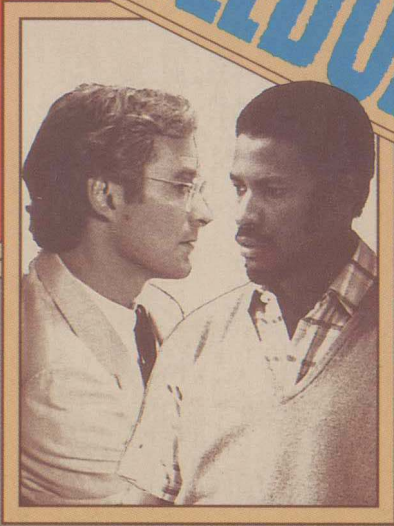




The Book Behind Richard Attenborough's

CRY FREEDOM



BIKO

DONALD WOODS

BIKO

Revised and Updated Edition

Donald Woods



An Owl Book

HENRY HOLT AND COMPANY • NEW YORK

This book is for Ntsiki, Mamphela, Thenjiwe,
Nohle, Malusi, Thami, Mixolisi, Hlaku, Percy, Aelred,
Beyers, Theo, David, Cedric, Peter, and all our friends
now banned, exiled, detained, or dead.

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In Memoriam

The following South Africans are known to have died in detention in the hands of the Afrikaner Nationalist government's Security Police. All were imprisoned without legal representation and access to friends or relatives. The causes of death alleged by the Security Police are given in parentheses.

L. Ngudle, September 5, 1963 (suicide by hanging); B. Merhope, September 19, 1963 (causes undisclosed); J. Tyitya, January 24, 1964 (suicide by hanging); S. Saloojie, September 9, 1964 (fell seven floors during interrogation); N. Gaga, May 7, 1965 (natural causes); P. Hoyer, May 8, 1965 (natural causes); J. Hamakwayo, day unknown, 1966 (suicide by hanging); H. Shonyeka, October 9, 1966 (suicide); L. Leong Pin, November 19, 1966 (suicide by hanging); A. Ah Yan, January 5, 1967 (suicide by hanging); A. Madiba, September 9, 1967 (suicide by hanging); J. Tubakwe, September 11, 1967 (suicide by hanging); an unnamed person, day unknown, 1968 (death disclosed under questioning in Parliament on January 28, 1969); N. Kgoathe, February 4, 1969 (slipped in shower); S. Modipane, February 28, 1969 (slipped in shower); J. Lenkoe, June 17, 1969 (suicide); C. Mayekiso, June 17, 1969 (suicide); J. Monakgotla, September 10, 1969 (thrombosis); Imam A. Haron, September 27, 1969 (fell down stairs); M. Cuthsela, January 21, 1971 (natural causes); A. Timol, October 27, 1971 (leapt from tenth-floor window during interrogation); J. Mdluli, March 19, 1976 (fell against

chair during scuffle); M. Mohapi, August 5, 1976 (suicide by hanging); L. Mazwembe, September 2, 1976 (suicide by hanging); D. Mbatha, September 25, 1976 (suicide by hanging); E. Mzolo, October 1, 1976 (no details given); W. Tshwane, October 14, 1976 (no details given); E. Mamasila, November 18, 1976 (no details given); T. Mosala, November 26, 1976 (no details given); W. Tshazibane, December 11, 1976 (no details given); G. Botha, December 14, 1976 (fell down stairwell); Dr. N. Ntshuntsha, January 9, 1977 (no details given); L. Ndzaga, January 9, 1977 (no details given); E. Malel, January 20, 1977 (no details given); M. Mabelane, February 15, 1977 (no details given); T. Joyi, February 15, 1977 (no details given); S. Malinga, February 22, 1977 (natural causes); R. Khoza, March 26, 1977 (suicide by hanging); J. Mashabane, June 5, 1977 (suicide); P. Mabija, July 7, 1977 (fell six floors during interrogation); E. Loza, August 1, 1977 (no details given); Dr. H. Haffejee, August 3, 1977 (no details given); B. Emzizi, August 5, 1977 (no details given); F. Mogatusi, August 28, 1977 (suffocation in epileptic fit)

