

SASO Leaders  
October 23, 1972  
86 Beatrice Street, Durban  
Interviewer: Gail Gerhart

Not verbatim

*This informal discussion took place in the SASO office when Gerhart visited to make an appointment for a formal interview with Steve Biko, which took place the following day. Gerhart was preparing her doctoral dissertation, which became her book, 'Black Power in South Africa' (1978).*

Strini Moodley: One can't say that any of our ideas *began* from external sources—these just helped us at a point where our ideas were forming. After the banning of the black organizations of the sixties, there was a period when white liberals held the field and were the only spokesmen for blacks—Helen Suzman, etc. Eventually, we had to react to this and reject it; we said "no" to this before we actually began trying to formulate our position in a positive way. At this stage many different influences came from different directions—Aime Cesaire, Fanon, Senghor, Stokely Carmichael. Different ones of us were affected by different ones of these to differing degrees. It wasn't so much their specific analyses as the whole mood which they set. We can see that there are bound to be differences between their situations and ours.

Jerry Modisane: We don't find students asking us what they should read; they just want to know what they should *do*.

Black consciousness is different from African nationalism because its perspective takes in the whole black world, not just South Africa

It is nonsense to say that black consciousness is too abstract. If I meet a man of any educational level, I can talk to him about the grievances he has, and everyone can relate to that; there's nothing abstract about it. It's an existential thing; everyone has experienced it, even if they don't express it in the same terms as we do. Everyone is acquainted with the basic attitudes of whites.

Moodley: Basically, it's making people accept the idea of self-reliance, non-dependence on whites. This doesn't just mean blacks who have experienced trying to work in multiracial organizations—every black knows what it is to meet the attitude that whites know everything and must make all decisions.

Modisane: It isn't true that fatalism is part of the traditional African attitude. It may be there as a result of oppression, but it isn't permanently in our culture.

This is the rationale for our rejection of Gatsha Buthelezi and all separate development institutions: first, on principle, we take the view that all SA belongs to blacks, who owned it before the whites came and conquered us in war. They have no right to parcel it out, cut it up, etc.

Secondly, every attempt to "use" these institutions is going to be a "cul-de-sac". If this system proceeds, SA is going to be balkanized, just as West Africa was by the colonial powers who arbitrarily carved it up into little unviable states. The same idea of balkanize-and-rule applies in the SA government's philosophy. Anything one does to bolster these divisions is inimical to our cause, and every attempt to use them in fact adds to their legitimacy. No one can operate a government-designed machine without contributing to divisiveness along tribal lines. Even though Buthelezi says he is against tribalism, everything he does contributes to the building of a separate Zulu identity, just by the fact that he is working as a "Zulu" leader. These things will harden over time, even if Buthelezi doesn't want them to.

Ben Langa: Our view is that the government never says "here, I will give you a gun—now shoot me." It definitely counts on being able to control this machinery which it has established, and it *can* control it. The process towards "independence" isn't irreversible; the government can stop at any point if it sees its interests being really threatened.

In any case we don't need to cooperate with the homeland governments in order to work with homeland people. Umlazi location of Durban is nominally part of the Zulustan, but we can operate there without having anything to do with it.

Modisane: Buthelezi seems like an important spokesman for blacks partly because the sixties were so quiet, and people were so intimidated until he appeared.

Jeff Baqwa: (ex-Fort Hare, finished BA but was doing Honours at time of the demonstrations of which he was a leader. He and Ben Langa left at that time. Langa was in his second year toward a BA. The Fort Hare authorities have tried to kill the issue by playing it down and inviting all the students back, but some have not returned.)

Buthelezi contradicts himself. He wants black self-reliance, yet he asks for outside investment. This will only put him under the thumb of the BIC (Bantu Investment Corporation). Buthelezi's policies will only help black capitalists in Zululand—which we don't want because it's un-African and against our long-run interests. These capitalists will still be beholden to the BIC.

Buthelezi wants more education for blacks, but we know that this is one thing the government really opposes and is afraid of, so they will definitely not give Buthelezi what he wants.

Modisane: We don't believe the government is omniscient or all-powerful or we ourselves wouldn't be here. Not everything which exists works in their interests.

When we are critical of Buthelezi, we aren't doing that for the consumption of outsiders. We are addressing ourselves to black people and trying to teach them something.

*How long will SASO last?* This isn't a big concern. We look at the situation, analyze it and decide what needs to be done. If something requires a year, 15 years, 1000 years, we budget that length of time, operating on the basis that we'll be around. If they ban us we don't care—we'll cross that bridge when we come to it.

*But what are you doing to insure that there will be future leadership to carry on?* We are not able to discuss or reveal what we are doing on that score, but we definitely recognize that need. This was a defect in older movements, and it's a lesson we have taken to heart.

Another lesson we have learned from the past is that there must be no white members in our organizations. All past movements had them—even the PAC had one.

Sobukwe is regarded as one of the great leaders of the past. I can't judge PAC as an organization, except to say that if I had been there in 1960 I would probably have done the same things that they did.

Langa: Getting across the acceptance of Indians as blacks is one of our goals, and to preach the idea of black unity. It's a long process regarding Indians. Acceptance of them depends a lot on the background of a person, and on whether Africans know Indians as being poor like themselves. This may depend on where they grew up. It's much easier to get young people to accept this than older ones, especially here in

Durban where older people remember [Indian-African clashes of] 1949. 1949 means little to teenagers, though.

Some students who returned to Fort Hare have already been kicked out again, because they beat up a student they suspected of being an informer.