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'Putting the History books straight': Reflections on rewriting Biko

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Introduction

This paper is in no way either a biography of the late Bantu Stephen Biko nor a full exposition of his political thought. I leave that task to others much more accomplished than I, including Nkosinathi Biko whose words quoted in the title inspired this paper. I intend merely to raise questions about the way in which Biko's work and his untimely death are represented and may be represented in the future, particularly in school textbooks. The paper consists of 3 parts. The first is a brief personal reminiscence concerning the impact of Biko's death on my own understanding of South African politics, the second is a commentary on the way Biko has been treated in the Truth and Reconciliation Committee (TRC's) published Report and in two of the better textbooks published since 1994, and the last contains some tentative suggestions on how Biko might be discussed and presented in textbooks to come.

1.

In 1977 when Bantu Stephen Biko was murdered I barely knew who he was. In that year I was a History Honours student and, instead of writing my research report, I went to the inquest because, I suppose, I knew that, as he had put it, 'the winds of liberation (were) sweeping down the face of Africa' and had 'reached our very borders' (Biko 1978:139) - we had talked about it and made bets on it in class, after all. Naive and indulged white liberal as I was, I was eager for and curious about that change. Although mostly I was wary and sceptical, sometimes I believed that it would come suddenly in the wake of the suffering and 'righteousness' of the year before.[1]

I remember the Biko family dressed in black and Professor Proctor's meticulous, impassive delineations of the pathological evidence. In the face of palpable grief and Proctor's tireless recitation of the scientific details of the injuries inflicted on Biko's body I was convinced that the police did not stand a chance. But my father, a journalist who had started his South African career under Verwoerd's regime, said that nothing would be proved against them and he was right. That such a monstrous iniquity could be glossed over by the Law made me see South Africa in a very different light. Before, I had somehow believed that there were degrees of enlightenment and justice that were beyond the reach of the National Party - that there were transcendent aspects of the judicial system that would judge apartheid wrong and find its perpetrators guilty.

We waited more than twenty years for something of the truth to come out and for Biko's murderers to be denied amnesty. It would be hard not to rejoice. On hearing of the results of the amnesty hearing, Nkosinathi Biko, son of Stephen Biko, is reported to have said: 'This is a

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significant step to put the history books straight'(*The Star* 17 Feb 1999). Biko, for his perspicacity, compassion, the power of his writing, his ability to outwit the numbskulls who questioned him about his use of the descriptor 'black' or his intellectual commitment to democracy, and for his singular courage in facing down his persecutors, should have a foremost place in the new history books.[2] Biko himself reiterated the necessity for a 'positive history', which would give black children a sense of the power once wielded by their ancestors. He enumerated Shaka, Moshoeshoe and Hintsa, but pointed out that, thanks to Nationalist propaganda, they had already done their share to convince students of Christian National and Bantu Education that blacks were naturally bloodthirsty, or destined to be defeated. The authors of syllabuses and textbooks in the days of apartheid, as Biko suggested, could wax poetic about Shaka's unorthodox upbringing and savage disposition (Boyce 1973:139-143), or, alternatively set out the 'scientific' reasons for the rabid expansion of the Zulu Kingdom (van Jaarsveld 1974: 143-154) without offending educational authorities in the least.[3] Shaka, as Carolyn Hamilton has shown in her recent brilliant study, was particularly susceptible to being summoned by a variety of political actors, often much more interested in refining mechanisms of control and governance of subject peoples, than they were in encouraging children to see in Shaka a spirit of innovation and autonomy (Hamilton 1998).

'Positive history', I want to argue, is not achieved only by extending the catalogue of heroes to people hitherto considered too unworthy or too obscure. Nationalist ideologues of the old regime, after all, were only too pleased to resurrect African leaders of the past in order to give the 'homelands' a false antiquity or to inspire sentiments of ethnic pride.'Positive' history should give its students, not only a capacity for analytical thought, but also an opportunity to reflect on themselves and, I will argue, to work through their own pain and turmoil.

We know what Nkosinathi Biko meant in his reaction to the long awaited verdict - or I make so bold as to say I think I know what he meant - it was his way of saying that the truth about his father's death, which had been so shamelessly suppressed, would have to be acknowledged even by those who would have liked to carry on believing that it was an accident or self-inflicted. But, the History books are not automatically set 'right' by the findings of the TRC's Amnesty Committee. Even if textbooks (let us assume that he meant primarily textbooks as media of instruction for the next generation) are now able to put faces to his murderers with impunity and to describe the manner of his death less tentatively, it is still possible to do the memory of Bantu Stephen Biko an injustice and to impair the 'positive history' which we are in the process of reconstructing.

The elder Biko insisted on an analytical perspective, which included looking into ourselves and being brutal about our own motives, as well as understanding the specific historical context in which we are operating, eschewing both defeatism and romanticism. These are hard lessons to take, and the insights which he brought to bear on South African society in the 1970s are searing and radical, and of course they jar with the most simplistic forms of the rainbow ideology we are hoping our school pupils will take home with them on the eve of the millennium.

In the file pictures used by the media we always see a delicate, slightly built Biko. We do not quite know if we see his vulnerability retrospectively - because we know about the terrible end that awaited him - but what we see now is a man defenceless, but for his wit and his stoical patience. I want to argue though, that Biko would not want us to see him as the hapless victim of the policemen who killed him. He meant his death to impart a different message.

2.

