Identity, Repression, and the Collapse of Apartheid

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Abstract

Scholars emphasise that an influx of resources during the 1980s lowered the costs of collective action and nourished a mass nonviolent anti-apartheid movement that eventually brought down the incumbent regime. Utilising a discourse theoretic approach, this study demonstrates that the 1976 Soweto massacre and its antecedent organisational campaign waged by the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) were pivotal yet overlooked historical factors that contributed to the apartheid collapse. While the Soweto massacre led to the detainment of BCM leadership and the death of leader Steve Biko, the event of white police killing unarmed black students in June of 1976 backfired and revealed central antagonisms and contradictions underpinning the apartheid project. Only once political identities were dislocated did the possibility arise for a unified mass opposition movement to form. Alongside weighing economic costs under threat of state repression, this study demonstrates that historical waves of revolutionary mobilisation are also influenced by identity and meanings attributed to repressive events by publics.

Keywords: Soweto Uprising; Black Consciousness Movement; Steve Biko; Repression; Mobilisation; Identity

1. Introduction

From 1948 to 1994, one of modern history's most repressive regimes carried out a state project of systemic segregation called apartheid. The ruling National Party (NP) committed over 37,000 human rights abuses to upkeep a mass project of economic exploitation and support nationalistic myths and an idea of a *Volk* race (Norval 1996). The native population and people of colour in South Africa were formally and informally subjugated and made into inferior citizens. They were institutionally and morally excluded from political terrains, while a ruling minority group controlled around one-third of the world's gold deposits. Meanwhile, challenges to the status quo were brutally suppressed – the regime successfully killed and attempted to kill anti-apartheid activists inside and outside of South Africa (Clark and Worger 2013: 97). To date, there has been a large multi-disciplinary literature explaining the dynamics behind the downfall of the apartheid regime, and many would agree that no single factor can be responsible for the demise of the NP. Popular historical and social scientific arguments emphasise that by the late 1970s and into the 1980s, the apartheid state consistently conceded its power to prevent a revolutionary overthrow (Goldstone and Tilly 2001).

A popular perspective tells us that large-scale nonviolent direct action stripped legitimacy away from the project of apartheid (Zunes 1999). Economic boycotts, mass nonviolent, cooperative efforts, and the international anti-apartheid movement of the 1980s are believed to be causally associated with the apartheid collapse. These viewpoints are underpinned by rationalchoice oriented logic in which utility maximisation is assumed to drive protest behaviour. For instance, Olivier (1991) argued that labour market increases and resource surpluses enabled protest to explode in South Africa by the early 1980s. Similarly, Marx (1992) contends that material pressures stemming from the opposition's ability to establish links with workers had the most significant influence on the downfall of apartheid. Explanations of this sort are numerous throughout historical and social scientific inquiry on apartheid. A cardinal argumentative point produced thus far tells us that it was less costly to protest for South Africans in the 1980s than in previous decades. However, throughout these historical accounts, anamnesis is devoid of why and how the powerful apartheid state first started to get overthrown from within. Specifically, why did the 1980s end up

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experiencing a major anti-apartheid struggle? How was the NP forced to start restructuring the project of apartheid? What made the formation of a mass civil resistance-based movement possible?

This study draws a theoretical discourse argument to investigate these questions. The tradition we draw from is the Essex School of Ideology and Discourse Analysis (Laclau and Mouffe 2001; Glynos and Howarth 2007), which is a framework concerned with studying hegemony and identity. Although not heavily utilised by social scientists, our approach complements those that draw attention to symbolic meaning in the study of collective action (Lukes 1975; Polletta and Jasper 2001; Zepeda-Millan and Wallace 2013; Ebila and Tripp 2017). I argue that before mass cross-societal mobilisation emerged in the 1980s, a key set of processes took place in which the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) strategically brought together a dispirited population not as apartheid-constructed ethnic races but as one universal black identity that was constructed to have been blocked by white racism. When this force came up against the apartheid state, severe repression resulted in a dislocatory event that shifted the hegemonic formation underpinning apartheid. The government-led massacre at Soweto backfired and revealed internal antagonisms and contradictions of the incumbent regime. After these processes, mass collective action in the 1980s was driven by a new hegemonic political struggle under a dislocated polity full of destabilised political identities. Differently put, this study discovers that a large-scale nonviolent campaign in the 1980s did not arise simply due to new access of resources for the opposition, but rather, they were made possible due to the hegemonic dislocation of the 1976 Soweto massacre and the organisational campaign that was initiated by the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) proceeding up to that event.

The order of this paper is as follows: I first overview historical explanations of apartheid and its collapse. This is followed by investigating different oppositional challenges waged against the regime. Here I assess seven different challenges and state responses to those challenges. This is followed by a section that emphasises the challenge that turned out to be among the most significant – the 1976 Soweto protests. Attention is given to the BCM campaign that organised this protest and subjective meanings surrounding political agency in the context of the repression and mobilisation nexus, also known as repression backfire. The paper then highlights the profound impact of this massacre, the antecedent BCM

impact, and trajectories of liberation and revolution that ensued in the following decade. The paper concludes by presenting several implications for scholarship on the apartheid collapse and the study of repression and mobilisation.

