

Black Theology of Liberation

(Is it the) Thing of the Past? A Theological Reflection on Black Students' Experiences

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Abstract

This article pursues a theological reflection on black students' experiences using the liberative paradigm found in Black theology of liberation (BTL). Reflecting on black students' experiences in the classroom, the article asks the question; is Black theology of liberation the thing of the past? Pertaining to the question, the article links James Cone and Steve Biko's experiences in university with my own experiences in the university, particularly as a student of theology in South Africa. Therefore, the focus of the article is threefold; James Cone's experiences as a student of theology in America, Steve Biko's experiences as a black student under the apartheid government. Lastly, the article investigates my own experiences to present a theological reflection on black students' experiences post-apartheid.

Keywords: James Cone, Steve Biko, Black Student, Black Student Experiences, Black Theology of Liberation

1. Introduction

Amongst other things, the article reflects on the status of BTL in present-day South Africa. However, with a clear focus on the need for BTL in theological education, particularly in the contexts of the student call for decolonisation of the curriculum in South Africa. Inspired by the likes of Frantz Fanon, Steve Biko, Bell Hooks student's movements announced the need for decolonisation of South African universities. They argued that to decolonise the university is to re-imagine the university space, the curriculum, and the worker relations in post-apartheid South Africa (*Rhodes Must Fall, Fees must Fall, and End of Outsourcing*). Black students argued that to decolonise is to recognise the need of a complete calling into question the colonial/apartheid situation they found themselves in post-apartheid South Africa (Booyesen 2016). Against this, the article presents a cross generational experiences of black students in university. By reflecting on James Cone, Steve Biko's experiences together with those of the new generation of black students in South Africa, the article presents a diasporic experience.

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In the aftermath of the passing of the father of BTL, namely; James Cone in 28 April 2018 the article's overall intention is to suggest that to celebrate and remember the contribution made by Cone in academic discourses is to remember the impact he made on many black students in different generations, giving them the necessary tools to express and articulate themselves in contexts of oppression. Another goal of the article is to generate conversations about the mission of the church, and its contributions in the struggles of the new generation in South Africa.

In the main this article examines intergenerational intersections in Cones,' Biko's and the authors experiences as black students in universities. The argument is that BTL has to be included in the curriculum of theological training as it remains a subject and field that is on the peripheries.

2. James Cone's experiences as a black student of theology

In his reflections on BTL, James Cone clearly points out what made him to write BTL. He argued that he struggled to make sense of God in his life as a black student, and in the lives of black people in America. It was an existential crisis that gave rise to his liberation theology; the struggle was how to make sense of a theology that did not speak to his own existence, experiences as a black person in American society. He argued that if to know self, is to know the historical self, and make sense of existence in the present being (Cone, 1970:50). The question was; why black freedom did not form part of the educational ministry in theological seminaries in America, and in Europe.²

Cone (1970:50-53) maintained that BTL was born in the courage to affirm being in the midst of non-being, for in recognising black existence in America as non-being, the black is forced to ask, "what God has to do with black struggle for liberation". If to know God is to encounter him in historical liberation process as experienced in the community of the oppressed people in the bible (Cone, 1970:52). The task of BTL in America, was to analyse the black condition in the light of God's revelation in Jesus Christ with the sole intention of creating a new understanding of black dignity among black people (Cone, 1969:117). He argues that it was against this background that he socked himself, his theology in blackness with liberation at the centre. Blackness was the starting point and the main criterion for doing theology, and the only tool for liberation in the struggle for justice in America. He maintained that "the appearance of Black theology on the American scene then is primarily due to the failure of white religionists to relate the gospel of Jesus to the pain of being black in a white society" (Cone, 1986: 4).

² The Cry of Black Blood: The Rise of Black Liberation Theology. Presented by James Cone. (2016: New York: Union Theological Seminary, 2018.) YouTube video.

