# Black Aesthetics and the *Son of Man* film

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# DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation/thesis, which I hereby submit for a Master's degree at the University of Pretoria, is my own work and has not previously been submitted by me for a degree at another university.

Signed :……………………………………………………

(Katleho Karabo Mokoena )

Date :…………………………………………………..

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*Mokoena, Mohlakoana, Pholo ya Lisema. Kgotso Pula Nala!*

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## DEDICATION

For my Mother

And

In memory of my Father

I am because of their enduring love, support, and encouragement.

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# CHAPTER 1

# INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Introduction

The *Son of Man* (2006) is the first film in the Jesus film *genre* with an entirely black cast, including the leading role of a black Jesus. Historically, the Jesus film *genre* has been produced by western filmmakers with a white cast in ancient film sets, portraying how the world of Jesus would have been in first century Palestine. Portrayals of Jesus are, thus, typically portrayed as a white man with long blonde hair, blue eyes, and long white/brown robes with sandals. *Son of Man* however, places the narrative of Jesus in a contemporary South African context. Jesus is black, bald-headed, speaks isiXhosa, and upholds isiXhosa culture and tradition. *Son of Man* is a transcultural narrative of Jesus, relating the gospel narrative(s) to the black experience in South Africa. *Son of Man* diminishes the perception that the image of Jesus can only be portrayed as western. It reinforces the ideology of Black Consciousness and the praxis of Black Theology creatively and artistically through film.

This study analyses arguments about the purpose and role of art (film) in the black experience. This study will demonstrate how art may be used to address social injustices in post-1994 South Africa and the *Son of Man* film will be used as a case study. First, we will discuss the interdisciplinary study in the fields of Theology and Film Studies: provide the history of the portrayal of the Jesus figure in film, and define black aesthetics. Second, we will relate blackness and art from the Black Power Movement in the United States of America and the Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa during the 1960s. We will also discuss how Black Liberation Theology relates to aesthetics. Third, we will discuss the relationship between aesthetics and ethics. Fourth, we will explore what it means to be black and Christian in post-apartheid South Africa. Last, we will integrate these findings and provide a conclusion.

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### 1.2 Problem statement

The study seeks to analyse how the black experience in film ought to be interpreted by means of a black aesthetic theory. Black aesthetics finds that the problem with western principles and methods of analysing art is its universality and "non-ideologue" (Hall, 2010: 59). This stance regards the purpose of art as a masterpiece to be admired which cannot influence ideology and social behaviour. It ultimately ignores that art can be used as a means for social justice for the dispossessed, poor, marginalised and those that are discriminated against through systems of subjugation. When analysing the *Son of Man* film, is it only meant to be admired or is it a call to action? What are the dynamics of a black Jesus who experiences the communal struggle of black people for social justice in a South Africa that continues to disregard the dignity of a black person? How can a Jesus film be a source of social justice in post-apartheid South Africa? What does it mean to be black and Christian in a post-1994 South Africa? The purpose of this study is to analyse black aesthetics and Black Liberation Theology to understand the *Son of Man* as a social justice film.

### 1.3 Methodology

A literature based research methodology will be employed in this study. The presupposition of this paper is that film is regarded as art. The other presupposition about this paper is its Pan-Africanist stance, which holds the view that people of African descent in the diaspora share common experiences of historical oppression from different forms of social injustices (Adi and Sherwood 2003: vii).

This paper subscribes to black aesthetics from the perspective of Amiri Baraka and Mulana Ron Karenga who argue that black aesthetics should be collective, functional, and committed (Grewal 2014: 119). To elaborate, it comes from the collective experience of black people. It is committed to social justice and it has to function in the lives of black people. The ideologies of black aesthetics consist of black nationalism, Black Consciousness, Pan-Africanism and black power. These ideologies will be within the framework of the Black Consciousness Movement in the South African context.

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In South Africa, Black Consciousness and Black Theology are interwoven. Dolamo (2014: 220), states that Black Consciousness and Black Theology were initiates undertaken by the students and youth of the 1960s as a means to resist racial domination. Some like Barney Pityana regard it as two sides of the same coin, while others like James Cone regard Black Theology as the religious arm of Black Consciousness. We will engage proponents of Black Consciousness, Black Theology and African Philosophy in order to analyse the *Son of Man* as a social justice film. We will engage people like Steve Biko, Stokely Carmichael (Kwame Toure), Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones), Frantz Fanon, Takatso Mofokeng, James Cone, Sigqibo Dwane, Mogobe Ramose, Mercy Amba Oduyoye and others.

**1.4 Objectives**

In broader aspects, the objective of this study is to highlight the continued relevance of Black Consciousness and Black Theology in post-apartheid South Africa. It is to demonstrate that art is an important media (communication) for Black Consciousness and Black Liberation Theology to be pragmatic in post-1994 South Africa. Art has the potential to educate the lay man and be a call to action against injustice. The purpose of this study is to demonstrate that art may be used as a means to address issues of social justice in post-1994 South Africa.

**1.5 Literature review**

This is an interdisciplinary study in the fields of Theology and Film Studies. Marsh (2004: 60) states that books falling into the interdisciplinary field of 'theology and film' or 'religion and film' are appearing thick and fast. The first such books began appearing in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and there has been a steady trickle. There was something of a boom in the 1990s. There is now if not a flood, then at least a fast-flowing river. Johnston (2007: 15) mentions the earliest theological reflection of film to Herbert Jump's 1910 pamphlet, "The Religious Possibilities of the Motion Picture". Johnston (2009: 310) elaborates that Jump likened the church's use of movies to Jesus' parables, focusing in

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particular on the dramatic story of the Good Samaritan found in Luke 10:30-7. The story of the Good Samaritan like the motion picture was, "a dramatic story of contemporary experience, exciting in character and thus interesting even to the morally sluggish, picturing negative elements such as crime, accident, ignorance, sin, and thus commending itself as true to life, but in the virtuous souls, God-like traits" (Jump, 1911: 56). Johnston (2007: 15) argues that there was no sustained interest in the topic of theology and film prior to the 1980s even though in the late 1960s and early 1970s a few books were published that sought to establish a conversation between film and the church (e.g., Robert Konzelman's *Marquee Ministry: The Movie Theatre as Church and Community Forum* [1971], William Jones's *Sunday Night at the Movies* [1967], Neil Hurley's *Theology through Film* [1970], and James Wall's *Church and Cinema* [1971]).

The interdisciplinary study of theology and film has not been all positive. Johnston (2009: 310) recalls in the 1930s and 1940s, religious publishing houses like Zondervan, produced books and pamphlets decrying the theatre as harmful, if not sinful. In *Movies and morals* (1947), Herbert Miles labelled cinema, "the organ of the devil, the idol of sinners, the sink of infamy, the stumbling block of human progress, the moral cancer of civilisation, the number one enemy of Jesus Christ." Wall (2005: 74) states that movies are often dismissed by many academics and religionists who disdainfully say that, since movies are products of pop culture, why should the religious community give them time, energy, and, in our publications, space? Marsh (2004: 60) responds that the field of theology and religious studies need to attend to film not just for examples of religion's appearance in culture, as a quarry for useful illustrative material or for apologetic purposes. Film is becoming more respected as an art and an aspect of culture with which theological and religious enquiries inevitably have to engage. How such 'engagement' occurs, of course, is what makes publications in this interdisciplinary field so diverse.

Mitchell (2005: 738) states that over the last hundred years, no mutually agreed pattern of theological engagement with films has emerged. The landscape is marked by fragmentation and a diversity of approaches. Johnston (2009: 312) mentions that some

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see this diversity as a continuing weakness within the discipline (Eichenberger 1997). But the interchange of conflicting viewpoints has also sparked new insights.
According to Johnston (2009: 312), seeking to understand the kaleidoscope of perspectives that have presented themselves within the field, critics have turned in particular to the typologies of Paul Tillich and H. Richard Niebhur, two of the most influential twentieth century Christian theologians of culture. These scholars have provided theological mappings of possible Christian perspectives on culture that have proven helpful in describing the emerging discipline of theology and film, whether descriptively or prescriptively. The theologies of Tillich and Niebhur will not be discussed at length but two theologians that were influenced by their theology in order to contribute to the study of theology and film will be discussed. Mitchell (2005: 738) mentions two authors, John May and Rob Johnston that attempted to consolidate the study of theology and film.

John May was influenced by Tillich to describe the emerging field of theology and film. He believes that over the last forty years there has been a shift in how theologians have engaged with film. Johnston (2009: 313) states that May applies to film Tillich's three approaches to a theology of culture. Following Tillich, "heteronomy" considers film the handmaiden of faith; "autonomy" insists that film should be judged only by its own norms; and "theonomy" sees both theology and film to be grounded in ultimate reality. May broadened his categories in later years to five: (1) Religious discrimination (related to "heteronomy"), which seeks to judge film by concentrating on the morality of specific portrayals. (2) Religious visibility, which focuses on how religious figures or themes are represented in films. (3) Religious dialogue, which promotes theological conversation with particular films. (4) Religious humanism (related to "theonomy"), which examines how film can promote harmony between humans, human progress and Christian values; and (5) Religious aesthetics (related to "autonomy"), which ultimately explores how the transcendent may be manifested at the cinema.

Mitchell (2005: 738) mentions the second author, Rob Johnston who offers a complimentary framework. Johnston's typology follows that of Niebhur. Recognising

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parallels with May's work, he also provides five basic categories to reflect the theological response by the church movie-going: avoidance, caution, dialogue, appropriation, and divine encounter. Johnston (2009: 314) views it historically, "avoidance" was more typical of critics in the 1920s, "caution" in the 1940s, "dialogue" in the 1960s, "appropriation" in the 1980s, and "divine encounter" is becoming more prominent now in the new millennium.

In a world where secularism is gaining momentum and technology is advanced, people search for the meaning of life even in films. Theologians should acknowledge the role film plays in shaping our understanding of life, our perspectives in its content and how it influences our social behaviour. It is also important for theologians to provide ways of critically watching and engaging film. Theologians should not necessarily study religious films only but also study secular films within popular culture.

