⁹ Helen Suzman, In No Uncertain Terms (Johannesburg, Jonathan Ball, 1993), p.54.

reported by liberal journalists was to be found in the court proceedings throughout the country where the cases of the political detainees were heard.

The impact of parliamentary debates on the Biko inquest

Political correspondents covered parliamentary debates relating to the Biko incident for the first six months of 1978, that is, for the duration of the first session of parliament of 1978. Much of what was reported devolved on the National Party's attempts to defend the various roles played by its operatives and employees, namely the police and doctors who were accused by the opposition of having been responsible for Biko's death.²⁰ The focus of this attack was Jimmy Kruger in his capacity as minister of justice, police and prisons. From the opening of parliament in early January, the newspapers reported that Kruger was adamant that the government had done everything in its power to find the truth about the circumstances which had led to Biko's death in detention.²¹

Kruger went as far as blaming the legal counsel for the Biko family, led by Kentridge, for criticising the police and doctors concerned in spite of the fact that they had, according to him, done the best they could after they had discovered that Biko was ill.²² Thus Kruger, as the responsible minister, bore the brunt of the liberal newspapers' attacks. It was clear also that the newspapers expected Prime Minister John Vorster to act promptly against Kruger, either by

²⁰ Cape Times, 20 May 1978, p.8.

²¹ "Kruger satisfied with Biko inquest", Cape Times, 20 Feb 1978, p.4.

²² "Kruger acts on Biko", Post, 1 Feb 1978, p.1.

instructing him to conduct further investigations into the Port Elizabeth security police, or by firing him. The prime minister refused to comment on the issue as he believed that the minister of justice was fully in control of the situation.²³ Perhaps Vorster reckoned that the effects of sacking Kruger would be more harmful to the government than a determination merely to ride out the storm. Biko's death in detention was a matter of no importance to the majority of white voters who were voting at the time for the National Party. Most of them had scarcely ever heard anything about Biko or about the Black Consciousness Movement. Those who had heard of Biko dismissed him as an arch revolutionary and agitator who had been misguidedly used by communist instigators whose aim was to overthrow the South African government.²⁴

Other important information which was brought to the surface by liberal political journalists related to the stand taken by the minister of foreign affairs, R.F. Botha. Unlike the rest of the National Party cabinet and members of parliament, who remained silent on this issue or who defended what the police had done, Botha criticised the minister of justice. He was as appalled as were members of the opposition party by Kruger's insensitivity in his handling of the Biko affair. Kruger's first statement to the national and international press had stated that Biko had died from the effects of a hunger strike.²⁵ Botha felt that Kruger should have verified the authenticity of this information before issuing a press statement. (This statement was soon afterwards retracted in another statement by Kruger.)

²³ "Questions unanswered", Cape Times, 19 May 1978, p.4.

²⁴ "Red herring", Reality, vol 9, no 5, November 1977, p.2.

²⁵ "Two words too few", Cape Argus, 30 Feb 1978, p.10.

Botha believed that false information such as this could only materially and diplomatically harm South Africa's standing with the Western powers who were supporting South Africa. He feared that the West would terminate its relationship with South Africa because of the way in which Kruger was handling the situation.²⁶ Botha was the only person in the National Party cabinet to criticise his colleague (indirectly thereby supporting the opposition party). This was perhaps a unique event inside a party which tended to stand united, especially when under pressure.

Before being nominated to the post of foreign minister, Botha had worked for some time in the United States as the South African ambassador before being recalled at the end of 1977. He had therefore been exposed to representatives from other countries, many of whom were at liberty to express independent opinions rather than to follow a party line. His experiences in the United States must have affected him to some extent. His interpretation of the Biko affair was clearly different from that of the majority of ordinary white South Africans whose opinions were decidedly conservative, especially in any matter relating to racial issues. An important point worth emphasising is that Botha was chiefly concerned that Kruger's mishandling of the Biko case could seriously harm South Africa's relations with the West. He was less concerned about establishing proper relationships with black South Africans as a way of minimising the racial tensions which had been engendered by Biko's death in detention. His main concern was to preserve intact the artificially high standards of living enjoyed by white South Africans, and, in his view, the only way to accomplish this was by ensuring that South Africa would not become the target of Western economic and diplomatic sanctions.

²⁶ "Biko: Botha hits at Nats", Daily Dispatch, 3 Feb 1978, p.2. See also, "The debate in retrospect", Cape Times, 6 Feb 1978, p.10.

While Kruger was, by his own admission, unmoved by Biko's death at the beginning of the parliamentary session in January of 1978, he was, after wave upon wave of hostile criticism had washed over him and over the government in the months that followed, eventually mortified and subdued. Towards the end of that first parliamentary session, in May, he was no longer as aggressive and arrogant about the issue as he had been at the beginning. He changed his tack and adopted a more conciliatory attitude by acknowledging some errors of judgement by both the police and the doctors in their treatment of the deceased.²⁷ He conceded that he had been emotional during the opening of the parliament. He took the initiative in ordering a clarification of issues which were still of central concern and which had not been resolved. He demanded to know why he had not been informed about Biko's changing condition. He also wanted to know why Biko was transferred to the Pretoria Prison Hospital when he should clearly have been treated at the Port Elizabeth provincial hospital instead.²⁸

Thus it was that the liberal press gave as much exposure to the Biko affair as they were able to do within the strictures of the law. The National Party in the meantime had failed to defend itself convincingly against allegations of the legalised torture and murder of an innocent man. With this in mind, one might say that liberal journalists were instrumental in informing the South African community at large about all debates in parliament which touched upon the Biko affair. These same journalists may be credited for the significant role that they played in putting pressure on a recalcitrant and arrogant government at a time when all radical black voices within South Africa had been effectively silenced.

²⁷ "Police erred over Biko", Rand Daily Mail, 16 May 1978, p.1.

²⁸ "Rising star now falling", Pretoria News, 16 Feb 1979, p.10.

The monitoring of political detainees

While the political correspondents in parliament covered all questions and debates which had any bearing on Biko, others from the liberal newspapers drew the public's attention to the plight of political detainees. A number of these detainees were Biko's associates. By reporting on the whereabouts of detainees, the conditions under which they lived and the various laws under which they were detained, the liberal press continued to expose the degrading and inhuman treatment to which detainees were exposed as the emergency regulations were applied. Also, by reporting the plight of detainees who were associates of Biko, newspapers were indirectly keeping the Biko affair under discussion.

As I have already indicated, a large number of blacks were arrested and detained in October 1977. Although they were imprisoned all over the country, most were incarcerated in the Transvaal and the Eastern Cape, where BC was most active and from where most of the leadership came. For the same reason, reporters most frequently visited and reported on detainees in these two provinces, and it follows therefore that the Rand Daily Mail, the Post, the Star and the Daily Dispatch were leaders in reporting about detainees. The first three in this list of papers reported on detainees in the Transvaal, especially those at Modder Bee prison where the key figures in BC and other BC sympathisers were detained. The Daily Dispatch reported on detainees in prisons in and around Port Elizabeth, King William's Town and Grahamstown. The prison in Port Elizabeth accommodated prisoners held under section six of the security act, while those who were held under section ten were imprisoned in Grahamstown prison. Those held under section ten of the act were at least allowed visits from an attorney and a member of the family, while those held under section six of the act had no such access. Because of this contravention of the

normal human rights of prisoners, and the absence of proper safeguards, the prison in Port Elizabeth acquired the sinister reputation of being a place where the rights of political activists were seriously violated during the 1970s. Soon after Biko was detained on 18 August 1977, many of his close associates who had worked with him at Zanempilo Centre were detained on 26 August 1977. These included people such as Thami Zani, the Black People's Convention's publicity secretary, Nohle Mohapi, and Asha Rambally-Moodley, the editor of Black Viewpoint, later known as Black Review.²⁹

The above-mentioned activists, all of whom were detained under section six, were detained on the pretext of having been involved in the production and distribution of the pamphlet which had been issued in Port Elizabeth on 18 August 1977. After the police had interrogated Patrick Titi and Peter Jones and their investigations had run into obstacles, they hoped that they would be able to get more information about the pamphlet from Zani and associates. More detentions took place after Biko's death. Ray Magida, chairman of the local branch of BPC, and Fikile Mlinda, the field worker for the Zemele Trust Fund, were detained three days after Biko's death.³⁰ It seems that the authorities hoped to sabotage Biko's funeral arrangements by these detentions. The two were reported to have been part of the committee which was arranging Biko's funeral.

Thus, by the end of September 1977, most of the BC activists were in prison. The police crackdown on BC-related organisations and one of its supportive liberal organisations, the Christian Institute, on the 19 October, mainly affected the leadership of these organisations and

²⁹ Daily Dispatch, 16 September 1978, p.9.

³⁰ Daily Dispatch, 16 September 1979, p.9.

sympathisers who were based mostly in the Transvaal but also in other areas, such as Natal and Western Cape. In the Transvaal, most of the detainees who were detained on 19 October were held under section ten of the security act. The reasons why they were detained under section ten, which was considered to be a less draconian provision than section six, was that section ten permitted prisoners to receive visitors, but, more importantly, it allowed the police to detain even when no act of violence or intimidation had been committed.

Some of these detainees were internationally known figures because Biko's death had been extensively reported abroad, especially in those Western countries on which South Africa traditionally relied for material and diplomatic support. The government could not afford to detain them under section six, the infamous provision under which so many people had been killed while in detention. Some of these detainees were prominent figures in their own right, such as Kenith Rachidi, president of BPC, Qoboza, editor of the World and recipient of Harvard's Nieman Fellowship for Journalism, Aggrey Klaaste, deputy editor of the World, Nthato Motlana, chairman of the Soweto Committee of Ten, Kuzwayo, general secretary for the Young Women's Christian Association and a member of the Committee of Ten,³¹ Aubrey Mokoena, executive member of BPC and the Committee of Ten, and Debora Matshoba, also a member of BPC.

