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The Black Consciousness Movement in Azania (South Africa): A triple heritage

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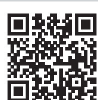

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Starting with the 2015 Rhodes Must Fall campaign, there has been renewed interest in the philosophy of black consciousness through popular expressions – on social media and mainstream media articles – and by scholars. This article seeks to revisit the origins of the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) in Azania (South Africa). Through an examination of primary sources, that is, documents written by the activist writers of the movement and secondary sources by scholars who reflect on the movement and other expressions of black resistance against colonialism and the oppression of black people globally, this article relies mainly on literature review of documents that are in the public domain. The overall findings of the review show that the BCM drew inspiration from and was shaped by the 'black radical tradition' influences from North America (specifically the United States), the Caribbean and South American region, and from the African continent, including locally in South Africa. While shaped by these influences the BCM adapted them and responded to the peculiarities of the condition of black people in South Africa and thus formulated a unique brand of black consciousness. The conclusion reached herein is that movements and the ideas that they espouse, are often confluences of views and practices drawn from different sources.

Transdisciplinary Contribution: This article contributes to the understanding of the evolution of political movements from a variety of disciplines – political studies, history, sociology of ideas, history of consciousness and political philosophy.

Keywords: black consciousness movement (BCM); black power; negritude; triple heritage; Steve Biko; South Africa.

Introduction

In his popular 1986 documentary-turned book, *The Africans: A Triple Heritage* and an earlier article, *The Semitic Impact on Black Africa: Arab and Jewish Cultural Influences*, Ali Mazrui posited that modern African culture has been shaped by three sources: indigenous African legacies, Eurocentric capitalism imposed through colonial conquest and Islamic cultural and spiritual influences.[1] Whereas Mazrui's views were well-received, there were those who criticised his postulation, arguing that his emphasis on foreign influences on Africa suggested that Africa was a 'cultural vacuum, or near vacuum' destined to be filled by other civilisations.[2,3] Such postulation would therefore not only be incorrect but offensive. Its perceived weaknesses both in fact and ideological implications notwithstanding, Mazrui's postulation provides a useful analytical frame that may be employed to revisit the origins of the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) in Azania (South Africa).[4] The name Azania is used interchangeably with South Africa to illustrate its adoption by the BCM as an alternative to the name South Africa. Used first by the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) but popularised by the BCM, the name signified what George Wauchope[4] argued is an "anti-imperialist content" by "situat(ing) the struggle for the liberation of the people of South Africa in the context of Africa's history". In his exposition on the name Wauchope outlines its etymology as well as myths.[4] What is critical, argues Wauchope, is that Azania "has come to stand for a political programme that is accepted by all the oppressed of this land.[4] It embraces no less than the aspirations of the people for an undivided, anti-racist, socialist country".[4] The use of the name in this article is in two forms. First, it is used to refer to the broad Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa (Azania). Second, there was a distinct political organisation within the broader BCM, the Black Consciousness Movement of Azania, which operated from exile.

Starting with the 2015 Rhodes Must Fall campaign by students in mainly liberal universities in South Africa there has been renewed interest in the ideas of the black consciousness philosophy.

These range from popular expressions on social media platforms and the mainstream media, through to reflections by scholars in academic publications.

The interest in the philosophy of black consciousness necessitates a revisiting of how the platform upon which this philosophy emerged in South Africa, the BCM, was itself founded. Importantly, it has become necessary to re-examine some of the major influences on the movement and how these were weaved into the resulting views and practices of the movement.

Reflecting on how intellectual traditions are shaped Charles Camic and Neil Gross have argued that 'meanings are always embedded in socio-intellectual contexts that must be opened up to in-depth investigation before the ideas themselves can be understood'.[5] While many writers have highlighted the antecedents to the BCM, this has largely been done passingly. This article provides an 'in-depth investigation' and review of primary literature produced by the BCM's own activist writers and the scholars who have reflected on the movement itself and the emergence of black resistance to colonialism and oppression in general, both in South Africa itself and other parts of the world. The article demonstrates how the BCM was shaped by the black resistance movement from the United States, the Caribbean and South America region, and from the African continent, including from South Africa itself – what is referred to herein as the BCM's triple heritage.

Methods

Many studies have been conducted on the emergence and evolution of the BCM in Azania; South Africa. The influences of established movements of black people from different parts of the world have been examined with regard to their influence over the BCM. A major limitation in most of the available literature has been how the BCM synthesised these influences to shape its unique expression of the condition of black life in South Africa.

This study aims to address the limitation in the existing literature on how the variant strands of liberatory voices within the black world can be understood to have influenced and shaped the BCM. The article examines the influences of North American, Caribbean and South American, and African liberation and resistance movements and the ideas that they espoused, and how these shaped the ideological articulation of the BCM in Azania; South Africa. This is performed through a review of three sets of literature – original texts of the North American, Caribbean and South American, and African liberation and resistance movements; the literature of the BCM itself; secondary literature that provides analysis of the history, sociology and philosophy of ideas, as well as political analysis of the liberation movement broadly. No single theoretical framework was adopted for this work. The study also adopts a transdisciplinary approach, drawing on political studies, history, sociology of ideas, history of consciousness and political philosophy.

