Introduction
Black Consciousness, Echoes of Haiti's Revolution and the Azanian Black Nationalist Tradition

The mistakes they made [the older generation], shall never be repeated. They carried the struggle up to where they could. We are very grateful to them. But now, the struggle is ours. The Ball of liberation is in our hands.[1]

At the tender age of seventeen, Khotso Seatlholo's fiery words quoted above during the Soweto Uprising of 1976–1977 captured the tone, tenor and tenaciousness of a new generation of African guerrillas emerging in 1970s South Africa. While aware of the contributions previous organisations like the African National Congress of South Africa (ANC) and Pan Africanist Congress of Azania (PAC) had made to the struggle against apartheid, Seatlholo and his comrades believed they had done all they could do. It was time for new leadership to fight against, 'the WHITE FASCIST MINORITY GOVERNMENT OF JOHN VORSTER and his gang of pro-Nazi Ministers'.[2] Continuing on, Seatlholo stated, 'Our whole being rebels against the whole South African system of existence, the system of apartheid that is killing us psychologically and physically.'[3] As members of the Black

[1] Wits Historical Papers, Karis/Gerhart Collection (hereafter WHP) A2675/III/795, K. Seatlholo, '[Soweto] Students Representative Council, Press Release', 29 October 1976, p. 1.
[2] *Ibid*., p. 2. Note, many members of the NP and the wider white population supported Hitler and Germany during WWII. Some, like Balthazar Johannes Vorster of the Ossewa Brandwag (Ox-Wagon Guard), would be welcomed into the NP after their imprisonment by the Smuts regime during the war for their militant support for Nazi Germany. See C. Marx, 'The Ossewabrandwag as a Mass Movement, 1939–1941', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 20, 2 (1994), pp. 195–219; A. Fokkens, 'Afrikaner Unrest and the Measures Taken to Suppress It during the Second World War', *Journal for Contemporary History*, 37, 2 (2012), pp. 123–142.
[3] WHP A2675/III/795, K. Seatlholo, '[Soweto] Students Representative Council, Press Release', 29 October 1976, p. 3.

Consciousness Movement (BCM) this new wave of activists attempted to transform themselves into the vanguard of the national and wider Pan-African struggle against white settler colonialism.

Seatlholo, like many Black South Africans at the time not in university, had his first sustained exposure to Black Consciousness through the Literacy Programs of BCM in the early 1970s.[4] Building on these early lessons, Seatlholo and others like Tsietsi Mashinini brought this new political orientation forged in the Soweto township high schools through organisations like the South African Students Movement (SASM), various debate teams and youth/cultural organisations to the mainstream discourse. SASM was central to the growing political consciousness of youths across the country and was a space where early planning for the 16th June 1976 Soweto march would take place. After white police opened fire on unarmed protesting Black children and teenagers, young organisers like Seatlholo and Mashinini utilised the lessons learned in BCM to transform themselves and their organisations into township guerrillas during the rebellions of 1976 and 1977.[5]

The ANC and PAC had a limited presence inside South Africa at the time as most of their members and leaders were either in exile or prison. Moreover, attempts to build an effective underground while dogged were minimally influential to the political currents of the time.[6] Given

[4] Toivo Asheeke interview with Nosipho Matshoba, 13 August 2019, Johannesburg (hereafter Nosipho interview), pp. 18–19. For more on the Literacy Programs, see T. Asheeke, 'Literacy, Armed Struggle and Black Consciousness: The Evolution of NAYO, 1973–1976', *South African Historical Journal*, 73, 2021, pp. 515–532.

[5] WHP A2675/III/796, D. Ndlovu, 'Amandla! The Story of the Soweto Students Representative Council', in *Weekend World*, 31 July–28 August 1977 five-part series, pp. 1–12.

