

Towards a World Where Many Worlds Fit:
The Black Consciousness Movement as Ontological Resistance

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Prologue

On the 24th of October, 1972, Steve Biko, one of the founders and leaders of the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) in apartheid South Africa, stated in an interview with American political scientist Gail M. Gerhart that,

In our preparation for the '71 conference, between '70 and '71, I went into a very extensive study of political movements in this country...in fact this is when I began to reject definitively elements of ANC [African National Congress]. And a lot of the so-called socialist crap that used to come from CP [Communist Party] and its ranks.¹

In this interview with Gerhart, Biko contended that the BCM did not emphasize any particular “post-revolutionary society,” rather, it was more concerned with a gradual and natural evolution of the movement.² This position is starkly in contrast to the rhetoric of other South African liberation movements, such as the African National Congress (ANC), the Communist Party (CP) and the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC), that had aligned themselves with either communist or socialist ideology and had articulated their ideal South African post-revolutionary societies according to the narratives of these ideologies. Although both communism and socialism are in opposition to capitalism, they still share with capitalism the telos of economic development and growth.³ In the European modernity perspective,⁴ all three ideologies maintain the similar idea that to get to the telos of development and/or modernity one needs to follow a linear progressive

¹ *Biko Lives!*, 27.

² *Biko Lives!*, 27–33.

³ Rai, *Gender and the Political Economy of Development*, 48.

⁴ I specify the “European modernity perspective” because there were several African leaders and intellectuals that were complicating and contextualizing the conceptual frameworks of modernity by mediating them with historical, institutional, gender-based, local, political, and socio-cultural contexts.

narrative towards “industrialization, urbanization, rationalization, bureaucracy, mass consumption, and the adoption of democracy.”⁵

The ANC was aligned with the CP and its communist ideology, while the PAC took up their own version of African Socialism that was being expressed throughout the African continent. Hence, in the interview with Gerhart, Biko was criticizing blind devotion to socialism and communism because of what he described as an “adherence to Moscow’s wishes than to the normal evolution⁶ of the movement toward social change.”⁷ In the first quote, he was referring to this adherence as the “so-called socialist crap,” because he saw that it was based on the premise that the European paradigm was inherently superior. Biko described the devotion to Moscow as pushing black South Africans towards an “observance of a strict code of discipline” to achieve the “ideological purity” of socialism, as opposed to, letting movements evolve and change naturally in the manner that black people wish.⁸ Additionally, in this interview, Biko also criticized capitalism, especially, “the individualism which is the hallmark of the capitalist approach.” Individualism was another premise of European value systems that he cautioned black people would be accepting if they did not interrogate ideologies stemming from the European modernity paradigm.⁹

In apartheid South Africa, socialism and capitalism were often paired with the concept of nonracialism. Nonracialism was the idea that the anti-apartheid cause required all the races to collaborate in a sort of multiracial setting. Biko described nonracialism as a white liberal fallacy

⁵ Rai, *Gender and the Political Economy of Development*, 48; Crossman, “A Brief Guide to Modernization Theory.”

⁶ “Normal Evolution” in this context refers to the *natural* evolution of a movement as opposed to the European evolutionary theory of development.

⁷ Mngxitama, Alexander, and Gibson, *Biko Lives!*, 27.

⁸ Mngxitama, Alexander, and Gibson, 27.

⁹ Biko, *I Write What I Like*, 42.

that, to fight against apartheid, black people must “have a white man next to [them], for the sake of depicting a non-racial society.”¹⁰ He criticized nonracialism because he believed that it was based on the white liberal belief that the integration of blacks into the European paradigm in South Africa was a viable solution to the racism of apartheid.

As the interview with Gerhart pushed on, Biko made it clear that it is not just the ideologies of communism, capitalism, or socialism that were the issue. He cautioned against the ideologies’ acceptance of a telos of modernity as dictated by European values and of a singular linear progressive narrative to achieve the telos. The BCM itself did not follow any particular ideology, rather, the movement was based on “a matter of different slants, different stresses on several points, within the common strategy.”¹¹ Members of the BCM could be committed to different and contrasting ideologies, yet, still stand united.¹² Their lack of ideology is a radical approach when put in contrast with the European world that assumes social movements to follow a singular ideology and have a singular demand.¹³ This is why, unlike other anti-apartheid organizations, the BCM as a movement chose not to align with any philosophical, social, political, or economic ideologies that were being expressed nationally – whether it be socialism, nonracialism, nonracial capitalism, or nonracial socialism.¹⁴ I find the BCM’s refusal to articulate any of the commonplace ideologies to be a radical deviation from the approaches of the time – especially for a movement that was operating against a background of European hegemony in apartheid South Africa.

¹⁰ Mngxitama, Alexander, and Gibson, *Biko Lives!*, 26.

¹¹ *Biko Lives!*, 27.

¹² *Biko Lives!*, 27.

¹³ Engler, “The Seattle Protests Showed Another World Is Possible”; Jacobs, “Not So Demanding.”

¹⁴ Mngxitama, Alexander, and Gibson, *Biko Lives!*, 25.

Chapter 1: Introduction

The Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) was an anti-apartheid movement that emerged in South Africa during the 1970s. Apartheid, which means “separateness” in Afrikaans, was a system of racial segregation that existed in South Africa from 1948 to 1994. The movement took a new and different approach to liberation that differed from other contemporary approaches in South Africa that had aligned with European ideas of socialism, communism, capitalism, and nonracialism. The BCM was a new type of social movement that arose to achieve black liberation by promoting the diversity of black values, black autonomy, and a black world view, while simultaneously challenging ideas of telos, modernity, and universalism that were extolled in the approaches of the time. Within the literature of the BCM, the movement is often described to be pursuing self-determination under the ideology of African nationalism. However, African nationalism exhibited plurality and place-centeredness, therefore, it is not enough to interpret the BCM using an umbrella term of African nationalism as it does not have a singular definition. Therefore, this thesis will ask, how can we better understand the BCM given that it was pursuing the psychological emancipation of black South Africans as opposed to pursuing a political takeover of apartheid South Africa?

Rather than focusing on African nationalism, I will argue that the BCM can be better understood as an ontological resistance movement that grappled with overcoming European modernity and developed its own world/ontology. The BCM recognized that the foundations of European hegemony were based on the suppression of blacks, therefore, it was too hard or of no use to try and integrate into European values or to try to adapt European systems – that is, capitalism or socialism – to benefit blacks. Instead, the BCM began to pursue its own world, which would be primarily cultivated according to the needs and values of black communities. Thinking

about the movement's approach as a form of ontological resistance showcases that the BCM was not accepting the European paradigm as intrinsically superior and then figuring out a way to fit themselves within it. They acknowledged that certain aspects of European hegemony – such as pursuing a particular telos, following a linear progressive narrative, and accepting universalisms – were not going to work for them and decided that they need to nurture for themselves a paradigm that could serve black people. The BCM engaged in several community programs that helped in generating an African reality that was not adjunct to European perceptions of the world. The practices of these community programs help constitute what I define as ontological resistance because they refused basic categories that European modernity takes for granted—i.e. the state, progress, and a reductive understanding of culture.

The BCM was focused on evolving black South African values towards building a world that was authentic to black people. The BCM employed a focus from within and a bottom-up approach, hence why it is difficult to understand the BCM from a European perspective that assumes movements to use a top-down or universal approach. Thus, I believe there is an opportunity to understand this movement by examining it from an ontological lens. My understanding of ontology throughout this thesis will be borrowed from Mario Blaser's three-layer definition of the word "ontology." First, ontologies are made up of "assumptions about what kinds of things do or can exist, and what might be their conditions of existence."¹⁵ Secondly, ontologies are the "practices and interactions of both human and non-humans. Hence, ontologies perform themselves into worlds."¹⁶ Lastly, ontologies are "enactments involving discursive and non-

¹⁵ Blaser, "Political Ontology: Cultural Studies without 'Cultures'?", 877.

¹⁶ Blaser, 877.

discursive aspects [stories and myths].”¹⁷ I will illustrate how a movement such as the BCM was tapping into ontology in order to realize liberation for themselves.

To make the aforementioned argument, I will first look at three literatures in the second chapter, these will be on the Black Consciousness Movement, critiques of development, and political ontology. These literatures represent the disciplines of political science, history, anthropology, and philosophy. Literature on the BCM will help to explain why the movement was seen as an African nationalist group. Critiques of development will showcase how academics of the 1990s, 2000s, and early 2010s began to challenge some fundamental ideas of European modernity. Whereas, political ontology will allow me to present an understanding that the world hosts a multiplicity of realities, world views, and ontologies.

In the case chapters — three and four — my methodology will include using both primary and secondary sources on the BCM to provide information about the BCM’s ideologies, approaches, and activities. Primary sources will include speeches, court statements, interviews, written texts, and journals from BCM members and leaders. Secondary sources will include books about the BCM by non-members or by members in the post-apartheid era. In particular, I will also reference sources referring to the BCM’s Black Community Programs (BCPs). These programs are important because they are tangible examples of how the BCM executed ontological resistance. The information I collect from these sources will then be used to interpret the BCM’s approach to modernity in a way that has not been done before, which is through using the newer frameworks and language provided by critiques of development and political ontology. The significance of this paper is to help transform contemporary knowledge on the BCM. I am hoping to showcase, in the

¹⁷ Blaser, 877.

famous words of the Zapatistas, that the BCM believed it was too difficult to change the world they lived in, so they decided it was easier to build a new one.¹⁸

This chapter will proceed as follows. The first section looks at the background of the BCM: who was a part of it, what did it do, why did it emerge, and how did it rise. The second section reviews modernization theory and briefly showcases how European modernity became hegemonic following the Second World War and how European hegemony in apartheid South Africa affected liberation efforts. Lastly, the third section will be an overview of the chapters to come.

I. Background on the BCM

The rise of the BCM in the 1970s is often situated in the context of some notable events of the 1960s. The 1960s in South Africa began with the Sharpeville Massacre on March 1960 where the police killed 69 people during a protest led by the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC).¹⁹ The PAC was demonstrating against the passes that black South Africans were forced to wear in order to leave designated areas.²⁰ The Sharpeville Massacre was followed by a decade of repression of black liberation movements by the apartheid government. Due to this repression, most leaders of the two prominent liberation movements at the time, the ANC and the PAC, had either been jailed, banned, or exiled by the end of the 1960s.²¹ For this reason, the BCM is often described as emerging to fill the vacuum left by these organizations, hence, providing Africans with an alternative freedom movement to join.²²

¹⁸ Savyasaachi and Kumar, *Social Movements*.

¹⁹ “Sharpeville Massacre, 21 March 1960 | South African History Online.”

²⁰ “Sharpeville Massacre, 21 March 1960 | South African History Online.”

²¹ “The Ideology of the Black Consciousness Movement | South African History Online.”

²² Fatton, *Black Consciousness in South Africa*, 31; Magaziner, *The Law and the Prophets*, 21; Gerhart, *Black Power in South Africa*, 280.

The BCM was formed by former members of the multiracial National Union of South African Students (NUSAS). Although NUSAS was playing an important role in student-led anti-apartheid activism, African students often felt that white liberals left them out of the decision-making process. African students asserted that white liberals often spoke on their behalf and excluded them from conversations about liberation.²³ Africans in NUSAS also believed that white liberal interventions against apartheid were preserving the status quo rather than transforming the system.²⁴ Therefore, due to the power imbalance between white liberals and Africans in NUSAS, African students, led by Steve Biko, left NUSAS and formed the South African Students' Organization (SASO) in 1968.²⁵ It was from within SASO that the Black Consciousness Movement was born.

The Black Consciousness Movement aimed to unite all black people in South Africa under the ideology of Black Consciousness.²⁶ To the BCM, black people were all those who were oppressed under the apartheid regime regardless of their Africaness.²⁷ The concept of Black Consciousness (BC) emerged from a variety of sources and influences—both on the continent and in the diaspora. The BCM drew inspiration from other African liberation leaders such as Julius Nyerere's concept of African socialism, Leopold Senghor's concept on Négritude, and Nkwame Nkrumah's advocacy for Pan-Africanism.²⁸ Other African liberation movements such as

²³ Gerhart, *Black Power in South Africa*, 258–60.

²⁴ Gerhart, 260.

²⁵ Gerhart, 258; Hill, *Biko's Ghost*, xix; Fatton, *Black Consciousness in South Africa*, 64; Magaziner, *The Law and the Prophets*, 4.

²⁶ Fatton, *Black Consciousness in South Africa*, 32.

²⁷ Robert Fatton, *Black Consciousness in South Africa*, 1986, 32.

²⁸ Gerhart, *Black Power in South Africa*, 274; Fatton, *Black Consciousness in South Africa*, 82; Magaziner, *The Law and the Prophets*, 27; Hill, *Biko's Ghost*, 182; Hadfield, *Liberation and Development*, 2016, 31.

Mozambique's FRELIMO were also a source of inspiration.²⁹ In addition, Frantz Fanon's writings were popular amongst the BCM as they helped contextualize the colonial situation and the necessary elements for liberation.³⁰ African Americans also had an impact on Black Consciousness through the writings of James Cone on Black Theology or more generally the Black Power Movement of the civil rights era.³¹ Even Latin American thinkers, particularly Paulo Freire, inspired the ideology of Black Consciousness.³² With the coming together of all these ideas, Black Consciousness ideology, for the BCM, was the notion that black people need to be conscious about their experience and identity, and unite as one to fight white supremacy. BC was based on the need for black people to be proud of their origins. It asserted that black people should base their community and society on their values rather than using the values of white people.

The BCM itself was made up of a variety of organizations tied together by the ideology of Black Consciousness. These organizations primarily included the South African Students' Organization (SASO), the Black People's Convention (BPC), and the Black Community Programs (BCP). In addition to these, there were another 15 organizations that were aligned to the ideology of Black Consciousness.³³ All of the organizations that formed the Black Consciousness Movement aimed to redefine blackness in a more positive light and attempted to spread this ideology across South Africa. To do this, the BCM took up a variety of activities through its various organizations. SASO was the student body of the BCM that was concerned with the

²⁹ Magaziner, *The Law and the Prophets*, 1.

³⁰ Gerhart, *Black Power in South Africa*, 274; Fatton, *Black Consciousness in South Africa*, 82; Magaziner, *The Law and the Prophets*, 42; Hill, *Biko's Ghost*, 1–2; Hadfield, *Liberation and Development*, 2016, 31.

³¹ Gerhart, *Black Power in South Africa*, 275; Fatton, *Black Consciousness in South Africa*, 75; Hill, *Biko's Ghost*, 1–2; Magaziner, *The Law and the Prophets*, 47.

³² Hadfield, *Liberation and Development*, 2016, 7.

³³ "Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) | South African History Online."

intellectual production of BC thought and with mobilizing students against apartheid under the framework of BC.³⁴ The BPC was the political party of the BCM that aimed to bring together all Black Consciousness groups within a new political movement.³⁵ While the BCP, which was the community body of the BCM, had programs that aimed to put into practice the ideology of BC. These programs included community health centers; leather home industries; and journals and community newspapers such as the *Black Review*, *Creativity in Development*, *Black Perspectives*, and *Black Viewpoint*.³⁶ Although the BCM did not engage directly in demonstrations, its ideology of Black Consciousness inspired some protests. The most well-known BC-inspired protest was the Soweto Uprising of June 16th, 1976, where an estimated 20,000 students took to the streets in objection to the government's move to implement Afrikaans as a language of instruction in schools for blacks.³⁷ The Soweto Uprising serves an example of how Black Consciousness ideology managed to spread across South Africa.

