

Indian South Africans and the Black Consciousness Movement under Apartheid

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Abstract

In the late 1960s, “non-white” university students marched out of the white dominated but, at that stage, still multi-racial, National Union of South African Students (NUSAS). They formed the South African Students Organisation (SASO) and began formulating an ideology called Black Consciousness (BC). At its heart, the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) called for the unity of South Africa’s oppressed, which they defined as African, Coloured and Indian. Those who were not students found a home in the Black People’s Convention (BPC). Many students of Indian origin joined SASO and played leading roles in the development of the BCM. This article traces these developments, paying particular attention to Indian women, seeking to understand their motivations in joining the movement, and record their experiences inside the BCM. Their story has to date been largely ignored, primarily because the Indian male members of BCM who stood trial and went to Robben Island during this period have tended to overwhelm the narrative, and in more recent times, the post-apartheid liberation story has been dominated by the journey of the African National Congress (ANC).

Key words: Black Consciousness, Biko, Gender, Identity, Apartheid

Introduction

In the early 1970s, a phenomenon hit the streets of Durban; young men and women of Indian origin began to call themselves “Black”¹ and embraced a movement called Black Consciousness (BCM). Its most iconic member, Steve Biko, born in the Eastern Cape, studied in Durban, and after his expulsion from the local medical school, remained in the city as part of a growing band of young people in their twenties debating and writing about the political situation in which Blacks found themselves in the belly of the apartheid beast (Woods 1978).

The organisation developed at the time of an assertive Black Power movement in the United States, the 1968 rebellion in France, and the hastening of African national liberation

¹While the author accepts that race is a social construct, race has played and continues to play a key role in shaping identities in South Africa. The descendants of those who were indigenous to Africa are referred to as Africans (and Black Africans in the post-apartheid period); those from Europe as Whites, those from the Asian sub-continent as Indians, and people of mixed race and Khoi-san as Coloured. The term Black was coined by anti-apartheid activists in the 1970s to refer to Africans, Coloureds and Indians

struggles in Southern Africa. The young adherents of BCM followed these events and were inspired by them (Badat 1999; Sono 1993).

The immediate roots of BCM were sown in the formation of the South African Students Organisation (SASO), born in 1969. Until then, “non-white” students found a home in the White-led National Union of South African Students (NUSAS). The break from of NUSAS and the formation of the exclusively Black student body, SASO, presaged an incredible period in the history of the South African anti-apartheid struggle. New identities were debated, cultural and self-help initiatives activated and fresh impetus breathed into the liberation struggle. This struggle had been hard hit by the state repression of the early 1960s and the buoyant apartheid economy of the latter part of the decade (Gerhart 1978; Lobban 1996).

The majority of Indian South Africans trace their forebears back to the thousands of indentured labourers transported from the Indian sub-continent between 1860 and 1911 to work on sugar cane farms. After serving their indenture, many decided to stay, eking out an existence as labourers, small-scale farmers, house servants, garment workers and fishermen. The labouring class was followed by merchants and men from the same village who worked in the merchants shops; the so-called passenger Indians; better off individuals, with local networks and not bound by any contracts of work. Over time, this small group developed a self-consciousness as a distinct community, not only as a result of common origins, customs and religious beliefs but also as common victims of the racial antipathy of White people. In the British colony of Natal in particular, the Indian community were seen as a menace to the legal, racial and commercial order of things (Meer 1969; Desai and Vahed 2010).

It fell largely to the Indian merchant class to form organisations which looked out for Indian interests in South Africa, as it was in the commercial realm where legislation sought to contain their ability to compete with Whites. The leading organisations formed in this regard were the Natal Indian Congress (NIC) and the Transvaal Indian Congress (TIC) (Swan 1985).

From the time of Mohandas K. Gandhi, in South Africa from 1893 to 1914, and a central figure in the establishment of the NIC in 1894, the NIC was organised along racially exclusive lines (Swan 1985). In the 1950s, the NIC and its counterparts in the the TIC, sought to break out of this ethnic enclave by allying themselves with the African National Congress (ANC), in what became known as the Congress Alliance. As much as this initiative was ground-breaking, it was at best an alliance at the fingertips and racial separation remained firmly in place, both at the

level of political organisation as well as among the Indian and African masses these organisations represented (Bhana 1997).

The ANC had its own tortured relationship with race. It did not allow non-Africans to join the organisation and contained a strong Africanist element that was not completely excised, even when elements broke away to form the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) in 1959 (Pogrud 1990). In 1968, at the ANC's third Consultative Conference, it was agreed that non-Africans be allowed to join but could not belong to the national executive (Lodge 1983).