A synthesising of varied approaches helps to provide a coherent understanding of how the BCM in Azania; South Africa was shaped by the three influences examined in this article. There are many other influences that have been excluded from this article, which remain deserving to be explored in how they influenced and shaped the BCM. These include the creative arts (poetry, music, fiction, film and performance), journalism, and Liberation Theology. Similarly, the evolution of the BCM can further be examined from disciplinary lenses of Literary Studies, Anthropology, Political Economy, and many others.

The emergence of the Black Consciousness Movement: A brief reflection

As an organised political formation, the BCM emerged in 1968. It 'arose from out of the ashes' of the government suppression of black opposition to apartheid following the 1960 Sharpeville and Langa Massacres, which saw the 'use of force, arrests, legislative restrictions, and an effective police-information network' by the apartheid government.[6] The movement filled the void resulting from the suppression of the African National Congress (ANC) and the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC).

In an article presented to the United Nations Centre Against Apartheid in July 1976, a few weeks after the 16 June 1976 uprisings against apartheid rule in many black townships, one of the BCM's co-founders, Harry Ranwedzi Nengwekhulu, who went on to serve as the full-time organiser of the first black consciousness formation in South Africa, the South African Student Organisation (SASO) between 1971 and 1973, traces the movement's formation to black university students' disillusionment with and disengagement from the liberal National Union of South African Students (NUSAS).[7]

According to Nengwekhulu, the brutality of the apartheid regime in the form of the Sharpeville and Langa massacres, followed by mass arrests, trials, detention and imprisonment of black leaders, led black people to think that it was futile to fight against the government. University students did not, however, lose hope. Through the African Students Association (ASA), which had links with the ANC, the African Students Union of South Africa (ASUSA), which had links with the PAC, and the Durban Students Union (Natal) and the (Cape) Peninsula Students Union, which had links with the Non-European Unity Movement (NEUM), black university students continued to organise themselves against apartheid. The latter two organisations merged to form the Progressive National Students Organisation (PNSO).

All three formations – ASA, ASUSA, and PNSO – saw themselves as national organisations and therefore concentrated on national issues and less on student and campus issues. Both ASUSA and PNSO were opposed to any form of cooperation with whites. This principled position, of non-collaboration with whites, meant that black students did not have any form of

representation and 'influence' in most university campuses, which were at the time dominated by the white-led liberal NUSAS and the University Christian Movement (UCM). It was out of these two organisations, particularly NUSAS, that SASO emerged. As a white-dominated organisation and espousing liberal views NUSAS found itself being challenged by black students whose aspirations were not being addressed within and by the organisation.

One of the movement's co-founders, Barney Pityana, who was a law student at the University of Fort Hare at the time, provides an explanation of the problems posed by the fact that NUSAS and other white liberal organisations had assumed the role of speaking for black people:

> Various bodies and institutions led by whites who were opposed to the policies of the apartheid regime, were assumed to be speaking for the black people. It was important to denounce any idea that they could be speaking for us. For one thing there was an effective accommodation of the prevailing white dominant ethos and hegemony, which needed to be exposed and set apart from the liberatory ethos we sought to affirm. The trouble with this was that there seemed to be the setting in of the idea that black people need not do anything by themselves, but that white people and institutions could be the defenders of black interests. There was a real concern that black people were abdicating responsibility for their own liberation and entrusting it to those who had no interest in the liberation of black people.[8]

The formation of SASO was triggered by events at the July 1967 annual congress of NUSAS where authorities at Rhodes University, Grahamstown, prohibited mixed accommodation and dining. A motion by black students for the conference to be moved to a neutral and racially integrated venue was defeated, prompting University of Natal student Steve Biko to lead a reflection by black students on the possibility of forming a new black breakaway group.[9]

At the next July 1968 congress of NUSAS Biko began to draw black students to the idea of forming a blacks-only organisation. South African Student Organisation was eventually launched in July 1969, with Biko as its first president. The organisation proceeded to establish the Black Community Programmes (BCP) in 1971 and a political organisation, the Black Peoples Convention (BPC), in 1972.[10] Biko emerged as the main theoretician of the BCM and its most prominent leader. To date his collection of essays, *I Write What I Like* (1978), serves as a reference point to understanding the genesis and ideology of the BCM.

