

CHAPTER 1

Introduction: Mapping the Landscape

1.1. Introduction

This chapter introduces the purpose of the dissertation. It spells out the background to the problem that is investigated, the assumptions held on the symbol of liberation and its place in public life. It presents the methodological approach adopted in the work followed by the scope and content of the dissertation.

The broad view assumed in the dissertation is that liberation is a root paradigm or organizing symbol that galvanizes the norms and principles of Black Theology of liberation. Within the context of constitutional democracy in South Africa, Black Theology can offer different epistemological tools, which can be employed to engage the new situation that has arisen. The extent to which blacks as interlocutors of Black Theology have been liberated, the dissertation seeks to show, does not justify the eclipse or occlusion of liberation and thus its detachment from the black interlocutor. By taking stock of “gains or losses” of the tradition of Black Theology, the broad intensions of the school are introduced. This assignment is carried out within the background of the ambivalent nature of our new democracy redolent with new symbols such as “miracle,” “rainbow people,” “truth and reconciliation,” *Bafanabafana*, *Mabhokbhoko* and so forth. The work embraces a less-embittered tone to establish liberating currents from an African subaltern culture.

1.2. Background to the Problem

In South Africa, the governing symbol of “liberation” or the root metaphor of “liberation” and its link with black liberation and thus with the school of Black Theology, requires to be examined in the light of the advent of democracy after centuries of colonialism and apartheid rule. From the outset, we need to clarify that symbols¹ can be used at various levels, namely, as heuristic devices, models i.e. layouts of thoughts, or visions and paradigms. In our view, liberation symbolizes that location of thoughts, emotions and actions associated with the struggle waged in various ways against oppression in South Africa. We can further elucidate this assertion by saying that liberation symbolizes the culture of the struggle against oppression, culture signifying the art, spirituality, work, faith, people, land and God in the struggle against oppression. Thus in this work, liberation is viewed as a root metaphor or governing symbol giving rise to norms and principles of the black theologizing project. Our examination of the use of the symbol of liberation and its pertinence to public life will be shaped by the tradition of Black Theology of liberation. Our aim will be to establish how Black Theology of liberation with its root metaphor of liberation could navigate from the arena of the struggle waged with clear demarcations into a changed, complex arena brought about by the advent of democracy in South Africa.

¹ The word symbol will be used with a measure of caution in this work. For further understanding of the import of the word symbol as employed in relation to publicity cf. Everett 1988:12-16; Vellem 2002:38-40.

The heritage and the roots of Black Theology of liberation gained intellectual erudition at least more than four decades ago. The defining problem of Black Theology in the late 1960's found expression in a collection of essays published by Basil Moore (1972). The publication of these essays synchronized with the rise of the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) in South Africa. The BCM was mainly a response by the students to both the euphoric intensification of apartheid repression and the vacuum within the ranks of black resistance created by the banning of the African National Congress (ANC) and the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) among others. Central to the convictions of the BCM was the view that white liberals could not adequately represent black aspirations. It was felt that blacks had to stand up on their own and direct their struggle for liberation. Prominent among the exponents and pioneers of Black Consciousness philosophy was Steve Biko, who coined maxims such as "black is beautiful" to mobilize black masses against the inseminated consciousness by the system² to unduly influence black masses to willingly accept white superiority.

To give content and scope to this brand of theology, South African Black Theology drew heavily from Biko's Black Consciousness philosophy. For example, Boesak, in his *Farewell to Innocence* (1976), borrowed from Black Consciousness to debunk a consciousness inseminated among the black oppressed masses by traditional white theology.

² The term "system" was a code name used to capture the apparatus of Apartheid repression. Albert Nolan, (1988:74-75) *inter alia*, expounded this notion by making a candid contrast between oppressive systems and the liberating gospel of Jesus in his book, *God in South Africa*. Biko (1978:63), in his criticism of the Church, uses the term system to imply that "white equals value." It is instructive to observe at this very juncture that the term is now used to designate the steering media of power and money in Habermas' work. We engage the Habermasian systems imperatives with this "liberation" connotation in mind.

In fact, under-girding the notion of innocence in *Farewell to Innocence*, Boesak argued, was a pseudo-innocence in South African society from which both black and white had to be liberated. Pseudo-innocence thus captures a particular form of consciousness engendered by western Christianity from which a departure must be instanced through Black Consciousness. Traditional western theology was seen to be a part of this false consciousness - if not the religious cloak of colonialism, conquest and Christianization in South Africa. In this regard Biko once said:

The missionaries confused the people with their religion. They scared our people with stories of hell. They painted their God as a demanding God who wanted worship “or else.” Knowing how religious African people were, the missionaries stepped up their terror campaign on the emotions of the people...By some strange and twisted logic, they argued that theirs was a scientific religion and ours was a superstition. (Taken from Maluleke 1996a:9)³

Against the confusion, scarring tactics and terror campaign of this religion, Boesak’s use of expressions such as “black man, stand up,” “blackness as a state of mind,” and “ontological blackness,” points to the theological fusion of Black Theology with Biko’s philosophy of Black Consciousness. In its defining moments therefore, it is imperative to grasp the fact that Black Theology harnessed Black Consciousness philosophy to define a particular consciousness that could be used to liberate black masses from their inferiority complex.

³ That the quotation is taken from Maluleke is intended to further demonstrate that many Black Theologians harnessed Biko’s thoughts in their writings and thoughts on Black Theology.

It traced the roots of inferiority complex among blacks to the white traditional theology viewed to be in cahoots with a system of oppression that stepped up its terror campaign against their emotions and well-being. Black Theology of liberation, in order to be rooted in the struggle for the liberation of the oppressed, sought different epistemological tools from those of traditional Western theology. From across the Atlantic, from America, the civil rights movement, governed by the symbol of “Black Power,” had an enormous impact on black theological thinking in South Africa. James Cone (1969; 1975) was among those crafting intellectual integrity to this brand of theology, turning Barth’s theology “inside out.” Reflection on racism became a common thread between the American and South African brands of Black Theology quite early in the development of the school.

Epistemologically, Black Theology had the situation of the suffering of black masses as its starting point. Methodologically, it became a “theology from below” *vis a vis* a “theology from above,” the latter of which describes the general approach of traditional Western theology, at least in so far as it has emphasized philosophy as a starting point. Furthermore, while Western traditional theology had as its interlocutor a non-believer, Black Theology defined its interlocutor as the non-person. Traditional philosophy as a key ingredient of theology in the West was substituted by critical social analysis. Black Theology was an “epistemological rupture,” a total shift in paradigm. It was a complete departure from the Western traditional forms of theology. It debunked the root metaphors and governing symbols inspired by the norms and values of the West.

Traditional theology became viewed to be incapable of liberating the oppressed masses, hence the governing symbol or root paradigm of liberation consigned and provided a new “rootage” and content to Black Theology of liberation as an alternative way of doing theology.

It is imperative to note that from across the South Americas, the development of Latin Liberation Theology associated with among others, Boff and Gutierrez (1975), also flowed into the streams of Black Theology. Latin American Theology borrowed heavily from Marxist thought in its critique of orthodox Christianity. Similarly, its point of departure was the situation of the poor and social analysis was its pivotal tool of situation analysis. A number of Black Theologians also used the Marxist tools in their analysis (Mosala, Tlhagale, Mokhehi). These intercontinental flows of thought had a common theme of liberation, hence they have been generically called liberation theologies. This includes Feminist and now Womanist projects whose quest is the liberation of women from oppression and patriarchy. In this sense, Black Theology, while specifically reflecting on the situation of blacks, derives its link with other liberation theologies from their common quest for liberation, but more so from the root metaphor of liberation in their analysis. The symbiosis of this trajectory of liberation theologies is documented by Wilmore and Cone (1979). In this work by Wilmore and Cone, Black Theology’s relationship and dialogues with African, Latin American Liberation and Feminist theologies dubbed as Third World Theologies is broadly documented. The point we are making is that they are commonly understood as projects of liberation theology.

Our focus is not on the symbol “black” *per se*, through which the South African reality of black oppression has hitherto been analyzed by Black Theology of liberation. It is not the manner in which blacks should define and express themselves in continuity with the tradition of Black Theology, and in line with insights from Biko’s philosophy of Black Consciousness that we seek to examine. Blackness is our deliberate taken-for-granted substratum in this dissertation and *ipso facto* our interlocutor. In other words, we could have chosen to explore the meaning of the symbol of blackness in public life with the view to redefining blackness. One such recent attempt to redefine blackness is Muendane’s (2006) work entitled *I am an African*. The focus, however, is on the extent to which blacks have been liberated and thus the implications imbued with the symbol of liberation in relation to the black masses in South Africa. Liberation is chosen as a variable. Currently, in South Africa, notions such as Black Empowerment, Black Economic Empowerment, Nation Building, Reconstruction and Development are assuming the centre stage of our public life with the notion of liberation undergoing some kind of eclipse in public discourse.

The motivation of this dissertation springs from our observation of a range of views and projections that either suggest to detach liberation from the black interlocutor on the presumption that blacks are liberated, or proposals to jettison in *toto* the symbol of liberation in search of other alternatives. It has become noticeable in South African public life to talk about liberation as something that has been attained since the demise of Apartheid. Wherever it is retained, i.e. the liberation symbol, it has become universalized and diffuses interlocution and the norms of the paradigm of liberation theology.

Our position is that we cannot afford to do away with the governing symbol of liberation, particularly its link with the black interlocutor and *ipso facto*, the symbolic composite of “black liberation” in South Africa today. While we do not refute that there is “something of liberation” that has been attained, our view is that we are in one of the contours of liberation, or “liberated areas” (Mugambi 2003:61). There are numerous reasons that could be cited in support of this position.

First, in agreement with Maluleke (1997a:4-23) and Cochrane *et al* (1998:73), we need in principle to take stock of the gains or losses in the struggle for liberation and how this struggle was analyzed. By so doing, we shall also be taking stock of the ground that has been covered by Black Theology of liberation. There is much that this tradition can offer even in our current democratic dispensation. Most importantly, liberation theology and by implication Black Theology is a science. Its cardinal principles cannot be simply abandoned without being qualitatively contrasted and engaged with newly proposed guiding principles of knowledge such as reconstruction and development, our major focus in the work.

Governing symbols, or root paradigms have a function to ensemble emotive aspects, frames of thought, symbolic actions, norms, visions and principles of any given school of thought. Principles, as abiding values, remain the same, albeit contextualized in different situations (Powers 2004:26). So, we need to take stock of these norms, values and principles associated with the root paradigm of liberation and test them in order to transit into our new situation.

We could also postulate that even the masses themselves have begun to translate and negotiate their principles, visions, values, emotions, common spontaneous knowledge and symbolic actions in transition to the new situation, from which we can draw, so as to contribute to the new situation. For example, “democracy,”⁴ is a new acquisition in the lexicon of the masses and their common spontaneous knowledge. “Idiosyncrasies” of democracy need to be examined on the basis of the vital norms and principles of Black Theology of liberation.

