

Whites Cannot Be Black

A Bikoist Challenge to Professor Xolela Mangcu

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Abstract

Professor Xolela Mangcu argues in his article ‘Whites Can Be Black’ that Steve Biko’s philosophy of *Black Consciousness* would support the thesis that white people can become black. In this article I argue that this thesis is incongruent with the articulation of Black Consciousness in Biko’s book of collected writings, *I Write What I Like*. I show that, for Biko, Black Consciousness is possible only in the context of a non-white person’s experience of white racism that is not only a material experience but also a psychological experience based on the racist claim that there is a hierarchy of race. I contend that a correct analysis of Biko’s writings would show that white people self-identifying as Politically Black are acting from bad faith that results from a flight from the responsibility that accompanies their facticity.

Keywords: bad faith, Biko, Black Consciousness, blackness, facticity, race, Sartre, whiteness

Race is a contested concept around which vigorous debate continues. For instance, although some writers theorise race as a fiction, others argue that it is an illusion (Appiah 1998) while yet others support the idea that race is a biological phenomenon (Andreasen 2005; Kitcher 1999). These postulations testify to the confusion that plagues the term and the uncertainty regarding what we can assert to know and expect in relation to this phenomenon. In this article I specifically want to address whether whites can be black. In his essay ‘Whites Can Be Black’, Xolela Mangcu (2015b) argues that whites can be black. However, what makes Mangcu unique is not that a white or black person can transcend race and acquire a national consciousness but his claim that a white person can transcend race and become a black person. In this article I argue that Mangcu has misinterpreted Biko, whose writings in his book of collected essays, *I Write What I Like*, would support the claim that

whites cannot, in fact, be black. I propose that because white people cannot experience the alienation that non-white people do, they cannot attain Black Consciousness and, thus, cannot be Politically Black.

In my argument I first give Mangcu's explanation of Biko's notion of Political Blackness, as spelled out in his article. Thereafter, I distinguish between essentialist and social constructionist notions of race. This distinction plays a significant role in identifying the exact locus of the difference between Mangcu and Biko's notions of Political Blackness. Following that, I characterise Biko's conception of Political Blackness. Finally, I interrogate Mangcu's interpretation of Biko's conception of Political Blackness using the philosophy of Black Consciousness and conclude that Mangcu has misread Biko. My main task is to discuss Biko's own conceptualization of the idea of blackness, not to present it as the best but to distinguish it from Mangcu's, as the latter's aim is to appropriate it for his argument that whites can be black. What is unique about Mangcu's claim is that he uses the philosophy of Steve Biko to bolster his case that a black person can transcend race. While Biko's position on the role of white people in the struggle and their limitations has been clearly extrapolated in his written work in *I Write What I Like*, there is no specific discourse happening concerning white people who pass as black and their capability of becoming black in a political sense. This enquiry is particularly relevant as it is becoming all the more necessary for black people to grapple with their identity in the context of the present-day political uncertainty in South Africa. Biko's philosophy can help with this endeavor for white people to think for themselves. In light of this, I will be limiting this article to the South African context for two reasons: First, it is this context that Biko was addressing in his works. Second, Mangcu's propositions about a new national consciousness direct the paper towards a local approach. Similarities and differences of racial experiences within global contexts are not explored in this article.

In the first part of the paper I will present Mangcu's attitude towards race in general and blackness in particular. Then I will extrapolate his understanding of Biko's notion of blackness. Thereafter, I give an exposition of different kinds of conceptualizations in order to ground both Mangcu's and Biko's outlooks in the greater conversation taking place in the field. After this I will expound Biko's conceptualization of blackness and consider the importance of his two conditions for legitimate black identity. Lastly, I will conclude by comparing Biko's and Mangcu's different viewpoints and showing that Biko's philosophy of Black Consciousness would not be lax

enough for whites to become black.

Mangucu's Articulation of Black Identity

Mangucu's proposition that whites can be black is part of a larger claim he makes in his writings (2015a, 2015b, 2017). He states that 'Biko's greatest relevance to our national life now may not be in his definition of blackness but his concept of a joint culture' (2015b). He considers Biko's notion of a joint culture to be the same thing as a race-transcendent national consciousness. He uses Biko's philosophy of Black Consciousness to build his argument, particularly as it pertains to his point that this race-transcendent kind of national consciousness can transcend race while preserving black identity. He describes this joint culture as 'a multi-racial society in an anti-racist democracy' instead of what has come to be known as nonracialism (2015a: 10). In this manner Mangucu's writing enters the general conversation that pertains to the possibility of an antiracist South Africa. He believes that when Biko (1996: 158) says he is 'looking forward to a non-racial, just and egalitarian society in which colour, creed and race shall form no point of reference', he is actually referring to a multiracial and antiracist society. Mangucu's (2015 a: 8) aversion to the term is that, as it gained support in the liberation movement, it supposedly became 'a negation of the concept of racial group identity'. In contrast, Rhodie and Liebenberg (1994: 45) assert that '[n]on-racialism also does not imply colour blindness, which would be a naive assumption after a long history of apartheid. Non-racialism merely holds out the promise that the state will not recognise or tolerate race as a public and legal criterion of exclusion, private racism notwithstanding'. Despite this explanation, Mangucu still considers non-racialism to have an 'antithetical stance to racial group identity' (2015a: 12), a stance he considers to be based on a false understanding of the role that race can play in group identity. It seems a contradiction for Mangucu to simultaneously advocate multiracialism and racial transcendence. For him this is not a contradiction because 'this would not be a multi-racialism based on biological racial or cultural essences but one that recognises not only people's racial experiences but also their contestation and reformulation of imposed racial essences to create new identities' (2015a: 10). According to Mangucu, race is primarily a historical and cultural phenomenon based on the common experience of the members of a particular race. Mangucu claims that race-transcendence is possible because blackness is a conceptually fluid political category. He