### 1.5.1 History of the portrayal of the Jesus figure in film

Jesus is one of the most known and influential people in the world, portrayals and expressions of him in art; music, films, and literature was inevitable. Reinhartz (2009: 420) mentions that films about Jesus began in the late nineteenth century. These films were produced in Hollywood, New York and other international centres of cinema. Reinhartz identifies two types of Jesus films; first, Jesus is portrayed directly – in the so-called "Jesus movies" about his life – and indirectly – in "Christ-figure films" that draw upon Christ related images to tell a fictional story. In this dissertation, film and movie are used interchangeably. According to Reinhartz (2009: 420) the human longing to see and hear Jesus again after his crucifixion dates back to Biblical Scriptures. In the Gospel of John, Christ first appeared to Mary Magdalene, and then to the disciples. The disciples were overjoyed but one of them, Thomas, was absent at the time, and refused to believe unless he could see and touch Jesus himself. Anker (2000: 25) dates it to the time when Jesus was still alive, the Magi's journey to Bethlehem and said: "Sir, we wish to see Jesus," (John 12:21).

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Reinhartz (2009: 424) recognises that most Jesus movies have been feature-length dramas, his survey of Jesus movies shows that Jesus' story can be told in virtually any *genre*, including musicals, comedies, and animated children's films. Although all of these rely on the gospels as source texts, their plot structure and many other features are determined by the *genre* chosen. If we were to fully list and describe all the movies chronologically that portray the life of Jesus, our scope would be too small as there are hundreds of movies about Jesus directly (Jesus movies) and thousands of movies about Jesus indirectly (Jesus figure-films). *Son of Man* portrays Jesus directly, thus the chronology would be on Jesus movies and not Jesus figure-films. Even so, we will mention Jesus movies that were influential and invoked scholarly debate.

Reinhartz (2009: 421) describes the first movie about Jesus as a silent movie. It presents a living, if slow-moving, *tableaux* modelled after devotional paintings. They generally make little attempt to create a coherent storyline and presumed the viewers' familiarity with the story. Walsh (2003: 2) concurs that film maker's made little attempt at character portrayal or narration. Instead, film staged pictures from illustrated Bibles (particularly the famous Tissot Bible) with titles written in "biblical" language. The plots that developed were primarily stories of divinely inspired conversions. There is inconsistency among scholars with details with regard to the title, date, content, duration and location of the first Jesus movie. Reinhartz (2009: 421) states that the first known example of a Jesus movie was the nineteen-minute long *The Passion Play at Oberammergau* (1898). Despite its title, it was not filmed at Oberammergau, Germany but in New York. Detweiler (2009: 110) states *The Passion Play at Oberammergau* is not the first but the second version of *The Passion Play* (1987) originating in Bavaria, Germany. Detweiler agrees with Reinhartz that *The Passion Play at Oberammergau* was filmed in New York City. Telford (1999: 1) describes the passion play as the story of Christ's sufferings from the Last Supper through his death [providing] screen practitioners with one of their most vibrant *genres*. Rainey (2010: 30) differs on the date, duration and title, that in 1897, a mere two years after the advent of the motion picture, the life of Jesus was first chronicled on the silver screen. The title thereof was *La Passion*. It was a brief passion play, consisting of twelve scenes and lasting only five minutes. Bakker (2004: 311) agrees on dating it in 1897, although

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the title of the film is slightly different, *La Passion du Christ* (The Passion of Christ). Lindvall (2009: 14) brings some consensus on the disagreements, the Oberammergau Passion Play was imported which found ready and receptive audiences, particularly in churches. The French Roman Catholic publishing house La Bonne Presse saw fit, in 1897 to reproduce the famously pious Horitz narrative on the back lots of Paris rather than in Bohemia. The said first film about Jesus no longer exists. Reproduction explains the different dating, location, titling and duration.

Reinhartz (2009: 421) mentions other silent Jesus movies including The *Life and Passion of Jesus Christ* (1905), *From the Manger to the Cross* (1912). The most interesting of these early films is D. W. Griffith's classic, *Intolerance* (1916). Griffith was the first to use the Jesus story to address a social issue in his period: he brought Jesus in to support his own case against the "Uplifters" of the Temperance movement who in his view exercised a moralistic and unchristian stranglehold on American society at the time. Detweiler (2009: 110) states that Griffith made the story of Jesus truly cinematic with massive sets erected which nearly overshadowed the life of Jesus embedded amidst four converging storylines. Reinhartz (2009: 421) describes Cecil B. DeMilles's *The King of Kings* (1927) as the most famous silent Jesus film. DeMille's narration was much more sophisticated than previous silent Jesus films, it developed a main plot and subplots the elements of which are linked through cause and effect. Furthermore, he used inter-titles not only to quote from Scripture and provide background information, but also to convey original, and often witty, dialogue and to provide commentary that helped develop the plot and characters. Detweiler (2009: 111) states that DeMille takes liberties with the biblical narrative, creating a love triangle between Mary, Judas, and Jesus. *The King of Kings* was so successful that there was no other Jesus produced film for the next thirty-four years after it was released. Ascough (2009: 180) regards the period of 1897 – 1920s designated as the time of the passive Jesus. During the silent film era (1897-1919), films such as *The Passion Play of Oberammergau* (1898) and *From the Manger to the Cross* (1912) are striking for depicting Jesus as unemotional, almost uninvolved in the activity around him. Even the introduction of sound in the 1920s did not dispel this.

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Reinhartz (2009: 422) mentions one of the major reasons Jesus was portrayed in a reverential manner was the production (Hays) code. The code was a censorship system that restricted the ways in which films were permitted to deal with subject matter pertaining to religion, ethics, sexuality, and numerous other issues. It was therefore forbidden to mock “ministers of religion” or portray Jesus in a radical manner. Reinhartz (2009: 422) mentions two early epics of the 1960s, Nicholas Ray’s *King of Kings* (1961) and George Stevens’ *The Greatest Story Ever Told* (1965), they held to the reverential conventions of the Hays Code by creating a static and solemn Jesus figures who spoke very slowly and rarely smiled. Ascough (2009: 180) concurs that the portrayal of Jesus in these two films were quite wooden.

Ascough (2009: 181) regards the period of the 1960s – 1970s as a countercultural era of Jesus movies. These movies mirrored larger movements in North American and European cultures. Pier Paolo Pasolini’s gritty black and white depiction a communistic Jesus in the gospel according to St. Matthew. Reinhartz (2009: 422) mentions two musicals, *Jesus Christ Superstar* (1973) and *Godspell* (1973), stand out as attempts to bring the Jesus story to life in the rock opera medium. Both also transpose Jesus to a contemporary setting: the Negev desert in Southern Israel filled with American hippies, in the case of *Superstar*, and the streets of a strangely silent New York City, in the case of *Godspell*. And both explore contemporary issues such as civil rights and the cult of celebrity.

According to Ascough (2009: 182) the 1980s focused on the human Jesus. Martin Scorsese shocked audiences with his adaptation of Nikos Kazantzakis's novel, *The Last Temptation of Christ*, which was about "the dual substance of Christ" and "the incessant, merciless battle between the spirit and the flesh" as the opening frame quotes from the book itself. Reinhartz (2009: 423) states that it made no claims to historicity and portrayed a Jesus who is unsure of his identity and struggles to discern whether the voices that guide him belong to God or the devil. Other controversies include Jesus’ final dream (or hallucination) in which he marries, has a family, and works as an ordinary carpenter. Also, the dream sequence created great controversy where it depicts Jesus making love with

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Mary Magdalene, and with Mary and Martha of Bethany. Ascough (2009: 182) mentions Denys Arcand's *Jesus of Montreal* (1989) where an out-of-work actor named Daniel is asked to re-write and perform the passion play at the oratory on Mt. Royal in Montreal. As he gathers other actors around himself and the play is performed, Daniel's life experiences begin to overlap with that of the Jesus character, and the acting troupe's communal existence begins to mirror the gospel story. Reinhartz (2009: 423) regards it as the most thoroughly allegorical of the *genre* (passion play); it deconstructs Jesus' traditional biography in order to mount a trenchant critique of the Catholic Church in Quebec, and of other elements in contemporary society, including the debasement of art. Despite, or perhaps because of, its anti-ecclesiastical stance, the film succeeds, better than most Jesus' films, in bringing us face to face with a Jesus who is humble, yet challenging and tremendously appealing.

According to Ascough (2009: 183) the 1990s – 2000s Jesus movies portray an evangelical Jesus. Some films reflect the piety of the earlier biblical epics, such as *Matthew* (1996), *Mary, Mother of Jesus* (1999), *Jesus* (1999), and *The Gospel of John* (2003). *The Miracle Maker* (2000) stands apart in its use of clay-figure action informed by archaeological and biblical scholarship to present a captivating portrait of Jesus through realistic dialogue and an interesting story line. Yet what unites all the films of this period is the effect of the evangelical Jesus. According to Reinhartz (2009: 423) Paul Saville's *The Gospel of John* (2003) utilised every single word of the Good News Bible's translation of the fourth gospel. It was soon overshadowed by Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* (2004). Pacatte (2014: 40) mentions Mel Gibson's graphic account of the passion and death of Jesus was playing in 68 countries, eventually grossing nearly $612 million. It played in American theatres for almost 23 weeks. In a few hours on the first day of its DVD release, more than 2.4 million copies were sold. Reinhart (2009: 423) states the movie created controversy with regard to both its heavy-handed violence and its negative representations of the Jewish authorities.

Reinhartz (2009: 424) mentions two other noteworthy Jesus films, both appeared in 2006: Catherine Hardwicke's *The Nativity story*, and Jean-Claude La Marre's *Color of the Cross*.

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*The Nativity Story* is a pleasant film about Jesus' birth and early childhood. The premise behind *Color of the Cross* is that Jesus was black, and was hated by the Jewish and Roman authorities alike due to the colour of his skin. Although *Black Jesus* (1968) is not the narrative of the life of Jesus Christ, it is a Jesus figure film that portrays the life of Patrice Lumumba. The events in the life Lumumba are paralleled with the life of Jesus as a person who fought for the liberation of his people from colonists and therefore suffered for his attempts with imprisonment and death in the film.

Films about Jesus are important to analyse as they portray different Christological perspectives. Although the filmmakers may not in most instances be biblical scholars or theologians, they still play a powerful role in how Jesus is depicted. The gospels attest that there cannot be one way of portraying Jesus. The portrayal of Jesus in the gospels depends on context: place, time, purpose, audience and author. Thus it can be expected that filmmakers would also have different portrayals of Jesus. The important question for the purpose of this dissertation would be how a black person can relate with a Jesus that is foreign to him in film? This brings us to the *Son of Man* film that depicts a black Jesus in the South African context.

