

Acting Out Ideas:

Performative Citizenship in the Black Consciousness Movement

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ABSTRACT: This paper introduces the concept of ‘performative citizenship’ to account for the manner in which the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM), and in particular its charismatic leader Steve Biko, transformed a collection of relatively abstract philosophical ideas into concrete political practice. We outline how the BCM challenged the psychological internalisation of white supremacy and asserted citizenship claims through a variety of performative techniques, many of which explicitly and implicitly reiterated earlier rights-based claims both in South Africa and abroad. We show how this took place within a remarkably restrictive context, which on the one hand constrained performances, but on the other augmented their dramatic efficacy. The paper makes an argument about the performance of counter-power, showing how whilst the apartheid complex retained its command over economic, military, and political power, it struggled to control the social drama that was unfolding on the cultural plane, therefore losing its grip on one key element of ideological power. Finally, the paper also makes a methodological contribution to reception studies by showing how researching the reception of ideas exclusively through the spoken or written word neglects other modes through which ideas might find expression, especially in contexts of pervasive censorship and political repression.

Keywords: citizenship; social movements; apartheid; performativity; South Africa; Steve

Biko

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people more frequently act their way into a new way of thinking than think their way into a new way of acting

- SASO Leadership Training Programme, 1972.

Much has been written about citizenship in apartheid South Africa, and for good reason, since the topic offers an unsettling case study in the annexing of citizenship rights for the exclusive enjoyment of a privileged and racially-determined minority. Fanon had spoken of the Arab in colonial Algeria as ‘an alien in his own country’ (1969: 53), and his phrase aptly describes the predicament of the Black population under apartheid. Although racialised laws preceded apartheid proper, after 1948 when apartheid became official policy with the coming to power of the National Party, and up until the early 1980s, a whole raft of segregationist and discriminatory legislation was introduced, the majority of which was only gradually repealed during the late 1980s and early 1990s.² A great deal of what had previously been *de facto* became *de jure* during this period, and additional laws restricting the rights of the non-White population even further were also brought into effect. The quantity of discriminatory legislation introduced was staggeringly large and differentially regulated almost all aspects of South African life, from one’s ability to vote and buy property, to one’s freedom to move throughout the country unabated, or have sexual relationships with whom one desired. This mass of legislation may at first glance appear to demonstrate the totality of the power structure of the apartheid state, yet it might also be read as a successive set of legal defences aimed at protecting the notion of ‘separate development’ from the multitude of everyday challenges that South Africans brought against it.³ In this sense, the abundance of repressive legislation might be taken as an indicator not of the monolithic nature of state power in South Africa during this period, but in fact of the ongoing resistance to such

² The ANC’s 1943 proposed Bill of Rights demonstrates how citizenship demands had become the key focus of resistance even before apartheid became official policy.

³ This is not to suggest that the state was unwilling to continually introduce new legislation as and when repression demanded it. Indeed, as the so-called ‘Sobukwe Clause’ (a clause in the General Law Amendment Act no. 37 of 1963) makes clear, the government were prepared to change legislation simply to suppress a lone individual identified as posing a threat. This specific clause was contrived with the sole purpose of extending the Pan Africanist Congress leader Robert Sobukwe’s prison sentence indefinitely, whilst the broader detention law of which it was a part was introduced in order to, in the infamous words of B J Vorster—then Minister of Justice, later Prime Minister—keep dissidents locked up until ‘this side of eternity’.

authority, and the state's struggle to quiet it. One key area in which this struggle was occurring during the late 1960s and 1970s was within the arena of ideological power, in which conflicts over the symbolic meanings of South African racial politics were being fought.

Weber's political sociology is the most obvious source for arguments over the manner in which different forms of power and authority have evolved alongside the development of social complexity and differentiation (Weber, 1946: 77-128; [1922] 1978: 215-216), and in a strongly Weberian manner, Michael Mann has more recently provided a global history of power on the basis of a fourfold ideal-typical schema of ideological, economic, military, and political power (2012: 1-33). Although the forms of struggle outlined in this essay were concerned ultimately with winning political recognition, the battles themselves were in fact fought within the realm of ideology, expressing themselves through an assortment of performative means. Various theorists have focussed upon the way in which power is performed, and perhaps most prominent among them has been Clifford Geertz. Geertz offered thick cross-cultural descriptions of power as a performed spectacle, in which authority is maintained through its being routinely dramatised to those over whom it is exerted (e.g. 1980; 1983: 121-146). Paying attention to these dramatised aspects of power is clearly important since it demystifies a central mechanism through which power—such as the 'charismatic authority' that Weber had earlier described—operates and is sustained. It also draws our attention to the common manner in which power is wielded in practices as diverse as religious ritual, royal pomp, and staged political spectacle, revealing how the 'gravity of high politics and the solemnity of high worship spring from liker impulses than might first appear' (Geertz, 1983: 124). A growing literature in recent cultural sociology has also been interested in the performance of power, offering even more autonomy for the cultural element than Geertz himself allowed, and often using this perspective to better explain the fortunes of enormously powerful and iconic political leaders (e.g. Mast, 2012; Alexander & Jaworski, 2014).

Much of this concern with the performance of power has, however, so far been directed towards dominant power, with less acknowledgement of the fact that there is 'no power without potential refusal or revolt' (Foucault, 1979: 253). Whilst theorists of the performance of power often acknowledge the performative significance of resistance in passing (e.g. Geertz, 1983: 122-3), with certain notable exceptions (e.g. Alexander, 2006; 2011), less attention has been paid to how this

dynamic of counter-power is performed,⁴ and especially when this performance takes the specific shape of citizenship claims. This paper contributes towards correcting this oversight, through an analysis of the performative counter-power harnessed by the Black Consciousness Movement in 1970s South Africa. Before we begin our analysis however, we will first elaborate a little more clearly what we mean by ‘performative citizenship’.

The concept of citizenship is often claimed to have emerged some time during the sixth century BC under the reforms of the Athenian statesman Solon, and it seems important to note that from its inception, and in fact throughout its subsequent development, the idea has carried with it—one might even argue, relied upon—the concomitant idea of exclusion. This exclusion has not only been about the barbarians outside the city walls or across the river, mountain, or sea but has also been directed towards internal residents; as is often noted, in ancient Athenian democracy, the citizens ruled not only over themselves, but also over women, children, slaves, and metics.

In T. H. Marshall’s classic lecture on the emergence of ‘social citizenship’ he stated that ‘I shall be running true to type as a sociologist if I begin by saying that I propose to divide citizenship into three parts’, which he then proceeded to label ‘civil’, ‘political’, and ‘social’. In the case of apartheid, all three of these notions of citizenship—even the ‘civil citizenship’ that Marshall claimed emerged earliest, and which he identified as ‘the rights necessary for individual freedom—liberty of the person, freedom of speech, thought and faith, the right to own property and to conclude valid contracts, and the right to justice’ (1950: 10)—were to a greater or lesser extent, and via more or less formal means, denied to the racially-circumscribed majority of the population. As a state, apartheid South Africa can therefore be accurately described as embodying ‘white supremacy’ understood as the ‘systematic and self-conscious efforts to make race and colour a qualification for membership of the civil community’ (Fredrickson, 1981: xi).

In this paper we focus on a mode of citizenship that lies outside of Marshall’s purview, and which was actively laid claim to by black anti-apartheid activists, rather than officially granted to them by the state. Working with a definition of citizenship as meaning a status of specific rights and duties

⁴ This is partly a consequence of the fact that the dominant Anglophone approach to the kinds of insurgent social movements that might embody counter-power was originally formed in a relatively structuralist mould (Goodwin & Jasper, 1999), even if some of its most celebrated proponents did eventually turn to the centrality of performance (e.g. Tilly, 2008).

through which a political community is constituted in respect to those outside such a community, we have chosen to call the claims to such a status that we discuss here ‘performative citizenship’. With this term (as distinct, for instance, to the ‘performance of citizenship’), we hope to draw attention to the manner in which the successful performance of such claims simultaneously manifested a sense of substantive belonging, rights, and indeed duties too, whether or not the state formally acknowledged the validity of such demands in law. The acting out of such citizenship, in other words, did not merely express something, as would be the dominant connotation with the term ‘performance’, but in fact *did something*. The performances we identify were not merely articulations of an underlying state of affairs, but forms of social action and symbolic communication, aimed at bringing about interventionist reorderings of the political landscape.

As well as this distinction between ‘performance’ and the ‘performative’, we are also working therefore, with a distinction between the *symbolic* and the *legal* realms, whereby achievements in the former are understood to hold a substantive political reality and significance, independently of whether or not they find themselves translated into official-sanctioned gains in the latter. Indeed, whilst the state was undoubtedly successful at suppressing, criminalising, and almost destroying the BCM through legislation, imprisonment, banning orders, violence, and even murder, they failed to adequately receive the BCM’s performative messages, let alone respond to them on the symbolic level, leaving a volatile imbalance in the system of symbolic exchange which subsequently erupted in various episodes of political violence from 1976 onwards. For this reason we argue that although the state was successful in retaining control of political, economic, and military power for almost two decades following the height of the 1970s BCM, there were emergent signs that it was struggling to retain control of the social drama that was unfolding on the cultural plane and progressively eroding its ideological legitimacy.

This is not to say that the apartheid regime did not itself employ performative politics. Aside from the obvious function of maintaining economic and political power for the minority white population, the apartheid legal structure was also involved in symbolic communication aimed at reshaping political realities. This operated both through the legislation of what came to be called ‘petty apartheid’: the rules affecting everyday existence in segregating almost all forms of communal life (hospitals, beaches, park benches, trains, ambulances, schools, etc.), as well as through more informal forms of separation that evolved (e.g. different queues at butchers’ shops). Whilst arguably inessential

to the material requirements of the apartheid economy and political order, the enactment of this everyday division served as an ongoing performative reminder of difference and hierarchy. Our point, however, is that the state was less successful in controlling this performative dimension - it was, after all, in large part the symbolic consequences of 'petty', everyday apartheid that inspired such strong revulsion both internally and abroad, and helped galvanise (after too long a delay) international support for the anti-apartheid struggle. In this context, it becomes less surprising that movements like the BCM focused their attention on the performative and counter-performative in the way in which it did.

Whilst the state itself was not engaging in 'performative citizenship' as such, there seems to be no reason to assume that this concept is only applicable to subordinate groups, and the emergence of an insurgent citizenship of the excluded. The concept may be just as useful for illuminating the politics of 'post-citizenship' movements too (Jasper, 1999), including those intent on fighting against the extension of rights to others. The highly dramatised protest activities of white supremacist groups such as the AWB (*Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging*) for instance, which emerged during the height of the BCM's operations in the early 1970s, were arguably engaging in their own particularistic and exclusionary politics of performative citizenship. For this reason, although our focus in this article is on the performative ways in which an excluded group went about making citizenship claims, the concept ought not to be treated as referring exclusively and by definition to a set of strategies available only as 'weapons of the weak' (Scott, 1985).