The sections of the TRC Report that deal with Biko are circumscribed by the fact that they were written up while the amnesty hearings were still pending so that anything that might have been considered *sub judice* has been cut out. It is strange to see his death dealt with so summarily - detained on August 18 1977, died 12 September 1977 - in the course of a narrative which appears on first reading to be a detailed chronicle of long term revolt and brutal state retaliation.

At one level the narrative does capture the enormity and the horror of the situation in the Eastern Cape over the thirty years of which it tells. It pans over a wide chronological terrain with the omniscient camera eye that we had no access to at the time. But of course it does not really pick out every blade of grass, every stark feature of the darkening landscape. It is representative as its authors make plain: 'It was not possible to include every case brought to the Commission - rather the sources that illustrate particular events, trends and phenomena have been used as windows on the experiences of many people' (TRC Report 1999:vol 3,1). What we see then is partial, pre-selected and - more than that - organised according to particular academic understandings of the significant moments, the most pithy or chilling descriptions of detention and torture and so on.

The TRC Report relies on various scholarly references (the works of Beinart, Lodge and Southhall predominantly) to provide it with a framework in which its statistics of death and suffering will appear less random than they would if they were merely recorded in chronological order. The most useful explanatory concept is that of the 'peasant revolt' (the Pondoland Revolt of 1960-1) precipitated by the Bantu Authorities Act passed a decade before, during which the chiefs were perceived by 'the people' to have collaborated with the National Party government. 'Our chiefs were singing the same song with the Boers which created the division between Pondo people and the chiefs' Clement Khelana 'Fly' Gxabu is quoted as having said to the Commission (TRC Report 1999: vol 3, 51).

The work of academics is drawn on to explain why resistance in the Eastern Cape was particularly strong and to expose the nature of its organisational links. ' In presenting these sources, background details have been used to situate the cases in their proper context' (TRC Report 1999: vol 3, 1).The story carries on effortlessly to chart the impact of June '76 on this area. More arbitrary police action is authorised by the increasingly ruthless state as 'youths' target schools, police vehicles, municipal bottle stores, buses and shops. The influence of the Black Consciousness Movement is mentioned, as always as part of the litany in the tale of the 1970s. It is at the end of the chronicle of youthful misdemeanours, in the wake of June '76, that Biko dies.

The overall appearance of a compact narrative driven by discernible motives is not vitiated by

skilful accounts of the divisions that sometimes cut across families confronting the chiefs. But, the broader narrative scheme holds it all in check and the per iodisation is neat - 1960-1975; 1976-1982; 1983-1989 and finally 1990-1194' (TRC 1999:vol 3:1) . Scholarly restraints, perhaps, make the horror readable, purposeful, not of the order of nihilistic horror. What would the effect be if we simply read the ragged, raw, unedited testimonies of survivors?

Explanation always seems to come from outside like the commentary offered by experts brought into the middle of TV news bulletins to speculate on the motives of some leader or the outcome of a particular conflict. They speak our language - that is the language of the well educated spectator - they do not gabble at us in the demented language of some foreign nationalism. They speak with the voice of reason and considered analysis, grounded in the academy so that we may grasp and domesticate terror and catastrophe, knowing very well that it is over now and will never happen to us.

Textbook A - South Africa 1948 - 1994 by Rosemary Mulholland

Rosemary Mulholland's textbook - so attractive and accessible that it hardly looks like a textbook at all - is one of the best published since 1994. I want to start with its treatment of Biko to raise several issues which I think important in a consideration of how what we have learned from the TRC may change the presentation of Biko and of Black Consciousness more generally.

Mulholland's account of resistance is quite conventional in terms of the narrative established by radical historians over the last couple of decades. It is primarily measured by the growth and actions of the African National Congress (ANC) in the 1940s and 1950s. The appearance of the Pan African Congress (PAC) in 1959 is dealt with very briefly and its decline into narrow, racial ideology happens quickly, leaving it as a decidedly unpopular party by the time of the 1994 elections. Its deviance from the path of non racial politics appears to account for its poor showing in that year. A moving depiction of the tragedy at Sharpeville *follows* the story of the PAC's fall from grace. After a brief justification of the resort to armed struggle - the founding of *Umkhonto We Sizwe* and *Pogo* respectively - and the dramatic arrest of Mandela in 1962, Mulholland turns to a section entitled 'Youthful Resistance', in which the ideology of the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) is linked - not to youthful aspirations or thwarted ambitions at all as the title may seem to suggest - but to the unspecified 'political frustrations of blacks' in general. The Movement's origins are explained by reference to several international developments as if there had been some kind of spontaneous efflorescence of the 'writings of Frantz Fanon, the black power movement in the USA and the international student revolts of the late 1960s' (Mulholland 1998:48). The 'black students' break away from the National Union of South African Students (Nusas) in 1969 to form the South African Students' Organisation (Saso) is explained blandly, with Saso described as an 'organisation for black students' - almost as if it already existed and certainly as if the need for such a separatist organisation was self-evident and natural and had not been painfully contested (Biko 1978:5; Budlender 1991:228 & Ramphele 1995:54-6).