### 1.5.2 Background of *Son of Man*

Giere (2011: 1) states that the film was released in 2006 by Spier Films (based in London and Cape Town), *Son of Man* (Jezile) was directed by Mark Dornford-May, an Englishman, who also co-wrote the film with his wife, Pauline Malefane, and with Andiswa Kedema. Malefane, arguably the star (even heroine) of the film, plays Mary, the mother of Jesus. The film's all black South African cast also stars Andile Kosi as Jesus, Andries Mbali as Satan, and features the South African music/ theatre troupe *Dimpho di Kopane* (meaning "combined talents" in Sesotho). Filmed entirely in South Africa, *Son of Man* is unique in that over ninety percent of the dialogue in the film is in isiXhosa. Portions of the film's dialogue – restricted to government officials and news media –are in English, as well as a bit of Latin with a choir singing "*Gloria in excelsis Deo*" at the birth of Jesus.
Gilmore (2009: 154) states that before this film was made, Donford-May developed a biblical play, "The Mysteries - *Yiimimangaliso,*" a precursor of the film. "The cast for both

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the play and the movie came of age under apartheid, an experience that proved useful in making *Son of Man*. *Son of Man* received the first Veto-Jury prize at the Africa Film Festival at the Catholic University of Leuven in 2007. The jury, summing up this work of art, wrote: "We selected a film which stimulates viewers to think and which does not leave them feeling indifferent. Musical beat, rapid rhythms, alternation of several styles and original shots ensure that the film is always stimulating. It is a film of a 'best-seller', but nothing is obvious in it; the story as we know it is turned upside down" (Signis, 2007).

Although the film was not in South African cinemas or even on television screens, it made an impact in the international film festivals where it was screened. Many South Africans do not know about the film or are aware that there is local film about the life of Jesus portrayed in a context that they are familiar with. *Son of Man* is a film that should stimulate theological reflection, debates and devotions in our various theological and church spaces.

#### 1.5.2.1 Synopsis

The synopsis is the summary, outline and plot of the film:

In the state of Judea in Southern Africa, violence, poverty and sectarianism are endemic. The neighbouring alliance has invaded under the pretence of restoring peace. Bloody street battles accompany the dictatorships incursion into its weaker satellite. Promises of a transition to open democratic rule are marred by summary executions and brutal massacres. As the civil war reaches new heights, a divine child is born to a lowly couple. As he grows and witnesses the inhumanity of the world he lives in, his angelic guardians offer him an escape to the heavens. He refuses. This is his world and he must try to save it from the work of evil men and from the darkness working through them. As an adult, he travels to the capital, gathering followers along the way from the armed factions of rebels across the land. He demands that his followers give up their arms and confront their corrupt rulers with a vision of non-violent protest and solidarity. Inevitably, he attracts the attention of the Judean tribal leaders who have struck a power-sharing deal with the aloof Governor Pilate. The Son of Man must be brought down and destroyed. This film is a powerful retelling of the life of Christ set in contemporary South Africa.

(Son of Man, 2006)

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## 1.6 Defining black aesthetics

Taliaferro (2011: 10) states that aesthetics refers to the philosophy of art and the philosophy of beauty. These two domains are occupied with controversy in terms of definition. Lorand (2000: 250) explains that the very concept of art has raised serious doubts in contemporary analytical aesthetics, not only with regard to specific definitions but, more importantly, whether or not the concept is definable at all. Aesthetics as a philosophical theory has an innumerable history dating back over two thousand years. Graham (1997: 1) states that throughout history philosophers were concerned about what art is, and why we should value it? Of course many perspectives and theories emerged about the philosophy of art, and our scope will be narrowed to a perspective of art called black aesthetics.

Payne and Barbera (2010: 80) explains that black aesthetic was committed to a radical revaluation of western aesthetic ideology, black aesthetic theorists claimed to derive their concept of black arts from traditional African aesthetics. Abiodun (2001: 15) enlightens us that the discipline of art history as defined and practised in the west has continued to resist non-western approaches to art. Aesthetic values of western art historians are shaped by European philosophical aesthetics and uniquely western visual preferences. This perspective is generally prejudiced and marginalises African aesthetics as a discipline.

Abidodun (2001: 15) states that the study of African art, having begun within the discipline of anthropology, inherited some pertinent and vexing questions, among which is the false assumption that western scholars can fully understand and interpret the cultures of other peoples by using western cultural notions, values and standards – a claim that cannot be divorced from western imperialistic involvement in Africa. The difference between African- and black aesthetics has to do with approach. African aesthetics emphasises the history of art as well as the culture in which it is derived and black aesthetics has political and ethical intentions. Even so, black aesthetics is Afrocentric and inspired by African art and especially for African-Americans to be rooted in the African culture. Payne and Barbera (2010: 80) states that black aesthetics declared its political intention of furthering the aims of black nationalism. Black aesthetics rejects the western ideology of ‘art for art’s sake’

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and could justify art only if it served the function of raising the cultural consciousness of the black community. Grewal (2014: 118) explains that the notion ‘art for art’s sake’ has to do with art being universal; it transcends culture, ideology, economics, politics and religion. In other words art is not functional, it is only meant to be admired for its beauty.

Hall (2010: 26) states that black aesthetics has been recognised as having four periods of development. (a) the Harlem Renaissance period (c. 1900-1940), (b) the second development (1940-1960) is identified as “realism, naturalism, and modernism”, (c) the critical era or the Black Arts Movement (1960-1970) and (d) the fourth period of literature and black arts since the 1970s includes form and analysis poststructuralism, black cultural nationalism, black feminist theory, and hip-hop philosophy. Each of these periods have an extensive history, we will briefly state the context and what each period contributed to the theory of black aesthetics.

### (a) The Harlem Renaissance (c. 1900-1940)

Gayle (1970: 78) notes Countee Cullen that during the Harlem Renaissance black people were only three generations removed from their ancestral homeland, a group of remarkable men and women converged in Harlem and transformed it into the literary capital of the world. Buck (2013) states that the Harlem Renaissance was not only a golden age of African-American arts, but a valiant effort to remove the masks of racial stereotypes in order to put a new face on African-Americans. Buck (2013) gives a brief context that the arc of the rise and fall of the Harlem Renaissance is imprecise. Coexisting with the Jazz Age, the Harlem Renaissance was made possible in part by powerful social forces that effected sweeping changes in America at this time, beginning with the end of World War I in 1918. Foremost among these forces was the Great Migration, a massive exodus of an estimated 13 million African-Americans from the rural south to the urban north in the period between 1910 and 1930. These shifts in American demography resulted in the rise of a black middle-class in major American cities, particularly in the northeast. In the midst of this status revolution, one place stood out in particular: Harlem. With this sudden influx of blacks and capital, Harlem became the capital of black America.

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Hall (2010: 37) states that although the Harlem Renaissance was a literary movement, it served as a form of resistance and a social rejection of racism and shaped the socio-political nature of black works of art, sparking the possibility of an aesthetic theory that reflects the social justice conditions and actions of men. Wintz and Finkelman (2004: 46) clarify that aesthetics was not given much attention than the role of and responsibility of black artists to social issues. It was about the most desirable way to represent members of the race and about whether art should furnish cultural models or present actual individual experiences. Gayle (1970: 78) mentions that when blacks expressed their dark-skinned selves, as late as 1925, it was not only unusual but revolutionary. The Harlem Renaissance was determined to express blackness without fear or shame.

Gayle (1970: 79) states that the Renaissance writers had to free their souls in order to express themselves. Writing about the black experience required a certain consciousness which draws its strength upon the fluid lore of a great people, and moulds this lore with the concepts that move and direct the forces of history today. This consciousness was about changing the old whispering “I want to be white,” to “why should I want to be white? I am a Negro- and beautiful.”

**(b) The realism, naturalism, and modernism era (1940-1960)**

Knellworth and Norris (2008: 257) state that this period was in the context after the Great Depression and against the background of increasing class conflict in America and Europe. This period is often taken to be a transitional figure in histories of African-American literature. Abrams (1999: 260) defines realism as to represent life as it really is. Naturalism is sometimes claimed to give an even more accurate depiction of life than realism. The term modernism is widely used to identify new and distinctive features in the subjects, forms, concepts, and styles of literature and the other arts in the early decades of the present century, but especially after World War I (1914-18). Wintz and Finkelman (2004: 731) describe modernism for African-American modernist art as experimental, and many modernists valued fragmentation over unity and implication over direct communication or description; they aimed to reproduce the workings of the mind rather than transcribe some supposedly objective reality.

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Knellworth and Norris (2008: 257) states that according to one critic, his work lays the foundations of a new “school” of black writing which registers a powerful “protest” against racism through a portrayal of “tough urban scenarios, the dehumanizing cycle of oppression, entrapment, and a view of individual fate as determined overwhelmingly by skin colour and poverty”. Artists did not share the same views and sometimes criticised each other’s work. The approach on social justice had various approaches from artists. Knellworth and Norris (2008: 257) mention Richard Wright who signalled rejection of ‘the so-called Harlem school of expression’ by asking a critical question about the role of black literature: ‘Shall Negro writing be for the Negro masses, molding the lives and consciousness of those masses toward new goals, or shall it continue begging the question of the Negroes’ humanity?’ Wright’s answer is a literary aesthetic which is informed by a Marxist analysis of society and committed to radical social change. Hall (2010: 38) mentions Dorothy West‘s creative works as an example of artistic narratives that explore social justice in terms of the desire for economic upward mobility and highlight the complexities of social class among blacks in America. In terms of social justice as economic redistribution, social division of labour and class. West examined these themes with stories about real and fictional relationships. Unlike Wright, West’s work provides a subtle aesthetic statement of social and political landscape and presents a middle-class aesthetic lens to view or think about social justice.

Knellworth and Norris (2008: 258) state a number of authors who challenge the black literary realism or naturalism that Richard Wright represented. Ralph Ellison, who, like Wright, had been associated with the communist party, initially praised Wright’s *Native Son*, but departed radically from his former mentor’s literary aesthetics in *Invisible Man* (1952), a self-consciously modernist novel which flaunts its textuality, its status as written artefact and de-familiarises the black literary subject. James Baldwin, too, rejected the aesthetics of protest developed by Wright who argued in a characteristically passionate and rhetorical essay, mistook sociology for literature and indulged a ‘passion for categorization’ which denied the humanity of African-Americans. Even so, Baldwin carefully crafted works which demonstrate his deep commitment to the struggle for civil rights.

