

# MAPPING COMMEMORATIVE CULTURES, BEST PRACTICES AND LESSONS LEARNED

## **CASE STUDY: South Africa**

**Author:** Steve Biko Foundation

### **Background describing the period of violence examined**

The selected case study relates to violence perpetrated by the apartheid system to eliminate activists who waged the struggle for freedom and democracy in South Africa. In particular, the case study is based on the murder of one of the leaders of the liberation movement, Bantu Stephen Biko, who was murdered in detention in 1977, by the apartheid security police and how he has come to be remembered over the period of his martyrdom. The murder itself was part of a systematic exercise to eliminate opponents of apartheid.

Apartheid was a system of institutionalized racism that consolidated the momentum of the racial inequities that were birthed by colonialism in 1652, into a more intensified, regulated socio-political system that was designed to elevate Whites over Blacks. In 1948, the system was drafted into law in South Africa and later in its annexed territory, of Namibia (formerly South West Africa). It consisted of a vast network of bigoted legislation, policy and practices that were implemented by the state departments, the security forces, and in general, by white South African citizens against their black counterparts.

Beyond governance over its own geo-political footprint, the Apartheid regime used the system as a basis for the extension of adverse foreign policies against neighboring countries such as Zambia, Mozambique, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Lesotho and Swaziland that were seen to be sympathetic to the struggle for freedom and democracy. Many of these sovereign states were themselves liberated from colonial rule through political resistance, hence

their support for liberation in South Africa. For this reason, they too were often attacked by South African armed forces, otherwise its propaganda machinery, purportedly because they harbored freedom fighters in exile.

Bantu Stephen Biko was born in 1946<sup>1</sup>, merely two years before apartheid was gazetted into national law. His formative years were thus immersed in the lived reality of two unfolding racially segregated worlds – one, a world of privilege that he witnessed from across the railway line, the other a world of poverty and deprivation that was designed to serve the other.

At the early age of sixteen years, he suffered his first direct act of injustice when, in 1963, he was expelled from Lovedale College. He had been part of a group suspected of being members of the Pan African Congress of Azania (PAC), which had been banned by the South African government following its campaign against the Pass Laws that resulted in the Sharpeville Massacre of March 1960. Despite the lack of any evidence that Biko was so much as interested in politics, let alone being a member of POQO – the PAC’s military wing – he was victimized. Approximately fifty other students were imprisoned for a year, including his older brother Khaya Biko. This was a turning moment at which, “The great giant was awakened”<sup>2</sup>.

Although there were suggestions in the years after the 1963 incident, Biko’s activism unfolded when he registered for a medical degree at the University of Natal in the year 1966. Upon admission he was elected to the Student Representative Council (SRC), as a candidate of a liberal, multi-racial students’ organization the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS). But in 1969, following a two-year debate about NUSAS’s hypocrisy and timid stance on apartheid, an issue that greatly concerned the black students in its ranks, Biko co-founded the South African Student’s Organization (SASO). At the center of SASO’s outlook was the notion of self-reliance in which Blacks were thrust to the fore of political leadership as the principal determinants of the texture and tempo of change. They were challenged to elevate their own unadulterated voice and to weaponize their lived reality under oppression.

One of Biko’s leadership skills was his admirable aptitude as a political organizer. He crisscrossed the country planting the seed of Black Consciousness on campuses with such effect that by 1970 SASO had garnered immense support that spread across all universities that admitted black students. This was later to cascade down to a strong network at secondary school level, such as the students that led the Soweto Uprising of 1976.

By 1972, the first cohort of SASO leaders was graduating from university and therefore could not continue their activism as students. Accordingly, the Black People’s Convention was established as societal wide organization to further the cause of Black Consciousness. It began to influence the arts, religion, professional associations, the workers movement and many other spheres of civil society. At this point, it became evident to the apartheid regime that they were faced with a compelling force of struggle that was at the center of the resurgence of political resistance.

## THE GLOBAL INITIATIVE FOR JUSTICE, TRUTH, AND RECONCILIATION

In 2014, the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience (ICSC) launched the Global Initiative for Justice, Truth & Reconciliation (GIJTR), a consortium of nine international organizations focused on offering holistic, integrative, and multidisciplinary approaches to issues of truth, justice, and reconciliation. GIJTR works primarily with local populations, civil society organizations, survivors, and governments to develop transitional justice approaches that are victim-centered and collaborative and support dignity, respect, inclusion, and transparency in societies emerging from conflict or periods of authoritarian rule. Since its founding, GIJTR has engaged with people from 72 countries, worked with 681 civil society organizations, conducted 323 community-driven projects, and documented more than 5,040 human rights violations.

For more information, please visit [gijtr.org](https://gijtr.org).



**GIJTR**

Global Initiative for Justice  
Truth & Reconciliation

In February 1973, Biko and the top stratum of leaders of his movement were served with restrictive five-year banning orders<sup>3</sup>. In his case, he was sent back home and prohibited from leaving the magisterial district of his hometown, King William's Town. He was restricted from meeting more than one person at a time, nor could he be published or quoted. During the period of his banning, Biko survived several attempts to have him held up for violation of his banning order. Then registered as a law student, through the University of South Africa, which offered distance-learning, he defended himself against many of the charges, while continuing to assert his freedom through working, albeit under difficult conditions, as the Branch Executive of the Black Community Programmes, the development arm of his organization whose mandate it was to give practical expression to the movement's ideas on self-reliance. In this capacity he built clinics, established creches, community scholarship schemes, wooden and leatherworks projects, publications and many other projects. By the time of his death, he had built this institution into a "showcase for community development"<sup>4</sup>.