History often defines the BCM as an offshoot of organizations such as the ANC or the PAC.³⁸ Although these organizations and movements were important antecedents that led to the rise of the BCM, the BCM's approaches to liberation starkly contrasted those of contemporary South African liberation movements. As Biko stated in his interview with Gail M. Gerhart, the BCM strongly rejected some aspects of its predecessors – specifically the alignment with communism and socialism.³⁹ The sentiment that Biko communicates in the interview with Gerhart

³⁴ “South African Student Organisation (SASO) | South African History Online.”

³⁵ “Black People Convention Is Formed | South African History Online.”

³⁶ “Black Community Programmes (BCP) | South African History Online”; Hadfield, *Liberation and Development*, 2016.

³⁷ Magaziner, *The Law and the Prophets*, 5; “This Photo Inspired the World to Fight Against Apartheid.”

³⁸ Fatton, *Black Consciousness in South Africa*, 31; Magaziner, *The Law and the Prophets*, 21; Gerhart, *Black Power in South Africa*, 280.

³⁹ *Biko Lives!*, 27.

is a rather dissenting opinion when put in the context of apartheid South Africa. In the second half of the twentieth century, most freedom movements in South Africa had strongly expressed allegiance with one ideology or another. The majority of contemporary South African liberation movements had taken up socialist or communist ideologies as blueprints for post-revolutionary societies. These blueprints were based on the dominating belief that the best way forward was through reforming apartheid systems and assimilating black people into white South African society and, more broadly, European modernity. In the following section, I introduce the idea of European modernity and modernization theory and how it took shape in apartheid South Africa.

II. Modernity, Modernization Theory, and “Underdevelopment”

The following review of modernization theory briefly showcases how European modernity became hegemonic following the Second World War and subsequently how European hegemony in apartheid South Africa affected liberation efforts. The section aims to illustrate how modernization theories were, in essence, attributing development and modernity to becoming more like western nations. In apartheid South Africa, the prevalence of European hegemony could be seen in the calls for integration and reformation that often took for granted ideas about the superiority of European society.

In an interview with *In Motion Magazine* in 2005, Gustavo Esteva, a post-development theorist, spoke on the topic of development and the origins of underdevelopment. In this interview he stated,

I got underdeveloped when I was thirteen years old, when President Truman took office and coined the word “underdevelopment.” I was one of the two billion people who that very day became underdeveloped.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Paget-Clarke, “Interview with Gustavo Esteva: The Society of the Different.”

Esteva was referring to Harry S. Truman's Four Point Speech that was delivered during his presidential inauguration in the United States in the mid-morning hours of January 20th, 1949. As the first-ever televised presidential inauguration, Truman's Four Point Speech had a massive audience of over 11 million watchers and listeners in the United States and abroad.⁴¹ Truman's fourth point of his inaugural address stated that "we must embark on a bold new program for making the benefits of our scientific advances and industrial progress available for the improvement and growth of underdeveloped areas."⁴² Gustavo Esteva, argues that it was from this speech that the ideology of underdevelopment was constructed.⁴³ Of course, the ideology of development had existed in earlier colonial conquests that sought to bring civilization to the "backward races" of the global south through a linear westernization process.⁴⁴ However, Truman's point four was the first time development was being defined as the escape from underdevelopment.⁴⁵ Shortly after this speech, modernization theories of development began emerging.⁴⁶ These theories viewed modernization as a unilinear process whereby "underdeveloped" nations need to move through specific stages to reach a final telos of development and modernity as determined by Europe.⁴⁷

Within apartheid South Africa, some saw integration and reformation as viable liberation options for black South Africans. However, these notions often normalized the European paradigm's understanding of modernity as an escape from "underdevelopment" through a process

⁴¹ "Truman Proposed 'Fair Deal' Plan for World; Challenge to Communism Voiced at Inaugural"; Oliver, "Millions to See Truman In Telecast of Inaugural"; "World to Hear Truman Inaugural Ceremonies."

⁴² "Inaugural Addresses of the Presidents of the United States."

⁴³ Paget-Clarke, "Interview with Gustavo Esteva: The Society of the Different."

⁴⁴ Press and Network, "History of Africa through Western Eyes."

⁴⁵ "Development | The Development Dictionary - Credo Reference."

⁴⁶ Crossman, "A Brief Guide to Modernization Theory."

⁴⁷ Magistrale, "On the Classical Theories of Development: Modernisation and Dependency," 62.

of westernization.⁴⁸ Integration and reformation suggested that all was well with the South African system apart from the enforcement of racial segregation.⁴⁹ Hence, the appeals for integration and reformation were largely overlooking the fact that European modernity and white supremacy ideals were hegemonic in South Africa. Integration proposed that black people could escape their secondary condition in apartheid South Africa by being assimilated into white South African society.⁵⁰ Integration was also presupposing that the organization of white society was inherently superior, which is why black people were to be integrated into white society and not the other way around.⁵¹ Likewise, reformation conveyed that some modifications to the apartheid system were what was needed for the liberation of black South Africans. Essentially, the notion of reformation was presuming an acceptance of major points underpinning the apartheid system – such as European hegemony – hence why there was no need to pursue a full transformation of the system.⁵² This thesis offers that the BCM's strong emphasis on the psychological emancipation of black people enabled them to circumvent the hegemony of European modernity that was prevalent in the advocacies for reformation and integration during apartheid.

III. Overview of Chapters

The thesis unfolds as follows. Chapter two is my literature review, which begins by studying literature on the BCM and how it is usually thought of in academic circles. This will explain how the BCM is often portrayed as an intellectual movement that developed and disseminated Black Consciousness thought as a way to achieve psychological emancipation. The

⁴⁸ Robert Fatton, *Black Consciousness in South Africa*, 1986, 69–70.

⁴⁹ Biko, *I Write What I Like*, 91.

⁵⁰ Robert Fatton, *Black Consciousness in South Africa*, 1986, 69–70.

⁵¹ Biko, *I Write What I Like*, 91.

⁵² Biko, 49.

chapter then goes on to review how, in the wake of modernization theory, new theories – critiques of development – emerged to problematize the singularity and Eurocentricity of modernity and development. The literature on critiques of development asserts that development theories that normalize western epistemology and western ontology are part of the colonial project. The third section will be a review of political ontology literature. The section will explore the idea that the world hosts a multiplicity of realities, world views, and ontologies – and, that all these paradigms can exist congruently. The lens gotten from the literature will allow me to explore how we better understand the BCM and whether it can be appreciated as an ontological resistance movement. Chapter three will historicize, contextualize, and situate how the BCM reached the point of generating ontological resistance. I will look at the antecedents that laid the groundwork for the movement to ultimately end up pursuing matters of ontology. Chapter four will give an in-depth analysis of why we should begin to understand Black Consciousness (BC) ideology as ontology. In particular, I will explore how rejecting European hegemony, thinking from alterity, and rejecting post-revolutionary societies contributed to ontological resistance. The practices of the BCM, namely the Black Community Programs, serve as my tangible examples of how the BCM engaged in ontological resistance. I will use primary and secondary sources that can give insight into the formation, foundations, and execution of the BC ideology and BCM organizations.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

I. Introduction

During the latter half of the twentieth century, the concepts of socialism, nonracialism, nonracial capitalism, and nonracial socialism prevailed in South Africa.⁵³ These approaches embraced aspects of European modernity such as taking a top-down approach to social change by looking to take over governance in South Africa or using universal approaches to social change such as focusing on nonracialism as opposed to the unique experience of being black during apartheid. However, the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) had chosen not to align themselves with any of the aforementioned concepts. Hence, this thesis will ask, how can we better understand the BCM given that it was pursuing the psychological emancipation of black South Africans as opposed to pursuing a political takeover of apartheid South Africa? I argue that the BCM can be better understood as an ontological resistance movement that grappled with overcoming European modernity and developed its ontology. I posit that the BCM's approach to liberation was not situated within the dominant paradigm of European modernity. Rather, the BCM approached liberation through a different paradigm that was guided by their ontology.

To make the aforementioned argument, I will look at three literatures in this chapter: The Black Consciousness Movement; critiques of development - that is, post-development theory and modernity/coloniality; and political ontology. These literatures represent the disciplines of political science, history, anthropology, and philosophy. Literature on the BCM mainly describes it as an African nationalist movement.⁵⁴ However, the thesis will argue that the BCM can be better understood as a social movement engaging in ontological resistance, particularly, through its

⁵³ Mngxitama, Alexander, and Gibson, *Biko Lives!*, 25.

⁵⁴ Gerhart, *Black Power in South Africa*; Robert Fatton, *Black Consciousness in South Africa*, 1986.

community programs. Critiques of development will showcase how academics of the 1990s, 2000s, and early 2010s began to challenge some fundamental ideas of European modernity. Whereas, political ontology will allow me to present an understanding that the world hosts a multiplicity of realities, world views, and ontologies. I will use these concepts to interpret how the BCM's community programs were generating ontological resistance.

II. The Black Consciousness Movement

The literature on the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) mainly falls into two disciplines – political science and history. Gail M. Gerhart, a political scientist who wrote *Black Power in South Africa*, explores the BCM from the perspective of the political ideologies of orthodox nationalism and Black Power.⁵⁵ Whereas, Robert Fatton Jr, a political scientist who wrote *Black Consciousness in South Africa*, explores how the ideology of Black Consciousness developed and how it served as a political tool to resist white supremacy in South Africa.⁵⁶ Daniel R Magaziner is a historian of 20th century Africa and his book, *The Law and the Prophets*, explores the theology of the BCM and how it evolved between 1968-1977.⁵⁷ Leslie Anne Hadfield is also an African historian and her book, *Liberation and Development*, looks at the Black Community Programs (BCP) of the BCM and how the philosophy of Black Consciousness was executed within these programs.⁵⁸ Beyond these, not many books exist on the Black Consciousness Movement itself. Most other books focus on the life, philosophy, and legacy of Steve Biko, one of the founders and leaders of the BCM. Although Steve Biko is a prominent figure of the BCM, I will not be

⁵⁵ Gerhart, *Black Power in South Africa*.

⁵⁶ Fatton, *Black Consciousness in South Africa*.

⁵⁷ Magaziner, *The Law and the Prophets*.

⁵⁸ Hadfield, *Liberation and Development*, 2016.

looking at literature focusing on him because I am more concerned about the philosophies and work of the BCM as a whole.

In her book, Gail M. Gerhart examines how the political thought of orthodox African nationalism and Black Power evolved in South Africa. Gerhart defines orthodox African nationalism as being akin to Black Power, which is the idea that black people should have the right to self-determination. She explains that orthodox nationalism differs from nonracial nationalism because it asserts that the liberation of blacks should be pursued solely by black people, while, nonracialism is related to the cooperation between all races, in a sort of multiracial setting, towards liberation. Within her exploration of black political thought in South Africa, she credits the BCM as being influential in the development of orthodox nationalism.⁵⁹ She focuses on particular historical moments that she believes were of significant importance in the intellectual production of orthodox African nationalism and Black Power. One such historical moment that Gerhart noted was the split of African students from the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS) and the resulting formation of the South African Students' Organization (SASO). African students who were disgruntled by the dominance of white liberals in multiracial organizations decided to create an “all black movement which would do away with the artificiality of symbolic integration and white liberal leadership.”⁶⁰ In this quote, Gerhart illustrates the origins of self-reliance, that both SASO and the BCM embraced, of which she compares to Black Power. SASO emphasized the need for black people to be at the forefront of the anti-apartheid movement and to pursue the evolution of their cultural values. Gerhart likens this to nationalism because she saw they wanted to create a society for Africans, made by Africans, and based on African values. This is why

⁵⁹ Gerhart, *Black Power in South Africa*, vii.

⁶⁰ Gerhart, 260–61.

Gerhart is arguing that the BCM can best be understood from the perspective of orthodox nationalism. Her analysis of the BCM's promotion of black self-reliance or black power is important for this thesis. However, the thesis will explore the concepts of black self-reliance or black power from an ontological perspective to see if it helps us understand the BCM a little better than we do from an African nationalism lens.

Robert Fatton Jr also describes the BCM as an African nationalist movement. However, he used the concept of Africanism to describe the nationalism of the BCM as opposed to Black Power. The ideologies of Africanism and Black Power are very similar, the main difference being that the former originated on the African continent while the latter originated in the diaspora. Fatton contends that out of the two main competing nationalist ideologies in South Africa during the 1960s – multiracialism and Africanism – the BCM took to Africanism. He describes multiracialism as “a strategy bent on uniting all anti-racist forces irrespective of their colors in a common front and a common fight against white supremacy.”⁶¹ Whereas, Africanism “was based on the conviction that Africans had to reject collaboration as well as alliances with both whites and the other South African ethnic groups.”⁶² Fatton argues that the BCM primarily embraced the Africanist understanding of nationalism.⁶³ He reasons that the BCM was aligned to Africanism because it was an all-black movement that excluded white liberals. However, for the BCM, “the concept ‘black’ came to encompass all of the exploited, irrespective of their Africanness.”⁶⁴ This understanding diverged from the Africanist view of “black” as being African. Nonetheless, Fatton maintains that even though their definition of “black” was different, the BCM was still in line with

⁶¹ Fatton, *Black Consciousness in South Africa*, 3.

⁶² Fatton, 4.

⁶³ Fatton, 32.

⁶⁴ Fatton, 32.

Africanists' brand of nationalism. This was because they emphasized the rhetoric of black self-reliance and advocated for the creation of a society based on black values. Similar to Gerhart, Fatton defines the BCM as being an African nationalist movement, however, he places more emphasis on the influence of Africanism as opposed to Black Power. Nevertheless, the BCM had articulated that it followed no singular ideology, instead, the movement was based on "a matter of different slants, different stresses on several points, within the common strategy."⁶⁵ This was a radical approach when put against a background of European hegemony that assumes social movements to follow a singular ideology and have a singular demand.⁶⁶ As a result, I propose the BCM can be better understood from an ontological lens.

Daniel R. Magaziner defines the BCM as a theological movement that evolved to impact South African politics. Where Gerhart places more emphasis on Black Power and Fatton on Africanism as influencing the BCM, Magaziner looks to situate the BCM's origins in black theology. Magaziner contends that "religious—primarily Christian—ways of thinking underpinned activists' political approach."⁶⁷ In his argument, Magaziner contends that Black Consciousness thought was deeply rooted in religion. He implies that the BCM's idea of affirming black values to counter apartheid is similar to how black theology aims to empower black values in religion. He explains that "Black Consciousness thinkers argued that missionaries not only had abetted material conquest but also were to some extent responsible for the psychological ailments afflicting black South Africa."⁶⁸ His quote explains that a religion based on white values was contributing to the inferiority complexes that black South Africans felt. This is why creating an

⁶⁵ *Biko Lives!*, 27.

⁶⁶ Engler, "The Seattle Protests Showed Another World Is Possible"; Jacobs, "Not So Demanding."

⁶⁷ Magaziner, *The Law and the Prophets*, 55.

⁶⁸ Magaziner, 55.

