An Examination of the Gendered Experiences of Black Women in the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM)

A half thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

(POLITICAL AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES)

RHODES UNIVERSITY

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2024

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To my family and especially my father this thesis would have been impossible without your support. Thank you for always being the pillar of strength in the most crucial moments, events, and milestones of my life. I would also like to express my gratitude to my supervisor, Professor Mandisi Majavu, whose guidance, patience, and supervision have contributed to bringing this project to life. To the eight women interviewed in this project, thank you for entrusting me with your stories to analyse and bring them forward to the world of academia. To my friends Anelisiwe Mgqwanca and Okuhle Boqwana, thank you for being the women that you are, thank you for being constants in a world full of instabilities. Your sisterhood and sense of community have shaped me to show up as the best person I can be, for that was needed to finish this project. To my colleagues and partners in laugh at the Department of Political and International Studies, thank you for the laughter, the conversations over coffee, the hugs and the sometimes annoying "How is research going?" question which showed compassion and care. Lastly, my deepest gratitude goes to the Andrew Mellon Scholarship for providing with the funds that have made the research and writing of this thesis possible.

ABSTRACT

This is a qualitative MA thesis that investigates the gendered experiences and political roles of Black women in the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM). This research project sought to answer two research questions: 1) What political role did women activists play in the BCM? and 2) What is the gendered experience of women activists who participated in this Movement? To engage with these research questions, this study recruited and interviewed eight black women who were politically involved in the BCM during the apartheid era. Research participants were interviewed through semi-structured interviews. An important finding in this study is that many of the research participants were attracted to the BCM by the Movement's philosophy which centred on black pride under slogans like "Black is Beautiful". Participants recounted stories of personal transformation that was activated by the philosophy of the BCM. For instance, participants talked about how the BCM philosophy encouraged self-acceptance by equipping women activists with ideological tools to struggle against the white beauty standards imposed by colonialism and apartheid. However, some research participants reported that while the Movement was underpinned by a black liberation philosophy, the Movement did not prioritise women liberation. Consequently, women's political agenda was often pushed aside. Thus, while the BCM championed racial solidarity and the psychological liberation of black people, it often marginalised and overlooked the unique struggles of black women, who faced intersecting oppressions of race, gender, and class.

Ultimately, this thesis aims to contribute to the post-1994 black feminist project by making visible and documenting the experience of women activists in the BCM. This research aims to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the BCM by foregrounding the experiences of black women and advocating for an intersectional approach to historical and political analysis. In doing so, it underscores the importance of addressing gendered inequities within liberation movements to achieve true solidarity and justice.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS/ABBREVIATIONS

ANC	African National Congress
BC	Black Consciousness
BCM	Black Consciousness Movement
BCP	Black Community Programmes
BPC	Black People's Convention
NUSAS	National Union of South African Students
PAC	Pan Africanist Congress
SASM	South African Students Movement
SASO	South African Students Organisation

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This MA thesis investigates the gendered experiences and political roles of Black women in the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM). To that end, this study recruited and interviewed eight black women who were politically involved in the BCM during the apartheid era. This chapter aims to locate the findings of this research project in the history of the BCM. Thus, chapter one discusses the history of the BCM, the ideology of the BCM, the philosophical praxis of the BCM, as well as the history of black women in this movement. The discussion begins in the late twentieth century, in the 1970s to be precise, largely because the BCM as a vibrant and self-defining movement emerged around this time. This study recognises that the ideological roots of the BCM can be traced to the 1920s Garvey's movement in South Africa, as well as the 1940s' 'Africanist' movement in the African National Congress (ANC) that eventually broke away from the ANC to form the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) in 1959. However, this project does not investigate these roots due to space constraints. As per the Politics Department's postgraduate handbook, "students reading for the Master's Degree by coursework-and-thesis take three courses and also write a thesis of between 15 000 and 25 000 words." In a thesis of about 25 000 words, a choice had to be made about what period and what theme of the BCM to comprehensively investigate and study. As already explained, this thesis focuses on the period between the 1970s and 1980s, with a particular emphasis on lack women's experience in the BCM.

1.2 A historical outline of the BCM

In the late 20th century, numerous back intellectuals fighting against the apartheid regime found themselves either banned, imprisoned, or in exile. For instance, the apartheid government banned the ANC and PAC in 1960. Black political activists like Nelson Mandela, Robert Sobukwe, Walter Sisulu, Govan Mbeki, Andrew Mlangeni, and Raymond Mhlaba were imprisoned on Robben Island, while others like Oliver Tambo, and Thabo Mbeki, to name a few, went into exile (Gehart, 1978) The banning of black political activists and anti-apartheid political organisations resulted in a political void that was eventually filled by the emergence of the Black Consciousness Movement in the 1960s and1970s.

The BCM began in the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS). NUSAS was formed as a student movement representing and negotiating the needs and interests of college and university students (Hirschmann, 1990). NUSAS's leadership was predominantly white students with 27000 white students and only 3000 black students (Biko, 1987). In its formation, NUSAS was liberal and inclusive; it represented every race that existed in the higher education populace (Hirschmann, 1990). Upon its formation, the ideological stance of NUSAS was anti-apartheid and supported black students and black people in their fight against the repressive apartheid government (Hirschmann, 1990). The organisation represented what Steve Biko termed 'white liberals'. Biko (1987) defined white liberals as white people who sympathised with and assisted black people in their fight against the apartheid government.

Despite years of efforts by black students to make NUSAS a political home, progress was minimal (Gehart, 1978). Apart from NUSAS, black students had no other avenues to express their political views and criticism of the apartheid regime (Gerhart, 1978). Many black students affiliated with NUSAS, felt that their role within the movement was that of "second-class citizens" (Gerhart, 1978, p. 260). It was against this backdrop that Biko and his peers "began to canvass support for the idea of an all-black movement" that would do away with "white liberal leadership" (Gerhart, 1978, p. 260). A NUSAS conference held at Rhodes University in July 1968 served as the catalyst that brought about such as an all-black political movement that Biko had envisaged. At the 1968 NUSAS conference, Biko and his comrades withdrew from NUSAS because NUSAS's white liberal leadership and "Rhodes University, the host institution, prohibited mixed accommodation or eating facilities at the conference site" (Gerhart, 1978, p. 260).

After breaking away from NUSAS, Biko and his comrades formed the all-black organisation they had envisioned and named it the South African Students' Organisation (SASO) (Gerhart, 1978). At the organisation's formal inaugural conference in July 1969, Biko was named president of SASO (Gerhart, 1978).

Other leading figures from the beginning in SASO were Barney Pityana, an ex-Fort Hare student from Port Elizabeth, Harry Nengwekhulu, Hendrick Musi, Petrus Machaka and Manana Kgware of Turfloop, Aubrey Mokoape, a medical student, and J. Goolam and Strini Moodley, Indian

friends of Biko's, the former a medical student and the latter an ex-student at the University College of Durban-Westville. (Gerhart, 1978, p. 261)

The first constitution of SASO stated the organisation's objective was to represent "non-white students nationally" (Gerhart, 1978, p. 261). In July 1970, at the organisation's first General Students' Council at the University of Natal, SASO declared the organisation's political agenda was premised on the notion that "the emancipation of the black people in this country depends entirely on the role black people themselves are prepared to play" (Gerhart, 1978, p. 262). SASO endeavoured to encourage and promote collective black agency. With this political vision to create a political organisation to conscientize black people concerning their material conditions and their mental enslavement, SASO was formed (Tafira, 2016).

1.3 Philosophy of BCM

According to Biko (1987), one way to spark a social revolution among black people was through an inward-looking process, an awakening, and what he referred to as consciousness. He argued that for a black individual to achieve this consciousness, he must first analyse his involvement in his subjugation (Halisi, 1991). Biko (1987) argued that black people had internalised the apartheid system's oppression and dehumanisation as their reality. They needed to be woken from their inferiority complex, which Biko believed the apartheid state had imposed on black people to achieve its goals. Biko (1987) argued that the apartheid system had diminished the dignity and self-esteem of black people, resulting in an empty shell. To be able to bring life back into black people, Biko (1987) thought that black people needed to see themselves as part of the revolution; to do so, they needed to reject the inferiority complex implanted in them by the apartheid regime, which was an obstacle to their political achievement (Halisi, 1991). Biko (1987) says that for black people to be free of this inferiority complex, they needed to liberate their brains, which was a tool used by the apartheid state in their oppression, as embodied in the popular quote "The most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed" in his prominent book I Write What I Like (1978).

Biko (1987) argued that apartheid's most powerful weapon was its control over black people's psyche. Apartheid used racist indoctrination to carry out its persecution. Mental emancipation required the reversal of this indoctrination, which might be found in the Black Consciousness (BC)

ideology. BC literature emphasised mental emancipation because Biko (1987) maintained that if the oppressed minds were free, they would be able to perceive the apartheid state and 'whiteness' as their enemies (Halisi, 1991). This would culminate in the rejection of white value systems and questioning of white history, and black people would begin to examine their history and origins, believing that Black is Beautiful and take pride in their blackness (Halisi, 1991). When black people were mentally freed, Biko (1987) believed they could unite for the same goal as he believed their mentality had been used to divide them. One of the apartheid government's accomplishments was the divide-and-conquer tactic. It had divided its victims through physical segregation and the indoctrination of beliefs emphasising inferiority to blacks and superiority to whites (Halisi, 1991). Furthermore, various forms of indoctrination were achieved through the division of resources and opportunities, with some blacks being denied resources and chances while others received them, such as university education, resulting in a different socioeconomic status compared to other blacks. This resulted in stratification among black people, as some believed that by having these things, they were superior to other blacks. According to Biko (1996), the antithesis to this division was solidarity. Biko (1987) argued that without solidarity the liberation of all black people could not be achieved.

In blacks-only universities and colleges SASO was the home of the BC philosophy, where black students would articulate their ideas and embrace their blackness (Gqola, 2001). BCM activists like Steve Biko were spreading BC philosophy through writings and sharing literature on oppositional and black power politics from Fanon, Cesaire, the Black Panthers, Martin Luther King, and Malcolm X (Ramphele, 1991). Black students in black-only universities also articulated their consciousness in the clothing that they wore, and the literature that they read. For the young women on these campuses this articulation was embedded in their expression of African beauty standards (Gqola, 2001). Their rejection of white values also came with the rejection of Eurocentric beauty standards, which demanded that black women put chemicals onto their hair to straighten it out and use lightening creams on their skin to look lighter because black was associated with being ugly and unattractive (Gqola, 2001). Young black women on these campuses redefined what it is to be black and what it is to be an attractive young black woman in a society that had acquiescence to Eurocentric values and standards (Ramphele, 1996). In reading and following BC philosophy instead of conforming to these Eurocentric values young black women in black-only universities

wore their natural hair and participated in activities such as smoking, and drinking beer, therefore, reconstructing gender norms. Ramphele (1991) explains:

> "For the first time many black women could fall in love with their dark complexions, kinky hair, bulging hips and particular dress style. They found new pride in themselves as they were. They were no longer 'non-whites', but blacks with an authentic self, appreciated on their own terms. The skin-lightening creams, hot-oil combs, wigs and other trappings of the earlier period lost their grip on many women" (1991, p. 217).

1.4 BCM activism

The ideology and philosophy of BC did not end in conferences and delegations; it was applied in black communities. The political activism of the BCM deeply immersed itself within the black community and the philosophy of the redefinition of black was what led to the activities of the organisation (Ramphele, 1991). BCM activists applied the ideology in various community programmes. These community programmes emphasised the idea of self-reliance and self-help in black communities (Ramphele, 1996). It also emphasised the idea that black communities can be resourceful. Mamphela Ramphele, one of the founders and activists of the BCM in her 1996 memoir Across Boundaries: The Journey of a South African Woman Leader, explains the role of the Black Community Programmes:

> "These community programmes had been set up as the wing of the Black Consciousness Movement to give practical effect to the philosophy of black self-reliance, self-help, and liberation through development of the whole person" (1996, p. 94).

These community programmes were also concerned with building more durable houses for poor black people in informal settlements, who were deprived of proper housing and their cries for housing were ignored by the apartheid state (Hadfield, 2017). The community programmes were also concerned with access to health care for black people, therefore carrying out health work in several hospitals. Later, the BCP established clinics for rural development projects. For example, Mamphela Ramphele became the medical officer in charge at the Zanempilo Community Health Centre in Zinyoka outside King Williams Town in the Eastern Cape (Ramphele, 1996).

Black consciousness philosophy also sought to disassociate with white values along with white history. For example, it promoted black literature from black intellectuals, and it questioned the school curriculum of history pointing at its lack of black history and black heroes (Gqola, 2001). This resulted in the implementation of leadership-training workshops and the formation of Black Consciousness-inspired education programmes in black communities and university campuses (Ramphele, 1991). In essence, the formation of Black Consciousness-inspired educational programmes was created to attract high school students to educate them on their origins, expose them to black history different from what they were being taught by the apartheid Bantu education system, and familiarise them with black culture, black art, music and poetry by black intellectuals (Gqola, 2001). This is where the youth could also learn and articulate BC philosophy and be able to contrast with their lived realities under a system of oppression leading to consciousness even amongst high school students (Gqola, 2001).

1.5 Women in the BCM

Women have been formal members and leaders of BC organisations since the formation of BCM. Winifred Kgware was the first president of the Black People's Convention (BPC), while Maphiri Daphne Masekela worked at the ecumenical Wilgespruit Fellowship Centre (WFC) to advance BC ideals. Thenjiwe Mtintso, Thoko Mbanjwa, and Asha Rambally produced BC literature (Nxongo, 2019). SASO leaders Vuyelwa Mashalaba, Mamphela Ramphele, Deborah Matshoba, and Oshadi Mangena, along with Sibongile Mkhabela from the South African Students Movement (SASM), spearheaded the 1976 Soweto uprisings (Nxongo, 2019). These women played important roles in the movement as professionals and political leaders. They spent their time working with the male leaders in planning and implementing BC ideals and community projects to uplift black women and black communities in urban and rural areas (Nxongo, 2019).

The women initially attracted to the BCM were university students who later became black professionals. A good example of a woman who found the BCM appealing is Mamphele Ramphele. She studied to be a medical doctor at Natal University and, subsequently, after her graduation she was involved in the BCM project of building a community clinic. (Ramphele, 1996). Her education in health care led her to become the medical officer in charge of the Zanempilo Health Centre in the Eastern Cape (Ramphele, 1996). In this position, Mamphele used the little power black professionals were awarded in the apartheid state as authoritative figures to achieve the ends of the

movement. (Ramphele, 1991). She would hide movement meetings, political organising, and anti-apartheid activism from apartheid police by pretending to attend and admit patients at the Zanempilo health centre when the 'patients' were BCM activists attending an organised meeting. For instance, when Steve Biko was under police surveillance in 1976 Mamphele admitted him for "pneumonia" with the knowledge that the security police could not keep an eye on him in the protected environment of the health centre (Ramphele, 1991). This position and her ability to articulate herself, for which she gives credit to the BCM's leadership-training workshops, succeeded in getting her out of trouble with the law numerous times. Not only did she use this position for herself but for her comrades as well by assisting her comrades when they sustained injuries from brutal apartheid police torture and using the clinic as a hideaway for activists who were under police surveillance and banning (Ramphele, 1996).

