

4 *Black Consciousness in contemporary South African politics*

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An ironic feature of contemporary South African politics is that while the organisations representing Black Consciousness (BC) ideas remain weak and fragmented, a revival in BC ideas, values and practices in official and civil society discourses seems evident. BC organisations dominated anti-apartheid politics in the 1970s, but their startling decline, particularly their weakened state under post-1994 democracy, calls out for analytical attention. In the 1999 and 2004 elections, the Azanian People's Organisation (Azapo) was the leading BC organisation. Together with the smaller Socialist Party of Azania (Sopa), Azapo received dismal support. Moreover, Azapo has split into three smaller organisations. Efforts to merge the three have so far faltered. One cannot conclude, however, that the obvious failure of BC political parties to challenge the ANC and the historically white political parties at the polls means that we should dismiss these organisations' ideologies as ineffective and lacking in influence. The resurgence of BC ideas at the level of civil society, at a time when we might expect BC to be anachronistic, is intriguing. It is also the subject of this chapter.

The chapter is divided into three parts. The first part discusses the BC movement and the legacy of Steve Biko. This discussion focuses on the establishment of Azapo and how, by the mid-1990s, it had weakened as an organisation. The second part of the chapter links the decline of Azapo's fortunes to the specific ideological choices made by its leadership in the late 1980s, and to Azapo's failure to make the transition to the terrain of democratic electoral politics. The third part of the chapter shows how significant sections of post-apartheid society have accepted and/or appropriated BC ideas, despite its organisational collapse. Examples include some of Thabo Mbeki's speeches and the proliferation of BC ideas in political and civil society among the black middle class and youth. I will attempt to spell out why this resurgence in BC ideas is taking place. I argue that the collapse of the BC movement is a result

of its rejection of the negotiations process and its marginalisation during the formative period of democratic society.

The argument for the resurgence of ideas associated with BC is premised on the ongoing conflicts over the distribution of power and resources that remained unresolved with the political settlement in 1994. The inadequacies of a 'non-racial liberalism', embraced in official and dominant discourses after 1994, do not resonate with the vast majority of South Africans, who experience, in the words of Biko, visibility but not 'real participation'. The ever-faithful contradiction between the material conditions of life and the dominant ideology goes some way towards explaining the continuing search for alternative ways of addressing this problem. In this case, the alternative happens to be BC. The chapter concludes by reflecting on why BC remains relevant in contemporary South African life.

Biko's legacy in contemporary black politics

The contemporary relevance and spread of BC ideas 30 years after Biko's death calls us to reflect historically on the developments in struggle politics from the perspective of BC and its emergence. As a point of departure, we could divide the struggle in South Africa into the following periods:

- firstly, when BC emerged in 1967 up to the Soweto uprisings in 1976 and the banning of organisations in 1977;
- secondly, the re-emergence of the ANC as the dominant political force in the anti-apartheid struggle from the mid-1980s to the first democratic election; and
- thirdly, the period after 1994, with the ANC dominating the political system.

In the mid-1970s a loose mosaic of civil society organisations – of women, workers, students and youth – oriented around community projects and political campaigns at local, regional and national levels. They were linked in various ways to one another, and they contributed to a renaissance in black civic and political culture. A culture of resistance began to take root. These new organisations, and some older established community organisations, embraced BC ideology. The surprising proliferation of BC ideas in township communities, and the consequent resurgence of black political consciousness, encouraged the South African Students' Organisation (Saso), the founding

BC organisation, to initiate a political organisation called the Black People's Convention (BPC). The aim of this organisation was to give direction to, and consolidate the various strands of, these civil society organisations into a political movement. Despite the repressive political environment, the BPC challenged the structures of power in society in its preamble and attacked the apartheid system. It aimed to unite all oppressed people into a political movement to liberate black people from psychological and physical oppression. The BPC saw itself as a movement of black people, rejecting any form of tribal affiliation and ethnic mobilisation and identifying with a global anti-racist struggle. When the students of Soweto revolted against the imposition of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction in schools, they demonstrated a new assertiveness that came with the cultural context of protest among black communities.

In the immediate aftermath of the Soweto uprisings, BC activists who were not banned, detained or in exile formed Azapo. We can divide BC as it relates to Azapo into the following five phases:

- the period of the 'united front' when ANC and Africanist groups worked within Azapo, from 1978 to 1980;
- the period from 1981 to 1983, with its emphasis on the socialist characteristics of BC and the outcome of ideological debate on the relationship between the national and social questions;
- the period from 1984 to 1985, when Azapo and the United Democratic Front (UDF) engaged in opposition campaigns against the Botha reforms;
- the period from 1986 to 1988, when Azapo adopted a rigid 'scientific socialist' approach, viewing itself as a vanguard party of the black working class; and
- the period from 1990 to the present, characterised by internal fragmentation, uncertainty and poor voter support in democratic elections.

