

Post -apartheid, Black theology of liberation: A decolonising theology in South Africa¹

Abstract

The article focuses on Black Theology of Liberation (BTL) as an ongoing decolonising theology of South Africa. The article involves a brief survey of the emergence of BTL within the context of the United States of America and South Africa. It also connects untold stories of resistance against colonisation within the African context, with that of liberation movements across the global South (e.g. Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT)). Furthermore, in order to trace different contexts in which black theology of liberation emerged in South Africa, a dialogue on the theory of analysis of oppression and liberation within the South African context will be advanced. This will link historical, and contemporary struggles within the South African context. Subsequently, it offers a critical account on the state of BTL in theological education; with a clear focus on some of my experiences and struggles as a theology student.

1.1. Introduction

much of the post-apartheid academic discourse about transformation has resolved around the notions of academic freedom, the centrality of the academic project, university autonomy, the bashing, and the ridiculing of all notions of Africanisation, and knowledge production (Maluleke 2016:2).

Without doubt progress has been made within universities in post-apartheid South Africa; the intake of black students has increased. However, it is argued there has been tendency among some people in the university to posit the hifalutin notion that knowledge is untouchable, that it is exclusive and depends on non-negotiable doctrines, without nuance, applicable in all situations, and all times. “The choice of topics South Africa academics occupied themselves clearly did not enable them to anticipate, let alone get into grip with, the burning worker and student issues that have catapulted universities into the #Mustfall movements” (Maluleke 2016:2).

Student activism in South Africa emerged in contexts where South African universities subject choices, curriculum went on to reflect the legacies of a segregated system. In the

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humanities and theology, and natural sciences many went on to believe that we must continue looking up to Europe, the United States, and the other “developed countries” for academic guidance. Even in our dialogues of a new South Africa we looked up to America, and Europe. Without getting into details South African transformation discourses within the university context became overwhelmingly white; for example, black philosophers had to withdraw their membership from the Philosophical Society of Southern Africa (PSSA) because of racism in 2017.² PSSA was described by its members as “in crisis”, because it “failed to recognize the philosophical prowess of African thinkers before 1994 and into the democratic dispensation, and that there was blatant racism in the classroom and amongst colleagues” (Govan Whittles 2015:2).

Similarly, the Mustfall movements, and the call for decolonisation within South African universities (also known as RhodesMustFall, FeesMustFall etc.) emerged as a disruption and radical tapestry of continual social economic challenges that strained the transformation agenda post-apartheid. Within the university context, black student felt that they were marginalised, and shut out of the transformation discourses. “The role that whiteness played in tempering with the discussions placed a volatile conversation which was seemingly for a few. Thus, the university unrest can be traced to the continued use of tempered discussion as proxy to conversation for transformation. It is argued that it is these transformation conversations that maintained the status quo. Consequently, out of fatigue the black students argued against transformation, and opted instead for decolonisation. Propelling the whole country to open conversations on colonial power, race relations, colonialism, black feminism, and to question concepts such as reconciliation and forgiveness on which the new South Africa was founded.

Against this background, the overarching argument of the article is that BTL is/has been at the forefront of the ongoing attempts to decolonise theology, particularly in South Africa. BTL has been instrumental in breaking down colonial missionary theologies that are often overlooked within theological discourses. “The irruption of the liberative paradigm used by BTL in its noble intent is/has been an epistemological breakaway from Western theology; which ‘often intended to offer if not impose a recipe on about how to become like the West’” (Vellem 2017:2). Moreover, the article suggests that for BTL, the must fall movements in South Africa, the call for decolonisation is/has been affirming. Because it engages discourses that BTL school has been reflecting and interpreting throughout its very existence. It is the

² <https://www.pressreader.com/south-africa/mail-guardian/20170210/281569470472992>

wretchedness of black people that led BTL theologians to argue that the “starting point for BTL is Blackness. The black people who are oppressed, the social analysis of the context and condition of blackness are key to this paradigm” (Vellem 2017:4). Thus, the must fall movements viewpoint of decolonisation forms part and parcel of BTL. BTL derives its theology from/within the decolonial turn discourse or the other way around. Student activism is not just “the signs of the time”, but a matter of life and death from BTL perspectives. It is a call to praxis; that theology is always informed by context and within the South African context it is the memory of the miserable blacks –the wretched, wounded.