The two groups of political detainees who were monitored and which I will discuss below, are those who were detained between 26 August and 25 September 1977, and those who were detained on 19 October 1977. A constant monitoring of detainees was maintained by the liberal press working in conjunction with extra-parliamentary liberal organisations such as the Institute

³¹ Kuzwayo, Call me Woman, p.222.

of Race Relations, the Black Sash and the Urban Foundation, which was founded in November 1976.³² The names of detainees were frequently published in various newspapers and there was speculation about their condition. It was because of such constant public reminders in newspapers about the identities and condition of detainees that the government decided to transfer all political prisoners who had been arrested and detained in 1977 in Port Elizabeth to Grahamstown. This took place early in 1978. Those who were transferred included Asha Rambally-Moodley, Ray Magida, Fikile Mlinda, Barney Pityana, Nohle Mohapi, Nosipho Keti and Xoliswa Ngabeni – all re-detained under section ten.³³

The motive which the police had for initially detaining all of them in Port Elizabeth, apart from the fact that the security police wanted them to be near the place where Biko was detained on 18 August 1977, was that the place was known for its ruthless treatment of detainees. By detaining them in Port Elizabeth when they (apart from Pityana) had come from King William's Town, the security police hoped to dissuade BCM members at large from continuing with any forms of political activism. The implicit threat was that they might end up joining their colleagues in the notorious Port Elizabeth Walmer police station.³⁴ The brutality which characterised the Port Elizabeth security police was not out of line with the attitudes of most of the white community in the Eastern Cape. Port Elizabeth had long been an ultra-conservative community in which both English and Afrikaans-speaking people still believed in the superiority of whites over blacks. As a counterpart, African nationalism was so powerful that the two races were bound to clash.³⁵

³² Ibid, p.204.

³³ Daily Dispatch, 16 Sept 1979, p.9.

³⁴ "Inside Biko country: the cradle of Black Consciousness", The Star, 6 May 1978, p.9.

³⁵ Ibid, p.9.

The Transvaal liberal newspapers mainly reported on detainees at the Modder Bee prison, although they occasionally covered the plight of detainees in other prisons. Newspapers probably concentrated their attention on Modder Bee prison because it was there that members of the Soweto Committee of Ten were detained. The Transvaal newspapers used the same tactics which were used in the Eastern Cape, namely to publish the names of detainees in articles. Percy Qoboza received more coverage than his co-detainees. It did not come as a surprise therefore when Qoboza was amongst the first group of detainees to be released in March 1978, after he had been in prison for five months.³⁶

Although the liberal press had pressurised the government to either charge or release detainees, Qoboza's release might have been precipitated by pressure from outside South Africa. As I have already pointed out earlier, Qoboza had been a recipient of Harvard's prestigious Nieman Fellowship for Journalism and the directors of the fellowship were concerned about his safety. Because Biko's affair was still fresh, the United States government applied pressure on the South African government to guarantee Qoboza's safety. Notwithstanding the fact that the justice department had assured the USA of Qoboza's safety, he received only two visits from a USA consular official, Richard Stemple, who was based in Johannesburg, on 31 October 1977 and on 19 December 1977.³⁷ This pressure from the United States influenced the department of prisons to be lenient on Qoboza because he was reported to have had a radio, something which was unheard of for other detainees who could only receive letters and reading materials on a daily basis.³⁸ It was also unusual for the minister of justice to visit a particular detainee. However, due

³⁶ "This was the fateful October 19, 1977", Post, 19 Oct 1979, p.2. See also "Free the rest", Cape Argus, 13 Mar 1978, p.10.

³⁷ Citizen, 6 Jan 1978, p.3.

³⁸ "Denial on detainee", Daily Dispatch, 25 Jan 1978, p.5.

to pressure from the USA government, the minister of justice, police and prisons, Kruger, visited Qoboza only a week before his release.³⁹ This ministerial visit also served as a publicity exercise on the part of the government who wished the international community to believe that prisoners were being well cared for. This was especially demonstrated when Kruger later made a press statement to foreign journalists after his visit to Qoboza.

Another way in which the liberal press informed the public about the cruelty of the South African security police was by publishing the names of those detainees who had died in detention at various prisons within the country. This information also served to indict the government for its negligence with regard to the safety of political detainees.⁴⁰ Furthermore, the South African Institute of Race Relations working in conjunction with the Detainee Parents Support Committee, compiled a list of detainees who had been killed between 1963 and 1977. The highest mortality was recorded in 1976, when thirteen died, and in 1977, with fourteen deaths reported.⁴¹ Apparently, the same list was smuggled out of South Africa and was recorded in the files of the International Defence and Aid Fund (IDAF).

The largest number of detainees were killed during 1976 and 1977 when the activities of the Black Consciousness Movement were at their height. This seems to suggest that the security police were unable to cope with the pressure of keeping the whole country under control, and so vented their frustration and brutality by murdering detainees and then inventing spurious stories which "explained" these "mysterious" killings. It is worth noting that only one person died after Biko in

³⁹ The Cape Times, 3 Mar 1978.

⁴⁰ "Detainee in death plunge", Daily Dispatch, 11 Jul 1978, p.11.

⁴¹ "Thermometer of justice: mystery of dead detainees", Star, 11 Mar 1982. See also Meli, South Africa Belongs to Us, p.178.

November 1977, and this took place in 1978. This demonstrates the impact of the inquest into Biko's death and the restraining effect which the coverage from the liberal press had on the security police.

Coverage of the court proceedings

The liberal press also focused their scrutiny on the various regional courts where the cases of political detainees were being prosecuted. It was clear from the outset of the inquest that the security police and doctors who were the principal state witnesses were lying and falsifying evidence. If state witnesses were able to fabricate evidence for the Biko inquest, which had attracted a vast audience of various political and ideological persuasions, both nationally and internationally, then it was obvious that they would continue to do so in magistrates' courts, which were less exposed to the public view. The liberal press, after the Biko inquest, therefore attended all court proceedings which related to detainees, and this took up much of their journalistic time. What liberal press reporters noticed in magistrates' courts was that, even after all the evidence had been carefully heard and weighed, magistrates frequently made rulings which went against political detainees.⁴²

In order to understand why political defendants were likely to be negatively prejudiced in magisterial courts, one has to appreciate that most magistrates would have been biased to some extent when hearing a case and that this bias would have been influenced by their particular

⁴² Daily Dispatch, 25 Jan 1978, p.5.

political and social beliefs.⁴³ Many magistrates were ordinary conservative Afrikaners who had been born and bred in rural areas where they had never been challenged in any way whatsoever by Africans whom they traditionally regarded as docile and simple-minded people. When they were therefore confronted by articulate, outspoken and well-informed defendants, it is hardly surprising that their rulings usually went against the defendants concerned.⁴⁴

Another security police modus operandi noted by the liberal press was how the security police intimidated detainees who had been caught committing minor offences to turn state witnesses against their co-accused. If that method failed, they were forced into making false statements against themselves. Since all detainees, however, were already familiar with such tactics, they would merely change their statement when giving evidence in court. The two examples given below are typical of how the security police, in the 1970s, intimidated witnesses to make false confessions. The first case was related to a thirteen-year-old youth who had been charged with the murders of Sergeant Msebenzi Mtintsi and Constable Lionel Mrazi at Mdantsane in the Eastern Cape on 25 September 1977, the day on which Biko was buried. The youth was arrested because he had witnessed killings carried out by older youths, aged between eighteen and nineteen, who had already fled the country. He was forced under interrogation by Sergeant W. Ncoko and Lieutenant E. Mostert to agree that he had committed the killings.⁴⁵ The second example of intimidation took place during a court hearing in the Pietersburg regional court. Members of the South African Student Movement (SASM) appeared in connection with acts of

⁴³ Michael Lobban, White Man's Justice: South African Political Trials in the Black Consciousness Era (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1996), p.15.

⁴⁴ "BPC pamphlet case is upheld", Daily Dispatch, p.2.

⁴⁵ Daily Dispatch, 15 Aug 1978, p.9.

violence when they staged a protest against Bantu Education in Venda.⁴⁶ As in the first case, they changed their statements in court because they had originally been intimidated into making statements which incriminated them. Ironically this particular protest was staged in the week following Biko's death and was doubtless influenced by the Biko tragedy.

Another important issue on which the liberal press focused in its news coverage of political detainees, was the inaccessibility of legal representatives to their clients. Because of the restrictions imposed on detainees in terms of section six of the act, it became difficult for their legal advisors to consult with them as often as they wished to. It has since also been established that the security police, acting in the interests of the government, intimidated detainees who were to appear as witnesses against the state to such an extent that some opted to withdraw before the case was resumed. This ploy was deliberately used on political detainees who were witnesses against the state and who hampered the expeditious conclusion of cases by causing frequent remands.⁴⁷ Another difficulty for political detainees was caused by the way in which the state hampered counsel for the defence who wished to consult with their clients. Because of the obstacles put in the way of communication, defending counsel would frequently have no idea of where his or her client would be appearing in court. The client thus appeared undefended and would be much more likely to lose a case.⁴⁸

In conclusion, it may be said that the liberal press opened the eyes of the public to grave abuses of the human rights of innocent detainees and informed them about matters that the authorities

⁴⁶ Post, 26 May 1978.

⁴⁷ "Lawyers hit back at Kruger - defence hampered by court rules", Sunday Express, 21 May 1978.

⁴⁸ Lobhan, White Man's Justice, p.15.

would have preferred to have kept secret forever. The liberal press did this by reporting relevant parliamentary debates, writing articles about the conditions of detainees and by giving extensive coverage to the proceedings of court cases in which detainees were the defendants. Many black people at the time believed that the state was committing various kinds of atrocities and serious abuses of ordinary human rights under the cloak of convenient legalities and impenetrable state procedures. When the liberal press, through its coverage of all matters relating to detainees, proved that this was true, it gave the government fewer opportunities to hide their tracks and deny their intentions and involvement. This kind of public press exposure also encouraged members of the official opposition party in parliament (the Progressive Federal Party) to remain as vigilant as they had been from the beginning. The role played by liberal members of parliament is the subject of the following discussion.