This was a movement that arose because of the political frustrations of blacks. It centred around

the idea that blacks should gain confidence in their ability to change things fro themselves and end their dependence on whites, and win their own freedom. The movement was influenced by the writings of the Algerian Frantz Fanon, the black power movement in the USA and the international student revolts of the late 1960s. In 1069 black students broke away from Nusas to form the South African Students' Organisation (Saso). This was an organisation for black students. Steve Biko, the young medical student who had founded Saso said that blacks needed to be aware of their own identity and "not regard themselves as appendages to white society". He thought Saso would be more successful than Nusas had been in encouraging black students to support the principles of the BCM. In 1972, the Black people's Convention was founded to promote the work of political groups in sympathy with Biko's ideas (Mulholland 1998:48).

Mulholland's paraphrasing of Biko's justification for the founding of Saso, understandably perhaps, skirts the major issues which Biko identified around white liberals' ultimate inability and unwillingness to detach themselves from the 'oppressor camp' (Biko 1978:23) and the deleterious impact of their superior ability to articulate ideas in English on the confidence of black students (Biko 1978:20-1).The intimation in Mulholland's synopsis that it was possible for 'black students' to wake up and repossess their latent identities, however, closely resembles the concept of identity that appears to permeate current curriculum documents - a discussion I will take up some pages hence (see p.7).

Although, strictly speaking, the wrong nationality is ascribed to Fanon - who was not Algerian but Martinican born - his influence is justly acknowledged by Mulholland, although neither followed up nor explained (Wilson 1991:29). As Bhabha has argued in his celebrated work *The Location of Culture*, the radicalism of Fanon's thought has been insufficiently appreciated (Bhabha1994:40). Bhabha points out that Fanon was not simply describing oppression but probing its 'deep psychic (uncertainties)' and how '... the very nature of humanity becomes estranged in the colonial condition ...' (Bhabha1994:44 & 42).

For Fanon, the black *man's* identity was not something temporarily mislaid, which its owner could lay claim to after a period of reflection or instruction.[4] In the colonial context it was a pathological identity constructed in conditions of abnormality, which the black man first apprehended through the frightened reaction of the Other - most poignantly through the eyes of the white child. The black man was, inexorably, a victim of his appearance, no matter what mask he assumed or how cultivated his mastery of the colonist's language. Fanon's outburst against Sartre's casting of 'race' as a mere phase in the marxian dialectic, in which eventually race would cease to matter, is well known.

At the very moment when I was trying to grasp my own being, Sartre, who remained the Other ... was reminding me that my blackness was only a minor term ... without a Negro past, without a Negro future, it was impossible for me to live my Negrohood' (Fanon 1967:37).

For Fanon, particularly the pre-Algerian War Fanon, that was the dominant question - how to '*live* one's Negrohood' (my emphasis). Fanon's understanding of how the black man's identity is

at once reduced in the eyes of the colonial oppressors to a matter of visible pigmentation and magnified to encompass images of primal terror, made him sceptical that the question would be resolved simply by reversing racist stereotypes (Wyrick 1998:39). The passage quoted above from Mulholland suggests however that the black students for whom Saso was founded needed only to stop thinking of themselves negatively and to develop more self-esteem - as if this were a simple, mechanical exercise (and here, of course I am flattening the Mulholland piece more than I should for the purposes of bringing out my argument). The immensity of the problem was captured by Biko who pointed out that blacks in South Africa had a 300 year old 'inferiority complex' to surmount, which had not only dented their self-confidence, but which, in words that are very evocative of Fanon, had emptied them of their very self-hood and had consequently rendered them entirely passive. Biko wrote: 'the first step is to make the black man come to himself; to pump back life into his empty shell; to infuse him with pride and dignity, to remind him of his complicity in the crime of allowing himself to be misused and therefore letting evil reign supreme in the country of his birth' (Biko 1978:29). Biko believed that the 300 years of oppressive rule had all but destroyed black 'imagination' and their logical convictions, and, in words that deliberately echoed Fanon, 'disfigured' the African past (Biko 1978:28). Thus, the scarring of the black psyche was profound. His analysis suggests a rehabilitation project of some magnitude not to be confused with an exercise in positive thinking.

At the time Biko was involved in establishing Saso to enable the creation of a 'solid identity' among black students and to facilitate the emergence of authentic black leadership (Biko 1978:4) he was brutally honest about the conflict of interests between the 'two colour groups' in which the 'non-white always get off the poorer' (Biko 1978:5-6). His sense of the historical context was, as always, acute. He wrote and argued with the conviction that a new epoch was dawning, describing - 'a time (1970) when events are moving so fast in the country ... students appear to be a power to be reckoned with ...' (Biko 1978:11). In 'Black Souls in White Skins' - a powerful rejection of political cooperation with white South African liberals in the latter part of 1970 - he described the 'white' South African 'community' as homogeneous since all its members, even those who claimed progressive political allegiances, were involved in the 'usurpation of power' and enjoying their stolen privileges (Biko 1978:19). It is important to stress that this analysis was strategic and linked to a particular historical moment. Even in these articles and speeches - so apparently harshly judgmental of whites he made it clear that he was not against ultimate integration. He held it to be a false and unrealistic ideal however until black people, profoundly damaged by the colonial encounter as they had been, had attained 'the envisioned self' (Biko 1978:21). Furthermore, he was adamant that blacks should not be assimilated into 'white society' on the terms of the latter. Throughout his writings, Biko stressed that he found 'white society' as it had evolved, unappealing because of its 'spiritual poverty' (Biko1978:28).