[6] L. Callinicos, *Oliver Tambo: Beyond the Engeli Mountains* (Claremont, David Philip Publishers, 2004), pp. 379–383; R. Suttner, *The ANC Underground in South Africa, 1950–1976* (Boulder, Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2009), pp. 59–83; A. Hlongwane, 'Reflections on the Pan Africanist Congress "Underground" in the Era of the 1976 Youth Uprisings', *Journal of Pan African History*, 3, 4 (2009), pp. 55–71; T. Simpson, 'Main Machinery: The ANC's Armed Underground in Johannesburg during the 1976 Soweto Uprising', *African Studies*, 70, 3 (2011), pp. 415–436. Others have argued that the ANC underground was very present in the 1970s especially around Soweto, see G. Houston and B. Magubane, 'The ANC Political Underground in the 1970s' in *The Road to Democracy in South Africa, Vol. 2 [1970–1980]*, pp. 371–451.

this, the township youths formed the Soweto Students Representative Council (SSRC) to better coordinate the youth rebellion with the wider Black community. As Soweto burned and the incarceration and death tolls of youths fighting continued to rise, activists and at times waged workers from across the country took to the streets to challenge the institutions and injustices of the apartheid regime.[7] By 1977, a national Black Power rebellion against the white supremacist regime had been triggered which in hindsight signalled the eventual fall in 1994 of legalised white settler colonialism in South Africa.

Yet, at the time, the counter-insurgency capabilities of the apartheid war machine were exceptional in their brutality and ruthless in their methods and the rebellion was eventually suppressed. As state-sanctioned violence increased key SSRC leaders like Seatlholo and Mashinini were forced to follow in the footsteps of countless African guerrillas and maroons before them and flee into exile. While abroad, they formed the South African Youth Revolutionary Council (SAYRCO) in 1979 which attempted to build an armed political organisation in exile which would return home to win freedom through the barrel of the gun. While it did not succeed in executing sustained armed actions against the apartheid regime, its very founding demonstrated the ability of Black Consciousness organising to find concrete political expression within the armed sections of the liberation struggle. For Nosipho Matshoba, one of the founding members of SAYRCO, organising this armed wing was important because 'people did not want to go through the ANC … they didn't want to go through PAC … So the only way to do this was to form a different liberation movement'.[8]

Unfortunately, our knowledge of SAYRCO and other armed wings influenced by Black Consciousness is scant at best. In the rich historiographies of South Africa's liberation struggle, it is the ANC and its armed wing Umkhonto We Sizwe (MK) which hold pride of place. The history of the ruling party has become synonymous with and

[7] B. Hirson, *Year of Fire, Year of Ash: The Soweto Schoolchildren's Revolt That Shook Apartheid* (London, Zed Books, 2016, org. 1979); A. Heffernan and N. Nieftagodien, eds., *Students Must Rise: Youth Struggle in South Africa before and beyond Soweto '76* (Johannesburg, Wits University Press, 2016); *The Road to Democracy in South Africa: Volume 7: Soweto Uprisings: New Perspective, Commemorations and Memorialisation* (Pretoria, UNISA Press, 2017).

[8] Nosipho interview, p. 20.

indivisible from the fight against apartheid rule.[9] This has left little space for other narratives, visions and political projects not aligned with the ANC or the wider Congress tradition to find concrete expression in the literature. As it pertains to Black Consciousness, many scholars have argued its principal contribution was as an intellectual/student movement and its main shortcoming was the limited degree of active political and military opposition it was able to offer the apartheid regime. *Arming Black Consciousness: The Azanian Black Nationalist Tradition and South Africa's Armed Struggle, 1967–1993*, challenges this narrative. Grounded in a careful analysis of numerous primary and secondary sources as well as oral interviews and memoirs, my research has unearthed a rich history of BCM's unrelenting engagement with armed struggle as a form of resistance to white settler colonialism.