In fact, Cone (1977:150) pointed out that BTL was as old as when the first African refused to accept slavery as consistent with religion and as recent as when a person intuitively recognises that the confession of the Christian faith receives its meaning only in relation to political justice. The liberative paradigm of BTL was not created in a vacuum and nor was it a simply intellectual enterprise of black professional theologians as many wishes to argue today. BTL was found in the songs, prayers, sermons, in the beauty and the tragedy of the Civil Right Movement as black people outpoured and expressed black visions of truth, created not for slavery but for freedom (Cone, 1977:150-157). BTL was a theology of, and for the black community seeking to interpret the religious dimensions of the forces of liberation in their community. It was a theology in search of a Christian theology in an age of societal dehumanization. Henceforth in its articulation contemplated the ultimate possibility of nonbeing (death) with the full intention to affirm the ultimate possibility of (being) life. It was in this regard that blackness then stood for all victims of oppression who realised that the survival of their humanity is bound up with liberation from whiteness (Cone, 1969:1-10).

It was the context of preponderance of abstract ideas about God that he came to realise that new times require new methods. According to Cone (1970:51) in the Bible, the knowledge of God is neither mystical communion nor abstract rational thought. It is the recognition of divine activity in human history through faith. Thus, BTL was the contextualization and appropriation of the God-talk to speak to the history of black suffering and pain in America. Because white theologians in America defined the theological task outside of black suffering, the task of Black theology in America was to “analyse the nature of the gospel of Jesus Christ in the light of oppressed blacks so they may see the gospel inseparable from their humiliated condition, and as bestowing on them the necessary power to break the chains of oppression” (Cone, 1986:5).

Cone (1977:153) maintained that theologians must come down from the mountain top and start reflecting on the experiences, the hurts and pains of the poor, the marginalised, the oppressed people. He argued that dreams need to be socially analysed because without scientific analysis dreams will disappear into the night. Thus, BTL was a matter of life and death enabling black people specifically in the U.S. to be conscious and recognise that the social, economic status of black people was determined by white people's inability to deal with the presence of colour. The focus on blackness was to be conscious of what colour meant for the black community and that is blackness is the reason for his oppression in American society. Blackness was the knowledge of ones being that placed one in conflict with those who refuses to recognise one's humanity, and in the context of James Cone, it was white Americans who refused to recognise the humanity of Black American's.

One of my favourite but challenging argument from James Cone was when he argued that if black people wish to live up to their people's expectations. Black people must look beyond Europe and America for the sake of Europe, for themselves, and for humanity. Black people must turn over a new leaf, and work out new concept, and try to set afoot a new humanity (Cone 1977:153). It is against this statement that I argue that BTL as it emerged from James Cone was and has always been a decolonizing discourse. With his reflection on the black experience in America, James Cone joined scholars such as Frantz Fanon, Du Bois, and many others who called into question white-western education in the world. Like the black students in post-apartheid South Africa Cone dared to re-imagine theological education in America.

Therefore, 'the irruption of the liberative paradigm used by James Cone in its noble intent is/has been an epistemological breakaway from Western-European theology; which 'often intended to offer if not impose a recipe about how to become like the West' (Vellem, 2017:2).

3. Steve Biko: A black student's experiences under apartheid

Inspired by the example of James Cone, and the struggle for liberation in South Africa, South African BTL emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s. From the beginning, students were a crucial part of its emergence; this includes the likes of Steve Biko, Sabelo Ntwasa, Mokgethi Motlhabi, Mamphela Ramphele, Malusi Mpumlwana, Manas Buthelezi, Barney Pityana, and other students at the time (Motlhabi, 2009:162-180). These students were not just critical of apartheid policies, but the systemic injustices that gave rise to apartheid in South Africa.