After the banning of the ANC and PAC in 1960, the NIC and TIC were not banned. However, state repression, which led to the imprisonment and exile of activists, curtailed their ability to operate and they receded from the public domain. Monty Naicker, the President of the NIC, was banned in the 1960s, and Yusuf Dadoo, his counterpart in the Transvaal, went into exile. There, he did not seek to revive the Indian Congress but turned his attention to the Communist Party (see Desai and Vahed 2010; Bhana 1997).

Indian South Africans were subject to profound social change during the 1960s. This was a period when long-established communities were destroyed by the Group Areas Act and people were forcibly relocated to the township of Chatsworth (Desai and Vahed 2013), when large numbers of Indians, especially women, entered factory employment (Freund 1995), and significantly, a growing number of young people were accepted into university as a result of the establishment of the University College for Indians in 1960 in Durban, in keeping with the apartheid policy of separating South Africans by race (Vahed 2013). It is out of this coterie of students that the first Indian BC followers emerged. One of the early adherents of BC, Asha Moodley, captures the local conditions in which the movement emerged:

SASO was established mainly because black students on campuses had had enough of being represented by white students. Basically, white students, through the white student body, NUSAS, didn't really represent the aspirations and hopes and fears of black students. At the level of the universities, that was one reason why SASO was formed. But on a broader level, students realized that there was a political lull within the black community and that there was a great fear on the part of communities to engage in political discussions and action. In a sense, that was only natural because the other liberation movements, the PAC and the ANC had been banned, and the movement that came after them, the African People's Democratic Union of South Africa [APDUSA],

most of the members had been put on trial and just been sentenced to prison...We had some very clear-thinking people who sort of analysed the situation of black people ... and identified the psychological fear that black people had. There was also an analysis of the previous liberation movements, that while we spoke about physical liberation we hadn't really addressed the question of psychological liberation, one of the reasons why the liberation movement as a whole wasn't progressing was because our minds really weren't free. Our aspirations, the kinds of political solutions that were visualized, were always steeped in a context defined by white people...We wanted a kind of struggle that would be initiated by black people and be the creation of black people (Interview, August 15, 2002).

The story of young Indians who sought to break the mould of racialised politics has not really been told, none more so than the Indian women activists of BCM. The contribution of BCM as a movement and of these young individuals was path-breaking in the context of the apartheid state's attempts to fix race identities into absolute boundaries. For these students not only sought to confront apartheid but also to create an imagined community (Anderson 1983) that united Africans, Indians and Coloureds into a new social imaginary (Castoriadis 1987). In contemporary South Africa, there is a dominating narrative of the ANC's role in freeing Black South Africans from the yoke of White minority rule and, in particular, the role of "Great Men" in the long march to freedom (Hyslop 2010). The alternate options and movements of the 1970s and 1980s have been largely written out of the script. Even where the BCM is concerned, its role in history has been dominated by powerful figures such as Steve Biko and those involved in the SASO/BPC trial, who were all men. Missing are the stories of those Indian South Africans, and more especially women such as Asha Moodley, Sam Moodley, and Vino Reddy, who played a significant role in not only challenging the racial mould but also the gender boundaries both in the Indian community and within the BCM.

There can be no under-estimating the difficulty and audacity of the task that the BCM set itself. What they embarked upon was as much a political as an ontological journey. In proposing the identity of "Black" to unite all whom apartheid oppressed, the BCM activists tried to break out of apartheid identities and congeal this into a new identity, a lived identity that involved 'a kind of disassembled and reassembled unity' (Haraway 1991, 174). It must be remembered that Indian South Africans who joined the BCM grew up in Indian areas, went to Indian schools and

universities and their immediate family were more often than not of Indian descent. Indian adherents of the BCM thus attempted to trespass racial boundedness and link up with Africans in a single political organisation, which espoused a single identity of Blackness. This new identity sought to foreshadow a new society, ‘the coming community’ to use Agamben’s evocative phrase (1993). This story is important, both for its historical contribution to the liberation struggle, but also for contemporary South Africa, which still confronts the inherited racial divisions of apartheid. This paper is based on interviews conducted by the author with Strini Moodley, conversations with Saths Cooper, as well as interviews conducted by the Documentation Centre, Westville Campus, University of KwaZulu-Natal, as part of its ‘Voices of Liberation’ Project during 2002.² These perspectives are cross-referenced against various works produced by the BCM and books and articles covering the period under discussion.

Who is Black?

SASO debated the notion of Blackness at some length. Initially, it used the word “non-white” but this was quickly dumped as denoting ‘white as the aspired-to-norm and separated those who had attained the status from those who had not’ (Magaziner 2010,43). SASO opted for “Black” as opposed to “non-white” from 1970, for reasons explained in one of its editorials:

The term (black) must be seen in its right context. No new category is being created but a “re-Christening” is taking place. We are merely refusing to be regarded as non-persons and claim the right to be called positively...One should grant that the division of races in this country is so entrenched that the blacks will find it difficult to operate as a combined front. The black umbrella we are creating for ourselves at least helps us to make sure that if we are not working as a unit at least the various units should be working in the same direction, being complementary to each other wherever possible. By all means be proud of your heritage or your African culture but make sure in looking around for somebody to kick at, choose the fellow who is sitting on your neck. He may not be as easily accessible as your black brother but he is the source of your discomfort.... It is a deliberate attempt by all of us to counteract the “divide and rule” attitude of evil-doers (as quoted in SADET 2006, 114-115).