The recurring theme of BC's relevance came up as expected at the inaugural congress of Azapo. The delegates addressed the question of BC's relevance in the period after the Soweto revolt. The congress celebrated the enormous impact of the Soweto revolt on resistance politics, maintaining that BC inspired the initial political awareness that led to Soweto but that it had to adapt to the changing socio-political conditions. These changing conditions

were the anticipated 'reforms' called for by key members of the political and economic elite. They emphasised that BC was a dynamic ideology of the oppressed, able to respond creatively to changing contexts. Responding to the mass fear and inactivity of the 1970s, BC stressed 'psychological emancipation' as a condition for mass mobilisation. In the aftermath of the 1976 revolt, BC had to challenge the entire socio-economic system (read racial capitalism) supporting white supremacy, especially when the system planned to move away from the more overt forms of racism. Azapo affirmed that it would concentrate on black workers and that the trade unions would be the organisational link to the black working class.

During the township revolts from 1983 onwards and the state of emergency that followed, Azapo moved closer to an uncomplicated Marxist position embracing 'scientific socialism' and committing itself to 'the leadership of the black working class'. The National Forum Summit in 1984 and the Azapo Council in Houtbosdorp in May 1985 extensively discussed the theory behind scientific socialism and how it related to the formative ideas of BC. In keeping with the radicalised political context sweeping through the urban townships, some delegates proposed workers' councils as alternatives to state structures, similar to the dual power system of pre-revolutionary Russia. The model of revolutionary insurrection of the masses and the successful seizure of state power in some kind of frontal assault dominated the imagery permeating party discourse.

There are two main views about the relationship between the periods before and after the Soweto uprisings. The first view is held by those who see themselves as upholding the authentic, unbroken tradition of BC. This view is critical of non-BC formations, especially of the ANC. Those who hold this view argue for an independent, dominant BC tradition embracing the best of previous resistance traditions and formations in the history of the struggle. This view pinned itself on what it considered to be the unique analysis of apartheid racism, the different strategy and the vision of a South African society after apartheid that BC and Biko represented. The second view, popular among many activists who joined the ANC, argues that BC played an important but limited role within the broader struggle led by the ANC. Once the ANC again assumed prominence from the 1980s, BC ought to have subordinated itself to the leadership of the ANC and embraced its tradition of non-racialism and the mobilisation of people around community issues

and the Freedom Charter. According to this view, non-racialism and mass mobilisation amounted to an advance on BC ideology and those who refused to make this important change and adapt to the new and different conditions displayed an unrealistic, hardline position that was difficult to justify. The weakened state of BC organisations proves that BC is a spent force and the correctness of ANC analysis.

After the post-Soweto state clampdown BC continued to be openly criticised, mainly from ANC quarters, for its emphasis on black power as opposed to the non-racial emphasis of the Freedom Charter. The ANC accused it of reverse racism and narrow nationalism, arguing that the fight against apartheid should in its practice resemble the society to be and that a progressive nationalism did not define participation on the basis of racial identities. Further, BC ideology inadequately theorised class exploitation and did not draw on class analysis. It reflected the interests and frustrations of the educated black elite who did not want to overthrow apartheid radically and build a society that addressed the interests of the working class (Hirson 1979; Lodge 1983). The ANC, by contrast, in its alliance with the South African Communist Party (SACP), saw itself as representing this more radical critique.

It is common sense to associate the period in which BC emerged with the figure of Steven Bantu Biko. Biko's unique role as the leader of the liberation struggle of the 1970s is generally acknowledged. The importance of this period in producing the turning point in the anti-apartheid struggle – the mass youth uprisings of Soweto – is also widely recognised. Biko occupies a special place among South African struggle heroes. He was a founding member of the BC movement. He was brutally killed by the security police and the international outcry that followed placed South Africa's apartheid policies firmly on the international agenda. The range, style and analytical power of his writings reflected, at the height of apartheid, the anger, frustrations and aspirations of a generation of young black people. In contemporary politics, and in the broader context of the transformative agenda of a democratic political system, debate surrounds the place of Biko and BC after Biko's death (Badat 1999; Halisi 1999; Lodge 1983).