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Hall (2010: 39) mentions Gwendolyn Brooks who primarily wrote poetry and employed traditional forms in most of her earlier works. Although her poetic writing ranged from ballads and sonnets forms to blues rhythms and free verse, it might be argued that Brooks was a protest poet. Brooks' aesthetic stems from the socio-political terrain that surrounded her as well as the many black people that she wrote about, thus providing an aesthetic alternative of making meaning of social justice.

What the writers of this era had in common was social political concerns and experiences. The approach varies from subtle to explicit political stances.

**(c) Black Arts Movement (1960-1970)**

Hall (2010: 44) states that the term black aesthetic grew out of frustration at the treatment of Black artists by some white establishment critics, namely in their assumption that black art work was not to be taken seriously. Payne and Barbera (2010: 81) mentions the prominent practioners and advocates: Amiri Baraka, Ed Bullins, Mari Evans, Hoyt W. Fuller, Addison Gayle, Jr, Nikki Giovanni, Stephen Henderson, Ron Karenga, Haki Madhubuti, Ron Milner, Larry Neal, Carolyn Rodgers, and Sonia Sanchez. Robinson (2005: 20) adds that many of the emerging writers characterised the debate as a struggle between a "black" and a "white" aesthetic. This stage of black aesthetics has its history rooted in the political climate of social change in the 1960s and 1970s. Robinson (2005: 20) quotes Addison Gayle, Jr. that the "white aesthetic genealogy" is rooted in the foundations of western civilisation and thinking, when "white" and "black" became signifiers for “good” and “bad.”

Abrams (1999: 23) quotes the words of Larry Neal in defining black aesthetics stating that “Black Art is the aesthetic and spiritual sister of the black power Concept. As such it envisions an art that speaks directly to the needs and aspirations of Black America" and "to the Afro-American desire for self-determination and nationhood." Hall (2010: 45) mentions that the black aesthetics of the 1960s and 1970s expanded the Harlem Renaissance project toward a system of evaluating the artistic works of black people, which reflected the character of the black experience. Robinson (2005: 21) in the words

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of Larry Neal explains that the black aesthetic has four essential parts: an assumption that its basis is already in place; second, the destruction of the "white thing" is a main motivation; third, it takes into account black interests; and fourth, it is, inherently, an ethical movement. Payne and Barbera (2010: 81) state that in order to raise Black Consciousness and to free the black community from the false consciousness produced by participation in mainstream American culture, black arts proponents attempted to create an autonomous black cultural community by various means. These included: several independent journals, publishing houses, theatre groups, and other cultural organisations. Numerous cultural events including street plays and poetry readings, concerts, lectures, exhibitions, and creative writing workshops were organised during this period with the explicit goal of fashioning an alternative system of values for the black community.

**(d) Black aesthetics: The 1970s to the present**

This period includes form and analysis, poststructuralism, black cultural nationalism, Afrocentrism, black feminist theory, and hip-hop philosophy. Black aesthetics here engages popular culture. We will only mention a few theories and arguments of black aesthetics in this period. Knellworth and Norris (2008: 260) state arguably the most radical revision of the African-American literary tradition was started by black feminists in the early 1970s and is still being carried on today. Hájková (2005: 21) adds that this period observed the role of woman in literature, woman-mother and mother-daughter relationships. The other focus was on sexual identities and preference of African-Americans. There was a search for a black identity in America which is seen in various art forms. Knellworth and Norris (2008: 260) reason that initially it was a response to Anglo-American feminists, whose work generally ignored black women, and also to the masculinism of the Black Arts Movement, black feminists sought to articulate the relationship between gendered and racial oppression and assert a positive and empowering identity for black women.

Knellworth and Norris (2008: 261) state that during the 1970s those working in African-American literary studies made increasing use of formalist and structuralist methods of

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reading with the twin objectives of critiquing the essentialism of the Black Arts Movement and 'yielding a "literary" understanding' of black literature. Hall (2010: 56) adds that Winston Napier a scholar in black literature and criticism critiqued the Black Arts Movement for being too focused on ideological platforms and establishing political agendas. Knellworth and Norris (2008: 261) explain that in their re-interpretations of the black literary tradition, Houston Baker, Henry Louis Gates and other critics show the influence of poststructuralism on their thinking and privileged the formal relationships between texts (intertextuality) over any external social, historical or biographical referent. Pointing out that 'black writers read and critique other black texts as an act of rhetorical self-definition', Gates goes on to insist that '[o]ur literary tradition exists because of these precisely chartable formal literary relationships'. Knellworth and Norris (2008: 262) state that Barbara Christian opposes this as a worrying symptom of the professionalisation of black literary studies, continues western cultural hegemony by other means, and diverts critics from reading and engaging with new literary works by black and third world writers.

Hall (2010: 57) concurs with Barbara Christian that the black power rhetoric seemed to wane and it has been noted that by 1977, African-American critics were incorporating the ideas of theorists such as Levi-Strauss, Roland Barthes, and Michel Foucault. Knellworth and Norris (2008: 264) contends that it is not just the content of black writing which is political however; in order to talk back, black authors have deployed a variety of 'literary' forms and turned to oral and musical traditions. Hall (2010: 72) states that the fact that all of these theoretical frameworks overlap points to the complex nature and current state of affairs, which, in part, defines black aesthetics in theory and practice.

The history and development of black aesthetics has been about self-affirmation and black identity in contexts that regard blackness not good enough to produce artwork that can be acceptable in western paradigms. This stems from the history of slavery and regarding black people as sub-human. Black aesthetics refused to be accepted according to western principles because that in itself suggests that black people are incapable of evaluating their own art. In order to be dignified as human beings as well as artists or literary writers black aesthetics had to protest the need to "fit-in" already established

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monopolised western principles. Therefore black aesthetics emphasises to be black and proud in a context that requires of them to assimilate.

## 1.7 Limitation

I acknowledge that the study of Black Theology and black aesthetics especially in film is not a well-developed area and this dissertation attempts to research possible ways of making a contribution in this area. The researcher is a male, black South African and a student of theology. The research will focus on the South African context, unless otherwise stated. The research is focused on blackness and may have a universal appeal from this particularity. It is written for a Masters dissertation and makes a humble contribution to the black aesthetic theory in South Africa.

## 1.8 Chapter outline

### 1.8.1 Chapter 1: Introduction

This study divided into five chapters. Chapter one is the current chapter which introduces the background, definitions, methodology and purpose of the dissertation.

### 1.8.3 Chapter 2: African aesthetics and ethics

This chapter discusses the relationship of aesthetics and ethics. First we will discuss African philosophy with regard to aesthetics. Second, we will define African ethics as imbedded in *ubuntu/botho*. It is important to understand African philosophy because aesthetics and ethics are branches of philosophy. Third, we will formulate the philosophy of *ubuntu/botho* as an African aesthetics. Last, we will analyse the *Son of Man* based on the music, dance and art from an African aesthetic perspective.

### 1.8.2 Chapter 3: Black is beautiful

This chapter explores the connections between the Black Power Movement of the United States of America and the Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa both in 1960s in regard to art. In this chapter, we will first define black power in the context of the United

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States of America in the 1960s. Second, we will define Black Consciousness in the context of South Africa. Third, we will identify how these black movements influenced an art to address the socio-political injustices of the time.

### 1.8.3 Chapter 4: Biko Christ figure

Dornford-May, the director of *Son of Man* not only wanted to retell the narrative of Jesus Christ as we know it, but he was also inspired by the life and death of Stephen Bantu Biko. Chattaway (2006) states that in adapting the story for film, Dornford-May said he was not interested in studying other retellings of the life of Jesus. Instead, he was drawn to accounts of Steve Biko. Steve Biko is given a Christ-figure around four key things in the *Son of Man*: non-violence, ideology, disappearance and death. We will last discuss Black Christology in light of the *Son of Man*.

### 1.8.4 Chapter 5: Son of woman – African women theology

The role of women cannot be ignored in the *Son of Man*. Mary the mother of Jesus is considered as the heroine of the *Son of Man*. It is thus appropriate to focus this chapter on the role of Jesus in the life of women. We will first discuss the development of the Circle of Concerned African Women theologians (the Circle) and their Christology. We will finally discuss the portrayal of Mary in other Jesus films as well as in the *Son of Man*.

### 1.8.5 Chapter 6: The cross and insurrection

This chapter explores the meaning of the cross from the black theological perspective and how the *Son of Man* portrays the cross in the film. We will also explore the resurrection as insurrection and the reappearance of the Steve Biko Christ-figure in contemporary South Africa.

### 1.8.6 Chapter 7: Conclusion

In this chapter, black aesthetics and Black Theology will be integrated and concluded; as well as give recommendations for further studies.

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## 1.9 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed black aesthetics particularly its development in North America. Black aesthetics is political and is influenced by black power to strengthen the black identity, self-affirmation and self-initiative. Black aesthetics is seen as collective, functional, and committed to blackness. Black art is a tool for social justice rather than something only to be admired. Film is considered art for the purpose of this dissertation. Films are important to study theologically to provide critique and methods of interpretation. The purpose of this dissertation is to analyse the *Son of Man* from a black aesthetic and black liberation theological perspective.

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# CHAPTER 2

# AFRICAN AESTHETICS AND ETHICS

## 2.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the relationship of aesthetics and ethics. First we will discuss African philosophy in regard to aesthetics. Second, we will define African ethics as imbedded in *Ubuntu/Botho*. It is important to understand the background of African philosophy because aesthetics and ethics are branches of philosophy. Third, we will formulate the philosophy of *Ubuntu/Botho* as African aesthetics. Last, we will analyse the *Son of Man* based on the music, dance and art from an African aesthetic perspective.