The reaction of the liberals to the results of the inquest into Biko's death

Biko's death in detention was horrifying in itself, but the revelation of how he met his end, as it was related during the inquest, caused yet more shock and disbelief. As I have already pointed out earlier in this chapter, there was no publically expressed black point of view about these events since members of BC and other organisations had been banned, and the World and the Weekend World had also been banned. The only ones therefore who remained to criticise the government and call them into question (in South Africa) were white liberals. Some liberals commented on events as individuals representing no particular organisation or movement. One of these was Alan

Paton, who was concerned about the repercussions of the commission's findings on the Western powers and who viewed South Africa as a champion in upholding freedom and justice in Africa.⁴⁹

There were also extra-parliamentary liberal organisations such as the Black Sash, the South African Institute of Race Relations, aided by liberal periodicals such as Reality and The South African Outlook, who voiced their criticism on the subject. Other liberals who took the government to task over the Biko affair, were members of the official opposition party in parliament, the Progressive Federal Party, who criticised the government in parliamentary debates which were widely covered by the liberal press. It is obvious that liberals in various sectors shared a common ideological outlook and so were able to work together.⁵⁰

When parliament re-opened on 27 January 1978 after having closed the previous year on 24 June 1977, it was faced with three major political events that needed to be tabled and debated in parliament. These three related events were the death of Biko on 12 September 1977, the crackdown on the BCM and its affiliates on 19 October 1977, and the inquest into Biko's death between 14 November 1977 and 2 December 1977. Everything pointed to the government being fairly and squarely to blame for these circumstances.⁵¹ On the other hand the official opposition party used these issues to enhance its political strength. Because of the magnitude of the three related topics, the aim of the opposition was to keep them under discussion long enough for the government to be embarrassed. Indeed the Biko affair in particular was under discussion for almost the entire first session of parliament. Ordinarily each opposition member was in charge of

⁴⁹ "We must stand up for freedom, says Alan Paton", Natal Witness, 26 May 1978, p.14.

⁵⁰ Suzman, In No Uncertain Terms, pp.58, 93-96, 135-136.

⁵¹ "Parliament - place of reckoning", Pretoria News, 27 Jan 1978, p.12.

a particular portfolio, and he or she was expected to take charge once the vote was tabled for discussion. What is most interesting about the Biko affair is that a large number of members from the official opposition party, including its leader Colin Eglin, as well as Alex Boraine, H. Schwarz, S.S. Van der Merwe and J.D. Basson, joined in grilling the government for its insensitive and callous attitude toward the whole Biko affair.⁵²

One would have expected Frederick Van Zyl Slabbert, who was also a member of the PFP and who was becoming prominent within the party, to have commented about the Biko affair. For some reason there is no mention of any comments made by Van Zyl Slabbert in Hansard. The absence of his comments might have been related to the fact that the Biko affair did not fall under his portfolio. He tended to concentrate on issues relating to the departments of Bantu administration and health and the suffering and injustice caused by the forced removal of blacks from areas which were then designated exclusively for white occupation.⁵³ Van Zyl Slabbert's major political achievement was the role he played in securing the release of his fellow Afrikaner, the poet Breyten Breytenbach, whom he had known since 1973 when they had shared a platform discussing Afrikaans literature at a University of Cape Town Summer School.⁵⁴

Helen Suzman was the leading critic of the government because the Biko affair fell under her portfolio of law and order. In addition she had been a member of the opposition since 1953, and this had made her the longest-serving member of the opposition against the National Party. Such experience must have helped Suzman to tackle the government head-on. She made use of

⁵² House of Assembly Debates, vol 74, 1974, columns 7112-7115.

⁵³ House of Assembly Debates, vol 72, 1978, columns 2315 and 2319.

⁵⁴ Frederick Van Zyl Slabbert, The Last White Parliament (Johannesburg, Jonathan Ball, 1985), p.29.

assistants to thoroughly research all available facts about the Biko case before confronting the minister of justice, police and prisons with embarrassing facts, in the face of which he would often have no convincing replies.⁵⁵ To the National Party, the Biko affair was a thorough embarrassment on all levels, and they wished it would merely fade away, but, because of Suzman's continuing attacks, the issue was kept alive far longer than anyone had dared to anticipate. She raised the issue in parliament fifty-three times.⁵⁶ This explains the ire of the National Party member of parliament, J.J. Lloyd (Pretoria East), who called Suzman a "Biko addict".⁵⁷ Others within the National Party were of the opinion that Suzman was exaggerating the importance of the Biko issue to impress foreign powers.⁵⁸ This view was supported by South African Party member, J.W.E. Wiley (Simonstown), who felt that the issue had been given attention at the expense of other matters.⁵⁹ This seems to demonstrate the similarity of opinion between the South African Party and the National Party on issues which related to law and order, specifically as they affected blacks in general.

It was of prime importance for the PFP, as the official opposition party, to pursue the government in every way with regard to all matters pertaining to the Biko affair. Apart from embarrassing the government by this course of action, the PFP benefited in other ways as well. The PFP came into existence on 5 September 1977, a week before Biko's death, as members of parliament joined together to form a new party from the remnants of ailing government-opposed parties including the United Party, the newly formed New Republic Party, the Progressive Reform Party and the

⁵⁵ House of Assembly Debates, vol 74, column 7088.

⁵⁶ "Helen Suzman v. Jimmy Kruger: Will you miss him? he asked", Progress, July 1979, p.4.

⁵⁷ House of Assembly Debates, vol 74, column 6761.

⁵⁸ "Kruger acts on Biko", Post, 1 Feb 1978, p.1.

⁵⁹ "Heads must roll over Biko - Wiley", The Cape Times, 2 Feb 1978, p.9.

Democratic Party.⁶⁰

The primary purpose of such a coalition was to consolidate the PFP's position as an effective official opposition to the National Party. Since the National Party had been virtually unopposed throughout the 1970s (except by the somnolent and ineffectual United Party), the government had continued to consolidate its authority and whittle away civil liberties in bill after bill under the guise of protecting the security of the state. The PFP replaced the United Party which, according to Suzman, had ceased to function in an oppositional capacity.⁶¹ For the first time in many years liberals were able to attract a number of voters. The November 1977 election gave the PFP a total of seventeen seats, out of the 165 which constituted the House of Assembly.⁶² The PFP coalition was formed with the intention (among other ideals) of opposing the restrictive legislation which caused immense suffering to the black majority in South Africa. Biko's episode emerged at an opportune moment for the PFP. Since it was, on any count, a major political issue both nationally and internationally, it gave the PFP a heaven-sent opportunity to flex its muscles as the new official opposition to the government. It was essential for the PFP to respond vigorously as an opposition, and it was able to do so because the Biko issue was tabled in January 1978, during the very first sitting attended by the PFP in its oppositional capacity.

Furthermore, there was a great expectation that the PFP would somehow be able to influence national policy in a way that would permit the country's political system to accommodate black disfranchised South Africans in a democratic and politically meaningful way. In addition, the

⁶⁰ Mackenzie, "The Relationship between the Progressive Federal Party, the English Language Press and Business with Special Reference to the 1983 Referendum", pp.37-38.

⁶¹ Suzman, *In No Uncertain Terms*, p.192.

⁶² "State of parties as at 16 June 1978", *House of Assembly Debates*, vol 72x.

liberal establishment in general had had a long-standing relationship with the international community, particularly with the United States of America and Great Britain.⁶³ These two countries were the leading critics of the government's policies in general but also of their handling of the Biko affair in particular. Although the British government maintained a low profile with regard to their dissatisfaction with South Africa, it was the anti-apartheid organisations, especially those based in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands, which uncompromisingly attacked the apartheid regime for its policies and especially for the detention, torture and murder of Biko. It is probable that the PFP's position was strengthened by the support of human rights organisations within countries, even when the governments of those countries were slow and reticent about openly condemning the apartheid regime.

The success of the PFP was a mixed blessing for those who longed for a new democratic order in South Africa. Because the PFP had won 17 seats in parliament and were vigorously opposing the government in the first sitting of 1978, especially with regard to the Biko affair, an erroneous perception was formed in some quarters overseas that South Africa was in fact a democratic country which permitted criticism of the government and which was concerned with issues of human rights. Hardly anything could have been further from the truth. This very notion of having a liberal opposition vocally opposing a racist "majority" government had been vigorously opposed by BC. This opposition was based on the perception that liberals in parliament were powerless to change government policies or even to block government legislation.⁶⁴ Although this was true

⁶³ Suzman, *In No Uncertain Terms*, p. 135.

⁶⁴ Geoff Budlender, "Black Consciousness and the Liberal Tradition: Then and Now", in N. Barney Pityana, Mamphela Ramphele, Malusi Mpumlwana and Lindy Wilson (eds), *Bounds of Possibility: The Legacy of Steve Biko and Black Consciousness* (Cape Town, David Philip, 1991), p. 229.

to a large extent, the liberals in parliament were nevertheless able to discomfort the government both nationally and internationally, and discredit it and its functionaries by opposing and delaying the passage of controversial bills for as long as possible. They did this by vigorous opposition and by utilising the vagaries of a parliamentary procedure which had been based on the Westminster system.

The focus of all the opposition's efforts in 1978 (and Suzman played a leading role in consolidating the attack), was to drive home the connection between Biko's death in detention and the provisions of the notorious section six of the terrorism act. People detained under this act were denied the right to be visited by a legal representative, a physician, or by the next of kin. This meant that only the security police had access to detainees, who quite logically were then left without any safeguards against the arbitrary brutality and violent whims of their state-sponsored and protected captors, the security police. The act itself had been opposed by Suzman when it was introduced by the then minister of justice, Piet Pelsler, in 1967.⁶⁵

The opposition party exposed all the consequences of the terrorism act. A major consequence of the act was that the security police were simply a law unto themselves. They were answerable really to nobody (except in theory) and they made life and death decisions about detainees who had been deprived of all safeguards and human rights in the name of state security. This became evident when Jimmy Kruger issued evasive, contradictory and totally unconvincing reports about the alleged "cause" of Steve Biko's death. If there had been any real control over the security police by the police authorities, Kruger would never have been embarrassed by having to negate

⁶⁵ Suzman, In No Uncertain Terms, pp.97-98.

his own initial statement in parliament to the effect that Biko had died as a result of his own self-imposed hunger strike. In fact, the huge number of deaths prior to Biko's, followed by insultingly simplistic and unbelievable "explanations" (slipping on soap in showers, falling from high windows) issued by the security police themselves, merely proved what everybody in South Africa already knew: the security police were effectively answerable and accountable to nobody. It was only the results of the post-mortem itself which forced Kruger to backtrack on his own first fatuous statement that Biko had died from the effects of a hunger strike. The pathology reports were made public and Kruger was forced to agree that Biko had died from the consequences of severe injuries inflicted to his head.⁶⁶

The liberals in parliament used the Biko affair to force the government to look more closely at the number of detainees who had been killed while in detention.⁶⁷ The blame for these deaths was laid at the door of the minister of justice and of the prime minister. To ensure that no more deaths in detention took place, the opposition tabled official questions about the whereabouts and welfare of Biko's associates, particularly Jones and Titi.⁶⁸ Although it may seem that the role played by the liberal members of the opposition was ineffectual and unimportant in the context of the larger picture, it cannot be denied that their questions in the house and their continual harring of the prime minister and the minister of justice in that session of 1978, put the brakes on the unlimited power of life and death which resided in the hands of the security police, and almost completely halted the number of deaths in detention (for which there were always rational "explanations")

⁶⁶ House of Assembly Debates, vol 72, 1978, columns 116-119.