Defining Black Consciousness, Biko had this to say:

> Black Consciousness is in essence the realisation by the black man of the need to rally together with his brothers around the cause of their operation – the blackness of their skin – and to operate as a group in order to rid themselves of the shackles that bind them to perpetual servitude.[11]

Black people were defined as 'all those discriminated against by law and tradition, that is, politically, economically and socially'.[12]

Inspiring these developments was the history and evolution of the broad international black resistance movement, the successful attainment of independence from colonialism by different African countries starting with Ghana in 1957, and the local resistance efforts against the apartheid government. As Biko would also state, identifying the source and interconnectedness of black oppression:

> The surge towards Black Consciousness is a phenomenon that has manifested itself throughout the so-called Third World. There is no doubt that discrimination against the black man the world over fetches its origin from the exploitative attitude of the white man.[11]

The rise of the black liberation movement: Caribbean, South American and United States perspectives

Black resistance to oppression in its varied manifestations has been chronicled in a collection of essays titled *Black Power beyond boundaries: The global dimensions of the Black Power Movement*, edited by Nico Slate.[13] In this collection, various authors unearth the different strands of the Black Power Movement in all the continents, including in unlikely countries such as Israel, where the minority black population sought to express their grievances.

While there are many expressions of black consciousness and Black Power in different continents, our focus in this article is limited to the United States, as well as the Caribbean and South American experiences that influenced the BCM in South Africa.

The influences of the black resistance movement in the United States have been acknowledged by some of the pioneers and associates of the BCM. Some writers emphasise the Fanonist roots and influences on the BCM, while others have adopted varied positions in the debate on whether Fanon had the kind of influence that he is said to have had on Steve Biko and the BCM.[14,15,16,17,18]

The Black Power Movement in the United States

Writing in their 1967 classic simply titled *Black Power: The politics of liberation in America*, Stokely Carmichael and Charles Hamilton offered what may be considered the best articulation of Black Power at the time. Their thesis seems closer to what the BCM would later consider a necessary approach to the politics of race and racial oppression in South Africa. They wrote as follows:

> The concept Black Power rests in a fundamental premise: Before a group can enter the open society, it must first close ranks. By this we mean group solidarity is necessary before a group can operate effectively from a bargaining position of strength in a pluralistic society. Traditionally, each new ethnic group in this society has found the route to social and political viability through the organisation of its own institutions with which to represent its needs within the larger society … the American melting pot has not melted. Italians vote for Rubino over O'Brien; Irish for Murphy over Goldberg, etc.[19]

Interestingly, the BCM rejected the equation of black consciousness to Black Power, arguing that:

> Black Power is applicable in an already open society where Blacks constitute a minority and can only impinge their wishes on the dominant groups through total harnessing of their numbers, we believe that in Azania no open society exists and that this can only be created by blacks once the government is rightfully elected by the majority.[12]

This rejection did not however prevent the BCM from drawing inspiration from the Black Power Movement, as demonstrated here. In fact, the rejection seemed to be mainly in form than substance. Carmichael and Hamilton's definition of Black Power in the United States did influence the definition of Black Consciousness in South Africa. Biko would emphasise the points made by Carmichael and Hamilton that black people needed to form themselves as a group before integrating with white people in the fight against apartheid, or in a new society. This is what Biko had to say about 'group solidarity':

> The quintessence of it is the realisation by the blacks that, in order to feature well in this game of power politics, they have to use the concept of group power and to build a strong foundation for this. Being an historically, politically, socially and economically disinherited and dispossessed group, they have the strongest foundation from which to operate. The philosophy of Black Consciousness, therefore, expresses group pride and the determination by the blacks to rise and attain the envisaged self.[11]

A select and brief genealogy of the Black Power Movement

The term Black Power is said to have been first used by Frederick Douglass in the 1850s. The irony although is that Douglass was using the term as an alternative to another term at the time, which referred to the power of those who owned slaves – Slave Power. Thus, Black Power as used by Douglass meant slave power. He is quoted as having said the following about Black Power:

> The days of Black Power are numbered. Its course, indeed is onward. But the swiftness of an arrow, it rushes to the tomb. While cursing its millions, it is also cursing itself. The sword of retribution, suspended by a single hair, hangs over it. That sword must fall. Liberty must triumph.[20]

It is worth observing that the strategy of assigning a new meaning to what was originally a negative term – Black Power – and turning that into a positive and empowering reference would later be adopted by the BCM in changing the term 'black' and giving it a liberatory meaning in South Africa. As Biko argued:

> Being black is not a matter of pigmentation – being black is a reflection of a mental attitude. Merely by describing yourself as black you have started on a road towards emancipation, you have committed yourself to fight against all forces that seek to use your blackness as a stamp that marks you out as a subservient being.[11]

One of the major influences in the growth of the Black Power Movement, although with a different emphasis but still relevant for this article, was Jamaican nationalist activist, Marcus Garvey, who emphasised black solidarity across continents. Garvey was however a controversial figure whose political views were a mixture of fantasy and an uncritical glorification of the African past. His clashes with William Edward Burghardt (WEB) du Bois, misguided meeting with the Ku Klux Klan and his view that communism would only benefit the white working class and not the black workers, remain a blight on his otherwise illustrious life. He was, according to Trinidadian Marxist theoretician, Cyril Lionel Robert (CLR) James, a 'race fanatic'. James on the other hand, endorsed Stokely Carmichael's Black Power Movement in a 1967 speech in London while debating with European Marxists.[21,22,23,24,25] Even before arriving at Carmichael's Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), it is important to mention another figure in the evolution of the Black Power Movement – Malcolm X.