On 17 August 1977, Biko as well as fellow activist Peter Jones, who was also banned, made an clandestine trip to Cape Town, inter alia, to meet the leader of the New Unity Movement, Neville Alexander as well as to resolve internal challenges in the Western Cape's branch of the BCM. Suspicious that their trip may have been uncovered, they drove back to King William's Town the next day, but were stopped at a police roadblock near Grahamstown. Once their identity was established, they were arrested for violating their respective banning orders which confined them to King William's Town and subsequently taken to Walmer police station, in Port Elizabeth, where they were held naked. The brutality of the conditions of their detention and torture led to Biko's death on 12 September 1977. Jones survived to tell the story but, in his words, he was to perpetually carry a "tear that refuses to drop."<sup>5</sup>

Biko became officially the 46th victim of torture and death under the State Security Laws. His death triggered an international outcry and helped highlight the brutality of South African security laws and the general plight of South Africans to the international community. It led directly to the decision by Western countries to support the UN Security Council vote to ban arms sales to South Africa (Resolution 418 of 4 November 1977)

### **Background describing the significant date or event that is being commemorated and the official/dominant narratives and the narratives of victims and survivors around the significant date or event**

The murder of Steve Biko has been the subject of political contestation for more than four decades. In the main, there are four principal axes along which this contestation pivots. The first is the family vs state axis, in which the family plays a leading role in driving legal and quasi-legal processes aimed at establishing the truth about his murder, as well as to keep his memory alive. The second axis is the ideological contentions that have played out within the historic liberation movements, in which the legacy of Biko swivelled from being a ground-breaking force of unity, to being a hotly and sometimes violently contested issue within the liberation movement. The third axis happens in the post-liberation era in which Biko returns to the national psyche as a near-spiritual source of national pride, as the South Africa government and society grapple with entrenching democracy and a

new national identity. Lastly, Biko is commemorated not merely as a South African icon but a global figure. His message of affirming the dignity of the marginalised – especially Black – has influenced communities in other parts of the world. Accordingly, his teachings inspire the work of several institutions around the world some of which are named eponymously. Here, we provide an overview of the underlying features of each of these axes as well as the ensuing commemorative practices that underpin them.

In relation to commemorative dates there are three that provide the most observed calendar references. Biko's legacy is principally marked in the month of September, given that his death occurred on 12 September 1977. To a lesser extent, there are references to Biko in the month of June, when South Africa celebrates Youth Month, given that the Soweto Uprisings of 16 June 1976 were largely influenced by the Black Consciousness Movement. More recently, there is increasing remembrance of Biko in the month of December as part of the growing trend to celebrate his birthday on 18th. But beyond the single day narratives that surface around these dates there is also an observable trend in which his memory has become interwoven in a substantive way into the continuous programming of various local and international institutions.

### **CONTESTATION 1: THE FAMILY VS STATE IN THE PURSUIT OF THE TRUTH AND JUSTICE**

It is important to preface this section with the fact that despite being arrested a healthy man and subsequently meeting his death through police brutality in detention, forty-five years after his murder, there has yet to be a criminal charge or conviction for the murder of Biko of any of the perpetrators. This unfortunate truth belies the persistence of the Biko family in seeking the truth and justice for his murder. We deal with it here in summary.

In the days following Biko's murder, the then Minister of Police, Jimmy Kruger, issued a statement implying that Biko had committed suicide by way of a hunger strike. Addressing a National Party Congress on 14 September 1977, he said: *"I am not glad and I not sorry about Mr Biko. His death leaves me cold"*<sup>6</sup>. By November 1977, the official storyline had changed to "death as a result of brain damage". In his revised statement Kruger opined: *"A man can damage his brain in many ways. I have also felt like banging my head against a brick wall many times, but realising now, with the Biko autopsy, that may be fateful, I haven't done it"*.

On 14 November 1977, following immense pressure from the family, as well as the local and international community, the state opened an inquest into the murder of Steve Biko. The inquest revealed that Biko died from brain injury, following trauma to his head. His body bore further evidence of torture. The inquest revealed co-operation between the police and the medical doctors who attended to Biko during his dying days, namely Drs Benjamin Tucker and Ivor Lang, to conceal the cause of death. But despite the overwhelming evidence against the police and the medical staff the finding by the presiding Magistrate Prins was that: *"There was nobody to blame"*<sup>7</sup>.

The pursuit of justice soon turned to the doctors. In 1978, despite concessions by Drs Lang and Tucker that they were acting on the instructions of the police, the state recommended to the South African Medical and Dental Council that no further action need be taken against the doctors. The Council's internal processes which took place in 1980 ended in a majority decision that supported the findings of the inquiry and the absolution of the doctors.

In February 1982, a new case opened within the South African Medical Council, and the doctors were again deemed innocent. Finally, in 1984, a cohort of progressive doctors and friends-of-the-family, initiated the Veriava Case within the Medical Association of South Africa to revisit the matter. The association acknowledged that the two doctors were culpable. Dr Tucker was suspended for three months, which was subsequently overturned. Dr Lang received a warning.<sup>8</sup>

In 2007, at the instigation of the Biko family, the University of the Witwatersrand in partnership with Steve Biko Foundation, established the Steve Biko Centre for Bioethics. Professor Yosuf “Joe” Veriava served as one of the Directors. The Centre hosts an annual Bioethics Lecture in the month of September, but its most enduring contribution is that in the period between the lectures, it seeks to foreground bioethics thus strengthening the resilience of the trainee medical professionals in our society against pressures that violate the Hippocratic Oath. In this way Biko’s life, which was taken in complicity with ethically malleable medical professionals, gives life to a new breed of practitioners that are resistant.