Discussing the merits of moving from a 'vertical' view of citizenship which, like Marshall, understands citizenship as fundamentally a relationship of entitlement between an individual and the state, to a 'horizontal' view which instead stresses the importance of relationships *between* citizens, Naila Kabeer writes that 'in situations where the state has proved consistently unresponsive to the needs of its citizens, it is through the collective action of citizens, particularly those who have been disenfranchised by the prevailing regime, that a more democratised vertical relationship can be established or restored' (Kabeer, 2005: 23). The sense of substantive belonging performed by the social movement discussed in this paper is likewise, we contend, well-conceived as an achievement of both horizontal intra-citizen action, as well as a project aimed towards the building up of collective psychological inner-citizen consciousness. Nevertheless, the performances we identify did not dismiss the importance of engaging in symbolic exchange with the state as well, and should therefore be

understood as addressed to four primary audiences.⁵ Firstly, those who enacted the performances themselves, because playing a certain role was conceived as helpful in building confidence in comfortably occupying that role and therefore raising one's consciousness; secondly, others within the Black population who might be inspired, both politically and personally, by the performances they witnessed ('witnessing' was increasingly occurring during this period through the development of a mass circulation press aimed at Black audiences); thirdly, the White liberals from whom the BCM intended to wrest back leadership of the struggle for Black emancipation in South Africa; and finally, the state itself, in its various manifestations in the form of police officers, prison guards, politicians, lawyers, judges, etc.⁶

Even if one leaves aside the enormous issue of the lack of universal franchise in apartheid South Africa, the example of the Bantustan policy hopefully illustrates the reason why the topic of citizenship, in a more formal sense, has been of such importance in studying apartheid. Though the policy of determining homelands was based upon the earlier creation of 'reserves' in South Africa at the beginning of the twentieth century, the policy was pursued far more vigorously under the Malan and Verwoerd governments during the 1950s (Giliomee, 2003: 487-542). In 1970, under the government of the Nazi-sympathiser B. J. Vorster, the Bantu Homelands Citizenship Act came into effect, establishing a central plank in what came to be known as 'grand apartheid' i.e. apartheid aimed less at regulating everyday life through segregating amenities and facilities, and more at managing the separation and disenfranchisement of whole populations via the creation of separate 'homelands' within the country's own borders.

This Act aimed to effectively denaturalise the Black population of South African citizenship, forcing every African member of the country's population into adopting the citizenship of a traditional

⁵ Blee and McDowell (2012) stress the need for more research not only on social movements' identification, construction, and assessment of their audiences, but also on the manner in which projected messages are received by these audiences. This is an area we do not cover in this paper, but the implication of Blee and McDowell's intervention is that since social movement activity is fundamentally dynamic and relational (e.g. McAdam et al., 2001), we would expect the perceived success or failure of this reception to have an iterative effect upon the social movements' own ongoing performances.

⁶ Obvious important secondary audiences whose significance was identified by the BCM (e.g. Black Review, 1973; 1974) included the governments and citizens of other states within the international system, especially those that had investment or trade interests in the country or diplomatic relations with it and who could therefore exert pressure by placing economic or arms embargoes on South Africa, boycotting its products, or isolating it politically. Eventually, due to a compound of forces well beyond the BCM's sole influence, all such external pressures were exercised.

tribal ‘homeland’, or ‘Bantustan’, the definition, location, and size of which was determined by the state, with the proposal that such populations should then be ‘repatriated’ to their ostensible ‘homelands’. This was in one respect a cynical policy of ‘divide and rule’, aimed at pushing the African population, who constituted around 75% of the total inhabitants of South Africa, into just 13% of the least fertile land, cursed with inadequate amenities and often non-contiguous with the other isolated islands that made up a particular purported ‘homeland’. It aspired to transform a threatening ‘racial’ majority into a series of manageable ethnic minorities.

Mamdani describes how this ‘closeting of subject populations in a series of separate containers, each under the custody of a native authority’ (1996: 49) had been a well-rehearsed practice throughout the continent of Africa during the colonial period, but most importantly for our concerns here however, was its goal (never in fact met) of entirely excluding the majority population from South African citizenship. This aim was in fact transparently expressed by the government at the time. During a debate at the House of Assembly in 1978, Connie Mulder, the Minister of Plural Relations and Development—the politician responsible for the administration of the Bantustan policy—notoriously explained to the House that:

If our policy is taken to its logical conclusion as far as the black people are concerned, there will be not one black man with South African citizenship [...] and there will no longer be an obligation on this Parliament to accommodate these people politically (House of Assembly, Debates, col. 579: 7. 2. 1978).

It was therefore not at all hyperbole when the South African sociologist van Zyl Slabbert described the goal of the policy, as ‘a massive exercise in social engineering aimed at denationalising the majority of South Africa’s citizens’ (1987: 212). Historically speaking, stripping eight million people of citizenship rights was an audacious aspiration. Its timing was also shocking, for at precisely the same moment that African populations elsewhere on the continent were experiencing citizenship for the first time through winning liberation from Belgian, British, French, or Portuguese colonial rule, South Africa was intent on charting precisely the opposite route.

As we have mentioned however, the kinds of citizenship being discussing here are formal, juridico-political modes of citizenship (i.e. citizenship as a *status*), yet in recent years citizenship studies have become concerned with defining ‘citizenship’ in more expansive terms. As Isin and Turner point

out, the ‘modern conception of citizenship as merely a status held under the authority of a state has been contested and broadened to include various political and social struggles of recognition and redistribution as instances of claim-making, and hence, by extension, of citizenship’ (2002: 2). It is within this newer and broader conception of citizenship that we wish to introduce and develop the notion of performative citizenship in this article. Whereas traditional political citizenship can only ultimately be *given* by the state, performative citizenship, as we understand it here, can, in indeterminate situations, be *taken* and *constructed* in the absence of any authoritative ratification.

Isin (2008) has used the notion of ‘acts of citizenship’ to differentiate along similar lines between citizenship as something that is instantiated in *acts*, as opposed to citizenship as a *status* or a set of relatively durable dispositions (a *habitus*). Whilst sharing certain aspects of Isin’s definition, we find the more enduring and stable connotations of ‘performative citizenship’ more satisfactory in dealing with our empirical material, in its signalling that such performances are ongoing, cumulative, and mutually reinforcing dramatic gestures, rather than discrete breaks from one’s evolving *habitus* (ibid.: 18). In fact, on one level the BCM can be understood as a direct effort towards reshaping the *habitus* of Black political subjects so that the acts that sprung (rather than creatively broke) from such embodied structures, were not only *perceived* by those that witnessed them as authentic and spontaneous, but in a sense actually became such. What we are trying to get at here was that BC was not a movement that encouraged a discrete set of expressive political acts, but rather one that attempted to engender an all-encompassing ‘way of life’ (as the 1971 SASO manifesto put it), aimed at restructuring precisely those (ultimately plastic, though relatively durable) dispositional modes of thought, distinction, and action that Mauss, Bourdieu, and others, captured under the term ‘*habitus*’. Key to this effort were the movement’s leadership training seminars and so-called ‘formation schools’, which aimed, at least in part, towards reshaping those self-damaging dispositions acquired through socialisation within an officially racist society, and in the process aspired to the literal formation of new subjects.

We also see performative citizenship as distinct from ‘acts of citizenship’ in that the scripts that performative citizenship enacts, whilst improvised, are never written from a blank sheet. Rather, such performances innovate on the basis of shared and pre-established constellations of meaning, narrative forms, and symbolic structures – what Durkheim called ‘collective representations’

(Durkheim, [1912] 2001). Such representations are composed of ‘symbols having a common intellectual and emotional meaning for all members of the group. They reflect, on probing, the history of the group, i.e. its collective experience over time’ (Turner, 1982: 54). If performative citizenship did not draw upon these representations, they would not only fail to find performative success but would moreover simply fail to be understood. Performative citizenship, as we understand it, only makes sense (at least in accordance with their script-writers’ intentions) within cultures that are able to interpret it coherently. Audiences must possess the cultural resources to decode the actors’ encodings (Hall, 1973), a fact which re-emphasises Clifford Geertz’s point that culture is necessarily public, because so too is meaning (Geertz, 1973: 12). Since comprehension relies upon shared understandings, specific performances are therefore certainly creative ‘acts’, as Isin understands them, but in their very creativity, such acts always involve reworkings of established traditions, and creativity can only take place to the extent that it does so through building upon, reacting against, subverting, or consciously breaking with previously established and understood collective representations.

In a context of widespread state-organised repression, performative citizenship gained particular salience because it became one of the only visible ways – in some cases *the only* – in which Blacks were able to exercise political authority within the boundaries of the law (e.g. Pityana, 1992; Turner, 1976: 3036-38). In a situation in which many were handed banning orders which ruled out any act of speaking out or expressing one’s views in writing, the reliance on a publicly available repertoire of performative politics which the BCM promoted, became particularly necessary and effective.

In order to ground these claims, we will now try to work our notion of performative citizenship through some empirical material both to illustrate its difference from more established notions of citizenship, as well as to demonstrate its analytic utility in illuminating our particular case. It should be clarified that whilst we identify various performances of counter-power, it is beyond the scope of this article to provide an accurate assessment of the complex issue of the efficacy of these particular performances in engaging their audiences. We separate out BCM’s expressions of both the performance of citizenship and ‘performative citizenship’ into four different categories: artistic performance, embodied performativity, performative self-sufficiency, and performative polarisation. Whilst all these expressions were united in their shared effort at symbolically challenging the state’s denial of citizenship, it is within the latter three expressions that performative citizenship comes most fully to

the fore. Before turning to these, however, we will briefly outline what the Black Consciousness Movement was, and how performance was used as a bridge between its philosophical outlook and its political application.

From Philosophy to Politics via Performance

The BCM was a characteristically philosophical resistance movement that emerged out of the lull in anti-apartheid activism following the banning of the ANC and PAC, and the arrest, imprisonment, or exile of their main leadership in the aftermath of the 1960 Sharpeville massacre. Gerhart writes that the 1960s ‘found Africans caught in an extremely frustrating political situation where virtually all channels for the expression of anti-apartheid sentiment were closed ... Apathy and silence were all-pervasive’ (Gerhart, 1978: 258). The performative politics of the BCM therefore began, like all the best performances, with a hush.

A central idea of BC philosophy, in part influenced by Fanon’s writings (esp. [1961] 1967; Gibson, 2011), was the notion that citizenship would remain forever inauthentic so long as it was not determined and actively won by those initially denied it. In South Africa, neither native ancestry, nor birth, nor residency was a sufficient qualification for citizenship if one happened not to be born White. However, whilst this exclusion may well have been inscribed in law, according to BC, and unlike other trends in apartheid resistance, its operation in fact functioned most effectively inside people’s minds, and it was therefore at this psychological level, through the reversal of instilled ‘inferiority complexes’, that the struggle for equal citizenship must, at least initially, be fought.