Like Garvey, Malcom X initially advocated black separatism before shifting and abandoning those ideas after his expulsion from the Nation of Islam and proceeding to establish the Organisation of Afro-American Unity (OAAU).[26] From then onwards Malcolm X began to advocate for solidarity among all those fighting for the dignity of black people, an approach that the BCM would later advocate, with Biko getting arrested and ultimately being killed while pursuing that course.

While founded in 1960 it was in 1966, a year following the assassination of Malcolm X, and after Carmichael assumed its leadership that the SNNC's programme became more pronounced in terms of its ability to fuse race and class analysis in the context of the United States.

At that same time as the SNCC was evolving into an anti-capitalist outfit the Black Panther Party for Self Defence (BPP) was founded. From the onset the BPP adopted an anti-capitalist programme, based as it were on a Marxist–Leninist–Maoist rhetoric. The party's *Ten Point Programme* provided a framework within which it would carry out its campaigns.[27]

Like other initiatives aimed at raising the consciousness of black people and providing platforms for the execution of the struggle against oppression, both the SNCC and the BPP faced a decline in the early 1970s and faded away in the 1980s following relentless harassment by the United States authorities.[28,29]

Black Theology influences and concientisation

Two other developments, seemingly unrelated, that can be said to have influenced the BCM was the emergence of Black Theology and the influence of Paolo Freire's concept of concientisation.

The black theology movement may be traced to a statement on 'Black Power' issued by the National Committee of Negro Churchmen in the *New York Times* of 31 July 1966, which addressed the state of race relations in the United States (National Committee of Negro Churchmen 1966). The

statement laid the foundation for a later radical interpretation of the Christian message for Black America. It is noteworthy that the statement was issued at the height of the Black Power Movement, thus indicating the movement's influence on a section of the Christian community. James Cone's pioneering book, *Black Theology and Black Power*[30] provided the best interpretation of the Christian message from a black perspective.

In a paper addressed to the Conference of Black Ministers of Religion in 1972, Biko demonstrated an awareness within the BCM of the developments surrounding the emergence of Black Theology in the United States. He articulated his, and therefore the BCM's, understanding of black theology:

> Black Theology therefore is a situational interpretation of Christianity. It seeks to relate the present-day black man to God within the given context of the black man's suffering and his attempts to get out of it. It shifts the emphasis of man's moral obligations from avoiding wronging false authorities by not losing his Reference Book, not stealing food when hungry and not cheating police when he is caught, to being committed to eradicating all cause for suffering as represented in the death of children from starvation, outbreaks of epidemics in poor areas, or the existence of thuggery and vandalism in townships. In other words, it shifts the emphasis from petty sins to major sins in a society, thereby ceasing to teach the people to 'suffer peacefully'.[11]

He then concluded his paper by challenging Christian ministers at the time:

> The time has come for our own theologians to take up the cudgels of the fight by restoring a meaning and direction in the black man's understanding of God. No nation can win a battle without faith, and if our faith in our God is spoilt by our having to see Him through the eyes of the same people we are fighting against then there obviously begins to be something wrong in that relationship. Finally, I would like to remind the black ministry, and indeed all black people that God is not in the habit of coming down from heaven to solve people's problems on earth.[11]

On the other hand, Brazilian educationist, Paulo Freire, published his seminal work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. The latter is seen at times as an extension or elaboration of Frantz Fanon's classic, *Wretched of the Earth*. Recent commentary advances the argument that Freire was not only influenced by Fanon but also there is evidence of the influence of the African revolutionary writer, Amílcar Cabral. This evinces the fact that black radical thought across the Triple Heritage is interlinked, one sphere influencing and being influenced and shaped by the others. Freire's works, including his other classic, *Education for Critical Consciousness*, were widely read within and influenced the BCM's method of consciousness-raising and literacy projects.[31,32,33,34,35]

What the BCM drew from Freire was the concept of *concientisation*; the raising of critical consciousness especially among the poor, with the aim to empower them to question the state of their poverty. As indicated here, Freire's concientisation may have been inspired by Fanon's *concienciser*, French for conscientiousness.

There can be no doubt that the BCM was aware and somewhat drew inspiration from the developments outlined here. It is indisputable that there are traces of the advanced elements of Malcolm X, the SNCC, and the BPP, together with the adaptation of the Black Theology approach from the United States in what became the overall ideological thrust and pronouncements of the BCM.

From the Caribbean and South America were influences from Garvey, James, and Freire. As shall be demonstrated here, other Caribbean influences would emerge through interaction with the African liberation movement.