Directly related to the post-1979 divisions is the more emotive dispute concerning where Biko would have situated himself politically in contemporary South African politics. Would he have abandoned old-style BC and joined the ANC as other key leaders of the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) did?

Would he have distanced himself from the ANC? Or, given his enormous organising capacities and intellectual analysis, would he have led the BCM to greater heights, where it would not have been a mere shadow of the ANC? Unsurprisingly, those aligned with Azapo and Sopa believe that Biko would not have abandoned BC to join the ANC (Nkadimeng cited in *The Star* 12.09.05). Some say this question is irrelevant and raises another red herring by those who left BC for the ANC. To them, it is impossible to know where Biko would have stood, because BC was always about more than the views of a few individuals and leaders, including Biko. The key question of a truly revolutionary project is the ideology, strategy and tactics that realise the aspirations of the vast majority in the society. The elements for a revolutionary project can only come from within the BC tradition. The core of this dispute lies in how we interpret Biko's texts in relation to the BC organisations established before and after his death (Gerhart 1978; Gibson 1988).

The main criticisms of BC fail to appreciate the context in which BC emerged and operated, and largely ignore what was needed to create a culture of resistance in the 1970s. At the first 'formation school', held at the Natal University Medical School in December 1969, Biko talked about the significance, role and future of Saso (Stubbs 1978). Biko relates Saso's establishment to the post-Sharpeville failures of black resistance: the pervasiveness of ethnic and tribal disunity, the consequent need for a cementing ideology, and the need to respond to the problem of weak black leadership in the face of a dominant white liberalism. The National Union of South African Students was structurally unable to facilitate black interests. The situation in which black students found themselves made it necessary to form an organisation representing their own interests without depending on white-dominated organisations. Establishing an independent black organisation did not translate into support for the government's racial policy; rather, in the context of the period, it was a realistic response to fight the system: 'what SASO has done is simply to take stock of the present scene in the country and to realise that not unless the non-white students decide to lift themselves from the doldrums will they ever hope to get out of them. *What we want is not black visibility but real black participation*' (Stubbs 1978: 5; emphasis added).

The initial task that BC adherents aimed at was the creation of a politically conscious subject of change after a decade of fear and apathy. They sought also to avoid the constant infighting that had characterised the activities

of the student bodies, the African Students' Association and the African Students' Union of South Africa, in the early 1960s. The immediate situation Saso experienced sparked the practical activities it chose, and inevitably these activities encouraged black self-assertiveness. This produced a political subject willing to engage in collective action. This was the aim of black students. They came from communities experiencing the brunt of apartheid racism. They were driven by the state into new higher education institutions, the so-called bush colleges. These were oppressive institutions consciously designed to produce passive elites willing to administer the bantustan project and buy into possible grand-apartheid 'reforms'. This student generation faced, in the post-Sharpeville period, a lull in black resistance politics – the exiled organisations were barely visible due to effective state repression of overt resistance activity. In addition, having established bases a great distance from South Africa's borders, the exiled organisations found themselves without easy access to a mass base inside South Africa. The influence of white liberal politics and bantustan political elites took centre stage in claiming to lead the resistance to apartheid (Mzamane et al. 2006).

The emphasis on culture and ideology that is meaningful to participants fighting systematic white racism and a white power structure is the BC's significant contribution to South African political discourse. The key BC elements of the pre-1979 period are succinctly summarised by Fatton. The students formed an 'ethico-political ideology capable of liberating blacks from their own mental submissiveness to white cultural hegemony' (Fatton 1986: 69). Part of BC's innovative character under South African conditions was that it set out to provide 'a radical critique of the pretensions and aims of white liberalism' (Fatton 1986: 70). While elements of white liberalism (as opposed to the overt racism reflected in apartheid) had always caught the critical attention of individual black leaders, it had not been systematically critiqued as a particular mode of politics in South Africa, nor put under the spotlight of a full-frontal assault. Finally, the emphasis was on the solidarity of the oppressed people as a means to end racism and its legacies (Fatton 1986). The definition of 'black' as a socially exploited group introduced a new political and constructivist dimension to identity politics, explicitly not grounded in an essentialist primordial understanding (Moodley 1982). In fact, the latter was vehemently opposed. The radical change of material conditions, as argued

in Biko's 'Quest for a True Humanity' article, would undermine dominant notions of both white and black identities.