African Anthem

Nkosi Sikelel' i Afrika
God bless Africa
Maluphakanisw' upondo lwayo
Raise up her spirit
Yizwa imitandazo yetu
Hear our prayers
Usi—sikelele
And bless us

Sikelel' amadol' asizwe
Bless the leaders
Sikelela kwa nomlisela
Bless also the young
Ulitwal' ilizwe ngomonde
That they may carry the land with patience
Uwusikilele
And that you may bless them

Sikelel' amalinga etu
Bless our efforts
Awonanyana nokuzaka
To unite and lift ourselves up
Awemfundo nemvisiswano
Through learning and understanding
Uwasikelele
And bless them

Woza Moya! [Yihla] Moya!
Come Spirit! [Descend] Spirit!
Woza Moya Oyingcwele!
Come, Holy Spirit!

Preface to the New Edition

On Tuesday, September 6, 1977, a friend of mine named Stephen Biko was taken by South African political police to Room 619 of the Sanlam Building in Strand Street, Port Elizabeth, Cape Province, where he was handcuffed, put into leg irons, chained to a grille, and subjected to twenty-two hours of interrogation in the course of which he was tortured and beaten, sustaining several blows to the head that damaged his brain fatally, causing him to lapse into a coma and die six days later.

The fatal blows were struck by one or more of the following members of the South African Security Police: Colonel P. Goosen; Major H. Snyman; Warrant Officers J. Beneke, R. Marx, B. Coetzee, J. Fouche; Captain D. Siebert; Lieutenant W. Wilken; Sergeant S. Nieuwoudt, and Major T. Fischer. (See Epilogue for corroboration by Peter Jones.) Most, if not all, of these men were members of two interrogation "teams"—one operating by day and one by night. Detainees with personal experience of Security Police methods say the day interrogation teams specialize in coordinated questioning, psychological tactics, and verbal abuse, but that the night teams are the assaulters, beating up detainees to "soften them up" for the day teams. If this procedure was followed against Steve Biko, the fatal blows were struck by one or more of the "night team"—Wilken, Coetzee, and Fouche.

However, these men were simply agents. The man ultimately responsible for the death of Steve Biko was James Thomas Kruger, minister of police, because it was his indulgent attitude toward the homicidal tendencies of his Security Police that created the atmosphere within which the torturers were given scope to act. Kruger can-

not validly claim to have known nothing of these matters, because two years previously I had warned him that there were criminal elements in his Security Police.

On the same occasion I told him of the importance of Steve Biko and later published a warning that if any harm came to him in detention, the consequences would be disastrous for the entire nation, and in particular for the Nationalist government. Mr. Kruger and his colleagues ignored this warning. Not only was Steve Biko detained several times, but he was increasingly persecuted, harassed, put into solitary confinement, and ultimately tortured and killed.

Kruger immediately implied that Biko had starved himself to death, but I knew this was nonsense. Steve and I had had a pact that if he should be detained, if he should die in detention, and if it should be claimed that he had taken his own life, I would know this to be untrue. Clearly, he had been killed by Security Police under the powers granted to them by the Afrikaner Nationalist government.

Therefore, in addition to being a personal testimony to Steve Biko, this book is an indictment of the Afrikaner Nationalist government and of the policy and the system it represents.

Steve Biko's death echoed around the world. He was only thirty years old when he died, and he had lived in obscurity, silenced from public utterance by banning orders and restricted to a small town remote from the metropolitan areas. He was forbidden to make speeches; forbidden to speak with more than one person at a time; forbidden to be quoted; forbidden to function fully as a political personality. Yet in his short lifetime he influenced the lives and ideals of millions of his countrymen, and his death convulsed our nation and reverberated far beyond its boundaries.

What made him so remarkable? What was so special about his life and his death? This book is an attempt to answer these questions from at least one perspective. It is an inadequate account, and others are better qualified to render it. Many others who knew Steve closely could

contribute to the fleshing out of this striking personality, and many books will be written about him in the course of the next few decades as appreciation of his historical importance grows. The more books written about Steve Biko the better, because the more that is known about him the more the significance of the man will be acknowledged.

