The history of the Black man's struggle for liberation in South Africa and the role of Black Consciousness


Use of the Aluka digital library is subject to Aluka's Terms and Conditions, available at http://www.aluka.org/page/about/termsConditions.jsp. By using Aluka, you agree that you have read and will abide by the Terms and Conditions. Among other things, the Terms and Conditions provide that the content in the Aluka digital library is only for personal, non-commercial use by authorized users of Aluka in connection with research, scholarship, and education.

The content in the Aluka digital library is subject to copyright, with the exception of certain governmental works and very old materials that may be in the public domain under applicable law. Permission must be sought from Aluka and/or the applicable copyright holder in connection with any duplication or distribution of these materials where required by applicable law.

Aluka is a not-for-profit initiative dedicated to creating and preserving a digital archive of materials about and from the developing world. For more information about Aluka, please see http://www.aluka.org
The history of the Black man's struggle for liberation in South Africa and the role of Black Consciousness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author/Creator</th>
<th>Ramphele, A. M.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>1976-07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resource type</td>
<td>Reports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coverage (spatial)</td>
<td>South Africa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source</td>
<td>Digital Imaging South Africa (DISA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rights</td>
<td>With thanks to Gail M. Gerhart.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description</td>
<td>This paper, possibly prepared for the inaugural conference of the Institute of Black Studies, Wilgespruit, 13-18 July 1976, traces the history of the political development of South Africa from the first Dutch settlements, British colonisation, the formation of the African Native National Congress (forerunner of the ANC) in 1912 and the emergence of national resistance movements and Black Consciousness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Format extent (length/size)</td>
<td>13 pages</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

THE HISTORY OF THE BLACK MAN’S STRUGGLE FOR LIBERATION IN SOUTH AFRICA

THE HISTORY OF THE BLACK MAN’S STRUGGLE FOR LIBERATION IN SOUTH AFRICA AND THE ROLE OF BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS
by Dr A M Ramphele

Introduction
Ever since the white man set his foot ashore in this country there has been a continuous struggle by blacks to retrieve and retain what they regard as rightfully theirs whilst the white man has continuously been involved in acquiring more in terms of political and economic power to entrench his position as the dominant power in South Africa.

This paper will attempt to trace the whole process from early colonial days to the present and critically examine the forces that have been at play as a contribution to the search that blacks are involved in for solutions best suited for their situation. Criticisms and points raised here will hopefully assist us as blacks to examine our past more objectively, learn from its mistakes and build for the future.

The Colonisation Process
The process of colonisation in this country followed the same pattern as anywhere else in the world with the characteristic conflict of interests between the invaders on the one hand and the indigenous people on the other. The former sought to subjugate the latter completely whereas the latter attempted to retain and hold what was rightfully theirs.

Although the Dutch were the first to occupy the Cape, they did very little to develop it beyond a half-way station for their merchant ships en route to and from the East. Their contact with the indigenous people was consequently limited to the Khoi in the immediate vicinity of Cape of Good Hope and a few skirmishes with the Xhosa people on the Eastern side of the Settlement.

The so-called violation of treaties signed between the colonialists and the indigenous people was in fact a sign of lack of faith by the indigenous people in the "good" intentions of the colonisers. These "violations" led to "kaffir wars" of which the first was fought in 1779 and the last in 1879.

The British took over administration of the Cape colony from the Dutch in 1806 and their administration was much more sophisticated than that of the Dutch and they were also much more ambitious in their outlook and operation than the Dutch were. Whereas the Dutch developed the Cape only to the extent of it being a half-way station, the British sought to make it a useful colony with control being exercised as far as the "frontier" expanded in line with the mercantilistic policy that motivated all European colonisers with Britian as the leader. The functions of
the colonies accordingly were therefore to:- provide the "home" country with raw materials which it could not produce itself
- act as a ready market for finished goods from the "home" country's industry.

The resentment of the Boers to British rule accelerated the expansion of the colony to as far north as the Transvaal; the intentions of the Boers being to find areas where they could exercise complete control over and deal with the indigenous people in the manner they saw fit, without interference from the British, however short lived their success in this matter was.

The above account only relates to the physical element of colonisation which was waged at the point of a gun, but one must also take cognisance of the psychological element which was facilitated by the advent of missionaries whose mission was to "civilise"the barbaric natives. They forced the christian religion down the throats of blacks using the means available to them inter alia: threats of hell fire for non-believers in the life hereafter and physical coercion backed by the colonial administration. Their intention was not only to preach christianity, but also to preach incompatibility between christianity and African cultural values and customs. Christian converts had to dissociate themselves from their traditional way of life and emulate their white teachers.