By 1971 he was more explicit (like Fanon himself in a similar phase) that black - for all that it was an obvious marker of difference - was not just a matter of skin colour when it came to considering strategic alliances. Against the background of rapidly consolidating bantustan politics Biko made it an essential condition of blackness that one had to be 'anti reformist' (Biko 1978:48). Within this framework whiteness too became a 'concept that warrants being despised, hated, destroyed

and replaced by an aspiration with more human content in it' (Biko 1978:77). The point he was making is that 'whiteness', no less than 'blackness', was a historically constituted identity with profoundly limiting ramifications for those who found themselves defined by it. It was not to be shed, however, simply by an act of goodwill precisely because it was so bound up with long historical processes and entrenched material interests.

In 1977 there was less sense of the euphoria borne by the new epoch. Biko was pondering on how to see the deaths of '76 and he worried about the nature of political transformation. Not only did he wonder whether or not it was possible to wean whites away from the concept of racism - which included 'monopolising the privileges and wealth of the country ...' (Biko 1978:132) but again, like Fanon, he was concerned that society might not change in any fundamental way and all that might happen was that a few blacks 'filtered through into the so-called bourgeois' (Biko 1978:149). It is clear that Biko was not racist or undiscerning in his embrace of African history, culture and black empowerment.

Thus far, I have argued that Mulholland tends to portray the ideals of Black Consciousness in a cautious and circumscribed manner, governed, I imagine, by her sensitivity to the feelings of the students who will read her book. Certainly there is a raw anger just below the surface in many black students' responses to the subject of apartheid and, in my experience, white students feel very vulnerable when they are studying apartheid in the company of their black peers. The latter speak of their inheritance of shame and guilt, which very often tumbles out in a confused anger of their own and a claim that their suffering is not reflected.[5] A vicious spiral develops as black students, witnessing the defensiveness of white students, interpret it as indifference or an attempt to deny the extent of the horror of apartheid. As long as we fail to address these feelings by presenting a platitudinous account of the liberation struggle we do not help students to come to terms with their feelings and sense of impotence. Mulholland does not explore the complexities of identity in the way that Biko did, influenced by Fanon, other African theorists and the Black Power movement in the United States to which only a vague and rather mysterious reference is made (Mokoape et al: 1991:137).[6] Her book will be received by a schooling system that is inevitably still the victim of apartheid era ideology with its tenacious loyalty to group thinking. The new curriculum being proposed for the so called Learning Area of Human and Social Sciences for Grades 1 through 9 (which incorporates History) is, despite a conscious effort to free itself, constrained by several decades of thinking of identity as static and externally determined. 'Communities' are still essentially defined as fixed and defined by their outer signs of 'cultural' affiliation. It is time we developed more creative and useful approaches to thinking about how we make out who we are, and how we decide to deal with the identities that, too often, are prescribed for us by others, or are the unkind legacies of the past.

Textbook B - From Apartheid to Democracy by Tim Nuttall et al

I hope to emphasise the points I have made above by a discussion of another textbook from the post 1994 era. *From Apartheid to Democracy* is, like Mulholland's, generally a very sound textbook, slightly more pedagogically daring than the latter. In the chapter entitled 'The tide begins to turn: Paths to the Soweto Uprising, 1970-1976' contributors Tim Nuttall, Nkosi Sishi

and Sam Khandlela, devote some time to explaining the image of the tide - in banal language it must be said which unfortunately detracts from the power of the image - and to illuminating terms such as 'turning point' and concepts of causality. They describe the 'ideas of Black Consciousness' as a 'seed' of opposition 'cultivated' by a 'small courageous group of black university students'(Nuttall et al 1998:93).

The ideas of Black Consciousness they portray as being 'especially attractive to young, urban black South Africans, who looked for a new language with which to oppose apartheid' (Nuttall et al 1998:93). Again, their introduction of Black Consciousness and the Saso breakaway are treated fairly tentatively. The radicalism of the new ideas is represented initially as a matter of language - in conjunction with the phrase 'young, urban, black South Africans' it might almost be taken to be an issue of style. The founding of Saso is described as an initiative taken by Biko and others (who have been named in the previous paragraph) because of their increasing scepticism about the ability of 'white-dominated student political and Christian organizations'... to represent effectively the grievances and aspirations of black students' (Nuttall et al 1998:93). A brief biography of Biko in smaller print size follows, illustrated by the well known black and white photograph of Biko's face, lips slightly parted as if he were about to make an intervention.

At the bottom of the page there are further elaborations of 'Black Consciousness'. A summary of its objectives begins as: (1) 'To free black people from their psychological (of the mind) oppression, by eradicating feelings of inferiority and reliance on white people. "Black man, you are on your own!" was a favourite slogan' (Nuttall et al 1998:93). This point in their summary has some features in common with Mulholland's evocation of Black Consciousness as an exercise in building self-esteem (see above, p.5). As yet Biko has not spoken - although he looks as if he would like to. On the previous page the authors have encouraged their readers to engage in 'healthy debate and discussion' (Nuttall et al 1998:92), but, thus far they have told us what to think and how to define several terms, including 'psychological'. What could we possibly understand from the textbook's lukewarm rendition of 'psychological' as 'of the mind' about the nature of the psychological damage suffered by the colonised which Fanon learned of in his psychiatric practice, and which Biko saw in the shattered lives and violent deaths around him in apartheid's townships?

Over the page further objectives of Black Consciousness are summarised and issues are engaged with on a much more subtle level, for instance the conceptual or 'political definitions' of black and the Black Consciousness position on the role that left wing white people should play in the South Africa of the early 1970s. The latter objective is summarised as follows: '(t)o challenge liberal and left-wing white people to change the attitudes of other whites, rather than to join with black people in multi-racial organisations' (Nuttall et al 1998:94).