²The audio recordings and transcripts can be accessed at:
http://scnc.ukzn.ac.za/doc/Audio/VOR/%20Featured_Voices.htm.

In the following year, 1971, SASO made more explicit that Black was defined as ‘those who are, by law or tradition politically, economically and socially discriminated against as a group in the South African society and identifying themselves as a unit in the struggle towards the realisation of their aspirations’ (as quoted in SADET 2006, 115). This translated into all those who did not qualify for the franchise. As Biko put it, SASO ‘is not a movement for Africans, not a movement for Indians, for Coloured people; it’s a movement for people who are oppressed’ (as quoted in Magaziner 2010,43).

What did this mean for Whites? The 1971 Policy Manifesto held:

South Africa is a country in which both black and white live and shall continue to live. That the white man must be made aware that one is either part of the solution or part of the problem. That, in this context, because of the privileges accorded to them by legislation and because of their continual maintenance of an oppressive regime, whites have defined themselves as a problem. That, therefore, we believe that in all matters relating to the struggle towards realising our aspirations, whites must be excluded. That this attitude must not be interpreted by blacks to imply “anti-whitism” but merely a positive way of attaining a normal situation in South Africa (as quoted in SADET 2006, 115).

The goal, according to Biko, was to ‘remove [the white man] from our table, strip the table of all trappings put on it by him, decorate it in true African style, settle down and then invite him to join us on our own terms if he liked’ (as quoted in Keniston 2014, 61). Here we see an attempt to both de-racialise by confronting apartheid categories while at the same time re-racialising by reinforcing the divide between White and Black.

The challenge of using Black instead of non-white began to permeate into broader society. According to Gerhart, by January 1971, NUSAS accepted the new usage, and in July 1972, ‘after reporters from the *Rand Daily Mail* had been expelled from SASO because of the paper’s continued use of “non-white”, the *Rand Daily Mail* became the first white newspaper to make the switch to “black”. The Institute of Race Relations also changed over in July 1972’ (Gerhart 1978, 278-79).

The Indian in Black and White

In Durban, Strini Moodley and Saths Cooper were two of the movement's most visible faces. As they saw it, the ideology of BC sought to empower Black people and develop a new self-confidence and militancy. According to Moodley, Biko argued that Black liberation had to be both mental and physical. As a starting point, Blacks should run their own organisations rather than rely on White liberals. Blacks oppressed themselves by accepting the second-class status accorded by the apartheid system (Interview by author, August 12, 2005). Strini Moodley pointed out that after the banning of the ANC and PAC, students like him saw

very few Black people speaking up. You had Whites like Helen Suzman and Alan Paton and all these liberals speaking on behalf of Black people and we felt, "No, Black people can't sit and watch what is happening in this country when they are the victims; that Black people have to take their future into their own hands and have to fight for their own liberation; that other people are not going to be able to give you your liberation. You have to fight for your own liberation" (Interview, July 24, 2002).

Black Consciousness, according to Strini Moodley, was based on the philosophy that the world was

designed and coordinated by White people [who] made the assumption that they were superior; that they were civilised, ... they exploited the labour of Black people, their riches, their wealth, their privilege was all built on the sweat, blood and tears of Black people. To turn the situation around, Blacks had to redefine themselves by being 'proud' of their blackness which becomes a weapon for restoring humanity to the world, ... standing up and overthrowing regimes that oppressed and exploited us (Interview, July 24, 2002).

The categorisation, Black, was not widely embraced by Indians and the idea of Black as an identity was hotly debated in the public domain, especially with the proposed re-launching of the NIC in 1971. Members of SASO queried the retention of an ethnic and potentially divisive name. This led to ripostes from those partial to retaining the "I" in the NIC. It was exactly at the time that SASO was debating issues of identity that the NIC decided to revive itself at a meeting in July 1971. A group of students identifying themselves with the BCM protested with placards (Singh and Vawda 1988). It is one of the ironies of the period that while the ANC-in-exile was moved in 1968 to allow non-Africans to become members inside South Africa, the NIC decided on an exclusive ethnic membership.