1.2 Resistance against colonialism

Resistance to colonialism has existed since the very inception of modern forms of colonisation and; at least since the late 14th and early 16th century. Queen Nzinga Mbade of Ndongo, in Angola fearlessly fought against the colonialization, and the expansion of slave trade in central Africa in the 16th century by Portuguese. She is remembered within the decolonial school discourse for her political and diplomatic judgement, and brilliant military manoeuvres.³ Furthermore, leaders like Tiyo Soga resisted colonialisation. In his return from Scotland, Soga was met with *iNqawule* or the mass Cattle killing of 1857. The mass holocaust known to the Xhosa people as *iNqawule* or the cattle killing.⁴ The “legend” is that a young woman known as Nonqawuse convinced the vast majority of the Xhosa nation to slaughter all livestock and destroy all crops in order to “somehow” send the British colonialists back into the ocean from which they came to enslave and pillage (Mnyanda 2016: 1).⁵ This resulted in a famine that ‘led to the death of more than 30, 000 people, leaving 29,000 destitute, and the rest of the Xhosa people forced to give up their lands and seek work in the colony.’⁶ It is in this context that Rev Tiyo Soga found himself in his return from Scotland. From this context, Tiyo Soga found himself in his return to South Africa.

Tiyo Soga was the first black Christian priest in South Africa, thus becoming the first “coconut” in South Africa. With a Scottish woman as his wife he became the symbol of a new world in South Africa. However, it is argued that he was taunted, and mocked by settlers

³ In Angola Queen Nzinga is remembered, a major street in Luanda is named after her, and a statue of her was placed in Kinaxixi dedicated by former president Dos Santos to celebrate 27 years of independence in Angola, 2002.

⁴ In 18 February 2017, South Africa marked 160 years since the *Ingqawule*.

⁵ The holocaust is name after Nongqawuse.

⁶ This is just after the Xhosa people donated with cattles to the Queen of England to help the poor and those who were in need in England at that time **Ndebele:)**

in Port Elizabeth. The settlers told Rev Tiyo Soga that, African people would be totally overwhelmed by Europeans, and that his culture and all it stood for would disappear and be forgotten.⁷ With Inqgawule in his mind, from the very same month Tiyo Soga lamented the destruction of his people by colonialism. He wrote the hymn; *Lizalis'idinga Lakho* which translates to, 'Fulfil your pledge, your commitment O God'. Bishop Malusi Mpulwana describes the song as a song of hope that "assured hope and confidence that the faithful God will make good on the pledge of the Jesus manifesto: To set the oppressed free and proclaim the year of the Lord's favour."

O Lord, bless (Nkosi khawusikelele)

The teachings of our land; (Iimfundiso zelizwe lethu)

And thereby revive us (Uze usivuselele)

That we may restore goodness (Siphuthume ukulunga) (Soga original lyrics)

Bishop Malusi Mpulwana laments that "this original version is not the popular version that is widely known; the popular one is a "remix" altered in the Methodist Xhosa hymnal, presumably for a tolerant evangelical message that reads as follows: *Nkosi khawusikelele iimfundiso zelizwi lakho* (Lord bless the teachings of your Word). Instead of the original words which said, "teachings of our land".

The above-discussion is very important, especially today, because this song was composed and written in a time where the colonialist project was at its pick in South Africa. 'The war of Mlanjeni was the longest, hardest, and ugliest war ever fought, over 100 years of bloodshed in the Cape Colony's Eastern Frontier', but, Nongqawuse's vision was the final straw. Thembeke maintains that "even Grey admitted "The cattle killing was by far the most decisive movement on the direction of Christianity," but its most significant consequence was economic, 'a restless nation who for years have harassed the frontier, may now, to a great extent, be changed into useful labourers'"(Thembeke 2017: 19).