Thenjiwe Mtintso, another BCM woman, used her occupation to the movement's benefit. Thenjiwe Mtintso was a journalist for the Daily Dispatch, a liberal newspaper edited by anti-apartheid advocate Donald Woods. Thenjiwe Mtintso joined SASO and the BCM as a student at the University of Fort Hare (Hlalethwa, 2018). She used her occupation to write about the racist persecution that black people faced during the apartheid regime. Her activism prompted her expulsion from the University of Fort Hare. Her expulsion from the University of Fort Hare did not deter her political activism instead she changed from student activism to community activism. In the 1970s, she was repeatedly imprisoned and banned by the security police for her political involvement (Hlalethwa, 2018).

Women like Christine Qunta who devoted their attention to the visible and fearless work SASO did to shake the apartheid government, joined the BCM while she was doing her social science degree at the University of the Western Cape. She was one of the students recruited by SASO in 1972 during one of its rallies at the university (Hlalethwa, 2018). Right after joining the organisation Christine sat on SASOs local executive as a secretary. In 1973 she was one of the students who protested against apartheid education by walking off campuses. Christine wrote provocative literature articulating BC philosophy and exposing the repressive apartheid government (Hlalethwa, 2018). Recalling about one time where she and other activists went around distributing pamphlets at the Kaapse Kloopse parade in Cape Town, she said:

> "Imagine! At that time, if you could be caught with things like that, you could literally go to prison. But those were the women of the BCM" (Hlalethwa, 2018, para 9).

Black women found the BCM politically appealing for various reasons. For instance, To some, the BCM slogans such as "Black is Beautiful" and "Black and proud" found resonance and empowered them to navigate a society that did not find them attractive because black was associated with ugliness (Ramphele, 1996). They found this slogan affirming in an environment where Eurocentric beauty standards were the norm, resulting in many women leaning towards bleaching their skins to suit said standards. Moreover, the intersection of identity black politics and black feminist politics conscientised black women in the BCM to the racist logic that over-valued light-skinned women over dark-skinned women. In such a racist society, the definition of beauty is often closely linked with white femininity (Hunter, 2005). In this context, "white women are considered more beautiful" than black women (Hunter, 2005, p. 5). The politics of beauty embedded in the BCM deepened black women's insight into how society regards the physical appearance of women to be "a crucial aspect of female value" (Hunter, 2005). Thus, in apartheid South Africa, the dignity, respect, and humanity granted to women depended on how light-skinned they were or how closely they could approximate white femininity (Hunter, 2005). The slogan "Black is Beautiful" challenged this racist logic of beauty. The slogans "Black and proud" and "Black is Beautiful" were ideals of a self-image that is proud of its skin and these women saw themselves as part of a movement that was proud of blackness and sought to redefine what it means to be black. The BCM slogans empowered black women and gave them self-confidence. Furthermore, the BCM slogans inspired black women to resist and challenge racist notions of beauty.

For some women, the attraction to the BCM was mainly its political philosophy. Women like Christine Qunta found the ideals of psychological liberation, solidarity, and self-assertion rational and fitting in an environment where black people had their minds misused and abused for their oppression (Hlalethwa, 2018). These slogans led to a re-evaluation of the self by black women which was the main objective of BC philosophy. It led to black women changing their aesthetic choices - what they wore, how they wore their hair, and which cosmetics they used which Moodley (2011) argues were critical to the functioning of Black Consciousness in the 1970s as a movement dedicated to the premise that identity politics could be revolutionary.

It is also worth noting that BCM women played frequently prominent and critical roles in the BCM as political organisers, executive leaders, and as activists who shaped the ideological standing of the movement. Whether through political and community activism or their aesthetical choices of embracing black beauty, their contributions remain a large part of the history of BCM. However, executing these roles was not without challenges as a pattern of sexism manifested itself in Black Consciousness organisations and their operations (Gqola, 2001).

SASO displayed the gender stereotypes and sexist behaviour that were deeply entrenched in the fabric of South African society in its discourse and operations (Gqola, 2001). For example, in SASO conferences, it was an expectation for women to play domestic roles of nurturing, and as the helpers of men they were expected to serve food to their male counterparts and ensure that activists were sheltered and fed (Ramphele et al., 1998). It did not end with serving food for the activists. There was also the expectation of sexual favours. They were also expected to provide and attend to the sexual needs of their male counterparts. Christine Qunta, an author, lawyer, and BCM veteran who joined the BCM in 1972 explains:

> "I think the attitudes of men within the movement weren't different from the attitudes of men generally. Sometimes the men in the Black Consciousness Movement would only regard women as people they could sleep with- but not the activists within the movement, we were very assertive" (Hlalethwa, 2018: para. 24).

Not only were they reduced to sexual objects and helpers, but their intellect was also questioned. The male counterparts held demeaning and misogynistic views of women and often objectified them or questioned their intellectual capacity. In an interview in 1998 on the Agenda journal titled A little bit of Madness Mamphela Ramphele on being black and transgressive with Pumla Gqola and Kimberley Yates, Mamphela explains that BCM women at political meetings were seen as ornaments there to decorate and were not expected to contribute to political discussion and debates. When women attempted to participate in debates, they were subjected to demeaning language that was intended to question their intellect with remarks such as "Not only are you beautiful but you have brains" (Ramphele et al., 1998).

As Qunta and Ramphele indicate, there were a few women who, like them, were assertive and challenged the status quo of the movement. Other women of the movement, however, were aware

of the traditional roles to which the movement confined them and had accepted those circumstances (Gqola, 2001). These misogynistic views and behaviour from their male counterparts did not deter them from achieving the objectives of the movement. Most importantly it did not deter them from standing against this behaviour. Instead, they challenged these behaviours. Ramphele asserts that she was one of the few women who challenged these behaviours by being a pain to the men who thought the women were in the movement to be decorative pieces and have no voice in the politics of the movement (Ramphele et al., 1998, p. 90). Ramphele (1998) explains that in meetings and conferences when the male counterparts did not allow them to have opinions, she would scream, illuminating how the contributions of women were not valued except when they were doing house chores. She explains:

> "Because if you have to move from silence, to be heard, you literally have to scream. And I used to scream at those meetings, and they would want to silence me. I'd tell them, 'You are talking rubbish!', and they never forgave me for that" (Ramphele et al., 1998, p. 92-93)

Challenging these behaviours did not come with acceptance; instead, it resulted in further pushback from the male activists, the BCM viewed internal criticism as divisive (Gqola, 2001). In the view of the BCM philosophy, disagreements and criticisms of the BCM were not supposed to come from the movement itself but from external sources (Gqola, 2001). Women raising concerns about the gendered oppression they were subjected to were viewed as divisive and a distractive tactic to the main goal of emancipation from racial oppression. It was also viewed as trying to break the unity of the movement (Gqola, 2001). In short, men in the BCM did not regard women's political grievances seriously.

Gqola (2001) argues that while the women were expected to fulfil their traditional roles there was also an expectation to be militant and assume similar roles to those of the males in the movement. This meant that their roles were masculinised, and they were awarded the status of honorary men (Gqola, 2001). Those who confronted the status quo by challenging the sexist norms inherent in the movement by participating in political activity and debate were viewed as 'exceptional' women. Their ability to articulate themselves, and have confidence and assertiveness awarded them exception from other women (Gqola, 2001). Being exceptional from other women was embedded in the belief that women are observers of the male; they speak when spoken to and they behave according to the traditional roles of how women should behave. Stepping out of this boundary

makes you unique and special, an alien amongst normal species. Furthermore, characteristics of confidence, articulation, and assertiveness were reserved for the male; women were not allowed to show these traits. If they showed these characteristics they were humbled and punished through public humiliation (Gqola et al., 1998). It is to be mentioned that the women did not see the honorary male status as something to be ashamed of;, instead, they used this status to further assert themselves in spaces they were not supposed to enter (Ramphele, 1991). They utilised their honorary male status for the benefit of women within the movement acquiring resources needed by the women and pushing the concerns of women to the forefront. Ramphele explains:

> "At the 1972 SASO conference in Hammanskraal three of us made our mark: Nomsisi Kraai, Deborah Matshoba, and myself. We overcame the trivialisation of our concerns by male colleagues and broke the monopoly over the interpretation of standing rules and procedures of meetings, and thus entered the world of political discourse which had been until then inaccessible to us" (1991 p. 220).

In this thesis, the concepts "Black," "White," and "Eurocentrism" are not used merely as racial descriptors but are treated as ideological and political constructs rooted in power and history. Following Biko (1987), "Black" is a term of political solidarity and identity that extends beyond pigmentation to include all those oppressed by apartheid, including Africans, Coloureds, and Indians who rejected white domination. In contrast, "White" is used not only to describe people of European descent but also to signify alignment with the system of privilege and superiority fostered by colonialism and apartheid. These meanings are consistent with how Black Consciousness literature has historically defined these terms (Macqueen, 2011; Gqola, 2001). Furthermore, this thesis engages the concept of "Eurocentrism" as the centring of European values, knowledge systems, beauty standards, and modes of being as normative and superior. Writers such as Hall (1996) and wa Thiong'o (1986) have critically examined Eurocentrism as a legacy of colonial domination that continues to shape African intellectual and cultural life. In the context of the BCM, Eurocentrism is what Black Consciousness explicitly resisted—whether through reclaiming African aesthetics, redefining Black beauty (Ramphele, 1991), or questioning white liberalism and historical narratives (Magaziner, 2011). These concepts provide the ideological foundation for analysing the gendered and racialised experiences discussed in this study.

1.6 Significance of the research

Historians and scholars of social movements who research the BCM often focus on the political and philosophical worldviews of men like Steve Biko and Barney Pityana to understand the BCM (Gqola, 2001). This narrative tends to negate and erase black women who fought alongside these men. Thus, the political and philosophical views of black women who were involved in the BCM remain at the periphery. The sacrifices made by these women and the social cost that these women had to pay in order to be politically active are not part of the dominant political narrative.

This thesis aims to contribute to the black feminist project by expanding on the research conducted by black South African feminists on the role of black women in the BCM. It aims to achieve this goal by documenting the experiences of black women who participated in the BCM. To that end, eight black women who were part of the BC movement were interviewed for this thesis. The thesis also demonstrates how the gendered experiences of these women underlined the movement's culture, resulting in alienation for its women activists.

1.7 Research questions

This research questions that drove this project are:

What political role did women activists play in the BCM?

What is the gendered experience of women activists who participated in the movement?

The gendered nature of BC discourse has resulted in the gendered experiences of the contributions of its women activists, who are now absent from the BCM literature., Consequently, women's political contributions to the BCM is not part of the mainstream discourse about the history of the BCM (Gqola, 2001). By researching these questions, the thesis aims to contribute to epistemological efforts to rewrite the history of the BCM in a manner that recognises and includes the political contribution of women to the movement.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews some of the key research that has been done on the experiences of black women in the Black Consciousness Movement. There has been a growing academic interest in the lived experience of black women who were active in the BCM. This chapter aims to critically summarise the ongoing conversation of the lived experience of black women in the BCM. The discussion of the literature is structured around three themes, namely, 'Contradictory Locations' of Black Women in the BCM, Black Women's Understanding of Sexism in the BCM, and the Psychological Impact of BC Ideology on Black Women. These themes emerged during the course of researching and reading of the literature. By and large, these are the themes on which many of the studies on this topic found consensus. The discussion begins with the theme of 'Contradictory Locations' of Black Women in the BCM.

2.2 'Contradictory Locations' of black women in the BCM

The idea that women occupied a contradictory position in the BCM is a recurring motif in the research on this subject to the extent that in 2001 Pumla Gqola published a journal paper titled "Contradictory Locations: Black women and the Discourse of the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) in South Africa". In that article, Gqola (2001) described this contradictory location that black women occupied in the BCM as consisting of patriarchal expectation that women fulfil traditional gender roles, on the one hand, while, on the other hand, some women were also expected to be militant activists. It is in this context that women were expected to defer the thinking and the leadership to men while women cooked, prepared food for men, cleaned after men, and made sure that they were available for sex (Gqola, 2001). Additionally, some women were granted an "honorary men" status that allowed them to play a role of a militant activist (Gqola, 2001). Some of the women were given honorary male status include Mamphela Ramphela, Thenjiwe Mtintso, Deborah Matshoba, Thembi Nkabinde, Nomsisi Kraai, and Vuyi Mashalaba (Gqola, 2001).

Gqola (2001) claims that another factor that created contradictory locations for black women in the BCM was the refusal of the movement to acknowledge the existence of other forms of oppressions, such class, geographical location, and sexual orientation as other forms of oppression along with race. Negating these other forms of oppression and allocating race as a primary source created a hierarchy in which race was the primary and sole oppression of black people across South

Africa. BC refused to acknowledge that black society had variations of oppression that did not rely on race alone. Other forms of oppression were seen as divisive tactics and distractions away from the goal of racial liberation. Most importantly race as the sole oppressive force meant that the black experience was uniform and the problems that stemmed from racial oppression were the same. Black people were expected to form solidarity under this form of oppression as it was assumed by BC that all black people suffered from it the same way. Gqola (2001) argues that gender oppression became side-lined by racial oppression in the BC by centring race as the sole oppressive force. Women were thus allowed participation in the movement as black people with a uniform oppression as other black people.

According to Gqola (2001) black women's participation in the movement was done along conservative lines as this was the dominant fashion in nationalist movements across the country. Gqola (2001) argues that women entered politics through motherhood and as wives, sisters, or romantic partners of comrades. They were not accorded the privilege of entering politics as individuals in their own right. The discourse of nurturing and motherhood through which roles were defined in BC was a way of entry for black women in BC politics. There was an expectation that women needed to participate within this mould and there was resentment from male counterparts for women who refused to participate according to this conservative mould. Women were caught between participating in the motherly and nurturing roles and at the same time expected to be militant and able to assume roles to those similar to the men in the movement which meant their status was masculinised (Gqola, 2001).

It is worth noting that Gqola's article discussed above was derived from her MA thesis which she completed at the University of Cape Town in 1999. Titled Black Woman you are on your own: Images of Black Women in Staffrider Short Stories 1978-1982, Gqola's (1999) MA thesis explores BC literature by researching images of black women in the Staffrider magazine. Gqola (1999) explains that the Staffrider magazine was established in March 1978 by Mike Kirkwood and Mothobi Mutloatse, and it was published by Ravan Press. Gqola (1999, p. 1) adds that the magazine was named after an aspect of the black experience because "it was named after the commuters who ride illegally ('ride staff') on the trains between the townships and the city of Johannesburg." The magazine sought to publish "established writers alongside of emerging artists" (Gqola, 1999, p. 2). Since "Black Consciousness (BC) was the dominant ideology at the time,

many of the submissions were influenced by this doctrine" (Gqola, 1999, p. 2). Gqola (1999) explains that many of the writers who published their writing in the magazine were male writers, and, as a result, Gqola's thesis analyses writings of black male authors. However, "a few poems by black women have been analysed in addition" to the analyses of the writings of black male authors (Gqola, 1999, p. ii). The research question that drove Gqola's (1999, p. ii) research project was to answer "the question of whether 'positive' characterisation of Black people, seen as central to Black Consciousness writing, includes women or not." To that end, Gqola (1999) researched the representations of black female characters in the writing published in the Staffrider.