Despite the opposition, moves to revive the NIC gathered steam and in October 1971, an executive committee of the NIC was elected at the historic Phoenix settlement which had been founded by Gandhi in 1903. At this gathering, SASO members commandeered the microphone and demanded the formation of an organisation for all Black people. This was rejected. The matter was raised once more at the NIC's first Congress in 1972 (Vahed and Desai 2014). By an extremely close vote of 32 to 30, the NIC decided to retain its exclusive racial identity. Leading members of SASO like Saths Cooper and Strini Moodley had served on the Durban branch of the executive committee, but once their attempts to turn the NIC into a "People's Congress" came to naught, they drifted away and found a home in the Black People's Convention (BPC) (*Natal Mercury*, May 1, 1972).

Within the BCM as well, the inclusion of Indians under the rubric "Black" was not without controversy and debate. Mamphela Ramphele, a leading SASO figure, remembers how a student mocked that 'Biko...your room is full of curry' (Ramphele 1996, 60). The use of curry in this context was meant to illustrate that Biko was associating himself with too many Indians. Indeed, it indicated in a perjorative and racial way, the apparent tension caused by the inclusion of Indians in the ranks of the BCM (personal communication, Saths Cooper, May 10, 2014). As Magobe Ramose put it: while 'The definition of the term 'black' to include Africans, Indians and Coloureds was crucial in the development of the movement... the debate about the wisdom of including Coloureds and Indians in the organization (SASO) was by no means over' (as quoted in Oshadi-Mangena 2008, 254).

In 1973, a leading SASO member, Mthuli ka Shezi, authored the play *Shanti*. It told the story of love across the colour line, between Shanti, an Indian woman and Thabo, an African man. The play spoke directly to the need for Africans, Coloureds and Indians to unite. Witness the "coloured" Koos:

Shall I be so easily impressed by parliamentary speeches that the Coloured comes immediately after the White, then follows the rest? Your kind, Shanti, then Thabo's. Are we three not components of Blacks? Are we not Blacks, suffering what we do in degrees? Are we not all Black, who shouldn't only be proud but who should also guard against contamination by induced inferiority complex? Yes, I am Black and inferior to no man...I am Black. Black like my mothers. Black like the sufferers. Black like the continent (as quoted in Magaziner 2010, 136).

How were the founder members of SASO of Indian origin thinking through these issues?

For Saths Cooper, a student at the “Indian” university:

Black Consciousness was a way of identifying subjectively with the conditions we found ourselves in objectively. We rose above any narrow ethnic or tribal definition because the apartheid state was busy increasing the Bantustans in our country... to further remove people from collective action and collective identification. So Black Consciousness in fact comes in as a cleavage during the incipient stages of Bantustanisation (Interview, April 14, 2003).

BC activist Sam Moodley makes the pertinent point that:

irrespective of whether we part of SASO or not, we still had white friends in NUSAS and they never objected to the fact that SASO must be formed. As much as people will say that we were anti-white – we were not anti-white, we were pro-black. There was a big difference, there was a need for black people to take conditions into their own hands, they had to realize that they got to make decisions and that was what the fight with NUSAS [where] decisions were made for black people all the time, there was no black people on executives, I mean, they sat there in their white enclaves and they were very satisfied with that..... From '69, '70, we started to attend SASO conferences and there was this big debate about who was black, you know, this is so relevant now, whether Coloureds and Indians were black enough to be black and then we had to go by that definition – all people who were not white were black, one; two, it had nothing to do with the colour of your skin; three, that it had to do with people who were socially, physically, socially, psychologically, economically oppressed in this country. We had to take those definitions and had to muster the fact that all people who were disadvantaged by law were black but it had nothing to do with the colour of one's skin (Interview, March 9, 2010).

For Strini Moodley, the idea of BC was both a response to a particular conjuncture and a way of seeing humanity:

After the banning of the ANC and the PAC, we students looked around and saw that very few Black people were speaking up. You know, you had Whites like Helen Suzman and Alan Paton and all these liberals speaking on behalf of Black people and we felt that no Black people can't sit and watch what is happening in this country when they are the victims; that Black people have to take their future into their own hands and fight for

their own liberation. So the Black Consciousness Movement was on the philosophy that the world has been designed and coordinated by White people; that White people made the assumption that they were superior; that they were civilised, and yet they exploited the labour of Black people; that their riches, their wealth, their privilege was all built on the sweat, blood and tears of Black people; and that Black people had to stop doing this. They had to first of all redefine themselves; that you are a Black person; that you are proud of being Black; that your blackness is a weapon for restoring humanity to the world (Interview, July 24, 2002).

Africans had long debated the issue of working with other “racial” groups and it led to much tension and division; witness the formation of the PAC in 1959. Indians and Coloureds, even when they entered the Congress Alliance, a body of South African progressives which famously drew up the Freedom Charter, did so through a separate, ethnically based organisation. Thus, the ANC was but one part of an alliance of racially separate organisations campaigning for democracy in South Africa. There were vehicles for White, Coloured and Indian participation in this struggle too (Lodge 1983). The call for unity across racial boundaries in the way in which the BCM envisaged, was revolutionary and not only came up against the state’s attempts to divide, but also the manner in which the oppressed had traditionally organised. It was a difficult terrain. As Gerhart points out, ‘the prospects for African-Indian-Coloured unity might logically have seemed dim at the time SASO set out to forge its new alliance’ (Gerhart 1978, 280).