With the advent of democracy South Africa elected to establish the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, in order to deal with the ghosts of the past. In 1997, the Biko family was advised that the five remaining policemen who were involved in his murder would apply for amnesty. The five officers were Harold Snyman, [Gideon Nieuwoudt](#), Ruben Marx, Daantjie Siebert, and Johan Beneke. In evaluating their amnesty application, it was evident that their primary intent was to merely clean up the awkward edges of their evidence at the 1977 inquest, without owning up to murder, although they were ironically applying for amnesty for his murder. As a consequence, the Biko family appeared before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to oppose the application for amnesty, led by surviving members of the legal team that had participated in the initial inquest. This time the applicants were found to have misled the commission in that there were contradictions between their collective evidence and the forensic evidence explaining Biko’s death. On this basis they were denied amnesty.<sup>9</sup> Notwithstanding the fact that they failed the critical test of full disclosure, there were however some valuable concessions drawn out of the applicants during cross examination, including the fact that Biko suffered conclusive injuries during a scuffle in which they deliberately “all three grabbed hold of Biko, whereafter we moved with him, in the direction of the corner of this room and actually ran into the wall with him.”<sup>10</sup> A subsequent attempt to recant this admission failed to expunge it from the record and thus, for the first time, the family came to establish just how Biko suffered a massive brain haemorrhage.

Following these hearings, which took place in 1997, the Biko family established the Steve Biko Foundation on 17 September 1998. It seeks to give contemporary meaning to the life of Biko, by continuing to address some of the social ills that inspired his activism. This notion of defining justice as inclusive of, but not limited to the criminal and legal processes, is deliberate on the part of the family. Biko himself opined that “*You are either alive or dead. And when you are dead you don’t care anyway...Your method of death can itself be a politicising thing.*”<sup>11</sup> Thus, death being full and final, leaves in its wake the unfortunate residue of a continued hollowness that cannot be completely cured. In dealing with this reality, and perhaps to liberate oneself from it, the quest for closure should not be wholly at the mercy of elusive justice. As such the family’s approach has included the deployment of legal and quasi-legal tools to achieve criminal justice while at the same time transcending these to find some closure through the fulfilment of social justice. In December 2012<sup>12</sup>, the Steve Biko Foundation unveiled the Steve Biko Centre, a cultural heritage destination with a museum, archive, as well as a public library, theatre, training spaces and a restaurant, all of which are designed to educate visitors about the legacy of Biko, on an ongoing basis. The programmatic activities of the Foundation and Centre are discussed in detail below.



In its closing report, the TRC recommended that the state address more than three hundred cases that were processed by it but denied amnesty, including the Biko case. There has been a deliberate delay by the state to prosecute these cases. A recent case exposed that the delays are in part due to deliberate political interference.<sup>13</sup> In 2019, the Biko family became a member of the Apartheid-Era Victims Family's Group (AVFG). This group consists of families of victims of apartheid who are pushing the state to implement the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The Biko case is currently being investigated by the Directorate for Public Prosecution, who have been provided all the available files held at the archives at the Steve Biko Centre.

## CONTESTATION 2: INTRA-LIBERATION POLITICAL GROUPINGS

The second sphere in which the memory of Biko has been hotly contested is within the broad liberation movement.<sup>14</sup> As mentioned above, Biko's philosophy of Black Consciousness was instrumental in informing the students of Soweto in 1976. As a result of the clampdown that followed this event, there was an exodus of young activists who left South Africa as exiles to wage the struggle from foreign lands. The murder of Biko in September 1977, followed by the banning of the Black Consciousness Movement in October 1977, together with its vast network of allied organizations, further catalysed the exodus.

Hitherto, the Black Consciousness Movement had intentionally not operated outside of South Africa, choosing instead to focus all of its efforts on waging a struggle within. Thus, the movement had no international bases. The infrastructure in the exile community was dominated by the African National Congress, and to a lesser extent by the Pan African Congress, as they had been banned in 1960 and thus had some seventeen years of investment in building an external presence. Naturally, many supporters of the Black Consciousness Movement who left the country crossed the political floor to join the ANC or the PAC out of convenience.

In South Africa two trends emerged. A core group of followers of Biko's ideas regrouped as the [Azanian People's Organisation](#) (AZAPO), which was formed in 1978. AZAPO subsequently established an external arm, the Black Consciousness Movement of Azania (BCMA), which was headquartered in Zimbabwe. But the ensuing reorientation of the political energy of the 1970s also resulted in the establishment of a new internal political formation in 1983, known as the United Democratic Front (UDF), which was to dominate the politics of the 1980s. The UDF aligned itself with the ANC. In the jostling for political space several of its leaders associated with the ANC disparaged Biko and his supporters during the 1980s, even as they themselves were Baptists of the waters of Black Consciousness or perhaps precisely because of this. As the late Black Consciousness leader Muntu Myeza framed it: *"Renegades are seldom the best advocates of a cause they have deserted"*.<sup>15</sup> But more than just impassioned ideological exchanges, these clashes extended to the use of propaganda, to hostile demonstrations and regrettably, at times, they degenerated into violent attacks and murders. Despite the subsequent progress that has since been made, this remains a part of history that left a bitter taste in those who were on the receiving end of the violence. It is now known that the South African intelligence often fuelled Black on Black differences as part of the strategy to divide and conquer.

But as apartheid began to crumble in the early 1990s, there was renewed contestation over the embrace of Biko's legacy. Those who were once "renegades of his cause" advanced new narratives that sought to connect him with whatever political pathways they had taken in 1977. Naturally, AZAPO became possessive, resisting in particular any suggestion by the ANC that Biko would have supported the negotiated settlement it had elected to embrace.