Gqola (1999, p. 174) found that the writing published by BC writers in the Staffrider expressed "the sexist bias which characterised BC discourse." For instance, the lived experience of black men is portrayed "as the definitive Black experience" (Gqola, 1999, p. 174). "This often translates into a direct exclusion of Black female experiences or the relegation of these to supplementary status" (Gqola, 1999, p.174). Moreover, black women characters in these writings were typecast in the role of a supportive and loving wife or girlfriend. In that narrative, there is no place for black women to be activists themselves, according to Gqola (1999). Instead, women are celebrated in these writings for the unconditional support and loyalty they offer to black men, as well as controlled sexuality that conforms to patriarchal values.

In the main, the literature argues that women contribute to the national struggle through their loyalty and support. It is this endurance which allows the men, whether they are husbands or sons, to leave home to liberate the country. Leaving home to liberate the country includes engaging in public political activity, leaving the country to go into exile and/or joining the liberation forces. (Gqola, 1999, p. 175).

In this narrative, black women are represented as stoic sufferers who are not affected by racial oppression and as people who do not understand its pervasiveness in their lives. The black men are presented as the only people who are affected by racial oppression who fight it and understand its effects in their own lives. Gqola (1999) claims this representation creates an image where the struggle is between black men and white men in the form of the apartheid state. This subsequently erases women on the political agenda and means that BC rejects the politicisation of black women's experiences and alienates these experiences. Gqola (1999) claims that exclusion from the BC language and the space accorded to black men directly points to black women's secondary

status within the movement, creating an ambiguous status for black women that allows them to be silenced. In the final analysis, this narrative "privileges male activism over female activism suggesting as it does that the latter is not as important as the former and does not warrant the attention from the community which the former does" (Gqola, 1999, p. 179).

Likewise, Dobrota Pucherova (2009) in her article titled Land of My Sons: The Politics of Gender in Black Consciousness Poetry explores the sexism and gendered discourse in BC poetry. Pucherova (2009) argues that BC's poetry's modern black selfhood is wrought by internal contradictions depending conceptually on the suppression of black women's agency and their participation in the liberation movement. Pucherova (2009) maintains that this poetry was created with the intention of creating a black positive self-image but it always spoke with a male voice. That imposed a male subjectivity at the expense of refusing humanity and agency to the black woman as well. Cast as an ideology that is said to restore humanity, BC poetry relegates the black women to a subordinate status in its writings. For instance, it casts black women characters as Mother Africa, meant to die and live for Africa. However, Pucherova (2009) argues that this glorified and celebrated Mother Africa trope in these writings works against black women and their realities. This trope casts them as saviours of the nation which is characterised as the black man as he is the one seen as human and in need of aid and support. Pucherova (2009) claims that, instead of facilitating the recovery of black women's selfhood as the ideology of BC promises, BC poetry normalises women's roles as the source and custodians of men's self-hood, pushing the misleading narrative that women's liberation is at the heart of national liberation. Pucherova (2009) then claims that BC compromises its values of human equality and freedom, and is part of the patriarchal discourses that have marginalised women before, during, and after apartheid.

Using biographies and interviews of BC women activists Sibusisiwe Nxongo (2019) lays a similar argument in her Master's thesis Women, Gender and the Black Consciousness Movement (1968-1977). Nxongo (2019) investigates the meanings and articulations of gender in the BCM, looking at how women struggled for gender equality within the movement and how this could have changed attitudes about masculinity and femininity within the BCM and in the broader liberation movement. Nxongo (2019) claims that, even though BC women were regarded as honorary men, they participated in the male struggle as women. They did not disregard their womanhood because of being regarded as honorary males. They defined and asserted themselves as women in the

movement and their specific experiences were because they were women. Nxongo (2019) argues that the BCM had a masculinised discourse that silenced the participation of black women. However, BC women were neither silent nor passive. BC women asserted themselves in the movement along masculine lines, contributing to the leadership direction of the movement. It was women who shaped their identity to reach the political ends the movement had envisaged at the time. How they wore their hair, disregarded skin-lightening creams, and their choice of clothing to represent black pride was important in endorsing the "Black is Beautiful" slogans of the movement. Nxongo (2019) maintains that these representations were essential in a movement that stood on identity politics.

In his PhD study titled Black Consciousness, Radical Christianity, and the New Left, 1967-1977 Macqueen (2011) in his discussion of the masculinities and femininities inherent in SASO claims that the sexism in the Black Consciousness Movement contradicted the movement's philosophy of humanity, as the ideology and philosophy of BCM was founded on restoring black humanity. But it created instead the inhumane treatment of its women activists through sexism resulting in their alienation from the movement's discourse and politics. Macqueen (2011) argues that sexism in the BCM is inherent in the different beliefs of masculinity and femininity of its male leaders. These beliefs shaped the direction of the movement away from a feminist possibility or an analysis of women's issues. Macqueen (2011) claims that male counterparts held conservative views about women's roles in associating them with the private sphere - the home and not with the public political arena. The women were encouraged and sometimes forced to adopt tough femininity that resembled the masculinity their male counterparts were representing (Macqueen, 2011). Women who were assertive and confident were awarded "honorary male status" or "one of the boys" because those were seen as the qualities that existed in men. These sorts of politics practised in the BCM rendered the male and his masculinity the standard norm. Macqueen (2011) maintains that these beliefs in masculinities made it impossible for a feminist possibility to represent itself and that SASO chose to distance itself from the cause of women's liberation. SASO activists conformed to the pattern of nationalist discourse rather than transcend it (Macqueen, 2011).

Likewise, in 2011 Daniel R Magaziner published an article in South Africa titled Pieces of a (Wo)man: Feminism, Gender, and Adulthood in Black Consciousness, 1968-1977. The article argues that Black Consciousness was a political philosophy concerned above all with the politics

of self-identification. Magaziner (2011) claims that its era offers valuable insight into gender's fraught role in South African and African social movements.

Magaziner (2011) argues that the male experience which was found in black manhood reduced the politics of Black Consciousness to a male-centred masculinist discourse that neglected women's issues. Magaziner (2011) claims that this masculinist discourse made it impossible for male leaders of the BCM to think of a feminist possibility in the movement and that even when a feminist possibility represented itself it was rejected. Before SASO, Steve Biko and Barney Pityana were members of the University Christian Movement (UCM), a Christian movement for black students that criticised white theology. Black theology emphasised pride in blackness and viewed white Christianity as oppressive (Magaziner, 2011). In the 1970s the UCM highlighted gender issues and women's oppression, advocating for national liberation and black men's responsibility for women's exclusion. The UCM argued that male oppression of women was comparable to white state oppression of blacks (Magaziner, 2011). However, not all members agreed, and black student activists, such as Steve Biko and Barney Pityana, did not view women's liberation as equally important as racial liberation (Magaziner, 2011). Magaziner (2011) argues that the focus then should be on why Black Consciousness leaders did not address the women's question when they were directly exposed to it. Deborah Matshoba one of the women leaders of the movement tried to raise the idea of starting up a women's wing within the BCM which Biko rejected saying:

> "If you are WSO (Women's Student Organisation) you are not SASO- so now you are going to have two roles" (Matshoba, 2007, p. 279).

This shows that BC women knew the dual struggle they were confronted with in terms of black oppression and gendered oppression and sought ways to engage women's issues independently, but their efforts were denied by their male counterparts (Magaziner, 2011). A women's wing was rejected because it was seen as a distraction from the fight for racial equality. It was seen as though a women's wing was going to subsume the course of racial liberation and create fragments within the movement when the primary objective was for activists to be in solidarity under one form of struggle (Magaziner, 2011). Feminism in the BCM was not only seen as a divisive tactic from racial equality. Magaziner (2011), also suggests that within the BCM, feminism was occasionally viewed as a Western ideology that threatened to divide the racial unity central to Black Consciousness ideology. However, this study's participants did not uniformly express this view.

Instead, many of the women interviewed described their activism as rooted in collective struggle against apartheid, without explicitly identifying with or rejecting feminist language. This silence on feminism may reflect strategic political choices or the historical framing of liberation priorities, rather than a wholesale rejection of feminist thinking. Therefore, while Magaziner's (2011) critique provides a useful lens for understanding ideological tendencies in BCM discourse, the lived experiences and motivations of the women interviewed reveal a more nuanced engagement with questions of gender and liberation.

2.3 Black women's understanding of sexism in the BCM

Gqola (2001, p. 134) has demonstrated that the BCM language "didn't have space for women partly because it was a language borrowed from a culture, English culture, which never accepted women really as full citizens." What Gqola is referring to is for example the slogan 'Black man, you are on your own'. The 'man' in that slogan communicates a gender bias that is rooted in the English language "where 'man' is generic shorthand for 'human' (Macqueen 2011, p. 78). It is within this context that BC activists such as Mamphela Ramphele argue that the BC language and ideology were largely exclusionary because they were borrowed from the English language which did not consider women as humans but as secondary citizens to men.

In his PhD, titled Re-imagining South Africa: Black Consciousness, Radical Christianity and the New Left, 1967 – 1977, Ian Macqueen (2011, p. 78) argues that the slogan 'Black man, you are on your own' has been used correctly as a point of reference to criticise Black Consciousness's masculine identity politics. Macqueen (2011) argues that this slogan represents a masculine philosophy that claims racial inequality was a fight against black manhood and so the struggle was masculine. Macqueen (2011) opposes Mangena's (2008) claims that gender was not practical in BC and argues that its ideology and philosophy demonstrated a gendered and masculinised discourse. It was a struggle to reclaim the manhood of black man which the apartheid state had emasculated (Macqueen, 2011). The narrative and analysis of black oppression was that of black manhood and his subjective experience of emasculation (Macqueen, 2011). In the centre of BC's discourse is the dominant concern of the black man's dignity and how it can be restored. Black Consciousness was designed to address the black male experience of emasculation to make "the black man come to himself and to "pump life back into his empty shell; to restore his pride and dignity" (Macqueen, 2011, p. 79). This restoration of lost manhood was at the centre of the

definition of Black Consciousness. The language and discourse of the BCM were largely male-centred and exclusionary of the female experience. The BCM prided itself on this language as seen in its discourse and philosophy (Macqueen, 2011). Furthermore, Macqueen (2011) claims the generic use of 'male' was considered the norm and therefore the person against which the struggle was formed and in which the struggle was to be achieved. The politics of masculinity bounded the politics of BC, in that the contributions of its women activists were ignored. Even women who held leadership positions had to "become one of the boys". demonstrating that even when women were leaders it was within masculine terms. Macqueen (2011) then claims that a politically liberated black identity was then gendered it was identified as masculine, and the participation of women was not full participation as it ran along the lines of masculinity. Macqueen (2011) argues that, although Black Consciousness would n ot have exerted the influence it had on the history of South Africa if it were not for its women activists, their contribution was subsumed within the dominant discourse of black manhood rights

Ian Macqueen claims in his book The Law and the Prophets: Black Consciousness in South Africa, 1968-1977 that the BC philosophy and ideology began with an assumption that the black is a man. Macqueen (2010, p. 32) claims that an investigation into SASO demonstrates that 'manhood' was perhaps the most basic element of non-white student identity. Furthermore, Macqueen (2010) maintains that gendered language was an essential feature of the conceptualisation and foundation of SASO as a project of what it struggled against and hoped to be (Macqueen, 2010). Masculinity and manhood grounded the politics of SASO, that if you were oppressed and you did nothing as a man you never had it if the apartheid state banned you, you lost it, and if you collaborated with the racist state, you never deserved it (Macqueen, 2010, p. 33). Manhood and masculinity were essential for the politics of BC at the expense of women. Macqueen (2010) claims this was evident in SASO's literature, how it discussed and placed women in society, and its politics, although black women had been political actors in SASO from its inception participating in the deliberations that led black students to break away from NUSAS in 1968. SASO literature in the form of its newsletter undermined women and mocked them as "creatures of instinct capable of exertion" in one of its publications (Macqueen, 2010, p. 33).

Finally, in the book Bounds of Possibility: The Legacy of Steve Biko and Black Consciousness Mamphela Ramphele (1991) says this when referring to joining SASO:

> "The socialization that I underwent at that time also included learning to survive in a male-dominated environment without falling prey to it. One had to be able to stand up to intimidation by men who were used to having their way."

Ramphele (1991) claims that SASO was a male-dominated environment with a sense of masculinity that made it hard for women to be political actors in their own right. (Ramphele, 1991). For women to be taken seriously as political actors they had no choice but to be transgressors. They had to transcend certain behaviours that their male counterparts were expecting from black women. They had to be loud, intimidating and aggressive for their opinions to be heard and taken seriously.

However, In The Black Consciousness Philosophy and the Woman's Question in South Africa: 1970-1980" in Biko Lives!: Contesting the Legacies of Steve Biko, Oshadi Mangena a BCM woman, defended the use of 'man' in the slogan "black man you are on your own" by arguing that 'man' was used loosely and interchangeably to describe people under the same oppressions. According to Mangena (2008, p. 253), it did not mean subjugation of the sexes because in practice the BCM did not problematise 'gender'. Instead, it provided a tacit understanding of gender concerns. Mangena (2008) attributes her argument to the fact that women were granted participation in the leadership ranks of the BCM "where women of ability made themselves available for leadership and other meaningful roles, they made important contributions and were accepted fully as colleagues by men." She makes an example of the appointment of Winnie Kgware a woman as the first president of the SASO affiliated Black People's Convention in 1972. She presented the BC as a multi-gendered organisation in times when it was unfashionable for women hold leadership positions in liberation politics. She contends that at the time racial liberation was the most important course above all and women who participated in the BCM knew this and made a strategic choice (Mangena, 2008).

Mamphela (1991) adds a very important point to this discussion. She explains that BC ideology came at a time when nationalist movements around the world had also adopted a masculinist ideology in their politics and it followed suit. Feminist of colour have documented and illustrated the fact that women of colour have a complicated relationship with nationalism largely because

"all nationalisms are gendered" (McClintock, 1993, p. 61; Enloe, 1990). While nationalisms are gendered, the ideology also idolise colonised women as mothers of a nation. "Nationalism, more than many other ideologies, has a vision that includes women, for no nation can survive unless its culture is transmitted and its children are born and nurtured, two activities that nationalists deem essential" (Enloe, 1990, p. 119). Furthermore, nationalism empowers colonised women with intellectual tools to view her struggle entwined with her colonised community, including men (Enloe, 1990). However, nationalism is also a marginalising discourse for colonised women, particularly because it typecasts them "as the symbolic bearers of the nation but are denied any direct relation to national agency" (McClintock, 1993, p. 62). Colonised women often find that nationalism as an ideology articulates "the frustrations and aspirations of men", and the same ideology positions women in a supporting role in that nationalism project (McClintock, 1993, p. 62). Feminists "identify five major ways in which women have been implicated in nationalism:

- as biological reproducers of the members of national collectivities
- as reproducers of the boundaries of national groups (through restrictions on sexual or marital relations)
- as active transmitters and producers of the national culture
- as symbolic signifiers of national difference
- as active participants in national struggles"

(Yuval-Davis and Anthias, 1989 cited in McClintock, 1993, p. 62)

It is against this discursive backdrop that colonised women are often silenced in nationalist movements when wanting to raise issues that affect women. At worst, women are told feminist politics are divisive, at best, colonised women are told to be patient,

"they must wait until the nationalist goals are achieved; then, and only then, can relations between women and men be addressed. 'Not now, later,' is the masculine advice that rings in the ears of many nationalist women" (Enloe, 1990, p. 120).