## 2.2 African philosophy

Fanon (1963: 210) states that colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures and destroys it. There have been numerous debates about African philosophy and if there is such a philosophy. Westerners held a view that Africans are not capable of reason as they are not "fully developed" human beings which in essence justified colonising and enslaving the African. Colonisers thus wrote extensively about Africa and Africans as if Africans could not speak for themselves and define their reality in their own terms and perspective. Ramose (2002a: 1) states that decolonisation was an important catalyst in the breaking of the silence about Africans. Africans should thus define the meaning of experience and truth in their own right. This means that Africans should speak for and about themselves. African thought can only be manifested in language by an African. Decolonisation of the mind deconstructs western knowledge and reconstructs an African way of thinking. African history becomes important in this regard. Ramose (2002a: 1) mentions that one of the main reason why colonisation considered itself justified in silencing and enslaving Africa was the definition of what a human is. Aristotle's definition that "man is a rational animal" is of the view that rationality is of "man" that was since challenged by feminists. Africans were excluded from that definition of being able to reason, making the African a sub-human. In order to understand the role of colonialism and colonisation in Africa, it is

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found in the root of those words. Mudimbe (1988: 1) states that colonialism and colonisation derive from the Latin word *colĕre,* meaning to cultivate or to design. Colonists (those settling a region), as well as the colonialists (those exploiting a territory by dominating a local majority) have all tended to organise and transform non-European areas into fundamentally European constructs. It is only logic that indigenous people had their own way of life and the imposition of European value systems were violently carried out in order to replace the African value systems. Ramose (2002a: 2) states that Europeans made themselves heirs of reason and established themselves as the producers of all knowledge and the only holders of the truth. This means that the right to knowledge in relation to the Africans is measured and determined by passive as well as uncritical assimilation, coupled with faithful implementation of knowledge defined and produced from outside Africa. Europeans considering themselves producers of all knowledge and heirs of reason is like God making them guardians of the earth. As guardians, they must rule and take care of everyone on earth. Africans would thus be under the guardianship of Europeans. That is, to be taught the ways of being human.

John Mbiti in his *African religions and philosophy* (1990) defines African philosophy as the understanding, attitude of mind, logic and perception behind the manner in which African peoples think, act or speak in different situations of life. Merely by saying "the manner in which African peoples think" is to reject the guardianship of the Europeans. No race, tribe or culture on earth is supposed to be a guardian of another race, tribe or culture. Westerners do not possess African thinking and thus cannot formulate an African philosophy. That is to say that western perspectives of African philosophy would be inauthentic because only Africans can authentically represent African philosophy. Wiredu (2004: 1) attests that a principle driving force in postcolonial African philosophy has been a quest for self-definition because colonialism included a systematic programme of de-Africanisation. The dignity of African people can only be achieved through self-definition, self-determination, and self-embrace. Africans should thus not wait to be defined by others or seek validation from others. Ramose (2002a: 7) proposes the liberation of philosophy from the one-sidedness of the history of western philosophy. He alludes that rejecting African philosophy is to defy the very idea of philosophy which consists of

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dialogue. Philosophy is the love of wisdom and one cannot acquire wisdom only by listening to themselves while closing both ears when someone else is speaking. Real philosophy encourages dialogue rather than imposing ones philosophy on another. Biko (1978: 62) quotes Aimé Césaire, "no race possesses the monopoly of beauty, intelligence, force, and there is room for all of us at the rendezvous of victory." This quote is fitting here, westerners do not possess the monopoly of philosophy, knowledge and truth. Philosophy is universal regardless of race, culture or tribe. That being said; races, cultures or tribes think differently and how they formulate their knowledge is also different. western philosophy is not the only philosophy, African philosophy exists as well.

Kaphagawani and Malherbe (2002: 259) assert that the existence of an African philosophy also implies the existence of an African epistemology. Epistemology is the study of theories about the nature and scope of knowledge, the evaluation of the presuppositions and bases of knowledge, and the scrutiny of knowledge claims. Epistemology seeks to answer the question: how do we know what we know? Again, presuppositions are universal but differ according to race, culture or tribe in different socio-cultural contexts. Udefi (2014: 108) states that the earlier discourses of African epistemology attempted to link the African mode of knowledge with African ontology (the nature of being African) and ultimately to establish that Africans had an idea of God even before Europeans came to Africa. The misconception was that Africans are emotional beings and not rational beings. Narh (2013: 2) states that ontology is the theory of existence, concerned with the nature of reality and that of human beings. Ontology and epistemology go together because every knowledge claim embodies a certain way of understanding *what* is to know (ontology) as well as a certain way of understanding *how* to know what to know (epistemology). Ramose (2002b: 270) upholds that *ubuntu* is the root of African philosophy and the being of an African in the universe is inseparably anchored upon *Ubuntu*. *Ubuntu* then is the wellspring flowing with African ontology and epistemology.

Dolamo (2013: 2) assert that to some *Botho/Ubuntu* means ‘humanity’, while to others it means ‘humanness’. Explaining *Botho/Ubuntu* as humanity may be rather misleading and

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confusing, since humanity may simply refer to humankind. Humanness seems to be more appropriate as it refers to the inner core of an individual. Ramose (2002b: 271) explains that *Ubuntu* is actually two words in one and it is best to philosophically approach the term as a hyphenated word, *ubu-ntu*. *Ubu-* is a prefix which implies motion and manifestation and understood in an ontological sense. *-Ntu* is a stem which is the substance of what is in motion in an epistemological sense. *Ubu-* and *-ntu* are not individual words but suggest the unity of ontology and epistemology. One cannot be without the other. *Ubuntu* is being becoming which implies a process. Dolamo (2013: 3) attests that although every individual is born human, the formation of humanness comes through the process of socialisation.

Ramose (2002b: 271) asserts that the word *umu-* shares an identical ontological feature with the word *ubu-.* Whereas the range of *ubu-* is the widest generality, *umu-* tends towards the more specific. When *umu-* is linked with –ntu, it becomes *Umuntu. Umuntu* means the human being. *Umuntu* is rational according to their socio-cultural context. *Umuntu* has the ability to question, acquire knowledge, have memory, believe and transfer information from one human being to the other. Ramose emphasises that the rationality of *Umuntu* is an activity rather than an act. This activity is always in motion unless motion itself has stopped. *Ubu-ntu* is silent and needs *Umu-ntu* to be to break that silence. Ramose (2002b: 272) adds that the language of *Umuntu* “relevates”, that is, it directs and focuses the entire epistemological domain towards the ontology of *ubu-*. *Ubuntu* is the wholeness of being *Umuntu*. *Umuntu* is a relational being, hence, *Umuntu ngumuntu nga bantu* (*motho ke motho ka batho*). Ramose acknowledges that the English language does not exhaust the meaning of this maxim or aphorism, it may nonetheless be construed to mean that a human being is to affirm one’s humanity by recognising the humanity of others and, on that basis, establish human relations with them. *Ubuntu* is being becoming and *Umuntu* cannot embody *Ubuntu* without another human being. This is the process of humanness, we are by nature expected to become humane.

We will now discuss how the philosophy of *Ubuntu* is in itself a moral theory.

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### 2.3 *Ubuntu/Botho* as African ethics

Ethics is a branch of philosophy which has to do with moral judgement. Lacey (1996: 102) states in general that the primary concepts are: ought to, obligation, duty, right, wrong, though not in all their uses. The other aspect of ethics is value and the primary concepts as the valuable, the desirable, and the good in itself. Ethics is another aspect of philosophy that differentiates the human and the animal. It is only when there is rationality that one can make ethical judgment and act according to the norms and values of a society. Udokang (2014: 266) mentions that early European writers about Africa maintained that Africans are not “fully developed” humans that are capable of morality and making moral judgements. Part of this perception is based upon that Africans do not perceive the future and the consequences of their actions. Just like animals they live without ethical reflections and live recklessly without aims and goals. These perceptions go back to question of the African actually being a human being. In some sense because the African is not “fully developed” he/she must be taught to become “more” human by the European. We have already argued that the African is indeed a human being and more than capable of reason. Arguing the humanity (rationality) of Africans may seem futile but it is necessity considering how the western world viewed Africans. Western presuppositions of Africans are still prominent in the many spheres of life of the African. Dolamo (2013: 6) states that people who came to Africa as colonisers, missionaries and researchers regarded Africans as primitive, backward, irrational, ignorant, pagan and uncivilised, and their mission was to correct all that using any means possible, including murder, pillage, plunder and theft.

Ethics is a social construct and the understanding thereof differs according to socio-cultural contexts. As we have alluded that a race, tribe or culture does not possess the monopoly of philosophy; western ethics cannot be the standard or measure of ethics. Udokang (2014: 267) concurs that African traditional ethics predates the coming of Europeans to Africa. Ethics and the sense or ideas of morality in Africa were not the creations of the Europeans and Christian missionaries; every community, town and village in Africa had a system of morals which are preserved in their customs and tradition. African ethics according to Van Rooy in his *Scriptural ethical principles and traditional*

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*African ethics* (1997) are dominated by two factors: interpersonal relationships (including ancestor spirits) and taboo. Taboos are an "elaborate code of rules for conducts designed to protect the hierarchy of forces against would be transgressors. A younger brother should not marry first; a wife should not throw her husband on the ground when they quarrel; a totem animal should never be eaten." Taboos are "concerned with what is forbidden rather than with positive behaviour." In terms of interpersonal relationships, Africans "have no knowledge of God and his laws… and consequently the ethical code has become entirely man-centred." This argument is flawed as there has always been a concept of God in Africa and to imply that Africans do not have written laws from God is to suggest that the Bible was written by God and placed it in the hands of westerners (Christians). Van Rooy emphasises that African ethics are not theocentric and the concept of God, *Modimo* in Africa "does not call men to account for their behaviour." This implies that God is metaphysical and speaks directly to westerners in the world as well as in the afterlife. It further implies that God "revealed" Godself only to westerners and are the sole mediators of God and man. Philosophically speaking, Christianity is a man-made superstition.

Although Van Rooy claims that western ethics are not superior, he contradicts himself that in many African countries where biblical ethics has not penetrated, "nepotism is a virtue" and "corruption has become a way of life." If being Christian and following biblical ethics prevents evil or immorality, there would be no slavery, colonisation and apartheid.

Gordon (2008: 186) states he does not know of any African philosopher who has not argued that African philosophy is humanistic. Humanness here refers to the value system that places priority on the welfare, worth, and dignity of human beings, its presence in precolonial African religious and philosophical thought can easily be found. Letseka (2012: 54) attests that many scholars regard *Ubuntu* as a moral theory. *Ubuntu* articulates our inter-connectedness, our common humanity and the responsibility to each that flows from our connection. It is a worldview that emphasises the commonality and interdependence of the members of the community. Ramose (2002b: 273) asserts that *ubu-ntu* is a metaphor for ethical, social, and legal judgement of human worth and human

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conduct. If it was regarded in a literal sense expressed as: *ke motho* or *gase motho* interpreted as being a human being or not a human being would be meaningless as it would not abolish or change the biological definition or nature of being a human being. In an African sense, *Ubuntu* is not embedded in written ethical rules or laws. It is integral of being *Umuntu. Ubuntu* is imparted into *Umuntu* from all his stages of life.