Second, and flowing from above, already there are suggestions that the tradition of Black Theology of liberation was broad (Ntintili 1996: 1-17). Clearly in the development of Black Theology, there is *prima facie* evidence that various notions of liberation, if not various heuristic levels of the symbol of liberation came to be used as evidenced by various strands of Black Theology extrapolated by Ntintili. In seeking to establish which of the strands is more liberative, Ntintili contrasts three strands of Black Theology. The first he calls Black Solidarity, the second, Black Solidarity-Materialist and the third, Non-Racialist. These strands give clarification to a broad understanding of the corpus of knowledge of Black Theology with the Black Solidarity-Materialist Strand significantly grasping and appreciating liberation in broad comprehensive terms.⁵ This broad view of the understanding of liberation is suggested in Tsele’s *Theology of Mzabalazo* (1997:47) when he says:

⁴ The notion of “democracy” is found in Vellem:2002:68. From Afrikaans, the word *dom* meaning idiot is used to designate the ambiguities of current democratic order in South Africa.

⁵ A fuller application of these strands is an important *Leitmotif* for any judgment and assessment of the liberation symbol. (Cf. Vellem 2002:68).

The church of the struggle which seeks the correlation of salvation and liberation in its life and teachings will be characterized by an integration and uniting of multi-life dimensions, differentiations, and a permanent moment of the negative principle, i.e. the negativity of the cross.

We note in this work that the church of the struggle against apartheid amassed support and convergence from all walks of life and ideological persuasions of resistance against apartheid which was a glaring pseudo-religious scandal. The force-field of that struggle is the liberation of the black masses whose history must be “a cultivated authority,” a liberated agent to give credence and expression to the new democratic dispensation. The integration of multi-life dimensions and differentiations of the various strands of Black Theology into the struggles of the masses and the betterment of their lives will remain a challenge to the liberative character of our public life. This broad view and approach should assist in positing the symbol of liberation a pertinent root-paradigm in the new situation. In a nut-shell, the synergies of principles of knowledge associated with Black Theology of liberation are indispensable for a better clarification and understanding of our current situation and its liberative potential.

For example, the debate between Black Theology and Contextual Theology led, amongst others by Mosala, is equally instructive. The view held by Mosala is that all theology is contextual. As a result, the designation of theology as Contextual is tautological. It has however, become fashionable to use the designations Contextual and Third World Theologies rather interchangeably (Pityana 1995; Van der Water 1998; Pillay: 2002).

Each of the sides in the debate holds some water. It is only when an attempt is made to select one designation against the other that the debate becomes problematic. Pityana offers typologies of “contextualization” to explain the matter. According to Pityana, (1995:173-185) liberation theology is in the genre of contextual theology. It is theology that is done in context. Drawing from Stephen Bevans, he outlines five models of Contextual Theology: Translation, Anthropological, Synthetic, Praxis and Transcendental (1995:176). Pityana defines “model” as “an approximation - a construction of reality” (1995:176). Of these approximations or constructions mentioned, Pityana (1995:180) says:

The praxis model has been the linchpin or cornerstone of liberation theology methodology. It is a method of reflection which began as a Marxist critique of Hegel and Fauerbach. Marx and Engels wished to refine the Hegelian abstraction of consciousness into one that is rooted in social reality and directed towards a set purpose. The point, Marx and Engels conclude their COMMUNIST MANIFESTO, is not to interpret the world but to change it.

Let us take a brief moment to reformulate the thoughts expressed in this quotation.

Praxis is at the helm of the liberation theology, it is its “cornerstone.” It is explained as a refinement of abstraction of consciousness in order to root consciousness in social reality and direct consciousness to a particular purpose. That purpose is transformation, meaning that *praxis* is purposed “not to interpret the world but to change it.” Therefore, the approximation of contextualization devoid of this purpose can hardly claim affinity with the liberation paradigm.

The ambivalence of constitutional democracy in South Africa requires critical engagement. In dealing with this ambivalence surely there will be a basis for us to critically engage with emergent projects in the light of the dawn of democracy. For example, the designation “miracle” used to describe the transition to democracy should be critically interrogated so as to take precautionary measures against the fatal implications of too euphoric a view of the democratization processes in South Africa. Luminaries such as Maluleke⁶ and lately Sachs (his book is entitled: *Beyond the Miracle*) have seriously engaged the use of the term “miracle” in relation to the South African transition. It is our view that our political liberation is terse and tense. As Weisse *et al* (1998:150) propose, there is a need for the political transition from 1994 to be analyzed, and *ipso facto*, the need for a systematic analysis of the role of religion in this era. The governing symbol of liberation inevitably requires as a paradigm, these procedures of intimate and systematic analysis of the transition before any innovations are mainstreamed or preferred to its use.

Most importantly, ecclesiology and politics are two sides of the same coin. In relation to the democratic polity, for us ecclesiology connotes the symbolic polity structures of organization that arise out of religious systems gaining public expression. Surely, there must be latent symbolic polity structures of organization arising out of Black ecclesiology that need dialogue with the democratic polity of South Africa.

⁶ My personal notes taken from a lecture by Chikane in celebration of the decade for Democracy in South Africa (UNISA) and Maluleke’s response to Chikane. In response to the use of the term miracle which was used by Chikane albeit cautiously, Maluleke further *problematized* this term particularly its potential for ambiguous use by different polarities in South African schools of thinking.

Stated otherwise, there could be dominant symbols of polity structures in our public life that emanate from other ecclesiological forms in contest with the heritage of Black Theology of liberation. Maluleke (1997a:9) has already pointed out that Christian theology of Africa almost by its definition has a “public function beyond its magisterial one.” In an earlier paper, Maluleke explicitly states that Black Theology has been public by its own intent and design (1998b:60). The crystallization and systematization of the public intent of Black Theology in the light of the democratic polity of South Africa will be a creative step to move from in search of the place of the symbol of liberation in public life.

In this work, therefore, we seek to maintain the bond between black and the symbol of liberation in a less-embittered mode. Black Theology espoused a polemical mode as a Christian apologia to foster black liberation from oppression, hegemonies and frameworks that were impediments against black freedom. However, liberation for black expression, as a *quid pro quo* for sound public participation, requires a change of mode and *ipso facto*, a re-evaluation of the symbol of liberation, we concur. Part of our investigation is to establish if such a change of mode may imply a departure from a struggle of liberation *against* the state, against racism - (i.e. a polemical mode), to a struggle of liberation *to* perform and have creative space of expression (i.e. an *agentic* mode of the struggle). Expressed differently, if there is any liberation that has been attained through democracy, the subtlety of the practice of liberation needs sound explication and impeccable erudition within the ambit of a legitimate state and the liberated zone of democracy.

Pityana (1995), apparently struggling with the same question, endeavours to glean out a theological method relevant for a South Africa beyond the time of transition because of the “unprecedented cultural consciousness since 1990,” and maintains that the African subaltern culture constitutes the antecedents that could be uncovered, that rendered a system of social injustice built on lies unendurable. He says (1995:3):

It was clear to me that regardless of what was taught by the church and imposed by the state, African culture gave people a different message about themselves, their thought structure and about their identity. It was a subversive reality, a subaltern culture, that was constantly affirming even in the silence of oppression. The inquisitive mind is given to challenging that still, small voice of consciousness.

In a less-embittered mode, the inquisitive mind must search that which lay under the polemical mode of Black Theology and subverting an unjust system based on lies. This work seeks to respond to this challenge by: 1) Looking at the classic conception of liberation in Black Theology, 2) Examining alternative suggestions to Liberation, 3) Exploring possible re-interpretations of the symbol of black liberation in public life and 4) Formulating a proposal for a Life Giving Liberation Agenda, i.e. a Life-giving Democracy.

1.3. The Research Problem

Our problem centers on the use of the governing symbol of liberation in the context of democracy in South Africa. We present our problem statement in this manner:

- (a) Is the symbol of “liberation” still the most appropriate one in designating the major goal of Black Theology in the present South African public life?
- (b) Is it possible to redefine “liberation” as a major goal of Black Theology in such a way that it would still be applicable in the present South African public life?

The problem is analyzed from a Black Theological perspective. In the designation “Black Theology of liberation” we can discern without much ado that liberation is a governing symbol of this brand of theology.

The use of the symbol of liberation also extends to brands of theology such as Feminist Theology, Latin American Theology of Liberation, African Theology, and Minjung. To the extent that there is a dominant sentiment to club them all together under the rubric of the symbol liberation, as already alluded above, we can safely surmise that the genre of liberation as a symbol governs the content and structure of these theologies. We therefore need, for our purpose to examine firstly, the manner in which Black Theology understood and saliently interpreted this symbol of liberation.

Stated otherwise, the differences between these theologies should not be taken for granted even though they might seem to be obvious. One obvious reason that usually accounts for the diversity of these brands of liberation theologies is their contexts, hence the designations such as South African Black Theology of liberation, Latin American Theology of Liberation and so on tend to signify their geo-political contexts.

We need to discern the manner in which various strands of Black Theology flow into the governing symbol of liberation.

In the context of democracy in South Africa, liberation becomes a complex notion to contend with. For some the scrapping of apartheid means that the struggle for liberation is over, as we demonstrated above. This implies a total departure from the use of the symbol of liberation or an addendum of this governing symbol of liberation. Clearly, the struggle for liberation is no longer against apartheid. There could be no struggle against a legitimate government, at least, not in the sense in which it was understood against an illegitimate government. The same seems to be the case with the term “black” as used in relation to this symbol “liberation.” It is viewed either as no longer relevant or adequate in the context of the new South Africa. It is no longer blacks only who need liberation, it is argued in some circles. One such cogent attempt to make this point is found in Jacob’s thesis (1998). Black Theology is thus viewed as moribund if not harbouring the danger of reversing racism in a situation where blacks are in political power since 1994 in South Africa. The advent of constitutional democracy in South Africa is a significant variable in the prevailing innovations put in tandem with both categories of “black” and “liberation.” This innovative trend finds expression in current options that seek to replace the symbol of liberation with symbols such as reconstruction, nation building, reconciliation, renaissance, development and so forth. Bold and notable strides in this regard were taken by Villa-Vicencio 1992 (*A Theology of Reconstruction*) and Mugambi 1995 (*From Liberation to Reconstruction*) among others.

Last, in dealing with the problem of this work, the liberal constitutional framework that defines our public life in South Africa today needs to be tackled. Constitutional democracy has made the question of the relationship between religion and state further complicated in so far as the positioning of the church and its solidarity with the poor goes. South Africa is a secular state and the manner in which the church engages in public life does not privilege the voice of the church against other plural players in public life.

Democratic participation in public life today can suggest that black South Africans are liberated in our democracy to participate and express themselves like others in the search of an egalitarian society. On the other hand, it could mean that the black masses who were oppressed and colonized now participate democratically in public life in order to be liberated. Are the black masses involved, or do they participate in public life? Thus the symbol of liberation becomes ambivalent and sometimes nefarious in our public life today if its meaning and content is not clarified in relation to the notion of constitutional democracy and the democratic participation of black masses.