According to the BCM, under apartheid Blacks experienced what Du Bois ([1903] 1996) had famously called ‘double-consciousness’. Apartheid was understood to have instilled a sense of self-alienation within the Black population, inclining Blacks to run away from their true selves by internalising the imposed belief of White superiority. If Blacks doubted this belief, or needed evidence to corroborate it, such evidence appeared everywhere in the material and symbolic conditions that surrounded them: in the schooling, in the housing, in the job situation, in the distribution of political power, and in the hierarchy of cultural valuation. However, whilst double-consciousness infected black minds with self-doubt in these ways, the BCM also stressed Du Bois’s intimations that the *predicament* of double-consciousness could be transformed into a *resource*. They argued that ‘double-

consciousness' allowed for the possibility of self-actualisation through refusing to accept the definition of oneself imposed by outsiders (Gordon, 2008). Drawing in part on the example set by the Black Power movement in the US, they asserted not only that 'Black was beautiful', but that Black was powerful, dignified, resistant, venerable, and so on, so Blackness should therefore be embraced and asserted. Recognising this, and embodying and enacting one's Blackness, opened up a resource of power which the state would go to murderous lengths to fragment and destroy.

In part as a consequence of its having germinated in the seedbed of university campuses, a problem faced by some of the initial BC activists (and a criticism frequently levelled against them by their detractors, e.g. Hirson, 1979) was that their ideas were relatively abstract and philosophical in character. In reference to the charismatic leader, founder, and eventual martyr of the BCM, Steve Biko, a newspaper article opined that he didn't 'conform to your standard Freedom Fighter image. Mandela might have been more typical but [...] Steve Biko was much more of a philosopher' (Fawkes quoted in More, 2004: 79).⁷ Political struggle demanded something more than philosophising, it demanded praxis. As Gerhart put it, the question confronting the BCM in its early days was why activists would 'waste time on an introverted, elitist, intellectual movement for "consciousness," when the real priority was action?' (1978: 267). Biko himself explained that

'[many philosophies] start with the so-called intellectual class within a society, or alternatively where this is not a strong section of a society they start within the student world. ... Now in our given society we do not have an unlimited number of so-called intellectuals within the Black situation, and certainly those who are there are often embroiled in the whole problem of existence. So we do not have researchers. We do not have people with free time to look at problems of the Black people and to evolve ways and means of cutting out our problems. But on the campus you do get a little bit of free thinking and experimentation, and this is why Black Consciousness evolved from there' (1979: 184).

⁷ A disproportionate number of the illustrations in this paper come from the undoubtedly exceptional character of Biko, posing a problem in terms of how far his example was replicated throughout the BCM in general. This problem arises in part as a consequence of the historical and documentary record inevitably including far more material on Biko than other BC proponents. Nevertheless, Biko was extraordinarily influential in both the founding and early development of the movement, and whilst in reality he may have done so imperfectly, his public persona symbolically personified (both at the time, and certainly in memory and myth) the principles of BC more fully than any other individual activist. We suggest therefore, that the *image* of his character and the stories from which this image was built, can, if handled with care, be taken as embodying as good a model as any of the Black Consciousness Movement as an all-encompassing 'way of life' (SASO, 1971: 1).

Whilst this intellectualism advantaged the movement in various ways, for instance in furnishing it with a philosophical elaboration and mission unmatched by alternative resistance organisations, it also posed a challenge in terms of engaging mass support and in terms of how to put a relatively abstract and fundamentally ideational programme to practical work. Black university students were, of course, a relatively small group in South Africa at the time, and in order to stand any chance of becoming a mass movement, the ideas needed to be communicated well beyond the spheres of the tertiary-educated elite. This paper suggests that one way in which such problems were overcome, was through encouraging, enacting, and disseminating forms of performative citizenship amongst the Black community. In the context of a relatively under-literate population,⁸ a comparatively elite philosophy was, in other words, to be transformed into an accessible politics via the tools of performance.

Good dramatists are invariably good listeners and observers, and for their performances to succeed, it helped that the activists became acquainted with the lifeworlds inhabited by their audiences. Much of this acquaintance was automatic, since most had grown up alongside those they intended to engage, and all Blacks, by definition, shared the phenomenological condition that stemmed from their collective denial of rights. Nevertheless, this process often involved crossing class divides. Whether or not they were successful in these endeavours (e.g. Karis & Gerhart, 1997: 148; Hirson, 1979: 284), the BCM nevertheless made an active effort to go out and discover the everyday concerns of the broader Black population, in order to then give political voice and philosophical coherence to their grievances. Inspired by the writings of Paulo Freire which advised learning the pre-established conceptual schema of those whom you intended to ‘conscientize’ (Freire, 1970; also Nkrumah, 1964), this was in part conducted through observational research methods (Hadfield, 2016: 44). It was an emic approach to gathering data in a manner parallel to what sociologists might identify as ‘grounded theory’ (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

⁸ Although literacy rates appear to have risen rapidly during the preceding two decades (Charney, 1993; Lodge, 1983: 324), hard data on actual literacy among Blacks in South Africa during the 1970s is unreliable (Fuller, Liang, Hua, 1996). However, the highly unequal government spending per capita on Black education, combined with the legacy of an oral tradition in rural areas which, according to Ramphela, ‘did not lay a firm foundation for respect for the written word’ (1995: 67), suggests that illiteracy and semiliteracy rates were still high in absolute terms, even if they may have improved to some extent in relative terms. If this were not the case, it seems unlikely that the University Christian Movement—an organisation that played a key part in giving birth to the BCM—would have provided Black literacy programmes (e.g. Magaziner, 2010: 128), later to be taken over by SASO itself (Hirson, 1979: 73).

Biko, for instance, explains in court that members of the movement went to areas where Blacks congregated in their daily lives, ‘in queues waiting to see a doctor or nurse at a clinic’, ‘in sports fields’, ‘in shebeens’,⁹ or on buses or trains, and simply listened to them, paying particular attention both ‘to the things that they were talking about, and also to the words that were being used’, which helped ‘to establish a point of departure for what you are talking about’ (1979: 31; 34).¹⁰ Biko reports that they heard ‘a round condemnation of White society. Often in very, very tough language’ (ibid.: 32), and he describes the language used by the BCM as in essence a ‘summarised version ... of what Black society knows from experience’ (ibid.: 123).

Similarly, even though a significant proportion of the leadership were themselves non-believers (Nengwekhulu, 2017; Nolutshungu, 1982: 156), in recognition of, and accordance with, the importance of Christianity to the majority of Black South Africans at the time, the movement likewise conducted much of its work through the churches, just as the Civil Rights Movement had earlier done in America (Morris, 1984). More generally, the centrality of the church to the BCM’s fortunes—in terms of institutional, financial, and moral support—is difficult to overstate. The movement also learnt to express many of their political ideas in theological terms that made intuitive sense to those they sought to engage. Influenced by James Cone’s Black Liberation Theology, developed in the racialised context of 1960s America, they encouraged a radicalised and politically active, rather than passive theology, tailored to meeting the political exigencies of the situation (Magaziner, 2010; Moore, 2013). Mangcu writes that through ‘this reframing of Christianity’, they ‘gave the movement an entry point into the heartbeat of the community’ (Mangcu, 2014: 175).

This inductive use of the language, concerns, and valued institutions of the BC’s audiences, allowed their political performances to be shaped around shared ‘collective representations’ and therefore bolstered the likelihood that their performances would not only be understood, but moreover,

⁹ *Shebeens* were illicit drinking establishments that sprung up in the townships of South Africa in response to the banning of Blacks from entering officially licensed bars under the 1927 Liquor Act.

¹⁰ In general, treating court testimony as reflective of underlying realities should of course be conducted with care, since in a trial situation immediate tactical concerns often trump transparency. On this particular point, for instance, it should be noted that Biko was occupied with the tactical concern of proving that BC was merely amplifying the pre-existent concerns of Black people, rather than manufacturing grievances and inciting them to action. Nevertheless, conducting research of this kind was a well-established element of the Freirian method (e.g. Freire, 1973), and one which BC certainly adopted (Hadfield, 2016).

would resonate. We will now turn to describing the four expressions of both the performance of citizenship and ‘performative citizenship’ mentioned at the end of the preceding section.

Artistic Performances

Another way in which a relatively abstract philosophy was linked to the concrete concerns of the people to whom it aspired to speak, was through actual artistic performances. Cultural performance has been a common feature of modern social movements (e.g. Eyerman & Jamison, 1998; Rosenthal & Flacks, 2011), and especially so in South Africa (e.g. Coplan, 2008; Ansell, 2004; Brown 1997). In the case of BC, this included ‘relevant theatre’ (Kavanagh, 1985: 145-196; Desai, 2013; Wilson, 2011: 45; Kruger, 1999: 129-154) and poetry performances by evocative troubadours such as Ingoapele Madingoane, Lefifi Tladi, and Mafika Gwala, held in the universities, or later the YMCAs, community centres, or church halls scattered throughout the townships. Part of the appeal of poetry is that it could, in the words of Mandla Langa, ‘carry all sorts of subterranean messages that authorities could not detect’ (Langa, 2007). They also communicated their ideas through groups such as the Theatre Council of Natal (TECON), the Peoples’ Experimental Theatre (PET), and the Music, Drama, Arts, and Literature Institute (MDALI) and staged plays in venues such as the Market Theatre in Johannesburg (Fuchs, 2002). Their artistic output included verse and prose written by authors such as Mongane ‘Wally’ Serote, Njabulo S. Ndebele, James Matthews, and Sipho Sepamla, published in forums such as *Black Viewpoint*, and later in literary magazines such as *Staffrider* (Mzamane, 1984; Penfold, 2013). Though repression existed—Saths Cooper, for instance, recalls an incident in which teargas was used to break up a performance (Cooper, 2016), and books were regularly banned—Karis and Gerhart point out that ‘unlike more direct methods of political mobilisation, [artistic culture] presented the state with quarry which was often too subtle and elusive to be snared’ (1993: 133).

Lindy Wilson notes that to ‘write and to perform became an intrinsic part of the many meetings, teach-ins and seminars held throughout the country’ (2011: 46). Artistic expression also took the form of iconic graphic design, what Hill, in her detailed study of the aesthetics and iconography of the BCM calls ‘images that come to embody an ideal’ (2015: xxvi). Such images drew strongly yet innovatively upon pre-existent socialist and Black Power symbolism, such as the pervasive image of the single dark-skinned fist, or the two raised fists breaking the shackles that bind them. Africanist symbolism was also

common, such as the wearing of continental-shaped medallions. Christian forenames were replaced with African ones, and the body became a medium of expressing the renaissance of pride in Black identity: the growing of 'afro' haircuts was promoted, skin-lightening creams condemned.