asserts that '[b]lackness may now not have the same meaning as it did under Apartheid - and it has never had any one meaning throughout history' (2015b). His point regarding social categories of race, he contends, is that it 'is not skin that gives us our identity, but our consciousness' (2015b). Below I will reveal how Mangcu uses Biko's philosophy to legitimise his claim that whites can be blacks.

Mangcu's Articulation of Steve Biko's Conception of Blackness

Mangcu claims that whites can be black. For clarity, he is saying that a person typically racialised as white in a society can *self-identify* as black in the political sense. There are two senses in which a white person can become black, according to Mangcu. He lays out the first way by recalling an example of a white girl rescued at sea and raised by the Mpondo people. Because she assimilated into the culture of the Mpondo people, following Mangcu's logic, she became black. Mangcu (2015b) writes that there were masses of 'Caucasians who became black through this form of acculturation'. So, seemingly, a white person can become black if they assimilate into a culture practised by black people. This can be referred to as *Cultural Blackness*. The second sense in which a white person can become black is through acculturation and experience of racial discrimination and defiance. I call this *Political Blackness* because it pertains to the political definition of blackness as articulated by Biko. Mangcu uses two quotes from *I Write What I Like* to support his claim that white people can legitimately self-identify as black. The first quote is a definition of blacks used by the South African Student's Organisation (SASO) that Biko used for his philosophy of Black Consciousness: 'Blacks are all those who are, by law and tradition, politically, economically and socially discriminated against and identify as a unit towards the realisation of their aspirations' (1996: 52). The second is: 'Being black is not a matter of pigmentation - being black is a reflection of a mental attitude' (1996: 52). Mangcu paraphrases this second quote thus: 'Blackness is a reflection of a mental attitude - skin pigmentation has nothing to do with it' (2015b). The two conditions for Political Blackness that Mangcu indicates are, first, that a person be discriminated against, and, second, that one possess a mental attitude of self-identification with others who work towards the realisation of their aspirations [of ending this discrimination]. Mangcu regards this mental attitude to be *Black Consciousness*. He refers to the interesting case of Rachel Dolezal in his analysis to give an example of a white person self-identifying as black. Dolezal is a white woman who considers herself a black woman and passed

as African American for numerous years but in 2015 was exposed by her family to be white. There is no apparent evidence that Dolezal experienced discrimination when in disguise as a black person and, thus, does not fulfil the first condition; therefore, he agrees that she cannot be Politically Black in that regard. However, if we follow Mangcu's logic regarding Cultural Blackness, if she had assimilated into a black culture, Mangcu would see nothing wrong with her self-identifying as Culturally Black. It appears that the white person would still be socially categorised as white but would have the choice to self-identify as culturally black.

Mangcu's next step is to make the claim that those white people who pass for black, such as Dolezal, and experience racial discrimination as a result would be fulfilling Biko's second condition for Political Blackness. Thus, if these white people identify with other black people and join the collective in striving for their interests as an oppressed group, they can legitimately identify as Politically Black. To make his case clear, Mangcu uses an example of a friend's mother who chose to hide her white identity to stay with her black husband and, thus, identified as black. Because she experienced racism as a result, she could legitimately self-identify as Politically Black. For Mangcu, that is the other way in which a white person can become Politically Black.

I have presented Mangcu's notion of blackness in the above section. I have asserted that he seems to have two ways in which a white person can become black. I have shown how his work indicates two kinds of blackness that the white person may attain: Cultural Blackness and Political Blackness. In this essay, however, I am specifically concerned with Mangcu's understanding of the way in which a person can become Politically Black because the claim under review is that Steve Biko's two principles are the conditions proposed for Politically Blackness, not Cultural Blackness. In the following section I will give an exposition of common conceptions of the notion of race in order to consider the contention that Mangcu's and Biko's notions of Political Blackness differ at the conceptual level and, thus, would not have the same support for the claim that whites can become Politically Black.

Conceptualisations of Race

In this section I explore the ways in which race has been conceptualised in order to give a theoretical basis to Mangcu's and Biko's conceptualizations.