2. Historical Explanations of the Apartheid Collapse

The dominant explanatory framework that has been voiced to account for the collapse of the Apartheid regime can be observed in scholarship that originates from rational choice oriented and positivist based reasoning. Here, scholars have attributed the formation and eventual success of the 1980s anti-apartheid movement to resource availability. As significant support for the antiapartheid movement arose and greater international scrutiny was being cast on the regime in the early 1980s, the costliness of engaging in protest decreased. Hence, it is believed that mass dissent eventually contributed to the collapse of the regime of the apartheid state. What this entails is that international and external support enabled an influx of resources to enter into the anti-apartheid struggle in the 1980s, and in turn, this led to greater opportunities for civilians to wage collective action. Early in the 1980s, Adelman (1982) contended that the 'means for blacks to redress their real grievances in peaceful ways are severely limited by political, economic, and security factors.' He also predicted that more riots and disruptions, including urban bombings, industrial sabotage, etc., would occur (Adelman 1982: 50). Schwartzman and Taylor (1999) investigate data through a time-series path model and find that 'constraints on the domestic labor market and international financial boycotts were the primary factors in the collapse of apartheid.'

Similarly, in his *Rethinking the Rise and Fall of Apartheid*, Guelke (2005) contends that the impact of the worldwide anti-apartheid movement was among the crucial factors that brought down the regime (along with shifts in global events and balances of power). Louw (2004) reasons that the 1980s anti-apartheid movement was a key factor that led to the apartheid collapse along with the NP abandoning its working-class constituency in 1978 (Louw 2004: 69). Similarly, Zunes (1999) argues that 'only when the youthful rebels were able to effectively build an alliance with the black working class was real change possible.' In the same vein, Zunes notes, 'In short, the rioting Soweto youths only began to seriously challenge the white authorities when they stopped rioting, built alliances with workers in the townships, and organised a nonviolent movement'

(Zunes 1999: 166). The shift to a largely nonviolent method of dissent helped to 'lure' white popular opinion away from continued white domination (Zunes 1999: 163). Approaches of this kind entail that individuals are rational actors that engage in cost-benefit analysis when choosing to dissent or not according to opportunity structures (McAdam et al. 1996).

External support was substantial for the anti-apartheid movement in the 1980s. Nigeria, Algeria, Egypt, Gabon, Cote d'Ivoire, and Senegal gave at least 1 million US dollars each to the ANC during the 1980s. Likewise, in the early 1980s, the ANC got funds from the USSR, which the Organization for African Unity facilitated. Then later in the 1980s, 'more resources came from Western Europe and North America' – even the UN provided funding which is why by 1986, the ANC claimed that more than half of its funds came from non-Soviet sources (Grisham 2014: 177). Interestingly enough, at this time, socialist and other left-wing forces were declining.

Moreover, the most widely referenced inquiry on the collapse of apartheid studies tends to embody a linear process of historical events. Events are treated as causal chains that empirically precede one another and connect to the outcome of interest. For example, Beinart and Dubow (1995) contend that extreme poverty in rural areas during apartheid increased birth rates, putting too much pressure on rural governance capacity, increasing prospects for large-scale political instability, and eventually leading to the system's collapse. Lowenberg and Kaempfer (1998) argue that international sanctions that were placed on South Africa in the late 1970s and early 1980s made it more costly for the regime to upkeep its status quo and that the nature of the economic system was contradictory (and hence the apartheid system was inevitably bound to collapse). In contrast, Welsh (2009) argues that splits in the NP elite base already occurred in the 1960s and that conflicts between different white interest groups played a significant role in the demise of the nationalist project underpinning apartheid. By the late 1980s, bargaining for regime transition became rational for both the opposition and the incumbent regime. Andresen (2021) describes how in 1979, there were 101 strikes, yet by the late 1980s, this number increased tenfold. Clark and Worger (2013) also emphasise that,

> During the 1980s, as South Africa disintegrated into a form of civil war as black opponents of apartheid fought, increasingly successfully, to make

> apartheid unworkable and South Africa ungovernable, most of the rest of the world joined in the near universal condemnation of the South African government and supported international steps to bring apartheid to an end, especially by enforcing boycotts (economic, political, sporting, and so forth) (Clark and Worger 2013: 5).

Similarly, Culverson (1996) argues that,

> the anti-apartheid movement emerged as a legitimate contender in the larger policy arena during the 1977-1984 period. Several factors account for this: more consistent international attention to the conflicts in Southern Africa; the development of movement allies in Congress and in the foreign policy bureaucracy; the gradual expansion of anti-apartheid activism at the state and local level (Culverson 1996: 132).

While the methodological premises behind such approaches to the historical and political inquiry are not problematic per se, we must consider that there is more than meets the eye in terms of the historical circumstances that led to the demise of the apartheid state. For instance, Culverson's analyses miss out on the fact that already in 1976, there was an immense amount of political support being cast for the victims of Soweto from not only whites in asymmetric areas abroad and whites in the neighbouring area of Johannesburg. Increases in resources and their role in mobilisation certainly played a role in the protests of the 1980s, I do not dispute this historical reality, yet the studies mentioned above fail to consider the complex array of political identities that were prevalent throughout the noted periods. As in many other rationalised historical explanations of social change and collective action, scholars tend to essentialise protesters' identities through their assumption that the identities of individuals and groups are pre-determined in the form of activists, dissidents, youths, rioters, or protesters.

This study aims to offer a much-needed contrasting account by assessing previously neglected factors in literature on apartheid, including the hegemonic formations and identities that were a part of the apartheid regime and its political challengers.