This symbolism required very little mediated interpretation. It spoke directly of strength, defiance, and the imperative to pursue freedom. Its directness acquired added force through its embeddedness in known traditions. In fact, so closely tied was such symbolism to preceding collective representations, that in his commentary on the BCM written from prison, Nelson Mandela hardly conceals his uncharacteristic irritation with the younger generations' adoption of the 'clenched salute' and the 'Amandla' slogan, both of which he seemed to consider the exclusive symbolic property of his own political party (Mandela, 2001: 33).¹¹

It is also important to note that the most popular forms of artistic endeavour within the BCM were collective ones. Even the poetry was made collective via large public readings in front of engaged audiences, who would often participate by periodically interjecting and vocalising their encouragement. This allowed artists to blur the lines between performers and audiences, whilst simultaneously connecting to homegrown traditions. Brown writes that the 'use of models such as *izibongo*, traditional song and music' during BCM poetry performances 'served to revive an African past suppressed by colonial occupation and apartheid' (1997: 11). Often this breaking down of the barrier between actors and audiences occurred directly, such as in the agitprop theatre practiced by the aforementioned PET. PET's leader, Sadecque Variava, recalls for instance entering busses with a co-actor under the pretence that they were strangers to one another. He would then start to argue loudly about political issues with his fellow conspirator; the idea being to get others in the bus to engage in the debate, 'conscientising' them in the process. Again, public theatre was also a savvy means of communicating political ideas since it avoided the censorship of the publication industry, and allowed for what Durkheim called 'collective effervescence', helping solidify group bonds. Such unification was not only achieved by isolated artistic performances, but was periodically reconfirmed by the integrative forces of the whole matrix of collective rituals and performances that the BCM engaged in. Such performances therefore

¹¹ Whilst the simple raised fist was strongly associated with international socialism from at least the turn of the 19th Century, and when black, with American Black Power by the late 1960s, the ANC had formally adopted the clenched right fist with an extended thumb as their sign at the end of the 1940s – a signal that was never adopted by the BCM, even popularly.

provided a means through which the movement could attempt to bring together different sectors of its constituency across ethnic, racial, and educational dividing lines.

Artistic expression helped play both a cathartic role for the movement, in channelling the pain and suffering that Black populations were subject to, but also an energising and communicative role, in interpreting the commonality of experience and identifying paths for liberation. Whilst these actual artistic performances were certainly highly important for the movement, what we wish to suggest in what follows is that they were only the most obvious form of performance in which the BCM was engaged. Moreover, the focus of these artistic expressions was on communicating meanings, often didactically (though as the agitprop theatre demonstrates – not always) and expressing feelings, and for this reason they are, for the most part, best described analytically in conventional terms of performance. The following three modes of performance, however, represent a shift from simply conveying or expressing meanings and feelings (something they often also did) to bringing into being new collective identities and agencies, constructing new senses of belonging and responsibility for one's community, and transforming shared psychological dispositions. For this reason, we refer to them as primarily 'performative'.

Embodied Performativity: I Act How I Like

The title that Biko used for his pseudonymous column in the newsletter of the South African Student Organisation (SASO)—'I Write What I Like'—perfectly captures the spirit of embodied performative citizenship that we wish to identify here. The phrase conveys confidence, pride, dignity, and a resolute refusal to bow to what the SASO activists called, in accordance with the argot of the international New Left at the time, 'the System'. Biko's target in the column was the '*baasskap*' (boss-ship) mentality which he argued held a stranglehold over the collective psyche of Black South Africans, and the dramatic act of writing-what-one-liked performed the self-assurance necessary to begin prising off this grip. Biko's own biography provides a multitude of examples of performative citizenship as it found expression in this embodied manner, as well as his attempts, alongside his fellow activists, to spread this mode of resistance throughout the movement.

One example comes from an early conference at Rhodes University, which proved to be historic in its role in initiating the foundation of the first BC organisation, SASO, as a reaction against

the predominantly White and liberal National Union of South African Students (NUSAS)'s refusal to stage a principled defence against the University's decision to segregate the conference delegates' accommodation. During the conference, which by tacit custom took place in the English language, Biko made a point of order in his native *isiXhosa* (Mangu, 2014: 124). After the initial amused bewilderment died down, it quickly became clear to his English-speaking audience that Biko's linguistic performance aimed at demonstrating the political point of what it felt like to be forced to always engage on—and through—another's terms. Even those few White organisations that opposed apartheid continued to transact their business in a language that created implicit barriers to full participation by Blacks, on whose behalf they were apparently acting.

Another example comes from Biko's court testimony in 1976 acting as a witness in the trial of nine members of the two primary organs of the BCM: SASO and the Black Peoples' Convention (BPC), an incident which Millard Arnold describes as full of 'high drama' (Biko, 1979: xxvi). Biko was subpoenaed to give evidence at the trial during his banning order, under which he was unable to talk publicly. The trial therefore offered a rare opportunity for public performance.¹² During Biko's cross-examination he worked away at inverting the power relationship that was implicitly established by the courtroom scene, turning the state's accusations on their head, and redirecting the charge of terrorism back against the state itself. He openly broke various racialised apartheid taboos within the courthouse, made jokes at the expense of the prosecuting lawyer, and showed little restraint in demanding answers to his own set of questions from his inquisitor (1979: 196; 304), whilst remaining all the time on the witness stand. All of this demonstrated a refusal to internalise intimidation, and gained much of its dramatic power from the fact that it was enacted within a context of extremely high risk.

Thucydides reports Pericles as asserting that 'the greatest dangers give rise to the greatest glory' (Thucydides, 2009: 72) and dramatic resonance similarly derives in no small measure from the perceived stakes of the performance. The tightrope walker teetering without a safety-net exhilarates the crowd to a degree that is impossible in the presence of a net. Biko's performances were conducted in a context in which activists were not only routinely banned, imprisoned, or exiled, often on the basis of

¹² During his banning order, Biko had been writing illegally for the SASO newsletter under the pseudonym of 'Frank Talk', a revelation he made within the courtroom to the surprise not only of the legal officials, but also even to some of the activists who had been enthusiastically reading the columns.

cooked-up evidence, but also habitually died under ostensibly mysterious circumstances whilst in police custody (Biko's own fate the following year),¹³ or were simply assassinated more or less openly by the security police and intelligence services. By ratcheting up the risk involved and instilling fear throughout the population, the apartheid state had attempted to close down the kinds of performance that the BCM and other resistance movements insisted on acting out. Biko stated during his testimony: that he was 'against the kind of fear that is there in Blacks—this bottled-up fear ... and I am also against the kind of mentality that emanates from White society, which seeks to promote that fear in Black society' (Biko, 1979: 239; also Biko, 1978: 73-81).

Had he been White, Biko's performance would not have been overly remarkable. It was the fact that it was delivered by a Black man within a society that denied Black people full civil status and equality before the law that made it remarkable. Moreover, it was delivered within a courtroom: one of the key institutional settings through which apartheid performatively propped itself up, and attempted to present a show of justice to the outside world. Such restrictive contexts on the one hand rendered these performances extremely dangerous, but on the other helped augment their consequential drama, since the dangers involved were known to all. His performance was not merely expressive though: in refusing to act out the role ascribed to him by the state, and instead appropriating the role a full and equal citizen, he performatively took possession of that which was denied to him and his kind, conjuring up and inhabiting that which was officially not his to have or to be. His performance provided an embodied demonstration of a Black man willing and able to be eloquent, confident, and self-assertive; to outwit White legal professionals at their own game; and to demand just and equal treatment for the accused, all within a heightened context of grave danger. The refusal of Biko and the rest of the accused (AD 1719, 1976) to occupy the meek and contrite roles ascribed to them, therefore did something: it challenged the implicit script of how political trials of Blacks in South Africa were to take place. If the state refused citizenship, his performance made clear that there were some—a growing number perhaps—who would simply take it, no matter what the risks.

¹³ Section 6 (1) of The Terrorism Act permitted indefinite incommunicado detention without trial, during which time not only was torture common, but a disturbingly large number of detainees died. When official explanations for these deaths were forthcoming (often there was no explanation at all), they involved such claims as the detainee had committed 'suicide by hanging', 'slipped in the shower', or 'fallen down the stairwell'. In one case the detainee was said to have accidentally fallen from a tenth floor window.

The performance was not entirely *sui generis*, however. As we have emphasised, scripts are necessarily fashioned within or against pre-existent and shared collective representations and cultural tropes, and as the example of Mandela's 'I am prepared to die' speech makes clear, it 'was not new for a South African, accused of political opposition to use the dock for defence speeches, thus keeping alive historic political statements and realities which could be quoted down the years' (Wilson, 2011: 87).

The insistence on speaking truth in the face of personal danger appears to place Biko's performance in the mode of activity that Foucault, nearer the end of his life, discussed in his lectures on the Greek term *parrhesia* (Foucault, 1983). The figure of the *parrhesiastes* refers to one who, through duty, speaks direct truth, always at potential risk to him- or herself, and therefore embodies courage in their actions. Precisely because of the grave risks that helped make performances such as Biko's at the SASO/BCM trial compelling, they demanded a great deal of courage and Foucault describes such courage as 'a kind of "proof" of the sincerity of the parrhesiastes' (1983: 4). In many ways Biko and the accused were rarities in their ability to evoke, manifest, and sustain such courage. Nevertheless, techniques for all kinds of performance can be learnt, and social thinkers as diverse as Goffman, Bourdieu, and Butler have argued that all performative technique is in fact ultimately learnt, and it is merely one's capacity to learn it well, and often unwittingly, that gives the illusion of naturalness, or what Bourdieu (1972) called *doxa*.

The BCM attempted to teach such techniques of the embodiment of dignity and resilience through leadership seminars and so-called 'formation schools'. These schools typically spread over a few days, and encouraged their participants to be critical of their social environments through identifying the power interests embedded in the structures that shaped these environments. This idea gelled well with the BC goal of provoking the Black population into refusing to be complicit in their own oppression.¹⁴ The philosophical and political objective was 'conscientisation' or 'critical

¹⁴ The Freirean method also disrupted common assumptions about the power relationships necessary for establishing effective learning between teachers and their students, demonstrating how teaching was always itself a form of learning, which when conducted effectively, should open the teacher up to being taught. More practically, the leadership seminars and 'formation schools' were also significant in training up new layers of leadership that could take over when necessary, allowing the movement to continue to function in the context of successive waves of banning orders, arrests, and assassinations.

awareness’, a participatory form of education aimed not merely at transferring knowledge, but rather at a transformation of the self and ultimately a transformation of society in the direction of social justice (Hope & Timmel, 1984). Whilst their curricula were relatively practical, their concern with ‘formation’ indicates that the training participants received aimed at shaping more durable and dispositional modes of actions, rather than simply encouraging specific ‘acts of citizenship’ (Isin, 2008).¹⁵ The training workshops and literacy programmes operated on the ideas of the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, and were introduced in part via Colin Collins of the UCM (Karis & Gerhart, 1997: 116), and Anne Hope of the Christian Institute, who trained many of the leaders of the BCM to in turn become trainers themselves. Mamphela Ramphele recalls that she ‘benefited enormously from them’, linking their importance to her own practical capacity to deal with being excluded from full civil status: ‘As a result I was able to transcend the naked anger of having been cheated out of a common heritage in one’s own society’ (Ramphele, 1995: 65).