Unlike other revolutionary guerrilla struggles across the Third World and Africa, none of the armed wings of the various South African movements built the capacity to engage in sustained armed confrontations against the apartheid war machine. In the early 1990s, MK Chief of Staff Chris Hani stated, 'the military achievement of MK cannot remotely be compared to those of the liberation armies in Cuba, Vietnam and Zimbabwe. We never liberated and administered territory, arms in hand.'[10] Instead, the MK commander compared themselves with the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) and the Irish Republican Army (IRA) in terms of its style of confrontation. Moreover, Hani lamented the reality that 'MK on its own has never developed the ability to adequately defend our people'.[11] Outside of the occasional death of a white settler (mostly through Poqo in the mid-1960s) and some police/military personnel (generally through MK activities in the 1980s), white lives and property went mostly unharmed.

[9] C. Saunders, 'The ANC in the Historiography of the National Liberation Struggle in South Africa' in K. Kondlo, C. Saunders and S. Zondi, eds., *Treading the Waters of History and Perspectives of the ANC* (Pretoria, Africa Institute of South Africa, 2014), pp. 11–22; S. Davis, *The ANC's War against Apartheid: Umkhonto We Sizwe and the Liberation of South Africa* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2018), pp. xiii–25; N. Dladla, 'The Azanian Philosophical Tradition Today, *Theoria*, 68, 168 (2021), pp. 1–11.

[10] C. Hani, 'The Achievements of MK', in G. Houston and J. Ngculu, eds., *Voices of Liberation: Chris Hani* (Cape Town, HSRC Press, 2014), p. 192.

[11] *Ibid*., p. 193.

Nevertheless, the importance of South Africa's armed struggle to the fall of apartheid was and in certain spaces still is touted by the ANC and some scholarship as being central to the fall of apartheid rule.[12] Others have argued it was relatively marginal to the eventual demise of the white supremacist Nasionale Party (NP) in the April 1994 elections and was overemphasised during the years in exile. There are even questions around whether an armed overthrow of the state was ever the goal of the ANC/MK as thousands of its trained combatants never saw battle inside South Africa.[13]

If this is the case, why is excavating BCM's armed struggle against the white settler colonialist state important? According to Thandika Zondo, an Azanian National Liberation Army (AZANLA) veteran, 'We need the world to be told the truth. We need people to know they [ANC] were not the only ones who were fighting, we were also in the struggle, in as much as we are still struggling now.'[14] The lack of attention paid to Black Consciousness's attempts at armed struggle and its history in exile has seen the sacrifices and struggles of its members marginalised. Consequently, it has been the worldview of the Congress tradition that has shaped the socio-economics and much of the mainstream culture and political direction of South Africa post-1994. This book troubles this hegemonic worldview by offering a historiography of what some scholars and activists have called the Azanian Black Nationalist Tradition, represented by the BCM, being built during South Africa's liberation struggle.[15]

Through this perspective, my book expands and deepens our understanding of the BCM prior to 1994. For some, a discussion about Black Consciousness, armed struggle and exile seems strange. In the literature we have available to us, there is hardly any mention of this history outside of in a few scattered places. In many of

[12] F. Meli, *A History of the ANC: South Africa Belongs to Us* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1989).
[13] D. McKinley, *The ANC and the Liberation Struggle: A Critical Political Biography* (London, Pluto Press, 1997); M. Legassick, *Armed Struggle and Democracy: The Case of South Africa* (Uppsala, Nordic Africa Institute, 2002).
[14] Toivo Asheeke interview with Thandika Zondo, January 2017, Soweto (hereafter Zondo interview), p. 14.
[15] H. Tafira, *Black Nationalist Thought in South Africa* (New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); Dladla, 'The Azanian Philosophical Tradition Today', pp. 1–11; J. Modiri, 'Azanian Political Thought and the Undoing of South African Knowledges', *Theoria*, 68, 168 (2021), pp. 42–85.

the accounts of the more internationally known figures of BCM like Steve Biko and Ramphele Mamphela, there is little, if any, discussion of this history.[16] In Biko's famous SASO 9 trial testimony, he avoids giving a direct answer about whether his organisation was engaged in armed struggle or not. At the same time, he rejected any notion that BCM was a front for the ANC or PAC or recruiting members for their armed wings.[17]