More precisely, Steve Biko critiqued the system of colonialization that gave rise to the apartheid government. Steve Biko argued that there were two forces in South Africa; one of oppression by the external world through institutionalised machinery. Institutional oppression manifested itself through laws that restricted black people from doing certain things in South Africa, through heavy work conditions, through poor pay, through very difficult living conditions, and through poor education (Arnold, 2017). According to Biko, the second force was that one of self-rejection. He maintained that self-rejection made black people to develop a certain state of alienation in which they attached the meaning of white to all that is good in the world. Black people associated good and equated good with white. Biko argued that this alienation was sustained through education. In university a black child writes an essay on topics tally very well with white experience. Black students had to grapple with something foreign to them, but also superior in a sense (Arnold, 2017:54-55). Like in the current struggle movements, Biko did not just critique the culture in university, but investment companies that came to invest in South Africa

for the precise reason of provision of exploitation of cheap labour from the black ranks (Booyesen, 2016).

3.1 Steve Biko's critique of Christian theology in South Africa

The most important critique that Steve Biko, and his generation managed under apartheid was to critique the church and its theology—an important matter the new generation has overlooked and did not have the courage to challenge. Steve Biko critiqued the kind of theology that was taught in academic institutions in South Africa, and more importantly, the Christian church's involvement in the oppression of the black people.

Steve Biko critiqued the black church for not being able to break the chains of colonization, dehumanizing white Christianity. He argued that the 'black church continued to believe in practising a theology that kept the Bible captive to enslaving hermeneutic, and subservient to a Christianised, colonialised mind set' (Boesak, 2017:207). In fact, Biko described the black church as the "poisoned well" from which black oppressed people are forced to drink. Biko pointed out that while Christianity had gone through rigorous cultural adaptation from ancient Judea through Rome, through London, through Brussels and Lisbon, somehow when it landed in the Cape, it was made to look fairly rigid. The usage of the spear in South Africa became a hallmark for savagery, the indigenous peoples clothing, languages, customs, their religious beliefs were described as pagan and barbaric. Thus, black African people were divided into two camps; the converted (*amaqobhoka*), and the pagans (*amaqaba*). For one to be a true Christian one had to cast out everything that is African spirituality. By some logic, Biko accounts that the Western Christian religion was the only scientific religion, and the African religions were merely superstition in spite of the biological discrepancies so obvious in the basis of the Western Christian religion (Biko, 1978: 56-57).

Biko (1978:57) suggested that Western theology went further to preach a theology of hell that scared Africans with stories of eternal flames gnashing of teeth and grinding of bone forcing our fore-fathers and mothers to believe that it was worth their time to be a Christian. I want to argue that this theological discourse continues to keep black people within the Western Christian church, even today as black people fear going to hell. Furthermore, Biko argued that in 'its introduction Christianity was corrupted by the inclusion of aspects which made it the ideal religion for the colonization of people. Thus, in its interpretation became the ideal religion for the maintenance of the subjugation of black people' (Biko, 1978:57).

Engaging BTL in their own time, black students of theology argued that in the African context, the Western-European missionaries drive though it did not succeed in stripping the African off, of his culture and traditions. It succeeded in distorting and making the Africans ashamed of themselves and their heritage. Africans were viewed, as uncivilised, savage and their beliefs as supersti-

tions. Missionaries' approaches in Africa were never satisfied in having the native in its grasp, but it turns to the native past with the intent of disfiguring and distorting it (Mosala & Tlhagale, 1986:175-199). Like Cone, Black theologians in South Africa rejected white theology's interpretation of the gospel and sought to interpret the gospel of Christ in the light of the black condition (Mosala & Tlhagale, 1986:47). It is in this regard that BTL as it emerged from Cone became extremely important in the black struggle for justice and liberation against apartheid, and colonialism.

It became clear that BTL was a theology that came from the oppressed people who shared an experience of dispossession, displacement, and oppression. Critical of Cone's use of western training in articulating black theology, black scholars advanced BTL for the liberation of the black people in South Africa, and Africa. Black South African scholars argued that BTL must have one leg in Black America, and one leg in Africa. Therefore, suggesting that BTL must find its roots within the African Independent churches (AIC's that make close links to culture and tradition), and African Traditional Religions (ATR). It was argued that BTL is African Theology, thus, arguing that perhaps South Africa's role in BTL could be to provide the cultural and traditional phenomena (Mosala & Tlhagale, 1986:37).