There are moments and movements that played a significant role in the decolonial turn ongoing project. These are signalled by heightened observations that linked colonialism, racism, and other forms of dehumanisation. The formation of ethnic movements of empowerment, feminism of colour, and the appearance of queer decolonial theorising, that

⁷ Quoted from a paper presented by Malusi Mpulwana at the Kairos Document 30th celebration).

eventually resulted in variety of decolonial turn discourses. These movements, theoretical schools pointed us to a family of diverse positions that share a view of coloniality as a fundamental problem in the modern age. And decolonisation as a necessary task that remains unfinished. Through decolonial turn discourses, whether from W.E Du Bois, Frantz Fanon, Steve Biko, Paulo Freire, it was clear that “just as the oppressor, in order to oppress, needs theory of oppressive action, so the oppressed, in order to become free, also needs the theory of action (Freire: 1970:28).

Thus, in the 1960s, Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) introduced a liberation hermeneutic. Precisely, because while western theology’s concerns were to convert the non-believer, believing was not the concern for EATWOT. The question for the then so called “third world countries” was whose side is God in the struggle for liberation and justice? A different way of doing theology was introduced, and the central question was “who are the interlocutors of theology?” Or who are asking the questions that theologians try to answer? The preferential option for the poor was given the centre. Scholars argue that this choice of interlocutors was more than an ethical commitment, it was an epistemological commitment, requiring an interpretive starting point within the social analysis of the poor themselves (see Gutierrez 2012). The experiences of the oppressed people became a heuristic device becoming the point of departure from western epistemologies. Black theology of liberation (BTL) which this article focuses on forms part of these liberation paradigms introduced by EATWOT.

Motlhabi (1986: 37) writes that BTL is a theology that comes from the oppressed people who share an experience of disinheritance, and oppression. To be precise, Motlhabi argues that the origins and sources of BTL are the historical past of black people in North America, and in South Africa. Moreover, the philosophical conceptualisation of BTL is based on the impact made by western culture, particularly through its Christian religion, and the general historical and contemporary experience of black people in a white, colonised world. Within the context of America, it is argued that James Cone is the originator of BTL intellectually. ‘James Cone presented a systematic method of BTL, where he used training in western theology, the bible tools, and more importantly, dependent on his predecessors and contemporaries in and outside the church for the raw material of BTL. (see Motlhabi 1986).

1.3 The history of Black theology of liberation in South Africa

However, Motlhabi (1987:40) argues that from within the South African context. BTL began

from the actual way of doing theology namely, practice of preaching, and exercise of pastoral duties before content to be analysed systematically was developed. Because BTL was seen as having one leg within the context of the US, and with the other in Africa. Within its development it was argued that BTL must find its roots within the African Independent churches (AIC's that make close links to culture and tradition), and in African traditional religions. It was in fact argued that black theology is African theology. Thus, arguing that South Africa can provide the cultural and traditional phenomena. Black theologians in South Africa argued that in the African context, the missionary drive though it did not succeed in stripping the African off his culture, and traditions. It succeeded in distorting and making the African ashamed of themselves and their heritage. Africans are viewed, as uncivilised, savage and their beliefs as superstitions. The missionary approaches in Africa are never satisfied in having the native in its grasp, but it turns to the native past with the intent of disfiguring and distorting it. For instance, today in South Africa there is still some people who believe that Africans somehow arrived in South Africa from further north in the continent, and they use this to justify land conquest. The Afrikaners still base possession of stolen lands from such arguments which for example, argue that the Xhosa people killed the Khoisan people who "somehow" arrived before the Xhosa people in the Cape. We are told that the Xhosa people were thieves who went to war with the colonisers for stolen lands, and that the Boers went on 'punitive expeditions' to teach the thieves a lesson. From this basis, BTL argues that the Dutch reformed church preached apartheid, and from the missionary church was not vigorous in speaking out against colonialization, and apartheid. Moreover, it is from this context that BTL rejected white theology's interpretation of the gospel and sought to interpret the gospel of Christ in the light of the black condition (see Motlhabi 1986:47, Itumeleng Mosola 1986).