Gerhart provides a stimulating set of reasons for why, despite the challenges, SASO pursued a Black political identity to encompass the oppressed and disenfranchised:

First....it seemed apparent to the founders of SASO that in theory non-white unity was a desirable thing. As long as the government’s aim was to divide and rule, there was always the threat that non-whites would succumb to the mentality of apartheid and waste their energies attacking one another. By the late 1960s, Nationalist plans to establish separate Indian and Coloured opinion, a political vacuum had come to exist. The time seemed ripe for a political revival among Indian and Coloured radicals, just as it had been among Africans. In the absence of pre-existing separate and rival radical organisations, circumstances seemed favourable for a joint effort. The particular circumstances of SASO’s genesis also favoured interracial cooperation. As a student at Natal medical school, the only place in South Africa where African, Indian and Coloured university

students were trained and housed together, Biko had been offered a rare opportunity to fashion and test his political ideas in a multiracial environment...Finally, most compelling...was the consensus...that polarisation per se in the race conflict would be a strategy conducive to change. Polarisation-the simplification of the conflict from a series of skirmishes into one battle perceived as a total confrontation between black and white-required not just the initial redefinition of all whites, including liberals, as oppressors, but also required the conceptual regrouping of all non-whites into the single category of "black" (Gerhart 1978, 280-81).

As strategically cogent as the initiative to forge a single political construct was, housing all the oppressed, Indians who chose to identify with the BCM were nevertheless going against the political grain within their own communities. This was triply so, since, in the first instance, a sizeable proportion of people of Indian descent self-identified as Indian and possessed in-group attitudes that set themselves apart from African and Coloured compatriots. Secondly, the government had newly created the South African Indian Council (SAIC), an attempt to create a moderate channel in which Indian interests would be pursued and Indian leadership co-opted. Thirdly, even amongst progressives in the Indian community, the predominant organisation of resistance, the NIC, had already decided to opt for an exclusive Indian identity while agitating against apartheid (Moodley 1975; Desai 1987). Witness the Chairperson of the SAIC, H.E. Joosub, lauding racial segregation in 1972:

The fact is that is how we want it...Our customs and religion differ from those of other racial groups, and we prefer to live with our own kind. We would, for example, not want our children to attend school with children of other racial groups, nor would we want our young people to belong to white or black groups and acquire their way of life (Joosub 1972, 431).

While the NIC had a multiracial and more democratic outcome in mind for a future South Africa, it was not hard to detect in their arguments a need for a space that provided a demographic and cultural comfort that an ethnically exclusive organisation afforded. An alliance with a much larger constituency of African people as a separate entity gave Indian leaders and their opinions somewhat greater sway than if individuals from this community were submerged within a greater, contending, and often non-English speaking mass (Moodley 1975).

The Frelimo Moment - 1974

On 25 September 1974, Saths Cooper and Strini Moodley were among those who organised the “Viva Frelimo Rally” at Curries Fountain in solidarity with the new government in Mozambique. The decision to organise the rally followed a sustained wave of protests on campuses across the country, sparked by a student protest at the University of the North, and this led to increased police repression. The BCM decided to adopt a more confrontational approach (Brown 2012, 58). This was no longer a debate about identity but a public show of support for a Marxist revolution in a state located a mere 500kms away from Durban. Prior to the rally, Minister of Police, Jimmy Kruger, banned all SASO and BPC meetings for a month. However, the BCM rally went ahead even though it was now deemed illegal. The repressive net widened and as Brown points out, by the end of 1974, around 20 activists belonging to BC organisations were placed under banning orders and a further 35 or so ‘were held incommunicado under various forms of detention’ (Brown 2012, 71). And on 31 January 1975, thirteen members of SASO and the BPC were charged under the Terrorism Act with seeking to overthrow the government by violent revolution. Other charges against them included sowing the seeds of hatred between Whites and Blacks, distributing subversive literature and undermining law and order. After charges against the four were dropped, the trial of nine BC members, including Strini Moodley, who was the SASO administrative assistant and editor of several publications, and Cooper, the BPC Public Relations Officer, began in Pretoria on 25 August 1975. At the onset of the trial, Cooper refused to plead and asked instead to read out a statement in court. Justice Boshoff denied him this request and entered a plea of ‘not guilty’ for Cooper and the other eight defendants. The state called 59 witnesses by the time it closed its case on 12 December (Lobban 1996).