⁶⁷ "Ten died in detention last year, says Kruger", Rand Daily Mail, 15 Feb 1978, p.1.

⁶⁸ Rand Daily Mail, 20 May 1978, Also House of Assembly Debates, vol 72, column 120.

after the death of Biko. For this alone, the liberal opposition of the time should be given due credit.

During that session of parliament, both Vorster and Kruger were repeatedly called upon to resign because they had failed to act promptly and punish the culprits.⁶⁹ Of course, the call to resign was merely the reflection of a (British) parliamentary tradition, but the government was sufficiently embarrassed in the long run for Kruger later to adopt what may almost be called a more cautious (and less arrogant) attitude towards the issue of the welfare of people detained under section six of the act. It was even announced in a debate that the department intended to introduce some measures that would ensure the safety of the section six detainees. This included the appointment of two jurists who would have the right to visit the detainees at any time without prior notice, and permission for detainees to select a doctor of their own choice who would be allowed to examine detainees on a regular basis.⁷⁰ Furthermore, the minister promised to issue strict measures ensuring that the security police no longer took the law into their hands to a point where the safety of the detainees was not guaranteed.⁷¹ It was also as a result of pressure from the liberal opposition within parliament that the minister of police had requested the Port Elizabeth head of the security police to furnish him with the information relating to those circumstances which had permitted gross irregularities in the medical treatment of Biko, irregularities which resulted in his death.⁷²

⁶⁹ "Kruger acts on Biko", Post, 7 Feb 1978, p.1. See also, "World won't forget Biko – Suzman", Cape Argus, 18 May 1978, p.1.

⁷⁰ House of Assembly Debates, vol 74, columns 6760 and 7027. See also "Police erred over Biko: Kruger", Rand Daily Mail, 18 Aug 1978, p.3.

⁷¹ House of Assembly Debates, vol 74, column 6761.

⁷² House of Assembly Debates, vol 74, columns 7116-7121.

In reality, nothing much changed as a result of these promises. However, the security police became more circumspect in their treatment of detainees arrested under section six of the terrorism act. While before Biko's death, during 1977 alone, eleven detainees were reported to have died in detention,⁷³ after the publicity surrounding Biko's death, only Bonaventura Malaza, Mbulelo Rocky James and Mzukisi Nobhadula died in the customary "mysterious" circumstances.⁷⁴

International reaction to Biko's death and the results of the inquest

Although South Africa had not been of any primary interest to the international media, the Biko inquest attracted high-powered international journalists who observed and reported on the inquest from beginning to end. As a result of the publicity engendered, various governments were forced to react officially to the Biko revelations. Most Western governments had already protested strongly immediately after Biko's death. The governments of the United States, West Germany, Britain, Belgium and France recalled their ambassadors. Also, nine countries of the European Economic Council delivered a formal protest to the South African government. This was followed by action on the part of the United Nations Security Council who imposed a mandatory arms embargo against South Africa. France was thereby forced to block the delivery of four South African warships, while Canada withdrew her commercial consuls stationed in Johannesburg.⁷⁵

The results of the inquest made such a negative impact internationally that the South African

⁷³ House of Assembly Debates, vol 76, 1978, column 103.

⁷⁴ Meli, South Africa Belongs to Us, p.179.

⁷⁵ House of Assembly Debates, vol 72, column 28.

government found itself faced with unprecedented criticism, not only from non-governmental anti-apartheid organisations, but at the level of government itself. Western governments, who had hitherto accorded the South African government almost unconditional recognition and support, found themselves forced into an awkward position by the insensitivity of the government over the Biko issue. They were left with no alternative but to act officially against the South African government.

Two countries who took the lead in this regard were the United States of America and Britain. The latter avoided confrontation and preferred private diplomatic strictures.⁷⁶ Perhaps Britain at this stage still hoped that the South African government might play a substantial role in assisting them in the solution of the Rhodesian problem, and that they might even be persuaded to resolve its own domestic problems without violence. Moreover, British companies had made substantial investments in South Africa and undoubtedly benefited from the bullish performance of the South African economy with its draconian management of internal unrest and abundant availability of unorganised and officially unpoliticised cheap labour.

Material expediency and self-interest naturally superseded moral imperatives in the minds of the British government of the time. However, the fact that London was the base of a number of outspoken anti-apartheid organisations meant that clearly heard international statements of outrage about Biko's death were issuing from Britain, if not from the British government itself. The United States government at the time was more aggressive in its condemnations, probably because of the Democratic Party presidential incumbency. As a liberal party, it had had a history

⁷⁶ Stephen Ellis and Tsepo Sechaba, Comrades against Apartheid: the ANC, the South African Communist Party in Exile (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1992), p.94.

of support for human rights in other countries. The Democratic Party has traditionally been more sensitive to human rights issues than the conservative Republican Party, which prefers to follow a policy of “non-interference” in the domestic affairs of foreign countries. The following section concentrates on the United States and Britain in order to demonstrate the points of criticism which were levelled at the South African government.

United States's reaction to Biko's death and the verdict of the commission

Senator Dick Clark, chairperson of the Committee for Sub-Saharan African Affairs, became the leading spokesperson on behalf of the American government in raising doubts about the efficiency and legitimacy of the security, legal and health systems in South Africa. As has already been mentioned in chapter four and at the beginning of this chapter, Clark knew Biko personally and so he had more than a politician's interest in arriving at the truth about Biko's death. He felt that the only option left for the US was to register its dissatisfaction over the verdict by imposing economic sanctions against South Africa.⁷⁷

Senator Clark's anger over the Biko issue derived from the fact that he had known Biko personally. As stated in chapter six, he had had a personal interview with the deceased which had left him convinced that Biko was a moderate who could have been an asset to the country – provided that the South African government were to have a sincere desire to identify and talk to recognised South African black leaders. Furthermore, the United States, through its

⁷⁷ “Little comfort for South Africa”, Weekend Argus, 28 Jan 1978, p. 12.

representative, Edward Mezvinsky, proposed that the United Nations Human Rights Commission re-open the investigation into the death of Biko. The US government retained grave doubts about the South African government's explanation of Biko's death.⁷⁸ The United States felt that, as an independent body, the Human Rights Commission would be able to uncover the truth. Tom Downey, a Democratic congressman, researched and compiled a list of 200 names of South African political prisoners. He persuaded his fellow members of congress each to adopt a political prisoner and to constantly monitor his or her personal safety.⁷⁹ This was yet another practical attempt to focus international attention on the plight of South African political prisoners.

Another non-governmental participant to react vigorously against the Biko verdict was Louis Pollak, already alluded to for his contribution. He was invited to attend the inquest as an independent observer by the South African Law Society.⁸⁰ In his report on the inquest Pollak criticised the whole court procedure, especially the way in which the security police and doctors were evasive in answering questions. Also he criticised the magistrate for having passed a verdict which exonerated all the main culprits from any form of blame or punishment. His criticisms were so influential that anti-apartheid organisations, particularly the Committee for Civil Rights Law, called for further investigation into the matter.⁸¹ It was Pollak's report that made it clear to many people that neither the freedom of the press nor a fair legal system existed in South Africa.⁸²

⁷⁸ "US call to re-open Biko case", The Star, 18 Feb 1978, p.3.

⁷⁹ "U.S. begins campaign for S.A. political prisoners", The Argus, 26 Mar 1980, p.11.

⁸⁰ "Killing claim in report on Biko inquest", Post, 9 Mar 1978, p.2.

⁸¹ "Biko returns to haunt S.A.", Sunday Times, 21 May 1978, p.15.

⁸² "Biko's death bad for S.A. image", Pretoria News, 10 Mar 1978, p.5.

Many influential American universities in particular joined in the chorus of protest against the Biko verdict. The following example demonstrates the way in which students targeted their universities for continuing to invest in companies operating in South Africa. Harvard University students invited two exiled South African activists who had left the country in the 1960s, namely Dennis Brutus and Chris Nteta, along with the former editor of the Daily Dispatch, Woods, to a protest march which was preceded by a rally at which these three South Africans were the main speakers.⁸³ The participation of both Brutus and Nteta in the protest march and its preliminary rally underlines the fact that the superficial tensions which existed between the ANC and BC members in exile did not deter the two from participation. In addition their cooperation signified that Biko was not only an icon for the Black Consciousness Movement but represented a potent unifying symbol for all South African black liberation movements. The students' pressure on Harvard's administration was so powerful that the university was forced to reconsider its policy of investments in US firms doing business in South Africa.⁸⁴

African-Americans contributed in their own way to keep the memory of Biko and the philosophy he died for alive. Some established personal relationships with Biko's family. One of the oldest African-American political organisations, the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NAACP), honoured Biko with a posthumous Humanitarian Award (Biko was the second recipient of this award). The first person to receive this award had been the American superstar, Stevie Wonder.⁸⁵ The award ceremony was held in Biko's hometown, King William's Town, in his house in the Ginsberg Township. A United States member of the House of

⁸³ Daily Dispatch, 13 Apr 1979, p.3.

⁸⁴ Time, vol 12, no 3, 17 July 1978, pp.40-47.

⁸⁵ "Honour for Biko", Evening Post, 26 Jul 1978, p.3.

Representatives, Andrew Macguire, who was visiting South Africa at the time, presented the award on 30 July 1978.⁸⁶

It is worth noting that members of the Black Consciousness Movement attended the ceremony without any restriction orders being imposed on them. The government decided to keep a low profile on this occasion, particularly as they realised that part of Macguire's brief when in South Africa was to determine whether there existed freedom of association and freedom of the press, freedoms that were enshrined in the American Bill of Rights. By not intervening in or restricting this particular ceremony, the government attempted to create the illusion that it was tolerant of the free association of other political groups. In addition to the role played by NAACP, Biko's memory and philosophy were kept alive by a number of cultural and religious organisations such as the American Friends Service Committee. This organisation helped to educate the public about the cruelty of the apartheid system of government. With the help of American liberal newspapers, which continued to hold the Biko affair up to the light of public scrutiny even after the South African minister of justice had threatened to close Biko's file, Biko's death continued to embarrass and haunt the recalcitrant apartheid regime.⁸⁷

Anti-apartheid protest in Great Britain

The anti-apartheid movements and other concerned groups in Britain played a far more substantial role in protesting against the Biko verdict than did their counterparts in the United States. In the first place, they did not wait long before they acted on the news of Biko's death. One of the first

⁸⁶ "Award to Biko family handed onto all blacks", Daily Dispatch, 31 July 1978, p.1.

