

# Remembering the Quotable Steve Bantu Biko: Introspection and Theoretical Epistemological Analysis of Apartheid Murder

by

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## Abstract

The apartheid governance which was practised in South Africa was not a human error, as we have been made to believe by Western academics. It was a deliberate machination of the desperate settlers in terms of human mental, spiritual, physical and cultural decapitation of South African majority Black population to completely obliterate their traditional, cultural and customary norms. During the struggle for Black emancipation, many prominent South Africans made contributions towards peaceful settlement of the impasse perpetrated by the apartheid government. The significant contribution made by Steve Bantu Biko still lies unveiled. His untimely death – which I consider as deliberate murder – has never been theoretically and epistemologically explained to reveal why he was brutally murdered in his prison cell. This paper is the first brave attempt to reveal the theoretical epistemology behind his untimely murder to alert other fellow Blacks worldwide who want to emancipate their compatriots of the need to know and be on their guard to avert sick brutal killings should their ideological postulations, like Biko's Black Consciousness, pose any visible threats to the survival of the capitalist hegemonic society.

**Key words:** apartheid governance, human error, deliberate machination, mental and spiritual decapitation, afflicted Black South African.

## **Introduction**

Even though Steve Bantu Biko came into prominence in the South African political struggle scene in the 1970s, apart from the massive contribution by the honourable first black President of South Africa, Dr. Rholihlahla Nelson Mandela who was imprisoned for a very long time, Biko was the most feared by the apartheid government in terms of his creative political ideological model, especially his political theory of Black Consciousness. As identified and glorified by Archbishop Desmond Tutu in these words “Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) was surely of God. I describe apartheid as almost the ultimate blasphemy.” This observation is supported by many Black South African religious communities.

### **The Skeleton That Frightened and Haunted the Apartheid Leaders**

The political ideology, call it political philosophy, in all its fullness sought to awaken in Black South Africans in particular and Blacks worldwide, a sense of their innate infinite value and worth independent of biological relevance such as ethnicity, skin colour or race. Black Consciousness, according to Steve Bantu Biko is a philosophy which “....sought to help to exorcize the horrible demons of self-hatred and self-contempt that made all black South Africans suck up to whites while treating their fellow blacks as scum they thought themselves to be” (Biko, 1978: ix).

What the apartheid leaders feared about the BCM was the ideological content knowledge and teachings that helped to aroused in all black South Africans a shared knowledge and understanding of their responsibilities to free themselves from apartheid bondage.

Some of Biko’s utterances which encapsulated undeniable fear in the hearts of the apartheid leaders include what I have selected from his book “I write what I like” which I believe are important to augment my presentation. In his article titled “We Blacks” published under the pseudonym Frank Talk, he closed the article with this statement:

*“To take part in the African revolution, it is not enough to write a revolutionary song, you must fashion the revolution with the people. And if you fashion it with the people, the songs will come by themselves and of themselves”. Biko finished this article with this excerpt: “In order to achieve real action you must yourself be a living part of Africa and of her thought; you must be an element of that popular energy which is entirely called forth for the freeing, the progress and the happiness of Africa. There is no place outside that fight for the artist or for the intellectual who is not himself concerned with, and completely at one with the people in the great battle of Africa and of suffering humanity” (Biko, 1978:35).*

Having identified with the necessity to be part of the struggle in order to make a contribution towards bringing it to its need for the achievement of Black South African emancipation from the apartheid clutches Biko addressed this in his article titled “Some African Cultural Concepts”, Biko wrote by quoting Dr. Kaunda that:

*“The Westerner has an aggressive mentality. When he sees a problem he will not rest until he has formulated some solution to it. He cannot live with contradictory ideas in his mind; he must settle for one or the other or else evolve a third idea in his mind which harmonises or reconciles the other two. And he is vigorously scientific in rejecting solutions for which there is no basis in logic. He draws a sharp line between the natural and the supernatural, the rational and non-rational, and more often than not, he dismisses the supernatural and non-rational as superstitions...”*