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3. Challenges to Apartheid

Social movement leaders and formal political parties engage in discursive articulation, and some even construct discourses of their own to challenge state hegemony. During the span of apartheid, there were a variety of different attempts at challenging state hegemony from forces such as the South African Communist Party (SACP), the African National Congress, the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC), the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM), among others. Trade unions were also active during the apartheid era – the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) played a pivotal organisational role in the 1980s. Political violence and conflict were widespread over the years of 1948-1994, and even in the ending era of apartheid, there was still significant conflict in South African society, including the 1992 massacre in Boipatong (45 fatalities) or the 1994 Shell House massacre (est. 20+ fatalities). Of multiple noteworthy challenges to apartheid status quos, only several had impactful outcomes. From our assessment of more than half a dozen political challenges and accompanying massacres, only one had a dislocatory effect on apartheid hegemony. This effect was not random.

Table 1. displays significant political massacres that arose due to collective challenges to either local, regional, or state level status quos. The motive for choosing the specific incidents listed is due to the observed commonalities in discrete acts of state repression that resulted in civilian casualties during dissent. There were a heterogeneous collection of challenges to governmental status quos throughout the Apartheid regime's existence, and importantly, as argued by Zuern (2011), the dominant scholarly post-apartheid narrative has tended to aggregate all of these challenges and credit them to organising carried out by the African National Congress (ANC) (Zuern 2011: 22). If we assess the outcome of increased domestic mobilisation and the post-massacre impacts that different challenges and movements had on the political status quo of apartheid, these cases reveal a lot about both the occurrence and non-occurrence of social change during apartheid.

Table 1. Severely Violent Protest-State Interactions

Massacres			
State Repression	Protest Tactic	Characteristics	Increased Mob
1960 Sharpeville (69 casualties)	Nonviolent March	March 21, 1960. 200+ dissidents - Organised by PAC to protest antimovement laws. Police opened fire	**Yes**
1976 Soweto (80 casualties)	Nonviolent March	June 16, 1976. 10,000+ dissidents. BCM and SASO protest against state changing of schooling language.	**Yes**
1984 Vaal Uprising (100+ casualties)	Violent Direct seize	Sept. 3, 1984. 5000+ Vaal townships south of Johannesburg. Thousands of burnt down homes.	**Yes**

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1985 Mamelodi Killings (13 casualties)	Nonviolent gathering	Nov. 21, 1985. 50,000+ 13 killed in a protest against high rents.	**Yes**
Massacres			
State Repression	Protest Tactic	Characteristics	Increased Mob
1986 Winterveld Killings (11 casualties)	Violent seize	March 26, 1986. 2,000+ Protest police brutality. Police opened fire on crowd. 50 burnt buses in township by unknowns	**Yes**
1990 Odi magistrate's court Killings (**11 casualties**)	Violent march/petition	March 7, 1990. Thousands of protesters from Garankuwa, Mabopane, Soshanguve met by police. Over 450 were injured.	**Yes**
1992 Ciskei massacre (28 casualties)	Nonviolent demonstration	Sept. 7. 20,000 protested in a prodemocracy demonstration. 300 were wounded in addition to those killed.	**Yes**

Beginning with the first of these challenges, in 1960, a wave of collective

mobilisation emerged as a response to the NP's anti-movement (anti-pass) laws. The PAC organised a nationwide protest throughout all major townships. The densest concentration of dissent was in the Transvaal province (North East). Thousands of civilians waged collective action against pass laws (restrictions on free movement) and marched to the Sharpeville police station. When hundreds of police began to respond to the crowd, live ammunition was used against protesters and led to dozens of deaths. The Sharpeville massacre ended up provoking a powerful set of repressive consequences as afterwards, the primary organisers of the protest were formally banned, and Nelson Mandela was imprisoned. Internationally, Sharpeville spurred the formation of the British Anti-Apartheid Movement. International attention was cast onto the apartheid regime, and Britain shortly after that condemned the NP only to see South Africa leave the Commonwealth one year later. Along with newly independent African states, the UN condemned this brutal act of repression. Additionally, many radical leftist groups worldwide (especially Black radical groups in the US) began to speak out and act against the apartheid regime.

Domestically, Sharpeville radicalised many opposition members, especially those in the ANC. As Fatton (1986) argues, after Sharpeville, African leaders were 'forced to become revolutionaries' (Fatton 1986: 23). Interestingly, Fatton also notes that the choice of nonviolent strategy of resistance in the Sharpeville protest was not for ethical reasons but was because the PAC was 'not yet ready to kill.' Sharpeville fostered a new era of political struggle and the creation of the Umkhonto we Sizwe (Spear of the Nation), which was a militant movement and functioned as an armed wing of the ANC. Although the PAC aligned itself with the ANC while both were exiled, their alliance did not mean much on the ground; they were still rivals until the final collapse of apartheid. Notably, substantial ANC funding came from the external source of the Soviet Union via the NP-banned SACP, and major periods of apartheid history coincided with what Shubin (2008) describes as a 'hot-cold war' that was taking place across different regions of the African continent. The early 1970s featured a revolution in Portugal and a simultaneous intensification of an independence conflict in Angola. Concurrently, guerrilla warfare based struggles were launched by revolutionaries against the oppressive Rhodesian state.