Dolamo (2013: 5) mentions that within a community an individual is nurtured into becoming a mature and responsible human being who would embrace the values, norms and principles of *Botho/Ubuntu*. The rites of passage are the key in imparting the philosophy of *Botho/Ubuntu*. From conception to birth to puberty and even until death, an individual is nurtured and socialised, because life and death are interlinked. It must be emphasised that African religions and philosophy do not have a concept of hell and heaven. That is to say that *Ubuntu* is in the here and now and not based on an uncertain eternity. It is safe to say that the motivation for Christian ethics is based on a supposed afterlife. That the "good" go to heaven and the "bad" go to hell.

Bujo states that it must be recalled that African ethics does not define the person as self-realisation or as ontological act: rather, it describes the person as a process of coming into existence in the reciprocal relatedness of individual and community (Dolamo, 2014: 216). *Ubuntu* is a process that takes place in society, there is no *Ubuntu* in isolation. The life of an African has no meaning in individuality, its meaning is found in the community. Unfortunately, this way of life was eradicated by Christian missionaries and colonialists for some odd reason that an African way of life was not positive at all. Dolamo (2013: 6) asserts that Christian converts were detached from their communities and families and sent to mission stations. Their indigenous names were changed to western names, the rites of passage were denied them and many other cultural and religious rituals were prohibited. These converts adopted an individualistic approach to life as Christianity itself was conceived of as a private, inner and personal affair between God and the individual. Conversion was not by choice but by force. It is quite ironic that Christianity claimed to be a moral agent of the world yet it did the most inhumane things to a people that had "recognition and respect of other people's humanity" (Dwane, 1987: 22).

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The struggle of the African continent from the jaws of colonialism is still not over. Africa is still being exploited of its resources and the humanity of Africans is at the mercy of neo-colonialism. Robertson (2004: 338) defines neo-colonialism as the argument that the conditions of poor countries are often no better, and their peoples no freer, than when they were actually governed by the European colonial powers in the period up to the mid-20th century. This theory still perpetuates the guardianship mentality of European countries over Africa. African countries do not govern themselves without the influence of European countries especially when it comes to the economics of foreign business. Dolamo (2013: 7) asks upon realising the loss or distortion of *Ubuntu/Botho*, if it is possible to salvage and retrieve whatever remains of *Ubuntu/Botho*? Dolamo mentions three major challenges:

a) We cannot return to a pre-historical, pre-literate, pre-industrial, and pre-technological understanding of *ubuntu/botho*.

b) Africa is no longer a home of African Traditional Religions only but has become a host of world religions like Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism amongst others.

c) It must be acknowledged that not everything in African culture was inherently good and not everything from the western culture was inherently bad. Culture is not static and there is a need to respect others diversity and avoid dominance.

The spirit of communality is not a difficult task as the very being of human is relation with other human beings. *Ubuntu/Botho* is achievable in the globalised world, in fact that would be the contribution Africa can give to make the world a better place.

### 2.4 *Ubuntu/Botho* aesthetics

Aesthetics is the branch of philosophy which concerns art and beauty. It has an ontological and epistemological inquiry. Ontologically it asks; what is art? Epistemologically it asks; how do we know what is art? It also has an ethical aspect; if art is good or bad and if it is beautiful or ugly. Abiodun (2001: 15) states that no single traditional discipline can adequately supply answers to the many unresolved questions in African art history. Because of the aesthetic, cultural, historical, and, not infrequently,

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political biases, already built into the conception and development of western art history, the discipline of art history as defined and practised in the west has continued to resist non-western approaches to art. Western art value judgement is based on western philosophy and as we have indicated concerning western philosophy is the mentality of monopolising branches of philosophy. This means if art does not fit-in the criteria of what constitutes art according to western values, it does not fall into the category of being defined as art. Because the humanity on the bases of reasoning of Africans was questionable, westerners came to the conclusion that Africans are not sophisticated enough to create art and reflect critically on art. Aesthetics are a socio-cultural value system that differ according to tribe, culture or race influenced by their social experience.

Mbembe (2001: 103) mentions how postcolonial powers still maintain to create a monopolised world of meanings, through institutionalising this world of meaning as a “socio-historical world” thereby instilling it into the consciousness of the population. This implies a globalised aesthetics that continues hegemony and marginalises whoever tries to challenge this. Post-colonialism has the economic and institutional power to define. This kind of power to define easily becomes common sense which gives the impression that domination and subordination is non-existent. Just like African philosophers that seek to define African philosophy in their own terms and own expressions. African aesthetics as a branch of philosophy that seeks to do the same. African aesthetics cannot dance to the tune of western aesthetics and perform its duties according to western standards and principles. Ramose would call for the liberation of aesthetics from the monopoly of western aesthetics.

Nzwegu (2004: 415) describes African art as intricately interwoven with other aspects of life. It is community focused. Owing to this relational quality, the critical question in creativity is no longer what constitutes a work of art, but the relationship between creative objects and social life in a given society. This implies that African art has a certain function for the community and not meant for personal admiration. Soyinka (1999: 85) describes art as the material expression of a people’s humanity. This also implies the communal form of African arts and collective expression in everyday life. Kamara (2000: 513) even

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goes to the extent of saying that African aesthetics anchors on our African Traditional Religion which reflects who we are, what we want to be, and how we want to be perceived. The responsibility of the African artists is to his or her community. Kamara emphasises that our deliverance will not come to fruition until we totally surrender to our religion.

African art is different from any other continent and its uniqueness should be embraced. Mphahlele (1962: 22) asserts that African art has and should have an African personality. "African personality" was a phrase used by Kwame Nkrumah at the All African People's Conference in December 1958. It is Pan-African in nature and seeks an African consciousness. It was in a context where African countries were at their peak fighting for independence and political freedom from colonial powers. Mphahlele argues that an African personality can only be achieved in the area of cultural activity that is concerned with education and the arts. This is clearly a decolonisation project and African artists are responsible for introducing and formulating an African personality. The African personality in art liberates the artist as well as his/her community.

The African personality is best expressed in an African language because language is the epitome of a culture. Fanon (1967: 9) attests that a man who has a language consequently possesses the world expressed and implied by that language. There is no doubt that language plays a vital role for an African personality. The issue of language has been highly debated by African literary writers, African theatre writers, and African philosophers. Wa Thiong'o (1981: 4) mentions the problem of language began in the so-called "Scramble for Africa" at the Berlin Conference in 1884 where capitalist powers of Europe carved an entire continent with a multiplicity of peoples, cultures, and languages into different colonies. The division of Africa was and still is economic, political, and cultural. African countries had to adopt European languages in accordance to their colonial countries. Fanon (1967: 9) articulates that every colonised people—in other words, every people in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality—finds itself face to face with the language of the civilising nation; that is, with the culture of the mother country. In order for the African to

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be elevated into the status of being “sub-human” he had to learn the language and culture of the European and at the same rejecting his Africanness.

Achebe (2012: 66) suggests that the role of the African writer is to challenge stereotypes, myths, and the image of ourselves and our continent, and to recast them through stories—prose, poetry, essays, and books for our children. Achebe acknowledges reclaiming the African language but just like many African writers, the European language is entrenched so deep it becomes difficult to abandon. Wa Thiong’o (1981: 7) quotes Chinua Achebe’s speech *The African Writer and the English Language* (1964) “Is it right that a man should abandon his mother tongue for someone else's? It looks like a dreadful betrayal and produces - a guilty feeling. But for me there is no other choice. I have been given the language and I intend to use it.” It is evident that even today, many Africans are able to express themselves more fluently in a European language. The soul of an African is fabricated in the European language and the African personality is drowning in it. Wa Thiong’o (1981: 9) attests that the bullet was the means of the physical subjugation and language was the means of the spiritual subjugation.

Rettova (2002: 130) mentions that the major factor African writers keep writing in English and French, especially English has to do with economics. English has a large international public; books in English get sold, get read, etc. African languages were ignored or even suppressed during the colonial era, so that speaking a European language became a matter of high prestige, whereas African languages were looked down upon. The under-development of African languages poses challenges as even the African looks down upon the African language. Although the African language is marginalised within the soul, the African personality with the help of the African artist must rise and liberate the African. African languages have rich connotations and expressions the European languages fail to capture. It is the task of the African philosopher and African writer to use the African language to make realise the full potential of the African personality. The African language does not need to be international, it should be the pride of the African.

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The essence of the African aesthetic is its representation as a construct of African people on the continent and people of African descent in the diaspora that articulates African culture, identity, and spirituality. It is how Africans consciously define their own concept of beauty—that is, the African-derived standards of perceiving, appreciating, appraising, or applying aesthetic values or knowledge of things African. The African aesthetic is African centred, and it reveals the cultural bond between Africans in the continent and abroad (Shava, 2015: 11). Africans in the diaspora during the colonial era not only had to embrace African value of art but also had to challenge colonialism, racism and capitalism. Mphahlele (1962: 25) mentions that Negro artists and writers came together in the first conference of the Society of African Culture in 1955, Paris. The major discussion was the concept of *negritude*- a word coined to embrace all Negro art, or the negroness of artistic activity. The term was created by Aimé Césaire together with Leopold Sédar Senghor, to denote an aesthetic quality for Africans in the diaspora. It derives from the words Negro and attitude, thus meaning a Negro attitude or the inner expression of the Negro. Rabaka (2009: 112) eloquently describes negritude as unique in that it was one of the first modern black aesthetic movements whose central credo was the spiritual and cultural redemption of continental and diaspora Africans. In the aftermath of the African holocaust, enslavement, colonisation, and segregation, Negritude redefined and radically politicised the black aesthetic, making it more modern by bringing black art into dialogue with Pan-Africanism, black nationalism, and African socialism, as well as, and equally important, Marxism, existentialism, and surrealism. The African aesthetic evolved from reclaiming African culture to a revolutionary aesthetic of decolonisation, social justice, Pan-African solidarity and liberation while seeking to re-Africanise at the same time.

