



CONFERMENT OF THE BIKO-FANON AWARD

12 MARCH 2018

MOGOENG MOGOENG

CHIEF JUSTICE OF THE REPUBLIC OF
SOUTH AFRICA

Programme Director,

Prof Saths Cooper, President of International Union of Psychological Science IUPsys,

Prof Kopano Ratele, Former President of Psychological Society of South Africa,

Mr Nkosingithi Biko, Son of the Late Steve Biko,

The Deputy Chief Justice of the Republic, Ray Zondo,

Vice-Chancellor of UNISA, Prof Makhanya

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen

I take this opportunity to express my immeasurable gratitude for the decision to confer the Biko-Fanon Award for psychological liberation on me to the:

- (a) Pan-African Psychology Union (PAPU).
- (b) Psychological Society of South Africa, and
- (c) Steve Biko Foundation.

I see the conferment of the Biko-Fanon Award not only as a rare and humbling honour, but also as an imposition of a frightening and yet unarticulated responsibility on a recipient. It requires of a recipient to forever be conscious of what BIKO and FANON stood for or represented, and to use his or her energy and all available opportunities to contribute in a meaningful way, towards the realisation of the aspirations they shared with all the right-thinking people of Africa and of the world. This award creates a great expectation, in the African people and the human race in general, that a recipient can be trusted to breathe life into the Black Consciousness philosophy and help realise the vision that it galvanised the people around. It in effect says, that, after careful analysis by a body of African Psychologists and the Biko Foundation, a conclusion was reached that the recipient is not psychologically damaged and can therefore be trusted to give practical expression to the black consciousness philosophy, to not betray its objectives or distort its wisdom-laden and profoundly futuristic outlook, and its unapologetically strong pro-black emancipation focus and yet non-racial character. It holds him or her out as a person of integrity and solid character who lives to serve others and not to be served or illicitly amass what belongs to others or a nation.

It is a daunting responsibility to receive a Steve Biko award. A combined BIKO-FANON Award seems to hold out a silent threat of condemning the recipient as harshly as was Judas Iscariot or any worst traitor, should he or she betray the hopes of the suffering and forgotten masses in Africa and other under-developed parts of the world. This is especially so, because of what South Africa and the rest of Africa has been through and where they are. But, in what state is Africa now and why?

After a breathtaking description of the African landscape, waterfalls, rivers, as well as fauna and flora, LOREN CUNNINGHAM goes on to say:

“Our great artist God has displayed these and other wonders in Africa. What are His plans for this continent and His people? He hid more gold here, more diamonds, plutonium, and copper than in any other place on earth. Africa has more hydroelectric potential than all the rest of the world put together, as well as an abundance of coal and oil.

Wisely used by and for Africans, the continent’s resources could contribute significantly to new health and prosperity. Unfortunately, for too long Africa’s people have been enslaved, raped, abused, dismissed by prejudice, hated, or just ignored. Their rich resources have often been collected and used by others – even stolen – with little if any benefit going to Africans. Instead, their value has attracted foreign exploitation, enriching dictators and warlords, bringing bloodshed, starvation, and even modern forms of black-on-black slavery.”

This was said by this white American brother as recently as 2007 and repeated in 2011. The rich resources of Africa have been collected, stolen and used by others. They have been exploited by foreigners who hate, ignore, and are prejudicially-disposed to Africa. But some African leaders join in to loot, assist greed-driven and merciless foreigners. They kill their own in the furtherance of the mutually-beneficial corrupt agendas of the local elites and foreigners, while multitudes die of hunger. This reflects the reality that both BIKO and FANON spent their lives seeking to awaken Africa and the rest of the under-developed world to. It is this inexplicable, and dehumanising exploitation that they sought to undo.

As a tribute to Steve Biko and Frantz Fanon, this acceptance speech will primarily be about what they stood for and their visionary leadership. It is best that you hear more from them than from me. FANON explains the inability of independent African and other under-

developed countries to make meaningful progress in governance and in the economic sector. He says this is a consequence of the control that foreign governments still have over “freed” colonies and the balancing of the budget through loans and gifts – a well-planned system of absolute and perpetual dependency. He says:

“The former colonial power increases its demands, accumulates concessions and guarantees and takes fewer and fewer pains to mask the hold it has over the national government. The people stagnate deplorably in unbearable poverty; slowly they awaken to the unutterable treason of their leaders. This awakening is all the more acute in that the bourgeoisie is incapable of learning its lesson.”