1.4. Purpose

Our goal is to demonstrate that African culture as the locus and subaltern culture of Black Theology's master symbol of liberation renders the current new order of constitutional democracy inadequate an achievement of liberation. African culture, we purpose to demonstrate, can provide a basis for a *de-ethnicised* expression of democracy to the contrary of what is often presumed.

Mamdani has argued for the de-tribalization and de-racialization of public life in South Africa (1996:24-25). The thrust of his argument is that tribalism and racism have the same origins and ethnological prejudices mirrored in colonialism and apartheid.

Samuel Kobia (2003:45-46) potently argues that the term tribe is not a precise term to employ to signify the differentiation of clans in the African worldview. He avers that the notion of “tribe,” which endeared itself to western scholars and journalists for a century, is a tool to reduce the complexity of the indigenous non-western societies.

He further states that the contemporary employment of the term “tribe,” was developed in the 19th century’s rise of evolutionary racist theories to designate non-White people as inferior or less civilized. Moreover, the uses of the term are varied and conflicting in sociological and anthropological literature with rampant political uses too, he avers. For example, it should be stated, the word usually employed to signify race in *isiZulu* and *isiXhosa* is *uhlanga*, meaning a reed, hence clans were rather differentiated geographically rather than through the pigmentation of the skin in these cultural milieus.

The re-Africanization of the democratic polity in South Africa, it will be argued, is not a project to dominate and monopolize the task of public theology, but the uncovering of the liberative currents of a subaltern culture. In other words, we argue that the symbol of liberation is still pertinent, albeit with some addendum. There is continuity between the struggle for liberation *against* apartheid and the struggle for liberation of black African masses against the current cultural forms of constitutional democracy.

Arising from the above, our goal is to contribute a “grammar” from inside that will clarify the master metaphor of liberation and its relevance to our public life. We dialogue and critique the alternatives offered by the projects of Reconstruction mainly by Mugambi and Villa-Vicencio, and attendant notions such as Development, for as long as the motif of liberation is intentionally occluded and subsumed under these notions. In this sense, the whole notion of publicity as currently defined and perceived will be critically engaged as arising out of a public theology school that is predominantly Western.

1.5. Contribution

The main contribution of this work is in the area of Public Theology from a Black Theological perspective. It is a contribution in the battle of ideas brought about by a constitutional democracy in a legitimate state understood to value persuasion without which there is violence. It is a study of the political. This study is also a contribution to cultural studies and liberation in general.

To the extent that culture must be viewed as a totality of structuring human interaction, Fanon’s (1959:12) sentiments on culture are a profound motivation for our commitment to the emancipation of the struggling masses in South Africa:

Culture like truth is concrete. And for the masses the most elevated form of culture, that is to say, of progress, is to resist imperialist domination and penetration although this might come wrapped up in valid forms of “culture” or “civilization.”

According to Boff, (Pityana 1995:189) culture is “the echo of God’s voice.” The resilience of African culture in resisting penetration and total eradication by modernity under conditions of dispossession and domination echoes God’s talk, thus dialogue with modernity necessitates the advance of African culture under conditions of relative liberation. Our democratization is thus placed onto the African revolutionary path of civilization, *tswelopele* or *ingqubela* (progress), echoes of God’s voice in black African culture. In this regard, the work will make a modest contribution to topical issues of policy making and development in public life today.

In general this work is a socio-ethical theological contribution to challenges of moral degeneration, poverty, unemployment and HIV/AIDS to cite but a few. By galvanizing the symbol of liberation with African symbols, the ethical summons arising out of a sound participation in our public life through Black Public Theological studies will point us to a tentative agenda for a sound *praxis* in public life and the quest for an alternative world.

1.6. Methodology

Our approach is based on the study of literature in search of a classic understanding of liberation in Black Theology. The framework of analysis will broadly be shaped by the heritage of Black Theology, particularly Mosala’s (1989:4) dictum that “black theology needs to relocate itself within the historical and cultural struggles of the black people. Categories of “pseudo innocence” (Boesak), “the rediscovery of agency,” (Maluleke) associated with the school and the liberation paradigm are among the prisms used to deal with material studied.

We search for meaning and expression in the *Sitz im Leben* of black Africans on the underside of socio-political sites in the post Apartheid era. Therefore, the disenfranchised “grammar” and symbols of the ordinary masses are perceived to be in synergy with our methodology in our quest to develop a black African ecclesio-political tool for contemporary and comprehensive participation in public life. Rather than construct a theology, our theology is constructed by the trenches and sequestered sites of African symbols particularly *ikhaya* (home) and *ubuhlanti* (kraal).

Taking our cue from Dussel we can describe our methodology as analectic exteriority (1998:238). “Analectics, which comes from the Greek root *ano* (beyond) takes as its point of departure the unmitigated transcendence of the other,” meaning that the horizon of the black interlocutor is not just a mere shadow, or echo, but points beyond what is experienced and comprehended; the alternative paradigm (Mendieta 2002b:283).

1.7. Limitations

The subject of liberation is too broad. We limit ourselves to the understanding of the notion within the tradition of Black Theology. We also note that Public Theology from a Black perspective is not a well developed area, hence our topography on the subject will be informed by dialogue with some themes written and intended for other contexts.

The researcher is a male, black South African, a student of theology. Our work is thus limited to the South African experience, even though it may have implications for contexts beyond South Africa.

Conceptually, the symbol of liberation can also not be romanticized as icons of the liberation are severely under scrutiny in relation to corruption, self-entitlement and authoritarian rule among others, once they are in power. Revolutions and revolutionaries can sometimes struggle to come up with creative ways of expressing freedom in practice once it is attained. In other words, the liberation project cannot be above reproach once confronted with enduring ethical questions that are rampant in our continent and the world today. In short, the vision of liberation is above its exponents as the litmus test of any project of liberation is life.

1.8. Scope

The work is divided into seven chapters and an epilogue:

1.8.1. Chapter 1: Introduction.

Chapter 1 is the current chapter which introduces the background, methodology and the purpose of the dissertation. The root paradigm of liberation is asserted and the question of the extent to which blacks have been liberated is posed within the framework of democracy. The chapter intimates that a less-embittered mode is espoused in the dissertation. From the very outset, the dissertation states that the alternative and subversive vision of the liberation paradigm is maintained. The work contributes to Public Theology from a Black Theology perspective.

It is an addendum of Black Theology to contribute to socio-cultural studies and socio-ethical challenges associated with the rebuilding of freedoms in democratic South Africa.

1.8.2. Chapter 2: The Classic Tenets of Liberation in Black Theology

This chapter explores liberation as a root paradigm or governing symbol of theology giving rise to norms and principles of theologizing from a Black Theological perspective. cursory connections between liberation and covenant, liberation and consciousness are made. Liberation is the covenant, the *testamentum* of the struggle for freedom by black masses. Liberation is the good news against the ontological negation of black experience and history.

1.8.3. Chapter 3: Post-Apartheid Liberative Trajectories

The chapter simply points at projects that emerged in the post apartheid era, notably the notion of inculturation as liberation and the proposal for liberative reconstruction. It reflects on the challenges that militate against the continuity of Black Theology and reiterates that the thesis of Black Consciousness is that there is a strong white racism in South Africa. The emphasis of this chapter is on the soteriological architecture of the symbol of liberation. The gestation of liberation is in black expectancy embedded in the subaltern black African culture, the *koinonia* of cross fertilization, mutual influence and solidarity in contrast with an en-framing or *Gestell* discourse in post Apartheid South Africa and the globe which inhibits open dialogue in a democratic dispensation. Pseudo-innocence in public discourse needs to be uncovered to harness the soteriological gift of the current democratic dispensation.

The chapter argues for the *praxiological* bases of salvation and presents liberation as an analectic vision of the world from the point of view of the oppressed, in itself a liberated zone.

1.8.4. Chapter 4: Liberation, Reconstruction and Development: A Critical Dialogue

The problem the chapter deals with is whether the symbol of liberation is still the most appropriate one in designating the main goal of Black Theology. The chapter evaluates reconstruction as a paradigm for doing theology in the post Apartheid context. This critical dialogue seeks to establish if it is possible to redefine “liberation” as a major goal of Black Theology in such a way that it would still be applicable in the present South African public life. To respond to this question, the crux of the argument is that “some kind of public theology” is proposed, albeit in a subtle manner through the proposal for Reconstruction as a paradigm. That Black Theology of liberation is not only potentially a kind of public theology, but an existing public theology among other forms of public theology, is demonstrated.

The chapter demonstrates that both reconstruction and development can be redefined as heuristic devices of liberation. There are links between these concepts, the governing principle being the symbol of liberation. Stated otherwise, the chapter redefines not the essence of liberation, but its expression through the notions of reconstruction and development. It argues that reconstruction and development can be interpreted as major goals of Black Theology in the post-Apartheid South Africa.

It is not the major goals of Black Theology or liberation as a paradigm that need to be redefined, but the mode of Black Theology and liberation, hence a less-embittered approach with a kind of “constructive impatience” needs to be maintained.

1.8.5. Chapter 5: Black Public Theology of Liberation: *Amandla Ngawethu!*

Chapter five proceeds directly from chapter four and deals with the same, whether the symbol of liberation is still the most appropriate one in designating the main goal of Black Theology. Having critiqued reconstruction and development, we demonstrate how these motifs can be given expression within the echoes of African culture. As indicated in chapter four, it is the redefinition of the mode rather than the vision of liberation that we have argued for. The main assumption in this regard is that there is a distinction between a prophetic mode and an apologetic mode in theology, or any religion for that matter. Flowing from this, building on the same paradigm of liberation, the chapter develops a public “apologia” of Black Theology of liberation in a democratic state. It proposes a “language and grammar” of Black publicity.

It makes a theoretical connection between ecclesiology and polity to propose innovative ways of harnessing African ecclesio-political symbols for what it designates as liberative polity and liberative reconstruction. The symbol of *ikhaya* (household) is used and the key of *ubuhlanti* (the kraal) constitutes the heuristic device of our project for Black Public Theology of liberation.

1.8.6. Chapter 6: Life-Giving Democracy

Having established the origins of publicity and power in the previous chapter, its “grammar and syntax,” this chapter argues that the *telos* of power is life. Public theology is the remaking of the bonds to instantiate and give life. The chapter harnesses the symbol of *ikhaya* (household) and *ubuhlanti* (kraal) further by bringing the notion of *ukudla* (food) and *inkundla* (*respublica*, assembly or open space) together to give a broad ethical perspective of Black Public Theology of liberation. Blackness, it is shown through this African symbol is a political and ethical construct. Dialogue with the Habermasian public and the current world system is pursued. This chapter provides the ethics of Black Public Theology of liberation.

1.8.7. Chapter 7: A Tentative Black Public liberation Agenda

This chapter is the application of the key findings of the dissertation. It is tentative and almost lists some important public issues that are currently shaping public discourse. Two main points which are intended as directives to the engagement of theology in public life are made regarding the church-state relations and the ethical criteria of economics in Black Public Theology of liberation. In addition, Moral Regeneration, HIV/AIDS, Gender and Poverty are briefly attended.