Until liberation is achieved, the only roles women are expected to play are to be "ego stroking girlfriend, stoic wife, or nurturing mother" (Enloe, 1990, p. 120).

This is the discourse that black women in the BCM were struggling against. This thesis aims to contribute to the longstanding political history of colonised women who have challenged

"masculine privilege" in popular and nationalist movements like the BCM (Enloe, 1990, p. 63). This research project is inspired by a feminist notion that "Erasing those women's efforts from the nationalist chronicles makes it harder for contemporary women to claim that their critical attitudes are indigenous and hence legitimate" (Enloe, 1990, p. 63).

2.4 Psychological impact of BC ideology on black women

Macqueen (2011, p. 87) identified a BC slogan "Black is Beautiful" as a slogan that women in the BCM found liberating. He explains that the slogan "was adopted from the United States and SASO women stopped using the skin lightening creams and wigs that were the mainstay of popular culture as presented through newspaper advertisements in papers such as Ilanga Lase Natal." BC women like Mamphela Ramphele (1991) argue that the BC slogan "Black is Beautiful" freed them from western concepts of beauty. They adopted a positive self-image and risqué sense of style that was imbedded in BC ideology of black pride. Black women started wearing clothes and their hair in a way that resembled black pride. They were no longer "non-whites" but blacks with an authentic self, appreciated on their own terms. Furthermore, the BC ideology and the culture of the 1970s encouraged black women to challenge and reject the traditional values of sobriety, restraint, and decorum (Macqueen, 2011). BC women transcended traditional norms of behaviour where women were expected to be passive and submissive and be supporters of the behaviours of their male counterparts. The women involved in the BCM were strong and articulate individuals, who were not just there as decorations as they were expected to be (Macqueen, 2011). They challenged the men in political debates and ensured that they were not silenced but were assertive, subsequently challenging the traditional gender norms expected of them as women (Macqueen, 2011). Macqueen (2018) expands this argument in his book Black Consciousness and Progressive Movements under Apartheid as he claims that black women particularly benefited from the BC rhetoric as they "changed their dress and behaviour to reflect their 'consciousness' as black adults". Macqueen (2018) further notes that black women found new grounds of empowerment within this rhetoric that they used in the struggle with the white racist state but also with challenging traditional gender roles within the movement.

To support this claim quoted in Bounds of Possibility: The Legacy of Steve Biko and Black Consciousness, Ramphele (1991, p. 217) asserts:

> "It could be argued that BC black women within BC ranks benefited as people because they also became more liberated as individuals. Having experienced being assertive as blacks. Women claimed greater psychological space in which to assert themselves in both public and personal relationships."

It seemed BC philosophy had enabled black women to put into context how as black women they could overcome the psychological oppression of being a woman and therefore being constantly seen as inferior. They had taken the philosophy of an inward-looking process as provided by BC ideology seriously. This is evident in how they abandoned Western concepts of beauty by abandoning their wigs and skin-lightening creams. Mamphela Ramphele in her memoir Across Boundaries: The Journey of a South African Woman Leader: A Memoir (1996, p. 57) adds: "I shed the way I used to wear whenever I felt I needed to look more respectable." Physical attractiveness was not the only way BC women defied social expectations of women. The BC philosophy helped them discard their preconceived ideals of beauty and prevailing notions of respectability in African society. Instead of allowing Western beauty standards to define what was beautiful to them, they embraced BC's ideology of black pride. Furthermore, BC women transgressed gender norms regarding how women should dress, speak, and behave in relationships with men. The women began smoking, drinking, and partying, defying traditional gender norms they had been taught at home (Ramphele, 1996). Ramphele (1996) recalls how she was scolded and became the centre of village gossip when she came home from university with the habit of smoking which was deemed inappropriate for women. It was believed that women should not smoke nor drink as these behaviours were seen to be immoral when done by them. Traditional gender norms dictated how women should behave but BC women through BC's ideology of psychological liberation had learned to transgress certain gender norms. They spoke loudly and with confidence contrary to the belief that women should be soft-spoken. They insisted on being included in the politics of the day and not being mere supporters or observers of their male counterparts (Ramphele, 1996). And they challenged their male counterparts when they insisted on these beliefs.

Deborah Matshoba (2008), in the book Biko Lives! Contesting the Legacies of Steve Biko: An Interview with Deborah Matshoba, recalls an occasion at Zanempilo Clinic where they forced their way into savouring a sheep's brain, an activity preserved for the male. They insisted that the men share it with them. On some of the catering arrangements, Deborah recalls:

> "We would get food and we would insist that the men should go wash their hands so that we could all eat together. They wanted to take big portions for themselves. We'd say "No anybody who wants to eat eats" just like that".

Ramphele and Matshoba's remarks reveal that BC women were aware of the status women had been accorded by society and by BC in general but used BC philosophy to transcend the conservative mould that had been reserved for women in BC discourse. BC's philosophy of psychological liberation awakened black women on the position of their status of oppression as women and it allowed them to be liberated from traditional gender norms.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This MA thesis adopts a qualitative research design and employs qualitative methods to investigate the gendered experiences and political roles of Black women in the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM). Qualitative research is particularly useful for examining how individuals understand and interpret their social worlds, including their beliefs, attitudes, and motivations (Pertti, 2010, p. 141). Accordingly, this project integrates qualitative methods with Black Feminist Theory to explore and theorise the lived experiences of Black women who were politically active in the BCM.

Data collection was conducted through semi-structured, in-depth interviews. Anderson and Kirkpatrick (2016, p. 631) describe qualitative interviews as a means to "place the people being interviewed at the heart of a research study." These interviews are epistemologically appropriate for eliciting participants' personal stories and worldviews. Eight women who were politically active in the BCM during apartheid were interviewed for this study. Each interview lasted between 45 minutes and one hour and was conducted via Zoom. This digital platform was selected due to

the geographic dispersion of participants, some of whom were based outside South Africa. The use of Zoom reduced travel-related costs (Adams, 2015), enabled face-to-face interaction, and facilitated rapport building. Participants appreciated the flexibility and convenience Zoom offered, especially when scheduling interviews outside regular working hours.

The semi-structured format was intentionally selected because it allowed for a flexible and organic conversational flow, accommodating follow-up questions and deeper probing (Adams, 2015). In contrast to rigid structured interviews, this approach fosters participant engagement and helps sustain the dialogue. Interviews were kept within the 45-minute to one-hour range to maintain participant engagement and ensure focus. While most interviews were conducted in English, two incorporated isiZulu and isiXhosa, reflecting the language preferences of participants.

3.2 Sampling

To generate in-depth, context-rich data, this study employed purposive sampling in conjunction with snowball sampling. As Crouch and McKenzie (2006, p. 383) argue, qualitative research benefits from small sample sizes that support close researcher-participant engagement, thereby enhancing the validity of nuanced inquiry.

Purposive sampling was used to identify eight Black women who were politically active in the BCM during the apartheid period. This form of non-probability sampling entails selecting individuals based on their knowledge, relevance, and willingness to participate in the study. I identified the relevant criteria and sought out participants whose political activism in the BCM occurred during the apartheid era. Snowball sampling was also employed, allowing existing participants to refer others within their networks. This strategy was especially effective due to the close-knit nature of the activist community (Beauchemin & González-Ferrer, 2011, p. 107).

Participants were initially contacted via Facebook and WhatsApp. A member of the Azanian People’s Organisation (AZAPO), Sikhumbuzo "Tshezi" Soxujwa, provided the contact details of the first participant, with her permission. I then contacted the AZAPO Eastern Cape Facebook page, and the group administrator shared the contact of a founding member of Imbeleko, AZAPO's

women's wing. This participant referred additional contacts. At the conclusion of each interview, participants were asked to recommend other Black women who were politically active in the BCM. Thus, recruitment continued through these personal and activist networks. And permisson was sought from potential participants before their contacts were shared.

3.3 Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance for this research was obtained from the Rhodes University Ethics Committee prior to participant recruitment and data collection. Participants were contacted via Facebook and WhatsApp, and the purpose of the study was clearly explained. Each participant received an informed consent form, approved by the Ethics Committee, which detailed the study's objectives, methodology, and the intended use of collected data (Dooly et al., 2017, p. 353).

Verbal explanations accompanied the consent forms to ensure informed participation. Participants were encouraged to ask questions and received clear, accessible information about their rights, including the right to decline participation or withdraw at any stage. Only individuals over the age of 18 were invited to participate, and their involvement was entirely voluntary.

Recognising the potentially sensitive nature of discussing gender discrimination and sexism, interviews were conducted with empathy and care. Participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. Prior to signing the consent form, participants were informed that the discussion might involve references to individuals within the BCM, including potential mentions of sexism. They were assured that all names—including those of individuals referred to as sexist or chauvinistic—would be anonymised through the use of pseudonyms.

All audio recordings and transcripts were stored on a password-protected laptop. In line with ethical guidelines (Dooly et al., 2017, p. 354), these digital files will be retained for five years and subsequently deleted. Hard-copy files will be securely shredded. Only the researcher and supervisors will have access to the collected data.

3.4 Data analysis

Manual coding was used to analyse the data. This involved identifying recurring patterns and themes that could shed light on the historical and theoretical significance of Black women's

gendered experiences within the BCM (McDougal III, 2014). The analytical process was iterative, involving multiple readings of the transcripts and integration of Black Feminist Theory to interpret findings (Basit, 2003).

Thematic categories were derived from repetitions, contrasts, and variations in participant narratives. These themes were used to frame the findings and included: (1) inspiration and attraction to the BCM, (2) the impact of BCM philosophy, (3) leadership dynamics, (4) experiences of sexism, (5) male-centred politics despite women's roles, and (6) resistance strategies employed by Black women.

Data were coded by assigning meaningful labels to words, sentences, or paragraphs. The themes also served as headings in the findings chapters, supported by relevant literature. As Seidel and Kelle (2015) note, coding enables the identification of structure, patterns, and differences across data. This thematic framework facilitated conceptual clarity and analytical rigour.

3.5 Theory: Black Feminist Theory

This research is grounded in Black Feminist Theory, which centres the lived experiences and intellectual traditions of Black women. As Qunta (1986, p. 11) contends, Black women "are Africans before we are women," meaning that their oppression arises from their position as both Black and female.

Black feminism, as an ideology and political movement, opposes patriarchal domination and calls for the dismantling of sexism as a social relationship wherein men hold structural power over women (Collins, 1996). In the context of the BCM, Gqola (2001) identifies how racial solidarity was often prioritised over gender equity, leading to the marginalisation of women who challenged patriarchy within the movement.

This theory provides a critical lens to understand how Black women navigated overlapping systems of oppression. It foregrounds intersectionality, acknowledging that Black women face racial, gendered, and class-based subjugation simultaneously (Collins, 1996; Hassim, 2006). It rejects the Eurocentric framing that portrays African women as passive victims and instead insists on centring their voices, agency, and political subjectivity (Gqola, 1999; Qunta, 1986).

Black Feminist Theory also calls for self-definition, emphasising that African women must determine their own identities, challenges, and aspirations (Qunta, 1986, p. 13). It critiques the notion that feminism is inherently Western and affirms the existence of diverse feminisms rooted in local contexts and struggles.

This interpretive framework enables a rehistoricisation of Black women's experiences in the BCM. It shifts the analytical gaze from the margins to the centre, writing "herstory" and reclaiming space for Black women's activism in political narratives. This study, therefore, engages in the epistemological task of reframing and theorising Black women's contributions within the BCM through the lens of Black Feminist Theory.

CHAPTER FOUR: DATA ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter reports the results of the interviews conducted with eight women who were politically active in the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM). The chapter is divided into three themes: inspiration to join the BCM, the impact of BC philosophy on black women, and the role of BC women in BCPs. Some of the themes include sub-themes that provide in-depth analysis of the themes. The findings will contribute to the epistemological struggle to rehistorice, reinterpret, and reframe black women's experience and activism in the BCM. The chapter begins by discussing the various reasons that attracted black women to the BCM.

4.2 Inspiration to join the BCM

Four participants interviewed for this thesis joined the BCM because of the 1976 uprisings. Four of the eight women say the movement's philosophy of psychological liberation, racial unity, and black pride under slogans such as "Black is Beautiful" attracted them to the BCM. Participants were inspired to become involved in Black Consciousness oppositional politics mainly due to the repressive apartheid regime that saw black people as inferior along with its policies such as the Bantu Education Act of 1953.

For instance, Thandi, an activist of the BCM since the 1970s, explains her reasons to join the BCM:

> "Well, I was a student in Soweto during the Soweto uprising. As you know in 1953, Bantu education was introduced as a medium of-I mean as an education system for black people. And then Afrikaans was later imposed as a medium of instruction. So, in Soweto, we started off negotiating, you know the rejection of Bantu education, that I mean excuse me of Afrikaans saying one, there are not so many Black teachers who teach Afrikaans and to pass matric you had to pass Afrikaans also. So, you know, there were negotiations between student leaders. I went to school in a school called Naledi and the students in Naledi High School were the leaders of this whole Soweto uprising. So, there were negotiations that, no, we do not want Afrikaans as a medium of instruction and you know, there was no positive answer to that. So, on the 16th of June, we decided we were going to march and say away with Bantu education and away with oppression, away with colonialism and that's when I became involved. And motivated by Steve Biko's words saying we as black people, need to sort ourselves first as a group before we can think of uniting with other groups is what made me join as well."

Thandi in her narrative refers to the Bantu Education Act of 1953, which established racially segregated education. This system was expressly meant to limit black South Africans' educational prospects and educate them for submissive roles in society (Lodge, 1983). The choice of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction is important since it was viewed as the oppressor's language under apartheid, further isolating black students who could not speak Afrikaans fluently. Secondly, the imposition of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction was one of the main reasons that students decided to protest against the apartheid state (Lodge, 1983).

Thandi recalls how students in Soweto began discussions, requesting that Afrikaans not be utilised as a language of instruction. This was a protest not only against being forced to learn a foreign language but also against the broader system of racial oppression (Lodge, 1983). The frustration grew as their demands were ignored, resulting in a breakdown in negotiations and the decision to take action. As a result, student movements like the South African Student Movement (SASM) were established to relay student grievances to state authorities. Student movements like SASM were active in Soweto high schools in the 1970s and played a crucial role in the Soweto uprisings (Nxongo, 2019). When high school students developed political consciousness, SASM focused on educating them about Black Consciousness philosophy and the anti-apartheid movement (Nxongo, 2019). It held workshops and formation schools to educate black high school students about the battle against apartheid. As previously stated, the foundation of SASM was motivated by a lack of student representation in high schools as well as dissatisfaction with the apartheid state's repressive policies (Diseko, 1992). Two elements were crucial to the organisation's goal, firstly, to act as a platform for African students to articulate their grievances and to provide a place for African students to express their grievances and, secondly, to enhance young people's understanding and sensitivity to social and political issues, particularly those related to the apartheid rule (Diseko, 1992). SASM hoped to earn the support of high school students by educating them about the repercussions of Bantu education and apartheid state persecution. On June 13, 1976, SASM convened a meeting at Naledi High School, the school Thandi attended, as she explained in the quote above. This meeting was called to address students' dissatisfaction with the Minister of Bantu Education's circular, implementing Afrikaans as a medium of instruction (Lodge, 1983). It was also decided to establish a Soweto Students Representative Council (SSRC) comprised of two SASM members from each secondary school (Lodge 1983). Thandi's quote above highlights the emergence of student leadership in Soweto, particularly in schools like Naledi High School, as the vanguard of the uprising.