Indeed, AZAPO declined the opportunity to participate in the first national elections and in the government of national unity, arguing that the compromise amounted to a betrayal. It asserted its exclusive title to the philosophy of Black Consciousness and its primacy as the voice of Biko.<sup>16</sup> For many years AZAPO has retained Biko as the face of its campaigns. Regrettably, it too was to suffer internal divisions, which resulted in splinter groups, namely the Socialist Party of Azania (SOPA) and the new Black People's Convention. Collectively, these formations have failed to make a meaningful mark in the electoral process. Factually, Biko was never a member of AZAPO or any of these as they were created after his death. AZAPO has, however, gone beyond most organizations in hoisting the face of Biko and organising annual commemorations in his honour in the month of September. These usually include a visit to the cell in which he died, as well as a lecture out of the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University. The organization maintains that the ruling party has not done enough to recognize Steve Biko because he was not a member of that party.

More recently, there is a cohort of new political parties and social movements claiming Biko as an inspiration. These include the Economic Freedom Fighters<sup>17</sup> as well as the Fees Must Fall and Rhodes Must Fall<sup>18</sup> movements. In these quarters, there is heightened activity in the form of references and commemorative activity in the month of September. Many of them pay regular visits to his grave to offer tribute, but it is not always clear that substantively there is a granular appreciation of the essence of his teachings.

### **CONTESTATION 3: A SOURCE OF NATIONAL UNITY**

Although there remain some sensitivities and contestations as described above, the work of the Foundation over the past 24 years has contributed to ensuring that Biko's legacy is liberated from suffocation in petty political clutches and elevated to a more appropriate place as a shared heritage of one of the nation's founders of democracy. To understand Biko is to appreciate that organizational form, which started with the establishment of SASO, was secondary to the spreading the essence of his message – to create a completely *“non-racial egalitarian society in which there shall be no minority, no majority, just people.”*<sup>19</sup> In pursuing this ideal, the role of political vehicles is important but so is that of other elements of civil society. The customization of Biko's legacy in this manner began in earnest in 1997.

On 12 September 1997, the world converged on the city of Monti (East London) South Africa, to pay homage to Bantu Stephen Biko as a freedom fighter and father of Black Consciousness. The occasion was the 20th commemoration of his murder in detention by the South African state security police. The event was organized by a committee which included government, his wife, Dr Nontsikelelo (Ntsiki) Biko and friends of Steve Biko, including the late Donald Woods. Then only three years into democracy, with the much-revered South African Constitution one year old, the country was still licking the wounds of the past. But the political negotiations at the Congress for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA), which were often tense, had also yielded a fragile truce that was built on the challenging pledge of embracing former political adversaries.

Steve Biko's 20th anniversary commemoration was to be one of the first public experiments in the quest for national unity. The event included the unveiling of a statue in his honor, and the declaration of his home, grave, office, and the Zanempilo Clinic which he built, as sites of national significance. The event drew onto the same stage several factious political formations of the liberation movements that had held divergent views even on the question of a negotiated political settlement of 1994. At the event the tension was palpable. There was political jostling. Some toes were sure to be trampled.

When then state President Nelson Mandela finally addressed the crowd, he evoked the memory of Biko with these words: *"In those difficult hours twenty years ago, the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune robbed a nation of a gifted young man whose contribution to our cause would have been even more immense. But our commitment to the unity that Steve Biko stood for will continue to guide us as we join hands in practical action to redress the legacy of oppression. It means working together with government in each sphere and all sectors from society, in bringing prosperity to the province, the country and the continent which spawned him. It means all of us helping to take South Africa across the threshold of greatness on which it stands. That will be achieved by each of us respecting ourselves first and foremost, and in turn respecting the humanity in each one of us. It means an attitude of mind and a way of life that appreciates the joy in the honest labour of creating a new society. In time, we must bestow on South Africa the greatest gift – a more humane society. We are confident that by forging a new and prosperous nation, we are continuing the fight in which Steve Biko paid the supreme sacrifice."*<sup>20</sup>

Many years later, Virgin boss Sir Richard Branson was to reflect on the significance of this event in his own words: *"Years ago, he (Mandela) invited me to South Africa for the unveiling of Steve Biko's statue. I invited Peter Gabriel, who wrote the wonderful song, Biko, about the anti-apartheid activist. We sat onstage with South African leaders including Mandela and Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi, as well as Biko's family. Mandela obviously had differences with the opposition parties. He got up onstage and asked the 100,000-strong crowd: "Should we not all be uniting ... for the good of all?" He did it with a smile; it was incredibly inspiring seeing thousands of faces cheering him on. After his speech, Peter Gabriel performed Biko a capella, and the whole crowd sang every word. He said: "I have been living with the words (of the song) for a long time. It is a sense of completion to be here." You could see tears in Madiba's eyes – it was one of the most emotive moments of all of our lives."*<sup>21</sup>

Amongst its many meanings the event accentuated two issues. The first was that Biko's life, and story, had touched the lives of many people around the world so much that even years after his death, there remained obvious global interest in his legacy. The second and highly significant observation was that, as in life, Biko's death continued to unite people across many socio-political divisions. He died following his arrest while pursuing the establishment of a united political front among the liberation forces in South Africa. Thus, it was most fitting that his memory should be the midwife of unity in the new South Africa even twenty years later.

In the first week of February 1998, the year following the commemoration, his widow Dr Ntsiki Biko, and son Mr. Nkosinathi Biko, travelled to visit several legacy-related institutions around the world to begin the planning process. The trip included, *inter alia*, the Martin Luther King Centre in Atlanta, where they held discussions with the late Dr Coretta Scott King, (patron of the institution), and the family of Malcom X in New York where they met with his daughters shortly after the death of their mother Dr Betty Shabazz. On 17 September 1998 the Steve Biko Foundation was born. In 2001, the Ford Foundation donated funding to commence planning the establishment of a Steve Biko Centre in Ginsberg. The project was subsequently declared a National Legacy Project by the cabinet of then President Mbeki and accordingly a significant portion of the requisite capital funding was raised from the National Department of Arts and Culture, the National Lotteries Development Trust Fund and the Department of Tourism, with a modest amount contributed by the Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality. Built on time and on budget, it was opened as scheduled in December of 2012. As described above, the Centre provides an experiential encounter with the legacy of Biko.