Meanwhile, the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) provided a new avenue for selfrealisation for the native population of South Africa through

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rejecting NP discourse. Black consciousness was articulated based on being an attitude of mind, a way of life.' Student intellectuals led the BCM, but it attracted a much wider following. Steve Biko, the leader of the BCM, helped configure the South African Students' Organisation (SASO) in 1969, which turned out to be a major establishment and hub of BCM ideology, helping to attract other students and their families throughout South Africa. Women were vital for the strategy of the BCM (Pohlandt-McCormick 2000; Magaziner 2010). The BCM struggle against apartheid was significant because it created an 'alternative hegemony' that could only be satisfied via the complete liberation of the black masses (Fatton 1986). It also drew from Fanon and his views on political morality and sought to abandon self-serving definitions of good and evil that were assumed to be defined by self-interest (Gerhart 1978: 275). A primary political idea put forward by the BCM had to do with creating broad solidarity among blacks through emotional support (Nolutshungu 1982: 188).

Biko sought to lessen differences in characteristics between the coloured and native populations of South Africa. Its goal was to deviate away from the fundamental antagonism between the racist white regime and the suppressed native black subject. This was done not to mobilise resources as the resource-mobilisation framework assume strategically, but rather, the BCM was a philosophical force that had a major aim of personal revitalisation for highly oppressed people. In a social order where exogenous forces (minority ruling groups) had subjugated the native population for hundreds of years, Biko believed that a strong build-up of black consciousness was the only way forward so that blacks could learn to assert themselves and 'stake their rightful claim' (Biko 2005: 21). The BCM sought blacks to be self-reliant, and it assumed that emancipation for black people across South Africa depended on the role that blacks themselves were 'prepared to play' (Gerhart 1978: 262).

Importantly, this did not mean the BCM was opposed to the goal of emancipation for other coloured groups as long as groups were conscious of disengaging with what Biko referred to as a myth of liberal integration. Sakhela Buhlungu points out that the BCM defined 'black' to include all oppressed racial groups, Indians, Africans and Colored alike (Buhlungu 2006: 106). This also pertains to the SASO's strategic usage of the term 'non-white' regarding its coloured members who may not have wanted to be referred to as black (Gerhart 1978: 277). While the BCM's purpose was to unify South Africa's oppressed,

including African, coloured and Indian groups (Desai 2015), the strategies it were specifically geared towards stepping outside the realm of apartheid discourse in order to negate one of the fundamental antagonisms of apartheid between the racist white regime and the suppressed black subject. Biko argued that

> The myth of integration as propounded under the banner of liberal ideology must be cracked and killed because it makes people believe that something is being done when in actual fact, the artificial integrated circles are a soporific on the blacks and provide a vague satisfaction for the guilty-stricken whites (Biko 2005: 22).

This is also likely why the BCM did not take a class-driven approach to organisation or social change and regarded workers, not as vanguards but ordinary oppressed people – like themselves (Nolutshungu 1982: 187). Theoretically, Biko was ahead of his time in acknowledging that economic relations were neither determinates of identity nor social change. As Laclau theorised, 'antagonism does not occur within the relations of production, but between the latter and the social agent's identity outside them' (Laclau 1990: 15). By formulating a platform that separated and made distinct the Anglo-Boer culture from that of native African culture, Biko directly dealt with a structure of power that was 'bestowing an inferior status to all cultural aspects of the indigenous people' (Biko 1978: 41). Unlike other political movements (and parties) that were operative during his era, Biko and the BCM believed that reformation of the current system was out of the question as this implied accepting and engaging in apartheid discourse. Nelson Mandela once wrote about Biko, 'history had called upon Steve Biko at a time when the political pulse of our people had been rendered faint by the banning, imprisonment, exile, murder and banishment' (Charteris-Black 2006: 99).

The BCM put forward a universalising characteristic in its discourse. David Howarth (1997) elucidates the theoretical underpinning of BCM in the following way,

> the affirmation of a Black identity transcended the imposed apartheid system of ethnic and racial difference, and its adumbration displayed a subtle imbrication of the universal and the particular. In so doing, Black Consciousness activists and intellectuals expanded the field of universals so as

> to include the categories of 'blackness' and 'a true humanity' denied by white racism (Howarth 1997: 72).

Prior to the emergence of the BCM, Blackness was stigmatised. Biko's actions turned into a category of pride and asserted a new identity of 'strength, beauty, and defiance' (Morgan 2020: 14). Further, the BCM deemphasised the state constructed narrative of separation and ethnic divisions and placed it onto spirituality. Only this way could Blacks achieve group pride and individual freedom by exploring what Biko referred to as natural surroundings. These ideas contributed to spiritual realisation and the establishment of seminary networks in the early 1970s. Johann de Wet notes that Steve Biko was an existentialist communicator,

> Biko may be regarded as a foremost existentialist communicator during apartheid South Africa, and that his thoughts on meaningful and authentic existence remain relevant for confronting the vexing challenges facing contemporary South African communities (De Wet 2013: 297).

The BCM theological networks differed from the state-sponsored versions of Christianity advocated by the NP. The SASO had at least three theological seminaries in different regions of South Africa. Former students would engage with communities and develop new spiritual and political action forms that had yet to be imagined (Denis 2010). The NP perceived this as a major cultural threat. In 1974, nine leaders from the BCM were put on trial and accused of terrorism by the regime. The courtroom became a place of performative subversion (Morgan 2018). As Magaziner explains, this was the longest state trial of its kind (17 months), and the fascinating aspect of this trial was that it was based around the historical figure of Jesus Christ (Magaziner 2010). State prosecutors were frustrated after long weeks of hearing the defendants' theological propositions that compared Christ's actions (against the Roman Empire) to their own, as rebels fighting against a dominant regime of unjustness (the NP's white racism in their case). Biko effectively redirected the charge of terrorism away from the accused and towards the government (Morgan 2018: 468).