Then, at last, there is a fairly substantial quotation from Biko himself, which carries the date of 1970. The authors neglect, however, to contextualise the extract, which comes from a paper entitled 'Black Consciousness and the Quest for a True Humanity', which Biko wrote as a contribution to a University Christian Movement inspired project in the shape of a book called

Black Theology: The South African Voice edited by Basil Moore. The extract then, is part of a rationale for the development of a separatist 'Black Theology' and, inevitably, contains a radical argument against conventional Christianity associated with European missionaries in Africa. The excerpt selected by Nuttall et al starts off with the proclamation that Black Consciousness is a rallying call to blacks to come together so as to rid themselves of 'the shackles that bind them to perpetual servitude' (Nuttall et al 1998:94). But, the Nuttall et al version then proceeds to cut out a large section of the original, indicated by the conventional three dots. The omitted section includes Biko's statement that Black Consciousness expressed the 'determination of the black to rise and attain the envisaged self' (Biko 1978:92), which cannot, I hope it is clear from the argument advanced above, be limited simply to overcoming political oppression through collective effort.

Throughout the original paper Biko argues for a holistic review and eventual dismantling of the structures of exploitation then operating in South African society. He reiterates the need for black people to determine their own tactics and strategies without well-meaning white intervention. He repeats his view that liberal whites have a problematic understanding of racial integration because it is based on their terms and their blind acceptance of the values of 'white' society, which Biko invariably characterised as egocentric, individualistic and coldly analytical. His virulent attack on the missionaries holds that they taught a confused version of Christianity and waged a campaign of 'terror' by invoking alien images of hell to frighten black people away from their native religion (Biko 1978:93). This leads to his argument for a reexamination of Christianity and the development of an independent 'Black Theology'. A stinging critique of the education system, with its origins in missionary efforts, that was forced on blacks in South Africa follows. Biko points out how one of its major objectives has been the degradation of African culture, which, however managed to retain a certain resilience. Calling on Fanon, he describes very vividly the damage done to black history by the wilful propaganda of the white masters (Biko 1978:95). On this basis he argues that blacks should rewrite their history, redefine their culture recovering its crucial aspects of compassion and collectivity, and reject the prevalent economic system which depends on the exploitation of others.

Nuttall et al have left all this out, leaping straight to Biko's conclusion which is an unambivalent stand against reverse racism. Certainly the latter is an essential attitude to convey to the readers, and one can understand how the authors may have worried that the criticism of 'white' society, missionaries and educators contained in the omitted section may have been interpreted as hostility to people with a white skin. But, I would like to suggest that an inclusion of the omitted section could be most instructive - even if it simply helped to illuminate the sufferings and indignities of apartheid. There is a point at which white readers need to have their complacency about the superiority of their social values challenged, and to begin to perceive how their arrogant assumptions about the centrality of their culture are extremely offensive to others. As some of the Australian education scholars have argued recently, popping gobbets of multiculturalism into a curriculum which is based on the assumption that Anglo-Australian culture ought to be the norm serves both to conserve existing social privilege and to anger those who see their own cultures reduced to exotic culinary preferences and colourful items of clothing (Marginson 1997 & Dyson

1995 on similar developments in the USA).

Following the passage quoted from Biko which I have discussed at some length above, Nuttall et al ask learners to' ... summarise what Steve Biko says about Black Consciousness'. On the basis of the information they have provided in the passage referred to, it is unlikely that their readers will have gained a real insight into the novelty or persuasive force of Black Consciousness in the 1970s. Here it should be noted that the TRC Report itself offers us only inklings of this and a substantial challenge is offered by Sifuso Ndlovu who argues that the 1976 Soweto revolt was not directly inspired by Black Consciousness (Ndlovu 1998). Nuttall et all suggest that there is some debate around the contribution of Black Consciousness to the increased militancy of the 1970s but it would be hard to grapple with this on the basis of their text.

Nuttall et al ask learners to link Black Consciousness with earlier movements of the 1940s and 1950s - that is obviously before apartheid had really taken hold - before Bantu Education had really saturated the consciousness of its scholars and History, in particular, had been so grotesquely distorted. Implicitly readers are being encouraged to see the politics of the ANC Youth League, the PAC and Black Consciousness as virtually indistinguishable and as timeless variants on the more mainstream (and sober) ANC strategies. Biko's approaches to other political organisations, including the ANC, towards the end of his life, are mentioned briefly but could go by unnoticed (Nuttall et al 1998: 94-5; Mokoape et al 1991:140).

The History textbooks of the late 1990s are telling the story of Biko and Black Consciousness - to the surprise of some who do not expect them to be so far advanced - but they introduce a wary self-censorship into their accounts. Evidently the authors do not want to offend or to raise the racial temperature in South Africa's newly integrated classrooms. Nor do they want to challenge a certain historical orthodoxy that has come down to them from the academy. To write a 'positive' history though, I argue that they should be bolder and less apologetic for the implied slights of Black Consciousness. By introducing more of Biko's own writing into the text they might encourage their readers to grapple with its complexities - both those that concern strategic choices made in the 1970s, and those that pose questions about how identities are made and unmade. Deborah Wyrick's *Fanon for Beginners*, in the characteristic style of the *Beginners* series, offers some excellent ideas of how to present complex intellectual theories about identity in an accessible way, without losing the import and poignancy of the original works.