African liberation struggles: Some ideological and theoretical advances

The attainment of independence by Ghana in 1957 from Britain is generally regarded as the start of the formal decolonisation movement on the African continent. As was the case with the preceding section on black resistance in the Caribbean, South America, and the United States, it is impossible to provide a comprehensive list of independence movement initiatives that took place in Africa. Highlighted here are those movements, their leaders, and ideas that are considered to have influenced the evolution of ideas within the BCM.

Three themes can be identified when examining the African independence movement's influence on the BCM. The first is the generating of identity politics and efforts at consciousness raising, that is, the articulation of blackness. The second would be the ideal types in terms of post-independence society, encompassing ideological frameworks. The third would be the lessons learnt, or not learnt, with regard to class struggles in post-independent Africa.

Identity and self-consciousness: The articulation of blackness

The clearest articulation of 20th century black resistance and identity formation on the African continent emerged arguably with the crystallisation of what came to be known as the Negritude movement. Founded by African and Caribbean writers, intellectuals and activists residing or studying in France during the 1930s, the movement's prominent spokespersons were the Senegalese, Leopold Senghor, and the Martinican, Aime Cesaire.[36]

Some have argued that the movement was directly influenced and even founded by the Martinican sisters, Jane and Paulette Nardal, through their journal, *The Review of the African World*.[37,38] Here can be seen the coming together of writers, intellectuals and activists from Africa collaborating with those from the Caribbean to shape black radical thought.

The Negritude movement was inspired by the Haitian resistance movement and the United States's Harlem Renaissance movement of the 1920s and 1930s. The Haitian resistance movement had its roots and tradition in the 1790s triumphant black slave revolt led by Toussaint L'Ouverture

against France. In ways that parallel the intercourse of ideas between Cabral, Fanon, and Freire as suggested earlier, the emergence of the Negritude movement demonstrated the connectedness of the black resistance struggles wherever black people found themselves.

In brief, Negritude meant the belief in the formation of a common identity, an African personality, and shared heritage, using those as a tool to fight against colonialism at political, intellectual and cultural levels.

Melvin Dixon provides four points to summarise Senghor's understanding and purpose of the Negritude movement:

> (I) That negritude has evolved as part of the struggle for liberation from the chains of cultural colonization in favour of a new humanism. (II) That negritude evokes: the totality of values of black civilization. (III) That negritude affirms: the will to assure black consciousness and to explore its multiple forms of artistic, political, expression. (IV) That the power of negritude was in the utterance. It is a call into being of black presence in the modern world.[37]

The Negritude thought was to find in another Martinican, Fanon, the most articulate and harsh critic who would develop an elaborate theory of black self-expression. Thus, in his criticism of Jean Paul-Sartre's concept of the double-consciousness that black people would have developed as a result of intellectual and cultural alienation, a concept that Sartre learnt from Du Bois,[39] Fanon argues that there should be a better appraisal of Senghor and Cesaire's attempts to develop a coherent understanding of black people's self-expression.[40]

Fanon is known for his active association and participation within the Algerian liberation struggle against France. His influences on the BCM were therefore not only as a theoretician but perhaps importantly as an activist intellectual, the best expression of what Freire would term praxis – reflection and action directed at the structures that must be transformed.

Fanon was to develop a theory of black identity and expression in his two seminal books that adopt a sharp look at the violated dignity of black people globally, *Black Skin, White Masks* and *The Wretched of the Earth*.[31,40] This he does by observing how black people have lost their humanity resulting from the violence visited upon them by the colonial system, to the point that they would develop self-doubt and hatred, while aspiring to be white.

Firstly, the view, therefore, of the pioneers of the Negritude movement, and Fanon's formulation of the position of black people was first of a people whose being had been alienated. Secondly, there was a need for the emergence of a new identity and consciousness that would re-humanise black people, to empower them to express themselves in their own terms and fight for their liberation.

The state of alienation among black people was expressed by Biko in devastating terms when he observed:

> Black people under the Smuts government were oppressed but they were still men. They failed to change the system for many reasons which we shall not consider here. But the type of black man we have today has lost his manhood. Reduced to an obliging shell, he looks with awe at the white power structure and accepts what he regards as the 'inevitable position'. Deep inside his anger mounts at the accumulating insult, but he vents it in the wrong direction - on his fellow man in the township, on the property of black people.[11]

By referring to the Jan Smuts government, the Prime Minister of the Union of South Africa between 1919 and 1924 and from 1939 to 1948, Biko was acknowledging that during those times black people and the resistance led mainly by the ANC were at least visible and audible, even though he was critical of the organisation's integrationist approach.

The incorporation of ideas from the Negritude movement, as refined by Fanon, led the BCM, especially during its formative years, to focus on the alienation of black people from their own being, and the need to develop a new view of themselves by seeing themselves as fully human, and not lesser beings. Hence, the insistence on being 'black and proud'.