Thandi's involvement in the protest was driven by practical concerns (the oppressive education system) and a deeper ideological commitment to black empowerment, inspired by Biko's ideology. The use of phrases like "away with oppression, away with colonialism" indicates a broader political motivation beyond the immediate issue of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction indicating that this was a fight against the systemic racism and colonial legacy that defined apartheid.

Thandi's account reflects a deeply personal account of the Soweto Uprising, emphasising the combination of local grievances and broader ideological convictions. It highlights the significance of student-led activism and how education became a battleground for racial and political liberation in apartheid South Africa. This quote also underscores how philosophical and intellectual movements, such as the Black Consciousness Movement and the ideas of Steve Biko, played an essential role in shaping the political consciousness of young South Africans. Thandi's journey from negotiation to radical action mirrors the transformation of many youths during apartheid, who, after facing systemic resistance, moved from peaceful protest to direct confrontation with the apartheid regime (Lodge, 1983).

Much like Thandi, Lisa was also inspired to join the BCM through student politics:

> "Two men visited our school to discuss the formation of the South African Student Movement (SASM). They informed us about the activities happening in other schools, including SASM. Initially, our subjects were taught in English, with some subjects in Afrikaans. However, discussions about an uprising were not allowed due to strict teachers. But this teacher joined the school to teach history in the school, and he brought the Black Consciousness talk back to our school. After class, he would tell us those who want to remain can remain. I would be one of those who remained. In those classes he conscientised us about the uprisings, making us aware of the difference in the education system and that Bantu Education was only taught to black students in South Africa. Because people were scared to speak out about these things he will also look and identify people that he can talk openly about these things. So, he's the one who conscientised some of us and made us aware of what was going on. Not in detail, but enough for us to know that this is what was happening. Although the focus was more on the education that you know, you look at the difference in terms of education, we have been taught Bantu Education which is an education system only taught to black people. That's when I came across Black Consciousness and became inspired to join student politics and participate in the uprisings and the activities of 76."

Lisa's quote provides an insightful account of the personal journey toward political awareness and activism during the apartheid era in South Africa. The introduction of SASM to high school students hints at the broader movement of student activism that was sweeping through schools in

the 1970s (Diseko, 1992). SASM was a critical part of the student-led resistance against apartheid, advocating for educational reform and political change. The bilingual nature of the curriculum Lisa refers to in the quote reflects the educational segregation where Bantu Education was not only inferior but also sought to impose oppressive structures on black youth. Lisa's mention of Afrikaans being taught alongside English signals the tension that existed within the educational system and the discriminatory policies that governed it.

Lisa's quote also reveals how strict teachers and school principals discouraged discussions about political uprising or resistance. This aligns with what Diseko (1992) claims that apartheid police were not the only ones dealing with student activism. Most school principals were opposed to politics in their school yards and were keen to keep them out of their schools while monitoring student activities. This reflects the stifling atmosphere in schools during apartheid, where the government sought to prevent any form of dissent or political discourse among students. Teachers were often used as instruments of control to silence any anti-apartheid sentiment (Diseko, 1992). The inability to openly discuss an uprising or resistance highlights the authoritarian nature of apartheid and the fear it instilled in both students and educators.

A pivotal moment in Lisa's narrative is the arrival of a history teacher who reintroduces Black Consciousness to Lisa and other students. This teacher becomes the catalyst for Lisa's political awakening. Lisa implies in the passage above that it was up to school teachers to secretly educate children about the oppressive realities of apartheid and the Black Consciousness Movement. They assisted them to become aware of the injustices in their society and the inequalities perpetuated by the Bantu Education system. This teacher's role was crucial: by sharing ideas about Black Consciousness, he encouraged students to question the status quo and inspired them to consider their place within the broader struggle against apartheid. Using 'conscientization'- a term often associated with Paulo Freire's pedagogy - is the process of developing critical awareness of one's social reality through reflection and action (Freire, 1970) Paulo Freire was one of the writers BC leaders and activists read religiously for political insight and who also inspired their methods of activism (Brown, 2016). The teacher's discussions served as a form of conscientization, where students began to understand the oppressive nature of the apartheid education system. While the teacher did not provide full details, he made enough of an impact to spark Lisa's awareness of the impacts of Bantu Education a system designed to subjugate black people by limiting their

educational opportunities (Brown, 2016). The teacher's influence made Lisa and other pupils aware of their role within a racially divided society, setting the stage for their active participation in resistance. Lisa's exposure to Black Consciousness and the realisation of educational inequality led to a deeper involvement in student politics. This is a turning point where personal political awareness transforms into action. Lisa's political awareness of the education system's inequality motivated her to join the student-led uprisings, particularly the Soweto Uprising of 1976.

The ideology of Black Consciousness had a huge influence in shaping the minds of young black South Africans, leading them to challenge the system that oppressed them. This aligns with claims made by Lodge (1983) that the Black Consciousness philosophy was widespread among university students, clergy, and instructors. It would be strange to assume that the philosophy had not spread to high school pupils through their teachers, as these teachers were also exposed to the philosophy as university students a decade before. Black consciousness promoted the idea of reclaiming black identity, pride, and unity, and this helped Lisa see education as a battleground for freedom. Lisa's account from receiving an education under an oppressive system to becoming a participant in the political uprising shows how education and activism were deeply intertwined in the struggle against apartheid. The passage also highlights the importance of student politics in the anti-apartheid movement, where young people, motivated by new ideas of black pride and unity, were able to challenge and resist the systemic oppression of their time using Black Consciousness as a tool to fight racial oppression (Brown, 2016).

Similar to Lisa and Thandi, Lesedi's account of joining the BCM runs parallel with the same sentiments shared by both women. Student politics was the main reason for joining BCM and aligning with its ideology. Lesedi explains:

> "So then in the end because as kids we were attending Sasso workshops, they used to organise workshops and some of the teachers were people who had been at the university who had been in SASO and heard the languages that they were using. For instance, I was also taught by Tiro. Then at that time, there was SASO. When SASM was formed, I was a founding member of SASM, which catered to high school students. Then from there, then I when I went to university. And perhaps also the relevance of what was being discussed there and the atmosphere people were now rising against apartheid. There were strikes, of

> workers and things, and the language was that black people needed to rise and find different ways to fight and you felt you wanted to be part of that. As to fight the apartheid. So, this experience has made me train my consciousness."

Lesedi begins by mentioning her participation in the South African Student Organisation (SASO) workshops, organised by activists who were also former university students and had been involved in SASO. These workshops were critical for conscientising young students and raising awareness about the oppressive nature of apartheid. SASO, led by Steve Biko, used its Black Consciousness concept to highlight the conditions of black students under apartheid's inferior education system (Brown, 2016). SASO aspired to be a conduit of conscientisation in black communities at the time, the attention was primarily on black students on university campuses. However, at their 1972 conference, they agreed to include and educate high school pupils on Black Consciousness philosophy (Lodge, 1983). SASO advocated for Black Consciousness, encouraging black students to assert their identity, pride, and self-determination. By attending these workshops, Lesedi was exposed to ideas that went beyond the confines of formal education. This experience helped develop her political consciousness, providing her with the vocabulary and framework to understand and resist the apartheid system.

Interesting, Lesedi in the quote above mentions Tiro, likely referring to Onkgopotse Tiro, a well-known anti-apartheid activist and one of the leaders of the student resistance (Lodge, 1983). Tiro was an influential figure in the student movement, and he is best known for his role in the 1976 student uprisings and his outspoken criticism of Bantu education (Lodge, 1983). His teaching would have had a significant impact on Lesedi, further deepening her understanding of the oppression faced by black South Africans under apartheid. The use of "languages" in the quote likely refers to the radical and revolutionary discourse promoted by Tiro, which emphasised resistance and the importance of reclaiming black identity (Brown, 2016).

Lesedi mentions that she was a founding member of the South African Students Movement (SASM). This shows that Lesedi was directly involved in the early stages of organised student resistance and places herself within the broader context of youth-led political activism during the 1970s. According to Diseko (1992) SASM was instrumental in the Soweto Uprising of 1976, and Lesedi's involvement reflects SASM's influence on the Soweto youth.

Upon entering university in the 1974 Lesedi describes the political atmosphere around her as one of heightened resistance to apartheid. This period was marked by strikes by workers and growing political unrest throughout the country (Lodge, 1983). The language of black liberation and the need to rise against apartheid became more prevalent. This shows that the political climate of the time was charged with revolutionary energy, and Lesedi, like many students of the time, felt compelled to act and be part of this larger movement. The language of "black people needing to rise" reflects the influence of Black Consciousness, which emphasises the importance of collective action and resistance against systemic oppression.

Lesedi directly attributes her political development to these experiences: attending workshops, being taught by activists like Tiro, and participating in student movements. The phrase "this experience has made me train my consciousness" signifies that Lesedi's political awareness was shaped through her involvement in these movements and discussions. This process of developing consciousness refers to the ongoing learning and awakening to the realities of apartheid and the need for radical action to challenge it encouraged by Black Consciousness (Lodge, 1983). Additionally, by describing the political climate as one where people were "rising against apartheid", Lesedi highlights the momentum of the resistance, which included not only student protests but also strikes and other forms of civil disobedience (Lodge, 1983). Lesedi's involvement in these activities shows how she was motivated by the idea of black liberation as espoused by Black Consciousness and was willing to take part in the struggle for freedom. Without the influence of Black Consciousness, students like Lesedi, Thandi, and Lisa would not have had the bravery to confront and challenge the apartheid regime. Lodge (1983) contends that Black Consciousness created a new avenue to political resistance, including a rejection of white liberalism, which meant that the apartheid system had no method to influence national politics because black people believed that white liberals and their organisations were useless to black people and black politics.

In black universities, the philosophy of Black Consciousness was also gaining momentum as black students sought a channel of representation apart from the predominantly white student organisation, NUSAS. Bongi explains her reason for joining BCM as one of the students who attended black universities at the time SASO was formed:

> When I returned from Swaziland my sister helped me find a spot in university because I am Zulu and not a Xhosa as I would have enrolled at Fort Hare if I was Xhosa I enrolled at the University of Zululand. That's where my influence and activism as a Black Consciousness activist started. It was the time when Steve Biko was launching his Black Consciousness philosophy. As a student, he was doing second-year medicine at the University of Natal. So, I got into this excitement of Black Consciousness at the University of Zululand because it was spreading around at black campuses like Tuurfloop and Fort Hare as black students were breaking away from NUSAS, the National Union of South African Students. By the time I got to the University of Zululand in 1970, they had already broken away and everything was happening at Turfloop University you know where Tiro was, you understand? When that was happening, I got to the University of Zululand when they were doing the SASO manifesto and to just cut the long story short SASO the South African student organisation was launched, and then Strini Moodley, Nengwekhulu and other members of the leadership went around the country establishing SASO branches in these so-called Bantu universities. While I was at the University of Zululand, I became a member of the SASO branch of the University of Zululand and then I became involved in student politics and became a student activist a die-hard activist at that."

In the quote above, Bongi notes black students' decision for leaving NUSAS as symbolizing a shift toward self-determination and independence in organising. Indeed, as explained in chapter one, the establishment of SASO sought to reflect black students' political objectives, as defined by black students, articulated by black students, and fought for by black students, as opposed to NUSAS's representation (Brown, 2016). SASO's founding goal was to develop a philosophy of Black Consciousness that prioritised black people's political, social, and cultural realities (Brown, 2016).

The quote above also shows that Bongi's activism was deeply tied to her university experience and the spread of BCM ideology, at a time when Steve Biko was developing and promoting Black Consciousness, emphasising pride and black identity and collective action against apartheid. Her exposure to BCM at the University of Zululand demonstrates how the movement resonated with young black intellectuals. Bongi's involvement in SASO marks her entry into structured political activism. The quote also positions Bongi within the BCM's broader narrative, highlighting Biko's

leadership that inspired students across segregated universities. Biko's philosophy of self-reliance and empowerment profoundly influenced Bongi and the university populace in black universities.

Bongi describes how SASO branches were established across Bantu universities, linking their local activism to a national movement. This aligns with Lodge's (1983) argument that Black Consciousness was not just a philosophy but became a national organisation through SASO. Bongi's transition from a student to a "die-hard activist" reflects a personal journey shaped by collective struggle and conveys the depth of her dedication, rooted in both ideological conviction and the urgency of the anti-apartheid struggle. The spread of SASO and BCM ideas at Bantu universities helped create a new generation of leaders who would challenge apartheid both intellectually and practically. This aligns with Brown's (2016) claims that SASO provided a platform for black students to organise as activists, producing a new wave of political projects on the margins of the apartheid era's political realm.

Like Bongi, Mandisa joined student politics as a member of SASO in one of the Bantu universities, the University of the Western Cape:

> "I was a student at UWC in 1973 and there was a SASO branch on campus. I had been politically aware since high school, knowing that there was something seriously wrong with society but had no frame of reference or an understanding of how to analyse the political situation. When I attended SASO meetings on campus and listened to them, the way they analysed the apartheid system and the issue of mental slavery and the need for black unity in particular resonated with me. I felt like it was a worldview that made absolute sense. I felt so many things fall into place that I immediately joined SASO and later BPC. The consciousness imparted to me over the next two years has stayed with me for life because it gave me a sense of our place in the world as Africans and taught me how to proactively challenge the forces that sought and still seek to dehumanise us both physically and psychologically."

Mandisa mentions an early recognition of societal flaws but lacked a "frame of reference" or tools to analyse the political situation. This highlights the disempowerment many young black South Africans felt under apartheid. Listening to SASO's analysis of apartheid provided clarity, offering a "worldview that made absolute sense". This demonstrates the power of the BCM in articulating systemic oppression in a way that resonated deeply with the youth. SASO's analysis helped Mandisa "make sense" of apartheid, illustrating how BCM provided a lens for understanding and

resisting systemic oppression. The ideas of Black Consciousness provided new ideas of political identity (Brown, 2016). It provided black students with a new sense of self and a new way of being in the world. As the quote suggests the ideas of racial unity, black pride and psychological liberation manifested themselves in the minds and lives of black students in black universities (Brown, 2016). Brown (2016) argues that the philosophy of Black Consciousness "provided a broad and flexible system of thought culture and social orientation that could ground a wide range of political practices". Additionally, Mandisa' account mirrors the broader impact of BCM, which awakened a generation to challenge apartheid at multiple levels—intellectual, psychological, and physical. Mandisa's reference to forces that "still seek to dehumanise us" underscores BCM's relevance beyond apartheid, highlighting ongoing struggles against systemic racism and oppression.