⁸⁷ Cheetah Hayson, "Here, the Biko affair lives on", The Daily News, 26 May 1978, p.3.

concerned British groups to act was a British film crew which sent some of its members to South Africa to make a film based on Biko and the Black Consciousness Movement. The documentary included interviews with key members of BC as the film was shot before the arrest of the leadership on 19 October 1977. As a result, the crew was able to obtain first-hand information about Biko and the entire movement.⁸⁸ Ironically, this documentary was aired for the first time to the British nation on 19 October 1977 – coinciding with the date of the first police crackdown on the BCM. The film caused a sensation as it provided hot first-hand information about Biko and the BC philosophy. When the verdict was announced on 2 December 1977 it must have hardly surprised the British public: they had been prepared by the film. The film fuelled anger among anti-apartheid movements, but the verdict justified their decision to protest.

Soon after the verdict was announced, the same documentary was screened to an enormous number of viewers in the rest of Europe. The documentary, entitled “The Life and Death of Steve Biko” was shown in France at the International Television Festival of Monte Carlo, where it was rated as one of the best.⁸⁹ Other countries to buy transmission rights included Belgium, Finland, the Netherlands and Iceland. Non-European countries which bought rights included Jamaica, New Zealand, and Nigeria, as well as a number of television stations around the United States of America.⁹⁰ The excellence of the film as the source of information placed Biko and the movement he represented squarely under world-wide scrutiny. Both the New York Times and the New York Post commented favourably on its presentation.⁹¹ An attempt was made by the South African

⁸⁸ “Biko TV documentary wins French praise”, The Natal Witness, 15 Mar 1978, p.2.

⁸⁹ “Biko film for festival”, Daily Dispatch, 31 Jan 1978, p.9.

⁹⁰ The Natal Witness, 15 Mar 1978, p.2.

⁹¹ Cheetah Hayson, “Biko play renews U.S. criticism of S.A.”, The Friend, 22 May 1978, p.4.

government through its media to minimise the effect of the film abroad.⁹² This ponderous and belated attempt to manipulate overseas viewer reaction was naturally yet another exercise in futility. The tragic story which the film unfolded was able to speak for itself in a way that made any South African government opinions seem irrelevant.

Another way in which anti-apartheid organisations kept the Biko affair under the spotlight was by disclosing the names of the security police who were responsible for the death of Biko since they had been his chief interrogators. Their names were published in British newspapers.⁹³ It was only in South Africa that the public was denied the right to know the names of the perpetrators. Hence the South African white community were left suspended in ignorance, knowing far less than foreign countries about what was happening under their noses. Such concealment of information gave the white community, the beneficiaries of the apartheid system, the impression that the National Party was on the right track in dealing with radical political opposition. This explains why the National Party won the election of November 1977 with a majority, a sure sign of support for the party after Biko's death.⁹⁴ The British media also made use of Donald Woods who escaped the country in early January 1978. As a journalist and close friend of Biko, Woods was well informed about the circumstances surrounding the death of Biko and he was able to supply the British with the names of the security police responsible for Biko's death.

An organisation of British jurists joined the protest by condemning the findings of the magistrate. The evidence given in court, the jurists explained, proved without any doubt that Biko had died

⁹² "Biko play runs for only a week", Citizen, 7 Jun 1978, p.9.

⁹³ "Biko policeman named", The Cape Times, 17 Sept 1982, p.2.

⁹⁴ "Presentation of programmes by SABC", House of Assembly Debates, vol 72, columns 1286-1291.

as a result of brain injuries inflicted on him by either one or more security police.⁹⁵ These British jurists supported the US representative to the United Nations, Mezvinsky, by calling upon its government to influence an international body, preferably Amnesty International, to intervene. The role of Amnesty International is discussed below. The response of the British jurists mentioned above was issued after they had read a detailed report prepared by Sir David Napley, who had been invited to attend to the inquest along with Louis Pollak from the United States. His report, like that of Pollak, condemned the South African legal system unequivocally. The report to a large extent blamed the magistrate for failing to charge the security police for responsibility for Biko's death (this has already been discussed at the beginning of this chapter).⁹⁶

Internationally recognised church leaders joined in criticising the South African government for its callous and arrogant attitude to the Biko affair. In his address to the House of the Lords, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Donald Coggan, called on the South African government to reopen Biko's inquiry. He further proposed the introduction of new legislation that would prevent incidents such as Biko's death from being repeated.⁹⁷ Coggan's call for the reopening of Biko's inquiry was followed by a festival which was organised by a non-political body, the Bloomsbury Society, led by the Guyanese musician, Ian Hall. Although the purpose of the service was the commemoration and celebration of the lives of Biko, Albert Luthuli (President of ANC) and Martin Luther King (the American Civil Rights leader), the main purpose of the event was to keep the Biko affair in the public eye.

⁹⁵ "Steve Biko won't go away", The Cape Times, 2 May 1978, p.8.

⁹⁶ Berstein, no 46 Steve Biko, pp.137-147.

⁹⁷ "Call for Biko inquiry", Post, 28 Apr 1978, p.7.

This was evidenced by the fact that the speeches of the day concentrated on Biko. The inclusion of both Luthuli and King must have been strategic. The organisers planned to attract an audience by including the names of both Luthuli and King since both were well known internationally for the role they had played as political activists. Both had received the Nobel Peace Prize. A number of eminent clerics attended to honour the occasion, as did officials from the British government. Judith Hart, Minister for Overseas Development, addressed the crowd. The secretary-general of the Commonwealth, S.S. Ramphal, while avoiding blaming anyone specifically for the death of Biko because the Commonwealth was strongly influenced by British policy, recognised the role played by Biko as the leader of Black Consciousness in South Africa.⁹⁸

Literature was another area where some individuals and other Biko associates, demonstrated their anger over the Biko verdict by writing critically about the South African government. This literature became important as it served as a source of information for those who were unfamiliar with the brutalities of the apartheid government. Three important books, mentioned below, were written about Biko. The first, entitled *Biko*, was written by Donald Woods and was published in 1978 by Penguin Books. It is divided into two sections. The first discusses the way in which the apartheid system affected blacks, the circumstances of his first contact with Biko and his associates in BC, his confrontation with the system itself, and his escape from the country. The second section was contributed by his wife, Wendy, and concerns the inquest into Biko's death. Woods had been unable to attend the commission as he was a banned person. The second book was written by Aelred Stubbs, and was entitled Steve Biko, I Write What I Like. It was published by the Bowerdean Press. It was a compilation of essays written by Steve Biko and contained some

⁹⁸ Roger Omond, "No comfort for Pretoria", Daily Dispatch, 18 Jul 1978.

of the interviews which he had had with international personalities. Aelred Stubbs, as pointed out in chapter four, was also an associate of Biko who had known his family when Biko was in his teenage years. In this book readers were able to read Biko's own views about current political events and judge for themselves as to whether he was as radical as the state claimed. The third book was written by Hilda Bernstein. Entitled no 46 Steve Biko, it was published by the International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa. It dealt mainly with the inquest and included an appendix of Sir David Napley's report. These three books supplied the public with relevant information, and tried to depict the horror and tragedy of the South African political condition. It did not come as a surprise that these three books were all banned in South Africa.

A later book was written by the South African exile, Wessel Ebersohn. It was called Store up the Anger and was published by the London publisher, Victor Gollancz. This book articulated the role usually played by the security police in relation to the treatment of the political prisoners. Like the other three books on Steve Biko, Store up the Anger was also banned. The reason given for the ban by the Publications Control Board was that it was not a novel but a documentary propaganda work masquerading as literature about the life of Steve Biko.⁹⁹ Not every South African supported the Publications Control Board's decision. As always, liberals in South Africa opposed the ban. It was J. Dugard's opinion that there was a great need for South Africans to be exposed to such literature. He believed the book would promote a better understanding of the moral problems of torture and unlawful interrogation.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ "Banned 'Biko' novel set for prize", The Daily News, 26 Nov 1980, p.8.

¹⁰⁰ "Banned book of educational value", Pretoria News, 22 Nov 1980, p.3.

The other international body which reacted with outrage to the Biko verdict was Amnesty International. As already pointed out earlier, it levelled its criticism at Professor Isador Gordon from the University of Natal Medical School. Amnesty International felt that Gordon, as an official assessor on the Biko inquest, should have influenced the presiding magistrate, Marthinus Prins, to charge the police and the doctors for being responsible for Biko's death.¹⁰¹ The organisation went to great lengths to expose the conditions in which political detainees in South African jails found themselves. It compiled a list of human rights violations perpetrated against prisoners. This information was used internationally for purposes of research and information. The report, more than any other document available to the international community, harmed South Africa's image in the outside world. This explains why it was banned in this country.¹⁰²

In conclusion, Biko's case attracted so much interest world wide that even those countries which had always supported the apartheid regime against the "Third World", for example, had little alternative but to support sanctions against South Africa as a means of punishment. In South Africa itself, although the Nationalists naturally down played the effect of Biko's death and the inquest which followed, it was obvious to even hardcore supporters that the ruling party had to be more cautious in future. More particularly, they had to attempt to control the security police in such a way that they would treat detainees less violently in future.

Liberal South Africans in general profited from the Biko affair. For the first time a liberal party, the PFP, had seventeen members in parliament. This enabled them to oppose the ruling party more vigorously than before. The liberal press also profited because their news coverage attracted a

¹⁰¹ Citizen, 18 May 1978, p.8.

¹⁰² House of Assembly Debates, vol 72, p.122.

large new readership. On the other hand, although the Black Consciousness Movement was silenced by the banning and detention of its leadership, the Biko affair ultimately favoured the organisation. The publicity given to the inquest served to highlight the importance of the movement nationally and abroad. Biko was viewed as a hero and symbol of Black Consciousness. This might have been the reason why, two years after the banning of BC, the Azanian People's Organization, based on the principles and policy of BC, was formed with Biko's name and ideals as a rallying point. The banning of BC did however favour the African National Congress in the sense that the organisation's underground movement infiltrated South Africa immediately after the banning when confusion among black political leaders was at its height.¹⁰³

¹⁰³ Meli, South Africa Belongs to Us, pp.180-182.