African theology became of prominent importance to the BCM. African theology was a way to make religion in South Africa speak to the realities of black people.⁶⁹ It aimed to contextualize Christian theology and adopt African values within it.⁷⁰ It also aimed to convey a message of struggle and a need to mobilize towards liberation.⁷¹ As a result, Magaziner argues that Black Consciousness ideology had found its roots within African theology before moving into the political sphere. His analysis of the BCM's efforts to make religion relevant to black South Africans is instrumental in understanding how the BCM was working towards ontological resistance. African theology is a good example of how the BCM did not want to take over and change society from the top-down. Rather, they were looking to work from the bottom-up and build afresh. African theology is an illustration of how the BCM was attempting to develop an ontological framework that was autonomous from the dominant white supremacist one they were living within.

Leslie Anne Hadfield is the only author to date who speaks of the BCM from a perspective of development. Hadfield focuses on the BCM's Black Community Programs (BCPs) which were part of the community outreach body of the movement. She explores in depth the three biggest community programs of the BCP —the *Black Review*, the Zanempilo Community Health Center, and the Njwaxa Leather Home Industry — to show how the BCM's philosophies were applied in these programs. Hadfield's main argument is that the BCM was not simply an intellectual movement that did not have any pragmatic activities and was detached from the working class.⁷²

⁶⁹ Magaziner, 83.

⁷⁰ Magaziner, 83.

⁷¹ Magaziner, 91.

⁷² Hadfield, *Liberation and Development*, 2016, 3.

She explains that through the Black Community Programs, the BCM played an active and important role in community development. She defines community development as

increased agricultural and manufacturing production, improved infrastructure, access to basic services, and increased consumer power, but for a small, geographically defined group... [that is] not led by the state or foreign agencies.⁷³

This quote explains why Hadfield decided to portray the Black Community Programs as community development programs. She is asserting that, within its ideology of black self-reliance, the BCM took development into their own hands through the programs. The importance of terming the BCP as community development programs is so that Hadfield can portray how “Africans practiced a type of participatory development before the international community started to widely discuss, debate, and practice it.”⁷⁴ In essence, she aims to showcase that the BCPs can reshape the way we think about African history of development. Although I agree with Hadfield’s analysis that the BCPs illustrated the practical side of BC ideology, the definition of development that she uses to explain the BCPs still falls within the dominant culture of European modernization – which is a paradigm that perceives the telos of development and/or modernity as a linear progressive narrative towards “industrialization, urbanization, rationalization, bureaucracy, mass consumption, and the adoption of democracy.”⁷⁵ However, the BCM did not agree with articulating a specific ultimate goal or post-revolutionary society, especially one that followed European value systems. Thus, this thesis will explore whether the BCPs can be better understood from an ontological lens instead of a development lens grounded in European thought.

⁷³ Hadfield, 5.

⁷⁴ Hadfield, 5.

⁷⁵ Rai, *Gender and the Political Economy of Development*, 48; Crossman, “A Brief Guide to Modernization Theory.”

The literature on the BCM has evolved greatly over the decades. During the latter half of the 20th century, the BCM was primarily talked about from a political science perspective as illustrated by Gerhart's and Fatton's analysis of the movement. Within the political science sphere, the BCM is mainly thought of as an African nationalist movement, though the origins of its nationalism are still debated. Despite this common interpretation, I will not be looking at the BCM as a nationalist movement. Rather, I will evaluate it as a social movement that was creating ontological resistance to the apartheid state. I take this approach because the BCM chose not to follow any particular ideology, even a nationalist one. Instead, it was open to having different and contrasting ideologies within the same movement. Contrastingly, Magaziner takes a historical perspective in explaining the BCM. He terms it as a movement rooted in African theology which eventually moved into politics. Magaziner's analysis is pivotal to my question because it provides one example of how the BCM was building from the bottom-up as opposed to using a top-down approach. Nonetheless, Magaziner does not explore how African theology asserts ideas of locality and community in religion — as opposed to universalism — and how these ideas cannot be understood from the European ontological paradigm. Hadfield's piece is instrumental in showcasing that the BCM was not solely an intellectual movement and that it engaged in pragmatic resistance. However, she still defines its pragmatic activities from the lens of European modernity. In contrast, this thesis will explore the BCPs from a separate lens to European development.

III. Critiques of Development: Post-Development theory and Modernity/Coloniality

Post-development theory and modernity/coloniality emerged as critiques of mainstream development theories, particularly modernization theory of development and neoliberalism.⁷⁶

⁷⁶ Sachs, *The Development Dictionary*, 42,73.

Modernization theory attributes development to the public sphere, the division of labor, and the discarding of the more emotive aspects of private and cultural life.⁷⁷ While, neoliberalism identifies “unregulated free-market capitalism” as the best way to organize the economy.⁷⁸ Post-development theory, which arose in the early 1990s, suggests that the idea of development contributed to the subversion of Southern history and cultures, and that it was a mission to consolidate Northern power over Southern states.⁷⁹ Modernity/coloniality came about in the late 1990s, and it holds that “‘modernity’ as a universal global process and point of arrival hides its darker side, the constant reproduction of ‘coloniality.’”⁸⁰ Essentially, modernity/coloniality is the assertion that modernity cannot exist without coloniality.⁸¹ I have chosen to group post-development theory and modernity/coloniality as critiques of development because they both problematize ideas of modernization and neoliberalism as being Eurocentric. I will be focusing mainly on Latin American scholars in this section because my muse for this thesis was the Zapatistas of Chiapas Mexico, and, I was introduced to modernity/coloniality and post-development theory by reading about the Zapatistas. Nonetheless, given the geographical concern of the thesis, I believe it is important to acknowledge that African scholars - such as Ngugi wa Thiong’o, Issa Shivji, Amicar Cabra, etc. - have for many decades articulated de-colonial thought and practices.⁸² Literature on critiques of development will help to explain why the BCM’s

⁷⁷ Vincent, *Modern Political Ideologies*, 336.

⁷⁸ Vincent, 337.

⁷⁹ Sachs, *The Development Dictionary*, 2.

⁸⁰ Mignolo, “DELINKING,” 450.

⁸¹ Tlostanova and Mignolo, “Global Coloniality and the Decolonial Option,” 132; Escobar, “Worlds and Knowledges Otherwise,” 185.

⁸² In light of the important critiques to development that African scholars have made, it would be worthwhile partaking in a future project that highlights the decolonial thinking of African scholars (such as Valentin Yves Mudimbe, Ngugi wa Thiong’o, Ousman Sembene, Micere Mugo, Mahmood Mamdani etc.) and puts them in conversation with theories of post-development and modernity/coloniality. Luckily, there already exists seminal literature on

community programs neither announced any sort of modernization or development goals nor offered a singular linear and universal path in any of their programs.

Post-development theory attempts to do three things: question the very definition of development and underdevelopment, problematize development theories as being Eurocentric and colonial, and propose a new way of thinking about development. Arturo Escobar asserts that the era of development and modernity is a reflection of European hegemony over the South.⁸³ This is because the concept of development is based on western epistemology and ontology which ends up “marginalizing or precluding other ways of seeing and doing” particularly those emanating from the global south.⁸⁴ In essence, Escobar conveys that development discourses privilege western lifestyles and ways of knowing as being the right way to organize society. Escobar argues that a way to overcome the Eurocentric nature of development discourse is through “alternatives to development.”⁸⁵ This means “rather than searching for development alternatives [sustainable development, women and development, grassroots development]” there should be a “rejection of the entire paradigm.”⁸⁶ In essence, Escobar is arguing for an entirely new language of development which means removing development from the center and looking at the question of how to effect positive societal change from the perspectives of groups at the periphery. Escobar argues that the social movements of the global south are better positioned to do the work of transforming development due to their locality and proximity to their communities.⁸⁷ In essence, Escobar is

decolonial thought of African thinkers such as Kari Dahlgren’s work – “African Cultural Producers and Border Thinking: Dennis Brutus, Micere Mugo, Ousmane Sembène, and Ngugi wa Thiong’o” and V.Y Mudimbe’s work - “The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge.”

⁸³ Escobar, “Imagining a Post-Development Era?,” 23.

⁸⁴ Escobar, 22.

⁸⁵ Escobar, 22.

⁸⁶ Escobar, 26–27.

⁸⁷ Escobar, 22.

arguing that local social movements are better at safeguarding plurality, promoting diversity, and creating autonomy.⁸⁸ The thesis will explore how the BCPs generated “alternatives to development” by working outside a telos of modernity or development. The discussion on the BCPs and “alternatives to development” will be instrumental in showcasing how the BCM was engaging in ontological resistance. The community programs illustrate that the BCM did not abide by the European paradigm’s understanding of modernity as synonymous with industrialization and urbanization. I will showcase how the BCM as a social movement was able to promote what Escobar calls plurality, diversity, and autonomy through their community programs.

Whereas post-development questions the concept of development, modernity/coloniality problematizes the idea of modernity. Similar to post-development theory, modernity/coloniality interrogates the eurocentrism that is found within the concept of modernity. Enrique Dussel argues that the concept of modernity is actually “the myth of modernity.”⁸⁹ Dussel asserts that this myth of “modernity appears when Europe affirms itself as the ‘center’ of a world history that it inaugurates; the periphery that surrounds this center is consistently part of its self-identification.”⁹⁰ Dussel is asserting that this myth of modernity arrives because Europe’s positioning of itself as the epitome of civilization is contingent on constructing an alterity of non-Europeans whose sole definition is to be antitheses to Europe’s modernity – such as backward, savage, or uncivilized. Dussel goes on to argue that this creates the fallacy of developmentalism. This fallacy “consists in thinking that the path of Europe’s modern development must be followed unilaterally by every other culture.”⁹¹ Essentially, “the myth of modernity” is pushing the idea that European modernity

⁸⁸ Escobar, 33.

⁸⁹ Dussel, “Eurocentrism and Modernity (Introduction to the Frankfurt Lectures),” 65–66.

⁹⁰ Dussel, 65.

⁹¹ Dussel, 68.

is synonymous with development, hence, all other societies should aspire to adopt European culture. The myth of modernity, the fallacy of developmentalism, and the Hegelian tradition - which painted non-Europeans as barbarians, childlike, or immature - all provide justification for the colonization of non-European cultures. This thesis will explore how the BCM's community programs overcame the myth of modernity and the fallacy of developmentalism by choosing to embrace African customs and traditions in their programs although European modernity often sees African culture as static and a mark of underdevelopment. In doing this, the BCPs were engaging in practices that were challenging the European paradigm of modernity and development.

Aníbal Quijano argues that modernity not only allows for the physical colonization of non-European cultures, it also removes the possibility that other cultures, in their diversity, can and *have* experienced modernity.⁹² Quijano explains that “colonizers also imposed a mystified image of their patterns of producing knowledge and meaning.”⁹³ Colonizing Europeans constructed their culture as superior and unattainable to the colonized peoples, while, only allowing a limited group of colonized people to have access to their culture.⁹⁴ The effect of these actions was that

European culture was made seductive: it gave access to power...Cultural Europeanization was transformed into an aspiration. It was a way of participating and later to reach the same material benefits and the same power as the Europeans: viz, to conquer nature – in short for ‘development’. European culture became a universal cultural model.⁹⁵

The quote demonstrates that there is a seduction of power that comes with European culture that can obscure the liberation process by looking at it through the lens of European modernity. Hence, the final goal morphs into achieving development as dictated by Europeans. This quote is

⁹² Quijano and Ennis, “Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America,” 543.

⁹³ Quijano, “Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality,” 169.

⁹⁴ Quijano, 169.

⁹⁵ Quijano, 169.

important in making sense of what was going on in South Africa during the era of apartheid. During this time, many were looking to integration and reformation as viable solutions for black South African liberation.⁹⁶ However, these ideals often overlooked the fact that European hegemony in South Africa had normalized European society as being inherently superior. Integration and reformation respectively assumed that black people should be assimilated into white society – and not vice versa – and that the apartheid system only needed some modifications as opposed to a full transformation.⁹⁷ My thesis asserts that by stepping out of the European ontological perspective the BCM was able to overcome this seduction to European culture and begin to charter their path by focusing on localities and on conducting nonlinear programs.

In thinking of ways to overcome modernity/coloniality, Arturo Escobar clearly articulates and summarizes some possible approaches proposed by Dussel, Mignolo, and The Latin American modernity/coloniality research program. Escobar suggests that the “periphery” or the “alterity” that was subjugated to create the concept of modernity still exists.⁹⁸ He writes that the histories, cultures, and societal designs of periphery societies are still enduring possibilities that can be and are being pursued today.⁹⁹ In essence, Escobar proposes that solutions to overcome modernity/coloniality will emanate from thinking from the “exteriority.”¹⁰⁰ The hypothesis is that thinking away from the center of European modernity leads to “unfreezing the radical potential for thinking from difference and towards the constitution of alternative local and regional worlds.”¹⁰¹ Escobar points out two proposals by modernity/coloniality thinkers on how to overcome

⁹⁶ Biko, *I Write What I Like*, 91.

⁹⁷ Robert Fatton, *Black Consciousness in South Africa*, 1986, 69–70; Biko, *I Write What I Like*, 91.

⁹⁸ Escobar, “Worlds and Knowledges Otherwise,” 183.

⁹⁹ Escobar, 183.

¹⁰⁰ Escobar, 183.

¹⁰¹ Escobar, 183–84.

contemporary European hegemony. He cites Mignolo's proposal of "border thinking," which is the idea of engaging in epistemology outside of the western model.¹⁰² This entails working outside of a Eurocentric understanding of the world. He also cites Dussel's proposal of "transmodernity," which is the idea that there is an opportunity to transcend contemporary understandings of development and modernity.¹⁰³ Escobar does not claim that the exterior or the alterity is "untouched by the modern" instead he affirms that "the notion of exteriority does not entail an ontological outside; it refers to an outside that is precisely constituted as difference by a hegemonic discourse."¹⁰⁴ This point is important because it clarifies that there should not be an essentialization of periphery societies. Their cultures and histories should neither be romanticized nor viewed as static. The BCPs serve as good examples of how the BCM was engaging in this type of border thinking or transmodernity. Their community programs were operating from the alterity of European epistemology, embracing African epistemology, and at the same time trying not to exoticize or essentialize African values or cultures. In taking these approaches, the BCM was able to assert the positivity of African values that existed alongside European ones in contemporary South Africa. This move by the BCM to challenge the perception of African societies as static and to affirm African values as modern cannot be fully understood from the lens of the European paradigm, hence, why I offer ontology as a way to better understand the BCM.

¹⁰² Escobar, 187.

¹⁰³ Escobar, 187.

¹⁰⁴ Escobar, 186.

IV. Political Ontology

The literature on political ontology began to take shape in the early 2010s. It proposes that multiple realities can and do exist at the same time.¹⁰⁵ Hence, European modernity is not the only understanding of reality or modernity that exists in the world. Instead, there are a multiplicity and variety of competing and contrasting ontologies. Political ontology opens up the possibility that practices of other communities', that do not make much sense within the European paradigm, are actually operating from a different ontological perspective. While this section focuses on political ontology, it is important to acknowledge that African thinkers – such as Achille Mbembe and Valentin Yves Mudimbe, in particular – have also made important interventions on the hegemony of European modernity.¹⁰⁶ Literature on political ontology is important to my research question as it helps to explain why the BCM was not pursuing a political takeover of apartheid South Africa. Political ontology will also help us understand why the BCPs were focusing on localities as opposed to universalisms and why they decided to embrace African traditions alongside European concepts.