4.3 Impact of Black Consciousness philosophy on black women

Biko (1987) claimed black resistance could not be mobilised without psychological liberty. The black man must first liberate himself from the constraints of the apartheid state to unite with his brothers and fight against racial injustice (Biko, 1987). According to Biko, as a consequence of apartheid repression, the black man had developed an inferiority complex, with the black man believing his oppressors were superior and himself inferior. Biko (1987) argued that for a black man to see the world differently and comprehend the effects of racial oppression, he must adopt the concept of Black Consciousness. The black man will then start to reject white structures and beliefs in favour of embracing his skin color and being proud of his blackness. The black women interviewed for this thesis all discussed how, as women and black individuals living under oppression, the ideology of Black Consciousness spoke to them in different ways.

For instance, Zinzi explains how the philosophy resonated with her as a black woman who lived in a white supremacist state:

> "I think it's that it's exactly that it affirms who you are, it affirmed me as a woman, as a black person, as an African. And my role, not my role so much but my sense of the world because it's when you have a very strong sense of the self that you can then interpret the world around you."

She adds:

> "What I learned is for us as a people to be proactive and work towards restoring that which was taken away from us as a people starting with self-reliance and self-determination. It also aimed to instil a more assertive sense of self, both individually and collectively. This was through workshops called formation schools held for members from all over the country where theoretical and ideological questions were debated as well as in leadership training seminars and the annual General Student Council meetings. In these meetings, leaders of the movement consistently explained the basic tenets of Black Consciousness and how the first step to true liberation is to free oneself mentally from a false consciousness imposed by colonialism."

This affirmation stands in stark contrast to the apartheid system, which systematically sought to dehumanise and marginalise black people. Black Consciousness provided an antidote to anti-black racism by instilling pride and dignity. Zinzi highlights that the philosophy of Black Consciousness allowed her to gain a strong sense of self. This reflects a key idea in Black Consciousness: psychological liberation precedes political liberation. Steve Biko emphasised that reclaiming one's sense of identity and worth was foundational for resisting oppression. By affirming "who you are," individuals could challenge societal narratives that sought to define them as inferior. For black women, Black Consciousness offered a framework to challenge both racial and gender-based oppression. This quote reflects the psychological depth of the Black Consciousness philosophy. It was not only a political ideology but also a deeply personal philosophy that sought to restore dignity and pride to individuals. By addressing both the internal and external dimensions of oppression, Black Consciousness aimed for holistic liberation—mental, emotional, and societal (Brown, 2016)

Kgomotso shared how the philosophy of Black Consciousness not only resonated with her as a black person but also as a black woman:

> "Specifically, as a black woman, I learned that we do not have to be ashamed of the way we looked and therefore do not need to adjust our looks to approximate that of white women in order to feel attractive. I had straightened my hair at the time and like other black women did not even know why I was doing it. Once I became aware of the ideological basis for such actions, including women using skin lighteners, I stopped straightening my hair and have ever since groomed my natural hair. There was also a public campaign by BC activists to persuade black women not to lighten their skin for two reasons, one being ideological and the other the serious health side effects of such chemicals."

Lesedi adds:

> "It made me very proud, and you know, have felt like a sense of pride, you know, because it emphasises being proud of who you are."

Mandisa also shared the same sentiments as Lesedi and Kgomotso about how the philosophy of Black Consciousness affected her:

> "I was proud to be a black person who fought all that was happening in terms of poverty and inequalities, as a member of Black Consciousness, I mean our slogan was black men you're on your own. That had to do with my identity, where we even realised that this black skin is part of who I am and I mustn't be ashamed of it. We even stopped using those skin lightening creams (and) hair became the symbol of our identity. You understand? Yeah. And we were courageous. We stood up to the then apartheid system and, for instance, in the police force we would be brave and approach the black policemen who employed by the system and we would say. You must join the black conscious movement and be able to stand up. You know? That is how it collided and affected my identity and my coming from a poor background. I just felt that you know, there is nothing to be ashamed of in being black."

The quote by Kgomotso reflects a powerful personal transformation that centres on self-acceptance and the ideological struggle against the beauty standards imposed by colonialism and apartheid. Kgomotso describes how, as a black women, they were influenced by societal standards that equated beauty with white features and how they came to reject these standards. Kgomotso explains how, as a black woman, they internalised the idea that white beauty was the standard of attractiveness. This is a common experience for many black women, particularly under systems of racial segregation, colonialism and apartheid, which promoted white ideals as the standard while marginalising black identities (Hunter, 2005). White features were deemed desirable and could grant those who possessed them a certain status and open them up to certain privileges in society. For instance, when one possesses features that approximate whiteness, society tends to treat one differently as desirable and deserving of certain opportunities and resources (Hunter, 2005). On the other hand, African features were deemed to be undesirable, and a lot of black women were subjected to abuse and oppression because of those black features (Hunter, 2005). This oppression because of skin tone and African features led to a lot of black women feeling unattractive, with low self-esteem, ashamed of their skin, their hair, and their dignity damaged. Subsequently, black

women sought ways to modify and alter their appearance to fit into white beauty standards to be seen as attractive and desirable (Hunter, 2005).

Kgomotso's statement—"we do not have to be ashamed of the way we looked"—signals a critical turning point in their understanding of beauty and self-worth. It is a declaration of self-acceptance and empowerment, rejecting the false notion that black features (such as natural hair) were inferior or unattractive. Kgomotso attributes this transformation to a growing awareness of the ideological basis for their previous actions. By discussing their experience of straightening their hair, Kgomotso reveals how deeply ingrained the notion of white beauty was in their consciousness. Straightening hair, a common practice among many black women, was often seen as a way to conform to what was considered "acceptable" beauty.

The turning point in Kgomotso's journey came when she recognised the ideological reasons behind such beauty standards. The connection between Black Consciousness and rejecting colonial beauty norms is important here. Black Consciousness emphasised the importance of embracing black identity, culture, and beauty through slogans like "Black is Beautiful" derived by BC from the Black Panther Party (BPP) in the US. This slogan aligned closely with BBP's vision of empowering black communities and challenging societal standards that sought to devalue blackness (Bloom, & Waldo, 2013). The "Black is Beautiful" slogan began gaining popularity in the 1960s as part of the broader Black Power Movement (BPM) (Bloom, & Waldo, 2013). The Black Consciousness Movement adopted this slogan as they believed they were faced with asimilar situation in South Africa under the white supremacy of the apartheid regime.

By rejecting the practice of straightening their hair, Kgomotso was aligning herself with this ideology and affirming her identity as a black woman. Choosing to groom her natural hair Kgomotso embraced a significant act of resistance to the beauty standards imposed by colonialism and apartheid. Natural hair is often a symbol of authenticity and cultural pride. The decision to stop straightening her hair was a reclaim of her identity and heritage. Kgomotso's choice to groom her natural hair was both an individual decision and a collective act of solidarity with the broader black community, which has faced pressure to conform to Western ideals of beauty. It was a rejection of societal pressures to change oneself to be considered beautiful or acceptable. The philosophy of Black Consciousness assisted in liberating black women from conventional

standards of beauty. As this philosophy espoused black pride, confidence, and a restoration of their dignity, slogans like "Black is Beautiful" gained favour among black women. As a result, they abandoned skin-lightening lotions and hair relaxants in favour of embracing their own black beauty and rejecting Eurocentric ideas of beauty (Ramphele, 1996).

4.4 The role of black women in black community programmes (BCP's)

The responsibilities of black women in black community programmes are discussed in this section. which aims to draw attention to their role as active activists in black communities as well as in black universities, as they have pointed out. This aspect of the BCM history is important because it contradicts what the majority of academics who write about the BCM claim, i.e., that BC activism was restricted to the university population or the black middle class. Two research participants in this project explained that the BCM's roles extended beyond politics to include social development. They take pride in these positions and consider them to be the most crucial aspect of their activism, contributing to the growth and advancement of black communities. These initiatives were a practical application of the Black Consciousness philosophy, aiming to uplift impoverished black communities through health, education, and empowerment projects. This aligns with BCM's goals of fostering black pride and autonomy. As Bongi recalls:

> "they had already started black community programmes which was a wing of SASO which you know would focus on uplifting the poor black communities, and yeah, so me and Asha Rambali, who is still alive, were recruited to work on black community programmes and our role was to put together a book. …we used to look at every newspaper for events that were talking about black communities. And then we eventually were able to produce a booklet which was called Black Review. The first edition of Black Review was done by Sam Moodley and she became our manager under her we continued and did the community programmes. The next thing was to do the Zanempilo clinic, which was based in the Eastern Cape in a rural community. There were black women who were very poor and when pregnant they had to attend the clinic in King Williams Town which was far away. So, the black community programmes were another major programme of Black Consciousness. I stayed there. I worked there, banning orders were issued, but I remained an activist."

Mandisa also has a similar narrative on the BCPs:

> "Community building and supporting community organisations was essential as well as you know helping people wherever you know they needed support. And I'm talking about if there was a need for things as basic as cleaning up campaigns. Or campaigns for us at that time as more agile and younger. To assist you know, people who are older, who were going to clinics and they needed their medication and they needed some people to come in to help. And in other words, just the restoration of the dignity of black people was the aim of the programmes. So, those programmes worked fundamentally, you know to shift how black people look at themselves and to show us as young black people, who we were and our role in society."

These community programmes were largely influenced by the Black Panther Party in the US. The BPP organised programmes to address immediate needs in black communities, including free breakfast programmes for children and health clinics offering free medical care for black Americans (Bloom, & Waldo, 2013). In addition, it also provided educational initiatives, including classes on black history and political awareness as well as housing and legal aid programmes (Bloom & Waldo, 2013). Additionally, the BPP also published a series of essays in the Black Panther newspaper to explore and transcend ways to fight the brutally of white police (Bloom, & Waldo, 2013). These initiatives demonstrated the BPP's commitment to building alternative systems of support outside of government control. Just like the BPP the BCM organised community programmes in black communities in South Africa to realise their goal of impacting black communities and restoring the dignity of the black community.

The Black Review, the Black Community Programme's yearbook that ran from 1972 to 1976, was a project that documented activities by and against the black community (Hadfield, 2016). The 1972 and 1973 editions of the Black Review were edited by Khoapa after his banning by Mafika Gwala in Durban. Two women in King Williams Town, Thoko Mbanjwa Mpumlwana and Asha Rambally Moodley, edited the 1974–1976 volumes before Moodley's ban in 1976 (Hadfield, 2016). The efforts to document black experiences through the Black Review and to create practical solutions for community upliftment reflect a proactive resistance to apartheid's dehumanising effect. Women such as Bongi, Asha Rambali, and Sam Moodley are highlighted as key contributors in this quote, challenging traditional narratives that often sideline women's roles in liberation struggles. Bongi's involvement in both documenting the struggle via the Black Review and

participating in the BCM community programmes showcases a multi-faceted approach to activism—balancing intellectual contributions with direct action. The initiatives by the BCM to develop black communities as described by Bongi reflect a deep commitment to the ideals of Black Consciousness, showing how BC women translated philosophy into impactful action.

Additionally, Hadfield (2016) asserts that the publication portrays the crucial role that BC women performed in the organisation. The more recognisable male-dominated leadership of SASO stands in stark contrast to the unrecognised role and dominance of women in the BCP activities (Hadfield, 2016). According to Hadfield (2016), the significance of women in community initiatives aligns with a greater amount of research on South African women's long history of leadership in public health and education initiatives which supports the significance of women in community projects. Despite the long-standing dominance of men in both black and white political groups, women have historically taken the lead in grassroots initiatives.

Highlighting the establishment of the female-led Zanempilo clinic emphasises the tangible efforts of the movement to address systemic inequalities in health care, particularly for rural black communities and poor black women in the Eastern Cape (Hadfield, 2016). This is a notable example of community-based health care in an apartheid-era context. The clinic not only addressed health care disparities but also served as a visible, localised symbol of the BCM's commitment to uplifting marginalised communities. In addition, they helped by providing exceptional maternity and primary health care both on-site and via mobile clinics to help poor pregnant women with maternity care. The clinic also offered social work services, grocery cooperatives, gardens, and a sewing group. They placed BC’s ideology of black self-reliance and the reclaiming of the dignity of black people with humanity at the centre. The work described reflects a deep commitment to the ideals of Black Consciousness, showing how individuals translated philosophy into impactful action.

The programmes aimed to reshape how black people viewed themselves, moving away from the internalised oppression of apartheid. This mirrors Biko’s (1987) emphasis on self-definition and psychological liberation as prerequisites for broader societal change. Mandisa in her quote highlights the importance of supporting and organising communities, addressing both immediate and structural needs. This reflects a grassroots approach to activism, rooted in direct engagement with people’s lived realities (Hadfield, 2016). Central to the programmes was the idea of uplifting

black communities by restoring their sense of self-worth and agency. This aligns with the broader goals of Black Consciousness, which sought to counter the psychological damage inflicted by systemic oppression. Hadfield (2016) contends that by engaging in community work BC activists not only addressed practical issues but also redefined their identities and roles within a larger struggle. These actions were not isolated charity but part of a broader strategy to "shift how Black people look at themselves"(Hadfield, 2016). This shows a deep understanding of the interplay between material conditions and psychological empowerment.

CHAPTER FIVE: DATA ANALYSIS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter is a continuation of the previous one reporting the results of the interviews conducted with eight women who were politically active in the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM). The chapter is divided into three themes: Everyday sexism in the BCM, Silencing of women's voices in the BCM official discourse, and strategies used by black women to counter misogyny and gendered experiences in the BCM. Some of the themes include sub-themes that provide in-depth analysis of the themes.

5.2 Everyday sexism in the Black Consciousness Movement

Four participants interviewed for this thesis have claimed that they have experienced sexism in the Black Consciousness Movement. Two refer to it as subtle, and two admit there was sexism, but it was resolved. This means that the issue of sexism was addressed or negotiated, and their male counterparts began respecting them. Nothando explains how everyday sexism in the BCM affected her:

> "one thing that I've realised in this movement in the Biko movement is that what we were taught and what at least we believed it to be, is that we are a non-sexist movement, we are, we are non-patriarchal movement but people did something different to what was planned

> to be. You find yourself that because you are a woman, then automatically when an event is being planned your V section [vagina] then decides for you to to take care of all the catering. Take care of who's going to stay where. Take care of things that could be maybe aligned to be tackled by a woman."

At the beginning of the quote, Nothando expresses disappointment at the BCM stating that it did something different to its intended purpose in relation to the treatment of its women activists. Furthermore, Nothando reflects frustration and critique of traditional gender roles and expectations placed on women in society and the BCM. The use of the 'V section', which implies the genitalia of a woman, suggests a societal norm where women are often expected to take on certain responsibilities during events simply because of their gender and sex (Gqola, 2001). The use of V section is a way to express that gender (symbolised by genitalia) is used as the sole criterion to assign tasks like catering, which are traditionally seen as "women's work". This could imply frustration over the reductive association of women with domestic and caregiving roles. These tasks are examples of logistical or emotional labour often assigned to women, reinforcing the critique of the gendered division of labour in events and other social situations. Nothando expresses irritation with the automatic assumption that a woman should handle these responsibilities, rather than them being distributed equitably. This quote highlights how deeply ingrained these expectations were in the movement, to the point where they seem predetermined (Gqola, 2001). It also mirrors Macqueen's (2011) argument that sexism in the BCM contradicted the movement's ideology of humanity and restoration of dignity and it instead stripped its women activists of their dignity

Mandisa also shared the same sentiments:

> "Sometimes when things were to be done like cooking or dishing up some men would expect us [women] to do that. In this instance, I didn't dish up for men I'll dish up for me, and they respected that. For example, as activists will go around the country, we would be called to come and work with communities then we wake up in the morning transport picks us up at 4:00 am to start work in the morning with the community the whole day we carry bricks and sand like everybody else. In the evening on our return, we are expected to wash, cook, and eat. We have political discussions, education, you know, we discuss things, we

> review the days there. But for the first few days, men would wash and then sit on the table and wait for their food."