That BC lacked a comprehensive class analysis is unconvincing criticism and more accurately reflects the cut and thrust of political competition between rival ideologies in the anti-apartheid struggle. Fattou (1986) dismisses this criticism, arguing that any viewpoint that sets out to transform society radically can only offer a vague description of the future revolutionised society. BC was no exception, vaguely describing the future society as majoritarian and socialist. Fattou goes on to say that 'Black Consciousness was not a theory of the future. Its task was not to describe the classless society of tomorrow, but to ruthlessly criticize the existing white racist order in all its institutional manifestations with the hope of contributing to the rise of black hegemony, and black dignity' (1986: 78).

The formidable attack from the left that Azapo faced from elements in the SACP, the ANC and the Unity Movement in the early 1980s, and the post-Soweto intellectual influences among activists inside and outside the country, influenced Azapo to frame BC increasingly within the lens of a particular kind of Marxism–Leninism, narrowing its identity to the fight for a socialist Azania (Murray 1987). The Leninist turn represents too sharp a diversion from the pre-1977 BC. The formative ideology, according to Gibson, was strongly influenced by Fanon's existentialism and Marx's humanism:

By the end of 1987 it seemed that Black Consciousness as seen through AZAPO is something radically different from its origins. As an idea originally situated in the subjectivity of the oppressed, which refused to comply with narrow 'Marxist' applications, it is now merely the projection of another Marxist-Leninist tendency. Black is the substance rather than the subject of revolution, the 'phenomena' of material conditions. (Gibson 1988: 19)

Two essential elements of Biko's BC were the way he theorised the concepts of leadership and the power of ideas (consciousness of the masses). The notion of the single party adopted by Azapo flies in the face of Fanon: 'The single party is the modern form of the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, unmasked, unpainted, unscrupulous and cynical... The party leaders behave like common sergeant-majors, frequently reminding the people of the need for "silence in the ranks"' (Gibson 1988: 22).

The rich political–cultural critique produced by Biko of the many manifestations of white supremacy (in both its conservative Afrikaner nationalist and white liberal frames), and its devastating psychological effects in the daily lives of black people, was somehow mechanistically absorbed and assumed in the scientific socialism of Azapo and its emphasis on class and capitalism. Undoubtedly, these structural notions had a basis in the earlier framework. However, they were not presented as the exclusive concerns to which everything else could be reduced. The ideological choices made in the 1980s have had consequences for the approach adopted towards the democratic transition.

The key ideas of cultural expression, black solidarity and psychological liberation – all things necessary (political, economic, social–psychological) to create a fighting political subject, to reflect ‘a way of life; an attitude of mind’ and to ‘infuse the black man with pride and dignity’ – are absent from Azapo’s discourse of BC (Pityana et al. 1991: 1–12). It is the earlier values demanding ‘real black participation’ rather than mere ‘visibility’ that have resonated most with the expanding black middle class, as this middle class interacts in institutions and spaces dominated by white society in pre-1994 South Africa. Whether Biko would have followed his closest comrades along the path of Azapo is an open question. Presumably, even Azapo would have been a different organisation, to the extent that some of the debates of today may simply have fallen away.

Azapo and the transition to multiparty democracy

During the late 1980s, the apartheid system experienced a crisis of social control. This took the form of growing resistance, a general breakdown in social order, lower productivity and profit rates, and increased unemployment, which the existing political–economic order was unable to resolve (Price 1990). The National Party (NP), under pressure from the broader Afrikaner and capitalist elite, proposed negotiations with its long-standing enemies. The ANC became the government’s main negotiating partner, whereas Azapo immediately refused to participate in the various stages of the negotiations process. The Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC) later refused to participate as well. The negotiations process included the ‘talks about talks’, Codesa I and II and, finally, the multiparty negotiating forums

(Friedman & Atkinson 1994; Waldmier 1997). Inspired by the Zimbabwean model, Azapo and the PAC wanted the ANC to join them in a Patriotic Front. This would increase the liberation forces' bargaining power, allowing them to demand from the government a set of minimum conditions. Azapo consistently demanded international mediation and a constituent assembly of democratically elected representatives of the people. The idea of a national convention such as Codesa (Convention for a Democratic South Africa) was rejected during the 1982 Azapo congress. Such a convention would include discredited ethnic and bantustan organisations that had collaborated with the apartheid regime, and was viewed as a sell-out to goals of radical transformation.