Whilst these formation schools and training seminars may have helped shape an emboldened cadre of young Black leaders (many of whom now hold prominent leadership roles in post-apartheid South Africa), *parrhesia* appears to be a slightly ill-fitting concept for capturing the nature of Biko and his fellow activists’ public performances of confidence. This is because the term describes a relationship to speaking truth in public via frankness, rather than via persuasion. Indeed, *parrhesia* relies upon an explicit rejection of the art of persuasion in favour of simply telling-it-as-it-is and therefore evacuates an important element of the dramatic from the act of speaking truth to power (Foucault, 1983: 6-7). This rhetorical element however, was clearly present within, and in most instances central to Biko’s and others’ public performances, which relied upon skilful persuasion more often than simple declaration or logical demonstration (e.g. Fergusson, 1996). Alongside the organised training events, this sense of the counter-power that could be harnessed through paying attention to speaking well (as an essential element of stagecraft), was an art Biko no doubt also honed through his study of law.¹⁶ Rhetoric allowed Biko to appeal to the emotions, as well as simply the intellects of his

¹⁵ The term ‘formation school’ came to SASO from the University Christian Movement, which itself had borrowed it from Catholic theological training aimed at forming new generations of church disciples and leaders (Karis & Gerhart, 1997: 75).

¹⁶ Since rhetoric is fundamentally aimed towards shaping the judgement of an audience, alongside the public assembly, the courtroom has been, from its earliest days with the Sophists, its model setting.

audience, as is clear from the numerous moments in which he evokes laughter in the courtroom.¹⁷ This capacity to induce emotions in an audience was what Aristotle (1991: 74-6) called *pathos*, and alongside *ethos* (the character of the speaker) and *logos* (the reasoned argument of the speech) constituted one of the three essential pillars of any successful public delivery of a message.¹⁸

To say that Biko was a skilful orator and rhetorician is not to suggest that he was unaware of the potential artifice and deception of rhetoric, or the fact that fluency in language is invariably learnt, and most importantly, that it acts, as Bourdieu (1991) later stressed, as a medium of power, and that misrecognising this fact helps legitimise social inequality by appearing to naturalise it. Biko in fact draws attention to this idea during his court testimony, probing its inevitable psychological consequences:

English is a second language to you [Blacks]. You have probably been taught in a vernacular, especially during these days of Bantu education This makes you less articulate as a Black man generally, and this makes you more inward looking. You feel things rather than say them ... You may be intelligent but not as articulate ... when you play side-by-side with people who are more articulate than you, you tend to think that it is because they are more intelligent than you' (1979: 27-28).

Whilst his deployment of rhetoric therefore pushes Biko's performances outside *parrhesia*, his reflexive exposure of the authentic sources of linguistic fluency in fact draws him back to it, since it demonstrates his fidelity to the practice of self-criticism: another key characteristic that helps shore up the trustworthy character of the *parrhesiastes*.

Unlike stage performances, social performances are uneasily bounded (Morgan & Baert, 2015), they run into one another, overlap, repeat, and find themselves reiterated throughout time and place in varying permutations. The performances of the accused at the SASO/BPC trial were no exception and did not abate once they had been sentenced and boated off to Robben Island: the imprisoned BCM activists continued, through embodied demonstrations of defiance, to refuse to capitulate to the

¹⁷ Rhetoric's most enthusiastic Roman champion, Cicero, argued that 'there is nothing that has so potent an effect on upon human emotions as well-ordered and embellished speech' (1939: 193).

¹⁸ Smith & Howe (2015) provide an excellent cultural sociological analysis of the social drama of climate change in part through returning to these Aristotelean conceptions of rhetoric.

theatrical direction of the state. In his autobiography, Nelson Mandela describes the radical shakeup of prison life on the Island that the incoming BCM activists initiated:

‘These young men were a different breed of prisoner than we had ever seen before. They were brave, hostile, and aggressive; they would not take orders, and shouted “Amandla!” at every opportunity. Their instinct was to confront rather than cooperate. The authorities did not know how to handle them, and they turned the island upside down. During the Rivonia Trial, I remarked to a security policeman that if the government did not reform itself, the freedom fighters who would take our place would someday make the authorities yearn for us. That day had indeed come on Robben Island . . . These fellows refused to conform to even basic prison regulations. (Mandela, 1994: 576).

Even after their citizenship had been doubly stripped, the prisoners refused to play along, rejecting any subservient role, even if acting that role out might help them win short-term benefits from their warders (Cindi, 2015). Mandela, for instance, goes on to recount a typical performative encounter between a recently-arrived BC activist and a prison guard:

The young man, who was no more than eighteen years old, was wearing his prison cap in the presence of senior officers, a violation of regulations. Nor did he stand up when the major entered the room, another violation.

The major looked at him and said, “Please, take off your cap.” The prisoner ignored him. Then in an irritated tone, the major said, “Take off your cap.” The prisoner turned and looked at the major, and said, “What for?”

I could hardly believe what I had just heard. It was a revolutionary question: What for? The major also seemed taken aback, but managed a reply. “It is against regulations,” he said. The young prisoner responded, “Why do you have this regulation? What is the purpose of it?”

This questioning on the part of the prisoner was too much for the major, and he stomped out of the room, saying, “Mandela, you talk to him.” But I would not intervene on his behalf, and simply bowed in the direction of the prisoner to let him know that I was on his side.

This was our first exposure to the Black Consciousness Movement. (Mandela, 1994: 577-8).

On another occasion (recounted in Woods, 1978: 75-6), when Biko—a large man who could easily intimidate opponents on the rugby field—was slapped across the face by an older White police

officer, Biko hit back in the manner in which thinkers such as Fanon ([1961] 1967) and Amery (1980: 21-41) have argued is imperative in salvaging a dignified self, even at the risk of sacrificing one's physical security. During another interrogation incident, Biko describes having 'a boxing match the first day I was arrested. Some guy tried to clout me with a club. I went into him like a bull' (1978: 152).

Given the balance of powers, it seems unlikely that the intention in these instances was to *physically* challenge the bullying officers. It would have been as obvious to him as it was to the armed policemen which side would ultimately triumph in any such challenge. The point appears to have been to *symbolically* challenge them; to performatively disrupt the structures that made such bullying acceptable and routine, and to dispute, through action, the assumption that intimidation and fear would be easily and automatically internalised by its victims. Biko goes on to tell of how the officer who had been beating him then threatened to kill him, and by this he of course 'meant to intimidate. And my answer was: "How long is it going to take you?"' (ibid.).

Biko's friend and confidante, the priest Aelred Stubbs, notes that Biko 'had a much greater fear of betraying himself than a fear of physical violence even to the point of death. He had conquered fear by his inner conviction of his outer undefeatability if he was prepared to give everything' (quoted in Wilson, 1978: 141). Indeed, although thanks to the lies of the security police it is still not entirely clear exactly what happened in Room 619 of the Sanlam building, where Biko was tortured and sustained his fatal head injury,¹⁹ evidence given at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission amnesty hearings in the late 1990s has given rise to a possible narrative that Biko infuriated the security police by simply sitting down in a chair during his interrogation after earlier being ordered to stand. According to the unreliable evidence of the security police officers (their story had changed from their initial evidence given at the inquest into his death in the 1970s), the result of him being forced to stand was apparently to push the chair back at his tormentors.²⁰

Again, if this story has any truth in it,²¹ it seems highly unlikely that Biko was intending to physically overcome the multiple armed Security Policemen, who later admitted beating him.

¹⁹ His interrogators concealed and twisted the truth both at the original inquest into his death, and at the later TRC hearings (Bernstein, 1978; Bizos, 1998; Kentridge, 2012; Wilson, 2011; Woods 1978).

²⁰ Wilson reminds us that whether 'Biko defended himself with the chair on which he sat without permission—if this was not itself a fabrication [...] is not of major significance in the face of the violence of his death' (Wilson, 2011: 139-140).

²¹ Bizos understands this account as 'fanciful' (1998: 70).

Physically pushing back appears instead to have been primarily a symbolic challenge against the racist power structure later revealed by one of the policemen under questioning at the TRC:

[Advocate George Bizos:] ‘was it your general view that a black man had to obey an order of a white man, particularly a white man who was in the Security Police?’

[Colonel Harold Snyman:] ‘Your Honour, according to the state system or state order of that time, it had been our thinking that that is the way that things should be done.’

‘Yes, your state of mind at that time having regard to the words that you used in your application, was that the late Mr Biko was stubborn, *parmantig* [impertinent] and too big for his boots for a black man?’

‘Your Honour, that was the case. That is the impression that he created for us; that he did not really want to listen to us.’

‘Yes, but he was a proud man and that your self-respect would have been insulted if he continued sitting on the chair?’

‘Your Honour, we had to realise that he was a high-profile person in the Black Consciousness organisations. He was a president of one of these organisations and by sitting he maintained his own status.’

‘I see. So that you were offended, personally offended that you, a white man, had a pretender [to] political power before you and that you were not going to tolerate it and now you told him to get up? Is that correct?’

‘That is correct, Your Honour.’ (Bizos, 1998: 90-91).

Elsewhere, in an interview with an American businessman soon before he was killed, commenting upon those who had died during the Soweto uprising, Biko stated that you ‘are either alive and proud or you are dead, and when you are dead, you can’t care anyway. And your method of death can itself be a politicising thing’ (Biko, 1978). His wife, Ntsiki, had commented that she ‘expected [Steve] to die in the hands of the security police. I think all of us expected it. Steve was prepared to sacrifice his life for the black cause’ (quoted in Bizos, 1998: 46; also Wilson, 2001: 114). Whilst the capacity to make confident claims over the details leading to Biko’s death at the hands of the security police is fraught with difficulty, it is nevertheless possible to acknowledge that embodied performativity is at the heart of the dominant memory of his death. Within this dominant memory, even

the ultimate physical sacrifice of life is recalled not primarily in material terms, but first and foremost in symbolic terms; as a potent method of conveying defiance.

This section has tried to show how the performative embodiment of citizenship demonstrated by the BCM, and in particular by Biko, acted to evoke what was formally denied. Of course, this evocation had no immediate consequence on the juridico-political status of Blacks in South Africa at the time, and for this reason, one might argue that it was inconsequential. However, we would like to suggest that such activity was, and is, of consequence, and ignoring it overlooks a key element in processes of social change. Insofar as their performances were successful, the BCM's embodied refusal to continue playing the roles ascribed to them by the state disrupted the state's control over the unfolding social drama, and therefore effectively prised back a key element of ideological power. The symbolic significance of figures like Biko lay in their embodying the idea that if citizenship and dignity would not be willingly given to Blacks, it would be taken by them, whatever the consequences.

Performative Self-sufficiency

Another way in which the BCM used performative action to link abstract philosophy with concrete praxis, was through expanding its institutional structure beyond that of the student organisation through which it was initially born (SASO). This was done through the creation of two further organisations: one based on the imperatives of political mobilisation, the Black Peoples' Convention (BPC), the other built around an agenda of community development, the Black Community Programmes (BCP).

Biko explained that whilst SASO was useful in articulating 'the ideology which should form the guiding light' in the 'process of change', its 'operation is limited by [its] very nature, mainly to the student theme. On the other hand BPC is a political organization, and because of this it does adopt programs which are meant to bring about change' (1979: 318). Institutionally, whilst SASO served as the philosophical head of the BCM organism, the BPC was intended to function as its political body. Its creation developed out of a series of SASO-organised meetings of church, educational, welfare, sports, and youth groups, held throughout 1971, with the organisation officially founded the following year. Though certain voices within the movement initially wished the organisation to serve primarily cultural purposes, eventually it was decided that it would act principally as a political organ (Badat,

2009: 84). As the BPC constitution states, its purpose was to exist fundamentally as a ‘political movement ... with a view to mobilizing the masses’ (Butelezi, 1978: 5). This meant that membership was also open to non-students over the age of seventeen, allowing a far broader and more socially (and generationally) diverse membership base.