Mandisa's quote highlights the gendered expectations and inequality in labour—both physical and emotional—women often face, even in movements that are deemed progressive like the BCM. Mandisa highlights the expectation to fill in gender roles by their male counterparts. She also demonstrates agency and challenges the norm when she says she did not conform to that expectation and she chose to dish up for herself instead. This quote aligns with the argument made by Gqola (2001) that BC women were neither passive or allowing of the mistreatment they were subjected to by their male counterparts. Instead, they stood up to sexism in various ways, sometimes like Mandisa had done by refusing to dish up for the men. "In this instance, I didn't dish up for men I'll dish up for me, and they respected that." This part of the quote suggests that when BC women asserted themselves or pushed past their boundaries and refused to conform to traditional expectations, they earned respect from their male counterparts. The context of activism adds another layer of complexity. Even in spaces aimed at fostering equality and justice, gendered divisions of labour persist, revealing how deeply these expectations are embedded in society (Magaziner, 2011). Additionally, the political discussions and education juxtaposed with the unequal domestic expectations highlight the contradiction between the ideals of activism and the lived realities of gender inequality (McClintock, 1991). The quote reveals how women in male-dominated or traditional environments must navigate and resist societal norms that perpetuate inequality. This dual burden of physical and emotional labour serves as a representative of broader gender inequalities, even in progressive movements like the BCM (McClintock, 1991).

Lisa shares similar experiences with Nothando and Mandisa in her narrative:

> "When we were in Gaborone, I was publicity secretary in the BC, but I have to say that you know, there was always that resistance among our male comrades, you know. As a woman to be the publicity secretary, I remember we used to fight over the key because I had to be getting the mail, and newspaper and we would discuss that [events in the newspaper]. And we always found ourselves as women in the kitchen having to be cooking when we were supposed to be discussing. And you know, and, you know, thinking about it now makes me so angry that I didn't. I feel like I didn't fight hard to say no. You know, they would say you guys go (to the kitchen). I mean, they were helping. Don't get me wrong,

> they were helping with the cooking, but most of the time it was like “hawu, comrade. Why don't you do this? “Comrade, please check this”, you know, things like that.”

Lisa highlights the resistance she faced as a woman holding a leadership position reflecting broader societal attitudes that question women’s authority or capability in roles traditionally held by men. Despite her formal leadership role, societal expectations relegated her and other women to domestic tasks, taking them away from critical discussions and decision-making (Gqola, 2001). This highlights the way traditional gender roles persist, even in spaces advocating for broader social or political change. The emphasis on "helping" suggests that men saw domestic work as primarily a woman's responsibility, with their involvement framed as assistance rather than shared duty. This reinforces unequal dynamics, where men’s ‘help’ is optional and women’s involvement is assumed. Lisa expresses regret and frustration over not challenging these expectations more forcefully, reflecting on the internalised acceptance of unequal roles at the time, placing the blame and burden on herself instead of the systematic issue at hand. Additionally, the casual language used by male comrades to assign tasks underscores how normalised and unchallenged these dynamics were, often disguised as politeness or camaraderie. “Hawu, comrade. Why don't you do this? Comrade, please check this.'" The quote demonstrates how societal gender norms infiltrate even progressive spaces, subtly undermining women’s roles and reinforcing inequities (Gqola, 2001). Lisa highlights how women in the movement were often burdened with both emotional labour and domestic responsibilities, diverting their attention from substantive discussions or leadership tasks. This aligns with Gqola’s (2001) argument that women in the BCM faced contradictory locations or positions in the movement and were expected to adhere to domestic roles while at the same time filling in leadership roles, a duality that was not expected from the men.

Mandisa expresses that sexism sometimes antagonised women in the movement:

> “Because you ask yourself, am I being placed in this position because of my gender? Am I being placed here because these people have so much belief in me and trust that I can execute my job as required? As a human being who is capable? Who is enlightened as well? So, you end up with questions that you will never find answers to and you know it

> antagonises one, I got antagonised by my own comrades and I said to myself, you know what, I cannot keep on flying this flag if people don't recognise me,"

This quote reflects a common concern for women in leadership roles: whether their presence is due to genuine recognition of their abilities or tokenism, where individuals feel they are included as symbols rather than valued contributors (Jacquette, 1997). While the BCM did not always explicitly foreground gender as a political category, the women interviewed in this study demonstrate that they exercised considerable agency and held substantive leadership roles. Their work in education, health care, and political organising reflects deep involvement in the strategic direction and ideological development of the movement. Rather than being symbolic figures or 'tokens', these women's stories reveal the multiplicity of ways Black women have led within and alongside national liberation movements—even when gender was not foregrounded as a distinct political issue.

Mandisa sees her worth beyond her gender, emphasising her humanity, intelligence, and capabilities. This plea for recognition highlights the frustration of being reduced to gender in the movement rather than being seen as a complete, competent individual. Being undermined or unrecognised by allies or peers, particularly in activist or progressive spaces, often adds a layer of betrayal or alienation as Gqola (2001) terms it. It shows how even those fighting for justice can perpetuate inequality. In the last part of the quote Mandisa draws a boundary, refusing to continue supporting a movement that fails to value or respect her contributions. This demonstrates a powerful assertion of agency and self-worth, even in the face of systemic inequities.

Mandisa adds an interesting point that sexism was often used as a tool by male comrades to pit women against each other:

> "They [men] had made it their project to divide women, to make women like, to indoctrinate them, to make us fight against each other. To undermine each other. And that is not how things are supposed to be."

Patriarchal systems such as sexism benefit from disunity among women, as they prevent the formation of collective movements that could challenge systemic inequality or sexism (Manne, 2017). This tactic is evident historically and culturally in various forms, including competition for resources, status, or male approval (Manne, 2017). Division prevents unified resistance,

reinforcing patriarchal systems and perpetuating gender inequality. When women are made to see each other as competitors or adversaries, their potential to collaborate and challenge systemic inequities is diminished (Manne, 2017). Additionally, encouraging women to question or belittle each other's abilities and achievements erodes trust and mutual support among women. This perpetuates cycles of self-doubt and reinforces male dominance in social, and political spheres. Manne (2017) claims that misogyny and sexism enforce patriarchal norms by targeting women who deviate from or challenge these norms, including fostering competition and mistrust among women.

The other women interviewed in this thesis highlight how they never experienced sexism, and they were treated with respect by their comrades whom they refer to as brothers. For instance, in Thandi's narrative she says:

> "No. they were very kind to me, they were my brothers. They are still my brothers to this day. I still call them I still love them. And they still love me. We made a family out of it."

Bongi shares a similar sentiment:

> "I never felt like I was treated on the margins as a woman. We were there as women when we had meetings. We would stand up and talk and our men ooNengwekhulu would listen to us. There was no "don't do this or do that because you are a woman." No, no. I never experienced that. We were there as a movement and we supported each other, and the men respected us tremendously. Not just because we were in the core leadership but we were just respected by those men."

Thus, woman like Kgomotso felt like they were respected and were allowed a sense of agency as women in the movement:

> "In terms of my own experience, I never felt that I was being treated differently because I was female. Black women in BC were very assertive and the equal of the men, intellectually and ideologically, and I took my cue also from that although I too was always quite assertive. If there were disagreements on issues other than gender, they dealt with it. Women such as Vuyelwa Mashalaba (who was the only woman on the first SASO executive), Deborah, Nomsisi, Mamphela Ramphele, Thenjiwe Mtintso did not allow men to push them around. Their numbers were small and this was in part because women had

> smaller numbers on campus. So, I never felt that my gender was a drawback to my participation in SASO and BPC."

This quote provides an intriguing perspective on sexism within the BCM, offering a nuanced view that acknowledges both the agency of women leaders and the systemic challenges they faced. However, the assertion that women leaders like Mamphela Ramphele and Thenjiwe Mtintso "did not allow men to push them around" suggests that these women had to actively resist potential marginalisation, indirectly highlighting the presence of patriarchal attitudes they needed to confront. Kgomotso states that "Black women in BC were very assertive and the equal of the men, intellectually and ideologically." This highlights the resilience and capability of the women involved. However, the need to emphasise their equality suggests that the prevailing environment may have questioned or undervalued their contributions. The emphasis on assertiveness implies that women had to adopt certain traits to ensure their voices were heard, which could be seen as a response to a subtly patriarchal environment.

In the narratives of these women, the word 'assertive' comes up a lot, alluding to how being assertive helped them escape sexism or marginalisation. For instance, in Zinzi's explanation:

> "If you assert yourself, if you knew, if you were strong and you know your story there was nobody stopping you from talking. You didn't get any disrespect."

In the quote, the absence of disrespect is framed as a direct consequence of self-assertion and confidence. This implies that respect was often earned or negotiated through individual action, especially in a space like the BCM where women's voices did not gain much value (Gqola, 2001). The quote suggests a conditional dynamic, where respect was given to women if and only if one demonstrated strength and confidence. This reflects a reality where respect is not freely afforded to all but must be actively demanded or proven by women – a sexist double standard. This mirrors bell hook's (1984) claim that respect for women is often conditional and is tied to patriarchal conditions of merit. Women have to work hard in male-dominated spaces to be granted respect. While self-assertion in this instance serves as a pathway to respect, it does not address systemic inequalities that might have prevented some women from asserting themselves or being respected, regardless of their confidence.

5.3 Strategies used by women to counter misogyny and gendered experiences in the BCM

This section provides a vivid example of how women in the BCM have countered misogyny, specifically in the context of resistance to traditional gender roles in activist spaces, using subtle resistance and active political engagement. For instance, in Lesedi's narrative she states:

> "Nobody listened that evening, what we did then we dished up what was left the previous day. And we took bags of onion and put it in the pot where it was supposed to be meat and put it on the stove. So, when they tried to eat, they found that it was onions and then that day they had had to be a session run by Steve Biko that we need to talk about chores. How are we going to divide them then we formed teams, some must wash the dishes, some cook, and then we exchange. And to show that there was no problem we had to stand up to educate them. Yeah, but, but if you thought, no, it's a social norm as a woman you must cook then the situation would just go on. So, in many places, I'll do that like if we are in a conference, you go and sit with the men and you discuss. But if you are weak then you want to go and cook. How can you leave your house to go and cook at a conference?"

The first part of the quote describes a situation where women actively subverted gender norms related to cooking. They replaced meat with onions in the meal, symbolising how they were unwilling to accept the traditional and sexist expectation that women should always cook. This act can be seen as a form of resistance — taking a mundane task that is typically imposed on women and using it to disrupt the status quo. The gesture is both symbolic and practical, forcing those who traditionally hold these assumptions to confront their own biases. The act of serving the dish with only onions rather than meat is a quiet rebellion, a form of passive resistance where the absence of expected fulfillment becomes a statement of protest. It demonstrates agency and autonomy (Manne, 2017). This means the women did not just passively accept sexism, they took actions against it. By forming teams to divide domestic labour, by collectively organising, they were able to ensure that the responsibility for domestic tasks did not fall disproportionately on women. By forming these teams and making clear agreements about who would do what, the women actively resisted the stereotype of the woman as the sole caretaker or domestic labourer. This was a practical and

strategic move to ensure that the burden of "women's work" wasn't overlooked or imposed without discussion.

Additionally, the statement, "if you are weak then you want to go and cook", highlights the tension between the traditional expectation of women's domestic labour and the empowerment that comes from challenging that role. Lesedi acknowledges that choosing to cook at a conference could be seen as a sign of weakness or internalised oppression, which reflects a broader struggle for women in political movements to assert their own political authority and not be relegated to traditional roles (Magaziner, 2011). The women's refusal to be pigeonholed into these domestic roles demonstrates an active assertion of their own worth and political agency (Gqola, 2001). It shows that the women understand that their roles in the movement go beyond cooking and cleaning — they have intellectual, organisational, and leadership capabilities that deserve recognition.

Lesedi also reflects on how, over time, some men "took us seriously" when they stood up for themselves. This suggests that while women in the movement faced initial resistance or even dismissiveness, persistence in challenging traditional gender roles can lead to genuine acceptance of their equal participation. The quote highlights the ongoing tension in many political movements where women's contributions are often undervalued or subordinated to those of men (hooks, 1984). However, through strategies like education, collaboration, and direct confrontation of sexist assumptions, women carve out space for themselves in these movements, ensuring their voices and leadership are heard (hooks, 1984).

Another instance of being vocal would be Mandisa's narrative:

> "The way that I was raised, I was raised to be a strong black woman. I saw it in my lineage I saw it in myself. And if I come across a person who threatens my existence my strength, and what I believe in, I would have a problem with that person. And I would not dilly dally around it. I will speak and I would say to a person, this is not supposed to happen. I was like that with men in the Black Consciousness movement, I was very vocal."

In the quote Mandisa emphasises her refusal to "dilly dally," signaling an unwillingness to tolerate or excuse sexist behavior. This directness challenges the norms of silence or deference often expected of women, especially in patriarchal structures. Vocal resistance in this context serves as an act of reclaiming agency and asserting equality. By speaking out, Mandisa disrupts the dynamics that allow sexism to persist unchallenged.

Zinzi adds another interesting narrative about vocal resistance:

> "I realised in the organization (BCM) I belong to is that if you spoke out, you knew your story, and you were powerful nobody oppressed you. Some people were afraid, but they were afraid for nothing, because if you spoke out, then you would earn respect from most men."

Overall, this quote by Zinzi reveals that women in the BCM had to adopt strategies that aligned with behaviours traditionally associated with men/masculinity - strength, assertiveness, confidence - to assert their equality and to earn the respect of their male counterparts (Gqola, 2001).

5.4 The persistence of male-centred politics despite women's leadership roles in the movement

This section of the chapter discusses obtaining leadership in the BCM as a substitute for including women in its official discourse. Four of the women interviewed for this thesis refer to access to leadership positions for women as an indication that women were not marginalised in the official discourse of the movement. Therefore, they were not silenced by the movement because they could occupy prominent roles. According to these narratives, the access to leadership positions for women in the movement erased any sense of inferiority amongst women.

For instance, Kgomotso explains:

> "Initially there were no specific focus on women's issues, even by us as women because we joined in our own right as activists and worked side by side with male comrades. But there were women in leadership positions and at BPC's inaugural conference, in December 1972, it elected as its first president, a woman, Winifred Kgware, which to my knowledge was the first political party to be led by a woman in South Africa at the time."

Kgomotso explicitly states that women's issues were not a priority, even among women activists within the BCM. Magaziner (2011) argues this reflects a broader trend in many liberation movements where the primary focus was on overarching goals like racial or national liberation, often sidelining gender-specific concerns. The election of Winifred Kgware as the first president of the Black People's Convention (BPC) in 1972 is significant. Her leadership represents a symbolic victory for gender equality within the BCM and the broader liberation movement. However, the quote suggests that her position—and the presence of other women leaders—did not

necessarily translate into a discourse that centred on women's issues. Kgomotso notes that women joined "in their own right as activists", working alongside male comrades without prioritising or highlighting gender-based struggles. This could indicate that women's inclusion in leadership was more about individual merit than a deliberate effort to address systemic gender inequities.

