

'Race and media' is all about identity politics. And someone who thought – and did – a lot about this was Black Consciousness leader Steve Biko. He also did a lot of journalism himself, and he did a lot to transform journalism.

Biko wrote for the media – not just his column 'Frank Talk' in the SASO newsletter, but also pseudonymous opinion pieces after his banning and befriending of *Daily Dispatch* editor Donald Woods.

He also helped change journalism in the 1970s. "Start giving some decent coverage to the Black Consciousness movement," Biko told Woods, who then agreed to assign a reporter to the beat, and to allow a Black Consciousness proponent to write a regular column.

Biko did not wait for Woods to choose the reporter – he nominated Thenjiwe Mthintso to be hired for the job. He put forward his associate Mapetla Mohapi as the columnist (Mohapi later died in detention, allegedly by hanging himself with his jeans).

In short, media transformation for Steve Biko was a two-pronged matter: first, encourage conscientised blacks to do journalism – a whole generation of reporters was inspired in this way; second, change the worldview of whites like Woods already working there.

Biko is probably best known for black exclusivism as a foundation for black pride in the 1970s, i.e. for building a strong black identity against the tribalistic and slave mentality fostered by Apartheid.

But Biko did not conflate race identities with skin colour. Nor did he regard black and white identities as permanently segregated ghettos that could share nothing between them. These insights remain relevant to the 21st century.



For Steve Biko, to be black or brown in skin colour was a necessary, but not sufficient, condition to have a black identity.

For Biko, Black Consciousness was a means to an end, i.e. South Africa as "a land where black and white live together in harmony without fear of group exploitation". This would be "when these two opposites have interplayed and produced a viable synthesis of ideas and a modus vivendi".

He saw a future of fusion beyond a harmony between separate and parallel race groups living without racism. "You have got to synthesize. This is all part of the values, the beliefs, the policies that have got to be synthesized in the bargaining process between black and white in this country".

Thus he argued that "at the present moment we have a culture here which is a European culture. The black contribution will change our joint culture to accommodate the African experience. Sure, it will have European experience, because we have Whites here who are descended from Europe. We don't dispute that. But for God's sake, it must have African experience as well."

Herein are the seeds of seeing a democratic South Africa going further than a racist-free, multi-racial society, and becoming an entirely non-racial one. This thinking is of enduring relevance for identifying and combating racism in the media. To transform our media means we need a clear notion of the opposite condition: i.e. what a racism-free media is, and what route is needed to get there.

If the goal is a media melting pot that com-

over the rainbow



Black Consciousness has a lot to offer in countering racism in the media, writes Guy Berger.

bines racial identities into a common South Africanism – wherein colour is not a measure of culture, class or consciousness – then Black Consciousness offers some ideas on getting there. A start to de-linking race from expected traits, part of eliminating race as a signifier of anything significant, is to counter the negative aspects of racial identity. To replace these with positive aspects is what Black Consciousness emphasises.

If blackness was negatively portrayed in the apartheid-era media, positive role modelling is now called for. Such measures constitute corrective action against the historical consequences of white racism.

Without reaching some kind of parity in the status of racial images, it is impossible to proceed to the ultimate goal of de-racialising society entirely. The end point of transformation then is doing away with racial distinction altogether: deracialisation such that race has no social significance at all.

In short, racial identities need reconstruction. Black identity must be given due status, White identity taken down several notches – and both without making the classic racist mistake confusing identity with intrinsic pigmentation or seeing races as impermeable and permanent laagers.

For Biko, to be black or brown in skin colour was a necessary, but not sufficient, condition to have a black identity. In fact, for him, not all those who were not-white, could be counted as black. To

be black (with a capital B) was to identify with the struggle of people oppressed by racism: it was, for Biko, a political definition and a political identity.

The implication of this perspective is that racism, in the sense of anti-black views, is not exclusive to pale people. It can be practised by anyone. What we are looking at in media racism then, is not so much whether images come from a particular racial journalist, but whether they intrinsically have negative connotations.

Biko's thinking also draws attention to the way that racial identity gains rationale from political purpose. 'Race' is still about power and politics and combating racism in the media means appreciating this factor.

It means a political project, à la Biko, to include black voices in the media, and a valuation of Blackness as part of constructing a rich and democratic South African identity.

This requires a frame of mind that celebrates black culture, history and experience. There is still lots of room for this perspective among South African journalists – irrespective of their skin colour.

The challenge bequeathed by Biko is a journalism that proliferates racial colours positively, but which also blends these beyond biologically-given hues. This is surely the way to the proverbial pot located the other side of the rainbow.

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BULELANI FATMAN b. 1984

Ithemba alidanisi – Hope does not kill

I chose to make a work for this proverb, because I think that although the history of our country has been difficult, there is still a lot of hope. I have chosen four sites where the battle took place in 1819 and I show what is there today.

There is a rugby field where men still fight each other in sport at the actual battle site, Egazini.

Where the British had their guns, the barracks of Fort England, now stands a hospital for the mentally ill.

At the site that some people call Makanaskop, and where they say Makana stood watching the battle, I have shown how people have built their houses there.

At the place where amaXhosa tried to run away, I show how a school is now built there.

I think that it is very important that people do not give up hope for a better and more peaceful life.

By showing how people have built over the places where the battle took place, I hope to show how people are moving on with their lives. I have put all of my interpretations into the shape of a traditional Xhosa cooking pot, called an *unopoty* because I can see how the history and the stories still feed the identity of the people.