This book is written as objectively as grief and anger in bereavement permits, because Steve Biko's significance to Africa and to the cause of freedom everywhere is more important for the reader to understand than his loss to me as a friend.

Nearly ten years after the original edition of this book was published in 1978 it has become the basis of a motion picture produced and directed by Sir Richard Attenborough for international release in late 1987. Biko's character, charisma, and leadership qualities are central to the theme of the film, which portrays events in South Africa during 1976 and 1977, thereby exposing the excesses of the apartheid policy to the world as no feature film has done before, and in the process revealing the basic causes of the escalating tragedy now unfolding in that country.

What I didn't realize early in exile was that while we in South Africa always referred to the Afrikaner Nationalists as "the Nationalists," in the world outside the phrase refers more appropriately to the African Nationalists fighting for liberation. So I have amended the text to refer to "the Afrikaner Nationalists," meaning the governing party in South Africa.

By temperament and inclination Biko preferred non-violent means of politicization—but then so did Mandela, Sisulu, Mbeki, Tambo, and other leaders of the African National Congress (ANC), and Sobukwe, Mothopeng, and other leaders of the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC). The latter simply saw no further alternative to violence at that stage, whereas Biko still saw fruitful potential for aboveground activity not necessarily involving violence unless the white minority compelled such a reaction. And while in his personal life he

sought to avoid violence, he did not hesitate to retaliate when attacked. On one occasion mentioned in this book, he hit back at an interrogator who had struck him.

But perhaps the most remarkable, and in some ways chilling, exposition of Biko's approach to provocation under interrogation was conveyed in an interview given only three months before his final imprisonment. It was published in *New Republic* magazine in January of 1978, shortly after his death. In the extract that follows, Steve Biko says things that may explain how he later came to be fatally assaulted:

You are either alive and proud or you are dead, and when you are dead, you can't care anyway. And your method of death can itself be a politicizing thing. So you die in the riots. For a hell of a lot of them, in fact, there's really nothing to lose—almost literally, given the kind of situations that they come from. So if you can overcome the personal fear for death, which is a highly irrational thing, you know, then you're on the way. And in interrogation the same sort of thing applies. I was talking to this policeman, and I told him, "If you want us to make any progress, the best thing is for us to talk. Don't try any form of rough stuff, because it just won't work." And this is absolutely true also. For I just couldn't see what they could do to me which would make me all of a sudden soften to them. If they talk to me, well I'm bound to be affected by them as human beings. But the moment they adopt rough stuff, they are imprinting in my mind that they are police. And I only understand one form of dealing with police, and that's to be as unhelpful as possible. So I button up. And I told them this: "It's up to you." We had a boxing match the first day I was arrested. Some guy tried to clout me with a club. I went into him like a bull. I think he was under instructions to take it so far and no further, and using open hands so that he doesn't leave any marks on the face. And of course he said exactly what you were saying just now: "I will kill you." He meant to intimidate. And my answer was: "How long is it going to take you?" Now of course they were observing my reaction. And they could see that I was completely unbothered. If they beat me up, it's to my advantage. I can use it. They just killed somebody in jail—a friend of mine—about ten days before I was arrested. Now it would have been bloody

useful evidence for them to assault me. At least it would indicate what kind of possibilities were there, leading to this guy's death. So, I wanted them to go ahead and do what they could do, so that I could use it. I wasn't really afraid that their violence might lead me to make revelations I didn't want to make, because I had nothing to reveal on this particular issue. I was operating from a very good position, and they were in a very weak position. My attitude is, I'm not going to allow them to carry out their program faithfully. If they want to beat me five times, they can only do so on condition that I allow them to beat me five times. If I react sharply, equally and oppositely, to the first clap, they are not going to be able to systematically count the next four claps, you see. It's a fight. So if they had meant to give me so much of a beating, and not more, my idea is to make them go beyond what they wanted to give me and to give back as much as I can give so that it becomes an uncontrollable thing. You see the one problem this guy had with me: he couldn't really fight with me because it meant he must hit back, like a man. But he was given instructions, you see, on how to hit, and now these instructions were no longer applying because it was a fight. So he had to withdraw and get more instructions. So I said to them, "Listen, if you guys want to do this your way, you have got to handcuff me and bind my feet together, so that I can't respond. If you allow me to respond, I'm certainly going to respond. And I'm afraid you may have to kill me in the process even if it's not your intention."