The second key organisation in translating the abstract philosophy of Black Consciousness into the practical realm of action was the Black Community Programmes (BCP), which grew out of the Special Project on Christianity in apartheid South Africa (Spro-cas 2) (Walshe, 1983), and was founded in 1971 (Hadfield, 2016: 25). The BCP was explicitly described by SASO in terms of transforming ideas into action: as translating ‘idealism into stark realism’ (SASO, 1972: 2-3).

Commenting on the effect of concrete conditions upon consciousness, Biko wrote that for the Black population, the ‘homes are different, the streets are different, the lighting is different, so you tend to begin to feel that there is something incomplete in your humanity, and that completeness goes with whiteness’ (Biko, 1978: 101). Even if universal formal citizenship had in fact existed in apartheid South Africa, a fuller realisation of citizenship would arguably still have required the material resources that could enable individuals to participate as full members of their society. These basic conditions include such things as adequate healthcare, acceptable living environments, gainful employment, educational opportunities, and so on,²² and the BCP was founded in 1972 in part to address such problems. It aimed, in its own words, to engender self-help and self-determination ‘in response to the critical circumstances of the urban and rural black community’ (Gwala, 1973: 167). It was directed by Bennie Khoapa and headquartered in Durban and established regional branch offices in Johannesburg, Umtata in the Transkei, and King William’s Town in the Eastern Cape, where Biko had grown up and where he was restricted to under his banning order in February 1973. Biko ran the King William’s Town branch of the BCP from an old Anglican church in Leopold Street until an additional clause was inserted into his banning order in December 1975, forbidding him from doing so.

Being a Black Consciousness organisation, the purpose of the BCP was not simply charity work, or even just community development. As one energetic SASO organiser put it, the ‘greatest danger’ of the BCP projects was their potential to ‘become welfare projects [which would help to]

²² The ongoing lack of such resources for much of the population arguably constitutes the biggest challenge to the realisation of substantive citizenship in today’s democratic South Africa.

alleviate the suffering rather than to eradicate the source of the evils' (Nengwekhulu, 1976). Instead, they aspired to 'help the black community become aware of its own identity' and its own 'power' (Black Review, 1973) and founded a number of initiatives on the principle of self-reliance, with the aim that the projects could eventually be turned over to the management of the communities themselves.

The main projects undertaken by the BCP included the Njwaxa Home Industries, a cottage industries venture producing leather products, including 'belts, handbags, horse saddles, nail bags and, later, sandals and shoes' (Ramphela, 1995: 101);²³ the Zimele Trust fund, which helped ex-political prisoners and their families, 'mainly ANC and PAC people who were being released into "resettlement" areas where there was no employment' (Wilson, 2011: 94); the reopening of a crèche in the Ginsberg township on the edge of King William's Town in order to free women from childcare responsibilities so that they could engage in paid employment; a mobile clinic operating from a caravan to serve township communities without adequate healthcare services (BCP, 1977); and the foundation of the Ginsberg Education Fund, which supported primary school children in continuing to secondary education (Barnes & Haya, 2002: 146-7). They also helped run adult education and literacy programmes and published a variety of journals.²⁴

Perhaps the most important initiative of the BCP was the Zanempilo Health clinic, which was established not far from King William's Town, and built on land provided (again) by the Anglican church. A precursor to the Zanempilo clinic had been set up in Durban at the Alan Taylor residence hall, where many of SASO's founders had met whilst studying at the University of Natal. This was the 'Happy Valley Clinic', which aimed to provide medical care for those in poverty and without access to alternative healthcare resources in the surrounding area. Zanempilo translated as 'bringer of health', 'a reflection of the idealism of the project' (Ramphela, 1995: 97), and was run by Biko's girlfriend, and mother of two of his children, Mamphela Ramphela. Ramphela recalls how, in accordance with Freirean principles, whilst she provided her expertise as a trained doctor, she was simultaneously taught

²³ This leather working factory was callously destroyed as part of the major wave of BCM banning and repression that took place in 1977.

²⁴ These included *Black Perspectives* and *Black Viewpoint*, and most importantly the *Black Review*, which ran from 1972-1976, covered cultural and political issues relevant to the Black community that failed to find voice elsewhere, and surveyed Black organisations throughout the country.

by the local community, including (since she hailed the Northern Transvaal) learning the local language, disrupting the dependency-promoting notion of the all-powerful, all-knowing outsider/saviour (ibid.). As we have outlined, compelling performances often find themselves repeated, and the Zanempilo clinic inspired the Solempilo (Eye of Health) Clinic, to be set up a little later in Natal (Khoapa, 2017b).

These projects were generally under-resourced, improvisationally-managed, and their scale, like SASO's earlier community projects, was not vast (Badat, 1999: 152-3). For these reasons, they never stood a great chance of any significant role in the mammoth (and still unmet) challenge of nationwide development for the Black community. However, seen from the viewpoint of performative citizenship they played a crucial role for the movement. Not only did they tend to socialise and distribute Black performance away from the sole preserve of charismatic leaders, but moreover they also addressed not only the *rights* side of the citizenship equation, but its counterpart too: the notion of one's civil *responsibilities*. Taking responsibility for the employment, education, healthcare, and so on, of one's own communities was not, however, what we might now refer to as a 'neoliberal' conception of citizenship in which 'citizens must "earn" their rights and for whom, therefore, duties precede rights' (Kabeer, 2005: 2). Rather, it was both a response to the direct and very real needs of poverty, as well as a classic example of performative citizenship: Blacks demonstrating their capacity to look after themselves without relying upon the paternalistic and philanthropic benevolence of 'do-gooding' Whites. Conveying this message of resourceful independence it constituted a form of 'propaganda of the deed', which Bakunin remarked, is '*the most potent, and the most irresistible form of propaganda*' ([1870] 1972: 195-6).

As well as communicating a message of self-sufficiency, and alleviating material suffering, the BCP's enactment of performative citizenship also helped address psychological issues of consciousness, and its distortion within a racist society (Khoapa, 2017a).²⁵ In Biko's words:

the Black man is a defeated being who finds it very difficult to lift himself up by his boot strings. He is alienated—alienated from himself, from his friends, and from society in general.

²⁵ Ramphele describes how this psychological role of the BCP initiatives in fact helped Biko's own mental state too, offering him a psychological crutch during his period of enforced isolation (1995: 92).

He is made to live all the time concerned with matters of existence, concerned with tomorrow, you know. What shall I eat tomorrow? Now, we felt that we must attempt to defeat and break this kind of attitude and to instil once more a sense of human dignity within the Black man. So what we did was to design various types of programs, present these to the Black community with an obvious illustration that these are done by Black people for the sole purpose of uplifting the Black community (1979: 113-4)

Again, we wish to stress that the primary significance of the Black Community Programmes was not so much their role in alleviating material suffering (Marx, 1992: 11; 12). Seen from the perspective of the vast nationwide underdevelopment of Black populations during the 1970s, this developmental role, whilst present, was severely limited. Rather, it was the BCP's performative demonstration, both to onlookers and to the participants themselves, that when Black people worked together they were capable of providing for themselves and collaboratively improving their downtrodden conditions. Whilst many were undoubtedly helped by the BCP's projects, these projects' symbolic and performative achievements likely far outweighed their material and developmental outcomes.

Performative Polarisation

Performativity was also at the heart of the BCM's terminological innovations. It is well established that classificatory schemas are not merely impartial reflections of underlying realities, but also designations that help shape such realities themselves (e.g. Becker, 1963; Callon, 1998; Hacking, 1999; MacKenzie, 2006; Morgan, 2016). This insight is even more resonant when examining apartheid South Africa, since racial classifications not only exerted the informal symbolic effects that they exert in all racialized societies, but also formally determined one's place in the pecking order of citizenship, and therefore the rights one was due, and the obligations one owed.

As we have noted, the classificatory codes of BC thinking were in part inductively drawn from observation of the terminology used by Black people themselves, so that the terminology employed would dovetail effectively with its intended audience's own semantic sorting-frames. The categories of BC thinking were also, however, influenced by another element of the extant 'collective background representations'. That is, those of the apartheid state's own legal classificatory schema *viz.*, in order of

relative distance from full citizenship status, ‘Bantu’ (or in some instances ‘native’ or ‘African’), ‘Coloured’ (amended to include various subcategories), ‘Asian’ (or more narrowly ‘Indian’), and ‘White’ (or in some instances ‘European’).²⁶

One reason why the BCM was so concerned with emphasising the category of ‘Blackness’ rather than opting for the non-racialism of preceding groups like the ANC was that theirs was a philosophy which believed in working through the racist situation they historically found themselves in, rather than artificially circumventing that situation by appealing to an abstract non-racialism which was in fact nowhere to be found. Such an account is found in Biko’s response in the SASO/BPC trial when the judge asks him, ‘now why do you refer to you people as Blacks? Why not brown people? I mean, you people are more brown than black’. Biko responds with characteristic didactic humour that ‘In the same way as I think White people are more pink and yellow and pale than white ... *historically* we have been defined as Black people’ (Biko, 1979: 26, our emphasis).

Rather than challenging apartheid through appeal to some abstract liberal ideal, BC instead chose to grapple with the actual historical structures that confronted them. Black South Africans lived in a society in which they were oppressed on the basis of their Blackness, therefore the method of resisting this oppression became organised around that same category.²⁷ The antithesis of Blackness was formed to diametrically oppose the thesis of anti-Black racism (Biko, 1978: 90). This led to accusations by liberals, and others, that the BCM was reinforcing apartheid divisions rather than overcoming them. A newspaper article from the time argued, for instance, that the ‘promoters of SASO are wrong in what they are doing. They are promoting apartheid. They are entrenching the idea of a racial exclusivity and therefore doing the government’s work’ (Gerhart, 1978: 268).

Performatively, however, appropriating the term ‘Black’ and redefining it around their own philosophical and political imperatives achieved three strategic goals for the movement, all of which in fact directly contradicted and undermined, rather than reinforced the government’s apartheid vision. The reason we describe this as ‘performative’, is because in spite of their terminological polarisation, in reality (rather than performative rhetoric) the BCM continued to engage with White liberals (Lekota,

²⁶ Much of this same apartheid-era racial schema, which came into law through the Population Registration Act of 1950, continues to operate through both official and unofficial means in South African society to the present day.

²⁷ cf. Sartre’s (1964) critique of Negritude, and Fanon’s ([1961] 1967) response.

2016; Macqueen, 2011; Maimela, 1999), whose own ideas themselves developed through participation in this paradoxical relationship (e.g. Turner, 1972).