Notably, I will examine how they both consider race to be socially constructed and real. There are generally two dominant understandings of the metaphysics of race: race essentialism and race anti-essentialism. *Race essentialism* is the belief that there are distinct human races differentiated by their biologically distinct essences or racial types. Proponents of this view (Andreasen 2005; Levin 2002) recognise a biological conception of race, which depicts races as bearing ‘underlying natural (and perhaps genetic) properties that (1) are heritable, biological features, (2) are shared by all and only the members of a race, and (3) explain behavioural, characterological, and cultural predispositions of individual persons and racial groups’ (Mallon 2006: 528-529). In other words, individuals who are part of a race group are considered to be members of said group because they alone possess distinctive identical biological traits or attributes that provide ‘a unified, singular social experience, a single canvas against which social actors construct a sense of self’ (Cerulo 1997: 387). For the essentialist it is uncontroversial that race is real and exists in the form explained above. Race essentialism has come to occupy a fringe position in the sciences due to the absence of conclusive scientific evidence of the existence of ‘racial essences’ in human biology.

In contrast to essentialism, anti-essentialists argue that the concept of race does not have a biological basis but is, rather, a social construction. For some anti-essentialists race is an illusion; it has the semblance of a real category but is actually an empty term signifying nothing. Anthony Appiah (1998: 40) claims there is no way we can find referents for the term. In fact, ‘[t]he evil that is done is done by the concept and by easy - yet impossible - assumptions as to its application’. Naomi Zack (1998: 78) argues that ‘[t]he whole idea of race requires an assumption of a population stable in certain physical characteristics, which will “breed true”. That is, the idea of race rests on fantasies of racial purity.’ However, says Zack (1998: 78), ‘[t]he facts of racial mixture, namely the existence of individuals of mixed race, undermine the very notion of race, which proposes “racial purity”’. For Zack, therefore, the term *race* has no meaning, and it is misleading to continue to use the word as if the biological notion of race were a reality (Mallon 2006: 526). The problem with this view is that it is not the case that if race essentialism is false, then race cannot be real in any other sense (Mills 1998: 47). Linda Alcoff (2001: 270) criticises this form of anti-essentialism for not being able to ‘capture the multiple meanings of race and assumes . . . that race can only refer to biology’ (2001: 270). Alcoff offers an alternative approach that shows that race is a social construction and is also real.

Alcoff (2001) argues that race, though being a social construction, is real and not an illusion or a fiction. 'This position is racial constructivism' (Mills 1998: 47). Here, the understanding is that race is simultaneously a social construction and real. Ron Mallon (2006: 534-535) divides constructivists into three categories: thin constructivists, interactive kind constructivists, and institutional constructivists. Thin constructivists argue that society can keep racial designations and use them while acknowledging that there is no biological fact behind them. For interactive kind constructivists, 'people are members of a race R insofar as they have R-typical experiences caused by racial labelling. [S]uch experiences are only possible in a society in which persons are causally affected by the racial labels they fall under' (Mallon 2006: 535). Lastly, institutional constructivists support the view that races are social entities and that their existence is manifested in the institutional structures of a very specific society with very strict characteristics that are not identical to another society, so each society is unique in how race is manifested in it.

Alcoff proposes a view that corresponds all three forms of constructivism discussed above: *contextualism*. Alcoffs (2001:270) contextualism conveys the message that the nature of race is dependent on the context in question. For contextualists, race 'is a means by which society allocates privilege and status' (Delgado and Stefancic 2001: 17). Similarly to thin constructivism, contextualists propose that the language of race be preserved even though the idea of a biological basis has been rejected. Retaining this language of race would be helpful in the cause of addressing past and present race-related injustices, for instance. Contextualists would agree with the interactive kind of constructivists that race signifies unique information about members of racial groups with regards to their individual as well as group experience in the context of racial categorization. Contextualists would also agree with institutional constructivists that social institutions act as the gatekeepers of racial identities in that they are 'culturally and historically local, they are relationally and socially produced, and they are causally powerful' (Mallon 2006: 536). For the contextualist, this not only means that these identities, being culturally and historically local, are part of the dominant epistemological practices of a given society but also that they may and do share some characteristics with other societies. Contextualism, then, is the view that 'race is socially constructed, historically malleable, culturally contextual, and produced through learned perceptual practice' (Alcoff 2001: 270). I find contextual-ism to be helpful with regards to delineating race because it succinctly brings across the character of race as a social

construction.