The question of ontology is relevant to the theories of post-development and modernity/coloniality because it interrogates whether the proposals - that is, alternatives to development, transmodernity, and border thinking – are transforming the nature of modernity/coloniality or reproducing it. In talking about ontology, I will borrow Mario Blaser's

¹⁰⁵ Blaser, "Ontology and Indigeneity," 51.

¹⁰⁶ In light of the important interventions on European hegemony that African scholars have made, a future project putting decolonial and post-colonial African scholars in conversation with ontology would be very worthwhile. This project could explore the decolonial and postcolonial works of African thinkers such as Achille Mbembe, Valentin Yves Mudimbe, Thandika Mkandawire, Wole Soyinka, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Mariama Ba, Ousman Sembene, Micere Mugo, Issa Shivji, Mahmood Mamdani, Chinua Achebe, Amina Mama, Samir Amin, and founding members of the Tanzanian Gender Networking Program (TGNP).

three-layer definition of the word “ontology.”¹⁰⁷ Ontologies are made up of “assumptions about what kinds of things do or can exist, and what might be their conditions of existence.”¹⁰⁸ Ontologies are the “practices and interactions of both human and non-humans.”¹⁰⁹ And, ontologies are “enactments involving discursive and non-discursive aspects [stories and myths].”¹¹⁰ I use this definition to showcase that ontologies are made up of a specific society’s: ideas of the world, day to day activities, and narratives of their existence. Blaser also uses the words “ontologies” and “worlds” interchangeably because “ontologies perform themselves into worlds”.¹¹¹ Thus, I shall also use these words interchangeably to showcase that, as the BCM was trying to imagine a different world, they were simultaneously conceiving a different ontology.

Within the literature of modernity/coloniality, there has been much debate on whether the way forward in decolonizing ontology is to pursue “alternatives to modernity” that are completely disassociated with the idea of modernity and do not use the language of modernity.¹¹² Or rather, to pursue “multiple modernities,” which is the idea that there are other modernities that exist at the exterior of European modernity, hence, each culture has and can practice their own modernity.¹¹³

Blaser sets out to resolve the tension by stating that,

The dominant trope of multiple modernities, as it stands with its drive toward incorporating all differences within the ontological domain of modernity, makes it even more difficult to account for ontological conflicts as part of the present conjuncture.¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁷ Blaser, “Political Ontology: Cultural Studies without ‘Cultures’?,” 877.

¹⁰⁸ Blaser, 877.

¹⁰⁹ Blaser, 877.

¹¹⁰ Blaser, 877.

¹¹¹ Blaser, 877.

¹¹² Blaser, 875–76.

¹¹³ Blaser, 875–76.

¹¹⁴ Blaser, 880.

In this quote, he is conveying that the problem with the dominant approach to multiple modernities is that non-European modernities are not recognized as being ontologically distinct from European modernity. Instead, in the dominant trope, alternate modernities end up being housed within European modernity simply as cultural differences rather than being differentiated as separate ontologies. Blaser asserts that the ontology of European Modernity is a naturalist ontology.¹¹⁵ Naturalist ontologies “distribute what exists between two large domains, Nature and Culture” hence creating a distinction between Nature/Culture.¹¹⁶ Blaser asserts that European modernity has “a sort of false consciousness” because it believes that modern people are above both nature and culture, hence, they are at the top of the hierarchy.¹¹⁷ As a result, for European modernity to survive, it must reject the existence of other ontologies as they would put it question the totality and universality of European modernity.¹¹⁸ Consequently, to preserve its authority, European modernity “tames radical differences by converting other ontologies into just another cultural perspective on Nature,” rather than recognizing them as whole and distinct worlds.¹¹⁹ Blaser contends that in order to maintain its totality, European modernity defines differences between groups as cultural perspectives embedded within a larger European culture rather than as distinct ontologies. This is important to note when talking about the BCM because I will argue that the Black Community Programs were not merely cultural differences within the paradigm of European modernity. On the contrary, the BCM was creating and running a distinctive world through the BCPs.

¹¹⁵ Blaser, 886.

¹¹⁶ Blaser, 886.

¹¹⁷ Blaser, 887–88.

¹¹⁸ Blaser, 888.

¹¹⁹ Blaser, 889.

With this understanding of periphery cultures as distinct ontologies or worlds, Blaser resolves the tension between “alternatives to modernity” and “multiple modernities” by contending that they both can exist at once. Blaser writes that

once we are able to identify and protect ontological differences from this domesticating gesture [of reducing other ontologies to cultural perspectives], we can get a better understanding of modernity (multiple and otherwise), for then we can fully recognize that there are other worlds - not cultures - that are different from the modern one but certainly not traditional.¹²⁰

Hence, the “border thinking” that Mignolo proposes can be interpreted as thinking within different ontologies or as using epistemologies from worlds that are distinct from European Modernity. Indeed, it is then possible to have “multiple modernities” because different modernities can exist within different ontologies and simultaneously be separate from European Modernity. At the same time, these plural modernities are also “alternatives to modernity” because they do not exist within the European paradigm and do not use the language of Europe’s modernity. Hence, “multiple modernities” or “alternatives to modernity” can contain certain aspects of European modernity without being “European” because they are emanating from ulterior ontologies. Therefore, I will argue that the BCM’s community programs were constructing an alternate modernity from the European one. The thesis will show that the BCPs are examples of “multiple modernities” and “alternatives to modernity” because the BCM’s ideology emanated from the periphery of European hegemony in apartheid South Africa.

V. Conclusion

These three bodies of literature aid me in explaining the approach that the BCM took to modernity. The literature on the BCM has generally focused on the movement as an African

¹²⁰ Blaser, 890.

nationalist project, and, where there has been literature on the BCM's development framework, it has often talked about the community programs from the perspective of European modernity. In contrast, I argue that the BCM had an ontological dimension that opposed European modernity. Literature on critiques of development conveys that European modernity and development are Eurocentric and colonial projects. At the same time, literature on political ontology posits that there exists multiple ways of being and knowing and they can occur simultaneously. Critiques of development and political ontology encourage social movements to engage in plural, diverse, and autonomous approaches towards "multiple modernities" and "alternatives to modernity." Drawing on these approaches, I will explore how the BCP's focus on locality, nonlinear interventions, and embracing contrasting ideologies are good examples of plurality and diversity.

The rest of the thesis unfolds as follows. Chapter three will historicize, contextualize, and situate how the BCM reached the point of generating ontological resistance. I will look at the antecedents that laid the groundwork for the movement to ultimately end up pursuing matters of ontology. Chapter four will give an in-depth analysis of why we should begin to understand Black Consciousness (BC) ideology as ontology and how BC created ontological resistance. In particular, I will explore how the BCPs rejection of European hegemony, thinking from alterity, and rejection of post-revolutionary societies contributed to ontological resistance. I will use primary and secondary sources that can give insight into the formation, foundations, and execution of the BC ideology and BCM organizations.

Chapter 3: Setting the Foundations for Ontological Resistance

I. Introduction

In this thesis I aim to answer the question, how can we better understand the BCM given that it was pursuing the psychological emancipation of black South Africans as opposed to pursuing a political takeover of apartheid South Africa? My argument is that the BCM can be better understood as a group that was rediscovering black ontology and creating ontological resistance to the apartheid state. To make this argument, I will first use this chapter to historicize, contextualize, and situate how the BCM reached the point of generating ontological resistance. I will look at the antecedents that laid the groundwork for the movement to pursue matters of ontology, which will be explained in the following chapter. In this chapter, I use documents such as testimonies, speeches, academic papers, journal articles and manifestos from the BCM to situate my argument that the movement: rejected the pursuit of any particular telos; challenged modernity as being synonymous with European civilization; focused their work on localities and communities as opposed to universalities and individuals. The chapter will unfold as follows: I will first look at how the BCM came to recognize the prevalence of European modernity in South Africa, then I will look at how the BCM began to articulate and distinguish black values against the background of European hegemony. These two steps laid important foundations for what I argue was, in essence, an ontological mission of Black Consciousness ideology.

II. Recognizing European Hegemony within Apartheid South Africa

The recognition of white supremacist hegemony in South Africa was a key first step in the BCM's creation of ontological resistance through assigning positivity to blackness. Black university students were central to building awareness on racial issues and creating the ideology

of Black Consciousness. The ideology of Black Consciousness provided a framework to counter European ideological hegemony in South Africa. In order to oppose European hegemony, black South Africans first had to be aware that this hegemony existed and that it had adverse effects on their lives. This section will illustrate how the ideas of “black” and “blackness” as defined by BC were pivotal in generating the recognition of European hegemony amongst black South Africans. I demonstrate how this dual recognition of the positivity of blackness and the domination of the European worldview helped to empower black people to authentically document their culture and history and showcase their agency.

The recognition of European hegemony in South Africa began with black university students who were involved in multi-racial student organizations. As discussed earlier, during the 1960s, Black South African students in the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS), a multiracial student organization, had found issue with the dominance of white liberal values within the organization. Although NUSAS had become a multiracial organization in 1945, it was still led and financed by white students, and where non-whites played a role in the organization, they tended to be overlooked by fellow white members.¹²¹ This led to black South African students feeling left out and tokenized by NUSAS. In addition, black students became frustrated that the organization often defaulted to white liberal values that believed reformation was what was needed for liberation as opposed to pursuing the more transformative demands that Black South Africans were proposing.¹²² In 1966, the University Christian Movement (UCM) was established as another multiracial voice against apartheid.¹²³ UCM was initially popular with black students, however,

¹²¹ Robert Fatton, *Black Consciousness in South Africa*, 1986, 65; Budlender, “NUSAS - Its Background and History,” 7.

¹²² Robert Fatton, *Black Consciousness in South Africa*, 1986, 64–65.

¹²³ Robert Fatton, 65.

they soon ran into the same problems of misrepresentation and underrepresentation that they had faced in NUSAS.¹²⁴ These grievances with multiracial organizations were key in allowing black students to begin understanding European hegemony in their society. Black students had quickly begun to realize that, while working within multiracial organizations, the approach often defaulted to the wishes of white liberal students. These experiences taught black students about white hegemony within multiracial organizations.

The recognition of white hegemony within multiracial organizations allowed black students to begin understanding the European hegemony within South Africa as a whole. Black students had learned early on what it was like to try and enact social change from the core of European modernity through their experiences with working against ideals of assimilation and integration in multiracial organizations. It was in these spaces that black students became conscious of European hegemony in their society and came to grasp that their activism was not simply against apartheid laws but the whole value system of white supremacy. Black students then wanted to share this new consciousness with their communities, hence the birth of the concept of Black Consciousness. I argue that this idea of creating consciousness within the black community was an important precursor to forming ontological resistance through empowering black people to begin countering the distortion of black identity by European hegemony.

Black university students were the vanguard of the BCM, and black students led the charge in convincing black communities to recognize European hegemony. As black students came to realize that their dissonance with multiracial organizations was due to the prevalence of white hegemony within the groups, they reached an important turning point.¹²⁵ They moved to form the

¹²⁴ Robert Fatton, 65.

¹²⁵ Robert Fatton, 66.

South African Students' Organization (SASO), where black students began to contemplate their existence within the white supremacist hegemony of apartheid South Africa. SASO was created in 1968 as an organization that allowed black South Africans to be at the forefront of the liberation movement against apartheid. It was from SASO that the philosophy of Black Consciousness (BC) was born. Thereafter, other organizations that followed BC philosophy emerged to form the BCM.

The establishment of SASO was not an entirely smooth process. There had been pushback both from white and black students who saw an exclusive black organization as keeping in line with apartheid's ideals. However, SASO proponents argued that not only were racial divisions already in existence in multiracial groups but that black unity was paramount for bringing the black communities into consciousness about the system they were living under.¹²⁶ In a December 1971 paper that Steve Biko wrote for a SASO leadership training course, Black Consciousness was described as

The realization by the black man of the need to rally together with his brothers around the cause of their oppression---the blackness of their skin---and to operate as a group in order to rid themselves of the shackles that bind them to perpetual servitude.¹²⁷

Biko illustrates that BC ideology firstly comprises of the notion of black unity. BC placed particular importance in the black South African population joining forces to mobilize against their joint suffering under apartheid. BC saw that all black people shared a common end goal, which was liberation from white supremacism. As the quote conveys, the point of unification was to be around blackness. BC aimed to leverage the common experience of blacks under the apartheid state as a way to bring people together.

¹²⁶ Pityana |, "Circular from Barney Pityana to SRC Presidents and Other Organisations," 4.

¹²⁷ Biko, *I Write What I Like*, 49.

While the above definition of BC provides us with a window into how the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) was hoping to liberate the black community from white supremacy, it also highlights that the notions of “black” and “blackness” were central to this liberation. The ideas of “black” and “blackness” were essential in allowing black people to begin reidentifying themselves on their terms. These ideas not only brought acknowledgement to the existence of European hegemony but also redefined blackness and black values in opposition to whiteness and white values. These actions allowed BC ideology to begin generating an ontological paradigm dictated by black people as it was already challenging European modernity’s understanding of who is black and who is not.

BC’s definition of blackness was in direct opposition to the European paradigm’s understanding of blackness, in particular, the Population Registration Act of 1950 which classified all South Africans into racial categories such as white, Indians, Coloreds, Africans, etc.¹²⁸. As stated earlier, to counter European hegemony, one first needed to be aware of its existence. The acknowledgement of oneself as “black,” as defined by BC, was simultaneously an acknowledgement of the white supremacist hegemony and of how it set itself as the standard to which black people should assimilate and integrate themselves into. One was not able to accept their experience of blackness without also accepting that it was demarcated by the dominant background of whiteness in apartheid South Africa. This means that blackness was in large part shaped by how whiteness viewed black people and their values. As black students began to contemplate the meaning of blackness, they ended up having to define who is a black person. BC

¹²⁸ Wren, “South Africa Scraps Law Defining People by Race”; “S. Africa Repeals Apartheid Basis”; “Washingtonpost.Com: South Africa Report.”

took on a unique definition of “black” which was highlighted in the SASO Policy Manifesto written in 1971. In this manifesto, black people are 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 realization of their blackness.¹²⁹

As this quote asserts, black people came to encompass all people who were oppressed under the apartheid state. This meant that Africans, coloreds, and Indians – three groups which were historically stratified by both the colonial and apartheid regimes – were viewed as having a common experience of oppression and were being asked to join forces. The decision to take such a broad approach to oppression and “blackness” caused some friction in South African society, especially amongst Africanists who believed that the term black should be solely reserved for Africans.¹³⁰ However, as the quote above conveys, BC thinkers saw blackness as the experience of being discriminated against by the state based on the color of your skin and this experience was not exclusive to black Africans. This was an important foundational step towards the creation of ontological resistance because BC was already challenging the racial stratifications of apartheid.

I posit that the step to include all persecuted groups under blackness allowed BC ideology to begin crossing over into matters of ontology. As BC was defying the racial separations implemented by apartheid and the Population Registration act of 1950, it had begun challenging an important ontological feature of European modernity. This feature being that there is an intrinsic difference in communities based on the color of their skin. However, BC was moving the marker of race and saying that the racial divisions offered by the European paradigm in the apartheid state are incorrect. Instead, it was saying that race is a matter of a white group, the “us,” rendering all

¹²⁹ Organisation, “South African Students Organisation,” 2.