All nine; Saths Cooper, Strini Moodley, Mosiuoa Lekota, Muntu Myeza, Aubrey Mokoape, Nkwenkwe Vincent Nkomo, and Pandelani Vincent Nefolovodhwe were found guilty and sentenced to between five and ten years imprisonment, to be served on Robben Island (Magaziner 2010).

As Brown (2012, 71) points out in his study of the Frelimo Rallies, the arrests and imprisonment of the leaders had a devastating effect on the BC organisation. Many of the leading lights of BCM tried to re-group after the trial. This proved difficult, as the state focussed its formidable repressive gaze on the movement. These tactics involved frequent detentions, the

banning and banishment of a number of founding members, as well as the death in custody of the BCM's inspirational leader, Steve Biko (see Woods 1978 for details of Biko's murder and the subsequent decimation of the BCM).

BC and Gender: One Woman's Journey

In thinking through the experiences of BCM women activists, one should keep in mind Ali Rattansi's point, albeit written in a different context, that 'masculinization may function in an oppositional mode, for example, in struggles for nationhood, while simultaneously being part of the discursive practices which subordinate women in the community' (1995,264). The ideology of the movement was fashioned and proceeded to operate without paying meaningful attention to the gendered nature of black experience. As Gqola points out, this remained the practice even though there were women in the movement whose very presence should have challenged the masculine premise of Black Consciousness (Gqola 2013, 19). So, for example, Ramphela points out that 'the responsibility for catering, cleaning-be it at national conferences, formation schools, workshops or elsewhere. In those cases where top leadership were sensitive to gender discrimination and allocated duties regardless of gender, males feigned incompetence, and women would then have to take over the entire nurturing responsibility, thus positively reinforcing the feigned incompetence of men' (1991, 219).

Asha Moodley (née Rambally) was born in 1946 in Pietermaritzburg and grew up in the small northern Natal town of Colenso. After matriculating, she arrived in Durban to attend the University College on Salisbury Island.

Asha got involved in SASO from its earliest days. For much of 1974/75, she supported the "SASO Nine" who were on trial in Pretoria. After the trial, she returned to Durban but shortly after, she 'received a call from Mamphela (Ramphela) and Steve (Biko) who asked me to come to King [King Williams Town] to work in the research department of the Black Community Programme (BCP)' (Interview, August 15, 2002).

The BCP was spreading outwards from King Williams Town and engaged in a number of self-help schemes and health clinics:

Quite a number of things happened in King William's Town. Mamphela Ramphela was the resident doctor at the Zanemphilo Clinic. The clinic was a great example of the kind of community development work the BCM believed in, because people would come for

health care needs. There was a place for women to have their children, there were regular classes for women nursing children, there was an agricultural officer, who went around the communities and spoke about basic food growing and we had a mobile clinic which went out into the villages (Interview, August 15, 2002).

It was not long before Asha was arrested on 26 August 1977. She recalls that a few days before-hand:

Steve (Biko) and Peter (Jones) went off to Cape Town. Steve was banned, at that time. The purpose of their going to Cape Town was to meet with members of the other liberation organisations to engage in talks... There was the idea amongst all the Liberation Movements that it was time that they all came together and started working out things for the country (Interview, August 15, 2002).

Biko and Jones were arrested on 18 August 1977. Soon thereafter, the offices in King Williams Town were raided:

A day or two after their detention things became very ugly because the police in King William's Town ... arrested members of staff, and started confiscating a whole lot of stuff from the offices. There was only myself and Malusi Mpulwana who were left so it was quite a horrible feeling to see the offices which had once been quite full, empty of people and of most of its equipment and publications. The day before I was arrested, they [police] actually told me 'we are going to come and pick you up tomorrow.' It was difficult to know what to do. Malusi said, "you should just skip, go away." I didn't want to do that because I actually said to Malusi, 'look, I think maybe just detention for a few days or maybe they just frightening me because this is what cops do.' I didn't believe that anything would come out of this arrest of Peter and Steve. Well, on that Friday, I remember they came and arrested me and that was in the evening.

Asha was driven overnight in the custody of two policemen to Uitenhage, some two hours away:

On that Sunday of my arrest, it was quite late at night when two very short and mean-looking white men came into the cell and they said: "so you are Asha.... well listen, you better make up your blessed mind to talk or else." This guy, while talking to me, sort of pushed forward so that I eventually backed into the wall... They called me a Kerriekos Meisie (Curry girl). What a Kerriekos Meisie, a so-called Indian woman, was doing in