The ANC initially considered the Patriotic Front idea. It eventually rejected the conditions, however, and the approach to negotiations expected of it by much weaker organisations. It decided instead to proceed without the support of Azapo and the PAC. As a result of the sufficient consensus mechanism, whereby agreement between the ANC and the NP constituted approval, a series of compromising agreements produced a negotiated settlement. After many unpredictable setbacks and general uncertainty, a democratic Constitution was agreed to in early 1994. The negotiated outcome incorporated black voting rights in exchange for a complex system of checks and balances, the protection of private property rights, the cultural recognition of minorities, as well as promises by the ANC to form a coalition government for the first five years and not to replace the white civil service after the first election (Sisk 1995).

The PAC and Azapo failed to influence the main actors – the ANC and the NP – during the negotiations process. They quickly condemned the ANC for the compromised outcomes. Consequently, they could not lay claim to any of the successes or the global acceptance and legitimacy of the final Constitution. In the elections that followed, both the PAC and Azapo performed dreadfully, with results that were far below expectations. Azapo boycotted the first elections in 1994. This placed its supporters in the unenviable position of almost withdrawing from the political arena just as the country was experiencing its most historic moment. Azapo's stance meant that it was going against the mass of citizens, including the black working class that the organisation claimed to represent. Azapo participated in the 1999 and 2004 national elections and the 2000 local government elections. In 1999, Azapo received 0.17 per cent of the vote, or 27 257 votes. In 2004, it

received 0.25 per cent, or 39 116 votes, a slight increase. The breakaway Sopa received just 0.1 per cent of the national vote, or 14 853 votes. By contrast, in 1994, 1999 and 2004 the ANC won resounding victories with around 10 million voters, stampeding over its opposition. Fewer eligible voters went to the polls in each consecutive election, however. In 1994, the ANC won 62.6 per cent of the vote, ranking a full 42.0 per cent ahead of its nearest rivals. In 1999, it increased this to 66.5 per cent, winning another 14 seats to control 266 seats. In 2004, it won a further 4 seats, bringing the number of seats in its control to 279 of the 400-seat National Assembly legislature.

A further disappointment for BC supporters was the increasing fragmentation of Azapo. Two breakaway groups resulted, splitting the BC vote and creating an impression of disarray and organisational weakness. Sopa was formed in 1998 and the Black Consciousness Forum (BCF) was established in 2002. The latter was led by Nkosi Molala. Disputes over participation in the ANC government, relations with other political parties, and personality and factional differences are the most common reasons cited for the fragmentation of Azapo. Numerous attempts have been made to unite Azapo, the Sopa, the BCF and the PAC to create a radical black party to the left of the ANC, but these have proven fruitless so far.

Recurring internal conflicts, factional disputes and splits are manifestations of a weak institution. The inability to accommodate factional differences and to prevent personality differences from manifesting as splits in the organisation are key indicators suggesting a deeper malaise in the BC movement. The different political terrain of multiparty competition seems to highlight Azapo's institutional weaknesses even further. Azapo lacks the characteristics of adaptability, coherence, complexity and autonomy that are essential to effectively making the transition from liberation movement to political party in a democracy. Aside from the ANC, the parties involved in the liberation struggle were unable to adapt to the new political terrain and to maintain their original coherence. Even the ANC appears to be faced with leadership selection crises and difficulties with reproducing the high moral values associated with the struggle among its members.

Several additional and interacting factors from the mid-1980s onwards account for the decline of BC organisations and their influence in the broader society. In retrospect, an important factor is Azapo's emphasis on mass mobilisation based on ideology from the anti-apartheid struggle, instead

of focusing on community issues as the UDF did in the 1980s. The latter approach proved so much more successful in mobilising large numbers of people. Azapo wanted to strike an appropriate balance between aspects of community life that people wanted to fight against and change, and BC ideas. However, in its ideological disputes with the ANC/UDF, it was compelled to emphasise ideological issues. Azapo often had to defend BC against attacks of irrelevance, of lacking a class analysis, of charges of 'reverse racism' and of merely representing elitist interests by demonstrating the unique capacity of BC to critique and radically change established social relations.

When FW de Klerk started negotiations to change the terrain of conflict, Azapo was unable to develop a strategy that kept it in touch with the vast majority of citizens. Through rejecting negotiations on principle in its internal debates, its position came across as ambivalent, or as unrealistic and hardline. The refusal to engage in key forums during the negotiations process was quite understandable in the revolutionary context of the 1980s. When the ANC decided to enter into negotiations with the government, the situation had changed so dramatically that any anti-negotiations position merely marginalised Azapo from the historic, far-reaching changes in the political terrain. The strategy advocating the seizure of state power, appealing as this was during the heady days of mass struggle and independent community organisation, was unachievable once the negotiations process began. The ANC mobilised its support base in relation to the logic of the negotiations process. Azapo simply did not anticipate that the mass of South Africans considered the negotiations legitimate. This was partly due to its conception of revolution in absolute terms. To Azapo, total victory needed to occur without negotiations. Any mention of the latter conjured up ideas of compromise and defeat.