As a theory of race, the challenge constructivism faces is its basic premise that race is socially constructed. This challenge, which extends to contextualism, is the argument that if race is socially constructed, then it cannot be real. This is because, if something is a social construct, this implies that its meaning is contingent on how society uses it. By implication, if society's use for race - as a social construction - changes, so does its meaning. This being the case, to postulate that race is real is to give the idea of race the characteristic of a thing that cannot change and become something else. In defence, Alcoff (2001: 270) explains that social identities like race 'are real (or not) within the social world, but this is not to say that social identity is infinitely plastic, malleable to opportunistic specifications, or merely linguistic'. So where do the boundaries of socially constructed terms lie? Michael Root (1998: S633) reasons that '[s]ocial categories, unlike those in the natural sciences, are normative', whereas those in the natural sciences are descriptive. Social kinds are categorised through a normative strategy, as opposed to the naturalist strategy used in nature to categorise natural kinds. According to Gordon and Gordon (2006: 18), 'in the social sciences and the humanities, identification of phenomena requires working according to rules whose underlying subject matter always asserts an exception'. In contrast, when a law of nature is proven to have an exception, that law will be rejected and replaced with another that accommodates that exception. With human beings, '[s]ocieties are held together by the statements of what ought to be and not merely what happens to be' (Root 2000: S634). For example, when we watch a soccer match, we have expectations of what the rules will be. Although these are made up rules, there is still an expectation that they ought to be followed and that the game is a legitimate soccer game if the rules are indeed followed. The game of soccer is not real as we have come to understand natural kinds to be real; it is completely a social construction. However, we can distinguish between a game of soccer and a netball match. The boundaries of each kind of sport are respected by their inventors and every other stakeholder, such as the players and the fans.

In a similar way, races are real in the sense that they have rules about the epistemic interpretation that should be followed when referring to a race or races. These epistemic rules are not essentialist as would be the case with a natural kind, but they are binding. The rules are contingent on the context in which they are operating. For instance, the criteria of what counts as black may differ from context to context. However, there is still a general understanding across these contexts that typically blackness is accompanied

by certain properties. Historically, the criteria for racial identity have been ‘bodily appearance, ancestry, self-awareness of ancestry, public awareness of ancestry, culture, experience, and self-identification’ (Mills 1998: 50). When they do not conflict, the most these criteria can be is indicator properties of someone’s race. The point is that different contexts are governed by certain criteria that are perceived to be indicator properties of race, even if there is little consensus about what the term *race* itself is. In these contexts these criteria determine how society organises itself structurally and institutionally. These criteria are not only descriptive but also normative in that how one is perceived in that society determines whether they may attain certain rights. The manifestation of the phenomenon of race in society is thus inherently political. The meaning of blackness is contingent on the political and historical moment in which it is explored. Blackness under Apartheid, according to Mangcu (2015b), is different from blackness after 1994. The context is different. In the section that follows, I endeavour to show that Biko is also an anti-essentialist contextualist, albeit different from Mangcu. Below I will expound the context in which Biko outlined his conception of blackness.

Biko’s Conception of Blackness

Biko started to take the idea of black people’s resistance to Apartheid seriously when his brother Khaya was jailed for his political activities in 1963. The liberation movements such as the African National Congress and the Pan Africanist Congress had been banned by the state, and there seemed to be a lacuna of leadership in the struggle. Biko soon followed his brother’s example and was also harassed for his political activities. In 1968 Biko and other black students who had been part of the multiracial student formation NUSAS (National Union of South African Students) left to form the blacks-only SASO (South African Students’ Organisation). According to More (2017: 21), Biko and his political contemporaries read and were inspired by people in the Black Power movement in the United States at that time, such as Stokely Carmichael, Angela Davis, and James Cone (More 2017: 21). At the time African countries such as Ghana and Tanzania had recently gained ‘independence’ from their colonisers. The Black Consciousness movement integrated African modes of resistance to colonialism with other influences across the globe, such as Franz Fanon (Algeria), Julius Nyerere (Tanzania), Paulo Freire (Brazil) and the like (More 2017: 21, 24). Notably, members of

the Black Consciousness movement in South Africa were influenced by the thoughts of people like Robert Sobukwe, a significant contributor to cultivating the foundational ideas of the Black Consciousness movement who questioned the role that white liberals played in liberation movements in comparison to how blacks participated in those liberation movements and found that white liberals tended to dominate the movements. Sobukwe inspired Biko and others in the movement to locate ‘the responsibility of struggling against oppression and racism squarely on the shoulders of black people themselves’ (More 2017: 24).

The Black Consciousness movement that had begun as a student movement was gaining ground beyond student politics. The movement gained momentum in the context of strict Apartheid laws. The Population Registration Act that had been passed in 1950 divided the population into three racial collectivities: Coloured, Native, and White. In 1959 the Coloured category was further divided into the subgroups ‘Cape Coloured, Malay, Griqua, Chinese, Indian, other Asiatic, and other Coloured’ (Cowlin 2016). If an individual believed they had been miscategorised, they could appeal to a governmental board dedicated to hearing such cases. In practice the traits to which applicants to this board appealed generally invoked the following grounds for recategorization: the texture of the hair on one’s head, shades of skin colour, facial features, home language, neighbourhoods, friends and associates, kinds of work done, social standing and class, food and drink (Posel 2001: 62) - in essence, their appearance and way of life or, rather, their lived experience. As Posel (2001: 64) points out, because there was no exact science of race, a ‘racial classification, therefore, was a wide-ranging judgement about a way of life, in its entirety, rather than a narrower issue concerned merely with particular bodily features (such as skulls, brains or skin colour)’. My assertion, along with Posel (2001: 65), is that race was ‘the primary determinant of all experience: If race was a description of a shared essence that made people what they were, then its ubiquity was not simply a descriptive feature to experience, but also its primary cause’. This means that there was a strong sense in which racialization caused lived experience, and lived experience in turn was the evidence for race. Race was, thus, an ontological category.

