

= Frances Ames =

Frances Rix Ames (20 April 1920 ? 11 November 2002) was a South African neurologist , psychiatrist , and human rights activist , best known for leading the medical ethics inquiry into the death of anti @-@ apartheid activist Steve Biko , who died from medical neglect after being tortured in police custody . When the South African Medical and Dental Council (SAMDC) declined to discipline the chief district surgeon and his assistant who treated Biko , Ames and a group of five academics and physicians raised funds and fought an eight @-@ year legal battle against the medical establishment . Ames risked her personal safety and academic career in her pursuit of justice , taking the dispute to the South African Supreme Court , where she eventually won the case in 1985 .

Born in Pretoria and raised in poverty in Cape Town , Ames became the first woman to receive a Doctor of Medicine degree from the University of Cape Town in 1964 . Ames studied the effects of cannabis on the brain and published several articles on the subject ; seeing the therapeutic benefits of cannabis on patients in her own hospital , she became an early proponent of legalization for medicinal use . She headed the neurology department at Groote Schuur Hospital before retiring in 1985 , but continued to lecture at Valkenberg and Alexandra Hospital . After apartheid was finally dismantled in 1994 , Ames testified at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission about her work on the " Biko doctors " medical ethics inquiry . In 1999 , Nelson Mandela awarded Ames the Star of South Africa , the country 's highest civilian award , in recognition of her work on behalf of human rights .

= = Early life = =

Ames was born at Voortrekkerhoogte in Pretoria , South Africa , on 20 April 1920 , to Frank and Georgina Ames , the second of three daughters . Her mother , who was raised in a Boer concentration camp by Ames ' grandmother , a nurse in the Second Boer War , was also a nurse . Ames never knew her father , who left her mother alone to raise three daughters in poverty . With her mother unable to care for her family , Ames spent part of her childhood in a Catholic orphanage where she was stricken with typhoid fever . Her mother later rejoined the family and moved them to Cape Town , where Ames attended the Rustenburg School for Girls . She enrolled at the University of Cape Town (UCT) medical school where she received her MBChB degree in 1942 .

= = Medical career = =

In Cape Town , Ames interned at Groote Schuur Hospital ; she also worked in the Transkei region as a general practitioner . She earned her MD degree in 1964 from UCT , the first woman to do so . Ames became head of the neurology department at Groote Schuur Hospital in 1976 . She was made an associate professor in 1978 . Ames retired in 1985 , but continued to work part @-@ time at both Valkenberg and Alexandra Hospital as a lecturer in the UCT Psychiatry and Mental Health department . In 1997 , UCT made Ames an associate professor emeritus of neurology ; she received an honorary doctorate in medicine from UCT in 2001 . According to Pat Sidley of the British Medical Journal , Ames " was never made a full professor , and believed that this was because she was a woman . "

= = Biko affair = =

South African anti @-@ apartheid activist Steve Biko , who had formerly studied medicine at the University of Natal Medical School , was detained by Port Elizabeth security police on 18 August 1977 and held for 20 days . Sometime between 6 ? 7 September , Biko was beaten and tortured into a coma . According to allegations by Ames and others , surgeon Ivor Lang , along with chief district surgeon Benjamin Tucker , collaborated with the police and covered up the abuse , leading to Biko 's death from his injuries on 12 September . According to Bentar & Bentar 2012 , " there were clear

ethical breaches on the part of the doctors who were responsible " for Biko .

When the South African Medical and Dental Council (SAMDC) along with the support of the Medical Association of South Africa (MASA) , declined to discipline the district surgeons in Biko 's death , two groups of physicians filed separate formal complaints with the SAMDC regarding the lack of professionalism shown by Biko 's doctors . Both cases made their way to the South African Supreme Court in an attempt to force the SAMDC to conduct a formal inquiry into the medical ethics of Lang and Tucker . One case was filed by Ames , along with Trefor Jenkins and Phillip Tobias of the University of the Witwatersrand ; a second case was filed by Dumisani Mzana , Yosuf Veriava of Coronationville Hospital , and Tim Wilson of Alexandra Health Centre .