BTL in South Africa 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 dehumanized them. Thus, within the South African context, BTL engaged three theories of oppression and liberation: the black solidarity phase, the black solidarity-material phase, and the non-racialist phase.

Of course, Tshaka and Makofane (2010:536) suggest that in the 1980s in academic spaces, there were debates concerning the future of BTL; the question was, however, if BTL had a future in academia. Did black theology of liberation have a future in the academia? Tshaka and Makofane, contended that one of the black students of theology, namely; Simon Maimela responded to these concerns by stating that BTL as a theology of liberation was around to stay. Maimela argued that when used ontologically, the term "black" refers literally to certain people, is specific, and therefore particular (Tshaka & Makofane, 2010:536). As such, it is confined to black people and their concerns as Cone argued. Cone argued that the focus on blackness did not mean that only blacks suffer as victims in a racist society, but that blackness is an ontological symbol and visible reality which best describes

what oppression means in America.³ Cone argued that when used symbolically, blackness referred to 'every human situation of enslavement, domination, and oppression and therefore to the situation of deprivation, powerlessness and of being the underdog who suffer injustice at the hands of the powerful and the ruling elite (Cone, 1986:7).

However, in post-apartheid South Africa, BTL has been confronted by "unpredictable" or "predictable difficulties. Tshaka (2015:1) points out that white liberals in conjunction with some of the "black protagonists" became adamant that black theology of liberation was only necessary as a protest theology against apartheid. With some of the "black protagonists" moving into political, and management positions in different institutions to support the new black government. It was not long, after, that BTL evaporated into an elitist project that was used as a spring board to personal well-being'. It is against this background that this article asks the question, is BTL the thing of the past?

4. A black student's experiences in academia in the post-apartheid era

Likewise, the theologies that I was taught in university in the new democratic South Africa were those of Karl Barth, John Calvin, and Martin Luther and others. When one needed ethical guidance, one depended on Euro-Western philosophers and theologians. James Cone's theology did not feature in any of my theological education.

I only came across BTL in my graduate studies. *Farewell to Innocence: A socio-ethical study on Black Theology and Black Power*, (1976) is the first book I came across in liberation theology. From this book, I discovered James Cone and discovering James Cone's BTL changed my life for the better in academia. In the 1960s, Boesak argued that there were problems within theological debates to accept Cone's BTL. The fundamental problem was that BTL as introduced and announced by Cone was based on the reality of the theology of liberation. It was the challenge BTL as introduced by Cone posed for the Christian church, and the realities that are often ignored by White-Western theology, and the church of the western world. "The realities of rich and poor, of white and black, of oppressors and oppressed, of oppression and liberation from oppression" (Boesak, 1976:1-3).

Boesak (1976:3) argued that white people, and the Western Christian church was used to moving through history with bland kind of "innocence". Hiding painful truths behind façade of myths, and real or imagined anxieties; silently hoping that God would take the responsibility for human failure. Through reading Allan

³ Of course, other black liberation theologians in America such Victor Anderson and J. K. Cameron Carter disagreed with Cone on the notion of "ontological blackness".

Boesak's book, I travelled through time without never really living my present time. I realised that Boesak's experiences as narrated in the book were similar to my experiences in the new South Africa. I realised that the whole South Africa, even the theologically-founding concepts such as reconciliation, forgiveness personified this white, Western innocence.

Furthermore, BTL became more important for me when Boesak argued that blacks must realise that liberation from coloniality does not happen automatically or naturally, even when we manage to get some form of liberation we must realise that the oppression could simple continued on another level. He also contended that we must realise that the situation of the black is not caused by some cosmic inevitability by powers beyond our control. "Historical structures are created and maintained by people, and oppression is a system" (Boesak, 1976:3).

He suggested that theological education in Africa in the black communities must take the responsibility and formulate in its own words, (its own language about the Black South African people's belief in God and the Christian faith within the context of their struggle and socio-economic conditions) their belief in God. Like Cone, he proposed that as black people we could no longer hide behind theological formulas created from somewhere, with an illusion of universality applicable everywhere and in every situation, and context. Blacks must be ready to re-evaluate thoroughly traditional roles of white liberals, and they must produce the necessary knowledge for the liberation of the oppressed people in the world.