Beyond the political organizations, the Foundation and the Centre, in his home country, the legacy of Biko also thrives in the strong network of informal associations, clubs and discursive circles that draw on his inspiration. These tend to be in the creative and cultural sphere. Local artists such as Moses Taiwa Molelekwa, Simphiwe Dana and more recently Zulu Boy, *inter alia*, have crafted songs of tribute. Poets such as Maishe Maponya, Don Mattera and Pitika KaNtuli have coined poems and carved sculptures in his image.

#### **CONTESTATION 4: COMMEMORATING BIKO IN THE INTERNATIONAL ARENA**

Biko has been an inspiration as much in his own country as he is in the world. The life and work of Steve Biko are used as a philosophical guide in the development approach of several institutions around the world. These include, *inter alia*, the Steve Biko Housing Association in Liverpool ([www.stevebikoha.org](http://www.stevebikoha.org)) and the Steve Biko Cultural Institute in Bahia Brazil ([www.stevebiko.org.br](http://www.stevebiko.org.br)). The Housing Association was established in 1990 to provide housing and housing related services for black and racial minority (BRM) communities in Liverpool, the historic gateway of the slave trade. The Cultural Institute has since its establishment in 1992, been deliberate in suffusing its programmes in education, which are aimed at empowering black Brazilians who are susceptible to dropping out of the education system, with a positive sense of self anchored in identity, as a key to self-actualization, based on Biko's teachings.

There are numerous structures and public spaces around the world that have been named after Biko, such as the Steve Biko Square in Amsterdam. In 2012, the Google Cultural Institute entered into a partnership with Steve Biko Foundation, digitizing several thousand documents from the archives of the Foundation. Jointly, they curated and published several online exhibitions, translated into more than 30 languages. On the occasion of Biko's 70th birthday, on 18 December 2016, Google produced a special commemorate Google Doodle bearing Biko's image.<sup>22</sup>

The United Nations included Steve Biko in their Exhibition "A Legacy of Black Achievers" displayed at the headquarters, and travelling physically to tertiary institutions around the United States. The exhibition was later made available in all 6 official languages of the UN – Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish to the UN Information Centres. The Steve Biko Foundation is in the process of having all the heritage sites related to Biko, many currently on the interim list, to be fully declared UNESCO World Heritage Sites, under the World Heritage Convention by 2023. They are with a process underway toward a full declaration.

But the prevalent practice by which Biko has been commemorated in the international world is in the creative sector where artists have produced fine art, sculptures, poetry and songs in his honor. For example, Biko features in the works of the famous Gerard Sekoto, the late South African artist who was based in France and who, *inter alia*, produced *Homage to Steve Biko* in 1978. In that very year, Tom Paxton released the song; "*The Death of Stephen Biko*." A year later Paul Stopforth, produced and featured a peace titled *The Interrogators* in his 1979 exhibition. Reggae Group, Steele Pulse, recorded a Tribute to Martyrs featuring Biko's Kindred Lament which was also released in 1979. One of the most recognized musical tributes to Biko is by Peter Gabriel, a song titled "Biko" referenced above. It was first released as a single in 1980 and has been adapted into different versions, including one featuring Manu Dibango and Ladysmith Black Mambazo. During the pandemic shutdown Gabriel returned to the studio to re-record the song with Angelique Kidjou, Yoyo-Ma, Sebastian Robertson, bassist Meshell Ndegeocello and the Cape Town Ensemble<sup>23</sup>. In 1981 the music group Sweet Honey in the Rock released a song titled Biko. A Tribe called Quest released a song titled Steve Biko in 1993. In 2000 Former Black-Eyed Peas Wyclef Jean released a song titled Diallo which features Steve Biko.

In 1984, Albert Finney and Graham Evans directed a British televised play, *The Biko Inquest*, produced by Cecil Clarke. It had originally been performed in London in 1978 as a stage piece. In 1988 the movie *Cry Freedom* was produced and directed by Sir Richard Attenborough, which featured Denzel Washington as Biko and covers his journey with Donald Woods.

There are numerous more examples of artistic tributes over the years which complete the picture that, undoubtably, civil society and in particular the artistic world has ensured that, even in death Biko, has defied the attempt to silence his voice, and that his legacy has travelled to distant places where it continues to touch the lives of citizens around the world. It was thus fitting that as part of the campaign by the Black Lives Matter movement in response to the murder of George Floyd, Reverend Al Sharpton gave the Steve Biko Memorial Lecture in September of 2019.<sup>24</sup> During the pandemic in 2020, the annual commemorative message was delivered by the African Director of the World Health Organisation Dr Matshidiso Moeti<sup>25</sup>, who examined the inequities of vaccine distribution.

### **How is the significant date or event commemorated in the public sphere?**

In terms of negative examples, although not directly related to Biko's commemoration, it is regrettable that there are several dates on our national calendar that have been renamed, and as a consequence, de-linked from their historic significance. March 21st is now Human Rights Day. It is the day on which we commemorate the Sharpeville Massacre which resulted from the leadership of Robert Sobukwe. June 16th has become Youth Day, somewhat delinked from its emersion in the story of the youth of Soweto. These blend titles, coupled with the lack of continued public education, have also encouraged a culture where commemorative days are more about holidaying and barbeques than they are about national revival.