More (2017: 51) classifies the concept of blackness as it is expressed by Biko and SASO into three: ‘(i) the *real* black person, (ii) the black person and (iii) the non-white person’. The attitude the *real* black person has adopted against Apartheid is that of defiance and is actively involved in individual and collective methods of resistance against the Apartheid regime (More 2017:

51). Secondly, the 'black person' is one who, 'while suffering from Apartheid oppressive machinery, recognises his blackness from a detached position, neither supporting the system nor openly resisting it. Such black people constitute a category which, through conscientisation, is amenable to change from an uncommitted blackness' to the blackness espoused by the *real* black person (More 2017: 51). Lastly, the term *non-white* was used by the movement to refer to 'those who were regarded or perceived as collaborators or puppets of the racist regime' (More 2017: 51). In this essay the *real* black person that More (2017: 51) describes can be called the *Political Black*, and the ordinary black person of More's second category can be called a *Racially Black* person. The person described in the first category is first and foremost politically active and is characterised by their political resistance to the oppression they face. The person in More's second category is defined principally by the Apartheid categories in which they are put, which is basically a racial category. The category of Racially Black includes the Politically Black person and the Non-white. Biko's concern is with the way in which the Racially Black person responds to the system of oppression because how they respond can indicate whether they are Politically Black or a non-white. In the section below I will explain Biko's two conditions necessary for someone to self-identify as Politically Black. This explanation will involve his characterization of the non-white.

Biko's First Condition for Political Blackness as Self-Identity

When asked to explain the choice of the word *black* to refer to the marginalised people of South Africa who are not white, Biko (1996: 115-116) explains,

historically, we have been defined as black people, and when we reject the term non-white and take upon ourselves the right to call ourselves what we think we are, we have got available in front of us a whole number of alternatives, starting from natives to Africans to kaffirs to bantu to non-whites and so on, and we choose this one precisely because we feel it is most accommodating.

So the categorization by white racist society is embodied by these different words, but the encompassing idea of white racist society is that all those who are not white are inferior. For instance, the Reservation of Separate Amenities Act of 1960 pertained to the separate use of public amenities by white (or European) people, on the one hand, and non-white people on the other, as opposed to dividing the amenities by the subgroups of African, Indian, or Coloured. As More (2004: 93) points out, '[a]ll people defined as races, other

than white were negatively referred to as non-whites. Their non-whiteness was their common identity within the antiblack world that confronted them'. This common identity derived from these groups' common experience of racial discrimination. So Biko's first condition for one to identify as politically black is that one experiences racial discrimination because of being classified as non-white.

For Biko this experience of racial discrimination takes two forms: a material struggle and an internal mental struggle. Racially Black people, says Biko (1996: 110), are materially 'oppressed by an external world through institutionalised machinery, through laws that restrict [them] from doing certain things, through heavy work conditions, through poor pay, through difficult living conditions, through poor education, these are all external to [them]'. This racial discrimination, which is an external pressure on the individual who is non-white, leads to the second form of the experience of racial discrimination: an internal, mental struggle. All these conditions, along with others, communicate to people who are not white that they are inferior to white people. A person faced with these conditions by virtue of not being white has thus 'developed a certain state of alienation [where she] attaches the meaning white to all that is good [and tends] to feel that there is something incomplete in her humanity' (1996: 110—111).

The Non-White

Notwithstanding the above discussion of the experience of racial discrimination, being discriminated against for not being white is not enough to qualify a person to consider herself Politically Black.

It is a necessary element but insufficient. As Biko asserts, 'the term black is not necessarily all-inclusive; i.e. the fact we are all not white does not necessarily mean that we are all black. . . . If one's aspiration is whiteness but his pigmentation makes attainment of this impossible, then that person is a [non-white]' (Biko 1996: 52). The non-white aspires to attain whiteness, however, she can never attain it since she 'cannot create a self-consciousness "existing in and for itself as it is dependent upon a negative trait: not being white' (Habibi 2014). To elucidate this point, it is useful here to understand the phenomenon of the non-white according to what Jean-Paul Sartre termed *bad faith*. More (2017: 91) describes it as 'the attempt by consciousness to avoid it being free by constituting itself as an object without freedom; it is a flight from one's freedom, from self and from others'. The individual struggling with bad faith lies to herself to escape the responsibility by which she is confronted as a being with the freedom to transcend its facticity. To