This role of the missionaries was an important facet of the complete subjugation of blacks who found themselves despising their cultural heritage and value systems and were therefore easy prey for colonial domination. It was a well known strategy followed in other parts of the world by colonialists to make the colonised people rootless culturally. As Frantz Fanon observed in The Wretched of the Earth, the colonialists are not satisfied only with completely emptying the minds of the colonised, but go back to their past and distort it.

Tribal Resistance to Colonisation

The Xhosas were the first tribe to put up serious resistance to European colonisation and their heroic wars with the invaders are well known in history. Their final defeat in 1856, the date of the so-called Xhosa National Suicide which many historians believe was engineered by white missionaries as assistance to the colonial administration in finally breaking the backbone of the courageous Xhosas. This occurred during the governorship of Sir George Grey. It is significant that when he was governor of New Zealand the Maoris had a Maori National Suicide which was stage-managed along the same lines as the Xhosa Suicide. Genocide would be more correct. Other groups like Zulus, Sothos, etc., did put up their own resistance, but were eventually defeated by the superior arms of the colonisers. Whites were then free to consolidate their position as the dominant group in South Africa with blacks only being tolerated to the extent that they contributed to the prosperity of the whites.

Consideration of the White Power Structure

Following the defeat of the Boers in the Transvaal and Free State, negotiations were entered into to form the Union of South Africa. The constitution finally
adopted in 1910 was agreed upon between Boer and British without any consultation with the indigenous people of South Africa.

4/ The constitutional qualified voting rights of Africans which were enshrined in the constitution were gradually eroded until 1936 when the Hertzog Native Bills became law. All the other abhorrent discriminatory laws which were operative before the Union, e.g. Pass Laws, Master and Servant's Acts, were re-enacted. Economically South Africa was going through a period of prosperity following the discovery of minerals, viz. gold and diamonds in the late 19th century. Capitalism with all its exploitative ramifications was further entrenched with capital monopoly lying in the hands of the British who were early starters and therefore of necessity the people to benefit most from capitalism. Afrikaner economic power lay mainly in their agricultural production which still had tinges of feudalism with blacks acting as serfs for the white lords. The growing economy of this country depended mainly on cheap labour which was provided by blacks who had no say over their conditions of employment as is the case now in the South African economy. Blacks are just extensions of the machines in the production process with no rights accorded them as workers; in fact in the definition of employee in this country Africans are totally excluded.

Culturally, the European settlers as mentioned earlier imposed their western culture on Africans in all facets of life. Even the most liberal of whites could not bring himself to respect African culture and felt instead that he had a "duty" to civilise whatever native he came into contact with. Africans educated in mission schools, which were the earliest education institutions established for blacks, emerged from these institutions as poor images of their white tutors. Education was tailored to school the African in western civilisation especially English culture and values. Most educated Africans developed hang-ups about their cultural heritage; they became as near perfect English men as was possible given their social position and equated all that was good and valuable with whiteness. This was an important dimension in the complete psychological domination of blacks by whites.

National Resistance Movements

1906 can be regarded as the turning point between two periods in the history of the black man in South Africa: the early period of individual tribal struggles against the white invaders on military lines which ended in the 5/.....

in the loss of their country and complete subjugation of the black man; and the second period, one of struggle for national liberation.

The transition was facilitated by the shortage of labour on white farms following the failure of a scheme of importing Chinese farmworkers who proved unsuitable. In 1905 they were repatriated after most of them turn "robbers" after running away from farms. The poll tax was then introduced with effect from January 1906 to force Africans to sell their labour to the whites. The exact amount varied from province to province, e.g. in Natal it was £1 whereas in the Transvaal it was £2.
Resistance to this measure in Natal led to the Bambata rebellion around May 1906. Isolated rebellions were organised from time to time against specific oppressive measures directed against Blacks until 1912 when the South African Native National Congress, the forerunner of ANC, was founded to unite all politically minded Africans and act as a representative organ for African political expression.

The activities and mode of operation of this organisation were based on the assumption that the problems of the African people could be solved through negotiations and representations to the Government of the day in South Africa and if need be to take matters up with the Queen of England for final arbitration. This type of approach was encouraged by the liberal whites who acted as advisors to the leaders of the ANC. The African National Congress remained a protest type political organisation until the late thirties after the three Hertzog Native Bills became law in 1936. One of the acts, the Native Representation Act, led to the Native Representative Council which dashed all hopes for meaningful participation in the political process by Africans. The question of whether or not to participate in this council, which was purely consultative in nature and scope, caused severe divisions amongst Africans. Most of the ANC leadership e.g. PrJ Mrok- and A G W Champion opted for participation arguing that half a loaf is better than no bread at all. Some people who felt strongly against this "sell-out" dissociated themselves from the ANC and formed the Non-European Unite Movement in 1943 which was a development from the remnants of the All African Convention called in 1935 to fight the Hertzog Bills. The AAC opened its doors to Coloureds and Indians because of the recognition of the need for all blacks to put up a unified struggle against the common enemy. NEUM stand on the NRC was that of non-collaboration with the enemy and its collaborators; their policy and programmes were to the left of those of the then ANC.