Challenged by Civil rights movement in America, the coming of Black Consciousness Movement, Steve Biko's critic of Christianity in Africa, and the Soweto Uprising in South Africa; BTL theologians asked what has the gospel of Jesus Christ to do with the black struggle for liberation, and justice. The interest of BTL was to analyse the nature of the gospel of Jesus Christ in the light of the oppressed, so they might see the gospel as inseparable from their immediate conditions and bestow on them the power to break the chains of oppression, thus blackness became the starting point (see Boesak 2017).

Consequently, the methodological framework of BTL pursued all intellectual energy in the analysis of economic relations, structural distortions in society that accentuate inequalities, and social biases against black South Africans. The aim of BTL was not just to understand the

socio-political conditions of black people who lived under oppression, but to change them. The ultimate goal was the liberation of black people from all oppressive conditions that dehumanised them. Thus, within the South African context BTL engaged three theories of oppression, and liberation namely; the black solidarity phase, the black solidarity-material phase, the non-racialist phase (Ntintile (1996), West (2010)).

1.3.1 The black solidarity phase (late 1960s -1970s)

The black solidarity phase focuses on conceptualisation of oppression, mainly, on racism as the cause. The main concern being how racism victimised black people. In the analysis of the phenomenon of racism, it is posited that racism had subjective and objective dimensions (see Biko 1972). The subjective dimension had to do with the psychological impact racism has on black people, meanwhile, the objective dimension has to do with the social, cultural, political, and economic effects of racism on black people. In a nutshell, for whites to perpetuate the myth of black inferiority, they must first denigrate everything black, black humanity, especially black culture and history, which therefore leads to self-rejection. In this analysis of oppression, the socio-psychological dimensions of racism are emphasised. Thus, liberation is viewed as the elimination of racism with all its attendant evils. In the end, liberation is viewed as the realisation of an anti-racist society in which black people are treated as human beings entitled to enjoy the privileges of their country. In such society the contribution of black people is fully recognised, and culture and history accorded the place of honour it deserves (see Journal of Black theology in South Africa, published in 1996).

1.3.2 The Black solidarity –material phase (late 1970s-1980s)

The Black solidarity –material phase concentrates on revealing the dimensions of class and race, and gender. This phase, focuses on the oppression of the black working class, arguing that the black working class bears the brunt of oppression. Moreover, this phase reflects on the oppression of black women, that the situation of black women is even worse. Black women are oppressed because of race, gender, and social class position. Oppression in this phase has to do with economic exploitation, racial subjugation, and sexism. Cause and effect between racism and exploitation, and between racism and sexism, are central. Liberation for this phase means elimination of the conditions that lead to exploitation, and dehumanisation of all black people in general, and of the black working class. The vision, is a liberated South Africa where black workers enjoy full participation in every aspect of society. Therefore, the vision could only be realised in anti-racist, anti-sexist, and socialist South Africa, in which the

black working class plays a significant role (see *Journal of Black theology in South Africa*, published in 1996).

1.3.3 The non-racial phase (1982-1989)

At the time of apartheid, the non-racial phase analysis of oppression focused on apartheid. Apartheid seen as the worst form of racism, being akin to Nazism. This phase concerned itself with apartheid. It was argued that apartheid affected all South Africans regardless of race and colour. The non-racialist phase focused on legalised racism, and the lack of democracy. This phase suggested that apartheid affected all South Africans; specifically, the right of black people to vote, and be elected to political office in South Africa, and the white people who were aware of democratic ideals but were not practising them because of apartheid. Moreover, the legalised apartheid divided blacks and whites from being neighbours, attending the same churches, schools, and marry whomever they want. The policies of apartheid deprive their citizens of the above-mentioned rights and many others. Liberation here was the elimination of apartheid, and extension of democracy to all South Africans regardless of race, creed, or colour was the ideal. The vision championed by this phase is that of a non-racial democratic society in a united South Africa, in which rights and privileges were equally enjoyed by all citizens regardless of race or colour. This phase, followed the guiding principles of the freedom charter, forming the basis of a liberated South Africa (see *Journal of Black theology in South Africa*, published in 1996).

All the above-mentioned phases are interrelated. BTL theologians such as Tinyiko Maluleke have suggested that BTL uses all of them, thus all of them are important, and they have played a significant role in the struggle against colonialism, and apartheid.