CHAPTER EIGHT: EPILOGUE

BIKO: BEYOND BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS AND LIBERALISM

Some observations about Biko's universality

I have decided, in this last chapter, to take one last critical look at some of the central tenets of Black Consciousness philosophy and at the character around whom all these dramatic events revolved, Biko himself. In the process, I shall ask few questions that are central to the topic of this research and offer some provisional answers which, I hope, may shed a little light on the perennial misconceptions that seem to beset Biko and Black Consciousness scholarship. If Biko had not performed the role to which destiny so manifestly called him, it is conceivable that the course of history in South Africa might have run along very different lines.

It has been my purpose throughout this research to explicate and lay bare the roots of the apparent paradox in BC philosophy that Biko was profoundly hostile to liberalism while current and past scholarship (and, indeed, Biko's own words) seem to suggest that he was profoundly influenced by the "universal" liberal values of human freedom, dignity, individualism and self-determination. My whole purpose in examining in some depth the extent to which the main determinants of Black Consciousness have shaped irreversible changes to the political and social landscape of South Africa in the past thirty years has been preparatory to attempting to answer "Was Biko (and therefore Black Consciousness itself) hostile to liberalism?"

Provisionally, I would like to suggest that while Biko and the BCM were indeed deeply hostile to the kind of liberalism that was represented by the traditional *white* liberalism of the Liberal Party and its leading exponents such as Alan Paton, Biko himself was neither anti-liberal nor anti-white, but in many ways drew his inspiration from concerns that are central to the kind of liberal thinking that became influential in Europe at the time of the Enlightenment and the French and American Revolutions. In making such a claim, I do not wish to minimise the importance of the impact of Africanist, Marxist and African American ideas on Biko's philosophy.

Biko as quintessentially African

In claiming Biko as a universal genius whose legacy is continuous with that of some of the greatest political and religious thinkers in history, I do not wish to deny that his roots are essentially African – or that his vision, which nowadays seems so relevant in so many different contexts, was anything other than quintessentially African. The key, in my opinion, to Biko's universality arises out the essentially traditional African ideal of communal solidarity that does not oppose the interests of some falsely constituted "self" to the interests of a suffering community. To be sure, one may adduce numerous examples of African leaders (such as Mobutu Sese Seko or Idi Amin) who have betrayed the African virtue of communal solidarity and sold their countries down the river. But in Biko one finds a person who was faithful to the best in traditional African culture. He embodies in his legacy an ideal of service and self-giving and a refusal to compromise with the dark currents that flow beneath the surface of all cultures. This, in my opinion, qualifies him to stand among the enduring benefactors of the human race. Nor is it fanciful, I believe, after cold examination of the evidence, to locate his contribution to human well-being as one that will

endure long after his contemporaries (both detractors and supporters) have finally been forgotten.

His status which I claim for Biko's genius resided, in my opinion, in his ability to incorporate many of most fruitful currents of European, American and African political, social and revolutionary thought into a synthesis that was uniquely his own. I would also like to suggest that Biko's personality, reputation and influence loom larger today than they have ever done before and that this seemingly irresistible process of finding contemporary relevance in Biko's thought suggests that the roots of his philosophy were watered by what is best and most enduring in European, African American and African thought. What Biko envisaged as necessary solutions for the seemingly intractable problems of South Africa during the darkest days of apartheid, now seem on closer inspection to be applicable *mutantibus mutantibus* to many of the problems of that affect the world at the beginning of the new millennium.

What separates a thinker of universal significance from a person who provides particularistic or localised solutions to problems is the extent to which the universal thinker comprehends in his or her life, utterances and actions what remains eternally relevant and pertinent to the human condition and the dilemmas which beset the human race – however dramatically the external components and artefacts of human culture change as the centuries pass.

Biko was profoundly Africanist in his inability to divorce his theory and actions from the specificity of particular human lives in their space-time particularity. In his case specificity meant the condition in which Africans in South Africa found themselves after three centuries of colonisation – especially as this three-centuries old process of colonisation became crystallised in the period of National Party rule after 1948. In the short period during which Biko was at his

most active (the brief few years between his early student days and his death at the hands of the security police), the plight of Africans had worsened exponentially.

All in all the black man has become a shell, a shadow of a man, completely defeated, drowning in his own misery, a slave, an ox bearing the yoke of oppression with sheepish timidity. ... The only vehicle for change are those people who have lost their personality. The first step therefore is to make the black man come to himself; to pump back life into his empty shell; to infuse him with pride and dignity, to remind him of his complicity in the crime of allowing himself to be misused and therefore letting evil reign supreme in the land of his birth. This is what we mean by an inward-looking process. This is the definition of "Black Consciousness".¹

It was Biko's insistence that human pride in *all aspects* of one's self, one's condition and one's heritage are *logically prior* to any programme of physical emancipation or improvement in one's material situation. While some commentators have criticised Biko for not paying sufficient attention to the physical dimensions of black suffering, I contend that Biko's determination to instil proper self-respect and unqualified self-regard into a shattered, demoralised and impotent people was strategically necessary – for how can a people who have been conditioned into believing themselves to be inferior otherwise take control of their own destiny and *demand* their liberation from their oppressors? To pursue the point: part of Biko's critique of traditional South African white liberalism was his realisation that their insistence on gradualism in liberation theory

¹ Biko, quoted by Toussaint, "Fallen among angels", page 24.

and praxis (by means of education and the "civilisation" of the oppressed majority until they became less offensive to the controlling white racist minority) constituted a fatal impasse for the liberation struggle. Biko knew from his own observation of his fellow citizens that people who had been psychologically and spiritually emasculated would never be able to claim (let alone demand) what was theirs from their oppressors.

Did Biko fail to create a programme to combat material poverty?

Biko had been criticised for his failure to concentrate on improving the physical conditions of blacks or for working out a detailed programme of statements about the kind of social polity in which all the citizens of liberated South Africa would eventually live. While admiring Biko's "interesting, often original and thought-provoking writing on the differences between African and European cultural and social patterns", Toussaint criticises Biko for prioritising "consciousness, thinking and ideas" while regarding "the material basis of society [as being] secondary, almost unimportant".² In similar vein, Marx writes:

The Black Consciousness strategy for attracting followers was based more on spiritual than material motivation, with the movement promising the gratification of group solidarity fostering a positive self-image. Material incentives for joining the movement were shunned, since leaders feared that encouraging a focus on material gains would reinforce efforts by state and capital to mollify black with

² Toussaint, "Fallen Among Angels", p.24.

reforms.³

In the words of the SASO's Policy Manifesto, SASO was dedicated to "the liberation of the Black man *first from psychological oppression* by themselves through induced inferior complex..., secondly from physical oppression" [my emphasis].⁴

The primacy of psychological emancipation from conditioned feelings of inferiority and worthlessness were not therefore merely an oversight on the part of Biko and the revolutionary cadres whom he inspired. What Howarth has to say tends to confirm my deduction that Biko had made a *deliberate* choice in granting primacy in the struggle for what he [Howarth] calls the "spiritual" rather than "material" liberation.

Drawing on Fanon, Biko argues that a central dimension in the constitution and reproduction of white domination is the "dehumanization" of blacks, their reduction to pure form, which induces an attitude of fatalism and the internalization of their own oppression. This privatization of anger and resentment toward white domination leads to political paralysis, and a spirit of resignation.⁵

In spite of the clear evidence that Biko's dichotomy between the material/physical and psychological/spiritual was an intentional and premeditated issue of long-term liberational

³ Anthony W. Marx, "Race, Nation and Class Based Ideologies of Recent Opposition to South Africa", p.316.

⁴ South African Students Organisation, "Policy Manifesto" (1970), quoted by Marx, op.cit, p.316.

⁵ David Howarth, "Complexities of Identity/Differences: Black Consciousness Ideology in South Africa", Journal of Political Ideologies, p.61.

strategy, some of Biko's critics have denounced him for his failure to attune his policies to the of dialectics of poverty and the imperatives of the material base of life. Toussaint writes:

Society, clearly, is seen as being determined by its own ideas and beliefs. Where ideas and beliefs themselves spring from, how they are themselves arrived at, is not to be examined: for in the beginning is the idea. And so, logically, the new ideas of Black Consciousness which he himself is expounding, also arise nebulously in the mind, not from the substance of African life or South African society; its source is to be found in a replacement in the mind of those other ideas of white liberalism which preceded them – a sort of disembodied, rotating consciousness, in which liberalism grows out of mental disenchantment with white conservatism, black consciousness out of disenchantment with white liberalism.⁶

This criticism of Biko is, in my opinion, unfair, for it fails to take into account the carefully crafted programme of social community self-help projects that had to operate in extremely difficult conditions among the restrictions placed on individual blacks and black organisations by institutionalised apartheid and the security laws which, by the middle 1970s, had become harsh indeed. These programmes were designed, as Lötter notes, "to show the oppressed peoples that their well-being mattered to the Black Consciousness movement – an attempt to show that somebody in society cared".⁷ Ramphela, one of the outstanding symbols of BC resistance during the 1970s, founded and ran a medical clinic in the remote rural area to which she had been banished as an act of service to the dispossessed poor. It was her observation that "people who

⁶ Toussaint, *op cit*, p.25.

⁷ Lötter, "The Intellectual Legacy of Stephen Bantu Biko (1946-1977)", p.27.

had known nothing but scorn and humiliation needed symbols of hope to lift the them out of despair and to empower them to liberate themselves".⁸

The intentional liberational strategy inherent in the community projects undertaken by SASO and the BPC is evident from Biko's own words, which were delivered as part of his testimony in court:

Now, conscientization programmes are precisely the type of programmes we embark upon in communities. ... In other words, if we have got a physical programme like a clinic, we are helping the community to remove from their minds the defeat element that good comes from Whites. Here are Blacks working among us. Here are Blacks achieving a particular end which [it] is thought could not be achieved by us as Blacks. This helps in the building-up process. This is conscientization.⁹

It was Biko's genius that he saw that the oppression of Africans could not be resolved by a people who had been radically demoralised by centuries of racial, economic, political and moral abuse. Biko certainly appreciated the distinction between the material and spiritual dimensions of apartheid. But because he believed that most critics of apartheid tended to be obsessed by the material harm done to blacks by apartheid, he tended to focus his emancipatory critique on the spiritual and psychological harm done to blacks. But in so doing, neither he nor his colleagues

⁸ Quoted in Lötter, op cit, p.27.