The overwhelming electoral support for the ANC goes some way towards explaining Azapo's inability to adapt to multiparty democracy, both in the activity of elections and in the cut and thrust of arguing for and making policy. In a typically cyclical fashion, this continued lack of support and internal rejuvenation produced increasing ideological rigidity, perceived irresolvable conflicts among the organisation's leadership and eventual fragmentation. Finally, the electoral campaigns, uncharismatic leadership and insufficient funding have not helped to reverse the dismal tide. Many left-wing socialist parties participate in South African elections, but Azapo presents no distinctive identity, aside from a historical one for older voters who may

vote for it out of nostalgia. To focus exclusively on the socialist project is too narrow a focus compared with the broad BC viewpoint to articulate 'the way of life, and attitude of mind' of the rich and multifaceted experience of historically oppressed subjects. New and innovative ways have to be fashioned to intervene creatively in contemporary democratic politics and to produce, from the disoriented subalterns, agents of radical change.

The resurgence of BC ideas in state, political and civil society after 1994

A distinctive characteristic of BC arising from its origins in the late 1960s is that many diverse organisations represented an eclectic range of BC ideas. The impotence of Azapo or Sopa cannot be translated into the death of the BC ideology. This is abundantly evident in its increasing recognition in the contemporary discourse of politics and change. The figure and memory of Biko is ever more popular and his ideas have found resonance in contemporary South African society, especially among the black middle class and youth.

In the post-1994 democratic period we witness, as expected, a significant change in political culture. Where unrealised expectations of black empowerment are evident, we see black frustrations rise. We witness strident responses from many sources, but those from within the white liberal paradigm appear to be the most significant, criticising the ANC and the government for failing in the areas of policy implementation and state efficiency. Despite its electoral popularity, the ANC, in this context, has failed to present an alternative discourse of rule and change to a dominant non-racial liberalism. This has resulted in disaffected elements of civil society. For example, the black middle class is frustrated with the continuing dominance of white culture and the black working class is unhappy with service delivery. These groups are discovering in BC ideas the seeds of a more effective and satisfying response. While at the organisational level support for BC could not possibly get any lower, at the general societal level there has been a resurgence of BC ideas. Some could be considered conservative, whereas others are progressive and radical.

Faced with an onslaught of media criticism for his leadership style as president of South Africa, even Thabo Mbeki chose to draw on ideas that can be traced to the Biko era to respond to what he viewed as a media controlled

by white liberals and conservative Afrikaner elements. He incorporated a range of BC and Africanist ideas into his eclectic range of political speeches and writings. He also spearheaded an African Renaissance, calling for the rapid and immediate economic development of the continent, albeit largely within existing global relationship patterns of exchange. Aspects of this programme resonate with ideas associated with BC and Africanism – such as the long-standing pan-Africanist campaign for continental unity, a respect for and resurgence of African history, cultural values and practices, and ways of critically challenging the history of Africa's marginalisation. Moreover, in introducing particular policies that directly attack legacies of apartheid, the Mbeki government justified these policies in terms that BC supporters found familiar, even though the terms may have lacked Biko's complex and subtle arguments. In doing this, Mbeki aimed to narrow or overcome the gap between 'two nations'.

Given Mbeki's determined critiques of BC during his years in exile, his 'I am an African' speech at the opening of Parliament in 1996, and his 'Two Nations' address to the same institution in 1998, demonstrate striking and unexpected overtones of BC. Mbeki adopted an interesting position on the politics of identity in his 'I am an African' speech (cited in Mbeki 1998). He emphasised, in his typically poetic way, that his definition of 'African' consisted of all the various cultures and significant experiences and events that divide South African society historically. To be African means to be made from multiple cultures and pasts. He proposed Africanness as a unifying identity, the composition of which involves the contributions of all who make up South African society, but which, importantly, sees the history of injustice and the struggle for liberation as essential to its meaning. For Mbeki (1998: 32), 'being part of all of these people' constitutes an African identity. He concluded that because of these experiences, a South African, African nation already exists, if it will only recognise that of which it already consists.