King William's Town with African people? That was highly unusual for them... And then I wasn't allowed to wash or anything. There would be a woman prison warden who would come to see if I needed sanitary pads or something, and there was no place to have a bath or a shower. I wasn't given any change of clothing, nothing. I remember that, it was on the 12th of September, I remember very clearly because of what happened later. I used to keep tabs on the dates by scratching on the wall. I was taken to PE this time, to that Sanlam building where I think some detainee had been thrown down the stairwell. I was interrogated about a pamphlet that Steve was supposed to have drawn up. According to the police, I had been at the office on the Saturday when that pamphlet had been drawn up. Essentially, what they wanted me to say was that I had seen Steve draw up that pamphlet and that Steve photocopied it for some group or other from PE, and actually no such thing had happened. So it was the easiest thing in the world for me to say 'no you're wrong.' I think the next thing I just felt this horrible, horrible pain and I realised that there was a guy behind me with a piece of green hose. And there was another chap in front of me with his open palm and essentially they beat me up with a length of green hose....It was a very traumatic experience for me because I was badly assaulted. And, on reflection, over something that really wasn't true. It brought home to me, how deadly this system was. How you could just be killed in total isolation? (Interview, August 15, 2002)

Steve Biko had been badly beaten and tortured, bundled into a police van and driven naked from Port Elizabeth to Pretoria. He died in police custody on 12 September 1977 (Woods 1978). After almost eighteen months, in December 1978, Asha was released, handcuffed and driven back to Colenso.

Much was made of BCM's masculinity, encapsulated by the slogan 'Black man you are on your own' and which Gqola points to. Asha recognises this but differs to an extent, arguing that:

...in SASO, women were given a lot of space. I mean if there is one thing I recall that's people like Vuyelwa Mashalaba who's sadly deceased now, and Mamphela Ramphele, who were really outspoken, and I mean really did a hell of a lot to give direction to the Movement. But I'm talking about when you went out say to campuses, then you'd sort of get a different kind of thing. I mean you'd sense this kind of male outrage, if say some of us stood and I know who, particularly, Vuyelwa, because she was very strong and very

forthright. If she stood up and made a statement the guys would actually say: “look at this woman telling us what to do.” And of course, she smoked and that was a primary sin then, and they said “she’s smoking, going against our culture.” And “she’s wearing jeans, even worse.” But Vuyelwa would just deal with them, you know, in a very perfunctory, direct way. But ya there was this other thing, you were safe in certain spaces like conferences and so on, you were free to say your bit. But I think when you went out, at other meetings, you were also aware of this other, other thing, this kind of prejudice that these were uppity women... you know (Interview, August 15, 2002).

But while Asha deals with the sexism of broader society, she says much less about the internal dynamics of BCM. Ramphele writes, for example, that while women in BCM were often given ‘honorary male status’,

There was an interesting disjuncture between the genuine comradeship one experienced within the movement, and the sexism that reared its head at many levels. For example, the responsibility for catering, cleaning up and other entertainment functions tended to fall on women participants, be it at national conferences (1991, 219).

While Ramphele holds that many of these ideas were challenged, she goes on to concede that

...these challenges to male privilege did not represent a systematic departure from traditional gender relationships, but only served to undermine this tradition for the benefit of those who were prepared to take risks in challenging sexism at a personal level. Interpersonal relationships remained unchanged, with the man as the dominant partner, and many women remained trapped in unsatisfactory relationships that violated their dignity as people (1991, 221).

These insights accord quite strikingly with those of bell hooks, an American feminist and political activist:

Individual heterosexual women came to the movement from relationships where men were cruel, unkind, violent, unfaithful. Many of these men were radical thinkers who participated in movements for social justice, speaking out on behalf of the workers, the poor, speaking out on behalf of racial justice. However when it came to the issue of gender they were as sexist as their conservative cohorts (hooks 2004, 146).

Notwithstanding this, Ramphele holds that:

In general, the BC movement had a significantly positive impact on black women in South Africa. The assertion that “Black is beautiful” spoke to many blacks, whose self-doubt and depreciation of their blackness had dominated their lives..... “Black is Beautiful” liberated black women from being defined in terms dictated by the dominant culture. For the first time many black women...found new pride in themselves as they were. They were no longer “non-whites”, but blacks with an authentic self, appreciated on their own terms...Having experienced being assertive as blacks, women claimed greater psychological space in which to assert themselves in both public and personal relationships. Black women also benefited from the intellectual stimulation they received in the course of their activism (1991, 217).

One can see how women like Asha travelled very different journeys from the “normal” trajectory of Indian South African women. They not only challenged the dominant way in which women should enter the public domain, but also the boundaries of race, demanding to be defined as Black and making common cause with Africans and Coloureds in a single political organisation.

As the 1970s turned into the 1980s, the BCM became increasingly marginal and the Charterist movement (those who had allegiance to the ANC’s Freedom Charter) began to dominate. Many young people who left the country in the aftermath of the 1976 Soweto uprising, although influenced by BCM ideology, joined the ranks of the ANC, which had a solid organisational base outside the country, and to a lesser extent, the PAC (Hirson 1979).

In 1990, with the release of Nelson Mandela and the unbanning of the liberation movements, the BCM was totally eclipsed. In the 1994 elections, the ANC demonstrated its power by winning an overwhelming majority (Bond 1998).