¹³⁰ Robert Fatton, *Black Consciousness in South Africa*, 1986, 66.

other groups that do not fit in the definition of white as the “*other*.” Essentially, BC ideology was displacing the meaning of race from being supposedly based on inherent attributes to being a relational concept based on how ideas of whiteness obscure and oppress certain communities.

III. Rejecting Assimilation into Whiteness

The recognition of European hegemony in South Africa prompted the BCM to partake in a “quest for a true humanity” as a way for black people to realize themselves in the face of white supremacy.¹³¹ The idea of a “quest for true humanity” emerged in a 1971 paper, titled “Black Consciousness and the Quest for a True Humanity,” that Steve Biko wrote for a UCM mandated book on Black Theology.¹³² In this essay, Biko discusses racism and white supremacy as the source of the inferiority complex within the black population and offers Black Consciousness as a way to counter this inferiority complex and restore in the black person a sense of confidence and agency. I will explore how the “quest for a true humanity” using Black Consciousness ideology was pivotal in setting a precedent to reject integration and assimilation into the European paradigm.

Biko’s “quest for true humanity” problematized the normalization of whiteness. Apartheid had effectively created a racial hierarchy that rendered whiteness as synonymous with humanity and blackness with sub-humanity. This racial hierarchy could be seen in laws such as the Land Acts of 1913 and 1936 which designated 87% of the land to whites, the Group Areas Act of 1966 which segregated residential areas based on race, and the Population Registration Act of 1950 which classified all South Africans into racial categories such as white, Indians, Coloreds,

¹³¹ Biko, *I Write What I Like*, 87.

¹³² Biko, 87.

Africans, etc.¹³³ These laws determined “whether a person could vote or own land, where [they] could live, eat, work and relax and whom [they] could legally love and marry.”¹³⁴ In effect, white people were given access to better facilities, more resources, and more rights than non-whites.¹³⁵

Such laws affected the psyche of marginalized black South African communities by leading some to believe that white people received more privileges because there was something more intrinsically human in whiteness than in blackness.¹³⁶ Hence, some saw that the way to resolve the apparent lack of humanity in blackness was to pursue whiteness – that is to assimilate themselves into white society. Biko describes those pursuing assimilation as wanting to “run away from themselves and to emulate the white man.”¹³⁷ He was cautioning black people from trying to imitate white people as a way to regain their humanity. The BCM did not see that imitating Europeans was a viable path to liberation, rather it was seen as undermining the positivity of blackness. This caution is pivotal to understanding why the BCM was looking to build from the bottom-up as opposed to taking over the South African state. It was rejecting the push to emulate European modernity by building an autonomous world through its community programs.

The BCM had also “reserved the pejorative term ‘non-white’ to define those Africans, Asians and ‘Coloureds’ who collaborated with white authorities.”¹³⁸ The BCM defined a non-white as one whose “aspiration is whiteness but his pigmentation makes attainment of this impossible, then that person is a non-white.”¹³⁹ To the movement, ‘non-whites’ were those who

¹³³ Wren, “South Africa Scraps Law Defining People by Race”; “S. Africa Repeals Apartheid Basis”; “Washingtonpost.Com: South Africa Report.”

¹³⁴ Wren, “South Africa Scraps Law Defining People by Race.”

¹³⁵ Wren; “S. Africa Repeals Apartheid Basis”; “Washingtonpost.Com: South Africa Report.”

¹³⁶ Biko, *I Write What I Like*, 101.

¹³⁷ Biko, 49.

¹³⁸ Robert Fatton, *Black Consciousness in South Africa*, 1986, 32.

¹³⁹ Biko, *I Write What I Like*, 48.

attempted to integrate themselves into whiteness – that is, trying to embody white South African values – in order to achieve humanity.¹⁴⁰ In doing this, non-whites were seen as preserving white supremacy by participating in the myth that a black person needed to be accepted into white society to regain humanity.¹⁴¹ The conversation on non-whites set a precedent that allowed the BCM to reject the integration of blacks into white South African society and to challenge approaches that only called for the reformation of apartheid as opposed to a transformation.

IV. Challenging the Idea of Modernity

To fully understand the BC's foundations for ontological resistance, one must explore the values on which the ideology was based on. Setting an understanding of black values allowed Black Consciousness ideology to create a black ontology by, calling on black South Africans to think from difference and work on defining themselves through their understandings of the world as opposed to European ones. While doing so, the BCM was careful not to romanticize the African past by declaring a “return” to African beliefs and practices in a way that portrayed African culture as static and stuck in the past. In this section, I will look at what exactly were black values to BC thinkers and how they differed from European values.

Black ontology, like any other ontology, involves connecting ideas of the past, the present, and the future, albeit not in a necessarily linear manner.¹⁴² In the quest to rediscover the values of black communities, the BCM cautioned against essentializing and rendering static the customs and practices of black South Africans. In a 1972 article for a Black Community Program journal called

¹⁴⁰ Robert Fatton, *Black Consciousness in South Africa*, 1986, 59.

¹⁴¹ Robert Fatton, 32.

¹⁴² Staley, “Time and the Ontology of the Future,” 35.

Black Viewpoint, Njabulo Ndebele, a member of the BCM and BCP, wrote an article titled “Black Development” in which he contended,

customs and traditions are man-made, therefore they can be changed according to whether man continues to find value in them... Culture therefore is essentially dynamic. That is why the blacks must set about destroying the old and static customs and traditions that have over the past decades made Africa the world's human zoo and museum of human evolution. When customs no longer cater for the proper development of adequate human expression, they should be removed. Almost all the so-called tribal customs must be destroyed, because they cannot even do so little as to help the black man get food for the day.¹⁴³

In this quote, Ndebele is critiquing the adherence or attachment to customs, traditions, and beliefs that no longer serve black people in the present day. BC ideology wanted to give black people the freedom to realize and fulfill their potential based on their current reality, rather than holding on to practices that may no longer be congruent with their present situation. The BCM argued against a “return” to past customs because it did not allow black South Africans to define themselves based on their current experiences. Hence, part of destroying the “old and static customs” that Ndebele is speaking about is deconstructing the idea that the culture of black people only exists in the past and has no present expression. BC problematized the perception that African cultures are archaic and underdeveloped. This problematization challenges how European modernity places Europe at the end of the evolution spectrum, while, non-European communities are portrayed as playing catch up to Europe. BC was challenging the idea that African culture was lagging behind and that to reach modernity it needed to follow a linear progressive narrative set by Europe.

Black Consciousness warned against the idea of unchanging black communities that are waiting to be brought into modern times by Europe. This caution can be understood as a critique of how the European paradigm understands development and underdevelopment. BC was careful

¹⁴³ “Black ViewPoint - Black Development by Njabulo Ndebele | South African History Online.”

not to propose the idea of returning to black values because that would have aligned with ideals of underdevelopment, whereby, non-European societies are seen to be living in the past. In the 1971 paper, “Black Consciousness and the Quest for a True Humanity,” Biko wrote,

We must relate the past to the present and demonstrate a historical evolution of the modern black man. There is a tendency to think of our culture as a static culture that was arrested in 1652 and has never developed since. The ‘return to the bush’ concept suggests that we have nothing to boast of except lions, sex and drink. We accept that when colonisation sets in it devours the indigenous culture and leaves behind a bastard culture that may thrive at the pace allowed it by the dominant culture.¹⁴⁴

In this quote, Biko asserts that African culture in South Africa was largely viewed as having stopped evolving after the Dutch East India Company landed in 1652. The arrival of Europeans, and their subsequent domination over telling the African story, led to the disfiguration of African history, such that, African culture was likened to barbarianism and stagnation. Within this narrative, African culture could only evolve to the extent that Europeans permitted it. As a result, ideologies that declared a “return” to the past were inadvertently accepting the idea that African culture had stopped evolving and had no present manifestation. In contrast, Biko’s quote asserts that there is a modern black person, and their origin can be historically traced to show an ever-evolving culture. This idea of a modern black person that is separate from a modern European can be better understood from the perspective of multiple modernities. The BCM was affirming that modernity is not limited to Europe. Their assertion on modernity sets the foundation for ontological resistance because they are displacing the idea of modernity, which is often reserved for white people by European modernity, and using it to describe black South Africans.

As much as BC was showcasing that there is, in fact, a modern black person, they were also attempting to articulate what values this modern black person holds in the face of the dominant

¹⁴⁴ Biko, *I Write What I Like*, 95–96.

culture of Europeans. The BCM went into detail about which values were inauthentic to the black community, and, while doing so, they were also critiquing some European values. In the 1971 paper that Biko wrote for the UCM's book on Black Theology, he asserted that,

Ours is a true man-centred society whose sacred tradition is that of sharing. We must reject, as we have been doing, the individualistic cold approach to life that is the cornerstone of the Anglo-Boer culture. We must seek to restore to the black man the great importance we used to give to human relations, the high regard for people and their property and for life in general; to reduce the triumph of technology over man and the materialistic element that is slowly creeping into our society. These are essential features of our black culture to which we must cling.¹⁴⁵

Biko is arguing that one of the values that has lived on in black communities is human-centeredness. He asserts that this can be seen in the way black society had been rejecting the individualism of European society. He goes on to illustrate how human-centeredness is a value that black South Africans should embrace in the quest for liberation. He also demonstrates that not only was the BCM calling for the natural evolution of black values, it was also calling for the active refusal of European ones. In the quote, Biko affirms an end to the manner in which materialism and technology take precedence over humans – a trait he associates with Anglo and Boer culture. The BCM was acknowledging that Anglo-Boers civilization is not the only way to organize society. Instead, black people can organize societies in ways that relate to their principles.

I posit that the BCM's challenge to the idea of modernity can be interpreted as a search for "alternative modernities." BC ideology firstly established that black communities are modern and not stuck in the past. Secondly, BC ideology affirmed that, although modern, black communities were not modern in the same way that European communities are modern – for example, they rejected materialism. In this way, the BCM was asserting that their modernity is an alternative to

¹⁴⁵ Biko, 96.

the European model of modernity that does not proclaim any of the attributes of European modernity. Understanding BC from the perspectives of “multiple modernities” and “alternatives to modernity” allows us to see the movement as an ontological movement. The BCM is essentially saying that, yes, they are modern, not by the standards set by the European paradigm, but by their own standards which are equally as valid.

V. Understanding Welcomed versus Imposed Values

As the BCM pursued evolving their society based on their standards and principles, they had to grapple with the fact that ontologies do not exist in silos and do not remain untouched by one another. In light of this, BC ideology began to tackle how to work towards developing an authentic black paradigm without essentializing blackness as a whole. Ameliorating this tension would set the final foundation that allowed the BCM to generate a both/and mentality. This mentality allowed them to come to terms with the tensions that result from different and contrasting cultures coming together. On May 1976, Steve Biko served as a witness in the SASO/BPC trial of nine students charged with terrorism. These nine members of SASO and the BPC had been arrested in September 1974 for hosting a pro-FRELIMO rally to celebrate legitimization of FRELIMO, a Mozambican freedom movement, to the government of Mozambique.¹⁴⁶ The apartheid government argued that the celebration of Mozambican independence was a move to portray whites as oppressors and push Africans, Indians, and Coloreds towards a violent revolution, hence, terrorism.¹⁴⁷ All detainees were eventually found guilty. However, as the trial dragged on for two years, it became evident that the purpose of the court case was to try the BCM itself, not to try

¹⁴⁶ Biko, 99.

¹⁴⁷ “The Trial of SASO/BPC Detainees,” 3–4.

supposed terrorists.¹⁴⁸ As a result, Biko's testimony principally went over the philosophies of Black Consciousness and the practices of BCM organizations. In his testimony, Biko stated,

cultures affect each other, you know like fashions and you cannot escape rubbing against someone else's culture. But you must have the right to reject or not anything that is given to you.¹⁴⁹

In this testimony, Biko was recognizing an ideal similar to Escobar's assertion that the "notion of exteriority does not entail an ontological outside; it refers to an outside that is precisely constituted as difference by a hegemonic discourse."¹⁵⁰ This highlights that BC ideology was not "ontological outside of" or untouched by European modernity.¹⁵¹ They accepted that there will be brushing up against different ideologies, worldviews, and cultures. However, as a community, they should still have autonomy over deciding to what extent a different paradigm should inform their understanding of the world. As the BCM attempted to resolve the tension of how far cultures should interact and inform each other, they were simultaneously setting a precedent of how far ontologies should do the same.

In continuation of resolving this tension, the BCM was not looking to have black values become the sole definition of South African society. Doing so would be a form of essentialism as it would ignore the reality of the European presence in South Africa. What BC wanted was for the black paradigm to have its place in South African society, for black values to genuinely feature as a distinct reality in the South African experience and not become engulfed or assimilated into the hegemonic European world. As Biko mentioned during his testimony for the SASO/BPC trial of the May 1976 trial, the BCM was supporting the

¹⁴⁸ Biko, *I Write What I Like*, 99.

¹⁴⁹ Biko, 130–31.

¹⁵⁰ Escobar, "Worlds and Knowledges Otherwise," 186.

¹⁵¹ Escobar, 186.

proportionate contribution [of African values] in the joint culture...to accommodate the African experience. Sure, it will have European experience, because we have whites here who are descended from Europe. We don't dispute that. But for God's sake it must have African experience as well.¹⁵²

As the testimony demonstrates, there was an understanding that the European world had rubbed against the world of blacks and that this was now an undeniable reality. Hence, the question became more of how can the black reality adequately feature in South African society because European culture at the time was dominant. The issue with this dominance is that non-European ways of being and knowing were excluded from the South African narrative. Therefore, BC saw that, yes, the European experience is a reality of South Africa, and also, yes, so is the black experience. The foundations for their ontological resistance were being set by the fact that the BCM was learning how to embrace a both/and mentality. Since the black and European experience where both present in South Africa, the BCM had to learn how to allow different and seemingly contrasting worldviews exist alongside each other without necessarily removing the tension.

To illustrate the two above points, Biko offers the case of the shebeen to demonstrate how the BCM was trying to resolve the tensions of different cultures interacting and informing each other. A shebeen was an unlicensed bar or club that illicitly sold alcohol to Africans during apartheid. Black people were neither afforded bars to drink at nor could they drink in bars designated for white people - thus, the shebeens. In the testimony from the 1976 SASO/BPC trial, Biko explains that

At the moment we [blacks] exist sort of as a limb of the white culture. You know we form what we must call a subculture, precisely because of a situation that forces us to behave in a certain way. For instance if you look at the sub-culture of drinking at a shebeen, now this is very common in black society, you know; everybody drinks at a shebeen; I drink at a shebeen. Now it cannot be traced back per se to our tribal life because we didn't have shebeens in our tribal life.

¹⁵² Biko, *I Write What I Like*, 131.