Trusted leaders, heroes of yester-year get compromised and neutralised by design. Some tend to develop and resign themselves to an insatiable appetite for money and material possessions while the people who trust and support them continue to live in conditions of squalor and die of disease and hunger. As Fanon puts it:

*“The leader, who has behind him a lifetime of political action and devoted patriotism, constitutes a screen between the people and the rapacious bourgeoisie since he stands surety for the ventures of that caste and closes his eyes to **their insolence**, **their mediocrity** and their fundamental immorality. He acts as the breaking-power on the awakening consciousness of the people. He comes to the aid of the bourgeois caste and hides his manoeuvres from the people, thus becoming the most eager worker in the task of **mystifying and bewildering the masses**. Every time he speaks to the people he calls to mind his heroic life . . . thereby intimating clearly to the masses that they ought to go on putting their confidence in him.”*

This means that the leader who is often a struggle hero, sells his and the soul of a nation and gets captured either by the former colonial power and its allies or by the internal and associated corrupt elite or both. FANON goes on to explain the

abandonment of sacrosanct high moral values and the shameless betrayal of a noble cause in post-independent Africa as follows:

“There exists inside the new regime, an inequality in the acquisition of wealth and in monopolization. Some ... are specialized in opportunism. Privileges multiply and corruption triumphs, while morality declines. Today the vultures are too numerous and too voracious in proportion to the lean spoils of the national wealth.”

And who are the thought-leaders and beneficiaries of these treasonous projects, practices or trends? FANON says:

“By dint of yearly loans, concessions are snatched up by foreigners; scandals are numerous, ministers grow rich, their wives doll themselves up, the members of parliament feather their nests and there is not a soul down to the simple policeman or the customs officer who does not join in the great procession of corruption.

. . .

The enormous profits . . . derive[d] from the exploitation of the people are exported to foreign countries . . . the behavior of the national bourgeoisie of certain under-developed countries is reminiscent of the members of a gang . . .”

Does all this sound new or familiar? And what are we as citizens doing or to do if this holds true in our countries?

The heritage or treasure that STEVE BIKO left behind for humanity was more about the struggle for psychological emancipation and national liberation than about the post-apartheid era. Fanon dedicated comparatively more time to the diagnosis of the realities of an apparently free under-developed country, and proposed remedial measures for the extensive psychological or mental damage known to have claimed the sanity of some of

our heroes, and its overall deleterious national consequences. That said, BIKO had quite a visionary or futuristic outlook that constitute the rich material that citizens of Africa and the under-developed world need now, to undo and overcome the post-colonial state of perpetual underprivilege, under-development, imposed inferiority and self-evident mental damage. BIKO says:

*“Granted that it may be more attractive and even safer to join the system, we must still recognize that in doing so we are well on the way towards **selling our souls**.”*

Although this statement was made with reference to the system of balkanising South Africa, it applies with equal force to those who support strategies and narratives designed to ensure that national and African unity is unrealisable, the lives of the suffering masses do not improve, vested sectarian interests are preserved at all costs, corruption and historical state capture do not end. Instead corruption or state capture is made out to look like an exclusively or inherently African or black problem. Biko’s statement applies to those who aid and abet the attainment of the following or of similar divide and rule objectives:

. . . Colonialism pulls every string shamelessly, and is only too content to set at loggerheads those Africans who only yesterday were leagued against the settlers.”

Is the position any different now from what it was in the sixties and seventies? Reflect on the tensions between White Africa (including those from Egypt, Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Libya, etc) and Black Africa, Islam and the Arabs versus Christianity, the virtually fossilised disunity between the African Anglophone versus the Francophone blocks. Is there resistance to or support for the financial autonomy of African countries and the African Union? If there is some discomfort and opposition, where does it come from and why? Whose interests are best served by perpetual and entrenched African dependency, disunity and under-development?

Genuine and lasting continental unity, peace and prosperity require that most African countries themselves be united, well-run and strategically positioned for peace and sustainable economic development and growth. Both BIKO and FANON held the view that the starting point is to educate the people in order to change their world-view or mindset. Fine-sounding declarations which are devoid of meaning often deceive people but only for a while. All people, including the youth, in under-developed countries need to have their specific problems or national issues “*tackled with lucidity*”. For any country to make meaningful progress, people must be told the truth in understandable terms. They deserve the truth about what is really being done and where leaders are taking them to. Leaders “*must not voodoo the people, nor dissolve them in emotion and confusion*”.

Tribalism, racism and xenophobia also require a clear message from all leaders to exposes the danger they pose to national unity and reconciliation. BIKO said:

“We see a completely non-racial society. . . . We believe that in our country there shall be no majority, just people. . . . So in a sense it will be a completely non-racial egalitarian society. . . . All these must be brought ... and explained to the people. . . . The black man has got no ill intentions for the white man. The black man is only incensed at the white man to the extent that he wants to entrench himself in a position of power to exploit the black man. But beyond that, nothing more.”