My research shows that Biko was correctly not being forthright in his testimony. In reality, he was aware of something happening among BCM cadres in Botswana in the mid-1970s as it pertains to armed struggle. In an interview with Ranwedzi Nengwekhulu, one of those who was around cadres attempting to build this new wing of the movement in Botswana, he mentioned that he kept Biko informed of things when he could via phone.[18] Despite this knowledge, in part due to the fractures that existed among the South African liberation movements, Biko did not believe armed revolution would work as a means to overthrow apartheid. He had also been against the protests in support of Onkgopotse Tiro in 1972, the Frente de Libertação de Moçambique (FRELIMO) rallies in 1974 and the Soweto protests in June 1976 as he felt these actions would invite state repression before BCM was strong enough to withstand it.[19] Some would argue Biko was correct.

Others in the growing movement took a different and no less revolutionary view. This was nothing to lament as for the founding activists of Black Consciousness, a diversity of thought and action was encouraged and nourished in order to push BCM to grow in new and dynamic ways. One of them being what many felt was the logical

[16] S. Biko, *I Write What I Like: Selected Writings* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2002, org. 1978); L. Wilson, 'Bantu Steve Biko: A Life' in B. Pityana, M. Ramphele, M. Mpumlwana and L. Wilson, eds., *Bounds of Possibility: The Legacy of Steve Biko and Black Consciousness* (Cape Town, David Philip Publishers 1991), pp. 15–77; M. Ramphele, *Across Boundaries: The Journey of a South African Woman Leader* (New York, The Feminist Press at CUNY, 1996); X. Mangcu, *Biko: A Biography* (Cape Town, Tafelberg, 2012).

[17] S. Biko, M. Arnold, ed., *Steve Biko: Black Consciousness in South Africa* (New York, Vintage Books, 1979), pp. 43, 127–140, WHP A2675/III/796.

[18] Toivo Asheeke interview with Ranwedzi Nengwekhulu, p. 13.

[19] On Biko's disagreement with the FRELIMO rallies, see WHP A2675/I/26, Interview with Malusi Mpumlwana, 7 August 1989, Uitenhage, GG, p. 8.

conclusion to their rapidly increasing confrontations with the state, the return to armed struggle. Sam Nolutshungu, one of the few scholars to acknowledge the seriousness of armed struggle as a political strategy within BCM prior to June 1976, points out that Black Consciousness,

> could not work in public and engage in violent subversion at the same time, nor, indeed, openly espouse force as an integral part of liberation. The public espousal of non-violence was largely a tactical recognition of these constraints … Black consciousness militants were always conscious of an impending armed confrontation.[20]

Continuing on he wrote, 'The necessity of freedom imposed the obligation of violence, and the recognition of both was essentially a radicalising process in ideological terms as well.'[21] This matches what this book has uncovered in the process of my research. As much of the literature has focused on Biko, who is pivotal to understanding Black Consciousness, other significant dimensions and undercurrents of the movement which he did not take centre stage in have been overlooked.

Arming Black Consciousness recuperates and rehabilitates some of these shattered histories and hidden voices in order to reconstruct an expanded history of BCM as part of the wider Azanian Black Nationalist Tradition. Many of the revolutionaries it centres such as Bokwe Mafuna, Thandika Zondo, "Skaap" Motsau and Pitso Hlasa are not well known. Most of them were not university-trained cadres. Instead, they came from working poor backgrounds, which made it hard for them to obtain formal higher education. Others like Welile Nhlapo and Nosipho Matshoba decided university education was not for them as their time would be better utilised as full-time organisers. Scholar Ndumiso Dladla has correctly pointed out that many within the Azanian Philosophical Tradition were far more than 'simply academics. They were soldiers, activists, organizers, lawyers, and freedom fighters who distilled their thought in the process of the engagement of struggle.'[22]

[20] S. Nolutshungu, *Changing South Africa: Political Considerations* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1982), pp. 179–180.
[21] *Ibid*., p. 183.
[22] Dladla, 'The Azanian Philosophical Tradition Today, p. 5. The Azanian Black Nationalist Tradition, Azanian Philosophical Tradition, Black Nationalism and Black Radical Tradition are to be seen as generally interchangeable terms throughout the text. The first two are more regional (southern African) focuses of the latter two.