Post-independence societies in Africa: Some ideal types

Attempts at post-independence imagination, at least in relation to political and economic policies, produced an array of ideas. Prominent among these was the half-defined African Socialism. Its earlier proponents included Ghana's Kwame Nkrumah, Senegal's Leopold Senghor, and Tanzania's Julius Nyerere.[41,42,43,44]

Senghor argued that Africa's social background of tribal community life makes socialism natural to Africa but excludes the validity of the theory of class struggle. This view was later questioned by Nkrumah, who argued that to assume that Africa's past was free from class struggles was unscientific. Nkrumah's shift to radical class analysis may have been informed by his reflections in exile after the military coup that removed him from power.

The seeming glamourisation of the 'tribal community life' by Senghor is problematic when read against Archie Mafeje's criticism of the ideology of 'tribalism'.[45] Mafeje argued that the notion of 'tribe' as understood within colonial Africa was a creation of the colonial powers, aimed at promoting divisions among black people. The BCM agreed largely with Mafeje, viewing tribal identity as an afront to black solidarity.

Nyerere published his widely read *Arusha Declaration* in 1967,[44] a year before the BCM was to be founded. In it he developed the concept of *Ujamaa*, a variant of socialism based on the establishment of village cooperatives and self-help. Through this blueprint Nyerere had developed what would be seen as the African model of national development.

Post-independence African leaders' preference for what was called African Socialism, instead of the Marxist-inspired Scientific Socialism, seems to have influenced the BCM's adoption of what was to be termed Black Communalism; described as a system based on traditional forms of African economic exchanges that involves sharing within families and communities.[12] Mbulelo Mzamane and Bavusile Maaba were to later claim that, 'for the most part in the 1970s BC [*Black Consciousness*] saw little that was elevated in class analysis or gender analysis – dismissing both Marxist-Leninism and feminism as "foreign ideologies"'.[46]

It is important however to raise some caution in how the BCM's conception of Black Communalism is understood. In a paper delivered at the 1975 Seminar of the BPC, Hlaku Rachidi attempted to provide a labour perspective of Black Communalism. Rachidi's main argument was for black workers to campaign for the establishment of a free trade union movement.[47] There was therefore a recognition of the distinctiveness of class in the broader prosecution of the national struggle, although such understanding was still undeveloped at the time.

The conceptions of the post-independence societies in Africa did not, however, receive universal acceptance within the African politico-academic circles. Prominent critics included Walter Rodney, Abdulrahman Mohammed Babu, and Claude Ake,[48,49,50] who favoured class analysis when examining some of the developmental challenges faced by the African continent.

The writings of Rodney, Babu, Ake, and many other radical African analysts would later find traction within the BCM, especially among younger activists, during the middle 1980s through to the late 1990s: a period that is beyond the scope of this article. During the 1980s, the BCM adopted a distinct class analysis in its ideological pronouncements and practical posture, with the qualification that 'race is a class determinant in the current South Africa context'.[51] Even before then, similar views were already filtering into the BCM literature, as demonstrated here.

Post-independent Africa: Some lessons learnt or not learnt

Whereas the BCM seemed to have leaned on the concepts of African Socialism and Nyerere's *Ujamaa* during the 1960s and 1970s, through the adoption of Black Communalism,[12] the picture that emerges is in fact more complex than what is outlined here.

In a series of articles in the main theoretical organ of the SASO, the *SASO Newsletter*, Charles Sibisi began to question the conduct of the post-independence comprador bourgeoisie class, especially in countries such as Kenya.[52,53,54,55]

In what may be said to have been drawing from Fanon's criticism of post-independence African leadership's 'pitfalls of national consciousness', Sibisi developed a coherent critique of post-independence social and economic systems on the continent. One of Sibisi's observations was that the post-independence comprador bourgeoisie class was enriching itself at the expense of the population, while failing to undo the legacy of colonialism.

It is not clear if Sibisi's criticisms were at all influential within the BCM or even discussed at the time. It may be argued nonetheless that the emergence of a class analysis within the BCM can be traced to a 1973 article by Njabulo Ndebele titled *Towards the socio-political development of the black community in South Africa*.[56] This culminated in the presidential address by Diliza Mji to the last congress of the SASO in 1976, in which he argued for the inclusion of class analysis in the lexicon of the BCM.[57]

The BCM's views on post-independence Africa were more nuanced than many analysts have given due credit thereto. They were a mix of zeal to rid South Africa off apartheid on the one hand and beginnings of developments of a socio and economic ideal that was drawing on both the positive and negative experiences of independent African countries on the other. The movement contended with and was shaped by views ranging from the idealism of African Socialism while at the same time being receptive to concerns raised by some of the critics of African Socialism who favoured a clearer class analysis – Scientific Socialism.