But it is a sub-culture arising out of the fact that we don't have bars, we don't have hotels where we can drink, so what do we do?¹⁵³

Similar to the idea that blackness could not exist without white supremacy, this quote conveys that there was a fear that black culture could become defined by its interactions with white culture. The testimony conveys that the BCM was aware of how apartheid principles dictated that the black paradigm did not exist in and of itself. Rather, it became a representation of what a lack of European modernity looked like. As a result, the existence of shebeens is contingent on the existence of white supremacy. While drinking at the shebeen was a popular pastime, it did not originate as a practice that black people had wished for themselves. There had been some level of external imposition at the beginning. The black community, however, eventually claimed shebeen culture for itself. The point of this message on shebeens is two-fold. First, BC ideology understood cultures did not exist in vacuums. They saw that it was inevitable for cultures to affect and influence each other as shown in the case of shebeens. Second, while BC ideology accepted that cultures do rub off each other, they were also aware that one culture can to dominate the customs and practices of another culture and leave it no opportunity to accept or reject certain attributes. Thus, the dominated culture becomes an appendage of the dominating culture. This distinction was important in setting the stage for ontological resistance. The movement had to come to terms with what constitutes a “normal rubbing of cultures” and what constitutes “domination.” This question is pivotal because it enabled the BCM to embrace the impurity of cultures by using a both/and mentality that allows for contrasting ideas to work alongside each other.

¹⁵³ Biko, 130–31.

VI. Conclusion

In conclusion, the BCM realized that, not only was European hegemony present in apartheid South Africa, it also denied them the opportunity to develop a black paradigm. The BCM's definition of "black" and "blackness" required black people to recognize that there was a white supremacist system under which they were oppressed. The European paradigm believed that various groups such as Indians, Coloreds, and Africans should be treated differently, however, the BCM countered this notion by asserting that within the BC paradigm these groups were, in fact, similar and shared a common vision. At the same time, however, to be a member of an oppressed group was not simply enough. Black people were those who identified themselves as such and joined in the struggle for freedom. In the BCM, blackness came to entail an awareness of one's oppression and a willingness to mobilize towards liberation. The BCM's definition of blackness illustrated that blackness could not exist without white supremacy. Since the blackness was centered around unity in oppression, BC was asserting that European hegemony - that is, white supremacy - had to have existed before blackness could come to exist. This assertion is necessary because there can be no unity in oppression if there is no oppression to begin with. Therefore, to call oneself black as per BCM's criteria, one had to recognize that European hegemony existed. Recognizing and naming European hegemony was an important first step for creating the ideological base that allowed the BCM to begin using positivity to define blackness.

The conversation on values showcased that the BCM was aware that their current position in South African society was at the "periphery" of the "self-identification" of Europe.¹⁵⁴ In doing so, the BCM was actively challenging the European ideas of modernity and its imposed culture. As a result of these realizations, BCM began to push for a culture that authentically represented

¹⁵⁴ Dussel, "Eurocentrism and Modernity (Introduction to the Frankfurt Lectures)," 65.

black people without reference to European hegemony. This was an important foundational move for informing the BCM on how to go about the rediscovery of black ontology without falling back to the European modernity paradigm.

The BCM had realized that not only was European hegemony present, but it denied them the right to develop a black paradigm. Black reality soon became adjunct to that of Europe as it could not be defined without recourse to what it lacked of the European reality. The BCM took a key step by, firstly, affirming their modernity and, secondly, attempting to draw a line between the subtle differences of what was a welcomed rub off with other cultures and what was a domination by other cultures. This an important step in framing the positivity of black values. The BCM was able to define blackness in terms of the presence of black values such as locality, community, nonlinearity, and both/and mentality, as opposed to being defined in terms of the absence of European values.

As established in the literature review, European modernity often imposes itself as a relational point to the customs and practices of non-European cultures. The BCM recognized these externally imposed aspects of their culture – such as shebeens – that were born out of their relationality to European hegemony. This recognition pushed them to begin delineating which aspects of their practices were based on their values versus which ones were based on European values that affected their practices. This realization prompted black people to begin searching for an authentic evolution of black culture which will be discussed in the next chapter. I contend that demarking these subtle differences on what practices come from black values and which ones come from white values was instrumental in allowing the BCM to embrace black culture while also accepting the presence of the European experience in South Africa.

Chapter 4: On Ontological Resistance

I. Introduction

In this chapter, I aim to showcase how the Black Consciousness Movement's (BCM) approach to counteracting white supremacy in South Africa can be understood as ontological resistance. Literature on the Black Consciousness Movement often defines the program of the BCM as a form of African nationalism in opposition to apartheid. However, African nationalism exhibited plurality and place-centeredness, therefore, it is not enough to interpret the BCM using an umbrella term of African nationalism as it does not have a singular definition. I propose that the BCM can be better understood as an ontological resistance group than as an African nationalist group. The BCM recognized that the suppression of blacks was the foundation of European hegemony. Therefore, it was not possible to try to integrate into European values or to try to adapt their systems - that is, capitalism or socialism- to benefit blacks. Instead, the BCM began to pursue a world that would be primarily cultivated according to the values and needs of black communities.

Thinking about the movement's approach as a form of ontological resistance showcases that the BCM was not accepting the European paradigm as intrinsically superior and then figuring out a way to fit themselves within it. In contrast, they acknowledged that European hegemony was not going to work for them and decided that they need to nurture for themselves a paradigm that could serve black people. For this reason, it was not paramount for the BCM to align themselves with one of the post-revolutionary societies being declared at the time. Instead, they focused on evolving the value systems of black communities and allowing black communities the freedom to guide their evolution based on their needs. The BCM was more concerned with the natural evolution of black communities, as opposed to pronouncing a post-revolutionary society that would limit the possibilities for these communities to a singular telos. BC ideology saw that it was

necessary to transcend the limitations of a post-revolutionary society and affirmed that black people have the potential to discover other ways of doing and being that are authentic to them.

To explain how the BCM's focus on black values and black culture was a form of ontological resistance, I first have to explain my understanding of ontology. As stated earlier, I borrow Mario Blaser's three-layer definition of the word "ontology." First, according to Blaser, ontologies are made up of "assumptions about what kinds of things do or can exist, and what might be their conditions of existence."¹⁵⁵ I will demonstrate that the BCM was contemplating the condition of black people in apartheid South Africa and evaluating the authenticity of this condition in the face of white supremacy. In doing so, the BCM was working through issues of universality, individualism, European hegemony, reformation, telos, and linear progressive narratives – all aspects that we see in European modernity. Secondly, Blaser writes that ontologies are the "practices and interactions of both human and non-humans. Hence, ontologies perform themselves into worlds."¹⁵⁶ To demonstrate Blaser's second definition on ontology, I explore how the practices and interactions of black students in multiracial organizations evolved into the creation of a distinct world – that is, the BCM. This world will be illustrated using the Black Community Programs– that is, *Black Review*, the Zanempilo Community Health Center, and the Njwaxa Leather Home Industry. The programs will mainly be demonstrating the practices and interactions of humans. Lastly, Blaser suggests that ontologies are "enactments involving discursive and non-discursive aspects [stories and myths]."¹⁵⁷ European modernity told stories of who is modern and who is backward. It told stories of an ultimate goal of development and what was necessary to achieve it. Whereas, the BCM was looking to subvert this hegemonic discourse

¹⁵⁵ Blaser, "Political Ontology: Cultural Studies without 'Cultures'?", 877.

¹⁵⁶ Blaser, 877.

¹⁵⁷ Blaser, 877.

of European modernity. I will explore how the BCM was enacting its discourse on the differences between black and white value systems in order to distinguish what was an authentic black paradigm. I will use the BCPs and BC ideology to demonstrate how the BCM achieved values of localism, community, both/and mentality, building from the bottom up, and non-linearity.

Using this definition of ontology, I argue that BC's articulations on black culture and black values were at its core enacting ontological resistance. In this chapter, I use documents such as testimonies, speeches, academic papers, journal articles, and manifestos from the BCM to help make my argument and to demonstrate the discursive elements of their worldmaking endeavors. I organize this data into five sections. The first one introduces the Black Community Programs (BCP) as an ontological approach. The second section looks at how rejecting post-revolutionary societies indicated that the BCM was refusing telos, linearity, and universalism. The third section looks at how the BCM, through a both/and mentality, embraced the rubbing of cultures while challenging the totality of European modernity. The fourth section looks at how the BCM pursued autonomy against a background of reformation and integration. The last section looks at how rejuvenating the alterity challenged European hegemony by encouraging black people to think, innovate, and document black history and culture from the margins.

II. Black Community Programs

The Black Community Programs (BCP) were of particular importance in the pursuit of deconstructing white value systems and authentically evolving black communities. The BCPs were programs to conscientize the masses, affirm their capacity for self-reliance, and dynamize them towards liberation.¹⁵⁸ These programs were one of the more tangible places where one can see how

¹⁵⁸ Robert Fatton, *Black Consciousness in South Africa*, 1986, 98.

BC enacted its ideology and values into practices and then into worlds. In an article from the 1974 edition of the *Black Review*, a journal that was part of the BCP, the Black Community Programs were described to have the goal of initiating

principles of self-help and self-determination through inculcating, fostering, directing, maintaining and extending self-reliance in the black community, by encouraging the people in the urban and rural areas to deal with their needs in setting up an appropriate agency or organization with a structure capable of meeting these needs.¹⁵⁹

The article portrays that the BCPs were geared at empowering black communities to build a society that answered their needs. The BCPs provided the potential for self-realization by allowing people to build a world based on their own understandings and by encouraging black South Africans to look within and facilitate their own growth and evolution. Thus, even within the apartheid state, black communities had already begun to assert a form of autonomy through these community programs. The Black Community Programs created medical centers to cater for populations that had been ignored by apartheid, they created leather industries to provide economic opportunities to those who were left out of nationwide economics, and they were educating black communities on the systems in place that had led to their marginalization through journals and magazines.¹⁶⁰ In doing all these activities, the BCP was creating an autonomous world wherein black people were engineering their society, pursuing their desires, catering to their needs, and realizing their worth in and of themselves.

The Black Community Programs eventually became a world for black people. Projects such as the *Black Review*, the Zanempilo Community Health Center, and the Njwaxa Leather Home Industry created distinctive black communities that controlled their economics, their social life,

¹⁵⁹ “Chapter Sixteen,” 165.

¹⁶⁰ Hadfield, *Liberation and Development*, 2016.

and their local politics.¹⁶¹ In these spaces, black people relied on one another to achieve their socio-economic and political needs.¹⁶² By doing projects like the BCPs, the BCM was resisting the apartheid state in a manner that did not abide by European modernity's dominant assumptions of a movement. I will demonstrate in this chapter that the Black Community Programs were one example of how the BCM's values of locality, community, both/and mentality, and building a new world, all became practices that ultimately "performed themselves into worlds."¹⁶³

III. Post-Revolutionary Societies: BCM's Refusal of Telos, Linearity, and Universalism

Black consciousness was concerned with taking up black values in their contemporary form as a way of enacting social change from below. This concern meant recognizing that black culture was not held static in some pre-European past, was modern, and had elements of other cultures as discussed in chapter three. It also meant that the BCM not only opposed integration into the European world but also wanted to avoid romanticizing any future black society. The BCM's ideas for the future were more concerned with value systems as opposed to economic or political systems – such as, socialism, nonracialism, nonracial capitalism, or nonracial socialism - that often featured as central tenets in other liberation movements of the time.¹⁶⁴ Biko explains this point in his 1972 interview with American political scientist Gail M. Gerhart,

There are some leftist whites who have attachment to say the same rough principles of post-revolutionary society, but a lot of them are still terribly cynical about, for instance, the importance of value systems which we enunciate so often from the black consciousness angle. That it is not only capitalism that is involved; it is also the whole gamut of white values systems which has been adopted as standard by South Africa, both whites and blacks so far. And that will need attention even in a post-revolutionary society...So your problems are

¹⁶¹ Hadfield.

¹⁶² Hadfield.

¹⁶³ Blaser, "Political Ontology: Cultural Studies without 'Cultures'?", 877.

¹⁶⁴ Mngxitama, Alexander, and Gibson, *Biko Lives!*, 25.

not solved completely when you alter the economic pattern to a socialist pattern.¹⁶⁵

As the interview with Gerhart conveys, the BCM was reluctant to declare a post-revolutionary society – that is, a vision of what South Africa would look like after apartheid. This interview affirms that the BCM was neither seeking to take over the current system and attempt to create change from above nor was it keen to declare an endpoint based on European markers of modernity such as industrialization, urbanization, development, or mass consumption.¹⁶⁶ Rather, its main focus was building from the bottom without any given endpoint. The BCM's programs were oriented towards restoring a sense of pride and community within black South Africans. This restoration primarily involved the deconstruction of white value systems and the construction of black value systems to create the conditions necessary for multiple worlds to emerge.

Psychological emancipation was of paramount importance to BC, and, as such, they argued that even if blacks received other forms of emancipation – such as desegregation - without psychological emancipation, they would still be in bondage. As this section proceeds, I will look at how rejecting post-revolutionary society was a rejection of European modernity. BC ideology emphasized the importance of black people first realizing the truth inherent in their values and letting that truth guide them as opposed to being guided by a telos of development set by the European paradigm.¹⁶⁷ I will then evaluate the approaches the BCM took instead of declaring a post-revolutionary society and how these were akin to ontological resistance.

To understand why the rejection of white value systems by the BCM is a matter of ontology we must first understand what post-revolutionary societies were being proposed at the time and

¹⁶⁵ Mngxitama, Alexander, and Gibson, 34.

¹⁶⁶ Crossman, "A Brief Guide to Modernization Theory."

¹⁶⁷ Biko, *I Write What I Like*, 49.

how they extolled white values. While the BCM was hesitant to advocate for a post-revolutionary society, other anti-apartheid movements, such as, ANC, PAC, and CP, all had certain visions of what a post-revolutionary society would look like.¹⁶⁸ According to Biko in the 1972 Gerhart interview, the main visions being voiced at the time were,

little nuances about post-revolutionary society, others opting for socialism, others opting for a nondescript type of nonracialism. You might say there is nonracial capitalist, nonracial socialist. Others might be opting for some kind of bantustan¹⁶⁹ type of thing... or the adoption of a kind of black consciousness within the type of amorphous situation we have now.¹⁷⁰

In this interview, Biko goes on to explain why the idea of a post-revolutionary society was problematic to the cause of liberation. The BCM argued that by setting particular aspirations along the same lines as their counterparts – that is, nonracialism, capitalism, and socialism – they would be accepting some basic premises of white value systems.

Taking each of the ideological positions in turn, Biko discussed the failings of their visions in terms of post-revolutionary societies. Biko described nonracialism as a white liberal fallacy. He argued against the notion that to fight against apartheid, blacks must “have a white man next to [them], for the sake of depicting a non-racial society.”¹⁷¹ He criticized nonracialism for being based on the white liberal premise that the integration of blacks into European modernity is a viable solution.¹⁷² Biko also criticized blind devotion to socialism. He disapproved of what he saw as the Communist Party’s “adherence to Moscow’s wishes [rather] than to the normal evolution of the

¹⁶⁸ Mngxitama, Alexander, and Gibson, *Biko Lives!*, 27.

¹⁶⁹ Bantustans or homelands were territories that the apartheid government set up to keep blacks out of urban areas and national politics. They were areas designated by ethnicity and black people were given political rule over these areas.

¹⁷⁰ Mngxitama, Alexander, and Gibson, *Biko Lives!*, 25.

¹⁷¹ Mngxitama, Alexander, and Gibson, 26.