While many of the old BCM stalwarts joined the ANC, some like Asha kept faith with the ideology of BC, even if there was no organisational outlet for their beliefs.

Into the Present

Asha lives in Durban. Her partner, Strini Moodley, who spent five years on Robben Island, died in 2006. Ironically, having rejected racial categories, she lives in a world in which the ANC government, while adopting a constitution that outlaws racial discrimination, has continued to adopt racial apartheid categories. It forces South Africans to register as Black

African, Indian/Asian, Coloured or White for affirmative action purposes in places of learning and in the workplace. But still, the rise of BCM and the theorisation of a unified, political Blackness influenced many Indians of the 1960s and 1970s. Their memories of those heady times are carried into the present. According to Asha:

At that time BC had really spread and I think that was the Movement, the consciousness of that particular moment in history, and I think it was really revolutionary because it did speak about black people being the architects of their own destiny. And that slogan “Black Man,” although it’s sexist in a way, “you’re on your own,” was important, because it did put the responsibility of political liberation on black people and said: “listen, no white savior, no other person from outside there or wherever, is coming to save you, you’ve got to stand on your own”(Interview, August 15, 2002).

Bailey and Hall have argued that: ‘It is perfectly possible that what is politically progressive and opens up new discursive opportunities in the 1970s and 1980s can become a form of closure and have repressive value...and at that point you need another shift (1992, 15). Given the demise of apartheid, has the idea of a Black identity that separates itself from White identity become an anachronism? For Saths Cooper, it is still necessary because of the need to break the psychological chains of inferiority developed during the long years of White domination (personal communication, October 3, 2010). But this has not captured the imagination of South Africans. Rather, what one has seen is a disassembling of Blackness and the resurgence of ethnic identities inside a broader South Africanism, similar to the process that Hall described in the 1980s in England, where one saw the erosion of the ‘essential black subject’ developed by Afro-Caribbean and South Asian minorities (Desai and Vahed 2010; Hall 1992).

What Black Consciousness did, in creating new and affirmative conceptions of the self, was to draw a fairly rigid boundary between oppressor and oppressed. This could not endure the rush of nuance occasioned by the advent of democracy in South Africa. While economic inequality persists, post 1994, Black hands are every bit on the oppressive levers of the state as White hands once were. Black Consciousness does not have the theoretical repertoire to make sense of the Marikana mine massacre for instance, where White and Black business interests apparently coincided with that of a neo-liberal state to crush a strike of poorly paid workers (Peter Alexander et al. 2013; Bond and Saul 2014). Ironically, to apply a BC analysis of the

ANC government's post-democracy compradorism is to do precisely what BC was against. Remove agency from Black people, except this time, deny them agency not in their liberation but in their continued oppression, at least as far as electoral politics is concerned.

An increasingly popular new collective identity is to pronounce oneself African, not Black. This removes politics from being front and centre of group identity. Being African rests on the affirmation of a lost or suppressed cultural and ethnic essence. This certainly has progressive political elements to it, but Africanness is not an identity defined primarily with reference to challenging continued oppression. Its opposite is not White or neoliberalism or even vaguely, inequality. As MacDonald points out: 'By Africanising elites, the ANC plays to racialism, broadens the racial coalition that benefits from collusive business organisation, and depoliticises economic inequality. The new African bourgeoisie, because it shares racial identities with the bulk of the poor and class interests with white economic elites, is in a position to mediate the gap between rich and poor and black and white by creating cross-cutting cleavages' (2004, 651). Indian South Africans, as well as Coloureds, find it difficult to access this construct. This is both from a legal point of view, as well as a certain common-sense seen in the linguistic and conceptual use of Indian, Coloured and African to describe the South African ethnographic and political landscape. It is a common-sense at odds with BC but ironically derived from Charterist and apartheid government thinking, i.e. that four distinct population groups make up the nation.

The days when Asha and Biko walked the streets of Durban asserting their inclusive Black identity seem a distant memory. As Erasmus puts it, race will be with us for some time to come, even if only 'a detour on the way to new creations. It is always there because, whether we like it or not, we are still living in the shadow of the history of colonialism, segregation and apartheid, and their cultural and political aftermath' (2001, 392). While at a legal level, apartheid racial categories are used as a basis for affirmative action for example, it also has a continuing resonance inside old (apartheid), racially designated communities.

Despite these impulses, the racial boundary markers of apartheid are eroding, but we still have a long way to go, to paraphrase Biko, when everybody has a place at the table.

It is in this context that the lessons of Indian women activists in the BCM in developing a new social imaginary that challenged both the legally created racial boundaries and masculine

spaces of liberation politics need to be drawn upon. The starting point is the call to write these experiences and experiments into the broader narrative of the liberation struggle in South Africa.

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