I must admit, I felt challenged by Boesak, as a graduate student eager to create and produce knowledge I was filled with excitement. As a black woman growing up in villages, and townships of South Africa watching families die out, one by one, from entirely preventable and treatable diseases, and women suffering from gender-based violence, and families including my own living in poverty, I was challenged, and given responsibility.

Reading Tinyiko Maluleke's opinion pieces on the Mail & Guardian was never the same. With much enthusiasm, I began to understand why Tinyiko Maluleke has advanced the idea that maintains that Africans live in the tragedy and the wonder of the African continent. Questioning whether "Africans are poor because they are religious, religious because they are poor, or religious in spite of being poor?" (Maluleke, 2015). The African tragedy was not just a political predicament but also a theological one.

Discovering BTL, in fact, for me was a process of conscientization. Through BTL, I discovered myself in history, thus placing myself in existence as a black woman. I was so excited that I ran to my professor to tell him that I wanted to work on BTL. However, he told me there was insufficient literature in black theology; therefore,

he advised that I cannot study BTL. So disappointed, I discussed my interest in BTL with other graduate students; however, the students responded, “it is said that there is insufficient literature”.

4.1 Insufficiency vs literature in the library: What about the curriculum?

At Professor John De Gruchy’s birthday conference in Stellenbosch University, 2014, I decided to ask why BTL does not appear in theological education. To ask this question, I made the following 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 are advised that there is “insufficient literature available. Black theology is good enough for political manifestos.”

I made this comment on the last day of the conference when Allan Boesak presented a paper on what I term as memoir of black theology of liberation in South Africa. His paper was a response to the new generation of activism arguing that it was a ‘hope that was unprepared to accept things as they are’ in the new South Africa that drives the new generation to stand against injustices. Engaging John de Gruchy’s challenges for “Theology at the edge”, Boesak challenged the church for failing to engage the liberative paradigm in the new South Africa (Boesak, 2017:194-226). It is in this context that after so many years of being told there was insufficient literature in BTL, a different answer emerged: “the books were available, but in the library”—as if I were not aware that the books were available in the library.

However, the shift of the literature availability in the library, but not in the curriculum forced me, personally, as a research student to ask essential questions about BTL. Why is it that BTL is overlooked in academic spaces in South Africa? I was faced with many contractions in my mind. Because even if it were evidently, that BTL was just a protest theology in the times of apartheid. Is there no further need for BTL in the present day? Is really BTL a thing of the past today?

Considering that I grew up in a new South Africa characterised by service delivery protests, I asked myself if white professors did not see it necessary to develop the so called “protest theology” in this regard. Cone’s proposal was that of new methods in theology that enabled us to engage with the poor (the protesting poor).

The shift in response, and the stated obvious response signalled something I often suspected that white theologians convinced themselves about BTL, which is there isn’t anything academic about black theology of liberation. It is from this

point that I came across Donaldo Macedo's introduction to Paulo Freire's, *Pedagogy of the oppressed*, 30th anniversary edition; this book has helped me articulate clearly my suspicion (Freire, 2000:11-27).

4.2 Macedo's encounters and experiences in academic spaces

At the beginning of his introduction to Paulo Freire's book Macedo writes about his first encounter with *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Macedo argues that as a colonized person from Cape Verde struggling with cultural identity, yearning to break away from yoke of Portuguese colonialism, *Pedagogy of the oppressed* "gave him the language to critically understand the tensions, contradictions, fears, hopes, and differed dreams that are part and parcel of living a borrowed and colonized cultural existence". Moreover, he remarked, "it gave him the inner strength to begin the arduous process of transcending a colonial existence that is almost cultural schizophrenic: being present, and yet not visible, being visible and yet not present" ... struggling with two cultures, and two languages (Freire, 2000:11).