This strange combination of multicultural and post-structural elements in the African nation contributes to our understanding, but also introduces tensions. Mbeki's general notion of a renaissance in Africa involving development on all fronts – cultural, economic and political – lends itself, as argued by Chipkin (2007), to a reading of the concept of African in biologically essentialist ways.

Two years after this speech, frustrated and disappointed with the pace of change and the reluctance of privileged white sectors to embrace ANC initiatives, Mbeki focused on the continuing inequalities between white and black people. He criticised white society for failing to appreciate the legacy and role of apartheid policies in contributing to their material privilege. While reiterating sentiments contained in the concept of 'colonialism of a special type', he seemed also to draw on common-sense sentiments associated with BC ideas as framed by Biko. He pointed to the limitations of bourgeois democracy under South Africa's racially divided social structure:

We therefore make bold to say that South Africa is a country of two nations. One of these nations is white, relatively prosperous, regardless of gender or geographic dispersal. It has ready access to a developed economic, physical, educational, communication and other infrastructure. This enables it to argue that, except for the persistence of gender discrimination against women, all members of this nation have the possibility to exercise their right to equal opportunity, the development opportunities to which the Constitution of '93 committed our country. The second and larger nation of South Africa is black and poor, with the worst affected being women in the rural areas, the black rural population in general and the disabled. This nation lives under conditions of a grossly underdeveloped economic, physical, educational, communication and other infrastructure. It has virtually no possibility to exercise what in reality amounts to a theoretical right to equal opportunity, with that right being equal within this black nation only to the extent that it is equally incapable of realisation. This reality of two nations, underwritten by the perpetuation of the racial, gender and spatial disparities born of a very long period of colonial and apartheid white minority domination, constitutes the material base which reinforces the notion that, indeed, we are not one nation, but two nations. And neither are we becoming one nation. Consequently, also, the objective of national reconciliation is not being realised. (Mbeki 1998: 72)

Mbeki's language won him sympathetic support from some in Azapo, changing dramatically the adversarial relationship between Azapo and the ANC. In 2005, the publicity secretary of Azapo, Don Nkadimeng, wrote that 'when President

Thabo Mbeki speaks of two nations in one country, he is speaking of Black Consciousness, and, therefore of Steve Biko' (*The Star* 12.09.05). The Mbeki government, on the practical political front, incorporated Azapo into the ruling Cabinet coalition. The leader of Azapo, Mosibudi Mangena, was appointed a deputy minister in 1999 and a full minister in 2004. Other key Azapo members, such as Mojanku Gumbi and Itumeleng Mosala, served in crucial and senior posts in the Mbeki government. This indicates a significant break from the hostile relations between Azapo and the ANC that prevailed just a decade ago.

At the national level, this co-operation is purely academic. The ANC's unassailable electoral support and dominance of the political system does not require it to seek the support of any other party to govern. However, at local and regional levels of government, the trend towards party coalitions seems likely to continue. At these levels of government, the ANC will benefit from co-operative relations with parties it views as like-minded. Parties with similar struggle histories might work together in forming governing coalitions. It is equally salient that in existing governing coalitions – such as the ones governing the City of Cape Town or Beaufort West – party ideologies and histories count for very little. The almost unbelievable coalition formed around the Democratic Alliance (DA) in the City of Cape Town includes six parties from diverse and antagonistic historical and ideological backgrounds. Who could have predicted a coalition government of the DA and the PAC? Does this suggest that history and ideology may not be important determinants of party choices in the future? Will parties act purely out of instrumental interests? We will have to wait for a situation involving Azapo to arise to see whether this softening of past ideology prevails to the extent that it would join DA-headed coalitions.

The more interesting and direct influence of BC expresses itself in civil society. This is important because it is at odds with party affiliation, electoral behaviour and dominant discourse. It is common to see young people wearing Steve Biko t-shirts. This would have been quite unthinkable in the 1980s, unless one was a card-carrying member of Azapo, so entrenched was individual identity in political party affiliation. The intense intolerance between parties in that period made it thoroughly insecure for a party member to be found in the wrong place at the wrong time (Murray 1987). Nowadays, no one assumes that by wearing a Biko t-shirt a person is declaring himself or herself an Azapo supporter, or even that the person has any knowledge of BC. At the

very minimum, it would indicate a superficial identification with a broad conception of BC. Granted, these expressions do not indicate the degree (if at all) to which people embrace BC ideas or the extent of their awareness of BC ideology. They do, nevertheless, suggest some kind of identification. In early 2002, two of the leading popular and competing radio stations in Johannesburg, Radio Metro and YFM, released advertising campaigns to woo listeners. Both stations serve largely black youth constituencies. The station manager of Radio Metro indicated that the ads were part of the 'What makes you black' campaign – a familiar theme of the BC movement in the early 1970s.