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PROLOGUE

As a Restricted Person under South Africa's banning decree I was forbidden by the government to write anything—even a diary or postcard—and the Security Police in charge of my surveillance had threatened to raid my house at any time of day or night to ensure that I wasn't breaking the ban.

My home was under constant observation from the sidewalk and from the Security Police cars that cruised close by, and there were clear indications that apart from monitoring all telephone calls and intercepting all mail, they had planted listening devices inside the house.

For these reasons I wrote most of this book in long-hand, only twice using a typewriter while playing a phonograph record to mask the sounds of the keys. I wrote at a table by an upstairs window from which I could watch the rather predictable routine of my watchers, prepared should they approach the house.

I had been banned for writing and speaking against the government over the killing of Steve Biko in Security Police custody, and there was no form of legal redress available. As a Restricted Person I was also forbidden to speak to or associate with more than one person at a time, other than members of my immediate family; forbidden to travel, communicate publicly, or be quoted in any publication.

There were forty-four of us in South Africa so banned—the main purpose of banning being to silence and punish critics of the government who could not be further prosecuted under existing law. The most famous of the forty-four was Winnie Mandela, wife of the leader of the African National Congress, Nelson Mandela, who in 1987 is in his twenty-fourth year of imprisonment.

Steve Biko had also been banned, and it would have amused him hugely to know that I would one day experience banning. Readers of this book will soon learn of the gulf that separated Biko and me when we first met—in fact I hadn't even known the regulations covering a meeting with a banned person, even though I had often written newspaper editorials condemning banning, detention, banishment, and all types of state punishment without trial. Yet before my three-year friendship with Biko I hadn't met a banned person.

"If a third person comes into the room, even to bring a cup of coffee, one of us has to go out," Biko had told me dryly. The Security Police parked outside his office had watched me arrive for our first meeting, possibly intrigued because I had up to then attacked Biko and followers of the Black Consciousness Movement. I had regarded their stance against apartheid as "radical." I had attacked their go-it-alone position as black exclusivity, and had even used the phrase "apartheid in reverse."

Soon after the initial tensions of that first meeting we became friends, and over the next two years the harassment of Steve Biko and his followers had inevitably drawn my wife, Wendy, and me into a degree of involvement with him and his movement that bracketed us together in the view of the Security Police.

This showed the extent of Security Police ignorance of the realities of black politics in South Africa; the reality being that our involvement on the fringes of the Biko organization was more personal than political; that as whites we could never be near the inner circle of political activism. Some of Biko's followers resented our friendship, misunderstanding a mutual trust that allowed me to do what I could to help his cause. Following his murder we joined in the massive protests led by his friends, followers, and colleagues, until October 19, 1977, when a number of us were banned as individuals, along with all the Black Consciousness organizations.

It was strange to become a prisoner in my own house, forbidden to do the ordinary things I had done freely all

my life. At first I laughed at the idea that the Security Police could prevent me from writing in my own bedroom. How could they see through walls? In theory, of course, I could write provided I stayed out of sight. But one of the psychological effects of banning is to make you hyperconscious of rooms with windows. It wasn't long before my imagination got the better of me. At any second, I imagined, the Security Police would look in and catch me writing.

That was why I did my writing upstairs. They would have needed a ladder—or sophisticated surveillance equipment—to look in through an upstairs window and I would have been able to hear or see them before they could break into my house.