Most importantly, *Pedagogy of the oppressed* "gave him the critical tools to reflect on, and understand, the process through which we come to know what it means to be in the periphery of the intimate yet fragile relationship between the colonizer and the colonized." Also noted that Freire's invigorating critique of the dominant colonizers model of education that let him to proposing problem posing education;⁴ thus, enabling those who have experienced subordination though an imposed assimilation policy a path to realise what it means to come to one's cultural voice. Donaldo Macedo observed that this was possible because Freire's denunciation of oppression was not merely an intellectual exercise, and that his intellectual brilliance and courage were rooted in a very real and material experience.

However, as brilliant Paulo Freire was, Macedo observed that in academic discourses his work suffered from what he called "a more sophisticated form of censorship and that is omission" (Freire, 2000:11). The academic selective selection of bodies of knowledge, which borders on censorship of critical educators, was to blame for lack of knowledge of his contributions to the field of education. He was also convinced that even the liberals who embraced his ideas and education practices tended to reduce his theoretical work and leading philosophical ideas to a mechanical methodology. He, in fact, articulated that after Freire's death, some professors at Harvard University reduced Freire's ideas to a mechanised dialogical practise and suggested that everyone who was present in the room must take twenty seconds to say something in keeping with the spirit of Freire. Macedo noted that

⁴ Where men and women develop their power to perceive critically the way they exist in the world with which and in which they find themselves; they come to see the world not as static reality but as a reality in the process of transformation.

this was the way to not engage Freire's work which resulted in exoticizing discussions on lived experiences as a process of coming to voice.

There is a lot that Macedo mentioned in the 30th anniversary edition of Paulo Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed. However, for the sake of this article, I want to argue that Macedo's discussion on the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, helped me to voice out what I was experiencing as a black student in theology. The problem was not just the censorship of BTL post-apartheid, but it was the silencing of my voice as a black woman; similarly, it was the systemic regard for black pain, black suffering, and black existential condition in the new South Africa.

5. A theological reflection of a black student's experiences in post-apartheid

"Insufficiency of literature", and availability in the library for me had always signalled a clear gap of knowledge that needed to be occupied. The question was if we cannot study BTL to develop it further within the academic spaces because there is insufficient literature, then why are we in the university in the first place? Insufficiency should not be the reason graduate students are encouraged to study BTL? The university is, after all a place, to verify unknown knowledge, create and produce it. Moreover, the availability of the literature in the library kept me intrigued, as Fanon (1963) points out; each generation must, out of relative obscurity, discover its mission, fulfil it, or betray it.

I realised that I was at centre of farewell to innocence, as Boesak has forcefully maintained. This was not just because much of what I was taught in my theological education was white and Western theology. Moreover, it was not only the realisation of what Tinyiko Maluleke points out so well in one of his opinion pieces on the Mail & Guardian:

much of the post-apartheid academic discourse about transformation has revolved 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).

It was the fact that those who taught us in the university, seemingly, believed and posited the pretentious notion that knowledge is untouchable, and that it is exclusive and depends on non-negotiable doctrines, without nuance, applicable in all situations, and all times. Moreover, it became evident that the problem with BTL was not the literature, neither it had anything to do with soundness. The problem we had was essentially of the colour line, and gender. The problem was that there are those who are ordained by the colour of their skin and their

gender to ask questions of methodology, and there are those who are supposed to follow in the footsteps. I argue this because the emphasis on the question of epistemology was not distinct from James Cone's BTL. The rise of Protestant liberalism in the nineteenth century, the work of Schleiermacher, and the different ways of interpretations, and methods used by scholars such as Barth, Bultmann, and Karl Rahner the crux of the debate was that of methodological insights. The interesting part is that those who censored "decolonial" discourses such as BTL claimed that they fought along our ancestors against apartheid, and colonialism under the apartheid government.