transcend one's facticity is to take responsibility for one's freedom to choose their response to their facticity. Facticity, for Sartre, refers to the way in which human beings as conscious beings exist in the world apart from their choices. For instance, one's facticity may refer to one's height, weight, skin colour, economic status, history, and so forth (Sartre 1956: 84, 481). Because our consciousness enables us to transcend our facticity, our freedom makes us responsible for the meaning we give our facticity. Robert Bernasconi (2008: 200) elucidates, 'Sartrean freedom does not mean that one chooses one's identity independently of society. It means that one chooses it by taking responsibility for the situation in which one finds oneself'. Human beings are facticity and transcendence at the same time, and so when we act in bad faith, we lie to ourselves about the possibilities accessible to us for us to transcend our facticity. When we deny our freedom, we are acting in bad faith. Bad faith is a form of self-deception in that the liar and the one being lied to are one and the same person. Paradoxically, in order to lie, we need to acknowledge the truth. As Sartre (1956: 49) puts it, 'in bad faith it is from myself that I am hiding the truth. . . . It follows first that the one to whom the lie is told and the one who lies are one and the same person, which means that I must know in my capacity as deceiver the truth which is hidden from me in my capacity as the one deceived' (Sartre 1956: 49). So the person acting in bad faith knows the truth but attempts to escape the unpleasant responsibility that the truth imposes on them but chooses to act as if the lie is the truth.

There are two ways in which one may act in bad faith as a consequence of being at once both facticity and transcendence: 'one in which transcendence is denied and facticity affirmed, and the other in which facticity is denied in favour of a pure transcendence' (Martin 2002: xii). With the former, a human being may eschew their responsibility by telling themselves that they have no choices in their situation and are completely susceptible to their facticity, thus avoiding the unpleasant truth that they are responsible for how they respond to their facticity. With the latter, one tells themselves that they are not at all susceptible to facticity, thus avoiding the unpleasant truth that they are limited in their choices by the circumstances in which they involuntarily find themselves. In both cases a truth 'that one hides from oneself is a truth concerning the self; it is from some aspect of one's own being that one flees' (Birt 2004: 56). I argue that the non-white acts from the first form of bad faith, which arises from an assertion that one is completely susceptible to one's facticity. The non-white suffers from bad faith insofar as she has given herself over to her feelings of powerlessness and her categorization by white racist society as subhuman. Biko's (1996: 30-31) characterization of the non-

white shows why this is so: '[r]educed to an obliging shell, he looks with awe at the white power structure and accepts what he regards as the 'inevitable position'. . . . All in all the black man has become a shell, a shadow of man, completely defeated, drowning in his own misery, a slave, an ox bearing the yoke of oppression with sheepish timidity'. Race for the non-white is facticity, 'a necessary contingency' (Bernasconi 2008: 202), and the non-white convinces himself of the lie that he is responsible neither for his oppression nor his feelings concerning this oppression. He seeks to evade the truth, according to Biko, that he is complicit in the crime of 'allowing himself to be misused and therefore letting evil reign supreme in the country of his birth' (Biko 1996: 31). The solution for the nonwhite's bad faith is Biko's second condition for legitimately politically identifying as black, which is Black Consciousness.

Biko's Second Condition for Black Self-Identity

Biko's second condition for legitimately self-identifying as Politically Black, Black Consciousness, is a mental attitude that serves as the only legitimate response to the material and mental alienation of non-white people. Black Consciousness enables one to embrace the truth instead of avoiding taking responsibility in eradicating the power of their oppressors. 'Black Consciousness is in essence the realisation by the black man of the need to rally together with his brothers around the cause of their operation - the blackness of their skin - and to operate as a group in order to rid themselves of the shackles that bind them to perpetual servitude' (Biko 1996: 53). Given that 'the most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed' (Biko 1996: 74), Black Consciousness is the simultaneous rejection of the white racist interpretation of phenotype and the discrimination it perpetrates along with the affirmation of the full humanity of those classified by white racist society as non-white. Thus, Black Consciousness is the foundation of black solidarity, for only when non-whites embrace their freedom to oppose white racism can they take responsibility for its eradication and overcome the lie that they are trapped in facticity, that they are an agencyless 'extension of a broom or additional leverage to some machine' (Biko 1996: 74). In Biko's analysis a person who can legitimately self-identify as Politically Black is one who experiences the material and mental struggles that arise from racial discrimination based on being classified by white racist society as non-white and responds to that discrimination with Black Consciousness.

Mangucu and Biko: Two Conceptions of Blackness

As a reminder, Mangucu claims that Biko would agree with the claim that a white person can be Politically Black if she experiences racism while passing for black and if she self-identifies as Politically Black in that experience. My assertion is that Mangucu's presentation of Biko's conception of Political Blackness contradicts Biko's Black Consciousness philosophy. In Biko's writings the logical conclusion to draw is that white people who pass for Racially Black people are being disingenuous about their facticity and the limits of their freedom. A necessary element of Black Consciousness is the response to the mental/psychological struggle generated by nonwhite people's oppression under the domination of white rule. The white person who self-identifies as Racially Black on the basis of her allegiance to the struggle of black people and her experience of discrimination aimed at non-whites is acting in bad faith by denying her facticity in favour of the idea that she is pure transcendence. This white person avoids the unpleasant truth that her phenotype and the historicity that accompanies it is her facticity; it is a circumstance in which she involuntarily finds herself. She attempts to avoid the unpleasant truth that she may only transcend her facticity not by denying it but by taking responsibility for it. As noted earlier, to transcend one's facticity is to take responsibility for one's freedom to choose their response to their facticity. To embrace their responsibility in their facticity, Biko says (1996: 24), white people must realise 'that no matter what a white man does, the colour of his skin - his passport to privilege - will always put him miles ahead of the black man. Thus in the ultimate analysis, no white person can escape being part of the oppressor camp'. They have the option to 'forget about the problem [of racial oppression] or take their eyes off the eyesore. On the other hand, in oppression the blacks are experiencing a situation from which they are unable to escape at any given moment' (Biko 1996: 24).