Another resistance movement formed during the early 20th century was the ICU founded in 1919 in the field of labour. This was led by Clements Kadalie and drew lots of support from African workers until its collapse in 1929 following a split in its ranks engineered by Mr Champion of Natal who formed his own ICU yase Natal. The ICU although a Trade Union on paper also took keen interest in the political problems affecting blacks.

Resistance by Indians in South Africa to discriminatory measures was led by Gandhi, a lawyer who came to South Africa in 1893 to defend an Indian client and subsequently organised the massive passive resistance movement of Indians against measures like the Transvaal pass laws of 1906 which made it compulsory for all Indians from the age of eight years to carry passes. Gandhi, using his philosophy of Satyagraha or "soul force" presented a strong challenge to the government and this courage made him a popular and admired leader. It must however be noted that his mode of operation was such that some of his tactics were challenged by his followers because they were regarded as too
compromising. His contribution however to the Indian struggle in South Africa and later in India cannot be underestimated.

The Role of Liberals and Communists

Liberals and communists intensified their attempts at controlling and directing African political thinking after the 1936 Acts. Liberals concentrated on promoting certain individuals of moderate political persuasion to positions of leadership without offering any political programme for change; they were mainly interested in appeasing blacks but were in essential agreement with the status quo. Their call was for moderation on both the white and black sides to avoid rocking the boat. They attempted to fight for the rights of Africans, but only those Africans they regarded as "civilised" Africans were the subject of their concern, because they believed strongly in the innate inferiority of the African; but needed the African vote for purposes of power politics, hence their opposition to the erosion of African voting rights after the Union in 1910 up to the 1936 Acts. The liberals have continued up to now to attempt to control and direct the process of change for their own selfish interests.

... 7/.....

their policy and programmes were to the left of those of the then ANC.

Another resistance movement formed during the early 20th century was the ICU founded in 1919 in the field of labour. This was led by Clements Kadalie and drew lots of support from African workers until its collapse in 1929 following a split in its ranks engineered by Mr Champion of Natal who formed his own ICU yase Natal. The ICU although a Trade Union on paper also took keen interest in the political problems affecting blacks.

Resistance by Indians in South Africa to discriminatory measures was led by Gandhi, a lawyer who came to South Africa in 1893 to defend an Indian client and subsequently organised the massive passive resistance movement of Indians against measures like the Transvaal pass laws of 1906 which made it compulsory for all Indians from the age of eight years to carry passes. Gandhi, using his philosophy of Satyagraha or "soul force" presented a strong challenge to the government and this courage made him a popular and admired leader. It must however be noted that his mode of operation was such that some of his tactics were challenged by his followers because they were regarded as too compromising. His contribution however to the Indian struggle in South Africa and later in India cannot be underestimated.

The Role of Liberals and Communists

Liberals and communists intensified their attempts at controlling and directing African political thinking after the 1936 Acts.* Liberals concentrated on promoting certain individuals of moderate political persuasion to positions of leadership without offering any political programme for change; they were mainly interested in appeasing blacks but were in essential agreement with the status quo. Their call was for moderation on both the white and black sides to avoid rocking the boat. They attempted to fight for the rights of Africans, but only those Africans they regarded as "civilised" Africans were the subject of their concern, because they believed strongly in the innate inferiority of the African but needed
the African vote for purposes of power politics, hence their opposition to the erosion of African voting rights after the Union in 1910 up to the 1936 Acts. The liberals have continued up to now to attempt to control and direct the process of change for their own selfish interests.

immediately resolved to launch a Pan Africanist movement in South Africa. In 1959 the PAC held its first congress in Johannesburg and drew reasonable support from the masses in spite of the established ANC with its massive historical support. Their policy of “Africa for Africans” gained easy acceptance among freedom hungry blacks and J Madzunya's contribution in popularising PAC was tremendous in the rural areas; PAC later spread to the Eastern Cape, Western Cape and a sprinkling of support was also gathered in other parts of the country.