There are few whites in the resistance sections of the textbooks with which I have been dealing and this is likely to exacerbate the racial polarisation to which I have referred above (see p.7). The mention of Nusas will, in all likelihood, mean nothing to present day readers, which makes it all the more difficult to explain the origins of Saso through reference to the objections of Black Consciousness leaders to Nusas. It is true that *Textbook B* mentions Nusas, but it is in a separate context, after it has already told the story of Saso and even of Biko's demise. Some wayward characteristics of the predominantly white students' union are recounted in a featureless half page (Nuttall et al: 96). It would add immeasurably to the text if we had some visual images of Nusas and were able to read about the responses of white left wing students to the Black Consciousness

critique. Geoff Budlender, who was a student leader in the 1970s, recalled the Saso breakaway thus: 'For white people opposed to apartheid, the emergence of Black Consciousness was a powerful and bewildering development... (I)t is no exaggeration to say that the psychological impact was devastating' (Budlender 1991:228). A juxtaposition of Biko's arguments against coexistence with white liberals in Nusas, and Budlender's remembered pain and 'bewilderment' might help students to begin to work through their own confusion and anger - their fundamental charge that they are not acknowledged - even in the 'new' history.

3.

Michael Dyson's book *The Making of Malcolm* opens with the author fleeing his own university seminar on Malcolm X after having dared to challenge the dominant Malcolm mythology. Alone in his office Dyson reflects painfully on the geographical, generational, class, colour and intellectual connections that he feels bind him to Malcolm X, but of which his students, seeing only an 'old' academic who, through his critical stance, aligns himself with the enemy, remain perversely oblivious. He watches with an increasingly tender sympathy as the black men in his class try to erect a barricade around the Malcolm X icon saying, it seems to Dyson: 'white folks have ripped off so much of black culture, they can't have Malcolm too' (Dyson 1995:xiii). How can it be, he wonders, that he has alienated the very students to whom he feels closest and whom he wants most desperately to succeed?

The students are taken aback by his profession of concern for them, unable to reconcile it with his apparently sell out position on Malcolm X, and Dyson is forced to work through his position and the *raison d'etre* of conducting an academic seminar on Malcolm. Is there anything to be gained, he asks, fully conscious of his students' anger, from developing a critical and contextual approach to the life and thought of Malcolm X? Or, by exposing Malcolm's frailties and flaws is he indeed just 'ripping off' black kids again?

Dyson is concerned to position Malcolm X in his historical time, his point being that it is impossible to understand the nature of 'dissent' represented by Malcolm and others, if the 'scale' and convergence of race, class and gender oppression in the 1940s, '50s and '60s - not to mention the threat of nuclear holocaust which probably prompted Malcolm's vision of 'the war of Armageddon'- are underestimated. It seems to me that I have made a similar point about the tendency in some textbooks to conflate earlier decades in South Africa with the 1970s. Black Consciousness was not simply a recurring theme with older variations harking back to the ANC Youth League and the PAC. To make it appear so restricts the vision of students trying to get to grips with the 1970s, and belittles the significance of Black Consciousness.

Foremost in Dyson's mind is how a critical study of Malcolm X can help the social recuperation of black youth - black men in particular. One of the reasons Dyson had run into trouble with his students was his critique of Malcolm's prejudices against women - an unfortunate by product, perhaps, of 'the search for 'authentic (black) masculinity' which mainstream American culture had tried to eviscerate completely (Dyson 1995:93). Perceptions of the vehemence of white society towards black men led to the quest for emancipation being defined in 'largely masculine terms'

(Dyson 1995:97-8), ultimately at the expense of black women as Dyson, bell hooks (hooks 1994: 185-188) and others have pointed out.[7] What worried Dyson was the way in which their imagined identification with Malcolm X led the black male students in his class to adopt a 'rigid racial reasoning' which permitted no self reflection and, even though there is evidence that Malcolm himself began to revise his frankly misogynist views, used his version of masculinity to vindicate their own attitudes towards, and treatment of women (Dyson 1995:xi).

Biko, in many ways, was nothing like Malcolm X. He had neither the gangster youth, nor the same measure of unrestrained hostility towards white people as had the early Malcolm.[8] But he did write incisively of the black man's loss of 'malehood' under apartheid and the mounting anger which this deprivation engenders '(d)eep inside' (Biko 1978:28). The black man is a 'man only in form'(Biko 1978:28). It was in this context that he spoke of making the 'man come to himself' (Biko1978:29 & see p. above). One might conclude from this that his concern is fundamentally with the male. It is literally the man who has to be restored to himself and who is called to action against the 'evil' that has gained the upper hand in the country of his birth, leaving the woman to a more passive, unstated role. Later, Biko wrote again of how blacks under apartheid could not insist on an 'observance of their manhood' (Biko1978:76) and how the black man takes his anger out on his family (Biko1978:102). Black women are discussed only in so far as, given the commercial emphasis on 'white' ideals, they must be convinced that black is beautiful (Biko1978:104). Mamphele Ramphele stresses how important the latter idea was for her own personal emancipation (Ramphele 1991:217), but is herself critical of Biko's behaviour in the company of women who found his hero status irresistible, and of the 'being one of the boys' aspects of Black Consciousness culture (Ramphele 1991:218).