Hiding each day's output of manuscript was a problem. Each hiding place I could think of seemed too obvious. I hid the first lot in the inside of the grand piano—then recalled seeing a film in which something had been unsuccessfully hidden in a piano. Eventually I made use of a large collection of record albums, realizing the Security Police would have had to go through hundreds of these to find the one I selected—a double album of Winston Churchill's speeches with, appropriately, a commentary by that champion of free speech, Ed Murrow.

I wrote most of the book at night to be free of the many telephone interruptions or the visits by well-meaning friends who came by one at a time. One of the snags of the banning was that one was always at home, unable to escape the goodwill of acquaintances. Few were rebuffed, especially so because it took courage to drive openly to our house, knowing the car license plate number was being taken down by my watchers.

It wasn't long before I tired of saying the same things over and again. In normal life we forget how often we converse with small groups of people; thoughts are usually communicated only once in a discussion. But with people coming in one at a time to discuss the same news of the day, I found myself repeating the same phrases, questions, and replies to husbands, wives, even children of the same family.

Another snag about writing during the day was the front door bell. Every time it rang it could have been a school friend of one of my five children, in which event I couldn't be in the same room with them; or, worse, it might be the Security Police on a routine check. Writing by day simply involved too many interruptions, and hurried hidings of the manuscript.

When the book was completed it became clear that its publication was dependent upon my escape from South Africa with my family. Although parts of it had been smuggled by friends to a publisher in England, this draft version—though an adequate account of what had happened to Steve Biko—was incomplete. The fuller version, which I hoped had more impact, had to travel with me to ensure that it would get out of the country without risking another's arrest.

The manuscript was "hot" for three reasons: it was an obvious contravention of the ban on my writing; the subject matter—the killing of Steve Biko—was political dynamite; and, thirdly, the manuscript concluded with an appeal for international economic sanctions against the South African government—an act of writing regarded as a treasonous capital crime. Beyond the manuscript's security, I was worried about my family's well-being.

The escape plans we considered were highly amateurish. Talking out in the garden, away from the electronic "bugs" in the house, my wife and I thought of several possibilities.

If we could get to Botswana undetected that would have been our first choice. Unfortunately Botswana was beyond the fuel capacity of the small plane owned by a friend, assuming that friend would have agreed to fly us, and, also, assuming that I could get from the house to an airfield undetected. The second choice was Lesotho, which was closer, because even though it was entirely surrounded by South African territory it was an independent black-ruled country well known for its willingness to harbor political refugees from South Africa. And Lesotho had an air service to Botswana.

The first part of our plan was a leisurely affair. Wendy would steadily siphon money from our bank account so as not to arouse suspicion as we made our preparations, over several months. But then something happened that made it necessary to speed up our escape plans.

Our youngest child, five-year-old Mary, was sent a T-shirt through the mail which was saturated with Ninhydrin, an acid-based substance that painfully inflames the skin. This came on the heels of a series of attacks on banned people and their families throughout South Africa. It was the single phenomenon related to banning that made it worse for whites than for blacks.

A banned black man, like Steve Biko, was a hero in his community. He had the support and acclaim of his people in the black township. A white person who was banned was a pariah in his white suburban neighborhood; worse, he was a traitor to his race and subject to the ire of angry white enemies who considered it a patriotic duty to show their hostility.

Bullets were fired at our house; telephoned threats and hostile stares from passing motorists became common. Yet it was the T-shirt incident that frightened us most. If that could happen to a five-year-old child then worse madness could not be ruled out.

Our friend Donald Card, formerly of the Security Police but today a sworn enemy of the government, had incontrovertible evidence that Security Police officers G. Cilliers and J. Jooste had been responsible for the shootings; further, that Security Police officers L. Van Schalkwyk and J. Marais had been responsible for sending the doctored T-shirt to Mary.

A postal official had seen Van Schalkwyk and Marais intercept the parcel containing the T-shirt, which pictured Steve Biko on the front and had been mailed from Natal by friends of Steve. The two officers were later seen by a black cleaner at the Security Police offices spraying the inside of the small T-shirt with Ninhydrin, a substance common to police forces all over the world. Manufactured in Sweden, Ninhydrin was invented to lift