The lifespan of PAC was however limited by the anti-pass demonstrations which it led on March 21 1960. Lots of people, notably in Sharpeville, came out in support of this, but the ruthlessness of the Government led to the tragedies that followed that peaceful demonstration, with the subsequent banning of the ANC and PAC.

Up to the time of the banning of the ANC and PAC there was no evidence of acceptance of violence as a political alternative by the two movements, but following their banning under the Unlawful Organisations Act of 1960, there was intense underground political activity which demonstrated a departure from the earlier non-violent programmes of these movements. This tended to show an increasing acceptance of violence as a viable political programme. In turn intense activity and sporadic violent confrontations led to the passage of the Sabotage Act and massive police action which culminated in the arrest of thousands of people in 1963. This was followed by numerous political trials throughout the country, ultimately resulting in many severe sentences for those involved. At about the same time there started an exodus of political leaders from the country. ANC and PAC leadership abroad established themselves in places like London, New York and Tanzania with a two-pronged programme of massive propaganda to discredit South Africa internationally and also preparation for a violent overthrow of the South African government.

The Emergence of Black Consciousness
The period from 1964 onwards was marked by a phenomenal growth of fear in the minds of black people accompanied by the development of an equally strong resentment. Overt political activity died down and political discussions in buses and beer halls became increasingly superficial to avoid outright criticism of the status quo. This growth of fear was a result of the ruthless way in which the police had applied the Unlawful Organisations Act and the Sabotage Act. Often also in lower courts, where thousands of people were charged, there was a tendency by magistrates to be particularly vicious with people charged with political offences. At about the same time there was a
tremendous increase in the activity of the security police and their myriad informers, thus creating a state of schizophrenia in many of the townships.

For the first time there came onto the scene a manifestation of the real substance behind the separate development policy in the form of the Transkei Constitution Act of 1963. It was clear that this was part of the Nationalist Party answer to the problem of political accommodation of the black majority. It came at a time when organised black political activity was at the lowest ebb, and thus did not meet any coherent criticism from black political leadership.

In the meantime black political activists who had not left the country joined several liberal multi-racial organisations which had taken up the role of speaking on behalf of the black man. Foremost amongst these was the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS) which had very strong leftist leadership in people like Adrian Leftwitch, Jonty Driver, Ian Robertson, Margaret Marshall and John Daniel. On the non-student front there was the Liberal Party under the leadership of Dr Alan Paton, Prof Edgar Brookes and others. Besides these two there was also the Progressive Party (which was very active especially through its youth wing, the Young Progressives), Christian Institute, Civil Rights League, etc.

During this period the tone of political opposition tended to take the form of liberal criticism of undemocratic aspects of the policy of the South African Government, thus people spoke heavily in favour of "the rule of law," "academic freedom," "bannings without trial" etc. The role of blacks in all this gradually became secondary and there was a real dearth of meaningful participation by blacks in the formulation of opposition politics.

The only form of direct black political expression was to be found in the several so-called university colleges which had been created as a result of the Extension of Universities Act of 1959. These colleges were five in number, viz Fort Hare, Turfloop, Ngoye, Western Cape and Westville. Besides NUSAS, which was reasonably active on all these campuses, there was the African Students Association (ASA) formed in 1961, and the African Students Union (ASUSA) formed in 1962 on the African campuses.

On the mainly Indian and Coloured campuses there was the Durban Students Union and the Cape Peninsula Students movement who merged to form the National Progressive Students Association. These movements reflected themselves mainly as student wings of the National movements with ASA being pro ANC, ASUSA pro PAC and KPSM pro NEUM.

Attempts at uniting these student movements failed because of intense ideological debates that occurred amongst them, hence a potentially powerful expression of political thinking could not emanate from the campuses.

Intimidation and victimization of ASA and ASUSA leadership led to a collapse of both movements. With the death of Ernest Galo in 1965 nobody came up to put ASA together and ASUSA leadership in people like Sibanda who was at Natal University, soon fizzled out. In 1967 the Terrorism Act was passed and in 1968 the Improper Interference Act was billed and this led to the virtual collapse of the
Liberal Party. The Progressive Party decided to go completely white rather than disband like the Liberal Party.