1.8.8. Epilogue

The epilogue presents the summary of the whole dissertation. It brings the work to a close by pointing to the potential of the work for further development. Liberation is a governing symbol of Black Theology. The acquisition of this symbol is an expression of an alternative paradigm of theology, hence motifs of reconstruction, development, transformation and, as we have indicated, inculturation can be employed to express the values and norms of the governing liberation paradigm.

The motifs of reconstruction and development, as we have shown, do not necessarily implode the essence of liberation as a paradigm. At the best, these motifs are an expression of a mode in which liberation could be expressed in public life.

CHAPTER 2

The classic Understanding of Liberation in Black Theology

2.1 Introduction

This chapter explores liberation as a root paradigm or governing symbol of theology that gives rise to norms and principles of theologizing from a Black Theological perspective. It sets the stage to respond to the problem whether the symbol of “liberation” is still the most appropriate one in designating the major goal of Black Theology in the present South African public life. We do not present a history of Black Theology, but an interpretation of the key tenets of the liberation symbol from the perspective of Black Theology.

2.2 Setting the Scene

In the 2000 *Dictionary of Third World Theologies*, Fabella defines liberation in the following manner:

In the Hebrew Bible, the word for salvation also means liberation, as well as deliverance, rescue, and freedom from bondage. The term “liberation” gained additional prominence in theology and biblical studies since it was first used by two Third World theologians:

James H. Cone in *A Black Theology of Liberation* in 1970, and Gustavo Gutierrez in *A Theology of Liberation* in 1973 (which initially appeared in English in 1970 in an abridged form in *Theological Studies* entitled “Notes for a Theology of Liberation”). Gutierrez explains that “the historical process in which Latin America has been involved, and the experience of many Christians in this process, led liberation theology to speak of salvation in Christ in terms of liberation.” It better expresses the longing that arises from the innermost hearts of the poor and oppressed, and opens them to receive the saving love of God. Gutierrez gives different dimensions of liberation: liberation from social situations of oppression and marginalization; liberation from all forms of inner servitude; and liberation from sin, with breaks our friendship with God and other human beings. In short, Gutierrez equates “to liberate” with “to give life.” In his writings Cone speaks of liberation as sanctification. To be sanctified is to be liberated, that is, politically engaged in the struggle for freedom. Sanctification does not mean substituting inward piety for social justice. Liberation, however, is not exclusively a political event but also an eschatological happening. If the oppressed, while living in history, can see beyond it, salvation or liberation is not simply freedom in history, it is freedom to affirm that future which is beyond history - God’s own eschatological future (2000:122-123).

If this is going to be our compass as we navigate through the symbol of liberation in this chapter, we only need to mention that the symbol has Biblical roots, having been given theological prominence by the luminaries of Black Theology and Latin American Theology: Cone and Gutierrez. It is a comprehensive symbol of salvation, sanctification, equal to “giving life,” and designates God’s own eschatological future. Moreover, it is a better expression of the deepest longings of the poor and oppressed and opens them to the love of God.

Liberation is ‘the powerful and irresistible aspiration of the poor’ and one of the principal signs of the times’ ...Liberation is an ‘evangelical’ term in the original sense of the word: life giving word, good news, a joyful announcement... ‘Liberation’ is an evocative word, full of resonances. In it the dimension of the spiritual and the political, the historical and the ultra-historical, are fused without losing their identity...Liberation is a word that today describes the programmes of a theology that thinks as awakened faith, that has shaken off the burden of ‘religious-opium of the people,’ that seek a faith free from alienation, the leaven of a new history (Boff 1987: 90-91).

The irresistible aspirations of the poor almost define the symbol of liberation and irrevocably present the liberation symbol as one of the signs of the times. As an evangelical term, liberation adheres to the fact that its central core is something positive about the Christian message. In fact, we should say liberation adheres to something supremely good about the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Positive terms to express this central reality will include: love, kindness, justice, salvation, and liberation. These terms signify in various ways that the essence of the message of Christian faith is not just goodness, but supreme goodness. In addition to the centrality of evangelical goodness, God’s self-donation of goodness characteristically breaks into our time, meaning that the good and the positive of liberation happen as something real in our human lives. But liberation is evocative, it is power. In other words, it is a powerful symbol that is full of resonances fusing together the political, the historical and the ultra-historical, and thus ultimately symbolizes the vitality of faith.

As a fusion of the spiritual and the real, Sobrino's (1988:3) dictum that in order to have spiritual life we first need to have life, captures the evocative dimension of the symbol of liberation as a power behind a particular spirituality and consciousness. It is the gestation of the irresistible aspirations of the poor in their conditions of impoverishment that is evoked by the liberation symbol to connote a faith that fuses and integrates the real and the spiritual.

Extracted from the quotations above, liberation is a theological programme, an approach of theology that capacitates its adherents and audience to acquire a revolutionary and liberating form of consciousness (Chikane 1990:158). The subaltern of the world continue unabated with their quest for liberation, no matter how much this quest can be resisted. For them the gospel of Jesus Christ is an announcement of their long awaited freedom, liberation is to them supreme good news even if they continue to be the riff-raff of society. Liberation becomes an evocation of a message that resonates with their spiritual and political experience and the construction of a concrete programme for their emancipation to be realized in history. With the quotations above, it seems clear that a plethora of permutations can be constructed out of the symbol of liberation.

We therefore ask in line with Paulo Freire's and Antonio Faundez's epistemology of the poor, from the inception of this work, which are the irresistible aspirations of the poor? What is the message of good news they should hear? To what extent is the liberation symbol evocative, harnessing a particular spirituality and consciousness? And most of all, how do we structure the theological programme that will embrace these principles?

As Faundez and Freire (1989) assert in their conversation, intellectuals' contempt of the knowledge of the masses by makes them to be remote from the masses and deprive them of the rich social resource that is indispensable for any action to transform society. In order for progressive intellectuals to assimilate this rich resource, Faundez and Freire (1989:46) argue that they need:

To soak themselves in this knowledge and, as you said, to assimilate the feelings, the sensitivity, the actions of the masses, which basically take the form of resistance or the cultural expressions of resistance. As they assimilate them, intellectuals will be able to offer their "scientific" knowledge, while receiving in turn the sensitivity of the masses. And the masses will be able to assimilate this scientific "knowledge," not in the way in which it is formulated by intellectuals, but change it. "Scientific" knowledge becomes scientific as it takes on board the knowledge of the people. And the knowledge of the people becomes knowledge for action and effective change when it in its turn takes on board in a creative way the "scientific" knowledge offered by the intellectuals.

It should therefore be clear that the irresistible aspirations of the poor masses call upon the intellectual erudition of this dissertation to be soaked in the knowledge of the poor masses. The message of the good news is equally soaked in the knowledge of the poor masses and responds to their question. In assimilating that experience, thereby reciprocating by soaking this knowledge with scientific tools, action and effective change for programming our theological task is attained. Liberation is the designation for this theological paradigm and task.

It is soaking and assimilating theological questions with the knowledge and experience of the poor masses and that knowledge of the masses, in turn, taking on board the creative scientific knowledge offered by intellectuals for action and effective change of the situation of oppression to take place.

It is at this point that the connection between liberation, blackness and poverty needs to be tacitly made. According to Boesak (1976:19-20), liberation is the content of Black Theology. To the extent that liberation is the content of Black Theology Boesak (1976:19) also asserts that “it was James Cone who first focused on liberation as the central message of the gospel, and therefore of Christian theology.” This assertion has already been made above, but it is important to realize that the notion of liberation is a finding of Black Theology of liberation. This therefore means that the central message of Black Theology is liberation deigned to be consistent with the gospel of Jesus Christ. In other words, taking our cue from what we have already said about good news above, liberation is this good news in Black Theology. Boesak qualifies this link between liberation and Black Theology by saying that “liberation is not merely part of the gospel, nor merely “one of the key words” of the gospel, it is content and framework of the whole biblical message” (1967:20). From this, we can safely surmise that liberation is not only the content of Black Theology but its framework too, thus its paradigm. Flowing from the above sentiments, we now turn to the meaning of the term “black.”

In our view, we can sum up blackness as a term that has been understood to constitute both liberation and oppression as the cross is both a symbol of death and liberation at the same time. Blackness is a symbol of ambiguity in any society. The manner in which the term “black” has been used in relation to liberation is usually described as ontological. Exponents of Black theology suggested the term ontological blackness to serve as leverage for a counter-discourse that allows the tragic in life to be the point of departure for talk about God. Pityana’s (1995:247) use of Charles Long’s notion of opacity can be employed to elucidate our point. Opacity signifies the rejection of blacks by whites with terms like black, sin, evil, savage and the rest being equated with black. Blackness means that this opacity gets transformed into a positive symbol of supreme goodness promised by the gospel of Jesus Christ and symbolized by liberation.

The origins of black as a construct of self-affirmation can be traced from the Caribbean (Kee 1986:30-57). Our tenacious embrace of the term blackness goes as far back as Aimé Césaire who struggled against the French cultural domination and colonization, followed by the likes of Fanon who is well known for his erudition on decolonizing the mind. The contribution by Edward Blyden who himself was a Presbyterian minister viewing Christianity as a religion that deprived blacks of their history and identity and unutterably racist and similar themes extrapolated by Marcus Garvey, gave content to negritude and thus the development of black power and black consciousness. Finch III (1993) contributes to this tradition by tracing the black roots of Egypt and brings out the word “Kamit,” meaning black and used by Egyptians to depict their land. The 1960s saw the internalization of the black struggle with Africa being its volcanic ferment.

In this context, Black Theology, notably with Cone in North America, and Boesak in South Africa continued with this tradition. Ontologically, the word black has been traditionally understood to imply a state of mind, meaning that anyone assimilating and soaking his/her experience with that of the black masses' experience is understood to be black.

Blackness in these terms is indeed more than skin colour. “Even though it is a symbol that arises from the historic meaning attached to black skin in Western civilization, it points beyond mere colour to the solidarity in suffering and struggle of the descendants of all enslaved and colonized people (Boesak 1976:27).

But black connotes poor. There is a sense in which we can therefore say black is *sui generis* an ontological and symbolic expression of suffering poverty. Black means poor as expressed in one of the concepts used in this tradition to capture this state, called “anthropological pauperization.” Anthropological pauperization of the African means impoverishment of being, *ipso facto*, poverty not only in material terms but in cultural and psychological terms. The notion of “innocence” or “pseudo-innocence” in Boesak’s work signifies poverty as a consciousness of either superiority or inferiority complex. Therefore, in the school of Black Theology and certainly in the liberation tradition, poverty is understood in a particular way. Donald Dorr (1988: 239-244) explains that in the tradition of Third World Theologies, there is a distinction between poverty and impoverishment, which is extremely crucial for us to grasp at this very juncture. He says (1988:239):

Poverty is a state or condition which may be the result of a misfortune - something that just happens to people. But the word ‘impoverishment’, as used by these theologians, connotes a deliberate action. To impoverish nations or people is to inflict poverty on them.