4. A Historical Dislocation, the 1976 Soweto Massacre

An oppressive cultural policy was enacted in 1974 when the NP changed the medium language of school instruction from English to the Dutch dialect of Afrikaans. Education under apartheid was centrally controlled and designed around planned segregation to maintain the 'pureness' of the Afrikaner race (Christie and Collins 1982). As a response to this state mandate, plans for collective mobilisation emerged in the township of Soweto. Primarily organised by the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM), a network of groups such as the Black Parents Association, the Black Women's Federation (BWF), and the Federation of South African Women took on roles in organising against this state-dictated policy change (Venter 2005). The BCM facilitated the establishment of large-scale underground networks that contained links to labour and unions (Clark and Worger 2013: 78). Movements such as the South African Students' Movement (SASM), the National Youth Organization (NAYO), and the SASO also called for the creation of political support organisations (Diseko 1992). The NAYO was founded in 1973 to project the BCM leader's (Steve Biko) views and movement ideology into communities across South Africa (Maluleke 2008). The organisation was taking place when unemployment was rising due to the 1973 oil crisis and doubled in the year before the Soweto uprising (Marx 1992: 61).

These different forces inter-meshed and came together in June of 1976 just outside Johannesburg in Soweto's township. It is important to acknowledge that the role of the BCM in organising the Soweto protests is not straightforward as some scholars claim. Although many scholars such as Kuumba (2001) describe the events of 1976 Soweto as being inspired by the BCM (Kuumba 2001: 127), or that the SASM had a 'leading role in the demonstrations by Soweto high school students' (Nelson 1981: 258), there are also those who historically dispute these claims. Some historians believe that the BCM role in organising Soweto is disputable. Frueh (2003) contends that post-massacre mobilisation that arose across the country was not coordinated or organised even though the government narrative stressed that it was and that the ANC and PAC both tried to take credit for organising these processes (Frueh 2003: 78). Marx (1992) similarly contends that although the BCM suffered from a limited capacity for mass mobilisation, this enabled the ANC to claim credit for Soweto's aftermath (Marx 1992: 66-7). While Frueh (2003) and Marx (1992) are correct in the assertion that any single force did not organise the country-wide post-massacre mobilisation, this

occurred (as subsequent sections of this study will reveal) due to spontaneous processes triggered by repression backfire and the phenomenon of political ju-jitsu. Importantly, evidence points to the BCM being the organiser of the Soweto march and protest and is not only limited to the organisational role of the SASM who led the rejection of subjects being taught in Afrikaans. For example, George Wauchope was an exiled activist who returned to Soweto's hometown in 1972. From there, Wauchope worked for Biko's organisation called the Black People's Convention and was its chairman in Johannesburg. Here he organised widely in surrounding areas and for these reasons. After the massacre, his name made it to the secret police's most-wanted list, and he subsequently was arrested for hundreds of days at a time (Malan 2000). Malan (2000) describes Wauchope's role as significant in raising consciousness on behalf of the BCM before and after Soweto.

On 16 June, over 10,000 students, children, boys and girls gathered early in the morning to protest the changing of their language of instruction. The Soweto Students' Representative Council (SSRC) were at the front lines of the march, holding banners and slogans. Participants adopted an assortment of nonviolent direct action methods, and the presence of children, women and many students who had not been politically active prior took away the radical element of mass protest that was evident in the workers' movements or the armed branches of rival political movements such as the ANC and the PAC. Even with police and anti-protest forces in and near Soweto, prior to the rally, it had to have been difficult for the thousands of children and students who were drawing anti-Afrikaans language slogans to anticipate that bullets and police dogs would meet them. During the middle of the protest march, police intervened by setting dogs into the walking paths of unarmed marching children. Police then let off scores of gunfire. Rocks and stones were later thrown back from the unarmed crowd as they fatally shot dozens of children.

The fallout from Soweto was colossal. These events took the NP by surprise and fostered vast moral outrage from domestic and international observers. 'The front page of the news was shocking that day, it shocked the country and the world,' notes Sahm Venter (Venter 2005: 56). The incident went viral through domestic and international networks (Burns 1976). Dissentarose in all townships throughout South Africa, and as Jamie Frueh points out, 'Soweto forced people to notice and even question apartheid's political reality' (Frueh 2003: 87).

Widespread mobilisation exploded throughout all townships, and while violent in some cases and nonviolent in others, the protests were of a new form given they were diverse and not limited to a single group or political faction (Mxolisi Ndlovu 1998). A powerful account of the killings in Soweto is given in the autobiographical novel Kaffir Boy in which the author (who was present the day of the protest) recalls how police opened fire without warning. From all angles, the township children were attempting to escape a heavily armed police force but continuously dropped down like swatted flies (Mathabane 1986).