*Africans being a pre-scientific people do not recognise any conceptual cleavage between the natural and supernatural. They experience a situation rather than face a problem. By this I mean they allow both the rational and non-rational elements to make an impact upon them, and any action they may take could be described more as a response of the total personality to the situation than the result of some mental exercise”.*

Biko finished this quote with a concluding paragraph, stating:

*“This I find a most apt analysis of the essential difference in the approach to life of these two groups (that is the Westerner and the African). We as a community are prepared to accept that nature will have its enigmas which are beyond our powers to solve. Many people have interpreted this attitude as lack of initiative and drive yet in spite of my belief in the strong need for scientific experimentation I cannot help feeling that more time also should be spent in teaching man and man to live together and that perhaps the African personality with its attitude of laying less stress on power and more stress on man as well on the way to solving our confrontation problems” (Biko, 1978: 48).*

What scared the apartheid government was the infinite explanation that Steve Bantu Biko attached to the BCM. Hence, before touching on this definition, he provided some epistemological explanations in his introduction under the heading of his article “The Definition of Black Consciousness”, stating:

*“Being black is not a matter of pigmentation – being black is a reflection of a mental attitude. Merely by describing yourself as black you have started on a road towards emancipation, you have committed yourself to fight against all forces that seek to use your blackness as a stamp that marks you out as a subservient being” (Biko, 1978: 52).*

After providing this introduction, Biko succinctly outlined what he meant by Black Consciousness, thus:

*“Black Consciousness is in essence the realisation by the black man of the need to rally together with his brothers around the cause of their operation – the blackness of their skin – and to operate as a group in order to rid themselves of the shackles that bind them to perpetual servitude. It seeks to demonstrate the lie that black is an aberration from the ‘normal’ which is white. It is a manifestation of a new realisation that by seeking to run away from themselves and to emulate the white man, blacks are insulting the intelligence of whoever created them black. Black Consciousness therefore, takes cognisance of the deliberateness of God’s plan in creating black people black. It seeks to infuse the black community with a new-found pride in themselves, their efforts, their value systems, their culture, their religion and their outlook to life”, (Biko, 1978: 53).*

What alerted the apartheid government was not in the definition of Black Consciousness political philosophy but the utterances which Biko attached to the definition in terms of the interrelationship between the consciousness of the self and the emancipatory programmes he proposed. Thus, he succinctly indicated that Blacks no longer sought to reform the apartheid system because by so doing, it would imply acceptance of the major points around which the system revolved. For this reason, Biko affirmed that Blacks should all go out completely and transform the apartheid system and to make of it what they wished. And such major undertaking could only be realised in an atmosphere where people are conceived with the truth inherent in their stand. To Biko, liberation was of paramount importance in the philosophical niceties of Black Consciousness, and therefore he concluded that

*“...for we cannot be conscious of ourselves and yet remain in bondage. We want to attain the envisioned self, which is a free self,” (Biko, 1978: 53).*

He further indicated that the Black Consciousness philosophy recognised the existence of a major force in the South Africa environment, which was White racism. He indicated that:

*“...a solid black unity to counterbalance the scale”* was the only solution and indicated further that *“...What Black Consciousness seeks to do is to produce at the output end of the process real black people who do not regard themselves as appendages to white society”* (Biko, 1978: 55).

Before leaving the definition of Black Consciousness political philosophy, Biko also warned that what Black South Africans should be the reality of their situation, stating that:

*“...We are all oppressed to varying degrees is a deliberate design to stratify us not only socially but also in terms of aspirations. Therefore it is to be expected that in terms of the enemy’s plan there must be this suspicion and that if we are committed to the problem of emancipation to the same degree it is part of our duty to bring to the attention of the black people the deliberateness of the enemy’s subjugation scheme. That we should go on with our programme, attracting to it only committed people and not just those eager to see an equitable distribution of groups amongst our ranks. This is a game common amongst liberals. The one criterion that must govern all our action is commitment”*, (Biko, 1978: 57).