Biko uses dialectic materialism to explain the facticity of the Racially Black person and the white person. In this dialectic the thesis is White Racism, and the antithesis is 'a strong solidarity amongst the blacks on whom the white racism seeks to prey' (Biko 1996: 55, 96). Biko identifies White Power as the totalizing force that subjugates non-whites and is expressed through racism. White racism, as the thesis, is characterised by the exploitation of black people's bodies and is all-encompassing in the lives of those who live under it. The dispossession meted out by white racism targets those who are non-white, and it is the foundation of the political, economic, social, and epistemic privilege of those who are white. It is an ontological

oppression that requires an ontological resistance. For Biko, 'Black Consciousness . . . was . . . a necessary stage, not a means towards freedom rather than an end in itself' (More 2004: 89). This racist exploitation demarcates white facticity from nonwhite facticity so that the white person's responsibility diverges from that of the white person. For Biko (1996: 14) 'total identification with an oppressed group in a system that forces one group to enjoy privilege and to live on the sweat of another, is impossible'.

White racism forces privilege onto white people in one way or another, so much so that Biko (1996: 14) asserts that 'no one member [of white society] should automatically expect to escape from the blanket condemnation that needs must come from the black world'. This condemnation is a blanket condemnation because white racism is at the core a system perpetrated by white people working together as a group in order to subjugate non-white people (Biko 1996: 54). The only antithesis of this white racism is, then, a strong black solidarity of black people working together as a group. These group classifications are the facticity of both white and nonwhite persons. Both persons cannot escape their facticity; they can only transcend it by taking responsibility for how they choose to exercise their freedom within that facticity. Whereas the responsibility of non-white people is to 'respond to a situation in which they find themselves objects of racism', Biko (1996: 27) prescribes that for white people to take responsibility for their facticity, they should devote themselves to eradicating racism from white society.

The above discussion of Black Consciousness gives an indication as to why, in the Bikoist sense, the white person cannot become Politically Black. Although she may pass as Racially Black, she cannot become non-white. She cannot find herself in a position in which she is the genuine target of the racist proposition that Racially Black people are ontologically inferior to white people, nor can she feel a negation of her being in a world that is antagonistic to non-white people. Even if she may experience material dispossession when passing as Racially Black, she has the freedom to reject a life characterised by oppression and once again enjoy the privileges that come with being white in a racist world. A Racially Black person, in contrast, lives with the ontological burden that is her body. It is a body that carries what Noel Manganyi (1973: 18) calls a shared knowledge of 'suffering under the hands of white domination'. Alcoff (2001: 278) argues that because our first encounter with someone is often shaped by our vision, people have been socialised to look for those 'visible signs on the body' that are interpreted to be markers of race. In these social encounters '[t]here is a visual registry operating in social relations which is socially constructed, historically

evolving, and culturally variegated but nonetheless powerfully determinant over individual experience' (Alcoff 2001: 281). As a result, the way in which the Racially Black person experiences her being-in-the-world is mediated by how others see her, as opposed to what she chooses to show the world. 'Black Consciousness', according to Manganyi (1973: 18), 'has no choice but to start from the existential fact of the body'. This sense of alienation from oneself and the mediating of the self through others' eyes is something Fanon (1986) endeavoured to communicate. He finds that wherever he goes, he is 'a slave of [his] appearance' (Fanon 1986: 87). He is fixed. He cannot escape his blackness as a fact of his body.

Dolezal's mimicry of Racial Blackness and Political Blackness, in other words, is in bad faith because she seeks to escape the unpleasant truth that her ability to remove the mask at any given moment and enjoy the privileges afforded to white people sets her apart from the experience of Racially Black people, who are unable to present themselves as white. Those Racially Black people who *are* able to pass themselves off as white do so in bad faith and lack Black Consciousness. Those Racially Black people passing as white, the non-white, do not affirm the humanity of Racially Black people but rather aspire to whiteness. They cannot become Politically Black unless they affirm the humanity of their own phenotype - and the historical experiences that accompany it and that of other Racially Black people - by acknowledging its existence in spite of the oppression that accompanies it. These non-whites are unable to say, 'I'm black and I'm proud!' (Biko 1996: 50). The nonwhite does not escape her facticity and the material and epistemic oppression she faces but instead flees from taking responsibility for it. The white person who passes for a Racially Black person, in contrast, however much she may affirm the humanity of Racially Black people, cannot experience the discrimination that necessitates Black Consciousness as a response to oppression in the way that it would for a Racially Black person. She would never, for instance, be faced with the temptation to *pass* as white. She would simply need to present herself to be white. This is not to say that whiteness is a rigid category; there may be multiple ways in which whiteness evolves so that its material boundaries of inclusion and exclusion shift towards greater inclusivity or greater exclusivity. What remains constant, however, is that where white racism is the thesis, the privilege afforded to those categorised as white is accompanied by the racist oppression of those categorised as non-white.