However, Ntintile (1996:11) argues that the last phase was the fuzziest, and simplistic analysis of oppression, and liberation in South Africa. Interestingly, this analysis seems to be like one of the church documents namely, the *National Initiative for Reconciliation* (NIR), of 1985. For instance, the NIR focused on legalised racism, and supported the freedom charter without differentiating between oppressed and oppressors. The NIR document, like the phase three analysis had the potential of misleading the black majority into believing that once apartheid laws have been illegalised, and the freedom charter accepted, most importantly democracy had been installed the black majority's lives would be changed for the better. It is 24 years since the dawn of democracy, led by a black government of the African National Congress (ANC that produced the freedom charter), but, South Africa remains a colonialist

racist, sexist, and with widespread inequalities with the divide between the rich and the poor widening. “Structural apartheid residues as well as the pure selfish interests of the current political rulers” (Tshaka 2015:1).

As a result, in 2014, the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) published a report that announced that as South Africa makes progress towards certain areas of reconciliation, the transformation of material, and symbolic inequalities become increasingly overbearing to the progression of reconciliation. Meanwhile, in racial politics, IJR announced that in terms of acknowledging the injustice of the past and supporting redress measures. White South Africans were much less likely to agree with such measures. For instance, the report suggested that only half of white South Africans agreed that apartheid was an unjust, inhumane, criminal system and only a third agreed that it resulted in the continued impoverishment of black South Africans today. Moreover, regarding the question of redress, white South Africans were not only less likely to agree with the extent of historic injustices, but also less likely to agree with the measure of redress, compensation that is required by those who suffered from the systems implementation. The report suggested that in terms of the statement that reconciliation is impossible when those disadvantaged by apartheid are poor, and that the government should support victims of apartheid. Only about three in every ten white South Africans agreed, which is half of every black South Africans.

The above-mentioned context is the reality, and it is the context in which the call for decolonisation emerged. It is the situation in which the Mustfall movements found themselves; this includes movements for service delivery in the townships, the Marikana mine workers, Julius Malema and the birth of Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), and lastly, the student movements. The following section focuses on the state of BTL post- apartheid in South Africa, however, with a clear focus on black student viewpoint on the position of BTL within theological studies.

1.4. Black theology of liberation in South Africa post-apartheid

It can be argued that in theological education BTL became the thing of the past within the South African context. In fact, within the university, it never even entered the classroom, but it was confined to conferences (some would say to research papers). Tshaka (2015:3) writes that already in the 1980s and early 1990s, there was a view of a new critical theology that adopted a language that was friendly to all in the new South Africa. Tshaka writes that while there was nothing wrong with the development of a new theology, the new critical theology

that was developed compromised the black reality. He argues that this compromising theology of black reality came together ‘in the 1999 multi-event (Religion in public life) held in Cape Town organised by white liberal friends in conjunction with some black protagonists. Because of their involvement in BTL, they felt the need to determine the direction of black theology of liberation. With some of the black protagonists moving into political, and management positions in different institutions. Soon BTL evaporated into an elitist project that was used as a spring board to personal well-being’ (see Tshaka 2015).

Consequently, within theology BTL was argued to be a protest theology at the time of the struggle, therefore, in post-apartheid South Africa there is no need for it. It was argued that issues raised within BTL can be addressed within the context of Prophetic theology. However, this remains to be seen because Vellem (2012: 1) observed that though emphasis has been rather on the notion of prophetic theology post 1994, Prophetic theology’s relationship with the liberation paradigm was becoming unclear. Of course, we must be aware that prophetic theology was born from within the church, and for the church. Though it claims to be against empire, but it is done from a safe space because the church is an institution of power, and quite often in South Africa of colonial power. Christianity had used ‘the cloak of Christian missionary enterprise in order to hide the ruthless economic exploitation and political downfall of Africans’ (Thembeke 2017:53). Therefore, if prophetic theology is not done from the experiences, and context of wretchedness, woundedness. Without BTL’s liberative paradigms then black struggles, black pain, and suffering, and the consequence of colonisation will be left off. And what remains in theological debates is what I call silencing of BTL; where even the praise and worship from the poor is held hostage.