We would all do well to translate this into a well-resourced and practicalised national project. Where there is no clear and effective strategy for rooting out the ills of the pre-independence era, like racism, disunity and poverty, they ultimately become normalised and accepted as a regrettable part of life.

Do we have a deliberate plan in place to address the serious economic realities that confront South Africa and other under-developed nations? BIKO said:

“Yes, I think there is no running away from the fact that now in South Africa there is such an ill-distribution of wealth that any form of political freedom which does not touch on the proper distribution of wealth will be meaningless. The whites have locked up within a small minority of themselves the greater proportion of the country’s wealth. If we have a mere change of face of those in governing positions, what is likely to happen is that black people will continue to be poor, and you will see a few blacks filtering through into the so-called bourgeoisie. Our society will be run almost as of yesterday. So for meaningful change to appear there needs to be an attempt at reorganising the whole economic pattern and economic policies within this particular country.”

How are we doing in this country and in the rest of the continent? Has meaningful change taken place? Do attempts to reorganise the whole economic pattern and economic policies hold out meaningful hope to the poor? Real and tangible social, political and economic freedom for all, duly enabled by good governance grounded on transparency and accountability is what we all must strive for now. This requires absolute dedication to the cause that seeks to expose some of the modern-day pretext of freedom which in reality is an adeptly recalibrated system of assuring that we see only “a few blacks filtering through into the so-called bourgeoisie”, while the fire-walls around discrimination, exclusivity to real wealth and power are barely disturbed.

But be warned. A real challenge to the exclusive sectoral exercise of raw political or economic power, has often been visited with dire consequences. Consequences range from the well-refined and mastered art of smear by connected operators pretending to be acting on their own and out of concern, subtle and yet well-crafted narratives designed to call into question and erode the reputation of the morally upright opponents of poor governance, corruption, greed or vested sectional interests. Tools range from twitter and other forms of social media, subtle and yet effective utilisation of transactional journalists, “independent experts” or analysts, and lies which are repeated many times in the knowledge that they tend to morph themselves into truth. To cut a long story short, even

poisoning or other physical consequences such as were visited upon Biko, are not unheard of. What then is to be the attitude of you and I and all citizens of Africa to these risks where leaders or activists in politics, business, the media, the Judiciary etc, falsely hold themselves out as champions of our collective constitutional aspirations, when the opposite is in reality the case. BIKO said:

“You are either alive and proud or you are dead, and when you are dead, you can’t care anyway. . . .So if you can overcome the personal fear for death, which is a highly irrational thing, you know, then you’re on the way.”

We have to free ourselves from the psychological shackles of fear. Rather die as a caring man or woman of integrity, than as a wealthy, highly placed, and yet disgraced and corrupt person.

In memory of STEVE BIKO and FRANTZ FANON, may we at least commit to doing and conscientising others to do the following:

1. Identify the rationale behind colonialism, imperialism, apartheid and similar discriminatory, heartless and greed-driven systems and their ***modus operandi***.
2. Establish whether the plan and enthusiasm to derive optimum benefit from them died with independence or was merely refined into a more nuanced or sophisticated and yet effective weapon or mechanism for the “*informal*” or unofficial institutionalisation of perpetual disadvantage for the African and all other black people.
3. Develop and propagate individually and collectively, legitimate and effective strategies for arresting and reversing what, according to LOREN CUNNINGHAM, was still the order of the day as recently as 2007 and 2011. Do it not in pursuit of any divisive or unjustifiably prejudicial agenda. Be driven by what truly is in the

best interests of this entire nation and continent. But be warned, you will be misunderstood, even deliberately.

4. Seek to unite, reconcile and heal the divisions of the past and expose the lie that race is somehow inherently determinative of your intellectual prowess, smartness, superiority or wealth-generation capacity.
5. Pay special attention to the broader educational, health, economic, justice and governance systems and how they need to be changed to speak directly and more meaningful to the challenges that confront our nations and continent.
6. Be concerned about and contribute to the enhancement of the effectiveness of corruption-busting agencies and accountability–enforcing mechanisms so that they could bite all greedy functionaries in both the public and private sectors, most excruciatingly.
7. Find effective ways of helping people out of being misled or fed with false promises so that they may make truly informed choices of their leaders. Seek to put an end to the voodooing and bewildering of the people and the mystification of all important issues, including bread and butter issues.
8. May we never forget that it constitutes a naked betrayal of what STEVE BIKO and FRANTZ FANON stood for to be tribalistic, racist, or xenophobic, and to be so unethical as to sell your soul or the soul of the nation to the highest bidder.

I THANK YOU ALL!