Although there are historians that discount the role of Soweto, for example, Spence and Welsh (2011) note that the uprising had been costly in terms of fatalities, but it did not threaten the state, our comparative assessment reveals that the events of June 1976 turned out to be the most shifting and transformative of any apartheid massacres. A particular image from the massacre served as an important symbol of the struggle against apartheid for domestic and international audiences. A civilian photographer (Sam Nzima) took dozens of photos, and one of them contained a blood-covered dead 13-year-old boy named Hector Pieterson being carried by a sibling with a devastated township looming in the background. As historian James Sanders notes, the photo of Pieterson first appeared on 16 June 1976 in a late edition of the press outlet World, but then on 17 June, the photo was featured on the front page in the *Washington Post*, the San Francisco Chronicle, the Daily Mail, the Times among others (Sanders 2011: 184). The students at Soweto embodied the BCM and served as the central signifying force of its ideological project. Every June since 1976 saw millions protest in remembrance of the Soweto uprisings and Hector Pieterson (Ndlovu 1998: 78). The NP, however, was dismayed at the native revitalisation that went into Soweto and responded to the protests with anti-communist rhetoric. For example, the minister of justice (Jimmy Kruger) stated, 'Why do they walk with upraised fists? Surely this is the sign of the Communist Party?' (Clark and Worger 2013: 83).

Of all the collective challenges to the status quo and massacres that took place during apartheid, none possessed the same ideological dexterity as the BCM organised Soweto protest. The 1984 Vaal uprisings were a spontaneous violent protest formed in reaction to rent increases. Dozens were killed, and there has since been noted to have been over 6 million USD in property damage as a result (Zuern 2011: 34). In 1985, the NP issued a state of emergency, yet

protests still ensued. Another case of severe repression took place in the 1985 Mamelodi killings when tens of thousands challenged the high rents of a local council. From 1984 to 88, over 35,000 SADF troops were deployed to townships, and 45,000 persons were detained (Norval 1996: 247). Furthermore, in the Winterveld massacre, a large crowd gathered to protest police brutality in City Rocks stadium in Bophuthatswana. Dissent was a response to arrests of youths carried out at a squatter settlement. Meanwhile, buses were burnt as unaffiliated dissidents joined into the interaction between protesters and police. Western newspapers briefly picked this story up as a highlight noted alongside the mass violence occurring in that township and other parts of the country.

The 1990 Odi killings involved a large crowd of anywhere between 50,000 to 100,000 who demanded to chief magistrate Mr NC Greyling to attempt to be re-incorporated into the homeland of South Africa proper (Daily Report 1990). Police opened fire, and many fire and army trucks were set simultaneously. The last of the seven massacres under attention is the 1992 Ciskei massacre which occurred in Bisho when the ANC was already in negotiation with the NP to end the project of apartheid. The ANC had demanded that de Klerk replace Gqozo. However, the President refused and claimed Ciskea was not under apartheid authority. Led by the ANC and the SACP (Ronnie Kasrils and Steve Tshwete), protesters attempted to break through a wall of security forces. The Ciskei Defence Force shot 28 and wounded over 400. The 1980s were politically unstable as violence between government and opposition frequently arose in townships. Large scale civil resistance also emerged with a unified mass opposition movement in the United Democratic Front (which later turned into the Mass Democratic Movement). Concurrently, the international anti-apartheid movement grew in strength.

5. Theorizing Soweto's Profound Impact

Every single case in Table 1. experienced increased mobilisation after the incident of repression in the day following state violence. However, not all acts of state repression on movements, protests, and bouts of dissent had the same historical impact on the apartheid status quo. Soweto is an archetypal case of the phenomenon or process known as political jiu-jitsu and repression backfire in the literature on nonviolent civil resistance (Hess and Martin 2006; Sutton et al. 2014;

Aytac et al. 2018). The event caused greater protest mobilisation after repression, went viral domestically and internationally, spurred domestic and international moral outrage, and brought about sanctions and shaming against the regime. Above all, Soweto dislocated the political status quo. It propelled new waves of recruitment to movements in exile at the time, such as the ANC and PAC. Police repression directed at civilians brought about significant diplomatic pressures against the state. The most significant aspect of Soweto was that it exemplified repression backfire and turned out to be a development that led to structural change and dislocation that opened up political contingency. The combination of ideational (BCM) and material forces (physical violence and communicational spreading of the event) contributed to the manifestation of this mass dislocation.

In contrast, in 1960, the Sharpeville massacre also spurred a backfire process, but the outcome was not as transformative as Sharpeville did not possess the same ideological underpinning as Soweto. Put differently, Sharpeville did contain an ideological underpinning but was rooted in opposition groups that engaged in formal political terrain against the NP. Soweto signified the message of the BCM, who invented a new political frontier – one that operated outside the realms of state discourse. This is why it is important to consider that some instances of backfire result in more transformative change than others. In accounting for these phenomena, discursive and identity-based approaches to political analysis are fruitful to adopt. For example, while scholars have found that any protest-state interaction can backfire and the likelihood of this happening increases in cases that feature severe repression (10 or more fatalities) being inflicted on a diverse unarmed/nonviolent protest in an urban area (Anisin 2018; 2019), and others have argued that for an act of repression to backfire it must be 1) perceived to be unjust by audiences, and 2) for there to be media capability to circulate information about the act (Hess and Martin 2006), there also exist specific ideational categories of this phenomenon that warrant investigation.