Acknowledging that he has been honored with a National Order for Meritorious Service in Gold<sup>26</sup>, the day of Biko's murder is not an officially recognized day on the national calendar. Without the Steve Biko Foundation or the other stakeholders referred to herein, there would be no official commemoration on the day, save for an occasional tribute by the Ministry of Sport, Arts and Culture when the officials remember. However, the national broadcaster, the South African Broadcasting Corporation has for years been the official broadcaster of the Foundation's Steve Biko Memorial Lecture. In this context they have been leaders in carrying a remembrance message on the day, as well as broadcasting the lecture usually to 53 of the continent's nations.

### **How is the significant date or event commemorated in the local sphere by victim and survivor communities/ victim- or survivor-centered associations/ civil society organizations?**

We have outlined various ways in which the family, the Foundation, various political formations both the old and the new, and global allies all commemorate Steve Biko. In the main, the principal occupation is with events that are in the form of rallies, dialogues and pilgrimages to Biko related heritage

sites, as well as artistic tributes. Members of the public are usually in attendance at these events, visit the associated sites or participate in online tributes.

We argue above that a number of institutions have been established that are associated with Biko's legacy. Their principal focus is on programmatic activity drawn from the legacy and lessons of Biko and Black Consciousness and not merely events.

With the advent of technology there are new exciting trends. A growing one is how the public has taken it upon itself to curate its own "exhibitions" based on memory, using social media. Although exciting, such commemoration suffers from the ills of the internet, not unique to the commemoration of Biko. By way of example there may well be a copyright infringement in the rush to curate these tributes.

It is not always the case that such acknowledgement is welcome. For example the Biko Statue in East London has been vandalized through paint on at least three occasions since its erection, purportedly by the right-wing element that is resistant to change in South Africa.<sup>27 28 29</sup>

## **How does your affiliated organization commemorate the significant date or event?**

Much as the symbolism of songs and statues remains a worthy honour, the Steve Biko Foundation is intentional about extracting the lessons of his lifework and applying them to resolve some of the contemporary challenges that still face our society. Now 23 years old, the Foundation is a community development organization that is inspired by the legacy of its eponym.

The vision of the Steve Biko Foundation is: ***to be the premier, independent promoter of the values Steve Biko lived and died for: restoring people to their true humanity.*** In pursuing this vision, the Foundation promotes the use of intangible, yet essential aspects of development – *identity, culture and values* – issues that speak to the soul of a nation. Its programmatic portfolio is underpinned by the following strategic thrust:

- **Consciousness** – Who Am I?
- **Community** – What Is My Place in Society? How Can I Contribute Meaningfully?
- **Capacity** – What Skills And Tools Do I Need To Develop Myself And To Make My Societal Contribution?

Working to these three pillars, the Foundation's commemoration is thus through programmatic interventions that fall within the following sectors, each of which speaks to all three goals, but each of which has specific fortes:

### **PROGRAMME 1: PLANNING, MONITORING & ADMINISTRATION.**

The engine of all of the work of the Steve Biko Foundation and Centre operates on the theses that the system and its performance is a function of input into it, and that the institution must continuously be informed by the lessons of one cycle in preparing for the next. It is responsible for programme planning and development, implementation and administration, monitoring and reporting to stakeholders, legislative and contractual compliance, governance, accountability and capacity building, in order to support programmes, sustainability and the management of all assets.

## **PROGRAMME 2: DIALOGUE FOR DEMOCRACY**

A series of conversation platforms that provide resuscitative moments of reflection for the partnering communities in South Africa, the continent and beyond, made up of lectures, conferences and workshops, whose content is inspired by issues of public interest underpinned by the objective of raising consciousness and activism. This series of activities contributes substantively to the goals of the Foundation through:

- Promoting leadership
- Stimulating critical debate
- Creating platforms for intergenerational dialogue
- Bridging the gap between academia and civil society
- Linking local issues with the diaspora and the international community at large
- Generating content for publications and informing research

## **PROGRAMME 3: ARTS, CULTURE & HERITAGE**

Uses exhibitions, theatre, music, poetry, fine art, film, books, cultural apparel and other art forms aimed at evoking an Afro-centric identity and sense of pride. In this respect the Centre is the first stage for regional talent as well as the connection between emerging and established talent. The programme is also responsible for generating content related to the Heritage Trail. Such intangible yet integral elements of development: arts, culture and history are central components of the Foundation's work. Utilizing these tools, the Foundation:

- Empowers youth to actively shape and express a positive sense of self through social history and the arts
- Promotes the link between identity, agency and social action
- Develops role models and fosters peer learning

## **PROGRAMME 4: ECONOMIC JUSTICE**

The Foundation recognizes the link between economic realities and human dignity, and seeks to diminish the degrees of marginalization, of uncertainty and of vulnerability of the excluded sections of our populace by empowering individuals and communities, underpinned by the principle of self-reliance, developing capacity, skills and tools, and thereby promoting an inclusive economic environment for sustainable business enterprises. The iZwelethu Technology-for-Tenure program facilitates land ownership by unlocking the underlying value of land-based assets for the benefit of the marginalized.

## **PROGRAMME 5: EDUCATION & SKILLS DEVELOPMENT**

Anchored by the main Public Library & Information Centre, the Children's Library, the Mobile Libraries and the Community e-Learning Centre, which collectively buttress the teaching and learning experience for numerous surrounding public schools and communities that do not have library facilities. The program supports the school curriculum seeking to instill confidence, and the capacity to apply the tools learnt in the classroom in outside situations. To further assist individuals and communities to actualize the principle of self-reliance, the Foundation works to create an alternative to the culture of "service delivery" and its inherent dependency syndrome.

## **PROGRAMME 6: HEALTH & WELLNESS**

Run principally through the Steve Biko Centre for Bioethics its programming focuses on providing ethics and morality-based theoretical tuition to students of various programs under the Wits Medical program, as well as public education that enhances the public's understanding of their

public health rights under the constitution. The Foundation partners with community structures to support mental health awareness focusing on the youth, given the proliferation of this challenge, which has been flagged by health practitioners as the “next pandemic”.