There are two issues that occur in my exposition of Biko's notion of Blackness. First, if a white person passes for Racially Black and lives her life under the material oppression faced by other Racial Blacks, could she become

Politically Black if she stood in defiance in response to that oppression? In other words, how can we be sure that Biko's notion of Black Consciousness is not so inclusive that anyone who experiences oppression can be Politically Black? In my exposition above, it is clear that Biko, like Mangcu, would be classified as an anti-essentialist contextualist. However, there is a key difference regarding the kind of contextualists they are. To recall, contextualism is the view that 'race is socially constructed, historically malleable, culturally contextual, and produced through learned perceptual practice' (Alcoff 2001: 270). The context under review in this article is that of a white person who chooses to pass as Racially Black, experiences racial discrimination due to this passing, and self-identifies as Politically Black. Contrary to Mangcu's understanding of Black Consciousness, Biko's conceptualisation of Black Consciousness has at its core a material and mental struggle that brings with it an opportunity to affirm one's humanity in the face of a racist challenge against this affirmation. Mangcu's idea of Black Consciousness lacks the context of a fundamental experience of mental alienation that Racially Black people have in the first place. Mangcu's *passer* can never attain Black Consciousness because she can never encounter this racist challenge to her humanity. A white person is not the target of a racist epistemology that claims a human hierarchy of worth based on phenotype. The dehumanization is not levelled at her, so she is not confronted with a dehumanizing provocation. Therefore, she lacks the opportunity to attain Black Consciousness. In Sartrean terms, Mangcu affords her too much freedom with which to transcend her facticity.

The second issue concerns the exclusivity of the Black Consciousness movement. David Howarth (1997: 67) asserts that the Black Consciousness movement did 'contain tendencies toward racial exclusivism and particularism'. 'One of the main tasks of the BCM', he suggests, 'was the institution of a clear racial frontier around which oppositional identity could be forged'. Could it not be, so goes the critique, that the Black Consciousness movement is racist towards white people who feel a strong sense of solidarity with the oppressed and want to join the movement? The exclusion of white people from the movement was, in part, to ignite and entrench agency in Racially Black people, and the presence of white people from in the movement is antithetic to this agency. Even if a white person were to be a silent member, they are truly allies when they fight White Racism within the white community. As mentioned in an earlier section, what separates the white ally from her black contemporaries is that she has the freedom to choose to take hold of her privileges as a white person in a white world at any

time. This privilege, according to Biko (1996: 24), is a primary reason why ‘no white person can escape being part of the oppressor camp’. In fact, Biko (1996: 71) asserts that ‘total identification with an oppressed group in a system that forces one group to enjoy privilege and to live on the sweat of another’ is impossible.

Conclusion

In this article I have responded to Mangcu’s claim that Biko would support the assertion that whites can be black. I have argued in the negative of this interpretation of Biko’s philosophy and have put forward the view that Biko would contend instead that because white people cannot respond to the alienation perpetrated against non-white people with Black Consciousness, they cannot self- identify as Politically Black. In Biko’s analysis, for white people passing as non-white, their non-whiteness is not their facticity, but for non-white people their non-whiteness is their facticity. This distinction between experiences, I have shown, justifies the assertion that the responsibility with which the white person is confronted is fundamentally different from that of the non-white person. To transcend their facticity, non-white people need to attain Black Consciousness and form a strong black solidarity against white racism. To transcend their facticity, white people must turn towards white society and dismantle the fundamental racist structures and institutions that propagate and maintain their privilege. Thus, those white people who claim to possess Black Consciousness are acting in bad faith and contrary to the nature of their responsibility. When Mangcu says that they can transcend race, he is characterising them in a way that accords them too much transcendence, and this position causes bad faith.

In summary, to be Politically Black, according to Biko, one needs to have Black Consciousness, which is a mental attitude of resistance against the oppressive racial categorization perpetrated by white racism. This racial categorization is underpinned by an epistemic claim that phenotype is an indicator of racial hierarchy, and it gives social privilege to those people categorised as white - even those white people who pass as non-white. These white people cannot escape their privilege because they have the option of embracing their whiteness at any given time, which is an option that is unavailable those non-whites who have never been white. Blackness, as a social construction, is conceptually fluid, but not to the extent that it can be appropriated by anyone. Central to a person being black, politically, is the

resistance to a mental and material struggle. White people do not have this mental struggle, and so they cannot develop Black Consciousness. Biko would agree, then, that Mangcu is wrong and that whites cannot be or become Politically Black. Consequently, the new national consciousness for which Mangcu strives can only be achieved once Racially Black people no longer have to contend with a material or mental struggle originating from racism perpetuated against them.

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