As an analogy, Black Consciousness inevitably expressed group pride and the determination by Blacks to rise and attain the envisaged self. And at the heart of this kind of thinking was the realisation by Blacks that:

*“...the most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed. Once the latter has been so effectively manipulated and controlled by the oppressor as to make the oppressed believe that he is a liability to the white man, then there will be nothing the oppressed can do that will really scare the powerful masters”*, (Biko, 1978: 74).

Accordingly, Biko emphasised that thinking along the lines of Black Consciousness makes Black people see the full humanity of self, and thus, not as an extension of a broom or additional leverage to some machine, and consequently:

*“...Once this happens, we shall know that the real man in the black person is beginning to shine through”*, (Biko, 1978: 74).

Quoting Fanon to make his point clear Biko also indicated that:

*“Colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the Native’s brain of all form and content by a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people and distorts, disfigures and destroys it”*, (Biko, 1978: 76).

Biko buttressed Fanon’s observation, Biko suggest that:

*“It is through the evolution of our genuine culture that our identity can be fully rediscovered”*, (Biko, 1978: 77).

## **Frightening Apartheid**

In his article titled “Let’s Talk about Bantustans” Biko revealed to world that the White press knew that they had an advantage in how to misdirect the attention of Black people. Second, while the White press knew too well the limitations of the Bantustan theory, it was a far cry from what Blacks wanted, which went on to build the image of Matanzima and Buthelezi in order to harness them to a path they had already chosen and to make the non-analytic masses believe that a great victory was just about to be achieved. Therefore, it became apparently clear that whatever one did in the context of the Bantustans, it was likely to be exploited for self-aggrandisement, by the White world.

Furthermore, when one agreed with the apartheid government, they were an extremely exemplary native who saw value in being led by Whites. And for Biko, he went on to analyse and intoned that the South African information bureaux throughout the world carried long coverage of activities and pronouncements by Bantustan leaders to highlight the degree of open-mindedness and fair play to be found in South Africa. As a result, Biko responded with a big “No!” and indicated that Black people must learn to refuse to be pawns in a White man’s game. To him such politics called upon all Blacks to provide their own initiative and to act at their own pace, and thus not the pace created for them by the racist apartheid system. Biko was of the view that no Bantustan leader could tell blacks that they were acting at their own initiative when they enter the realms of Bantustan politics, and warned that Blacks could not have had their struggle ethicized through the creation of Zulu, Xhosa and Tswana politicians by the apartheid system. To Biko the Bantustans were nothing else but sophisticated concentration camps where Black people were allowed to suffer “peacefully”. And he subsequently concluded some changes had to be made in the Bantustan quandary, arguing that:

*“...we black people should all the time keep in mind that South Africa is our country and that all of it belongs to us. The arrogance that makes white people travel all the way from Holland to come and balkanise our country and shift us around has to be destroyed. Our kindness has been misused and our hospitality turned against us. Whereas whites were mere guests to us on their arrival in this country they have now pushed us out to a 13% corner of the land and are acting as bad hosts in the rest of the country. This we must put right. Down with Bantustan!!!”, (Biko, 1978: 94).*

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, if Biko was allowed to live and espouse his Black Consciousness political ideology, I argue that there was going to be a mass ideological resuscitation of the consciousness of Black people of South Africa, which could have led to a violent revolution against the apartheid government. Thus, the result of such a massive mobilization of a revolutionary cadre of the South African youth to remove the apartheid government by any means possible wherein the White minority were not ready and prepared to succumb would have led to a replica of Hitler's genocide. Therefore, it was incumbent upon the apartheid government to see to the immediate ending of this "ideological notoriety of Biko's BCM which enormously threatened the very existence of apartheid hegemony. Thus, in fear, the apartheid government planned and implemented the immediate execution of Steve Bantu Biko.

## **Reference**

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