The prominence of the Steve Biko Lecture and other forums that take place throughout the country to commemorate Biko is a new and surprising development. Since its formation, Azapo has commemorated Biko Week, but the events during this week were ignored by the UDF and ANC supporters during the 1980s. Media coverage was also often poor and disappointing. This has changed – now, many organisations not directly associated with Azapo or Sopa remember Biko in a variety of ways.

The Steve Biko Lecture, hosted by the University of Cape Town and the Steve Biko Foundation, is now in its sixth year. Organisers of the lecture have invited political heavyweights such as Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu as keynote speakers. In addition, internationally recognised African writers such as Ngugi wa Thiongo and Chinua Achebe spoke at this event, which is attended by large audiences and receives extensive national TV coverage. In each of the six years, speakers have reiterated the relevance of BC in contemporary South Africa. Even Mandela, initially a harsh critic of BC during Robben Island debates in the 1970s and while leader of the ANC during the height of violent clashes in the early 1980s between the two traditions, now points out the importance of an ideology of black pride, assertiveness and self-reliance.

What accounts for this resurgence of BC ideas? In South Africa, where negotiations produced a constitutional political settlement that left the broader socio-economic capitalist and cultural context relatively intact, unresolved issues play themselves out in a kind of trench warfare. This battle is fought in varied and multiple conflicts on a daily basis. Many of these conflicts take complex class–race expressions, especially where the class–race overlap has not been significantly dented. These conflicts take multiple forms, such as

challenges to different government policies, selection of sports team members, different interpretations of public practices, and ongoing debates about where responsibility lies for the unaddressed and ongoing patterns that apartheid has left behind. Many more examples can be cited, drawing on a general glance at letters to daily newspapers or from radio discussions on national and local stations in which citizens articulate their views.

These engagements by ordinary citizens resemble what Scott (1985: 1) refers to as 'small arms fire' in an ongoing battle for hegemony between dominant and subaltern discourses. Differences between white and black perceptions abound, although a small number who refuse to sit comfortably in either of these groups also exists, and will perhaps grow with time.

An integral part of these disputes involves the continuing dominance of Eurocentric values in post-apartheid South Africa, where the majority believes that, in the democratic political system, its will ought to hold. Arguably, this applies to the political world, but relations of domination have not been settled in any other important sphere of the social formation. The dominant culture – in the media, advertising, economics, art – tends to reflect the relations of dominance inherited under apartheid, with white society still controlling the various levers of economic power.

More controversially, white liberal discourses have been successful in drawing on and surreptitiously claiming to be custodians of the west, where the latter notion has been used as the standard against which all things in Africa and South Africa under a black government are judged. The non-racial liberalism of the ANC, which the DA and the dominant English-speaking establishment tend to appropriate, makes the ANC increasingly insensitive to having continuously to prove its liberal democratic credentials to quarters whose commitment to a democratic majoritarian South Africa it considers questionable.

The growth in social inequality, especially the marginalisation of the poor, and the strengthened discourses embracing liberal individualism, market mechanisms and capitalism, have all increased the relevance of Biko's ideas. At times, therefore, ANC leaders and the emerging black middle class find drawing on BC and Africanist ideas appealing, as well as historically valid.

Conclusion

To determine why BC resonates in the democratic period, recall Bishop Tutu's (2006) words: 'I have often said that Black Consciousness did not finish the work it had set out to do.' The significance of BC ideas and practices remains valid in South African society, not least of all because the quest for self-worth and dignity is directly related to the unequal material conditions of life – conditions that specifically made notions of whiteness and blackness seem like common sense. As long as the conditions that produced racial identities in South Africa prevail, the ideas of black assertiveness, black pride and the quest for dignity remain relevant.

Biko contended that BC was not a one-off, tap-like mechanism, but a continuous process of contestation and assertiveness and that this process, both internal and external to the individual, would eventually make itself unnecessary. It will simply lose its relevance and fall away. The grinding poverty that Biko wrote about, and its devastating effects on black life and culture, has worsened, or is perceived to have worsened. This accounts for the increase in violence within black communities and makes BC increasingly necessary if the true humanity of apartheid's victims is to be realised.

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