Inspirations from the pre-1967 South African Liberation Movement

For the purposes of this article the pre-1967 black resistance to oppression is divided into three epochs. Firstly, the quest for inclusion or, put differently, the fight against exclusion. Secondly, the radicalisation of black opposition to oppression. Thirdly, the suppression of black resistance and the aftermath.

The fight against exclusion

The formation of the South African Native National Congress (SANNC) in 1912, later renamed the ANC, by a nascent black middle class at the time – medical doctors, lawyers, priests and even kings – can be said to be the main starting point for formidable black resistance to oppression. This is not to minimise the importance of pre-1912 wars of resistance by indigenous peoples against colonialism. The limitation to 1912 is asserted purely for brevity and scope of this article.

The composition of the ANC's founding conference in the town of Mangaung (Bloemfontein) was seen largely as middle class oriented and not necessarily representative of the 'new and growing proletariat'.[58] Mokgethi Motlhabi views the gathering as:

> [*A*] congress of defeated people (whose) response to white domination and disinheritance seem nothing more than merely a demand for a little piece from the pie that had been taken from them.[59]

Motlhabi continues: 'throughout the early years, therefore, the strategy of the ANC was based on beggar-tactics, making

the early history of the movement that of "obsequious representations and cap-in-hand deputations"'.[59]

The ANC was to focus mainly on petitioning the British Empire against the increasing dispossession of black people. This approach can be understood from a class perspective as having been influenced by the position of those in its leadership, that is, mainly educated Africans.

The above approach was to change in the 1940s when the ANC was forced to alter its tactics by its youth formation.

Radicalisation of black resistance to oppression

According to Motlhabi, the formation of the ANC Youth League in 1944 forced the ANC to shift from the reformism of the earlier years through the adoption of a Programme of Action in 1949. The programme was aimed at infusing a 'radical' orientation that would be characterised by mass demonstrations.

> At the same time as the ANC was being radicalised by the Youth League an Africanist section was emerging within the organisation. This development is attributed to the first president of the Youth League itself, Anton Lembede, who was seen as the architect of the radical African nationalist thinking within the liberation movement.[60] There were therefore overlaps between the radicalisation of the ANC by the Youth League and the emergence of the Africanist section. The Africanist section within the ANC attracted Youth Leaguers such as Robert Sobukwe. When the ANC formed part of the Congress of the People gathering in 1955 to adopt the Freedom Charter some, including Sobukwe, viewed that as the replacement of the 1949 Programme of Action.[58] The internal strife within the ANC eventually led to the breakaway by some of its members and the formation of the PAC in 1959.

One of the key arguments in the PAC's articulation, contained in the 1959 *Pan Africanist Manifesto* was the need for Africans to determine their own destiny. The PAC's major disagreement with the ANC, particularly after the adoption of the Freedom Charter, was what was perceived to be the influence of white liberals who were seen as the main authors of the Charter. This view persists to date even outside of the PAC circles.[61]

What the BCM may have drawn from the PAC is emphasis on self-determination by black people and the need for blacks to form their own organisations free from perceived influence from white liberals.

The PAC's first major mobilisation drive was the 1960 *Status Campaign*, aimed at challenging the Pass Laws, which made it mandatory for black people to always carry with them an 'internal passport' of sorts to enable them to move into and live temporarily in the segregated sections of the urban areas for work purposes only. A peaceful march to the Sharpeville police station in protest against pass laws resulted in the killing by shooting of 69 people by the police. In Langa, Cape Town, five were killed a few days later and 29 were injured, 'including a baby tied to his mother's back'.[62] The two events and the apartheid government's response served as a turning point in the way that black people conceptualised and executed their resistance to oppression.

For Biko, the crisis within the ANC during the 1940s and the emergence of the PAC marked the beginnings of the BCM. Thus, Biko draws a direct link between the nationalist struggles of the 1940s and 1950s to the birth of the BCM when he writes:

> At about the same time that (Aimé) Césaire said this, there was emerging in South Africa a group of angry young black men who were beginning to 'grasp the notion of (their) peculiar uniqueness' and who were eager to define who they were and what. These were the elements who were disgruntled with the direction imposed on the African National Congress by the 'old guard' within its leadership. These young men were questioning a number of things, among which was the 'go slow' attitude adopted by the leadership, and the ease with which the leadership accepted coalitions with organisations other than those run by blacks. The 'People's Charter' adopted in Kliptown in 1955 was evidence of this. In a sense one can say that these were the first real signs that the blacks in South Africa were beginning to realise the need to go it alone and to evolve a philosophy based on, and directed by, blacks. In other words, Black Consciousness was slowly manifesting itself.[11]

Biko understood the BCM as the inheritor of the best and radical traditions of the local nationalist movement. A tradition that was to be suppressed when the liberation movement was banned in 1960.

