

Steve Biko within the social milieu of what Tony Morphet called the Durban Moment by Xolela Mangcu

This paper locates Steve Biko within the social milieu of what Tony Morphet called the Durban Moment, when there was a new sense of “brushing against the grain” of South African history. I argue, however, that this “moment” reflected more the social plurality of the time, with different social actors competing for “the right to define or co-define what shall count as intellectually established and culturally legitimate.” It is within the context of those “moments” and struggles for political and intellectual hegemony that Biko emerged with the irresistible idea of Black Consciousness.

Four decades later, newer struggles for intellectual and political hegemony have led to various interpretations of Biko, some of which are deliberate distortions, and some of which are legitimate criticism of his silences on issues such as class and gender.

The paper responds to the distortions and the criticisms while drawing out what I believe to have been his theory of action, among a set of other competing theories.