Nonetheless, at this point in our history, we did not just have the problem of those who provided the theology for oppression like Steve Biko argued, and the problem did not lay just in censoring BTL consequently, silencing the new generation of black theologians. In my opinion, the new generation of black students in the University are faced with those who want to keep the system intact; which they are the "gate keepers" of the system who use their credentials and power to keep the colonial system intact. I say that these were "gate keepers" as they had the similar overtone as what the University of Cape Town (UCT) students called 'proxy conversations of transformation that maintained the status quo at UCT'. At UCT, to change the discussion and expose the conversation they had to change the language and ask is UCT a racist university" from this, they asked:

If UCT is not racist, why is Cecil John Rhodes's statue still there? This statement challenged the university for failing to acknowledge the culture it had created, and in this moment the terms of the conversation about race began to change. The terms of previous conversations had never been balanced. This balance-caused primarily by the role that 'whiteness' has played in tempering discussions- has placed a lid on volatile conversations, which is seemingly for a few (Booyesen, 2016:57).

In my own opinion and experiences, the people who used sophisticated languages to keep us away from using the liberative paradigm of BTL were white liberals. White liberals who were involved, or their parents involved in the black struggle for liberation during apartheid. In fact, Vellem teaches us that "the ideas of BTL, its independence, are rejected in sophisticated ways post-apartheid or co-opted (sympathetic with), with little expressions and solidarity with the thoughts of the liberative paradigm" (Vellem, 2015a:4737). I want to argue that in post-apartheid BTL is rejected in the following ways:

First by declaring that post-apartheid did not need BTL, because BTL was a protest theology against apartheid,

Secondly, by arguing that post-apartheid South Africa needed a new theology (instead of developing BTL),

Thirdly, by providing this “new” theology and calling it “prophetic theology”, thus re-introducing prophetic theology as the only way to engage the liberative paradigm in post-apartheid South Africa,

Fourthly, mysteriously placing white-European theologians as the leading scholars in prophetic theology, as prophetic theology was imported from Western-European theologies and mostly advanced by white theologians in the university. With some of the prominent figures and black theologians moving to management positions in the university, and government to bring about black faces in management positions.

If you follow this framework, one would realise that this is the way that white people inherited superior position in academia that placed them at the top of the food chain as the only ones who possessed true knowledge in the new South Africa. In academic conferences, it was white theologians who at conferences decided the faith and direction that conferences should take. Black theologians occupied the last day at conferences when everyone is too tired to engage, with some already gone for other activities, and the agenda already set by scholars before them.

In the refusal to include BTL in theological curriculum and education, discouragement of graduate students to work on BTL, and the position that BTL occupied in theological conferences post-apartheid; an of exotic exercise that entertained white theologians after their serious academic discussions. I want to argue that for the white liberals that Boesak did so well to warn us about in the discussions above, BTL is the thing of the past.

Like Ndumiso Dladla’s experiences in philosophy, and that is African philosophy post-apartheid is marginalised, and simply used as an exotic option that should be included in a menu of an assortment of things. This was the case of BTL in theological spaces. For me as a black graduate student, this was blatant racism. In fact, I related with black philosophers who withdrew their membership from the Philosophical Society of Southern Africa (PSSA) because of racism in 2017 (Govan, 2017). In my opinion, the failure of South African university to recognize and include African scholars in the curriculum, particularly, in Africa University is nothing else but blatant racism as the philosophy students also have stated that marginalisation of African scholars, including them towards the end of conferences as an exotic exercise was nothing but racism. Like the students at UCT asked “If UCT is not racist, why is Cecil Rhodes Statue still there?” I ask if theological spaces are not racist, then why is it the presence of BTL not reflected in the syllabus of undergraduate students, and why graduate students are continued to be discouraged to work on BTL?

In a country where Christian leaders such as Desmond Tutu became the midwives of the new South Africa exactly because they applied the liberative paradigms

to engage apartheid. One would have expected that the new generations would have been encouraged to do the same.

