

BIKO

IN TIME, WE
SHALL BE IN A
POSITION TO
BESTOW ON
SOUTH AFRICA
THE GREATEST
POSSIBLE GIFT
- A MORE
HUMAN FACE

STEPHEN BANTU BIKO
18 DECEMBER 1946 – 12 SEPTEMBER 1977



GENDER, RACE AND IDENTITY
STUDIES

Professor Rozena Maart New forms of consciousness

While still a child and doctoring the grievous psychological wounds of her family's forcible removal from District Six, Rozena Maart was handed a banned pamphlet produced by Steve Biko's Black Consciousness Movement.

"Few words since then have had such resonance for me," says Maart, now Head of Gender Studies at the University of KwaZulu-Natal and Acting Director of the Centre for Critical Research on Race and Identity [ccrri]. "Biko's ideas changed my life; they showed me the centrality of the mind; that the mind is the most important part of the body."

Since then, Biko's ideas – interrogated at the intersection of Derridean deconstruction and psychoanalysis – have remained an unbroken thread in her intellectual development and critical approach, coalescing in part as the intellectual scaffolding for her doctoral thesis – *The Politics of Consciousness: the Consciousness of Politics. When Black Consciousness meets White Consciousness* – completed at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham.

Together with feminism, Maart lists black consciousness philosophy as one of the foundations upon which her generation was raised.

Currently she is concerned to move students' conception of Biko as a revolutionary or protest scholar towards that of a globally-relevant thinker in the field of philosophy of consciousness, a man who understood the centrality of the mind in dissidence. This is readily illustrated through Biko's own references throughout his work to philosophers such as Hegel, Marx, Jaspers, Cesaire, Fanon and Sartre. "There are many cases of revolutionaries who, like Biko, trained as medical doctors. Here it is possible to explore the materiality of race; the way in which race and racism affect physical and particularly mental health," argues Maart.

"My students often resist an emphasis on psychoanalysis, which they question and ask if it is African. But I remind them that one of the first recorded cases of psychoanalysis

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came in the form of dream interpretation by Joseph in Egypt – when Joseph interpreted the dreams of Pharaoh, an event which had a profound impact on the history of Africa and its development. Both Freud and Jung were fascinated with aspects of Africa and its peoples and this had a significant impact on some of their work,” she says.

In any event African scholarship is not about negating European philosophy or other knowledge formation, says Maart. “It's about broadening our horizons and recognising not only one source of knowledge, but many, and trying to make connections between them.”

Since leading the Centre, Maart has introduced several research groups examining issues such as transformation, Biko, whiteness and colonial amnesia, Black consciousness, gender-based violence, gender, sexuality, and the city, HIV and AIDS, masculinities, the Namibian holocaust and Pan Arabism and Pan Africanism.

She is committed to establishing a student-run Biko Colloquium to mark the University as the home of Biko, the South African Students' Organisation (SASO) and the Black Consciousness Movement of Azania.

According to Maart, the Centre is attracting a number of students interested in “interrogating silences” and engaging relevant and topical identity-based issues through new theoretical frameworks.

“Guilt and shame about race or gender, for example, don't sit well. We have a whole new research area arising out of whiteness, for example, in which the emphasis is on transformative agency rather than past burdens. We have Black women students engaging academically with the issue of skin lighteners,” and coming to consciousness about their agency within the world.

At a glance: Professor Rozena Maart

Professor Rozena Maart is Head of Gender Studies at UKZN and at the end of 2012 was appointed as Acting Director of UKZN's Centre for Critical Research on Race and Identity.

Maart works within the intersections of Political Philosophy, Black Consciousness, Derrida and deconstruction, Psychoanalysis, Critical Race Theory and Feminist Theory.

A published author, she won “The Journey Prize: Best Short Fiction in Canada 1992,” for *No Rosa, No District Six* which later became part of a collection titled *Rosa's District Six* and made the best seller list in Canada in 2006 and the Homebru list in South Africa. Her 2008 book *The Writing Circle* made the top 10 novels list in South Africa and was shortlisted for the African Studies award in the United States.

In 1987 she was nominated for the “Woman of the Year,” award for her work in the area of violence against women and for starting, with four women, the first Black feminist organisation in South Africa in 1986, Women Against Repression [W.A.R.].

Maart is a member of the International Assembly of Women in Philosophy (UNESCO), The Collegium of Black Women in Philosophy, the Sartre Society, the Society for Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy and the Caribbean Philosophy Association, among others, and serves on the Editorial Board of the Journal *Critical Philosophy of Race*.

In 2012, she was appointed UNESCO African Regional Co-ordinator of Philosophy South-South Dialogues, part of the larger UNESCO sponsored group SOPHITHINK which is a group of international Philosophers working towards educational packages in an effort to promote philosophies that have been marginalised by the history of philosophy itself.

Maart was Director of the Biko Institute in Guelph, Canada from 2001-2006 and was a member of the Biko, Rodney, Malcolm Coalition in Toronto. She is one of the co-ordinators of the panel series of the World Philosophy Congress, which is to be held in Athens, Greece, in August 2013.