All this then set the stage for the development of the now famous South African Students Organisation (SASO). The trusteeship role played by organisations like NUSAS and Progressives was bound to irritate blacks who felt that they could speak more realistically for themselves. SASO was ultimately formed at the 1968 Marianhill conference of black student leaders and inaugurated at Turfloop university at the 1969 conference. With the advent of SASO the black students for the first time developed a political outlook of their own, embodied in the philosophy of black consciousness. This was articulated mainly by people like Steve Biko, the first president, Barney Pityana, Strini Moodley, Harry Nengwekulu, Temba Sono and others. The slogan on which the whole philosophy rested was "Black man you are on your own", which was a call for the black man to "manhood" in the true sense of the word, a rejection by the black man to be seen as an aberration of the "normal" which is white and an assertion of the right by blacks to determine their own destiny. Notions which had led to automatic acceptance for blacks of an inferior status in all facets of life were challenged. Black consciousness is therefore a call to the black man to shed his self-imposed psychological oppression and the inferiority complex which had up to that period been aggravated by all the forces at play in the political arena; it is a call for the black man to take pride in himself and his cultural heritage and rely on his own resources for political salvation.

Reactions from the liberal world were expectedly those of utter dismay at the loss of ground under their feet as the trustees of black interests. The reactions, although originally heavily publicly debated, have ceased to be taken seriously now because most thinking people see the motives behind the reactions for what they are - a simple withdrawal syndrome.

-e various phases through which SASO went in spreading black consciousness are traceable. In the first instance when SASO first came onto the scene, the norm was liberal trusteeship of the black man's feelings and aspirations as expressed through multi-racial organisations. Hence the modus operandi was non-racialism as a goal and method of operation. For SASO to be listened to by the public at large, including blacks, they had to break the stranglehold on opinion-forming by the multi-racial organisations. The SASO leadership thus immediately launched an attack on liberalism and liberals in South Africa. They attacked the very premises of the liberal trusteeship role and urged blacks to think and act for themselves.

On the campuses this worked very well with the result that within two years of existence NUSAS became completely irrelevant to black students and was equally dismissed.

Once SASO had established herself as an opinion maker amongst blacks, the next step was to broaden the political base of operation, SASO went about consulting
with several black organisations like ASSECA, IDAMASA, Women's Organisation, etc., and in turn worked hard towards the creation of several Youth Organisations all sharing an essentially similar political outlook. The logic behind this was that blacks needed to take care of their business in all spheres of activity. It was also in pursuit of this goal that SASO facilitated the acceptance of Black Theology by Ministers of Religion and theological students alike.

The third traceable era in SASO's work was to work hard towards the creation of a political organisation embodying the philosophy of black A. consciousness to which she would need all leadership in the political sphere. The fourth phase in SASO work was to launch a protracted campaign against Bantustans. This was an important step since SASO was the first politically inclined organisation to attempt to shape the black man's thinking on the issue of Bantustans.

With the formation of the Black People's Convention in 1971, the Black Consciousness Movement entrenched itself in South African politics. Today the situation is such that black consciousness has manifested itself in many facets of the black man's life. Several organisations had been set up to take care of the black man's business and the political mood of the people reflects many aspects of the black consciousness thinking. This mood is not confined to people who are actual members of any of the organisations, but in a sense it is an all pervasive mood touching the hearts of the black people throughout the country.

Once more black people are feeling that they are people and they are responding to their situation of oppression not in a defeatist way, but much more in a creative way constantly looking for solutions to their problems. Gone are the days of the "Noble Savage" which were characteristic of the liberal trusteeship era. We should not earn our acceptance because we are noble although we are savages. We are human and we insist on a primary recognition of that humanity.

The Message of Black Consciousness to Us

BPC, as mentioned earlier, has taken over political leadership from SASO and is continuously engaged in working out the practical implications of black consciousness and to give political direction and work out a political programme for the liberation of blacks. The philosophy of black consciousness has therefore been further elaborated upon to give full expression in the various spheres affecting the life of blacks.

The December 1975 BPC Conference held in King Williams Town adopted black communalism as their economic policy and a document setting out a projection of the future state and further affirmed their rejection of Government created political platforms for blacks. These developments are an indication of the complete rejection by blacks of the white value system with all their economic, political and social ramifications. They are an affirmation of the fact that blacks have their own value systems which are being re-examined in the light of modern
developments and applied to establish the type of society that will be a truly humane one. BPC rejects the creation of a European Island on the African Continent and has committed itself to the establishment of a country which will reflect the true feelings of the majority of its citizens. As expected the South African minority Government has intensified its repressive measures to try and stem this tide of political activity by blacks through bannings, arrests, detentions without trial, etc., but the mood of the people is that of hope, pride and determination. Black consciousness has made a permanent mark on the political outlook of blacks in this country, and any attempt to set the clock back can only result in more determination on the part of blacks to forge ahead regardless. The black man is no longer struggling for a better deal from the system, but he is challenging the legitimacy of those in power to determine the destiny of the "silent" majority. Blacks are saying it loud and clear that they are not going to be deterred by any amount of intimidation and victimisation on the part of the security system in this country for to do so will be to deny their own humanity and manhood as a people.