Black Theology of liberation perceives blacks as the poor, a condition of poverty which is inflicted on them as non-whites or non-persons. The symbolic link between liberation, black and poverty emanates from the factual ontological exclusion and deprivation of the black people from all spheres of life historically and in the current world. Currently in Brazil over ninety million blacks, the largest number of black people outside the African continent and living in one country, survive in untold conditions of deprivation and oppression.¹ It is a documented fact that in the current order of neo-liberal globalization, the harshest living conditions ever are a reality in Africa where poverty in dollar terms has reduced millions of Africans to survive below one dollar a day. While there has been political freedom in South Africa, it is the largest number of black people that is living in poverty, hence the vestiges of the legacy of apartheid occur along the fault lines of race in our public life. The factual and ontological deprivation of the black masses in South Africa is also an epistemological and cultural condition as less than 5% of the public discourse is occupied by black African scholarship meaning that the forms of knowledge that dominate our public discourse are western and Eurocentric in provenance.²

¹ During the General Assembly of the World Council of Churches held in Brazil, January 2006, I had the opportunity to listen to a black Brazilian person who addressed us and there were displays outside the Assembly halls of the experience of the Afro Brazilians and their quest for freedom in Brazil.

² The recent formation of what is called the Native Club is indicative of this fact. It is an attempt to bring black intellectuals together so as to invigorate their participation in public debate not on the basis of euro-centric epistemological frameworks.

It is crucial to acknowledge that blackness is often repulsed with racism or the now spoken about notion of reverse racism in democratic South Africa. In the context of South Africa where blacks are now in power it has become easy to argue that blackness is no longer adequate because blacks are free and are in power. While this is not an easy matter to discount, to fail to understand that black affirmation is not “love for blacks and hatred for whites” (Boesak 1986:27) is equally a matter to be subjected to a hermeneutic of suspicion. The self-affirmation expressed by blackness can only be understood in the context of the love of the neighbour, what Tutu has famously dubbed as the “sacrament of neighbourhood.” In the African sense, the self-affirmation of blackness is comprehensible in the dictum: *motho ke motho ka batho* (Sesotho) or *umntu ngumntu ngabantu* (isiXhosa). In this work therefore, the affinity between liberation, blackness and poverty is maintained not only because blackness designates “integral liberation” (Kee 1986:48), but also because the anticipation of racism or reverse racism against blacks is not in itself devoid of racism, even more so now that the condition of the black people generally continues to be the same in the context of democracy in South Africa.

Furthermore, racism still abounds on a global scale and there is no empirical evidence for a structural engineering of racism by blacks in South Africa or elsewhere on the globe, nor is there historical, structural evidence to signify their collective propensity to racism, yet the contrary is true as racism is getting more sophisticated in the globalizing context dubbed by Mbeki as “global apartheid” (Terreblanche 2002:460). In the liberation struggle, as in all epochs of their struggle blacks embraced all races.

West raises important aspects with regard to the question of racial reasoning. He argues that racial reasoning can trap black leaders in at least three ways. First is the notion of racial authenticity. Second is what he calls black closing-ranks mentality and third, black male subordination of women.

Against the notion of black authenticity that is, racial authenticity, West argues that blackness has no meaning beyond a system of race-conscious people and practices (1993:39). All black people, according to this understanding, have an interest in resisting racism even though in different degrees. It follows then from this that there will be varying degrees in which blacks express this interest to resist racism but, the authenticity of black resistance to racism cannot go “beyond that of being a potential object of racist abuse and an heir to a grand tradition of black struggle” (1993:39). West then defines blackness as a political and ethical construct. Black claims to black authenticity cannot be stretched beyond the moral and ethical conceptions in relation to the black interests of individuals and communities. As a political and ethical construct, blackness is *ipso facto* directed to the white power structure and its *telos* is the morality and harmony of human relations.

For black authenticity that feeds on the mentality of closing-ranks, stated otherwise as a “closed covenant” of black nationalism, the danger is a constant lack of introspection manifest in the perpetual subjugation of women and class. Crude forms of a closed covenant of a nationalist version of the black cause find expression in xenophobia and homophobic tendencies often justified on the basis of culture.

Racial reasoning as countered by blackness can only assume what West designates a prophetic framework of moral reasoning. In this regard West (1993:43) says:

This new framework should be a *prophetic* one of moral reasoning with its fundamental ideas of mature black identity, coalition strategy, and black cultural democracy. Instead of cathartic appeals to black authenticity, a prophetic viewpoint bases mature black self-love and self-respect on the moral quality of black responses to undeniable racist degradation in the America past and present. These assume neither a black essence that all black people share nor one black perspective to which all black people should adhere.

It is quite clear that in this framework of prophetic morality, moral reasoning attains the highest pedestal in black identity and coalition strategies. The moral assessment of black identity becomes based on black dignity and decency that should be recognized for any other group of people or culture. This vision simply entails that blackness remains a perennial possibility for as long as white supremacy abounds and the styles of dominant modes of expression in black cultures themselves remain. This prophetic, moral framework is evidentially open, as opposed to the closed covenant of blackness, and recognizes whites and other cultural insights that are anti-racist. It is a framework that encourages solidarity and coalitions with liberative traditions among whites and other cultures. It is now the stimulating notion of black cultural democracy we need to glance at. In this work a clear and candid stance against romanticization of black culture in favour of liberative currents of the history and culture of the oppressed is assumed as we stated in the previous chapter.

Clearly by cultural democracy West has in mind the openness that comes with democracy as an ethical dimension of the cultural progress and the architecture of black civilization. Despotic cultural tendencies that, among others, perpetuate the subjugation of women and the exclusion of others in the quest for humane relations should pass the test of democracy and openness to scrutiny therefore. Despotic notions of blackness that either deify or demonize others remain challenged in the black cultural ethos of democracy. Blackness should thus be liberated from racial reasoning as a political and ethical construct. This point will be taken further in this chapter.

Suffice it to say that the black experience of impoverishment is not a universal criterion for Christian theology or liberation, but a framework within which God's revelation in Jesus Christ occurs. Blackness is a starting point, an interlocution of a theological paradigm of liberation. As this chapter offers a re-reading of a well developed school of thought, the starting point of the chapter is the acknowledgement that there was a struggle for liberation against oppression which was inspired by this tradition. This struggle was waged in order to gain freedom to liberate the black and suffering masses in South Africa. In our particular context, however, it is not the same kind of struggle that is being waged, hence our analysis of the tenets of Black Theology will subtly answer a different question from that of the manner in which the struggle was waged, namely on how it could be continued in a relatively free democratic context of South Africa. In our view, there seems to be a continuous confusion or conflation of the nuances of a struggle for liberation and the *praxis* of liberation and for us they are not the same.

While there is no doubt that the struggle against the oppressive regime in South Africa is over, it is however how this acquired freedom serves to liberate those previously oppressed masses that becomes our central question today. According to Gibellini (1987:55) a discourse of liberation presupposes a discourse about freedom and *ipso facto*, the discourse of liberation is a function of the discourse of freedom.³ From the aforesaid statement, one can deduce that liberation is a process.

To be more precise, political liberation, which has been attained by blacks in South Africa, is therefore a function of freedom. It is ironic that Black Theology has been criticized for equating political liberation to the promise of the gospel (Kee 1986:37-38). If the gospel of Jesus Christ promises more than political liberation, then we cannot equate black political liberation to the fulfillment of the gospel promise save as a function to fulfill the gospel. But we have said already that liberation is more than political liberation.

2.3. The Classic Tenets of Black Theology in South Africa.

In this section, the notion classic other than classical is preferred. The concept classical has often been used for the study of Greek and Latin in the western educational establishments.

³ The actual words are: "Talk about liberation presupposes talk about freedom and is a function of talk about freedom." Our interpretation of the line is that talk about liberation is a function of talk about freedom. Let us link this to "talk about God," in other words theology, then we will see that talk about liberation which is the content and framework of Black Theology implies that the latter is a function of freedom.

Used in theological circles it is highly dogmatic and ideological as it immediately excludes conversations in theology that came later, especially from the Third World in the 1960's and 1970's. It is certainly not the capacity to engage classical theology that is in question, but the actual reality of classical theology as a designation of theological discourse without the voices of the latecomers who reside outside Europe that is the fulcrum of our problem. With the resurgence of neo-conservatism, we find it hard to accept the term classical save as a construct of power. We elect to use the word classic to connote our search for intents and tenets serving as a standard or typical model of Black Theology in South Africa.

2.3.1. The Broad Demarcation of Black Theology

The question of the historical origins of Black Theology and liberation requires a broad demarcation. Motlhabi (1986) relates the dialectical relationship between American Black Theology and South African Black Theology. Black Theology stands with one leg in Africa, with another in America, he contends. In looking at the origins of Black Theology in South Africa, he cites two approaches:

- One approach grounds the origins in the historical past of black people in the United States and South Africa and interprets their cultural heritage, religion and philosophy and the impact made by Western Christianity, colonialism and Apartheid on this past.
- The other focuses on the literary “origins” of Black theology as an intellectual discipline.

Motlhabi avers that the second approach is the most accepted view and following this Cone becomes the father of the discipline of Black Theology. This makes Cone's understanding of liberation and how he defines it in the classic origins of the discipline extremely important. The important thing though is that these approaches cannot be treated as exclusive from each other. If the two views are held in dialectical tension, then Ethiopianism and the rise of African Initiated Churches in South Africa, together with what they stood for will have an important bearing on the origins and rootage of Black Theology. Maluleke's (1994) "Review of Theology in the Twenty First Century," tacitly arrives at the same conclusion, namely that African and Black Theologies are not mutually exclusive. To employ Tutu's phrase these approaches, i.e. African and Black Theologies, are "soul mates." There are cleavages in the historical past of black people in the United States and South Africa. Their cultural heritage, religion and philosophy and the impact made by Western Christianity, colonialism and apartheid on them weaves their experience. This should be taken into account in tracing the origins of the school of Black Theology of liberation.

Briefly, Cone's work characteristically has three main sources: Western Theology, Scripture, past and contemporary American writings. Cone's emphasis on Scripture has been Luke 4:18, which may be said to be his theology's liberatory Creed. The Exodus motif too, is central to his theology and the identity of Christ (Motlhabi 1986:42). In the case of South Africa there was a stage when Black Theology was mediated as an oral tradition with little being produced in terms of writings. African Traditional Religions and thus AIC's and Ethiopianism constitute the roots of this tradition.

We can say that Black Theology as an identifiable and explicit movement started in the University Christian Movement in 1971. Basil Moore was instrumental in this regard. He was its director of theological concerns. Black Theology was propagated by seminars and ministers' caucuses. Needless to say, Black Consciousness featured a lot in this era and had an immense influence on Black Theology. Sabelo Ntwasa was the first Director of the Black Theology Project. As Motlhabi notes (1986:45), "From the very beginning Black Theology in South Africa was seen to stand with one leg in Africa and the other in Black America. Black Theology looked at Christian missions critically and part of its task was to discover bases in which African forms of religious expression, which still have remnants in black mainline churches but are prevalent in African Initiated Churches, impacted on the search for liberation. The message of Black Theology is liberation: "to set the downtrodden free."