On a personal level, as a black student journeying, and understanding the genealogy of James Cone's BTL has helped me to discover many other black theologians. I discovered that while there were those who were seeking to bury the conditions of black existence in the new South Africa and present them as in the past. While, within the university, BTL never even entered the curriculum as one would have expected. Black theologians continued to write on the experiences of black people in the new South Africa critiquing the colonial project onto the democratic dispensation. I realised through Cone's theology of liberation that for black theologians their presentations at the last day of conferences were a matter of life and death as they experienced what I term "epistemic apartheid" (or sophisticated form of censorship and omission (Freire, 2000:11).

African women theologians under the circle for concerned African women theologians went on to reflect on the experiences of black African women, and the question of gender in theological education.⁵ The circle for concerned African women questioned the position of black women in the BTL's school of thought. Yet, the likes of Boesak continued to critique concepts such as reconciliation and forgiveness in the new South Africa.⁶ Vellem engaged the black condition in the new South Africa,⁷ while, Motlhabi went on to develop Ubuntu as an African philosophy/ethics.⁸ Maluleke took BTL into public discourses engaging what he termed as "The prophet syndrome: Let them eat grass" in the new South Africa. Moreover, Maluleke engaged the student's movements arguing that "the choice of topics South Africa academics occupied themselves clearly did not enable them to anticipate, let alone

⁵ Tinyiko Maluleke in fact observed that: "African women's theologies represent the most creative dimension of African Theology during our times. In the past twenty years, no dimension of Christian theology in Africa has grown in enthusiasm, creativity, and quality like women's theology" Maluleke 2001a:237.

⁶ With Allan Boesak arguing that reconciliation is a call for just and full equality between persons, and requires change in personal, economic, and power relations in his publications; *The Tenderness of Conscience: African Renaissance and the Spirituality of Politics* (2005), In 2012 Boesak with Curtiss de Young published a book called *Radical Reconciliation: Beyond Political Pietism and Christian Quietism. Dare We Speak of Hope? Searching for a Language of Life in Faith and Politics* (2014), *Kairos, Crisis, and Global Apartheid: The Challenge to Prophetic Resistance (Black Religion/Womanist Thought/Social Justice)* (2015).

⁷ This includes Vellem's article on "A critical black analysis of the church's role in the post-apartheid struggle for socio-economic justice", *Unshackling the church*, 2015 "Un-thinking the West: The spirit of doing black theology of liberation in decolonial times", published 2017.

⁸ Motlhabi Mokgethi, and Mnyaka Mluleki. "Ubuntu and its socio-moral significance". In *African Ethics: An anthology of comparative and applied ethics*. Edited by Munyaradzi Felix Murove. Pietermaritzburg: University of Kwazulu Natal Press. 2013:63-84.

get into grip with, the burning worker and student issues that have catapulted universities into the Must fall movements” (Maluleke, 2016:2).

6. Concluding Remarks

It is difficult to conclude this article, because of the many things that Black theology of liberation helped me with as a black student. BTL for me was and is a process of conscientization that every student should experience and engage.

BTL helped me to see the struggles of black people whether Julius Malema’s Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), and the poor conditions of mine workers not contrary to my own personal struggles. BTL helped me to discover the black community differently. Though BTL continues in the peripheries, it helped me to discover the true meaning of the prophetic church, and prophetic theology as standing together with the oppressed.

Furthermore, I want to point out that though I read about James Cone, and Steve Biko in the “periphery” (outside of the classroom), learning about their struggles in the 1960s and 1970s has helped me articulate my own struggles as a black student in the university today. Also, I realised our experiences in the university are very much similar to each other though we lived in different times, and different spaces in the world. Biko’s critique of Western Christian theology in South Africa, and Cone’s Black theology of liberation in America helped me to discern and be suspicious of changes that have taken place post-apartheid, and post-civil right movement.

They helped me realise that to engage the black existential condition in South Africa requires courage to stand in the gap for the oppressed blacks. To be courageous in critiquing academically what is wrong with the conditions of the poor and the rich, black and white in the world.

It is against this background that I argue that BTL must form part of the curriculum in theological education in South Africa. It is through my journey that I argue as the new generation that it is our duty to develop further BTL, to engage the black existential condition in South Africa, Africa, and across the diaspora as we remember the legacy of James Cone in theological education.

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