1.4.1 Black theology of liberation: a viewpoint of a black student in the classroom

The article maintains that within the confines of the classroom the silencing and censorship of BTL was characterised by the often response; “there is insufficient literature on black theology”. Engaging with other students and sharing ideas on what constitutes as academic knowledge student in theology often lamented that black theology of liberation was not part of the curriculum. Theological studies we undertaken were mostly European theologians, the likes of Martin Luther, Karl Barth, Moltmann and others. Whenever we would run to a black theology document, we often went to our supervisors, and lecturers to ask if we can work on BTL. But we were often met with the response, there is insufficient literature.

The “insufficiency of literature” concerned us as students eager to learn, create and produce

knowledge. The response was seen as a form of suppression because BTL offered students the necessary tools to engage with their experiences of pain, suffering as Black, African students in the new South Africa. As graduate students, many wanted to work on BTL because it reflected on daily lives of blacks in South Africa, but also it was a historical journey to get to know our own story as a people. Indeed, most importantly, students wanted to work on BTL because the statement “there is insufficient literature” was of course untrue, and unscientific. The question was often that, if they cannot study black theology, and develop it further within the university because there is insufficient literature. Then why are we in the university in the first place? Insufficiency, shouldn’t be the reason why graduate students are encouraged to study black theology? After all the role of the university is to verify unknown knowledge, create and produce it? Moreover, is it not true that “knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through restless, impatient, continued, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other (Freire 1970:45).

Within theological discourses amongst student these above-mentioned questions characterise the debates in their engagement in the decolonial turn discourse. Like professor Ndumiso Dladla in philosophical studies argued “African philosophy has been marginalised, and it was simply used as an exotic option that should be included in a menu of an assortment of things” (Govan Whittles 2017:1). Students in theology, expressed the same experiences within theology, particularly in fields such as systematic theology.

For example, at a conference at Stellenbosch in 2014. I attended professor John de Gruchy’s 75th birthday conference at the University of Stellenbosch.⁸ Dr Allan Boesak, a well-known BTL scholar was presenting paper on the last day of the conference. Dr Boesak presented a paper entitled, “A hope unprepared to accept things as they are”: Engaging John de Gruchy’s challenges for “Theology at the edge”, 2014. In a captivating and persuasive manner, Boesak reminded the audience about what the struggle times were about. He argued that the struggle was against systemic injustices that came with imperialism, colonialism which were then extended by the apartheid government. During the time of questions and discussion I raised my hand and made a comment:

Thank you for your work, but it has become a matter of entertainment. My generation has been pleading to study Black liberation theology. But it seems that there is no space for black liberation theology in the university. There is no space because when we ask our lecturers to study Black Theology in the university we

⁸ Professor John De Gruchy is a well-known professor as he was one of those who took “pen and ink” to write about the church struggle against apartheid.

are advised that there is “insufficient literature available. Black theology is good enough for political manifestos.”

In the above comment, I had forgotten to ask; why is it that black theologians always present their papers in theological spaces at the last day of the conference? I have never attended a conference in which black theologians set the stage for the conference. Their papers are always on the last day of the conference when people are too tired to engage or have left. Like professor Ndumiso Dladla in philosophy BTL had become a form of an exotic ritual that is supposed to entertain the theologians towards the end of conferences. With the protagonist blacks grand standing, and consequently controlling the black masses as they become the sole owners of black pain, and struggles. This latter statement is visible in the way the protagonist blacks are/ have been responding to student’s movements, labelling students as uncontrollable hooligans. Nevertheless, the response at the conference was slightly different from insufficient literature. BTL books were in the library, including those of Allan Boesak and on the shelves of the lecturers. After the panel discussion most of the HOD’s who were present at the conference came individually to suggest that, “black theology books are in the library.” The response had shifted, to suggest that the literature was in the library. Of course, the books are in the library, however my experience is being told that I cannot work on BTL because there isn’t enough literature available. Thus, the response of library, hinted to what students often suspected, that is: there isn’t anything academic about black theology of liberation.