Martey (2005:1) asserts that by the close of the 20th century, the modern African theology movement was over forty years old. The nationalist reflection on colonization with the spirit of African Nationalism began around the mid 1950's and gave impetus to the Africanization discourse as a theologically sound project for African revolution and liberation. Still, we could say the roots of Black Theology go back to Africa's singers across the Atlantic who found themselves in a strange land having been ferried as slaves uprooted from their motherland. Indeed, we can go back to the sudden eruption of ambiguity and perplexity manifest in the seven Frontier Wars in the Eastern Cape up to the Bambata Rebellion in Kwa-Zulu Natal to trace the roots of Black theology both on the continent and inter-continently.

Gqhubule (1977), for example, is among those who perceive Tiyo Soga as the father of Black Nationalism and to this point Khabela (1996: 2) elucidates:

Located within the history of colonialism, Tiyo Soga offers a benchmark for understanding the ambiguities of black Christianity in South Africa. Tiyo Soga must be understood against the background of organized African nationalism. His approach to the challenge of colonialism and white racism was a judicious one, born with the familiarity of a conquered race.

The formulation of a theology of liberation, however, came late. In fact, as Oduyoye (1993:203) poignantly observes, the liberation language of theology was a scandal, seen not just as a political, but also as a protest and violent language. It was viewed (and probably even now) as fraught with undertones of upsetting the existing political order. As a result, African Christians groomed within the educational systems of the oppressor were made to shy away from it. Chikane (1990:159-160) cites Cone as having made a similar assertion albeit in a different context:

In his evaluation of the New Delhi Conference, he says that while the North Americans placed more emphasis on socio-political liberation, Africans stressed cultural liberation. He says that in each of the meetings between the groups, Africans “shied away from the term ‘liberation’ because they say that the gospel is not political.”

As a function to unleash the freedom of the oppressed, the struggle for liberation became inevitable and indispensable.

Kee (1986:30) makes a good point when he says that “there is an iron law of colonial history.” What this means is that in the contest against colonial forces there are different waves such as moderate and radical. These waves also correspond with the colonial strategies to cling to power and perpetuate oppression. For example, when the struggle is waged in moderate terms, usually the colonial regimes are intransigent and step up their terror. When the struggle becomes radicalized it is then that the colonial regime seeks to embrace the moderate among those who are struggling. That there were those who feared the term liberation in the beginning explains this law. But then, the struggle became radical and gave impetus to the development of the school of Black Theology of liberation.⁴ The struggling people had changed, their consciousness had changed.

Two broad schools in South Africa are distinguishable, the materialist (Mosala, Tlhagale *et al*) and racial (Boesak, Tutu *et al*) readings of the roots of the struggle and thus Black Theology and as we shall later observe, this distinction is analytical and constitutes no cause for rivalry and exclusion of one by the other. For now it is imperative to note that Black Theology forms part of the groups of theologies referred to as liberation because it shares a methodology and content basic to theologies of liberation (Jacob 1989: 6).⁵ For now it is adequate to say Black Theology of liberation has a broad demarcation of its origins which must be taken into account in tracing its history.

⁴ As an example, the history of the ANC will exhibit these waves. It is known that the first generation of the African leaders used moderate means to challenge the colonial masters. The formation of the ANC was itself a reaction among others, to the 1910 Union of South Africa. The formation of *Umkhonto we Sizwe* resonated with the euphoric implementation of the Apartheid laws which culminated in the 1960 massacre. Black Consciousness followed this, and it was not just an expression of radical demand but more than that. People had changed, and the issue was that of the decolonization of the mind. Black Theology then arose in this context. Khabela’s (1992) thesis also presents a similar scenario. In it he distinguishes the Rebel and Accommodationist Traditions and he does the same in his 1996 *Struggle of the Gods*.

⁵ This point has been made in Chapter One too.

2.3.2. Liberation and Black Consciousness

Within the auspices of the South African Student's Organization (SASO), a philosophy of Black Consciousness with the aim to liberate blacks from their self-incurred mental and psychological bondage was propounded. The idea to conscientize blacks and call them to their personhood by rejecting white value systems and create their own was at the core of the Black Consciousness philosophy. Thus Black Consciousness created a new theological climate in South Africa (Maimela 1987:70). On the edifice of this philosophy, Black Theology became a response to white theology relating black experience to Christian belief. It sought to demonstrate that God was not sectarian and that black existence was a legitimate form of existence with God actively involved in their struggle for liberation. Hopkins (2000:32) gives this general definition of Black Consciousness:

Black Consciousness, in its theological context, arose in the mid-to late 1960s both in the United States and in South Africa. As a movement, it defined how one gained consciousness of being black. In the United States prior to becoming "black," African Americans had accepted the name of "Negro," even though this rubric suggested that blacks were defined, controlled, and, thereby, oppressed by whites. South African blacks struggled against comparable derogatory descriptions given to them by white Christians. Instead of *kaffir*, "colored" or "Bantu," Africans, like their black American counterparts, accepted "black" as an overarching designation of self-definition.

The question “How does one be black and Christian?” challenged both sides of the Atlantic. In response, a black theology of liberation arose, between 1966 and 1969, as the theological arm of larger liberation struggles (*Dictionary of Third World Theologies.*)

The connection between Black Consciousness and Black Theology does not need to be repeated in this dissertation.⁶ The relevance of Black Consciousness as Biko predicated arose out of an anomalous situation deliberately created by humankind. Biko (2004:97) forcefully posits:

...tradition has it that whenever a group of people has tasted the lovely fruits of wealth, security and prestige it begins to find it more comfortable to believe in the obvious lie and to accept it as normal that it alone is entitled to privilege. In order to believe this seriously, it needs to convince itself of all the arguments that support the lie.

The belief in the “obvious lie” becomes managed through a construction of consciousness, spirituality and rationality solely to support and give anchorage to the anomaly. The anomaly becomes institutionalized and Biko goes on to say that the success of white power structure has been its ability to manage to bind whites together to defend the *status quo*. This anomaly is further exposed to be deeply stringent because even those whites who perceive much wrong in the system make it their business to control black response to their provocation.

⁶ Tutu D, Boesak A, Goba B, Maimela S, Mosala I, Maluleke, T all drew from the insights of the Black Consciousness philosophy. Tutu (2004 :ix) says, “Constantly in the difficult days of our struggle against apartheid, I used to say that the Black Consciousness movement was surely of God,” in the preface of Steve Biko’s *I write what I like*.(2004 edition).

To illustrate Biko's point, and writing in the *Mail and Guardian*, (January 14-20, 2005 p24), Suttner observes the retreat from politics or "inward emigration"⁷ of large numbers of white people who were part of the active resistance to apartheid. Suttner cites a number of reasons for the despondence associated with white former activists:

Some believe that their contributions have been insufficiently recognized; they feel that whites have been "marginalized." What informs these judgments? What is the root of this dissatisfaction, often expressed with vehemence on the dinner party circuit? Certainly, some white former activists see their role as self-appointed moral guardians who have to keep their black former comrades in check. This often takes the form of an obsession with the lifestyles of their former comrades. But, fundamentally, there is discomfort with what is perceived as a form of Africanism that allegedly excludes whites and undermines non-racialism.

The feeling of marginalization and lack of recognition of white contribution, their self-appointment as guardians of the struggle and a suspect form of Africanism as opposed to non-racialism are surely constant problems in our public life today. Some have even begun to talk about "reverse racism." This seems to have been a problem as early as in the 1970s shown by Mbeki's quotation in the *Mail & Guardian* (2005:24) on what Oliver Tambo said in 1971:

⁷ While the use of the word "emigration" is not being pushed beyond the intentions of the author of the article in question, Moltmann's notion of "inward emigration" referring to the tendency to withdraw to self and find comfort among the think-alike surely comes to mind. De Villiers (2005) has used this concept too to analyze the state of public life in South Africa today.

This sweet bird from the blood-stained south flew into Zambia and sang a singularly sweet song: “I am opposed to apartheid; I am opposed to the isolation of South Africa; I am opposed to violence; I am opposed to guerrillas; I am opposed to the Lusaka Manifesto; I am opposed to the decisions of the World Council of Churches; I know the Africans can do nothing to cause political change in South Africa; I am in favour of change, but determined to prevent change.

The anomaly is glaringly self-evident in the quotation above and to avoid flooding the reader with many examples as there indeed are, according to Biko, the anomaly as demonstrated by the insights cited above is caused by an essential difference in probing the basic problem. Biko maintains that for liberals the problem has often been probed and diagnosed as Apartheid. He (Biko 2004:99) says that if the thesis entails that the problem is Apartheid, the antithesis will be non-racialism. The resultant problem will however, be the synthesis between apartheid and non-racialism. It will be unclear and anomalous, hence the ambiguous picture painted above. As we shall see in our discussion of different strands of Black Theology in South Africa, it is the manner in which the central problem has been viewed that distinguishes one strand from the other.

For Biko the Black Consciousness thesis entails that the problem is “a strong white racism.” The antithesis to this strong white racism accordingly is a strong solidarity among blacks. Synthetically, Biko posits, there will be a true humanity where power politics will have no role. We still find it hard to dispute Biko’s thesis that there is a strong white racism to which we must respond even in the post-Apartheid dispensation and the current globalizing world.

In other words this strong white racism is not confined to the South African boundaries as racism is a global problem.⁸ The link between liberation and Black Consciousness is therefore clear, namely, the thesis of a “strong white racism” whose antithesis is, stated otherwise, the liberation of black people for the liberation of humanity. Holbrook (1978:194) articulates the problem poignantly when he says that history has set black and white on a confrontation course, the point of contact having become solely one of violent conflict. To this point Maimela (1987:63) explains that “blackness” or “whiteness” carries enormous economic and socio-political values resulting into a fundamental difference between one who is black and another who is white.

The first problem we identify is the racial conflict between black and white, a conflict that has been brutal and violent. In this conflict blacks have been on the receiving end, experiencing oppression not as individuals but collectively as blacks. Exponents of black theology generally agree that in the last analysis this oppression was a dehumanizing total onslaught against the blacks. In the conflict it became clear that blacks were not viewed as human or fully human by whites. They were viewed as inferior to the white race and scientific and religious reasons were propounded to justify the claim. The summary of the problem is that it is a story of Christianization, Colonization and Conquest. The affirmation of blacks is but teleological, it is eschatological. The affirmation of blackness and black emancipation from racism is the means to the ultimate goal of human freedom for both blacks and whites.

⁸ We should remember that in the post-Apartheid era, a global Conference on Racism was held in Durban meaning that the problem of racism is still with us today. In the South African public life, the discussion on whiteness has been plunged into the centre stage of public life. Recently under the auspices of the SACC in December a Conference on Racism was held. Racism is now a global topic whose resurgence is coterminous with the reality of the unequal, divided world in the era of globalization.