Symbolic meanings get associated with acts of repression and tend to centre around the repressor and the repressed identities. I draw on a theoretical tradition stemming from the Essex School of Ideology and Discourse Analysis to assess these dynamics. This theoretical tradition is based on analysis of discourse which is assumed to comprise linguistic and non-linguistic practices (Howarth 2000). Discourses are qualitative, historically contingent, and are relational. As articulated by the NP, the political project and government of apartheid were

supported by a discursive structure that was indeed highly repressive and contingent. Apartheid was not simply a black versus white discursive articulation. Rather, non-Volk white, coloured and Indian populations were negated and differentiated by ruling Afrikaners with their construction and subject position of a Volk myth. The Volk myth was forged into a social imaginary when the Bantu Self-Government Bill was established (Norval 1996: 169).

The BCM articulated the first substantial alternative to apartheid hegemony which brings us to the key theoretical assumption that no discourse and accompanying ideological configuration is ever fully closed off. Political actors and movements possess the agency to articulate new discursive elements and alternative hegemonic practices. As noted by Laclau and Mouffe (2001 [1985]), 'only the presence of a vast area of floating elements and the possibility of their articulation to opposite camps – which implies a constant redefinition of the latter – is what constitutes the terrain permitting us to define a practice as hegemonic' (Laclau and Moufe 2001: 136-7). Discourses are also intrinsically antagonistic. When white police suppressed unarmed black students in a public setting in June of 1976, internal contradictions of apartheid structure were revealed grandly to domestic and international audiences. The antagonisms between protesters and white police were not a new development for the political scene of South Africa but rather were the underpinnings of the regime's discursive totality. They had yet to be revealed in such form as Soweto was a hegemonic dislocation that exposed the limits of NP discursive structure and reasserted the contingency of social reality. A dislocation is precisely the failure of a structure, and this failure is what compels subjects to act in the political arena 'to assert anew' political subjectivity (Howarth 2000: 13).

6. Soweto and the Historical Trajectory of the Apartheid Collapse

When compared to six other cases of severe state repression, Soweto and the preceding BCM campaign spurred a rupture in the hegemonic order of apartheid. Through images of white police shooting black youth and school children, the event exemplified an alternative hegemony that the BCM articulated. Indeed, these dynamics are not traditional in the sense of mainstream research on state repression and social movement mobilisation. They specifically pertain to a recent point made by Morgan (2020), who argues that successful movement

strategies cannot always be identified by examining movement outcomes in repressive contexts. To understand success, we must move outside the basis of 'externally-defined criteria' that are universal (Morgan 2020). At Soweto, antecedent conditions (including BCM organisation and political action) resulted in antagonisms between the ruling party and its suppressed population getting exemplified on a grand stage. The Black People's Convention President declared that Soweto ushered 'a new era of political consciousness' in South Africa (Kalley et al. 1999: 415). Although some reasonably negative viewpoints on the BCM (such as Marx 1992) claim that the BCM's emphasis on values ended up protecting the established order due to an inability to wage a frontal assault on the state through force, such perspectives fail to consider the deeper ideational forces that were active in the context under attention.

In the struggle against the NP and its project of apartheid, opposition movements that mobilised resources and were best organised were also engaged in political conflict within the realms of apartheid discourse. The BCM, on the other hand, was not as tightly organised as, say, the ANC, but it did have an ideological message that was substantially different from other oppositional movements of its time. Biko differentiated the BCM from other opposition groups and apartheid challengers by gearing the movement away from ideas of racial integration and into a more transformative political realm,

> Nowhere is the arrogance of the liberal ideology demonstrated so well as in their insistence that the problems of the country can only be solved by a bilateral approach involving both black and white. This has, by and large, come to be taken in all seriousness as the modus operandi in South Africa by all those who claim they would like a change in the status quo (Biko 2005:20).

These ideas were integrated into the message of the BCM in order to abandon the status quo of a one-way course of action featuring 'whites doing all the talking and the blacks the listening' (Biko 2005: 20). To re-centre attention on the indigenous population, the BCM engaged in a discursive endeavour. For example, Tshepo Moloi observed school settings in areas where BCM ideology had been advocated and found that those students influenced by the BCM ideology experienced a significant 'behavioural change' that resulted in newfound self-confidence (Moloi 2011). These are significant points if we consider that recent research has revealed

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that protests can indeed induce changes in racial identity, and such an effect does not simply dissipate after a given protest cycle (Zepeda-Millan and Wallace 2013). The BCM also built-up resilience in an oppressed population through leadership seminars and formation schools in which participants were taught to be critical of their social environments and identify interests that were embedded in power structures (Morgan and Baert 2017).

An interesting recent dialogue between Mahmood Mamdani and Michael Neocosmos sheds light on political agency and historical change in South Africa. Both engage with the question of the extent to which the BCM changed the course of the liberation movement. Neocosmos (2016) adopts insights from Badiou to theorise emancipatory transformation through subjective processes with the ultimate aim of human equality. His framework is based on the premise that 'experiences of emancipatory politics forma dialectic combination of expressive and excessive thought' (Neocosmos 2016: 27). The BCM thus overturned social classification, contested existing political representation forms, and reconfigured the social division of labour between races (Neocosmos 2016: 161). This overturning of social positions was necessary for constructing new human relationships, argues Neocosmos. A truly emancipatory political movement must seek to achieve universal aims rather than base itself on any 'particularistic' temporal concern; otherwise, it will find itself difficult to sustain. Neocosmos argues that the BCM represented a transformational project. In contrast, Mamdani argues that Biko did not repudiate race but imagined it broadly and creatively – as a historical and political force rather than a permanent condition. Turning back to universalism, argues Mamdani would forfeit plurality and 'the ground gained over the past few decades' of the liberation movement.