Dyson concludes that when one asks: 'can Malcolm X's example and memory in any way help black men past mutual destruction and the threat of social annihilation?' (Dyson 1995:167) the answer is yes, but not by denying Malcolm's human fallibility or by seeing him outside his time. Dyson explains that his black male students were also unable to tolerate the idea that Malcolm X's own views on whites softened towards the end of his life. A year before he died he wrote from Mecca that he was 'still travelling, trying to broaden my mind for I've seen too much of the damage narrow-mindedness can make of things' (Malcolm X to Farmer 1964). Dyson maintains that it is through a critical, historical examination of his thought, rather than a blind devotion to a fantastical single-minded hero that we are able to '(expand) the social criticism and moral vision that Malcolm represented' (Dyson 1995:151). Perhaps a similar idea could be brought to bear on what we have left of Biko's moral vision. So that we might ask, for instance, how the black woman's identity has been belittled and distorted in ways far more diverse and damaging than the expectations that she should conform to white ideals of beauty. What will it take for *her* to reach the 'envisaged self'?

Biko associated 'European' culture with analytical coldness that was centred on an interest in technological advance and individualism, and contrasted it with a human centred African culture. His descriptions of African culture tended to portray a static, idealised and predominantly male society. How could we conceive of African societies in more historical and multiple ways, which

suggest the changing roles of women, without losing the points he makes about the values of collectivity and mutual self-help derived from an African past?

In a recent article provocatively entitled 'An Alternative to Snob Democracy' policy analyst Xolela Mangcu points to some of the features of the system we have inherited through the negotiation process which was conducted primarily between political elites, and argues for a more thorough going democracy (*Mail and Guardian* Apr 30 - May 6 1999:25). In considering how the shift can be made from the elitist politics which Biko himself foresaw with a measure of dread towards the end of his life, Mangcu suggests that we review Black Consciousness traditions of political education. He maintains that they succoured many of the current political leaders 'even if some of them would now disavow black consciousness politics' (Mangcu 1999:25). Dyson argues that opening up the works of the mature Malcolm to 'a range of political negotiations of identity and ideology' could promote what he calls a 'lasting liberation' (Dyson 1995:xxiii) and that the opportunity exists for us to 'deepen' both Malcolm X's and Martin Luther King's criticisms of capitalism and pursue 'their leanings toward radical democracy' (Dyson 1995:102). Mangcu's argument seems to suggest that a judicious use of the Black Consciousness legacy would be similarly beneficial. *Curriculum 2005* supposedly endorses political education and encourages the development of an informed citizenry.

I have not, as yet, discussed Biko's death at the hands of his captors which, after all, was the real focus of Nkosinathi Biko's comment about the future of the history books. From the TRC Report and the amnesty hearings we know now a little more about how Biko died and we have a ruling that, in effect, holds the security policemen who assaulted him responsible, whereas the textbooks I have discussed above were still in the position of having to acknowledge the spurious finding of the inquest - even though they did so only implicitly and managed to cast doubt on them. It was important for them to challenge readers' curiosity about how Biko died and, to suggest through the pathetic circumstances of his death, that he was an innocent victim of an iniquitous system. Mulholland stresses the 'neglect' of his unspecified injuries and the apparent futility of resistance in the late 1970s (Mulholland 1998:50). Nuttall et al provide a vivid image of him 'naked and chained in the back of the police vehicle taking him to Pretoria' (Nuttall et al 1998:93).

Now that apartheid is over and we have access to the evidence of the amnesty hearings I think it is essential to write in a way that does not give his murderers the ultimate power and to be able to find the meaning in his death which he intended. The TRC Amnesty Committee refused amnesty to the five security policemen implicated in Biko's death on the grounds that they had not told the whole story, and that they had not demonstrated a 'political' motive for their deadly assault. In a sense the finding of the Amnesty Committee, necessarily predicated on a dismissal of political motive, reinforced the idea that Biko's death was caused by the petty spite of the security policemen who were peeved with him for having beaten up one of their colleagues in an incident described below (*The Star* Feb 17 1999). It is true that the evidence provided in their applications for amnesty was contradictory and incomplete, suggesting that there are still parts of the story that have not been revealed and that one of the policemen, Rubin Marx, tried to make a violent reaction on the part of his colleagues seem unlikely by describing Biko as quiet and 'cooperative'.

But the others all emphasised Biko's 'rebellious' behaviour with the story of how he sat down in a chair without their leave featuring prominently. Jacobus Beneke called Biko 'refractory, contemptuous and aggressive' (*The Star* Feb 17 1999) and, indeed, the Amnesty Committee did include in its reflections the high probability that 'Biko was attacked after the applicants did not take kindly to his arrogant, recalcitrant and non-co-operative attitude, particularly exemplified by his occupying a chair without their permission to do so' (*The Star* Feb 17 1999).

The most revealing evidence probably came from Daniel Siebert however, intentionally making a case for his political motivation. Siebert said that he 'knew Biko as an influential leader who wanted to "combat the apartheid policy ... white people, white power, white domination", and if this was not resisted, the entire white population would be affected and there would be anarchy and poverty in the country'. Siebert argued (and here visions of Malcolm X's Armageddon spring to mind) that there was an 'undeclared war' (*The Star* Feb 17 1999). Siebert, in particular, articulated his understanding of the function of 'assault' in keeping Armageddon at bay, although he expressed it more prosaically as being 'in the interests of state security' (*The Star* Feb 17 1999). During the Algerian War Fanon stressed the importance of not seeing torture as 'an accident, or an error or a fault. Colonization cannot be understood without the possibility of torturing, of violating, or of massacring' (Fanon 1968:66). Similarly, apartheid atrocities were not just random acts of violence committed by dull witted thugs who sometimes went a bit too far. They were an integral coercive aspect of the whole system. Siebert knew that and so did his prisoner.