### **PROGRAMME 7: SPORTS DEVELOPMENT**

Supports various individual and team sporting disciplines such as Soccer, Netball, Rugby, Boxing, Golf, Gymnastics, and Darts all with the aim of drawing youth towards more positive lifestyles. Sport is also used as a gateway to engage the community and for the provision of skills transfer between professionals and novices.

Since its establishment in 1998 the Steve Biko Foundation has transformed from an idea into one of the premier institutions of civil society with a global reach.

The Steve Biko Foundation’s commemorative activities and programs are distinguished from many other organizations in that they are principally resuscitative moments aimed at activating a sense of agency and eradicating dependency on the part of its beneficiaries. This is in keeping with the underlying teachings of Biko, which challenges our publics to be architects of change and occupants of the spaces that have become accessible as a result of our young democracy. It prompts citizens to be the “change they want to see”, converting the spaces they occupy into growing liberated zones, while pushing for inclusivity in those from which they are still marginalized. Of other institutions inspired by one or other of the founders of our democracy, few have come to anchor their work on building citizen agency and cultivating self-initiative, in the manner to which the Foundation aspires.

The Foundation has built a reputation of inclusivity while it remains a vociferous independent voice. One of the critical strategies towards retaining our independence has been the creation of some self-generated funding, which is designed to free the institution substantially from reliance on any one donor, including public funding. This is important, particularly for the retention of an effective independent voice that does not bend to undue donor pressure. The month of September marks the height of commemorative activities by a wide range of institutions and stakeholder groups and the Foundation promotes a widely published commemorative calendar on which we peg these multiple events in order to encourage cross-attendance and broader acknowledgement of the extent of his legacy. Beyond commemorating Biko-specific dates, the Foundation is a voice in challenging narratives attempting to erase and negate our history. As an example, with the death of former President FW De Klerk, who was honoured with an official state funeral, the Foundation raised its voice to challenge the falsified heroism of a man who, although he was agreeable to a negotiated settlement, nevertheless presided over a government that eliminated freedom fighters even as late as 1990, through state sponsored divisive violence waged by the third force<sup>30</sup>. More recently the Foundation has participated in a campaign by the Apartheid Victims’ Families Group to compel the incumbent President Cyril Ramaphosa to implement the recommendations of the Truth & Reconciliation Commission<sup>31</sup> and to prosecute perpetrators of apartheid violence referenced above, including the case of Biko.

Further to this, the Foundation has extended its platforms to celebrate history even as it may originate outside of the political lineage of Biko and Black Consciousness, for so long as it is in the tradition of affirming our collective humanity. It has celebrated the contribution of leaders such as Robert Sobukwe of the PAC, and Oliver Tambo of the ANC, and many fallen and surviving members of the Black Consciousness movement. In this way the Foundation has become a trusted partner to a diverse portfolio of stakeholders, in taking on the untold story. The Foundation has petitioned the Presidency and the Department of Sports, Arts and Culture,



towards a national social history project to record the testimonies of thousands of freedom fighters, whose voice is necessary to complete the history of resistance in South African, but who lack the capacity to write and tell their stories.

**What lessons learned would you caution against from official commemorative practices and/or civil society- and community-led initiatives and interventions, thus encouraging the development of creative mitigation strategies to address existing challenges and points of contention?**

One of the critical lessons to be learnt from South Africa is that in an attempt to achieve national reconciliation and racial harmony through a negotiated political settlement, there may well have been the unintended consequence of playing down the atrocities. In the early days of Mandela's presidency, South Africa was positioned as the rainbow nation. It glossed over its wounds even before cleansing them through frank reflections on the past, and consequently set an insincere foundation for what it really means to be South African going forward, and what collective sacrifice is required to build an embracing new national identity. In so doing we the country re-enforced its historic fissures.

In truth Apartheid was declared a crime against humanity by no less a body than the United Nations<sup>32</sup>, yet despite the violence on the Black citizenry, there has been little consequence. More concerning is the fact that the quest for national unity has shaped a false moral equivalence between the actions of agents of apartheid and those of resistance to apartheid. In this context, official narratives and commemorations of past atrocities have tended to lean towards an exaggeratedly apolitical chronicle that protect narrative of rainbowism.

**Identify best practices that work to instill an inclusive memory culture and broader goals of reconciliation, recognition, truth-seeking, education for future generations and non-repetition.**

In the broader South African context, the struggle history and the attendant memorialisation of human rights violations is mainly driven by museums. Some are public institutions, which to name a few, include:

- **The Robben Island Museum** – contains the history of the principal political detainees imprisoned on the island;
- **Freedom Park** – a site of remembrance where South Africa honours those who sacrificed their lives in the struggle for a free and democratic South Africa;
- **Constitution Hill** – in addition to being the site of the Constitutional court, has an extensive display of the experience of women prisoners under the apartheid regime.

Similar institutions that are private or independent initiatives include:

- **The Apartheid Museum** – a holistic overview of the experience of oppressed peoples under the apartheid restrictions;
- **District 6 Museum** – the experiences of the community who underwent forced removals in Cape Town

- **Liliesleaf Museum** – based at a farm that served as the secret headquarters of the ANC, SACP, Umkhonto we Sizwe and the Congress Alliance between 1961 and 1963, and at which the senior leadership was arrested on 11 July 1963, resulting in the famous Rivonia Trial, in which they collectively faced charges amounting to 193 counts of sabotage against the state;
- **The Steve Biko Centre** – the reservoir of the story of Steve Biko and Black Consciousness and the largest archive of materials about Black Consciousness Movement.

These institutions not only continue to remind our citizens of the experiences of the past, but many run programming and activities that bring the history alive for the education of current generations.