While my aim is not to engage with the implications that liberation struggles have on contemporary politics in the context under attention, Neocosmos brings up a very salient point in that the setting up of the UDF in 1984 was based on the idea of 'non-racialism' that was invented by the BCM – something that could 'only be achieved in political action as an affirmative emancipatory vision' (Neocosmos 2016: 161).

Along with the profoundly transformative subjective impact of the BCM, this study has demonstrated that the availability of greater resources for the struggle that ensued in the 1980s was not random as internationally, Soweto triggered the US anti-apartheid movement. In Oakland, California, Leo Robinson of the

Local 10 of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) began a boycott of the apartheid regime in July 1976 following what he perceived to be brutal state repression Soweto. For the next decade and a half, Robinson was active in national trade union caucuses mobilising against the regime to offer an asymmetric effort of political support. By 1979, the neighbouring city of Berkeley, California, became the 'first US city to opt for divestment, through a public ballot initiative spearheaded by Mayor Gus Newport' (Minter and Hill 2008: 779). Over 90 different US companies divested away from South Africa (Clark and Worger 2013: 102). As such, the 1980s saw an explosion of oppositional activity, including the emergence of the United Democratic Front (UDF), Mass Democratic Movement (MDM), numerous student associations (AZASO and AZAYO), and increased violence in townships (as highlighted in cases shown in Table 1).

Additionally, during the early 1980s, the most radical Leftists were expelled from the ANC. Friedman (2011) describes this eviction of 'a small group of socialists' who sought to steer the African National Congress (ANC) in a new strategic direction. They then formed themselves into the 'Marxist Workers Tendency of the African National Congress.' The members of the group were Martin Legassick. Paula Ensor, David Hemson and Rob Petersen, among others. Friedman (2011) notes that their chief aim was to persuade the ANC and its union ally SACTU to become vehicles for the socialist revolution. The Left, however, was on the decline and remained in decline as time went on. Hurt (2016) presents data on the annual value added by industry (as a percentage of South African GDP by different industries) and finds that the manufacturing industry decreased nearly twofold (from 19.4% in 1995 to 10.3% in 2013) – this is by far the largest decrease of any industry in South Africa, and importantly, is symbolic of the decline of the Left.

When it comes to the historical impact of the BCM, although less prominent in the 1980s than in prior decades, the BCM still played a role – especially in its participation in an allinclusive black political conference that was held in 1989 alongside the Mass Democratic Movement – a conference that was key in setting out pre-conditions and an outline for a postapartheid constitution (Kalley et al. 1999: 507). Ultimately, though the state responded with even greater repression by arresting hundreds of BCM members after the massacre and then murdering Biko, these repressive actions could not rid the nation of the effect already instilled by the BCM's discursive campaign. Nelson Mandela later said of Biko:

'They had to kill him to prolong the life of Apartheid.'

7. Conclusion

In light of popular historical accounts which have emphasised that the emergence of a mass nonviolent movement in the 1980s was a principal factor in the downfall of apartheid, this study has pointed to a different set of dynamics that have been under-theorised concerning the apartheid collapse. In the late 1960s and leading into the 1970s, the BCM helped native and nonwhite segments to step outside of the oppressive realm of NP-dictated apartheid politics. The movement re-empowered a vastly suppressed population that for decades had been told that they were second and third-rate citizens in comparison to a ruling minority. It also strategically disconnected itself from engagement in formal political outlets and the pretence of NP constructed myths that underpinned apartheid. The Soweto massacre and its antecedent organisational campaign launched by the BCM ended up being more than a simple challenge of the apartheid status quo. When white police severely repressed unarmed students at Soweto, the event exemplified central antagonisms underpinning apartheid discourse. This historically pivotal protest massacre dislocated the structure of apartheid discourse and paved the way for a hegemonic struggle. The historical importance of Soweto is not only in that it was a critical juncture and catalyst for the anti-apartheid movement that followed but also because of the meaning that was attached to it by publics. The event signified a clash between the subjugated native population on the one hand and the contradictions and myths of NP hegemony on the other. During the 1980s, a decrease in costliness in terms of dissent only arose as a by-product of a change in cognisance and collective understanding of newly found political opportunities that emerged due to Soweto and its antecedent organisational BCM-led campaign.

On the one hand, the implications of this paper pertain to the role that the BCM and Soweto had in the larger trajectory of the apartheid collapse. The analysis presents us with a different set of considerations compared to previous noteworthy claims. For instance, when compared to A. Marx's (1992) Gramscian framework in which it is argued that the BCM's impact was limited because 'ideas alone cannot account for the massive unrest and anger expressed by many more than had been formally affiliated with the movement' (Marx 1992:

71), several key points are worth considering. The dislocating of the apartheid political status quo that occurred as a result of Soweto was not only made possible due to the physical violence that transpired in the township and went viral through media networks. Audiences attach meaning to such events and the identities of the repressed. This is why some cases of repression backfire result in greater transformative change than others. On the other hand, the implications of this analysis also pertain to the dualistic nature of socio-historical change – both ideational and material factors appear to be necessary to consider if we are to understand social and protest movements in repressive contexts.

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