¹⁷² Mngxitama, Alexander, and Gibson, 26.

movement toward social change.”¹⁷³ He referred to this adherence as the “so-called socialist crap” because it was based on the premise that the European paradigm was inherently superior and that there was a certain linear approach to becoming modern. Hence, black South Africans need only ensure “their observance of a strict code of discipline” to achieve the “ideological purity” of socialism, as opposed to, letting the movement evolve and change naturally to answer the needs of black communities.¹⁷⁴ Lastly, Biko also criticized capitalism and “the individualism which is the hallmark of the capitalist approach.”¹⁷⁵ He feared that black South Africans would accept the premises of individualism and materialism if they did not interrogate capitalism.¹⁷⁶ Linking back to the Blaser’s definition of ontologies as “enactments involving discursive and non-discursive aspects [stories and myths],” the ideas of nonracialism, socialism, and capitalism are all based on certain stories and myths.¹⁷⁷ These stories maintain that European society is the only modern one, that the desired telos is European development, and that modernity must be achieved by following a unilinear path set by Europe. However, the BCM was acutely aware of the problems that came with accepting these stories and myths without having first interrogated them. Hence, they began to counter European modernity by choosing not to espouse a telos, not to follow a linear path of evolution, all while, thinking globally and acting locally.

As Biko described in the previous quote, the problems of racism in apartheid South Africa would not end in a post-revolutionary society as long as the question of values was not addressed. European modernity encompassed notions such as socialism and capitalism, and these ideologies did not challenge the unilinear model to civilization, the singular telos, and the universal approach

¹⁷³ Mngxitama, Alexander, and Gibson, 27.

¹⁷⁴ Mngxitama, Alexander, and Gibson, 27.

¹⁷⁵ Biko, *I Write What I Like*, 42.

¹⁷⁶ Biko, 42.

¹⁷⁷ Blaser, “Political Ontology: Cultural Studies without ‘Cultures’?,” 877.

that Europe proposed. Therefore, I argue that the BCM's refusal to enact the "discursive and non-discursive aspects" of nonracialism, socialism, and capitalism was concurrently a refusal of European modernity. BC wanted to depart altogether from the European paradigm and release the potential for black people to define themselves in and of themselves and explore all their possibilities without being yoked into conformity by white supremacy. Thus, the BCM hoped that black communities would not partake in pursuing an ultimate goal of modernity nor a linear progression of development nor a one-size-fits-all approach. In the 1971 paper on Black Theology for the UCM Biko contended that,

Black culture above all implies freedom on our part to innovate without recourse to white values. This innovation is part of the natural development of any culture. A culture is essentially the society's composite answer to the varied problems of life. We are experiencing new problems every day and whatever we do adds to the richness of our cultural heritage as long as it has man as its center.¹⁷⁸

Here, Biko affirms a pivotal goal of Black Consciousness ideology. BC wanted any societal change that would occur to be a transformation that came from within the black society and not one that was externally imposed. Their vision of change minted that black culture and values, as opposed to European culture, should be at the core of black society. Biko was proposing that black people do not need to look to European culture for answers – something that European modernity often suggests by featuring Europe as a blueprint for the development of other societies. Rather, BC posits that the answers are found within the community and in the everyday activities of a people. One such example is the Black Community Program of the Njwaxa Leather Home Industry. The BCM had identified that there was vast economic hardship in this village and that residents were heavily reliant on remittances from their male family members that had migrated to work in urban

¹⁷⁸ Biko, *I Write What I Like*, 96.

areas.¹⁷⁹ The women who were left behind often made and sold beadwork as a way to make ends meet, however, this was not providing enough economic sustenance.¹⁸⁰ The Ciskei – which is was a Bantustan in apartheid South Africa – was home to a variety of home industries due to the government's plans to use this homeland for industrial projects.¹⁸¹ The BCP saw an opportunity to take over a leatherwork home industry and utilize the skills of local bead-workers in creating leather products that could be sold in other areas and bring in more income for families.¹⁸² The home industry quickly evolved into a factory - though this was never the original aim – and provided much needed economic relief for residents, all while, working independently from the apartheid state.¹⁸³ Additionally, women and youth were heavily involved in the factory and were also the leaders of the factory which was uncommon at the time.¹⁸⁴

Njwaxa is an example of how the BCM was innovating to solve the varied problems of life within black communities. Whereas European modernity often has an ultimate goal of industrialization or mass production for economic projects, Njwaxa was never looking to industrialize or mass produce their leather or beadwork. Rather, the project was geared towards providing community members with economic agency. Additionally, whereas European modernity often looks to pronouncing a universal and then trying to adapt it to a locality, the BCP's leatherwork project was place-based, local, and was buttressing the skills of beadwork and the presence of home industries that were very specifically available in the village of Njwaxa. Throughout, this project there was no particular call to declare a post-revolutionary society. It was

¹⁷⁹ Hadfield, *Liberation and Development*, 2016, 123–52.

¹⁸⁰ Hadfield, 123–52.

¹⁸¹ Hadfield, 123–52.

¹⁸² Hadfield, 123–52.

¹⁸³ Hadfield, 123–52.

¹⁸⁴ Hadfield, 123–52.

simply the community, alongside the BCM and the BCP, identifying particular challenges that the village was facing and coming together to come up with a solution that utilizes and evolves the skills already available in the community to solve the problem. Hence, a project like Njwaxa's leather home industry does not fit into the European paradigm whereby a universal telos is pronounced alongside particular linear steps to achieve it. Njwaxa's leather home industry was subverting European hegemony by challenging its "assumptions about what kinds of things do or can exist, and what might be their conditions of existence."¹⁸⁵ It did so by showcasing the existence of an alternate African reality that does not abide to the paths and goals set by European hegemony.

IV. Embracing the "Impurity" of Culture: Employing a Both/And Mentality

A central tenet of Black Consciousness ideology was the rejection of European hegemony as the norm in South African society. Black Consciousness recognized and problematized the normalization of European values as dominant culture in South Africa. At the same time, BC also accepted the fact that the European experience was present in South Africa because Europeans lived there as well. They also accepted the fact that due to the presence of European culture, there will be some influencing between black culture and European culture. As discussed in chapter three, the BCM had to contemplate what constitutes a "normal rubbing off of cultures" and what constitutes "domination." In answering this question, the BCP's Zanempilo Community Health Center was able to employ a both/and mentality. Zanempilo allowed different and contrasting worldviews on medicine to exist alongside each other without having to remove the tension.

¹⁸⁵ Blaser, "Political Ontology: Cultural Studies without 'Cultures'?", 877.

Since BC formed the basis of the BCM, I must first restate what exactly is Black Consciousness. In a December 1971 paper that Biko wrote for a SASO leadership training course, Biko briefly summarizes the goal of Black Consciousness,

It seeks to demonstrate the lie that black is an aberration from the 'normal' which is white. It is a manifestation of a new realization that by seeking to run away from themselves and to emulate the white man, blacks are insulting the intelligence of whoever created them black.¹⁸⁶

Biko conveys that it was important for the BCM to make clear that whiteness was not the standard for humanity and that blackness was not a deviation of humanity. In doing so, BCM was rejecting an idea that was central to European modernity – that is, Europeans are the norm and all other groups are departures from this norm. I argue that the assertion that whiteness is not a benchmark for society is a form of ontological resistance as it is directly challenging an important foundational belief of the Modern European paradigm. However, it is also important to go back to chapter three's discussion which saw that the BCM was contemplating how to distinguish between the rubbing off of cultures versus a total imposition. This created a tension between not essentializing African culture by emphasizing a desire to reenact the African past in modern times, while, at the same time, not letting the European experience become all-encompassing or all-determining.

The Zanempilo Community Health Center of the BCP is a way in which the BCM resolved the tension of not emulating white values while at the same time acknowledging that cultures rub off each other. The Zanempilo community health center was initially built to give primary care to the village of Zinyoka.¹⁸⁷ The health center, like the leather home industry, quickly grew to carry out more medical activities than initially intended as Zinyoka villagers and visitors from other

¹⁸⁶ Biko, *I Write What I Like*, 49.

¹⁸⁷ Hadfield, *Liberation and Development*, 2016, 91–122.

villages began to frequent the clinic.¹⁸⁸ In fact, it was seen more like a hospital than a clinic as it didn't close and had a lot of equipment and facilities.¹⁸⁹ Zanempilo provided a great source of income for villagers, in particular, youth and women.¹⁹⁰ It was also run by a woman which was uncommon at the time.¹⁹¹

In terms of dealing with the tension between emulating white values and acknowledging that cultures rub off each other, the BCP's Zanempilo health center was a prime example. The clinic had decided to use western medicine and not incorporate traditional African medicine or healing practices in their work.¹⁹² However, at the same time, BCP members in Zanempilo wanted to evaluate black people's health in its totality which meant exploring the context in which black South Africans were living – socioeconomic and traditions - and how this affected their general wellbeing.¹⁹³ Therefore, “part of respecting a person and not separating the body from a person's beliefs and socioeconomic context was recognizing that Xhosa healing traditions were important to patients.”¹⁹⁴ BCP health workers at Zanempilo “constructively engaged [in] Xhosa philosophies and traditions.”¹⁹⁵ This meant that although they only used western medicine at the clinic – since the activists had been trained in western medicine at university and believed it was the most effective – they still used ideas of traditional healing practices such as looking at a patient holistically and consulting them on other parts of their lives - such as home, work, community, or spiritual life – in order to prevent or treat illnesses.¹⁹⁶ Additionally, many Zinyoka residents used

¹⁸⁸ Hadfield, 91–122.

¹⁸⁹ Hadfield, 91.

¹⁹⁰ Hadfield, 91–122.

¹⁹¹ Hadfield, 91–122.

¹⁹² Hadfield, 91–122.

¹⁹³ Hadfield, 91–122.

¹⁹⁴ Hadfield, 116.

¹⁹⁵ Hadfield, 116.

¹⁹⁶ Hadfield, 116.

both traditional healing practices alongside the clinic's western medicine and this did not pose a point of contention for BCP practitioners in the health center.¹⁹⁷

Zanempilo illustrates how the BCM was accepting the presence of the European experience in South Africa and engaging with it, yet, allowing space for the African experience and not letting the European perspective become all-encompassing. In other words, they were employing a both/and mentality where two different and seemingly contrasting paradigms could exist together without having to necessarily remove the tension. This is important because, as noted in the literature review chapter, European modernity is an ontology that obfuscates other ontologies by rendering the European worldview as the standard for understanding the reality of the world, while, non-European worldviews are relegated to being cultural perspectives on nature.¹⁹⁸ Contrastingly, BC ideology is challenging the idea that there is such a thing as a normal or standard way to perceive reality. By allowing for traditional healing practices to work alongside western medicine, the BCP is proposing that reality as understood and lived through a black lens is valid in and of itself, therefore, black people should not default to accepting the white lens as the only truth in an attempt to rid themselves of the labels of abnormality that have been placed on them.

V. Pursing Autonomy Amid Calls for Reformation and Integration.

BC activists had recognized that white liberals' notion of integrating black South Africans into white society – as was the case in many multiracial organizations such as NUSAS or UCM – was maintaining the status quo of apartheid because it took for granted that all other communities aspired to be included in whiteness. BC activists, by contrast, did not want to be assimilated into

¹⁹⁷ Hadfield, 116.

¹⁹⁸ Blaser, "Political Ontology: Cultural Studies without 'Cultures'?", 889.

white society because, in doing so, they would be giving merit to some central tenet of European values that had made apartheid possible - one of which is the idea of white supremacy. Instead, the BCM determined that the way forward would have to involve a radical change to the fabric of society rather than minor alterations or integration. I contend that this type of radical transformation is ontological resistance because it is exploring how to build a paradigm in which black people can actualize their desires and satisfy their needs. In the December 1971 paper that Biko wrote for a SASO leadership training course, he stated that,

The interrelationship between the consciousness of the self and the emancipatory program is of paramount importance. Blacks no longer seek to reform the system because so doing implies acceptance of the major points around which the system revolves. Blacks are out to completely transform the system and to make of it what they wish.¹⁹⁹

Transformation meant that there would be a radical change in the character of South African society, including the abolishment of the guiding principles that led to apartheid – such as the idea that European society was inherently superior to all other societies. The BCM's rejection of reforming the existing system was a rejection of the entire paradigm of European modernity. As demonstrated in the quote, reform of the system would have meant that black South Africans largely accepted major points of the apartheid but wanted to add some tweaks and slight modifications. In contrast, BC activists did not wish to accept any central tenants of European hegemony that were prevalent in the apartheid system. Rather, they sought the complete transformation of apartheid values. As the quote illustrates, a transformation meant the complete deconstruction of the values surrounding apartheid and then the construction of a new system based on the values black South Africans espoused. We can recognize this approach as ontology

¹⁹⁹ Biko, *I Write What I Like*, 49.

because BC is not trying to add an African spin to a fundamentally European ontology. By contrast, BC was saying, let us start from scratch and see what world we create for ourselves.

The Black Community Programs are a good example of how the BCM was creating a new world within apartheid South Africa. The Black Community Programs showcased the autonomy that the BCM was instilling within black communities instead of trying to take over the systems of South Africa. For example, before the Zanempilo community health center was created, black people from the rural village of Zinyoka had to travel to urban areas to receive care from white doctors who would only see fifteen black patients on Mondays and Thursdays.²⁰⁰ Instead of trying to take on a top-down approach where the BCM would gain control over or lobby the state to change the laws so that black patients are seen more frequently and treated better, the BCM decided it would be easier to build a center and take a bottom-up approach instead. The center was locally and community-focused in that it began as a primary care clinic which is what the Zinyoka community was initially lacking and then went on to deal with maternity and childbirth as residents began to demand more of such services.²⁰¹ The Black Review which was a journal publication of the BCP is also another example of how the BCM practiced autonomy and building from the bottom. Instead of looking to take over and reform existing white and multiracial publications to include an authentic black perspective, the BCM saw it was easier for them to create publications that, dealt uniquely with the experiences of black people, analyzed news from a black perspective, did research based on black issues, and allowed for black artists and writers to share their art.²⁰² Similarly, the leather home industry was another autonomous project of the BCP. The BCM had

²⁰⁰ Hadfield, *Liberation and Development*, 2016, 94.

²⁰¹ Hadfield, 91–122.

²⁰² Hadfield, 91–122.

decided to not try and take over or reform white factories.²⁰³ Rather, they built their own factory that was black-owned and run.²⁰⁴ All these cases showcase why it is important to understand the BCPs as working outside the European paradigm. In European modernity, it is assumed that a revolutionary movement wants to take power and implement changes from the top-down. However, the BCPs were saying that they would rather build another world from the bottom up. This is similar to the sentiment expressed by a famous autonomous group in Chiapas Mexico called the Zapatistas. Arturo Escobar pays particular attention to the Zapatistas and how they engage in ontology by generating pluriverses, autonomy, and making a new world. Like the Zapatistas, the BCM's community programs are helping to make "a world where many worlds fit" but not through conquering the world, rather, by making it anew.²⁰⁵

BC was also strongly against the idea that rediscovering the humanity of blacks could be done by simply integrating black and white communities. The issue with integration was that black South Africans were expected to assimilate into white society and not vice versa. Integration into the apartheid system would have meant approving the foundations of European hegemony that shaped South African society. As long as the centrality of European values remained uncontested, the myth of black inferiority would continue to thrive. In the 1971 paper that Biko wrote titled "Black Consciousness and the Quest for a True Humanity," he stated,

The concept of integration, whose virtues are often extolled in white liberal circles, is full of unquestioned assumptions that embrace white values. It is a concept long defined by whites and never examined by blacks. It is based on the assumption that all is well with the system apart from some degree of mismanagement by irrational conservatives at the top... It is an integration in which the black man will have to prove himself in terms of these values before

²⁰³ Hadfield, 91–122.