⁹ M. Arnold (ed.), The Testimony of Steve Biko (London, Maurice Temple Smith, 1978), quoted in Lötter, op cit, p.27.

neglected the material welfare of the people, in spite of the restrictive circumstances in which they were forced to operate.

Biko resistance to collaboration

If Biko had felt that the material advancement was logically and existentially prior to psychological/spiritual liberation, he might have followed the path which was being blazed at the time by various organisations such as the Coloured People's Representative Council (CPRC), the South African Indian Council (SAIC) and the various "Bantustan" authorities. He might even have opted for the kind of limited cooperation with the government that was being pursued by the Coloured Labour Party (CLP), Chief Gatsha Buthelezi's Zulu Territorial Authority (ZTA) and Chief Matanzima, who participated in the (homeland) Transkeian parliament.¹⁰ By refusing utterly to cooperate with these initiatives, Biko symbolically signed his own death warrant. Nevertheless he ensured that the ultimate triumph of the black liberation struggle that would take place on black people's terms – the terms laid down from the beginning by Black Consciousness ideals.

Biko was not merely inflexible or uncooperative. His very nature, I believe, tended towards pragmatism and cooperation. But he perceived with great clarity that the ultimate price that would have to be paid for any degree of collaboration with the enemy – a price that would be nothing less than the loss of the soul of an entire people. To him even *limited* cooperation with the

¹⁰ See Howarth, op cit, p.57.

government would ultimately leave little for black people to choose between the illusionary promises of "separate development" and the illusory hopes of the non-confrontational "gradualism" of traditional white South African liberalism. Biko refused to sell the soul of his people. It was a harsh path that he chose, and when the apartheid government became aware that in Biko they had finally met what could easily turn out to be their nemesis, they strained every fibre of their being to stamp out all remnants of Black Consciousness and the revolutionaries who carried its banners. By the late 1970s it seemed that the government had succeeded in destroying or neutralising BC because all of its most notable leaders were either dead, in exile, in detention or under house arrest. But what the government could not kill or even mutilate was the purity of the vision of *self-determination* (rather than definition by hostile and prejudiced others) that was the *raison d'être* of Biko's life.

While nearly all BC organisations and initiatives had been disbanded by the late 1970s or else banished (as was Ramphela's) to remote rural areas where (it was thought) they could have no possible influence on what the government dismissed as illiterate and ignorant peasants, many BC operatives escaped into exile overseas where they were usually absorbed into the structures in exile of the ANC, and, to a lesser degree, the structures of the PAC and CP. The BCM had not devoted any of its limited resources to building up viable structures in exile because Biko's policy from the very beginning was to operate (as far as possible) within the framework of the laws in South Africa – harsh and restrictive though these were. Biko had defined BC's primary task as the conscientisation of the masses. How could this be done by an organisation totally in exile?

It is evident from Biko's own testimony and writings that BC attempted in every way to operate within the restrictions of the laws that constrained the movement's basic human rights and

freedoms within South Africa. Since this was widely known both to the South African government and to concerned individuals, organisations and governments overseas, it came as an almost incomprehensible shock when Biko became the 46th prisoner to die "under mysterious circumstances" (the euphemism for murder) at the hands of the security police. Once the world had taken in the enormity of the news and the arrogant indifference of the South African government (personified by minister Kruger's tactless remark that Biko's death left him "cold", i.e. indifferent), the anger and outrage of the world's progressive community broke around the government's head, and supplied the impetus that carried the moral force of Biko's cause into the decades of struggle that lay ahead – and which are far from over even now.

Many of the cadres who escaped into exile joined (as I have mentioned above) ANC and PAC structures in exile and their enlivening influence still provides some degree of radical vision in these movements which (in the case of the ANC anyway) have proved so remarkably successful in effecting a creative compromise between violent revolution and the imperatives of running a country which is based on modern capitalist principles and the requirement of approval of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. In a world where the only successful players are those countries that can adapt to the requirements of globalisation, the ANC and its allies continue to attempt to balance the needs of a modern economy with the needs of the poorest of the poor – who still form the majority of South Africa's population and who are the true heirs (and possible beneficiaries) of Biko's vision.

The matrix out of which Bikoism arose

I have examined in detail how the supporters of BCM and white liberals complemented and supported each other by means of numerous formal and informal initiatives in an on-going symbiotic relationship from the very beginning. This kind of paradoxical relationship between BC and white liberals was especially evident in the dark days when the government finally woke up from their ideological stupor and realised that the racial separatism enunciated in BC strategy did not coincide with their own master plan for an ethnically divided South Africa.

In terms of this anti-liberal and totalitarian millenarian fantasy created by apartheid's arch-ideologue, Dr H.F. Verwoerd, all blacks would be [?]the accommodated in ethnically homogenous and fragmented "homelands" from which they would be permitted to continue in their historically defined role as migrant labourers in "white" areas. Verwoerd's vision (a malign fantasy inspired by concerns about racial purity, *lebensraum* and threats to minority identity) was continuous with the fantasies that inspired Nazi Germany in the 1930s and 1940s and the kind of spurious Aryanism that periodically grips the collective consciousness of European people. In spite of these drawbacks, it was billed as the only possible humane solution to the "racial problem" as understood by Verwoerd and his followers. It was even provided with an elaborate theological and philosophical justification by the theorists of apartheid and various theologians of the Dutch Reformed Church (with the notable exception of those few who risked their lives by opposing it from its inception). The approved version of these racial dogmas was then disseminated throughout Afrikaner society by the Broederbond, who supervised the ideological purity of Afrikaners. It was from this (invisible) locus of control that the vast infrastructure of apartheid was imposed on the whole country. In spite of heroic instances of personal and collective resistance to apartheid by both blacks and whites, it seemed that no power on earth could undo the terrible suffering that the government continued to impose on black people in the name of

"separate development". So eloquent was the vision inspired by the fervent ideologues of apartheid that even successive Western governments were dazzled by its logic (one thinks how obstinately both Thatcher and Reagan supported the comforting doctrines of "constructive engagement").

The realities of apartheid for black people were very different. As the juggernaut of "separate development" swept over the lives of more and more individual black people, human beings were treated as disposable and irrelevant pawns in a master strategy that defined blacks exclusively as a territorially distinct labour force for the benefit of white-controlled South African mining, industry and commerce. Those blacks who were fortunate enough to possess the permits and passes required to be able to work in exclusively "white" areas, were allowed to live in "townships" adjacent to the great cities of South Africa, from where they were required to commute to work in "white" areas. Never before had any country been so overwhelmed by legislation designed to control every aspect of a citizen's life. It was, as Biko was quick to perceive, a strategy created to instil fear and subservience in the hearts of all South Africans – for who could ever be certain that he or she was not infringing some minor regulation or breaking some or other law?¹¹ And since laws need bureaucrats and officials to implement them and identify and punish those who transgress them, a huge subsidiary industry arose that provided sheltered employment for many otherwise unemployable white people who worked for the state and local authorities sectors that regulated the vast machinery of racist suppression and control.

¹¹ Howarth draws attention to Biko's article entitled "Fear – An Important Determinant in South African Politics", in which "he shows how the systematic institutionalization of fear and violence in South African society during the 1960s and 1970s was preventing the formation of black resistance to white oppression". (See Howarth, *op cit*, p.56.) Barney Pitso Moseneke is also quoted in this same article as saying, "They [black people] live in collective insecurity, suspicion and *fear*" (*op. cit*, p.56) [my emphasis].

Biko as *deus ex machina*

If one wished to romanticize Biko, one might say that his personality and the political philosophy which he designed to emancipate black South Africans from centuries of white colonial domination, were exactly suited to the circumstances of the time. But he was not one of those charismatic figures who becomes an icon to his people merely because he died at a tragically young age. Biko does not survive merely as an icon or as a footnote to South African history, or even as a tragic reminder of how a country's most talented leaders might sometimes be cut off at the height of their powers and in the prime of life.

In spite of his short life, Biko became one of the giants of South African history because the political philosophy which he designed and the sheer force of his personality filled the vacuum that had been left by the death, detention or exile of the leadership of the ANC and PAC in the early 1960s. What history needed at that juncture in time was someone who could see what it *really* was that held South African blacks in chains. If the liberation of blacks in this country was to become more than a centuries-old hope, their situation needed someone who could articulate with absolute clarity the sources of their historical oppression by a foreign people who had subjugated them, stolen their land by deceit or force of arms, and (for all practical purposes) treated them as dispossessed slave labour in the land which had belonged to them and their ancestors since time immemorial.

Biko's identification of traditional white liberals as inimical to black liberation

Although Biko had no illusions about the ingrained racism of the white oppressors and the various forms of political, psychological and spiritual dogma that they had evolved to legitimate one of the cruellest macro-enterprises in history (the colonial exploitation of Africa), his most extraordinary political move was his predication of the roots of African oppression on the attitudes and political strategies of a class that he identified simply as "white liberals", by which he meant those (very few) white liberals that belonged to the Liberal Party and which were represented by widely revered opponents of racism such as Alan Paton and Edgar Brookes.

This in itself was an extraordinary insight (equivalent to an intellectual and political Damascus Road experience) because liberals (whether white or black) of the kind represented by people such as Alan Paton, had always been an extremely small minority in South African society (some suggest that they never represented more than about 3% of the white population alone). In addition, they themselves had (in their own way) endured a great deal of opprobrium and vilification from their fellow whites. Because the educationally circumscribed ideologues of the National Party government that came to power in 1948 soon learned to stigmatise all forms of multi-racialism as "communist-inspired", Paton and his ilk were subjected to the same forms of harassment by the security police (such as banning, house arrest and imprisonment) that became the routine lot of black liberationists. Yet it was for this minute but privileged and vocal minority of virulently anti-government non-racists that Biko reserved his most stinging condemnations.

In one of Biko's more graphic condemnations of the inefficacy of liberalism in South Africa, he wrote:

[Liberalism] is a one-way course with the whites doing all the talking, the blacks all the listening ... [and it is] almost always unproductive. The participants waste a lot of time in an internal sort of mudslinging designed to prove that A is more of a liberal than B. ... The black-white circles are almost always a creation of white liberals. ... They call a few [?]of "intelligent and articulate" blacks to "come round for tea at home", where all present can ask each other the same old hackneyed question, "How can we bring about change in South Africa?" The more such tea parties one calls; the more of a liberal he is.¹²

Biko's unremitting hostility to the traditional white liberalism of the time – the impotent, self-congratulatory and self-absorbed "tea party liberalism" to which he refers in the above quotation – has engendered a myth that he was opposed to *all* forms liberalism and to any participation of whites in the struggle for black liberation. Such an interpretation of Biko fails to distinguish between Biko's long-term political strategy and the philosophy and methodology he devised to accomplish it. Because of the constraints placed on Biko by his leadership of a movement of black emancipation while under house arrest and the increasingly hostile surveillance of the security forces who would ultimately murder him in detention, he needed to state the fundamentals of Black Consciousness philosophy as simply and unambiguously a manner as possible. This apparent simplicity of enunciation (in contrast to the crass simplicities and oversimplifications of white racist dogmas) concealed (and still do conceal) an enormous depth and sophistication of intellect and nobility of spirit, both of which were characteristic of Biko.