The aim of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission was to combat impunity, create a culture of accountability, and most importantly to uncover truth about gross human rights violations. Its objectives included assisting families of the victims in getting closure. In short, “the TRC was [to be] a prudent step for reconciling the South African community”<sup>33</sup>. It would promote a frank reckoning with the past as a foundation for the promotion of national unity. It is however debatable whether the TRC was successful in such an aspiration. Many scholars have argued that the failure to follow through on the prosecution of deceitful or disingenuous applicants for amnesty has put pause to the national project of reconciliation. Indeed, the country still does not have either a shared narrative, or a shared understanding, of our history as exemplified by the current national disunity. The 2021 South African Reconciliation Barometer (SARB), a nationally representative public-opinion survey conducted regularly by the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR), aims to provide a measure of several aspects of public opinion. In the first thematic section, Section 3, the 2021 SARB<sup>34</sup> explores the concepts of reconciliation and social cohesion. As the longest-running reconciliation barometer anywhere in the world, the SARB continually provides South Africans with an opportunity to define what reconciliation means to them. Noting that reconciliation is a contested and nebulous concept and South Africans attach many kinds of meanings to it, most notably those of forgiveness and peace, the data shows that most South Africans believe that reconciliation is still necessary, and that everybody has a part to play in the process. Another theme explored in the 2021 report is interpersonal trust. This section shows that there is a significant trust deficit in South African society, where circles of trust are small and people that fall outside these circles – those from different cultural backgrounds – are mistrusted by many South Africans. Interracial interaction is most likely to occur in public areas and mostly does not occur within the private sphere. Trust is central to building a more cohesive society and mistrust can foster feelings of enmity, such as xenophobia, or a greater propensity for conflict. The fifth thematic section, Section 7, explores the idea of national identity and nation-building. Inequality and divisions between racial groups are identified as the primary obstacles to a more cohesive society. The final section, Section 8, explores the legacies of apartheid in South Africa. The vast majority of respondents agree that apartheid was a dark period in South African history, and that certain groups benefitted while the majority were deprived of equal rights and opportunities. South Africans also agree that apartheid’s legacies continue to shape present-day South Africa and that not enough has been done to redress the inequalities, dispossession and hurt of the past.

The Foundation’s Dialogue for Democracy programme is at the core of our attempt to stoke the consciousness of citizens in South Africa and the continent. It foregrounds thought leaders to lead deliberations on a range of issues of public interest and community interaction and civic engagement is expressed through the Frank Talk Dialogue Series. This dialogue platform, historically a roving initiative that travels from campus to community hall around the country,

assumed a workshop format and assembled young leaders to reflect on national issues in a solution-oriented engagement. Most often these conversations were inter-generational and a majority broadcast live on both commercial and community radio stations to relevant audiences. With more than fifty such sessions on record, the series mostly targeted the general public as well as tertiary student formations such as SRC, Clubs and Societies. The platform is currently being updated to a virtual experience.

We have also referred above to the Annual Steve Biko Memorial Lecture series – the oldest lecture in the new dispensation and arguably one of the most alluring lecture series of our times. The Steve Biko Memorial Lecture was historically presented with the University of Cape Town (UCT: 2000 – 2015) and is currently hosted in partnership with the University of South Africa (UNISA: 2016 – present).

The education market is the principal target of the Foundation's work at the Steve Biko Centre, including the following sectors:

- **Primary Education Learners.**
- **Secondary Education Learners**
- **Tertiary Education Students**
- **Educators**

The offering is based on a wide a range of effective and age-appropriate methods as are available to us. These include live or virtual lectures aimed as well as theatre, film screenings, exhibitions and tours of the Biko Heritage Trail to provide a visualised experience of Biko and to bring alive the legacy to new generations. Currently between 2 and 5 school groups per week are hosted under this programme.

The ideal way of accessing this market is in having programming incorporated into the school curriculum and in 2007, the Foundation engaged extensively with the Department of Basic Education with the intention of introducing Steve Biko and Black Consciousness Movement into the national curriculum as part of the broader story of our liberation. As a consequence, these topics are included as a Learner Project in Grade 6, and as a full module – with compulsory essay question – in Grades 10, 11 and 12 (matriculation) levels<sup>35</sup>. The Steve Biko Centre is also included as a Heritage Tourism Site in the Grade 10 Tourism module taught to all learners. Further, the Foundation will continue to negotiate books, and other learning aids, such as the Grade 7 targeted *Biko Comic Book*<sup>36</sup>, into the prescribed list of teaching materials. There is an immediate opportunity to use *"I Write What I Like"* in its current form; additionally, to launch and position the isiXhosa version that is in production as set work material.

The next step will be the inclusion of the praxis of Black Consciousness in teacher education. In his paper titled, *"Stephen Biko's Philosophy and its Pedagogical Implications in South Africa"*<sup>37</sup> Vuyisile Msila makes a case for mainstreaming lessons of Biko through formalised pedagogy, thus: *"Arguably, the ideals of democracy, equality and social justice should be pivotal in teacher education programs. Without these aspects post-apartheid education will not achieve what it is supposed to achieve. The South African education is built upon the democratic constitution of the Republic. Values embraced by philosophers such as Biko will be crucial in realizing some of the ideals of the post-apartheid education system. Biko used liberation theories to emancipate the individuals from the constraints enforced by society. Existing research on Biko also shows the implications of Biko's philosophy on the society in general ... Education is intertwined with society and although Biko was mainly commenting on*

society and politics, his philosophy has huge implications for education. Finally, through Biko's philosophy one can see that education is always based on values and it is through values that individuals will find liberating or restricting." We concur with Msila's summary of the need to view education as a locus for the teachings of Biko and similar thinkers.

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**GIJTR**

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