The activism and activity of these lesser-known guerrillas created and shaped BCM's liberation struggle and provided it with an expanded and arguably more concrete vision of what the movement needed to mean in the day-to-day lives of the wretched of South Africa's earth. This enriched Black Consciousness's political praxis which helped bring it, especially while in exile, into closer contact with the wider Third World Revolution.[23] Operating within the Cold War, BCM's various armed wings represented a radical Black Nationalist vision of change and transformation for South Africa, or as they called it Azania, as its armed activists prepared for revolution.

If this book is successful, it will have opened a new avenue to understand South African historiography which moves us away from liberal, European Marxist and ANC/Congress centric versions of South Africa's liberation history.[24] By doing so, a fuller and more dynamic understanding of how Black South Africans responded to racist colonial oppression can be constructed. Moreover, for the contemporary moment, this work suggests Azanian Black Nationalist inspired struggles in South Africa against poverty, white monopoly capital, corruption, gender-based violence and racism are the continuation of some of these lesser celebrated political projects. Although activists like Khotso Seatlholo did not have all the answers to South Africa's problems, they offered an idea of freedom that Black activists today have rediscovered.

Exclusion/Domination, the Haitian Revolution and the Black Radical Tradition

More broadly, this book offers a new framework to understand Africa's decolonisation struggle and the liberatory traditions it produced in the post-WWII period. Ideologically, liberation movements in Africa have been divided into radical or conservative organisations with Marxism–Leninism or Maoism seen as the ideological

[23] For some early references to this hearkening to the Third World, see WHP A2675/III/748, SASO Executive Council Meeting, 1st–8th of December, 1971, pp. 1–27.

[24] On some of the silences produced by the Liberal and Marxist traditions in the writing on African Nationalism in South African history, see, T. Delport, 'Erasing the Nation: The Historiography of African Nationalism in Conqueror South Africa', *Theoria*, 68, 168 (2021), pp. 136–159.

orientation of the former.[25] Conservative organisations have generally been identified as being either Black Nationalist/narrowly racialist, ethno-nationalist, irrationally emotional and reverse-racist.[26] This construction of the ideas and practices of Black Nationalism as being conservative, or at best a transitionary phase towards a "higher" non-racialist class consciousness, has hindered a closer reading of the ways in which it has been and still is a viable political force for revolution in Africa since the earliest days of the European slave trade, enslavement on the continent and colonial rule. A closer look at the primary sources clearly shows Black Nationalism to be organic to African masses fighting white settler colonialism, not only as a fighting praxis of Africans in the diaspora. Hence, far from a foreign import or insufficient ideological current, this book agrees with and wishes to expand on Hashi Tafira's argument that,

> Azanian Black Nationalist thought, in all its forms and shapes, is a historical idea rooted in the colonial encounter between Africans and colonizers. It is a consummation of a long tradition steeped in the desire of colonized Africans to liberate themselves. It is a strand, a node in a long thread woven through different historical epochs in Azanian resistance struggles.[27]

As Tafira has correctly stated, this tradition of thought and material struggle has a long history in Azania.[28] From the moment Europeans

[25] Depending on where one stands in the Sino-Soviet split, Maoist leaning organisations were also seen as conservative. Indeed, by the late 1970s, China had completed its counter-revolutionary turn. The results of which were then at times supporting harmful movements on the continent as a means of fighting the USSR such as UNITA which was CIA-backed. More on this will be discussed in the conclusion.