¹² Biko, quoted in Toussaint, op cit, p.20.

Biko's heritage (sadly fragmented though it is) is so implicit with what one might call universal human values, that it continues to attract more and more attention from scholars, researchers and ordinary people, some of whom despair of being able to find any kind of spiritual compass in an increasingly complex world. (I do not mean to imply that Biko possessed any monopoly on moral virtue or political wisdom, but only that South African history destined him to become one of the primary spokespersons for the inarticulate and suffering masses of black people, most of whom even today live in the long shadow of personal and collective suffering cast by the centuries of white racism and exploitation. I shall therefore – as I have throughout this study – continue to use Biko's name in this synecdochic manner, thereby craving the reader's indulgence for generalisations made in his name, but also thereby hoping that appreciation of the role that Biko played might be understood as conveying an implicit gratitude to the countless (mostly anonymous) people who expressed the same sentiments that he expressed, fought the same fight that he fought and suffered the same ordeals that were destined to be his lot.)

The apartheid government's early miscomprehension of BC

As the government began to take in the full moral force of Biko's commitment to black liberation (after their initial misunderstanding of BC as merely a black exposition of the Verwoerdian dogmas of "separate development" and the inherent spiritual, psychological and physical inferiority of black people), they realised that the viper that they had allowed to grow in their midst was, if anything, a far more dangerous threat to the survival of white hegemony than the armed resistance wings that the ANC and PAC were building in exile.

But in the early days of SASO's existence, nationalist ideologues who had not yet come to understand the totality of the alternative that Biko was presenting, were thrilled to stumble across what they believed to be an independent verification of their political dogmas. This must have seemed like a coup indeed, for this apparent corroboration for and approval of separate development came from none other than SASO – the radical student movement which Biko and others had founded after their disillusionment with NUSAS. Thus an editorial of July 1971 in Die Burger, the Cape Town-based newspaper which acted as a mouthpiece for the National Party and apartheid ideology, lauded the "new spirit" that had that had arisen among "non-White" students and drew its readers' attention to the affinities between SASO and the government's policies of separate development. In the same newspaper, a leading article argued that Black Consciousness was to a large extent "the product of disillusionment over the nice-sounding phrases and ideas and programmes preached in the post-war years by ... the liberal school of thought".¹³

Dismal mishaps such as this make one wonder whether any there was anyone in any position of influence in the National Party government or in the government's well-sponsored security forces (BOSS) and its "running dogs" who staffed Die Burger, who ever really understood anything that Biko said or wrote in his short career as an ideologist and revolutionary leader. The very fact that some of the government's most intelligent commentators initially misinterpreted BC philosophy as represented a mirror image of their own defensive and exclusionary forms of racism, shows how great was the spiritual divide between Biko own understanding of the uniqueness and value of all human lives and the apartheid governments need to control, humiliate and degrade a vast nation of indigenous people in the continent which they had occupied for millennia.

¹³ Quoted by Howarth, op cit, p.53.

It is my belief that if those in the apartheid government of Biko's day had *really* understood what he was saying, they might have found the courage to revere him as a spiritual and political mentor and guide who certainly had all the necessary qualifications to lead South Africa out of the artificially constructed and maintained quagmire of state-mediated "race relations" which could only be sustained by an increasingly harsh application of force and moral subversion to every aspect of every citizen's life – although blacks were obviously the primary target of all these applications.

Although various superficial and populist understandings of Biko's legacy have encouraged some to imagine that he was simplistically anti-liberal and anti-white, it is my contention that a detailed consideration of the evidence suggests that he was at root neither anti-liberal nor anti-white. Having said that, I must also simultaneously assert that Biko's obsessive opposition to *traditional* white liberalism lay at the very heart of his vision for the liberation of Africans, but that it was merely a strategic prelude to his definition of blackness (to which he constantly alluded as a positive identity in its own right that needed no comparison with other racial identities such as "whiteness") and the inversion of the black/whites antinomies that were paradoxically central to both the racism of successive apartheid governments and the non-racialism of traditional South African paternalistic liberals.

Was Biko truly anti-liberal?

Why then, when the *real* enemy was so clearly defined, did Biko reserve his fury for the tiny minority of mostly white liberals represented by Paton and the Liberal Party who had devoted

their lives to opposing as best they knew how the very government and ideology which were the primary oppressors of the black people of Southern Africa?

The simplistic answer is that Biko was "anti-liberal" and that "anti-liberalism" is therefore one of the dogmas of Black Consciousness and part of its legacy to a future South Africa. An even more simplistic and naive answer is that Biko was (in some ways) a racist – even though everything that is known about Biko demonstrates that he was a person of such compassion, intelligence, courage and magnanimity that the Black Consciousness philosophy that he created continues to loom ever larger (rather than smaller) as the years go by. Biko is the kind of person out of whom legends are made, and many have tried (and have continued to try since his death) to co-opt him for their own political or personal gain. But the facts about Biko, sparse though they are because of his premature martyrdom, continue to verify his essential goodness and the universality of his vision. Never has any political vision seemed more relevant than Biko's in the circumstances of the New South Africa.

Xolela Mangcu suggests that Biko's most enduring political contribution may transcend racial politics altogether. He defines Biko's contribution to political thought as being his conviction that human freedom is "the right to self-determination" within the constraints of community life, and he compares him to political philosophers from traditions as various in their origins as those which gave rise to Rousseau, Gandhi and Nyerere.

I have been troubled by popular representations of Steve Biko as nothing more than the quintessential race man. Supporters and detractors alike have paid hardly any attention to the other dimensions of his political philosophy. But if we look

at the totality of Biko's politics we see that he was just as concerned with issues of democracy, identity and development. ... Biko was a public philosopher in the tradition of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Mahatma Gandhi and Julius Nyerere. All of them defined freedom as essentially the right to self-determination. The theme of self-determination has been the inspiration of modern revolutions since the 18th century. It became the basis of the modern conception of individual autonomy, albeit within the context of a national community.¹⁴

Possible future trends in Biko studies

Although the corrupting and degrading moral, spiritual, intellectual and psychological effects of centuries of state-sanctioned racism and racist applications on *white* South Africans would provide a fertile matrix for any number of studies, this is a field of research that has understandably been neglected as we still struggle to comprehend the depths of suffering and deprivation to which blacks have been condemned by white racist ideologies.

Racism has a long and complex history in the West, and it is only now that scholars are beginning to untangle the details of the pseudo-Darwinian European colonial obsession with alienating easily identifiable groups in order to control them, exploit them, harm them and degrade them. It is my contention that much of the malaise and many of the ills of modern Western culture (the radical disaffection and alienation of modern American youth, for example) may be explained by as a

¹⁴ Xolela Mangcu, "We must go back to Steve Biko for inspiration", Sunday Times, 7 February 1999.

transformed resurgence of the Western impulse to define artificial rigid boundaries between what constitutes the Self and what constitutes the Other. This impulse, I believe, arises periodically and spasmodically out of the deep anxiety and fear that seems to be a permanent part of the Collective Unconscious of people of Western European origin (who were the original colonisers of Africa).

Following Biko, one may posit a more humane and life-affirming attitude to life that is part of a traditional Africanist understanding of the self. Although it is admittedly difficult to defend such racial generalisations in the face of the current social and political upheavals in Africa, many distinguished theorists (including Biko and other Africanists such as Nyerere) have sought to locate the spiritual strength of the black people in values such as the interdependence of self and community, the expression of practical solidarity with others, and the elevation of friendliness and sociability over hostile competition and an obsessive individualism that seeks its own advantage at the price of others. It remains to be seen just how well such traditional black values will hold up under the onslaught of Western cultural, economic and social values, but since traditional black values have managed to survive centuries of "westernisation", perhaps they will survive into the future and become the critique which will enable Westerners to reconstruct themselves personally, politically and spiritually.

The most obvious difference between Africans now and Africans under colonial and white domination is that before colonisation came to an end on the continent, blacks were thrown back on each other and on their collective identity as an oppressed people. It remains to be seen to what extent the historic alliance between the ANC, the Communist Party and the various labour organisations of South Africa will be able to modernise the country and restore dignity and human worth to the impoverished masses of disadvantaged black people without losing their connection

to the kind of spiritual strength that is traditionally African. It was this spiritual the strength that enabled Biko to stare down – and ultimately defeat – centuries of oppressive white church- and state-legitimated racism. It is this spiritual strength that is the ultimate legacy of Stephen Biko and the Black Consciousness Movement to South Africa.

In conclusion, I offer Mangcu the last word on Biko and Black Consciousness:

For me the greatest revelation over the past few years has been the universality of Biko's insights. I never imagined that a man I grew up knowing only as ubhut'Bantu in our hometown of Ginsberg would be mentioned alongside some of the great political philosophers of the modern era.¹⁵

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January 2000

¹⁵ Mangcu, loc cit.

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VII. THESES AND PAPERS

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VIII. INTERVIEWS

1. Mamphela Ramphele, member of SASO, head of the Zanimpilo Community Health Centre in King William's Town and founder of Health Centre in Lenyenye near Tzaneen (26 January 1996).
2. Ernest Messina, a BCM student, whose Ph.D. focused on the influence of BCM in the Western Cape (21 April 1996).
3. Ranwedzi Nengwekhulu, founder member of SASO and BCM (20,25 and 26 May 1996).
4. Thomas Ranuga, former student at the University of the North in 1972 (January 1995).
5. Takatso Mofokeng, former theological student at Stofberg Seminary for the Dutch Reformed Church and Lecturer in Theology lecturer (24 November and 12 December 1992).
6. Mokgethi Motlhabi, former student at St. Peter's Seminary near Hammanskraal and editor of the first book on Black Theology in South Africa, published in 1972 (10 February 1995).
7. Mgwebi Snail, SASO activist at the University of Fort Hare in 1972 (17 September 1994).