The way in which Africans in the diaspora have been reclaiming their Africanness through arts is the very basis of the philosophy of *Ubuntu/Botho* aesthetics. *Ubuntu/Botho* aesthetics regards art as functional and not just for admiration. It is an aesthetics that is African centred and community orientated for the purpose of representing the African expression. The African artist is the voice of the people and has a responsibility to educate, conscientise, and entertain. The decolonisation project is a task of great importance, *Ubuntu/Botho* aesthetics deconstructs the inferiority complex in the mind of

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the African and instil African pride and the African personality within the African. The African artist brings the African history to the fore in order to re-Africanise the community and dispute the distortions. *Ubuntu/Botho* aesthetics recreates how the African image is represented, it takes into cognisance that being African is beautiful and there is no need to assimilate European. The functionality of *Ubuntu/Botho* aesthetics has to do with challenging a system of subjugation and the maintenance thereof. It is Pan-African in nature as it is in solidarity with all the colonised, oppressed and marginalised Africans in the diaspora. Because *Ubuntu/Botho* aesthetics recognises the humanness of others, it stands in solidarity with those whose humanity is compromised. It rejects the one-sidedness and monopoly of the western aesthetics that only recognises an aesthetic that is absorbed in western values. The other duty of *Ubuntu/Botho* aesthetics is that of social justice and liberation- it is rooted in socialism. The moral obligation of *Ubuntu/Botho* aesthetics is the emphasis on humanness meaning that it should not create derogative images and caricatures of others as it would contradict *Ubuntu/Botho*. This in no way does it mean that *Ubuntu/Botho* aesthetics will not express itself truthfully without fear. One of the most important aspect of an *Ubuntu/Botho* aesthetic is dialogue with other forms of aesthetics. Any form of aesthetic that avoids dialogue defies the very essence of philosophy.

### 2.5 *Son of Man* and the Xhosa culture

The *Son of Man* is inherently Xhosa and the baptism and temptation of Jesus in the desert is symbolised by *ukwaluka,* a Xhosa male rite of passage to manhood. AmaXhosa are a people with a rich history in South Africa, we will only reflect on the Xhosa culture and tradition as reflected in the *Son of Man*. Asante and Mazama (2009: 729) state that the name Xhosa can be translated into the language of the Khoi-Khoi or San to mean “fierce.” This is probably derived from the fact that the Xhosa met those earlier people in warfare when they arrived in the south. The Xhosa people believe that their history is replete with many heroes. They have had a long history of engagement with other ethnic groups, the land, animals, and spiritualists, and out of these experiences have come grand narratives

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of victory and consciousness of unity. The 20th century hero of umXhosa would be Stephen Bantu Biko, who often acknowledged native heroes who fought against colonialism and the importance of retelling our own history and be proud as well as embrace our African cultures and traditions. Everyone knows how iconic Nelson Mandela is throughout the world as the first black president of the democratic South Africa. He is also Xhosa and provides us with a description of his own experience on the journey from being a boy to a man.

In the *Son of Man*, Jesus undergoes a Xhosa rite of passage from being a boy to a man. Asante and Mazama (2009: 730) explain that one goes from *Umkwetha* to *Ukwaluka*, from boy to man. There is a ritual circumcision that is carried out on boys of the same age set. The boys are taken to the hills to live in isolation for several weeks as *abakwetha* (initiates), and when they return, they smear white clay over their bodies until they heal from the circumcision. Your manhood is based on going through this rite of passage, failure to do so, no matter how old you are, you will always remain a boy. The community does not recognise a male who has not undergone this rite of passage. There is thus pressure for boys to go to initiation school in order to gain respect from the community and there are consequences when you do not go. Mandela (1995: 39) explains that an uncircumcised male cannot be heir to his father's wealth, cannot marry or officiate in tribal rituals. For the Xhosa people, circumcision represents the formal incorporation of males into society. It is not just a surgical procedure, but a lengthy and elaborate ritual in preparation for manhood.

In order to be a man, the Xhosa man must not show emotion of weakness because it would be regarded as a disgrace "man must suffer in silence" (Mandela, 1995: 40). Mhlahlo (2009: 69) asserts that the Xhosa initiation rite plays a big role in promoting the ideas of masculinity to boys. This is manifested by the hardship the boys endure in initiation schools. In this school, they become initiates who are taught the behaviour expected of them and their responsibilities as men. A part of his teaching includes them going through physical pain which symbolises "warrior hood." After the circumcision the boys would cry out *ngiyindoda!* "I am a man!" Mandela (1995: 42) explains that the first night of being circumcised, they were instructed to go out at night to bury their foreskins.

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The traditional reason for this practice was so that the foreskins would be hidden before wizards could use them for evil purposes, but, symbolically, it is also burying your youth.

In the *Son of Man*, Jesus and fellow initiates are seen smearing *ikota/ifutha* "white ochre" which is done after circumcision. The circumcision is not shown in the film. It then shows them washing off the white ochre in the ocean. Mandela (1995: 42) explains at that moment they are now *abakhwetha*, initiates into the world of manhood. They are looked after by an *amakhankatha*, or guardian, who explained the rules we must follow if we were to enter manhood properly. The first chore of the *amakhankatha* was to paint our naked and shaved bodies from head to foot in white ochre, turning us into ghosts. The white chalk symbolises our purity, and I still recall how stiff the dried clay felt on my body. In the film, after being washed clean, they were smeared again with red ochre and covered with blankets as they return to the community. The community awaits them with joyful singing and ululation. Mandela (1995: 42) asserts the reason of being covered in blankets, "for we were not allowed to be seen by women. It was a period of quietude, a kind of spiritual preparation for the trials of manhood that lay ahead." They sing traditional songs as they arrive and an *amakhankatha* declares them men as they would now be able sit and eat together, even discuss manly things with each other.

One of the most important aspects of being *indoda* "a man" as recalled by Mandela (1995: 41) is that, "my words would be taken seriously now." Without this rite of passage, Jesus in the *Son of Man* would not be taken seriously when he speaks either privately or publicly. He would not be able to lead a people. It was thus important for Jesus to undergo this rite of passage. It is only then that Jesus can embark on a journey to the urban area, Judea. The first disciples (Peter, James and John) were from the same village as Jesus and probably went to the initiation school together. The significance of this is that the voice of Jesus had authority as a man, to be listened to and to be followed. In order for Jesus to go out from his community and into the world, he had to be prepared to be man to gain bravery when facing the world. In the film, Jesus is seen resisting the devil three times in the dessert which is symbolic to Jesus being ready to face the world. The story of Jesus is boldly told from a cultural context

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that is unique and gives a perspective of Jesus that is different from all the other films about Jesus.

## 2.6 Conclusion

This chapter has challenged the notion that western philosophy is the only philosophy and the view that western philosophy is that universal standard of philosophy. African philosophy was disregarded on the basis that Africans are sub-human and can therefore not rationalise and have value judgement. The colonialism era distorted the history and changed the African way of life and equated Africans to animals who could not act morally. Africa and Africans were studied like objects and the conclusions were discriminatory, offensive, and made to feel inferior. African philosophy has a duty to be defined by Africans and Africans should be liberated from the definitions of Europeans. Importantly is that philosophy is the love of knowledge and the rejection of African knowledge is in itself the betrayal of philosophy. Philosophy then should be liberated from being monopolised by Europeans. The African aesthetic evolved from reclaiming African culture to a revolutionary aesthetic of decolonisation, social justice, Pan-African solidarity and liberation while seeking to re-Africanise at the same time.

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# CHAPTER 3

# BLACK IS BEAUTIFUL

## 3.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the connection(s) between the Black Power Movement of the United States of America and the Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa both in 1960s with regard to art. We will also explore Black Liberation Theology in South Africa and the image of blackness. In this chapter, we will first define black power in the context of the United States of America in the 1960s. Second, we will define Black Consciousness in the context of South Africa. Third, we will identify how these two movements influenced Black Theatre in various artistic expressions to address the socio-political injustices of their time. The significance of Black Theatre in this study is the acknowledgment that the *Son of Man* film was developed from the biblical theatre play, "The Mysteries - *Yiimimangaliso*," by the same director and theatre group. In broader respects, one cannot deny the prominent role Black Theatre played in the said contexts of this chapter to express the soul of the black folk.

Barrios (2008: 47) eloquently captures the influence of Frantz Fanon on black power and Black Consciousness and thus should be quoted at length:

> "By the end of the 1950s, Frantz Fanon had established a revolutionary line of thought that African Americans, Africans and people from other Third World Countries would adopt in their political, sociological and artistic agendas. Fanon was determined to change the status, identity and history imposed upon Black people by Western culture. He advocated self-determination for his people and the peoples of the Third World against an intellectual and political imperialism that had colonized their land and their minds. He proclaimed the need of a national consciousness that could help the colonized unveil the lies by which they had been subjected to a dominant culture, which had denied and/or under-evaluated theirs. Fanon pronounced the need to look at their own past and to study and find new strategies for their present in order to build their future. He envisioned the necessity for a re-evaluation of their history by breaking myths and stereotypes dictated by colonizers, and by searching and discovering their true selves."

Fanon encouraged blacks in the diaspora to reclaim their dignity and history as Africans in order to be liberated. The essential view for Fanon is for blacks to perceive themselves not according to the oppressor but according to how blacks want to define themselves.

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Fanon realised that an oppressed mind is only meant to harm oneself and the beginning of true liberation is a mind that is free from the bondage of oppression. The liberated mind refuses to accept the conditions of the black experience as set by the oppressor and seeks to liberate his/her economic, political and educational situations. Fanon encourages blacks to do things for themselves and be the masters of their own lives.

What follows is Fanon's influence in the context, development and significance of the black power movement and the Black Consciousness Movement.

### 3.2 Black Power

Churcher (2009: 136) says the 1960s was a turbulent decade would be an understatement. Movements of all sorts - civil rights, women's liberation, gay rights and anti-war – sprung up across the country and fuelled the development of an entire counterculture that rejected traditional values and established institutions. Robinson (2012: 4) discusses the dominant narratives of Civil Rights and Black Power. In both the popular imagination and scholarly accounts of the 1960s, the Civil Rights Movement and black power movement are cast in dualities. Starting with the chronology, the Civil Rights Movement (CRM) is said to have taken place during the early 1960s and the black power movement (~~P~~BPM) followed in the latter 60s. Furthermore, the CRM is remembered as non-violent, Southern, community orientated, noble, and directed toward reasonable goals, while the BPM is violent, Northern, detached from local communities, irrational, and counter-productive.