[26] For a few specific examples of this from leftist and liberal supporters/participants of the liberation struggles, see M. Legassick, 'Racism and Guerrilla Struggle in Southern Africa', *Africa Today*, 15, 1 (1968), pp. 3–5; J. Slovo, 'South Africa – No Middle Road', in B. Davidson, ed., *Southern Africa: The New Politics of Revolution* (UK, Pelican Books, 1976), pp. 131–132; W. Burchett, *Southern Africa Stands Up: The Revolutions in Angola, Mozambique, Rhodesia, Namibia and South Africa* (UK, Urizen Books, 1978), pp. 9–10; J. Rogers and A. Callinicos, *Southern Africa after Soweto* (London, Pluto Press, 1978), p. 193; A. Marx, *Lessons of Struggle: South African Internal Opposition, 1960–1990* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 36–42; V. Shubin, *ANC: A View from Moscow* (Johannesburg, Jacana Media, 2009 2nd edition, org. 1999), p. 46.

[27] Tafira, *Black Nationalist Thought in South Africa*, p. 5.

[28] For more on where the name Azania comes from, see F. Chami, 'The Geographical Extent of Azania', *Theoria*, 68, 168 (2021), pp. 12–29.

invaded the southern tip of Africa, there were different ideas on how to react. As the European colonial project violently expanded some fled, others were forced to assimilate and still others chose to stand their ground and resist through armed struggle and/or non-violent direct action. By the nineteenth century, connections between the Azanian Black Nationalist tradition and the wider Black International began to take shape more concretely. This development was paralleled and resisted by a global white supremacist project Gerald Horne has meticulously sketched out in his recent book on the region.[29] Nevertheless, Africans throughout the diaspora and continent forged ways to ideologically and organisationally connect to the growing Azanian struggle. This took the form of the Ethiopianism movement, the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church,[30] Garveyism and the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), Black Communists and the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union (ICU) to name but a few.[31]

[29] G. Horne, *White Supremacy Confronted: U.S. Imperialism and Anti-Communism vs. the Liberation of Southern Africa, from Rhodes to Mandela* (New York, International Publishers, 2019), pp. 39–106.

[30] As it pertains to the founding of Fort Hare, part of the incentive behind its creation by white liberals was their worry that too many Black South Africans were going to the United States for formal education given the lack of opportunities domestically. These forces believed African exposure to the Afro-American struggle made them rowdy and rebellious towards whites upon their return. Ethiopianism and the AME Church were seen as the main culprits behind this radicalisation, not for some reason the real racism and land dispossession these Africans were experiencing at home. Biko and others made a point to study this formation in their early years. See D. Massey, *Under Protest: The Rise of Student Resistance at the University of Fort Hare* (Pretoria, UNISA Press, 2010); Steve Biko Centre Collection, 'Interview with Steve Biko' by Gail Gerhart, 24 October 1972 (full interview), in Durban offices, p. 20.

[31] J. Chinjere, *Ethiopianism and Afro-Americans in Southern Africa, 1883–1916* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 1987); J. Campbell, *Songs of Zion: The African Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States and South Africa* (Chapel Hill and London, University of North Carolina Press, 1998); T. Martin, *Race First: The Ideological and Organizational Struggles of Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association* (Massachusetts, The Majority Press, 1976), pp. 110–150; M. West, 'The Seeds Are Sown: The Impact of Garveyism in Zimbabwe in the Interwar Years', *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 35, 2/3 (2002), pp. 335–362; R. Suttner, 'African Nationalism' in P. Vale, L. Hamilton and E. Prinsloo, eds., *Intellectual Traditions in South Africa: Ideas, Individuals and Institutions* (Durban, University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2014), pp. 121–145; M. Ndletyana, 'Pan Africanism in South Africa: A Confluence of Local Origin and Diasporic Inspiration' in P. Vale, L. Hamilton and E. Prinsloo, eds.,