Biko's colleague, Barney Pityana has written of his friend: 'Dying, as he lived, he thereby expressed to many young blacks a fearlessness that helped change the face of the country' (Pityana 1991:256). Pityana argues and I think Biko's own words bear this out that (and this is said on the understanding that the author holds that his death was completely unjustifiable and horrific) that Biko wanted it to be clear that his death - if it came to that - was a political statement. Shortly before he died, reflecting on a recent experience at the hands of police interrogators, Biko told an interviewer: 'You are either alive and proud or you are dead and when you are dead, you can't care anyway. And your method of death can itself be a politicising thing' ..... (Biko 1978:152). The fuller account runs thus:

I was talking to this policeman, and I told him, "If you want to make any progress, the best thing is for us to talk. ..." If they talk to me, well I'm bound to be affected by them as human beings. But the moment they adopt rough stuff, they are imprinting in my mind that they are police ... We had a boxing match the first day I was arrested. Some guy tried to clout me with a club. I went into him like a bull ... he said ... "I will kill you". He meant to intimidate. And my answer was: "How long is it going to take you?" ... You see the one problem this guy had with me: he couldn't really fight with me because it meant he must hit back, like a man.

Even under the most appalling and terrifying conditions Biko is saying that he asserted, and would continue to assert his right to selfhood and to the manliness his torturers did their best to take from him. It is interesting that we are able to teach Mazzini's words about the tree of liberty being

watered by the blood of martyrs in the context of the nineteenth century *Risorgimento*, but that we feel squeamish and uncertain about how to deal with martyrs in twentieth century South Africa and this is a point I have long pondered in the course of writing this paper. As educators we do not want to exhort our students to go out and die for their ideals. But, if we continue to present Biko as a frail man killed by a blow to the head delivered by one or more policemen who did not know their own strength and who then simply 'neglected' to attend to his injuries, we detract both from the meaning of Biko's death - the exceptional courage with which he *knowingly* faced it - and from the ideals which he was defending until the bitter end. If we want to inspire students to tackle the issues Biko raised in his intellectual work, to urge them to address questions of race and identity with the same kind of intellectual integrity and compassion that he himself employed, then it is necessary, not only to reinforce his humanity by pointing out his weaknesses, but also by showing him as exceptional.[9] Dyson's black students could not bear to let go of Malcolm X the hero who dared take on the full power of white America. Dyson understood their need and his book, while it dispels much of the Malcolm mythology never sets out to demolish the greatness of Malcolm X.

My work with school pupils has shown very clearly that they are no more enthusiastic about letting go of their heroes than were Dyson's students and I do not think we should ask this sacrifice of them. I believe that a textbook which made available Biko's last recorded thoughts on death and his expressed intention to resist by asserting his manhood would help them to appreciate his importance and to reflect on his diverse influences. The TRC Report and the textbooks give in too easily to a narrative of long reversals and suffering of the innocents, which miraculously led to ultimate victory and, perhaps, as Mangcu suggests, support a government which is not very enthusiastic about admitting its debts to Black Consciousness.

In conclusion, I argue that the TRC process and its associated amnesty hearings have given us a valuable moment for reflection. Biko's story has already been told by competent textbook authors. But they have been constrained by their sense of how students may receive the principles of Black Consciousness articulated in the 1970s. I have recommended that, rather than scurrying over the arguments made by Biko and others, we should encourage a deeper engagement with them and that we should see Biko's death, not as a hapless error but as the result of a deliberate choice he made to reclaim his humanity.

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Notes

1. 'Righteousness' is a reference to the title 'The Righteousness of Our Strength' provided for an extract in the compilation of Biko's writings and speeches *Steve Biko. I Write What I Like* edited by A. Stubbs, 1978, see pp. 120 and following.

2. This is a reference to Biko's treatment of the 'Manichean' associations of whiteness and blackness with which he bamboozled Judge Boshoff in the Saso/BPC trial in May 1976. See part of the transcript under the heading ' What is Black Consciousness' in Stubbs (ed), pp. 99-119.

3.The differences between the free flowing narrative style of AN Boyce and the apparently more scientific presentation of FA van Jaarsveld in their respective accounts of the Mfecane, published in the mid 1970s are worth noting.

4. I emphasise the word 'man' in this context to highlight Fanon and Biko's concern with the male subject. This discussion is taken up towards the end of the paper.

5. White students sometimes point out that their parents and other relatives suffered too when they opposed apartheid / were forced into the South African army by conscription under the National party government.

6. The influences are very obvious when one studies the work of Malcolm X discussed in Part 3 of the paper. It seems to me that this could provide a very good opportunity for breaking the bounds of South African history and inserting it in an international context.

7.These points about race and masculinity have been made frequently. Cf Wyrick1998:46-8 for a discussion of Fanon's inconsistencies in his discussions of relationships between men of colour and white women and between women of colour and white men.

8. It is instructive to compare Malcolm X's rejection of an attempt to integrate 'wolves' (whites) and sheep with Biko's more historical and gentler views on integration.

9. I owe this last point to Inez Stephney.