Firstly, the reappropriation of the term 'Black' performatively evoked a black-African unity which opposed the ethnically divided silos through which the state was attempting to physically, psychologically, and politically split this population.²⁸ This goal was only possible on the basis that South Africa—alongside so many other African states in which political borders had historically been imposed through a crude colonial cartography—was conceived as a 'multinational state' in which various nations were forced together under an overarching administrative organ. Much of the broader preceding anti-apartheid movement was also concerned with the creation of one state out of many 'tribes'; the struggle, in short, for African nationalism.²⁹ However, with the rise of the BCM, the critique of those African figures, such as the Chief Minister of the KwaZulu bantustan, Gatsha Buthelezi, who saw the promotion of tribal interests as a viable tool in opposing apartheid, became far more direct and vocal. Unity, the BC activists argued, could not be won through tolerance of division, and neither could it be won through accepting the channels for expressing discontent provided by the apartheid state itself. The BCM recognised the Bantustans for the cynical trap that they were. Biko argued that

teaching a kid about his Bantu-ness—it also teaches him to be a Xhosa, a Xhosa, who is foreign to a Zulu, foreign from a Tswana and so on, so it entrenches in the mind of a kid the whole unholy division of Blacks into virtual cocoons which can easily be repressed (1979: 107).

Bantustans provided a sham citizenship, the semblance and simulation of citizenship and the illusion of free opposition to 'the system'.³⁰ As we have been explaining, the kind of citizenship that the BCM aimed to enact was grounded in a much fuller and deeper sense of the term.³¹

Secondly, asserting 'Blackness' in the manner in which the BCM did, not only allowed them to transcend ethnic, but also 'racial' divisions between those defined by the state as 'Bantu' on the one hand, and those defined as 'Coloured' and 'Indian' on the other. Much of the membership, and indeed

²⁸ Even the collective official term 'Bantu' was replete with tribal connotations (Halisi, 1999: 133).

²⁹ Hence, of course, the African *National* Congress.

³⁰ Internationally, no country (other than South Africa itself) recognised their legitimacy as independent states.

³¹ This deeper kind of citizenship is distinct from Tilly's (1996) transactionally-focussed notion of 'thick citizenship'.

leadership, of the main BCM organisations was composed of members carrying identity cards ascribing them to the so-called 'Coloured' or 'Indian' population groups.

Within the Pan Africanist Congress, unofficial prejudices against the relatively privileged Indian and so-called 'Coloured' populations, had denied these groups from full participation, even if the official policy of non-racialism (as opposed to multiracialism) in fact permitted membership of the organisation (Sobukwe, 1959).³² These prejudices and suspicions ran both ways, in that many Coloureds and Indians were likewise wary of the relative loss of position entailed by identifying their interests with those of the even more marginalised black-African population (Gerhart, 1978: 180). The mass expulsions of Indians from Idi Amin's Uganda that took place during the height of BC added to some Indians' suspicion of unity in struggle.

The constitution of the BPC stated that 'unless inconsistent with the context, BLACK shall be interpreted as those who are by law or tradition, politically, economically, and socially discriminated against as a group in South African society, and identify themselves as a unit in the struggle towards realisation of their aspirations' (Buthelezi, 1978: 21-2). The first part of this definition stressed the shared *objective* condition of discrimination (a group-in-itself), whereas the latter part focussed upon a *subjective* shared identity (a group-for-itself). BC's new political definition of 'Black' therefore involved a performative move signalling that whatever relative privileges may be accorded to different internal fractions, unity could be found in a shared denial of *full* citizenship status vis-à-vis Whites, combined with a collective willingness to resist this denial. The terminological redefinition of the category 'Black' to include all those 'discriminated against as a group in South African society' was therefore performatively aimed at the goal of drawing non-White audiences 'out of demographic and subcultural niches' (Alexander, 2004: 565) and into a more unified collective identity and subjectivity. It aimed, in short, at the creation of a new historical subject in South Africa.

Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly in terms of constructing a compelling script for the BCM's political role, adopting the term 'Black' and opposing it not only to 'White', but also to 'non-White' (which will be explained below), allowed for the performative enactment of *symbolic polarisation*. Good drama, the kind of drama which is capable of engaging peoples' imaginations and

³² Some white members were in fact admitted, such as, in 1963, the formerly liberal activist, Patrick Duncan (Driver, 2000).

inspiring them to fight for a dangerous cause is almost always agonistic. It involves the definition and elaboration of virtuous protagonists and corrupt antagonists, struggling with one another towards some kind of resolution (Alexander, 2004: 552-3). Compelling scripts define oppositions and exploit the tensions between them, and the symbolic opposition between Black and White provides an extraordinarily potent binary (Levi-Strauss, 1981: 537-61; Harvey, 2015). Neither colour comes in shades: whilst black is the absence of colour or the total absorption of light, white is the presence of all colours or the total reflection of light. A stronger, more dramatic binary is almost impossible to conceive, and this is no doubt why these categories have so often been used as analogues to symbolise and dramatise all other kinds of normatively-loaded opposition, between life and death, good and evil, knowledge and ignorance, etc.

Using this opposition as a form of racial classification is of course an historical and largely imagined metaphor, as Biko points out in his answer to the judge's question as to why the term 'brown' was not used instead. Actual blackness and whiteness may be gestured to by pigmentation in particular culturally-structured settings, but it is obviously these settings themselves that form the actual bridge between the signifier and signified. As opposed to the state's racial classificatory schema, the BCM understood 'Black' instead to be an emphatically *political* category—'not a matter of pigmentation' (Biko 1978: 48)—and it was frequently capitalised in BC literature, such as in SASO's Constitution (SASO, 1969) to stress this difference in meaning.

On this point, the BCM were thoroughly historicist in their thinking, and drew upon Hegelian dialectics (Biko, 1978: 87-99; Pityana, 2012) to argue that affirming Blackness was necessary as an antithetical contradiction to the thesis of 'strong white racism' they encountered. This meant that 'Blackness' was not some timeless elementary or biological essence of political organisation but rather the dialectically contingent opposition to the historical expression of white supremacy that confronted them. Without asserting this opposition, the synthetic outcome of 'a true humanity' (the ultimate goal of the politics of BC) would forever allude South African society. Liberals, such as the famous South

African author and founder of the Liberal Party, Alan Paton, tended of course to object to this analysis.³³

Paton wrote that he was,

strongly critical of Mr. Biko's use of the *thesis*, *anti-thesis*, and *synthesis*. He [Biko] says for liberals the *thesis* is apartheid, the *anti-thesis* is non-racialism, and "the *synthesis* very feebly defined," But for Black Consciousness the *thesis* is a strong white racism, the *anti-thesis* is a black solidarity, and the *synthesis* is a "true humanity where politics will have no place. Really, Mr. Biko, this is too much. The *Synthesis* is just as likely to be war

Paton's patronising tone in this extract—'Really, Mr. Biko...'—provides a perfect illustration here of the currents within the anti-apartheid movement that BC was so eager to extricate itself from. Paton was illustrating precisely the paternalistic condescension that BC was intent on fighting: the idea that Blacks couldn't speak for themselves but needed to be spoken for, by eminently more enlightened Whites. Whether they politically opposed or supported racial segregation and hierarchy, these liberal Whites were themselves inescapably the material beneficiaries of apartheid, yet it was still these same Whites who believed they should determine the shape that resistance took, something Biko referred to as indicating the 'totality of the white power structure' (1978: 89).³⁴

It might be considered ironic that Biko drew upon Hegel who, like most of the Enlightenment philosophers, confidently enunciated racist views.³⁵ What is important however about the ideas that composed BC—including Christianity, which of course arrived in Southern Africa through colonial missionaries—are not necessarily their easy automatic compatibility with what eventually became BC thinking, but rather the pragmatic use to which they were put.

The BCM's dialectical analysis did not involve objective determination either. The performative element of the BCM's analysis was clear: investment of subjectivity was needed for the synthetic goal to come to fruition. Biko stated in court that 'history works through people and we have

³³ Rik Turner's suggestion that 'human consciousness' was the 'synthesis which both Steve Biko and Alan Paton were looking for' (1972: 22) seems not to acknowledge that this was precisely Biko's own original position, not an innovation of Turner's own.

³⁴ Biko wrote that 'Not only have they kicked the black but they have also told him how to react to the kick. For a long time the black has been listening with patience to the advice he had been receiving on how best to respond to the kick. With painful slowness he is now beginning to show signs that it is his right and duty to respond to the kick *in the way he sees fit*' (Biko, 1978: 66).

³⁵ Hegel wrote of the African as exhibiting, 'the natural man in his completely wild and untamed state ... there is nothing harmonious with humanity in this type of character ... Africa is no historical part of the world. What we properly understand by Africa is the Unhistorical, Undeveloped spirit, still involved in the conditions of mere nature' (Hegel, 1956: 93; 99).

availed ourselves to history for history to work through us' (1979: 216). In this sense, some have claimed that BC was 'in the end primarily a transitional philosophy' (Gerhart, 1978: 310), in that it was a politics of the exigencies of the time and place in which it was devised, and Biko himself declared that it would 'be irrelevant in a colourless and non-exploitative egalitarian society' (1978: 87). The problem, of course, was that South Africa was clearly not such a society. It was a society formally organised on the very basis of its racism, and this fact could hardly, according to the BCM, be swept under the carpet. BC pointed to the phenomenological, rather than essential, reality of racial categories; a phenomenological reality that determined every aspect of one's private, civic, and political life in 1970s South Africa. This had to first be appreciated in order to then be challenged.³⁶ 'Race' mattered hugely in apartheid society, and simply ignoring it, would not make its destructive force magically disappear.³⁷

This is not to say that the Frankenstein-like dangers of evoking what might be mistaken as essentialised racial categories went unnoticed by the movement. Biko wrote that 'While it may be relevant now to talk about black in relation to white, we must not make this our preoccupation, for it can be a negative exercise. As we proceed further towards the achievement of our goals, let us talk more about ourselves and our struggle and less about whites' (1978: 88; also Ramphela, 1995: 65). Again, to put it in phenomenological terms, people had to deal with the conditions into which they were thrown, and could not ignore these conditions if their struggles were to be effective.

The term 'Black', however, had not always been used by the movement. In the early days, the term 'non-White' was often preferred in order not to exclude Indians and so-called 'Coloureds'. However, Biko discusses how this term 'non-White' was dismissed relatively early-on by the SASO activists because,

they saw it as a negation of their being. They were being stated as "non something," which implied that the standard was something, and they were not that particular standard. They felt that a positive view of life, which is commensurate with the build-up of one's dignity and

³⁶ It is this phenomenological point that Modisane is drawing attention to in the title of his (1963) autobiography, 'Blame me on History'.

³⁷ Patricia J. Williams's 1997 Reith lectures offer an eloquent elaboration of this critique of liberal 'colour-blind' anti-racism (Williams, 1998).

confidence, should be contained in a description which you accept, so they sought to replace the term Non-White with the term Black (Biko, 1979: 16).

It was for this reason that the SASO activists at the University of Natal Non-European Section, where Biko, Ramphela, and various other founding BC activists met whilst undertaking their university studies, requested that their section be renamed the University of Natal Black Section in 1970 (Noble, 2009). As Ramphela writes, ‘terms such as “non-white” and “non-European” exemplified the extent to which both blacks and whites in South Africa had accepted European “whiteness” as the golden standard against which all else was to be measured’ (Ramphela, 195: 59). Black Consciousness argued that employing the term ‘non-White’ as a White indicated an uninterrogated narcissism, whereas Blacks using the term as a self-description revealed a deep-seated self-alienation.