After Sharpeville: Suppression of black resistance and the aftermath

The Sharpeville Massacre and the government's response changed the history of South Africa forever. Sharpeville was a defining event, 'a moment or occurrence after whose appearance on the historic landscape nothing was quite what it had been, and nothing could quite be anticipated by even the most prescient of social commentators.[63]

The reaction of the white supremacist Nationalist Party government, which had come into power in 1948 on a campaign of racial segregation (*apartheid*) was the enactment of *The Unlawful Organisations Act, Act 34 of 1960*, which came into effect on 07 April 1960, 27 days after the Sharpeville Massacre. Through the Act, the Nationalist Party government banned different organisations within the liberation movement – the ANC, PAC, the Communist Party of South Africa, and the South African Congress of Trade Unions.

It is common cause that most of the leadership of the liberation movement went into exile after the Sharpeville Massacre, creating what is popularly known as the 'lull' in black resistance efforts against oppression.

At the same time as banning the liberation movement the Nationalist Party government declared a State of Emergency and arrested several leaders, including Sobukwe and the ANC's Albert Luthuli. These steps by the government –

bannings, arrests and the State of Emergency – created not only a gap in the existence and leadership thereof of the black resistance movement, at least inside the country, it also created fear among black people, a phenomenon that Steve Biko would address at some length in his article *Fear: An important determinant in South African politics*,[11] which the BCM aimed to eradicate from among black people. A combination of these factors, plus the quest to free black politics from white liberal tutelage, gave rise to the emergence of the BCM in 1968.

Discussion and conclusion

As already demonstrated throughout this article, a reading from a select literature of the BCM from December 1969 through the middle 1970s provides evidence that the BCM was influenced by and is a product of the triple heritage of the black resistance movement – from the United States, the Caribbean and South America, and the African continent.

The heritage that the BCM drew and benefitted from should however not be misunderstood to imply that the Movement did not formulate original ideas. Nor should it be understood to have wholly and uncritically been influenced by some such as Fanon, a point that Xolela Mangcu correctly protests, arguing that Biko and his contemporaries did not come into politics as 'blank slates'.[16]

The BCM was founded by black students who were inspired by other experiences but remained informed by own reflections and critique of existential material conditions that affected them in particular and black people in general in South Africa.

What comes out prominently is the need for a critical emphasis and focus on 'context'; be it an 'intellectual-historical context', or a 'socio-intellectual context'. Any study of the evolution of ideas therefore should be informed by an 'insistence on contextualism, and its insistence on the importance of an intellectual's social circles'.[64] The BCM contextualised both the ideas and organisational inspirations to the conditions affecting black people in South Africa.

The 'triple heritage' of the BCM must also be understood as a reflection of the commonality of the black experience globally. Wherever they find themselves, whether as a majority or a minority, black people experience oppression, exploitation and discrimination. To that end, the words of Frederick Douglass may be adapted to reflect the necessity of active solidarity among black people everywhere:

> We are one with you under the ban [*sic*] of prejudice and proscription – one with you under the slander of inferiority – one with you in social and political disenfranchisement. What you suffer, we suffer; what you endure, we endure. We are indissolubly united, and must fall or flourish together.[65]

Having demonstrated how the BCM drew from the struggles and articulations of the black resistance movement in mainly the United States, Caribbean and South America region, and from the African continent, including locally in South Africa, the Movement demonstrated what Césaire termed the peculiarity of the black experience, in this case the peculiarity of the South African situation for black people. Césaire wrote as follows in his letter of resignation from the French Communist Party, which he felt did not understand the peculiarity of the struggles of black people:

> We Coloured men, in this specific moment of historical evolution, have consciously grasped in its full breath, the notion of our peculiar uniqueness, the notion of just who we are and what, and that we are ready, on every plane and in every department, to assume the responsibilities which proceed from this coming into consciousness. The peculiarity of our place in the world is not to be confused with anyone else's. The peculiarity of our problems which aren't to be reduced to subordinate forms of any other problem. The peculiarity of our history, laced with terrible misfortunes which belong to no other history. The peculiarity of our culture, which we intend to live and to make live in an ever realler manner.[11]

Four points arise from Césaire's assertion. Firstly, the peculiarity of the South African situation is that black people were a majority living under a settler-colonial government, which had adopted a racist capitalist political and economic system. Secondly, the BCM had to contend with a unique brand of liberalism, which was white in both form and character and did not challenge racial oppression and exploitation as black students may have wished for. Thirdly, the BCM had to 'rally' a people who had but been defeated mentally, especially after the harsh bannings of the liberation movement in 1960. Lastly, the movement had to unite black people beyond their ethnicised identities as Africans, so-called mixed race, and Indians, into a single black group. As Daniel Magaziner asserts, the BCM's origins may have been influenced by the triple heritage; it was however ultimately crystallised by the existential circumstances under which black people lived.[66]

The triple heritage that shaped the BCM's intellectual, ideological and organisational forms was adapted to establish a unique movement that had to deal with a peculiar set of circumstances and out of that developed a 'near hegemonic hold on black politics' during the 1970s, until 1977 when Biko was killed and all BCM organisations were banned.

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