As Ames and the small group of physicians pursued an inquiry into members of their own profession , Ames was called a whistleblower . Her position at the university was threatened by her superiors and her colleagues asked her to drop the case . By pursuing the case against the Biko doctors , Ames received personal threats and risked her safety . Baldwin @-@ Ragaven et al. note that the medical association " closed ranks in support of colleagues who colluded with the security police in the torture and death of detainees [and] also attempted to silence and discredit those doctors who stood up for human rights and who demanded disciplinary action against their colleagues . "

After eight years , Ames won the case in 1985 when the South African Supreme Court ruled in her favor . With Ames ' help , the case forced the medical regulatory body to reverse their decision . The two doctors who treated Biko were finally disciplined and major medical reforms followed . According to Bentar & Bentar 2012 , the case " played an important role in sensitising the medical profession to medical ethical issues in South Africa . "

= = Cannabis research = =

Ames studied the effects of cannabis in 1958 , publishing her work in The British Journal of Psychiatry as " A clinical and metabolic study of acute intoxication with Cannabis sativa and its role in the model psychoses " . Her work is cited extensively throughout the cannabis literature . She opposed the War on Drugs and was a proponent of the therapeutic benefits of cannabis , particularly for people with multiple sclerosis (MS) . Ames observed first @-@ hand how cannabis (known as dagga in South Africa) relieved spasm in MS patients and helped paraplegics in the spinal injuries ward of her hospital . She continued to study the effects of cannabis in the 1990s , publishing several articles about cannabis @-@ induced euphoria and the effects of cannabis on the brain with co @-@ author David J. Castle of St Vincent 's Hospital , Melbourne .

= = Personal life = =

Ames was married to editorial writer David Castle of the Cape Times and they had four sons . She was 47 years old when her husband died unexpectedly in 1967 . After her husband 's death , Ames 's housekeeper Rosalina helped raise the family . Ames wrote about the experience in her memoir , Mothering in an Apartheid Society (2002) .

= = Death = =

Ames struggled with leukemia for some time . Before her death , she told an interviewer , " I shall go on until I drop . " She continued to work for UCT as a part @-@ time lecturer at Valkenberg Hospital until six weeks before she died at home in Rondebosch on 11 November 2002 . Representing UCT 's psychiatry department , Greg McCarthy gave the eulogy at the funeral . Ames was cremated , and according to her wishes , her ashes were combined with hemp seed and dispersed outside of Valkenberg Hospital where her memorial service was held .

= = Legacy = =

South African neurosurgeon Colin Froman referred to Ames as the " great and unorthodox protagonist for the medical use of marijuana many years before the current interest in its use as a therapeutic drug " . J. P. van Niekerk of the South African Medical Journal notes that " Frances Ames led by conviction and example " and history eventually justified her action in the Biko affair .

Ames 's work on the Biko affair led to major medical reforms in South Africa , including the disbanding and replacement of the old apartheid @-@ era medical organisations which failed to uphold the medical standards of the profession . According to van Niekerk , " the most enduring lesson for South African medicine was the clarification of the roles of medical practitioners when there is a question of dual responsibilities . This is now embodied inter alia in the SAMA Code of Conduct and in legal interpretations of doctors ' responsibilities " .

Ames testified during the medical hearings at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 1997 . Archbishop Desmond Tutu honored Ames as " one of the handful of doctors who stood up to the apartheid regime and brought to book those doctors who had colluded with human rights abuse . " In acknowledgement of her work on behalf of human rights in South Africa , Nelson Mandela awarded Ames the Order of the Star of South Africa in 1999 , the highest civilian award in the country .

= = Selected publications = =

Mothering in an Apartheid Society (2002)