Boesak's notion of "pseudo-innocence" should be understood from this point of view. As demonstrated above, the cry of marginalization of white activists, their self-appointment as guardians and their uneasiness about Africanization and the acceptance of the state of affairs by blacks, all constitute a crime. Boesak (1977:10) argues that it is no longer possible to innocently accept history as it happens, silently hoping that God would take responsibility for human failure. Boesak's thesis has its roots in psycho-social analysis influenced by Rollo May. The word innocence is taken from the Latin words *in* and *nocens* literally meaning "not harmful." It signifies a kind of guileless in actions and pseudo-innocence is childishness almost demonic as opposed to child-likeness. To maintain the *status quo*, as indeed Biko's thesis has maintained above, it becomes necessary to create an aura of innocence, hence the call to bid farewell to innocence.

A number of liberation theology scholars have not discarded the role of Black Consciousness in the post apartheid era (Jacob 1994; van der Water 1998). The recent publication of an article by E'skia Maphahle⁹ that "Steve Biko's teachings must be taken further if we are to know ourselves" (*City Press* 18 September 2005: 28) says it all. In this article, Mphahle reckons that Black Consciousness goes beyond the boundaries of the organization forged to propagate and live out this philosophy in its approach to liberation. For our current situation, he continues, Black Consciousness seeks to re-establish community relations, a responsibility that covers all areas of our socio-political existence. He says (2005:28):

⁹ The article is an edited version of the paper he presented at the Steve Biko Memorial Service in 2005.

Black Consciousness and solidarity are a logical response to white consciousness. Black Consciousness should mean continuity with the past and the future. What happens in the future will depend largely on what Black Consciousness means today.

Quite poignantly, Mphahlele argues that Black Consciousness should not be minimized by flashing the banner of non-racialism. He says that Black Consciousness and non-racialism are not in conflict, the latter simply expresses what we are, not-racialists. “Rather,” he explains, “we would urge you to tell us what you are and where you are going from there,” to signify the identity role played by Black Consciousness (2005:28). Black Consciousness is about the self-definition of blacks who have not been given the space in history to define themselves. It is conceivable on the grounds of collective ontological exclusion of blacks and the pervasive presence of a strong white racism. Black thus assumes both the ontological and symbolic dimensions in the struggle for a collective humanity by shedding pseudo-innocence and false consciousness. And Mphahlele helps us to perceive the classic relationship between Black Consciousness and Black Theology as “mutual knowledge.” To this effect Manganyi (1973: 18) says:

According to the Shorter Oxford Dictionary the following meanings of the word ‘consciousness’ are given: ‘mutual knowledge’; ‘knowledge as to which one has the testimony within oneself’; and ‘the totality of impressions, thoughts, and feelings, which make up a person’s conscious being’. The first usage, though rare, is of the utmost importance. In our definition of black consciousness, there is an implicit recognition of ‘mutual knowledge’. This recognition leads us further to that of black solidarity.

From this quotation above, ‘mutual knowledge’ connotes “the totality of impressions, thoughts, and feelings” that shape one’s consciousness. Black Theology of liberation thus engages with this totality of impressions, feelings and thoughts that shape the consciousness of black masses. Most importantly, Black Theology of liberation is in solidarity with the totality of the feelings, impressions and thoughts of the black people. As we have said, it is not the skin colour that is important, but “what the skin actually signifies in sociological and psychological terms” (Manganyi 1973:18). Its *telos*, as we have alluded above, is the liberation of both black and white. Achebe (2002:3) asserts that “although apartheid is gone the legacy of Steve Biko will grow,” for even though phrases like “reverse racism” have become handy, it is pseudo-multiracialism and not multi-racialism and the seriously damaged black self-esteem he vehemently attacked. “Well, why do I use the past tense?” Tutu asks (Tutu 2006:2). “The fact of the matter is that we still depressingly do not respect one another. I have often said Black Consciousness did not finish the work it set out to do.”

To sum up, let us note the following important points. Firstly, Black Consciousness rejects white societal standards as norms based on a strong racism. Secondly, it rejects black fear of whiteness. Thirdly, it calls for the unity of blacks and last, it is non-violent (Biko 2004: Chapter 2). Unequivocally stated in its thesis, that there is a strong white racism whose antithesis is a strong black humanity, in its relationship with Black Theology, Black Consciousness suggests that being black is a decisive faith category in the appropriation of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

2.3.3. A Catalogue of the Development of the Liberation Hermeneutic in Black Theology

Boesak avers:

Black Theology is a theology of liberation. It seeks to plumb the black condition in the light of God's revelation in Jesus Christ, so that the black community can see that the gospel is commensurate with the achievement of black humanity. Black Theology is a theology of "blackness." It is the affirmation of black humanity that emancipates black people from white racism, thus providing authentic freedom for both white and black people. It affirms the humanity of white people in that it says "No" to the encroachment of white people (1986:18).

This statement unequivocally puts Black Theology squarely into the mould of liberation. The condition of the black people is viewed from the understanding of how Jesus is revealed by God in their context. From a "Christo-pneumatological *praxis*," according to Mofokeng (1987: 4-6) the question is "who do people say Jesus is" that determines this "revelation." It is probably the *ipseity* (Ricoeur 1992), (different identity as distinct from *idem*, sameness) of Jesus Christ in the black condition that when plumbed yields a completely different tone of the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is to this extent that Maluleke (1997b) rhetorically asks whether "Will Jesus ever be the same again?"¹⁰ if blacks respond to this question.

¹⁰ This is part of a title of an article.

The public professions of this black Jesus present him as a character often acted out in dramatic and loud sermons quite different from the well-reasoned and calmly portrayed Jesus in the western traditional contexts. It is a revelation of a different worldview all together. Liberation became Africa's acquisition since the late 1960's during the emergence of Black Theology in South Africa. It became a category for a new theological self-understanding that challenged Africans to discover themselves as human beings created in the *Imago Dei*. As a new theological acquisition, liberation was harnessed as a tool to respond to white racism and capitalist imperialism and indeed, also to oppression by Africans against Africans, or blacks against blacks and African men against African women. So, there have developed variations in approach, histories and emphases with robust internal debates with regards to method, definition and content. Invariably, issues of race, poverty, culture and spirituality serve as departure points and *ipso facto*, count as contours covered in the hermeneutical paradigm of liberation in Black Theology.

To be precise, "Black Theology was the first liberation oriented theology to appear on the African scene in the early 1970s" (Martey 2005:2). Black Theology drew most of its influence from Cone with its key preoccupation being racism before the end of apartheid in 1994. Black theology therefore arose in the context of apartheid and the need to demolish it as a socio-political system. By the time of the demise of apartheid, there had emerged two distinctive definitional phases of Black Theology. We should immediately state our consciousness that periodization does defy easy consensus.

Consequently, our phases particularly attempt to sift out attendant problems more than a compartmentalization of periods.

2.3.3.1 The Classic Phase One of Black Theology ¹¹

Phase one began in the 1970s, closely linked with the Black Consciousness Movement and exclusively focused on race analysis. Propagated and inspired mostly by Steve Biko, this phase saw its task as the “conscientization” of black masses to become the vehicles of their own liberation. Eminent during this phase were figures like Boesak, Goba, Buthelezi, to mention but a few. It is however Moore who published a collection of essays contributed by a host of black intellectuals in South Africa in 1972. This phase was characteristic of a “theology out of the guts” between our shores. It actually placed Black Theology on the pedestal of intellectual scholarship with the *Journal of Black Theology* emerging on the scene.

¹¹ The development of Black theology has been delineated in various ways. Cf. Meko, I. S. (1995: 40). He traces the First phase from the 1970's, the initiation of the Black Theological Project and personalities such as Basil Moore, Sabelo Ntwasa. The Second Phase he associates with the Institute for Contextual Theology and the publication by Mosala, I.J. & Thlagale, B. (1986). The use of Marxist tools, economic violence and women's liberation come to the surface. Cf. Also Khabela, M.G. (1992:282ff.). He sees the divergence of the development of Black Theology along the lines of racial analysis and class analysis or ideology. In terms of the use of or development of social analysis cf. also Cochrane (1990:71). There is an important element in this whole question of delineating variants in this school of thought, namely the convergence between Black Theology and African Theology. For this there are important works to which we can refer, Cf. Kretzschmar, L. (1986). She discusses Black Theology within broad themes of African Traditional Religion, Black Consciousness and the gospel as the Gospel of liberation. Cf. also Cone, J.H & Wilmore, G.S. (eds.) 1979. There are dissertations that have been written which poignantly demonstrate the “soul mate” relationship between African Theology and Black Theology, cf. Maluleke, T.S. (1995b); Njeza, M.M. (2000). Maluleke later commented that these “siblings,” “distant cousins” “soul mates or antagonists,” need to redefine their conventional distinctions in the light of the emerging African Theologies, (1997a). All of them reflect on the experience of the black masses in South Africa and their encounter with the whites.

South African Black Theology was attaining scope and content, bidding “farewell” to a consciousness deeply entrenched by traditional Western theology which simply made black masses to accept their situation unquestioningly. It was a psycho-social mode of reflection on racism. It is important to note that alongside these developments African Theology was gaining some crystallization too. John Mbiti (1969; 1975), Dickson (1984) and in South Africa, Setiloane (1975;1986) were icons that sought to find a space for African culture in Christian theology. African theology was an intellectual exercise aimed at interpreting Christian theology within the framework of the world of African cultural meaning. Logically, methodological formulations of African and Black theologies led to fierce debates, among them the debate between Tutu and Mbiti remaining perennially illustrative. Documented well in Cone-Wilmore (1979), Tutu (483-491) and Mbiti (477 -482) crossed swords on the general apprehension by many African theologians about foreign tools predominantly used by Black theologians other than the culture of the African people.

Black theologians on the other hand were equally apprehensive about the vivid absence of liberation in the African theological discourse. Dubbing African and Black theologies as “soul-mates” Tutu’s persuasive argument gained wide support in establishing the harmony between the liberation trajectory and culture. As “soul-mates” Black Theology and African Theology were not mutually exclusive. Later, Mosala notably asserted that black hermeneutics should be rooted in the history and culture of the oppressed black masses. We shall also see later in this work how Keteyi argues that liberation is in fact inculturation.

2.3.3.2. The Classic Phase Two

In 1986 the publication of *The Unquestionable Right to be Free: Black Theology from South Africa* ushered in a second distinctive phase. Characteristically, this phase took the Marxist analysis of society seriously. This move arose as a result of a growing view that perceived race as an inadequate tool of analysis for black liberation. This debate between Race and Class analyses has a long history. It is important to give it some attention as it accords the liberation perspective an articulate dimension.

In the first Conference on Black Theology which convened in Atlanta in 1977, Cone rejected Marxism as underplaying the issue of race. By glancing at the problem that existed between Latin American Liberation theology and Black Theology, we can grasp the manner in which this debate was fierce. While liberation theologians in Latin America were trading their methodology on Marxist tools, most Latin American theologians belonged to the same class and race as the oppressor in the view of Black theologians. Pityana (1995:192) also gives a similar account at the EATWOT conference on “The Challenge of Basic Christian Communities” held at Sao Paulo, in 1990. African, Asian and black American representatives maintained that there was no dialogue between Latin American Theology and other liberation theologies because Latin Americans preferred to dialogue with traditional European and American theologies because they had no understanding of culture and racism.

