

#changethestory



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The Struggle to breathe: Part 1

THE current FW de Klerk discussion raises a critical dialogue required to move us from our reconstruction slumber.

The EFF did the country a favour by highlighting the issue of apartheid denialism and the privilege which white consciousness carry within our political eco-system. I do not approve of the EFF's disruptive methodologies, but they raise an important aspect: the intransigent eco-system of privilege that, on analysis, continues to be as destabilising a force as corruption is to our democracy.

In Dr Steve Biko's 1978 book, *I Write What I Like*, he pens a sentence that should be on all entrances to Parliament, and every government and school building. He wrote: "In time, we shall be in a position to bestow on South Africa the greatest possible gift – a more human face."

While the pre-1994 liberation struggle was driven by the marginalised, those who have retained their positions of privilege determine our post-1994 reconstruction and reconciliation.

To put it bluntly, the black disenfranchised classes drove the liberation discourse. The white privileged culture and class, however, owns the eco-system in which the reconstruction and reconciliation discourse is now struggling to breathe. The power of that eco-system of privilege intentionally delinks reconciliation from liberation and offers a pseudo-inclusion to blacks and a preservation of privilege to whites.

The terms of liberation were set out in multiple stakeholder agreements, while the terms of reconstruction and reconciliation were a side issue left to diversity management consultants, religious groups and the itinerant motivational speaker.

In a mauling of the liberation narrative, we ended up with multiracialism as the outcome of most redress activities, while the goal of the liberation Struggle was clearly non-racialism as doctrine and anti-racism as a stance.

In the current watered down "multiracial" contexts, people ensure that they have the numbers and faces right. In non-racialism, the outcome sought is to have the mindset right. Biko was clear in his articulation that Black Consciousness was a necessary condition for non-racialism to succeed.

A consciousness of blackness was a precondition for political and cultural liberation, for if you did not know who you are, you would always be defined and co-opted by others.

This is why white supremacy survives to this day. White people have an existing acute white consciousness that they bring into every aspect of life and into every occasion of existence. In a culture where white consciousness exists as a subliminal power in an eco-system of privilege, regarded as normal by white people and which they have made the standard for everybody else, nothing will change in the eco-system unless white consciousness is matched by black consciousness.

This is the area where government and political parties have failed us. Black consciousness was not understood as the justice-oriented force it had to be to white consciousness so that we together could build a new anti-racist and anti-privilege eco-system.

I have sat through diversity training seminars in which 90% of the instructors were white. That's not the problem. The problem is they had no black consciousness.

Black consciences is not the *swart gevaar* it's made out to be – it is in fact the necessary and balancing power within the eco-system. They chose instead to kill the prophet Biko because they feared the power of a just eco-system. As Biko said: they feared the greatest possible gift we could give South Africa – a more human face.