This highlights that Kgomotso framed her activism as a commitment to the broader national struggle against apartheid, rather than as a fight for gender-specific issues. Her emphasis on collective liberation reflects a political choice that was common among activists in the BCM, where racial oppression was often seen as the most urgent and unifying struggle (Gqola, 2001). While she did not explicitly foreground gender in her narrative, this does not indicate a lack of awareness or agency. Instead, it reflects how many Black women navigated overlapping systems of oppression and made strategic decisions about which forms of resistance to prioritise at particular historical moments. Gqola (2001) suggests that the reason women can prioritise racial oppression over gender oppression is that political movements often prioritise the "main struggle". In the case of BC this was racial liberation, over gender equality (Gqola, 2001). Gender issues may be seen as secondary or divisive when unity is deemed essential for achieving broader goals. Women often experience shared oppression with men in terms of racial liberation and may prioritise solidarity with male allies to combat the common enemy. Therefore, speaking out against sexism within a political movement can risk alienation, marginalisation, or accusations of divisiveness (Gqola, 2001). Furthermore, women may choose to remain silent to preserve their position or maintain solidarity within the movement. Gqola's (2001) analysis highlights the complexities women faced in balancing the fight against racial oppression with the need to address gender-based discrimination in the BCM. In male-dominated movements, raising gender issues may expose women to backlash, undermining their ability to participate effectively. Additionally, in patriarchal societies, women may internalise the idea that their roles are naturally subordinate or supportive (Constantinescu, 2021). This internalisation can lead to the belief that advancing gender issues might be selfish or inappropriate in the context of collective action (Constantinescu, 2021).

The election of women leaders like Winifred Kgware symbolises progress and inclusion, offering visibility and representation in a male-dominated space. However, the lack of focus on women's issues implies that this representation may have been superficial, with little impact on transforming

the gender discourse within the movement. As Gqola (2001) argues, the movement's primary focus on racial liberation may have overshadowed the intersection of race and gender. This could suggest that, while women were present in leadership roles, their inclusion did not necessarily lead to the prioritisation of gender as an integral part of the movement's agenda. Macqueen (2011) claims that the absence of a gender-specific discourse within the BCM suggests a missed opportunity to advance a more comprehensive liberation ideology that included racial and gender equality. The election of a woman as president of the BPC in 1972 was ground-breaking, but it occurred within a broader framework that still largely adhered to male-defined priorities and norms (Gqola, 2001).

Thandi adds:

> "You know Black Consciousness, I think also anyone who looks at Black Consciousness and Sasso, it's probably one of the few organisations that from the beginning had women leadership. And so you know it, it didn't feel odd because I had women leaders and looked at the seniors who were in Sasso and I would see women I related to and so whether it's a Mamphela Ramphele or its Ma Kraai or its Nontobeko There were just so many women leaders at that time."

The quote highlights the presence of prominent women leaders, such as Mamphela Ramphele, Nomsisi Kraai, and Nontobeko, as central to the speaker's experience of SASO (Gqola, 2001). However, the emphasis is on the representation of women in leadership rather than on the movement's efforts to advance a discourse on women's issues, suggesting that leadership became the primary measure of inclusion. This view misses the point that even though women were in leadership positions, that did not translate into the movement adopting women's issues. Thandi mentions that having women in leadership "didn't feel odd", indicating that the movement fostered a culture where women's leadership was normalised. While this is progressive, it also suggests that the focus was on integrating women into existing leadership structures rather than creating spaces to address the specific needs or challenges of women within the broader struggle (hooks, 1984). Furthermore, Thandi notes that they could relate to these women leaders, which highlights the importance of representation in fostering a sense of belonging and empowerment. However, this focus on relatability does not necessarily equate to addressing systemic gender issues, indicating a shift toward symbolic representation rather than substantive discourse on women's roles and struggles within the movement (hooks, 1984).

Bongi explains that the discourse that particularly focused on women was their roles as mothers who were encouraged to teach their children about black consciousness:

> "You know, they were addressing the issues of women or the famous topics that you know like what is our role as mothers? Most of the women were given that topic I remember. I remember my first talk I had to talk about the role of women at home. What is it that we were supposed to do to conscientise our children and all that? That was a famous topic in the discourse, the same as the famous occupation for women was secretary. Most of the time in organisations you would find most secretaries were women, so they were addressing it in that way that we had a role as oppressed people and as mothers, as wives, as women. So that's how they looked at it and that conscientised a lot of women to join."

The quote above reveals the nationalistic assumptions that underpinned the BCM ideology. This is because nationalism regards women's roles as primarily mothers whose role is to give birth to children and raise those children in accordance with an accepted ideology. According to Yuval-Davis (1993) nationalism and gender are interconnected where men and women are assigned specific roles that fit the national narrative. Women in nationalism are idealised as symbols of the nation often associated with reproduction and cultural continuity. Their roles are to be bearers of the next generation and preservers of national culture and traditions. Nationalism is a deeply gendered project and the entrance of women into this project is always along the lines of biological and cultural reproducers of the nation. Additionally, McClintock (1991) argues that in the national project women are often positioned as 'mothers' of the nation while being excluded from real political power. This paradox highlights how women's contributions are important in the national project, but they are often marginalised in this project. Their agency in nationalist movements was undervalued and their contributions erased during and post-liberation period.

CHAPTER 6: THE CONCLUSION

6.1 Introduction

This MA thesis sought to research the gendered experiences and political roles of Black women in the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM). To that end, this study recruited and interviewed eight black women who were politically involved in the BCM during the apartheid era. During the course of the research, this thesis made important research findings. These findings are comprehensively analysed and discussed in chapters four and five. The analysis and the discussion of these findings were framed around six themes, namely: 1) inspiration to join the BCM, 2) the impact of BC philosophy on black women, 3) the role of BC women in BCPs, 4) everyday sexism in the BCM, 5) the persistence of male-centred politics despite women's leadership roles in the movement, and 6) strategies used by black women to counter misogyny and gendered experiences in the BCM.

Chapter four of the thesis specifically dealt with the first three themes, whereas chapter five interrogated the last three themes. This chapter seeks to reiterate and synthesise some of the findings discussed in the data analysis chapters to highlight key themes. The discussion begins by interrogating the common threads in the findings analysed in chapter four.

6.2 Chapter four: Consolidating insights

This chapter highlights the most important aspect of these women's lives which is what attracted them to join the Black Consciousness Movement. In their narratives we get to see the impact of the 1976 Soweto uprisings in their activism and their reason to join the BCM. Four of the participants point to the apartheid's repressive involvement in their education as the reason they saw the need to join the BCM. Student politics became a rising theme in this chapter as these women were moved by the threat of Bantu Education to their future to become activists and confront the apartheid state. Afrikaans, viewed as the oppressor's language, became a flashpoint for resistance, with students like Thandi and movements like the South African Students Movement (SASM) challenging its imposition. The philosophical appeal of Black Consciousness drew them to the movement through student movements like SASM and SASO." The ideas of Steve Biko, particularly the emphasis on self-empowerment within black communities before uniting with other groups, inspired activists like Thandi to join the movement. This chapter also reveals how BC philosophy also became a personal and political framework in which black youth

could form an understanding of their oppression and find ways to fight the apartheid system through BC philosophy. These findings are consistent with Lodge's (1983) argument that BC philosophy played an essential role in shaping the consciousness of the 1970s youth. It also provided them with a tool of analysis to articulate the events of their time.

Secondly, this chapter also reveals the impact of BC's philosophy on black women's identity and beauty standards. This reveals to us as per Macqueen's (2011) argument that black women benefited from the identity politics of the BCM through slogans such as "Black is Beautiful" which indicated a rejection of European beauty standards that devalued black women, adding to their oppression. The movement provided black women with tools to resist both racial and gender oppression by emphasising self-acceptance and pride in African features. Kgomotso's transformation illustrates the ideological shift from internalised shame to empowerment through the philosophy of Black Consciousness.

Lastly, this chapter also reveals the impact of black women in shaping the direction of the movement via their roles in community development programmes. Women actively contributed to social development programmes, emphasising the grassroots and practical application of BC philosophy. This finding is consistent with Hadfield's (2016) argument that these black community programmes more than anything revealed the role women played in BC's community programmes, therefore contributing to the impact the movement had in black communities. Without these women at the forefront, these programmes would arguably not have had the impact they had.

6.3 Chapter five: Consolidating insights

This chapter deals with the everyday sexism that women activists encountered in the BCM. This chapter suggests that the BCM had multiple strands of sexism that women activists had to navigate in the day-to-day operations of the movement. In this chapter four of the women describe their gendered experiences through the persistence of traditional gender roles in leadership and activism in the movement. Suggesting that even when women were assigned certain tasks and responsibilities the men always revealed their distrust in women being able to carry out those responsibilities. Furthermore, women were not seen for their individual capabilities but were relegated to traditional roles of caterer, wife, and mother. This finding is consistent with Magaziner's (2011) argument that the status of women in the movement was always domesticated.

The masculinist nature and environment of the movement contributed to the expectation that women must cater to the desires of their male counterparts via traditional roles. So, the males always relegated women to traditional gender roles. It was always assumed that women should clean, cook, and be wives and mothers.

Women were expected to juggle domestic and emotional labour alongside leadership responsibilities, while men did not face this dual burden. This highlights how societal norms infiltrated spaces advocating for change (Gqola, 2001). Additionally, this chapter underscores the persistent dual burden faced by women in leadership roles, where they must meet the demands of both societal expectations and their professional or activist responsibilities. This particular finding is consistent with Gqola's (2001) argument that BC women were positioned in contradictory locations and expected to carry out dual roles of being militants and activists at the same time as performing domestic and emotional labour, while their male counterparts could just be activists.

This chapter also reveals the resistance from the women which reveals that BC women did not allow sexism to persist. They saw sexism as an oppression against women and something that should not be allowed to exist. This particular finding is consistent with Magaziner's (2011) argument that BC women had an idea and framework of feminism within their resistance and political stances. However, because feminism was deemed a Western ideology by the movement, they could not use it as a framework to articulate their resistance to sexism (Magaziner, 2011). Furthermore, the act of replacing meat with onions in meals symbolises women's refusal to conform to traditional gender roles. This quiet rebellion highlights how mundane tasks like cooking can become sites of protest, challenging the expectation that domestic labour is inherently a woman's responsibility. Choosing not to cook becomes a metaphor for rejecting subservience and asserting agency. Women's refusal to be confined to traditional domestic roles illustrates their understanding of their broader contributions to the movement, encompassing intellectual, organisational, and leadership capabilities.

Another important insight emerging from this chapter is the complex nature of women's leadership within the Black Consciousness Movement. While gender was not always foregrounded in the political discourse of the BCM, the women interviewed demonstrate that they exercised meaningful leadership—whether through leading community health projects, engaging in political education, or shaping the ideological direction of the movement. Their contributions were not simply symbolic but were essential to the everyday praxis and continuity of the BCM's mission.

A Black feminist lens allows us to appreciate these roles not as exceptions, but as indicative of a broader legacy of Black women's political leadership in South Africa. At the same time, it also prompts us to critically examine how these contributions were carried out within a political culture that, while revolutionary, remained shaped by patriarchal norms. As Jacquette (1997) reminds us, representation alone does not guarantee transformative power. However, rather than reading these women's presence in leadership as tokenistic, this thesis affirms their agency, resilience, and strategic navigation of a male-dominated space.

This chapter also reveals that to confront sexism and marginalisation some women used vocal resistance described in the narratives as "assertive", "confidence" and "being powerful". These narratives emphasise that speaking out, demonstrating strength, and asserting one's knowledge were key strategies for earning respect from male counterparts, reflecting the need for women to adopt traditionally masculine traits to assert equality. This finding can also be found in Gqola (2001) where she argues that BC women were then assigned an "honorary male" status by their male counterparts for having these traits. This strategy, while effective, points to the patriarchal structures requiring women to conform to these norms to be taken seriously. The respect and recognition women earned were often conditional on their ability to demonstrate these traits, reflecting a broader critique of how patriarchal systems reward behaviour aligned with traditional power dynamics (bell hooks, 1984).

Another finding that comes up in this chapter is that women's issues were not prioritised, even by BC women themselves, reflecting a broader trend in liberation movements where overarching goals like racial or national liberation overshadowed gender-specific concerns which is consistent with arguments made by Gqola (2001) and Magaziner (2011) that the prioritising of racial liberation in the BCM led to gender-specific issues being sidelined. Additionally, many women activists in the BCM made strategic choices about when and how to foreground gender issues, often prioritising unity in the struggle against apartheid. As Gqola (2001) notes, the political culture of the time frequently demanded a unified front, and some women chose not to publicly challenge sexism in order to preserve collective solidarity. This should not be read as passivity or complicity, but rather as a reflection of the difficult terrain that politically active women had to navigate in patriarchal and racially oppressive structures. Their decisions to deprioritise gender concerns in certain moments were shaped by a deep political consciousness and commitment to the broader liberation struggle. As Constantinescu (2021) argues, in many patriarchal contexts,

women are socially conditioned to perceive gender advocacy as secondary or even inappropriate in collective struggles. Yet, the women in this study demonstrate how such pressures were negotiated with awareness and care. Rather than viewing this as self-silencing, it is more accurate to understand it as a calculated negotiation—one that reveals both the cost and the complexity of political organising under apartheid.

Ultimately, the findings point not only to marginalisation, but to the remarkable ways in which Black women expanded the possibilities of the BCM through their labour, intellect, and political vision. Their stories not only challenge historical silences but also invite future BCM organisations to build more explicitly inclusive and gender-conscious spaces that honour this legacy.

6.4 Recommendations

A future BCM has to follow the following recommendation for such a movement to align with women's liberation in the 21 st century.

- One of the BCM's weaknesses, as argued by scholars like Gqola (2001), Magaziner (2011), and Mcqueen (2011), is that it prioritised racial liberation at the expense of other oppressions that equally affected black people. One of the recommendations I suggest for countering this weakness for BCM organisations would be to adopt an intersectional approach or framework. An intersectional approach recognises that racial liberation is deeply intertwined with gender liberation. This would acknowledge that both race and gender shape the oppression of black women.
- The BCM should establish autonomous women's organisations or sub-committees within the BCM to create safe spaces where women could discuss and advocate for their specific concerns without fear of backlash.
- Address sexism within the movement directly through education and open discussions, making it clear that gender equality is central to the liberation ideology. Also create systems to hold members accountable for sexist behaviours, ensuring a culture of respect and equality where women feel seen.
- Integrate discussions on gender oppression into the discourse of the movement and consciousness-raising sessions, alongside racial and class oppression, so that women's

oppressions could be included in the discourse and therefore could be seen as equally important as racial oppression.

- Celebrate and document the contributions of women within the BCM to challenge the gendered experiences of their roles and build a legacy of gender-inclusive liberation. Make deliberate efforts to collect and archive the stories of women in the BCM to ensure their contributions are not erased from history.
- Reframe women's roles by challenging the nationalist framing of women as primarily cultural and biological reproducers of the nation. Instead, position women as equal partners in political and ideological leadership. It should advocate for a vision of nationalism that embraces gender equality as fundamental to the liberation of the nation.

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