In 1986 in Mexico, Oaxtepec, the Conference theme of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) was: “Commonalities and Divergences in Third World Theologies.” South Africa was represented by Chikane, Mofokeng and Maimela. In the report prepared by Maimela (1987b:55) this summary vivifies the convergences and divergences of these theologies:

The Latin American’s theological option intends to link the socio-political with the cultural and religious tradition of the Continent. Asian theology seeks to relate the positive contributions of the traditional spiritualities of the great religions of the peoples’ struggle for liberation and poses the challenge for a cosmic holistic theocentric Christology. As African theology explores cultural identity in the face of racist oppression, it serves as a critique to the models of traditional theology. The theological efforts of US Minorities challenge both the political and economic systems of their nation as well as the main neo-conservative trends in American religiosity.

Most pertinently, the issue of race was fiercely tackled:

Among many issues that will receive special attention are the problem of racism, class and sexism in the Third World Countries. The issue of race was a particularly painful one to deal with, especially by people from Latin America where on the surface there seems to be no racial problem. But the fact that there are a few members who are Black and Native American Indians is indicative of the reality of racism in Latin America, especially in Brazil where the population is more than 60% black. The EATWOT assembly resolved to freeze the membership from Latin America until one-third is black and/or Native American.

For now the point we are making is that the transition to the second phase of Marxist tools in Black theology was robust. We should note that Latin American theologians did also point to the narrow emphasis of racism as an analytical tool on the part of Black Theology. They indeed made a legitimate criticism that Black Theology ignored the issue of class and that their system and strategy of liberation was flawed without class analysis. Later KC Abraham (1990) edited a book entitled *Third World Theologies: Convergences and Divergences* in which many of these debates were tackled. This debate equally and unpalatably extended to the South African turf. The issues of race in relation to the exponents of contextual and liberation theologies in South Africa were sharply raised.

What for instance is the difference between contextual theology and black theology in South Africa? Is there an ideological-cultural explanation of white “progressive” theologians’ predilection for Latin American liberation theology? (Mosala 1987?: 37)

Mosala did not only stop there but continued in this manner:

But there was fundamental weakness in black theology which made the onslaught on it possible. This weakness has to do with our failure to do “internal” critical definitional work. If in the beginning it was clear that white people could not do black theology, did it follow that all black people could do black theology? Was it correct to be so loose in our definition of the black theological practice as to imply that it amounted to any theology done by any group of black people? The need to tighten up the theoretical and ideological screws in this area cannot be over-emphasized. This applies equally to the U.S.A. and South African situations (1987:37).

Logically flowing from this debate, it was asserted that not even every black person could be viewed as an interlocutor or exponent of Black Theology (Maluleke 1996b). So the 1980s saw a rough chapter of internal debates albeit fruitful in the long run. Hence, as EATWOT clearly stated in 1986, race, class and sexism were now receiving attention. Quite clearly this was a methodological phase. Mosala (1989), appropriating a materialist reading of the Bible, debunked theoretical tools employed by most Black theologians with special reference to Tutu and Boesak. He saw in them a potential danger of harnessing the tools of the oppressors which might ultimately perpetuate the same oppression. Race analysis was inadequate without class analysis. Furthermore, the uncritical use of the white frameworks and forms of knowledge often employed by Black theologians had begun to be seriously questioned. As Mosala (1988:39) noted:

In and of themselves the methodological and theoretical frameworks borrowed from other social and historical *praxes* are not wrong. The dangers do exist, however, of them becoming the means by which new forms of cultural and racial chauvinism and domination may be inaugurated.

It is not only the debate in transition to phase two of Black theology that should be our major concern in this catalogue. It is rather the contribution this phase made to the development of this school of thought that should be our focus. The contribution of the class analysis was pivotal in the area of black feminist theology. It was asserted that arising out of Marxist class analysis the “struggle between struggles” made the question of women struggle exceedingly urgent.

The experience of women and blacks was understood to be salutary in this regard. To be precise, the execution of the struggle of black women was a condition for the success of the black struggle for liberation. The normative link between historical materialism and the relationship between man and woman was made by Marx quite clearly in this manner:

From the character of this relationship follows how much *man* as a *species-being*, as *man*, has come to be himself and to comprehend himself; the relation of man to woman is the *most natural* relation of human being to human being. It therefore reveals the extent to which a man's *natural* behaviour has become *human*, or the extent to which the *human* essence in him has become *natural essence* – the extent to which his *human nature* has come to be *natural* to him (Taken from Kee 1990:281).

Mosala (1989) made the same point in his quest for black hermeneutics by challenging patriarchy and the racist capitalist oppression against which the struggle had to be waged. In recent times black women scholars like Dube (2000), Nadar,(2003) and of course the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians, have continued the tradition of the liberation hermeneutics. Maluleke and Nandar (2005: 1) testify to this when they say:

...the gender debate should be conducted more vigorously between and among Black male and female intellectuals as it is between White female and Black female intellectuals. It is often the case that in matters of race and gender Black intellectuals speak not so much to one another but to White colleagues. In the process, they do overhear one another, as they look at one another from the corners of their eyes.

Clearly the appropriation of Marxist tools meant that the grammar of Black Theology in South Africa, in spite of the internal rigorous debates, was expanded to include gender.

Furthermore, there was a shift in the use of philosophy to social analysis with the situation of the poor as the starting point of theology. The use of categories borrowed from Marx such as alienation, class, labour or historical materialism and *orthopraxis* equally became prisms in Black theological discourse to deconstruct domination. We can safely conclude that the second phase of Black Theology brought a sharp division albeit false, between the Race and Class Analyses that is to be held in creative tension to better understand the South African situation and the development of Black Theology itself.

In his dissertation, Khabela (1992) devotes considerable space in analyzing the debate between Race and Class Strands by pointing out that the Marxist school similarly drew its inspiration from Western scholars (referring to Mosala) in the same manner as the Race strand did. We need to further note that Marxist tools were not simply adopted uncritically and without some rigorous debate. Latin American theologians who prominently used Marxist tools were challenged by other Third World Theologians who saw the danger of overlooking the religio-cultural reality particularly in Africa and Asia. The use of Amilcar Cabral by scholars such as Mosala is indicative of this fact (Chikane 1990). So in the two phases of Black Theology thus far discussed race, culture, class and gender will truly represent the gains of Black Theology of liberation prior to the dawn of democracy in South Africa.

2.3.3.3. Strands of Black Theology of Liberation

A summation of the sentiments above is that, in South Africa, black reflection focused on this violence of oppression in different ways and most probably with different emphases.

Black Theology of liberation as an apologia of Christian theology is aptly summed up by what Vuyani Ntintili (1996:1-18) suggests by way of delineating strands of the school.

The semantic metaphor of strands is quite significant because it makes room for mutual flows into one another instead of the temptation to make a rigid demarcation between race, class, culture and gender in the analysis of Black Theology. He identifies three strands of development in South African Black Theology of liberation. His key thesis is that “Black Theology does not entertain a single notion of liberation. Instead, it espouses divergent notions and some of them are more liberative than others” (1996:1).

First, he identifies the Black Solidarity Strand; secondly the Black Solidarity-Materialist Strand and thirdly the Non-Racialist Strand. According to this, the Black Solidarity Strand focused its conceptualization of oppression on racism. It posited that racism has subjective and objective dimensions. The focus was on the socio-psychological dimension of racism. The Black Solidarity-Materialist Strand accentuated class, race and gender analysis. The Non-Racialist Strand focused on apartheid. Ntintili maintains that of all these strands, the non-Racial was the most popular. It focused on the legal dimension of apartheid (policy-making). Particularly through the Black Solidarity-Materialist Strand, the organic relatedness of oppression was demonstrated.

From this then an integration and holistic approach of liberation was emphasized with an essential element of taking a preferential option for the poor. He (1996:15) says,

My analysis of the three strands of Black Theology has led me to the conclusion that Black Solidarity-Materialist strand is the one that takes into account the four criteria of comprehensiveness, integration, identification and planned involvement. Thus, its notions of oppression and liberation are the most liberative.

The quotation above suggests that there are at least four criteria that need to be satisfied to analyze oppression and liberation. First, comprehensiveness in analysis is essential because oppression has many dimensions. Black Theology of liberation takes the dimensions of race, class, gender and marginalization to heart in its analysis. Second, integration implies the need to take the organic relatedness of these dimensions of oppression. Third, identification summons us to take sides. In doing theology there cannot be any neutrality. To this Maluleke (2006:304) concurs:

More importantly, and this is the message of Black Theology also, in order to assist in the liberation of the oppressed, theology must choose the side of the oppressed and as such must be done in solidarity not with the powerful and wealthy, but with the oppressed and the poor. Armed with this orientation, theology will then approach all of its traditional disciplines from the point of view of solidarity with the poor, the oppressed and the marginalized.

Molefe Tsele affirms this broadness and organic relatedness of this violent oppression in his proposal for a *Theology of Mzabalazo* (1997:47). He says:

The church of struggle which seeks the correlation of salvation and liberation in its life and teachings, will be characterized by an integration and uniting of multi-life dimensions, differentiations, and a permanent moment of the negative principle, i.e. the negativity of the cross.

Last, is the planned engagement of those who are committed to the transformation of the oppressive structures to *praxis*. It is not right-thinking but right-doing in the service of justice and transformation that characterizes those engaged in the liberation of the poor and the oppressed. In this regard planning involves the consideration of the outcomes of critical analysis and their interpretation out of which actions of transformation will emanate.

If we recall what we have said about Black Consciousness, a view that has emphasized non-racialism as the antithesis of racism is associated with the stream designated the Non-Racialist Stream. It is however, not the best or only representative of the Black Hermeneutics. As Biko asserted, the synthesis will be ambiguous if non-racialism is the antithesis and this we shall see in the next chapter of the dissertation where we consider a range of alternative paradigms that have been suggested. What we can safely surmise at the moment is that Black Theology developed into a holistic, organic relatedness hermeneutic of liberation. According to Cornel West, Black Theology “is critical in character and hermeneutic in content” (Pityana 1995:249).

2.4. Conclusion

This chapter purposed to explore the manner in which the root paradigm of liberation shapes the norms and principles of the Black Theology of liberation. At the very beginning of the chapter an assertion that liberation is a theological programme was made, which was then followed by an explication of the appropriation of this programme into a project of Black Theology. It is important, the chapter attempted to demonstrate, to be conscious of the demarcations of the project of Black Theology of liberation.

Following this demarcation, we managed to establish various notions of liberation and oppression. We have asserted that comprehensiveness, integration, identification and planned involvement constitute the important dimensions of liberation as attested by the various strands of Black Theology in South Africa. This holistic dimension of liberation and its link with Black Theology therefore implies that the symbol of liberation is still adequate for use in our public life in South Africa. This chapter then sought to concentrate on what the project of Black Theology is all about, which must be distinguished from what it offers or promises to offer the oppressed, a question we broadly respond to in the next chapter.