However, after the conference I was forced to challenge myself and ask the fundamental question about BTL. The question was why is it overlooked in academic spaces in South Africa? Was it because BTL asks the fundamental question of epistemology? Or is about “Who” is asking the question about epistemology? Is it possible that the struggle is about “who” is asking the question of epistemology? This is because the emphasis on the question of epistemology is not distinct from BTL. The question of epistemology is not a new question; it can be traced back to the rise of Protestant liberalism in the nineteenth century, for example, the work of Schleiermacher and others (see Allen 2012: 167). The different ways of interpretations, and methods used by scholars such as Barth, Bultmann, Karl Rahner and others. After all, in the type of theology that emerged in modernity the crux of the debate was always about methodological insights. And this is when I discovered that it might be because black theology asked fundamental questions about colonialism, power, racism, and injustices that the South African has maintained throughout the new South Africa. Boesak (1976: xi) once argued that engaging in liberation theology in the South African situation is an

extremely difficult, risky business. Of course, engaging BLT post-apartheid in South Africa would be an extremely difficult, and risky business.

1.5. Black theology of liberation: A decolonising theology post-apartheid

BTL is a challenge to the Christian church as an institution, but mostly a difficult, risky business because the Christian church is grounded on established western Christianity, more importantly Western theologies. With some theologians that occupy theological spaces seemingly believing that theology can be taken from one context to another, without engaging with that specific space, and context. Theological education became exactly what Paulo Freire termed “banking education” (see Freire 1993). Vellem (2015:1) argues that to discern changes that have taken place post-apartheid “change” must be subjected to a hermeneutic of suspicion. Like students have raised the important issues of decolonising the curriculum (including spaces), Student fees, etc. With Marikana mine workers, and Malema’s Freedom Fighters (EFF) raising the issues of systemic injustice. The church, together with universities must be the first institutions where a hermeneutic of suspicion is employed. In a country where Christian leaders such as Desmond Tutu became the midwives of the new South Africa. Using Christian terms such as reconciliation and forgiveness as founding concepts of the new South Africa. Even before we critique the South African government, Christianity should be the first in the decolonial turn discourse. It was the settler church that provided theological justification for apartheid. But more importantly, it was the missionary church that was in the fore front of land conquest in South Africa; where the church was planted, the livelihood, the cattle’s, the lands of indigenous people were stolen.

Where Christianity was spread; the people had to cast away their indigenous clothing, their customs, their beliefs. People were divided into camps namely, the converted (amagqobhoka), and the pagans (amaqaba). ‘The difference in clothing between these two groups became at times internecine warfare; stripped of the core of their being and estranged from each other because of their differences. The African people became the playground for colonialists.’ Henceforth, the systematic articulation response to Western Christianity that came in the 1960s was rooted in the dungeons of colonial oppression which then shaped the paradigm of liberation within the struggle church. (Biko, 1976)

Moreover, because change within the South African ecclesiological landscape is at times euphorically celebrated. Without giving attention to the foundations and pillars upon which racist and exclusive of ecclesiology are built.

“Straddling the classical view of ecclesiology without the historical models, and the experiences of oppression, ecclesiology in South Africa remains abstract, and

from BTL the subversive character of the church is in the memory of miserable, the condition of blackness” (Vellem 2015:5).

Thus, the student call for decolonisation, is critical for the development of South Africa. Vellem (2015:5) argues that from the perspective of BTL, ‘the pervasive spirit or fetish settler, and missionary models of ecclesiology is still dominant even to this day despite attempts to deal with these. He argues that the church in South Africa needs to be unshackled from false consciousness, from the colonial legacy and its pervasive trauma that remains a ferocious residue in South Africa post-apartheid. He argues:

“the colonial legacy of pigmentocracy, the cultural domination and annihilation of the indigenous dispensation of black Africans, is not devoid of institutional structures of faith and their historical performance in South Africa” (Vellem (2015:5).

Moreover, he argues that ‘from the perspective of black theology of liberation the boat of liberation remains elusive, moreover, unshackling the church remains a methodological question from, the perspective of black theology’. Theology needs to engage in the project of unthinking the West; the spirit of doing black theology of liberation in decolonial times must be taken seriously (see Vellem 2017).

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