‘Non-White’ then quickly became repositioned within BC thinking as a pejorative term, performing a similar connotative function to the ‘Uncle Tom’ epithet in a North American context. As Biko explained:

If one’s aspiration is Whiteness but his pigmentation makes attainment of this impossible then that person is a Non-White. Any man who calls a White man ‘Baas’, any man who serves in the police force or Security Branch is *ipso facto* a Non-White (1978: 48).³⁸

Whether there was a direct influence (e.g. More, 2004; Pityana, 2002), or whether it was mediated in part through Fanon’s writings, it is worth pointing out the similarity in structure of argument here with Sartre’s (1944) observations in *Anti-Semite and Jew*.³⁹ Whilst differences are also present (for instance in the social classes ascribed to the various characters), a structural homology exists between the two analyses. Contrary to much preceding anti-apartheid activism, which had focussed on the explicit racism of the state, the innovative objects of ire for the BCM—as for Sartre—were those figures who operated on the basis of existential ‘bad faith’, through failing to acknowledge and confront their own complicity with the system (More, 2004: 58).⁴⁰ The censure Sartre directs

³⁸ Biko’s own father, who had died when Biko was four years old, had been a policeman.

³⁹ The intellectual context in Durban between 1970-1974—a period Tony Morphet (1989: 92) has dubbed the ‘Durban Moment’—was informed by existentialist thinking, in particular through the influence of the white philosopher and activist, Rick Turner, an associate of Biko, who was later assassinated by the security police. Turner had written a doctoral dissertation on Sartre in Paris, studying under Henri Lefebvre, and went on to publish a highly influential book that discussed the role that radical White activists, sympathetic to BC thinking, and critical of the liberal approach, might play within the struggle (Turner, [2015] 1972).

⁴⁰ Gordon (1995) offers an extended analysis of the relevance of the Sartrean category of ‘bad faith’ to anti-black racism more broadly.

towards the ‘inauthentic Jew’ who aspires to assimilate to a corrupted system finds its counterpart in the BCM’s criticisms of the ‘non-White’, typified in Biko’s excoriation of figures such as Gatsha Buthelezi. Similarly, Sartre’s ‘democrat’ corresponds to the BCM’s criticism of the ‘White liberal’. ‘Blacks’ for Biko, like ‘authentic Jews’ for Sartre, therefore asserted their autonomy through breaking away from those claiming to speak on their behalf. Failure to resist—failure to act—was also to be inauthentic, since as Biko noted ‘there is no freedom in silence, Sartre discovered this to his dismay’ (1972: 10).⁴¹

Sartre claimed to have become conscious of the impossibility of freedom in silence in the context of the Germany’s wartime occupation of France. During this period, silence acquired heroic connotations and became associated with the Resistance. Only at the end of the war did silence become downgraded and the act of speaking out celebrated. Not dissimilar to French anti-fascists during WWII, Biko himself was confronted with a situation where it was illegal for him to speak out, hence his writing in the SASO newsletter under the pseudonym ‘Frank Talk’. Through performances like those we have been describing, members of the BCM, including Biko, were able ‘to speak out’ without the use of incriminating words, relying on their actions and terminological innovations to do the talking.

Each step in the terminological innovations made by the BCM was concerned not only with a reclassification of reality, but also with intervention in that reality. They were not merely representative therefore, but also performative. In the case of the redefinition of the term ‘Black’, this performative goal was aimed firstly, at obliterating the divisive internal hierarchies of citizenship that apartheid had created within the oppressed population, secondly, at polarising the opposition between the oppressor and oppressed groups, and finally, and perhaps more importantly, at the ushering into being of a new historical subject in South Africa.

⁴¹ Additional formal similarities with Sartre are found at in the relationship between self and Other. For Sartre (1943) this relationship is always problematic and potentially conflictual. The Other attempts to define and limit the self; so the self struggles to avoid being defined or restricted by the Other. Whilst Sartre’s case remains primarily philosophical, the BCM, following du Bois’s earlier innovations ([1903] 1996), translated this relationship into the psychological mode: the oppressed internalising the white supremacist representations of the oppressor, therefore cementing their oppression by granting it legitimacy.

Conclusion

In this paper we have used the historical case of the Black Consciousness Movement to reveal a mode of citizenship we believe has too often been neglected in the literature. We have called this ‘performative citizenship’ in order to distinguish it from other conceptions, most obviously that of citizenship as a juridico-political status officially granted by a state, but also from more closely-aligned conceptions such as Isin’s (2008) ‘acts of citizenship’. Performative citizenship instead refers to the evocation of a durable sense of substantive belonging, rights, and—as we saw with the case of the Black Community Programmes—duties too, that is continually manifested through its successful enactment. This enactment came in various forms within the BCM, including embodied defiance, the demonstration of self-sufficiency, and even the effort at summoning into being a new historical subject through organising political goals on the basis of an innovative terminological configuration. Performative citizenship can, and usually does, exist alongside formal recognition of citizenship, yet in contexts where formal recognition is denied (such as 1970s South Africa), the acting out of performative citizenship automatically becomes a mode of social protest.⁴²

We have shown how within the BCM performance acted as a vehicle to link the abstract philosophy initially developed by the movement’s early leadership with the concrete political praxis that was necessary for initiating social change. Performance enabled ideas to be translated into actions, and opened up a resource of counter-power for the BCM activists. This performance entered the realm of performativity at the moments in which it began itself to intervene in, rather than merely represent the realities it addressed. At these moments, the evocation of a denied status symbolically punctured the ideology of white supremacy and therefore presented a challenge to the state’s control over the unfolding social drama. Whilst the state’s control of political, economic, and military power remained unassailable, the emergence of the BCM advanced the erosion of the state’s ideological legitimacy on a cultural plane.

⁴² Jasper (1999) draws a distinction between protest movements conducted by outsider groups aimed at winning citizenship rights from the state, and those conducted by rights-bearing citizens aimed primarily at protecting or extending such rights, defending the rights of others, or changing the behaviour of other integrated groups in society. Our point here is that whilst the enactment of citizenship by rights-bearing citizens *can* be a form of protest, the same activity conducted by those excluded from citizenship status becomes a form of protest by definition.

Throughout, we have tried to stress that the political performances enacted by the BCM were rarely, if ever, composed entirely afresh. Instead, the BCM reiterated, and simultaneously innovated upon, a number of pre-existent ‘collective representations’ (Durkheim, [1912] 2001), ‘culture structures’ (Alexander & Smith, 1993; Alexander, 2006) or ‘meaning clusters’ (Smith & Howe, 2015), and much looser chains of signification that coalesce in particular cultural contexts and are often passed from one generation to the next. The most immediate sources for the content of the political formation that the BCM developed included, amongst others, the Black Power and Civil Rights movements in the United States,⁴³ the New Left movement in Europe and North America, the various pan-Africanist and colonial liberation philosophies, and earlier domestic anti-apartheid struggles. This is not to say that BC was merely a derivative movement (Sono, 1993). It is to recognise that no cultural or political product is forged *ex nihilo*. Turner & Alan (1978), for instance, document the reciprocal influence of the South African struggle on American black politics.

We believe that these explicit and implicit influences constitute something more than simply ‘social movement spillover effects’ (Meyer and Whittier, 1994) or tactical imitation (Soule, 1997). We also do not see any *a priori* reason to assume that the timing of the deployment of a particular cultural resource will map neatly onto expectations of its success, or what, in more structural analyses, is sometimes called the emergence of an ‘opportunity structure’ within a particular ‘cycle of contention’ (Tarrow, 1993; 1998). The continuity in reiteration of culture structures over time and place is clearly also an ongoing process. Current social protest in South Africa and Europe under the iconoclastic banners of Rhodes or Fees or Smuts ‘Must Fall’, or around the project to ‘Decolonise the University’, as well as the ‘Black Lives Matter’ movement that began in the USA, are themselves, self-consciously or not, clearly reiterative in their various permutations of many of the cultural formations expressed by the BCM.⁴⁴

This matter of cultural reiteration taking place from a pre-existent reservoir of symbolic forms is also linked to the relative lack of boundedness in social drama. Unlike stage drama, social drama rarely neatly concludes. If it proves resonant, it leaves behind formal imprints that echo down the ages.

⁴³ Alexander notes that the ‘iterative performances of the mid-century civil rights movement left a deeply ingrained culture structure, an intensely redolent set of background representations upon which later black protests felt compelled to draw’ (Alexander, 2017: 35).

⁴⁴ The Mission Statement of the UCT Rhodes Must Fall campaign quotes directly from Biko.

It is not just that anthropological accounts of ritualised social performance, such as those provided by Turner's (1985) model of breach-crisis-redress-reintegration or schism, have been overly restrictive and event-focussed (Smith & Howe, 2015: 31-2), but that such dramas in a certain sense have no necessary beginning or end at all. Whilst the boundaries placed around ritual events are usually determined by actors or directors (priests, shamans, etc.), the boundaries placed around the looser forms of social drama that we find in social movements are just as often determined by commentators (not least social scientists themselves!). This fact introduces a high degree of indeterminacy to social drama. Social dramas, including those found in ritual, extend back into the past through fashioning their own scripts from preceding cultural forms and stretch forward into an unknown future in which they may be resurrected long after their original actors have died, and often after extended periods of dormancy. We never know how or when a cultural representation might be picked up again, re-examined, and new twists made out of it, and so unlike on an actual stage, there is no definitive curtain call.

Finally, this paper has highlighted a methodological issue of interest to the sociology of knowledge. We agree with other studies that have highlighted the centrality of social movements in providing the context for innovations of thought and ideas (Eyerman & Jamison, 1991), but in studying both the circulation and development of ideas, sociologists must expand their gaze beyond the written and spoken word. This is especially important in contexts, such as that which we have examined, in which the ideas themselves are political in nature and repression and censorship are all-pervasive (McDonald, 2009). Like other South African intellectual traditions, the BCM was the recipient, synthesiser, and innovator upon of an enormous range of imported ideas (Vale, Hamilton & Prinsloo, 2014), yet many of these ideas found expression not through their inscription in texts or elaboration in speech, but instead through various forms of social performance and performativity. Understanding the way in which words and speech do things is therefore certainly key (Austin, 1962; Butler, 1997), but if reception studies neglects the power of ideas in their non-verbal and non-written performative manifestation, it will fail to detect large elements of its purported object of study.

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Interviews

- Biko, Steve (1972) interviewed by Gail Gerhart, 86 Beatrice Street, Durban, 24th October.
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- Khoapa, Bennie (2017a) interviewed by Marcus Morgan, Matatiele, Eastern Cape, 14th January.
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- Langa, Mandla (2017) interviewed by Marcus Morgan, Johannesburg, 2nd February.
- Lekota, Mosiuoa 'Terror' (2016) interviewed by Marcus Morgan, Johannesburg, 30th August.
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