²⁰⁴ Hadfield, 91–122.

²⁰⁵ Escobar, *Designs for the Pluriverse*, xvi; Savyasaachi and Kumar, *Social Movements*.

meriting acceptance and ultimate assimilation, and in which the poor will grow poorer and the rich richer in a country where the poor have always been black.²⁰⁶

Biko was asserting that simply merging black and white communities would neither interrogate nor eliminate the fundamental principles of apartheid society that promoted the exploitation of those who have been pushed to the margin and that mandated white South Africans as gatekeepers of humanity and judges of morality. As the quote illustrates, Biko and BCM were arguing that white people were ultimately the ones deciding who amongst the “alterity” would be accepted into the hegemonic discourse of European modernity in South Africa.²⁰⁷ Biko states that the wealth of the white South African society was defined in relation to the impoverishment of black society. Black South Africans would never be fully permitted into white society because their marginalization is pivotal to the self-definition of apartheid society – that is, the “us” at the core exists only if there is an “other” at the margin that it can measure itself against. I argue that the BCM’s choice to reject integration into white society is a form of ontological resistance because the BCM saw that it was too difficult to change apartheid and instead opted to create a new world.

VI. Rejuvenating the “Alterity”

After rejecting the European paradigm as the norm, the BCM then had to review what constituted of an authentic black paradigm. In doing so, BCM’s approach can be understood as thinking from the “alterity” of European modernity or “border thinking” away from European modernity.²⁰⁸ Remember that, according to Escobar, to think from the “alterity,” a society first has to recognize that it is at the periphery of European modernity and that, from this periphery, it can

²⁰⁶ Biko, *I Write What I Like*, 91.

²⁰⁷ Escobar, “Worlds and Knowledges Otherwise.”

²⁰⁸ Escobar, 183–87.

begin to make a transformative change that is not shaped by the European core.²⁰⁹ In January 1971, Biko wrote a paper for a conference of national student organizations that stated,

Wherever colonisation is a fact, the indigenous culture begins to rot and among the ruins something begins to be born which is condemned to exist on the margin allowed it by the European culture. It is through the evolution of our genuine culture that our identity can be fully rediscovered.²¹⁰

This quote showcases two things that BC ideology asserted. Firstly, they asserted that black culture was existing at the margin of European culture. Secondly, they asserted that evolution from this margin will aid blacks in the “quest for a true humanity.” Biko uses the word “rediscovered” to assert that black culture still exists albeit marginalized or pushed to the “alterity.” Biko and the BCM thought black culture could evolve from the margin and discover once again the humanity of the black person. I argue that in the process of leading this rediscovery, the BCM also offered a way for black ontology itself to be discovered. This call to rediscover black identity from the margins was a radical move, especially in the face of apartheid which had distorted the existence of black identities. This idea of rediscovering and evolving genuine black culture is, in essence, part of the transformative and radical change that Biko and BC were advocating for.

The BCP’s publication, *Black Review*, played an integral role in dealing with the distortion of black identity by apartheid. The *Black Review* was a project to conscientize the masses, provide information and news to black communities, and carry out research on topics relevant to black people.²¹¹ The publication meant that black writers, editors, researchers, artists, poets, and playwrights no longer needed to seek approval from white or multiracial publications, instead, they could turn to *Black Review* as a platform to share their thoughts, feelings, and art in its true form.

²⁰⁹ Escobar, 183–87.

²¹⁰ Biko, *I Write What I Like*, 70.

²¹¹ Hadfield, *Liberation and Development*, 2016, 90.

The BCM was using *Black Review* as a tool for black people to innovate, to document black culture and history, and to portray black people with agency.²¹² Additionally, the publication was not geared towards earning profit and was available at public libraries and after-school centers where they could be used for informal teaching and studying.²¹³ *Black Review* was also used as the basis for several student and community discussion groups.²¹⁴ All this was aiding the BCM in its goal of community and of restoring dignity and self-esteem to black South Africans. *Black Review* departs from the European paradigm's assumption that the prime aim of a social movement is a political or economic takeover as opposed to sharing art and preserving history and culture.

Although black culture was relegated to the periphery of Europe, it is from this periphery that the BCM saw that change would occur. The BCM's exclusion from the core of apartheid society is what empowered the movement to transform the system. Escobar refers to this process as, "unfreezing the radical potential for thinking from difference and towards the constitution of alternative local and regional worlds."²¹⁵ In the 1971 paper that Biko wrote for the University Christian Movement's book on Black Theology, he asserted that,

Being an historically, politically, socially and economically disinherited and dispossessed group, they [blacks] have the strongest foundation from which to operate.²¹⁶

This quote asserts the importance of working from the periphery. It allows black people to begin thinking from a core of black values rather than of European values. As the quote suggests, blacks can think from difference precisely because they have been excluded from the European narrative. The stakes for transformation were very high because the European paradigm had been historically

²¹² Hadfield, 87–89.

²¹³ Hadfield, 87.

²¹⁴ Hadfield, 87.

²¹⁵ Escobar, "Worlds and Knowledges Otherwise," 183–84.

²¹⁶ Biko, *I Write What I Like*, 68.

oppressive to blacks. Biko's words give evidence to the idea that the BCM embraced its position at the border of European modernity. The movement used its "alterity" as a base to engineer a radical transformation and "unfreeze the potential" for a paradigm that evolves genuinely out of black culture.²¹⁷ The potential that BC philosophy was hoping to unfreeze represented ontological resistance. They were moving away from the center of European modernity and attempting to reimagine their culture from a position of integrity to the values of black communities.

Although the BCM established the idea of thinking from difference as a necessary tool for transformative change, BC ideology did not emphasize a specific type of economic, political, or social outcome. Instead, the BCM's idea of change lay mainly in the freedom of the black person to choose and to articulate the changes they wanted to see. In the same 1971 paper, "Black Consciousness and the Quest for a True Humanity," Biko asserted that,

Freedom is the ability to define oneself with one's possibilities held back not by the power of other people over one but only by one's relationship to God and to natural surroundings. On his own, therefore, the black man wishes to explore his surroundings and test his possibilities---in other words to make his freedom real by whatever means he deems fit. At the heart of this kind of thinking is the realization by blacks that the most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed.²¹⁸

The quote suggests that true societal change will happen once communities and individuals are the architects of their own lives. Note, Biko does not articulate any particular end goal. This once again demonstrates that the BCM was more concerned with psychological emancipation. They wanted black people to see the truth inherent in their values and allow the evolution of these values to guide them, as opposed to, being guided by the linear progressive narrative set by the European paradigm. In these words, Biko calls for blacks to transform the system by enacting changes that

²¹⁷ Escobar, "Worlds and Knowledges Otherwise," 183–84.

²¹⁸ Biko, *I Write What I Like*, 68.

are based on the values of their communities. Black Consciousness posited a transformation dictated by black people's ways of knowing and understanding the world. This paradigm shift represented a rejection of the white supremacy of the apartheid state. The BCM argued that, as long as the minds of black people are yoked into believing that European values are inherently right, blacks will remain in bondage. Hence, radical change had to involve psychological emancipation so that blacks can see the "truth inherent in their stand."²¹⁹ The change that BC envisaged was freedom and humanity. Freedom and humanity signified the ability for blacks to realize and judge themselves based on their values. It was the ability to enact change from within their communities. In this way, thinking from the margins or from the alterity was a key element of BCM resistance.

VII. Conclusion

Thinking of the BCM and its community programs as ontological resistance showcases the importance of moving away from dominant culture when trying to understand social movements. The BCM opens up innumerable possibilities and avenues for marginalized groups to pursue their needs and desires through its attempts to make sense of the black South African reality. Although ontologies do not exist in silos, and will always inform each other, it remains up to each community to choose which aspect they would like to keep or reject from the options given to them. Thinking about social movements in this manner can help us expand our definition of success. Movements like the BCM which may not have been seen as initially successful because they did not overturn a government or lobby legislators to repeal laws, can begin to be understood as having been operating from a completely different reality where such goals were not markers of success.

²¹⁹ Biko, 49.

Conclusion

Black Consciousness therefore, takes cognizance of the deliberateness of God's plan in creating black people black. It seeks to infuse the black community with a new-found pride in themselves, their efforts, their value systems, their culture, their religion and their outlook to life.

– Steve Biko²²⁰

In writing this thesis I was looking to answer the question, how can we better understand the BCM given that it was pursuing the psychological emancipation of black South Africans as opposed to pursuing a political takeover of apartheid South Africa? To answer this question, I argued that the BCM could be better understood as an ontological resistance movement that grappled with overcoming European modernity and rediscovering its ontology. I explored how the BCM was working to resolve European hegemony in South Africa and the subsequent prevalence of European modernity values such as universality, individualism, white supremacy, telos, and linear progressive narratives. I offered that the BCM and its community programs were able to subvert European hegemony and open up the possibility of alternate African realities through its values of localism, community, both/and mentality, building from the bottom up, and non-linearity. These alternate African realities were then illustrated by the BCM's community programs (BCP).

The case chapters of my thesis looked at how Black Consciousness (BC) ideology set the foundations for the BCM to begin enacting ontological resistance to the apartheid state. BC ideology was able to do four things that allowed the BCM to set particular precedents that helped them tackle ontological questions later on. These four things included: recognizing European hegemony in apartheid South Africa and making this recognition a prerequisite to being considered

²²⁰ Biko, 49.

black; rejecting the assimilation into whiteness as a way to rediscover the humanity of blackness; challenging the totality of Europe's modernity and asserting the modernity of black South Africans; and, grappling with welcomed versus imposed values as cultures rub off each other.

All these conversations had set the foundations for the BCM to go on and generate ontological resistance through their community programs. The journal *Black Review* allowed for the BCM to rejuvenate the alterity by countering the distortion of black identity by European hegemony. Black people were able to share their art, writing, plays, poetry, and research through *Black Review*. This platform served as a way for black people to authentically document black culture and history and showcase the agency of black people. In terms of working through welcomed versus imposed values, the BCM embraced the impurity of cultures and employed a both/and mentality to work through the tension of conflicting and contrasting ideologies coming together. This was seen in the Zanempilo community health center where activists primarily used western medicine, however, they still embraced some aspects of traditional healing practices like looking at a patient holistically. They also found no issue with patients seeking traditional medicine alongside western medicine. The BCM's rejection of declaring a post-revolutionary society encompassed the rejection of following a linear progressive narrative towards a telos of modernity as described by the European paradigm. The Njwaxa Leather Home Industry showcase how the BCM was able to reject the universal approach of European modernity and instead focus on the needs and skills of communities and localities. Lastly, all three community programs demonstrated how the BCM pursued autonomy amid calls for integration and reformation. Essentially, in the famous words of the Zapatistas, the BCM and its programs saw that changing this world was too difficult, hence, it was easier to build a new one.²²¹

²²¹ Savyasaachi and Kumar, *Social Movements*.

Nevertheless, I think it is important to not romanticize or sensationalize the BCM. Indeed, the BCM still faced internal challenges as a movement such as in the sphere of gender where women of the BCM are often cited to have experienced sexism.²²² The gendered dimensions of BCM have been well articulated by its women members and leaders, such as Biko's long-time partner Mamphela Ramphele.²²³ Women of the BCM described feeling marginalized by, the male-centered language of BCM documents, the perception of women as nurturers, and the pressure to become "one of the boys" in order to be accepted to the ranks.²²⁴ Hence, this thesis is not suggesting that the movement was perfect, rather, it is examining how the ontological approach of the BCM helped it overcome the challenges it faced. Thus, we eventually see some of the gendered tensions being alleviated in the Black Community Programs where women - who at first struggled with gaining community trust – began to inspire respect and support from the various communities.²²⁵ In all three of the community programs explored in this thesis, women had become directors of the programs. And, in Njwaxa and Zanempilo in particular, women were in the majority.²²⁶ The community-centeredness and locality of these programs allowed women to build trust amongst locals.²²⁷ Likewise, the bottom-up approach and both/and mentality of these programs allowed women to deconstruct certain traditions that disenfranchised women and then construct more equitable practices, while, at the same time embracing local customs.²²⁸ The reason for my intervention on gender is to acknowledge that the BCM was not a flawless movement and to showcase that ontological resistance was also instrumental in overcoming internal challenges.

²²² edited by Andile Mngxitama, *Biko Lives!*, 14.

²²³ Hadfield, *Liberation and Development*, 2016, 119–20.

²²⁴ edited by Andile Mngxitama, *Biko Lives!*, 13–14.

²²⁵ Hadfield, *Liberation and Development*, 2016, 114.

²²⁶ Hadfield, *Liberation and Development*, 2016.

²²⁷ Hadfield, 114.

²²⁸ Hadfield, 119–20.

In a 1984 publication of Frank Talk – a political journal of the Azanian People's Organization that was committed to BC ideology, one finds the following quote:²²⁹

Biko lives!!! Two words slashed across a ghetto wall. A phrase that haunts the nights of South Africa's rulers. Reactionaries and opportunists of every stripe hope and pray that it will disappear under a rain of blood and the white-wash of reform. But it remains, bold and powerful; not a tired and worn out slogan but a battle cry of a generation whose hopes and aspirations are for revolution, and end to all exploitation and oppression.²³⁰

The quote indicates that the ideas of the BCM and its activists have outlived the movement and its founders who were either been killed or banned by the turning of the 80s. In contemporary South Africa, the legacy of the BC ideology continues to survive even after the banning of BC organizations in the late 70s and the untimely death of Biko at the hands of the apartheid government.²³¹ I believe there is an opportunity to further the research done in this thesis by exploring: what are the legacies and afterlives of the BCM in contemporary South Africa; how have these afterlives manifested; in what ways could these legacies change if the BCM is interpreted as an ontological movement?

Even further, in uncovering the ontological dimension of BC ideology and the BCM, I came to the question, had Biko lived longer, or had the ideas of the BCM been understood in the way that I am proposing them here, as a fundamental critique of Western Modernity's episteme could our basic understanding of social movements in Africa have changed? As a result, this thesis will hopefully inspire scholars to review other African social movements, both present and past, from an ontological lens. This could also be an opportunity to put decolonial and post-colonial African scholars in conversation with ontology. African thinkers – such as Achille Mbembe,

²²⁹ Digital Innovation South Africa, "Frank Talk."

²³⁰ edited by Andile Mngxitama, *Biko Lives!*, 1.

²³¹ "The Ideology of the Black Consciousness Movement | South African History Online."

Valentin Yves Mudimbe, Thandika Mkandawire, Wole Soyinka, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Mariama Ba, Ousman Sembene, Micere Mugo, Issa Shivji, Mahmood Mamdani, Chinua Achebe, Amina Mama, Samir Amin, and founding members of the Tanzanian Gender Networking Program (TGNP) – have long made important interventions on European hegemony and it would be very worthwhile to explore these interventions from an ontological lens. In doing so, we can hopefully unveil how other African movements, activists, and thinkers were and are, in the words of the Zapatistas, helping to create “a world where many worlds fit.”²³²

²³² Escobar, *Designs for the Pluriverse*, xvi.

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