Robinson (2012: 7) recognises that to explicate the dominant narrative of Civil Rights and Black Power history, we must examine the central role the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) plays in that version of history. The SNCC began in the 1960 black students' sit-ins throughout the south. It gained wide recognition in the early 60s for its brave efforts to organise voter registration drives, Freedom Schools, and other community programmes in rural Mississippi and other dangerous places for black activists to operate. Stewart (1997: 430) states that the SNCC worked alongside the CRM led by Martin Luther King Jr. was committed to non-violence and civil disobedience as the

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primary means to achieve integration. Stewart (1997: 430) states that Stokely Carmichael (Kwame Toure), the chairman of the SNCC, championed a “black power” ideology within the CRM that repudiated the movement’s leaders, organisations, strategies, and emphasis on integration as the means to end oppression and injustice. Churcher (2009: 133) explains that Carmichael was elected chairman of SNCC just as he began to have doubts and started to question the effectiveness of King’s non-violent strategy. When James Meredith, a demonstrator who led a 220-mile "March against Fear," was shot trying to prove that white violence was not to be feared, Carmichael came to the realisation that perhaps violence was sometimes necessary—at least in self-defence. It was not only Carmichael within the SNCC that had such views, there were others who understood that the question of morality upon which King’s organisation depended to bring about changes in the community was not possible. The SNCC people had seen raw terror and they understood properly this raw terror had nothing to do with morality but had to do clearly with power (Facing History and Ourselves, 2006: 113).

Stewart (1997: 431) explains that black power was not a new social movement but an effort to transform the civil rights revolution to make it more effective and acceptable to a new generation of protesters. Robinson (2012: 15) acknowledges that neither the term “black power” nor black nationalism was new in the mid-1960s. Stokely Carmichael, who brought the term to national attention, claimed that he has heard the term in one way or another since he was a child. Stewart (1997: 434) adds that Stokely Carmichael was not the first black leader to advocate separatism, the notions of black power, or the slogan itself. Marcus Garvey, W.E.B Du Bois, Adam Clayton Powell, Eldridge Cleaver, and Malcom X preceded him but neither the country nor the movement was ready for their militancy, ideas, and language. However, Stokely Carmichael seized the moment to launch major evolutionary changes in the movement.

Carmichael (1967: 3) explains what is expected of blacks in white America and the aims of black power. The black power movement has unique appeal to young black students on campuses across the country. These students have been deluded by the fiction that exists in white North America that if the black man would educate himself and behave himself he would be acceptable enough to leave the ranks of the oppressed and join white

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society. Stewart (1997: 436) mentions that Carmichael experienced a problem that white institutions and individuals continued to control everything in black communities, including resources, political decisions, law enforcement, housing standards, and ownership of land, housing, and stores. Carmichael characterised the prevailing vision of social justice through integration as an “insidious subterfuge” dreamed up by a “tiny group of Negroes who had middle-class aspirations,” “were already just a little ahead,” never wanted to be black in the first place, and were interested in merely loosening “up the restrictions barring the entry of Black people into the white community” (Stewart, 1997: 436). Carmichael (1967: 2) criticises the CRM of being a bourgeois movement because only the bourgeoisie are in a position to be concerned about public accommodations (motels, hotels, restaurants, etc.). Carmichael understood that the core problem of African Americans is not only the right to vote; be protected to vote and access to public facilities but the capitalistic system in America and therefore could not be alleviated within that system (Carmichael, 1967: 3).

Black power according to Carmichael is about addressing the necessity to reclaim our history and our identity from the cultural terrorism and depredation of self-justifying white guilt. To do this we shall have to struggle for the right to create our own terms through which to define ourselves and our relationship to society, and to have these terms recognised (Facing History and Ourselves, 2006: 114). Language and definitions are important for Carmichael, “because people who can define are the masters”; “the power to define is the most important power that we have” (Stewart, 1997: 439). Carmichael defines black power as a "psychological struggle", he noted how every time blacks tried to do something to improve their own situations, whites came around to show them "how do to it". That, according to Carmichael, only contributed to their feelings of inferiority and inequality. "If we are going to eliminate that for the generation that comes after us," Carmichael declared, then black people had to "be seen in positions of power, doing and articulating for themselves, for themselves" (Churcher, 2009: 138). Robinson (2012: 14) gives a basic definition of black power in the words of Jeffrey O.G. Ogbar; black power includes various ideas and goals, but its two most fundamental themes were —black pride and self-determination. In addition, the major ideological thrust of black power was black

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nationalism, which advocated black group consciousness and black empowerment through independence from white people and white dominated institutions.

Gallagher argues that it is wrong to label Carmichael a "radical black separatist" and pointing to his efforts to reach out to white audiences. Yet unlike some civil rights leaders, as Gallagher notes, Carmichael did not "appeal to white audiences for assistance or civic hand-outs but instead attempted to tell them what they needed to do to correct themselves and their civic culture" (Churcher, 2009: 139). Carmichael criticised white liberals in the CRM rather than racist whites who advocated segregation. At the University of California at Berkeley he asked, “Can the white activist stop trying to be a Pepsi generation who comes alive in the black community, and be a man who’s willing to move into the white community and start organising where the organisation is needed?” (Stewart, 1997: 440). Carmichael’s polarisation was not only black versus white but “black” versus “Negro.” He referred to all integrationists and older leaders as “Negroes,” a code name for Uncle Toms who were passive, self-centred, greedy, and ashamed of being black. They were a tiny minority wanting desperately to make it in the white community, to be accepted (Stewart, 1997: 440).

Carmichael created a symbolic realignment within the movement by replacing words such as Negro, Negro people, ghetto, segregation, and integration with black, black masses, colony, colonialism, and liberation that altered how audiences saw ghettos of large American cities and American institutions and linked CRM with the African movements for independence from colonial powers (Stewart, 1997: 439). Carmichael explains why “black power” scared white Americans: why do white people in this country associate black power with violence? And the question is because of their own inability to deal with "blackness." If we had said "Negro Power" nobody would get scared. Everybody would support it. Or if we said power for coloured people, everybody [would] be for that, but it is the word "black," it is the word "black" that bothers people in this country, and that's their problem, not mine—their problem, their problem (Churcher, 2009: 139). Stewart (1997: 441) adds that study of media interpretations and published reactions to Carmichael and black power led Wayne Brockriede and Robert Scott to conclude that “one meaning and one image thoroughly has engulfed the public mind and has dominated the attitudes of

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most white liberals: Black Power is violent racism in reverse, and Stokely Carmichael is a monster." Although there was growing dissatisfaction with black power from white liberals and black CRM that it is reverse racism, and nothing good will emerge when one evil attacks another evil. Stewart (1997: 442) states that Carmichael and Hamilton argued the analogy by defining racism, racism is not merely exclusion on the basis of race but exclusion for the purpose of subjugation and maintain subjugation. The black people in this country have not lynched whites, bombed their churches and murdered their children and manipulated laws and institutions to maintain oppression. The charge of racism in reverse was offered as further evidence of how out of step older movement leaders were with the needs and aspirations of black Americans.

Carmichael spoke out against systemic oppression throughout the third world and shared a socialist vision to address the common challenges. We [black power movement] seek with you to change the power bases of the world, where mankind will share the resources of their nations, instead of having to give them up to foreign plunderers where civilisations can retain their cultural sovereignty instead of being forced to submit to foreign rulers who impose their own corrupt cultures on those civilisations they would dominate (Carmichael, 1967: 2). Churcher (2009: 145) states that after Carmichael stepped down as SNCC chairman in 1967, he travelled around the world promoting black power and Pan-African solidarity. His travels took him to Cuba, North Vietnam, Guinea, and Ghana, and he spent time with Fidel Castro, Ho Chi Minh, President Sekou Toure of Guinea, and President Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana. His respect and admiration for Toure and Nkrumah led him to ultimately change his name to Kwame Toure.

### 3.3 Black Consciousness

Pityana (2012: 2) gives a brief socio-political background of South Africa, by the 1960s apartheid had consolidated itself, an Afrikaner republic had been established outside of the Commonwealth and minority rule had been further entrenched as not just rule by the white minority but even further rule by and in favour of the Afrikaner *volk*. With it the rest of the white community fell into line and was complicit, and the international community seemed powerless to bring this unjust situation to an end. It was the worst of times and

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the best of times. New efforts at resistance seemed to come to naught. Nelson Mandela, Robert Sobukwe and others were languishing in Robben Island, Oliver Tambo was in exile, all credible political organisations were banned, and communities were gripped and paralysed by fear, and uncertainty and despair was in the air. Kaidl (2013: 7) states that acts and laws passed before 1948 had already divided the population in South Africa into different groups, providing the superior position to whites. It is important to mention the big land reforms, the Native Land Act of 1913 and The Native Trust and Land Act of 1936, which proclaimed most of South Africa's land for whites and the rest for the black majority. A day after the Natives Land Act of 1913 was enacted in South Africa, Solomon Plaatje (1995:13) lamented: Awakening on Friday morning, June 20, 1913, the South African native found himself, not actually a slave, but a pariah in the land of his birth.

Modise and Mtshiselwa (2013: 363) mention four elements of the impact of the Native Land Act of 1913. First, the Act prevented black Africans from acquiring more land (assets). Second, black Africans could no longer rent land from their white landlords for the purpose of economic well-being and stability. Third, the Natives Land Act of 1913 prohibited the sharing of crops. Prior to this Act, black South Africans could sow on the basis of shares. Both white and black people could share the profit from the agricultural activities. Last, black South Africans were forced to consider labouring for the white farmers as an option to survive. In retrospect, blacks lost the economic independence that they had enjoyed prior to the legislation of the Natives Land Act of 1913. Lephakga (2013: 383) adds that the Native Trust and Land Act of 1936 was a continuation of the Land Act of 1913 that formalised the separation of white and black rural areas. This Act, which was the continuation of the Land Dispossession Project, was followed by the forced removals (from the 1950s to the 1980s) which came about under the Group Areas Act. Pityana (2012: 1) recalls that their generation of students in the 1960s in apartheid South Africa were much aware of the era of repression, and the apparent triumph of the forces of oppression and injustice. We were aware that these forces of white minority rule preceded the onset of apartheid as official policy of the country in 1948, and could be traced back to British colonial policy in the 19th Century. We were aware that there had been wave upon wave of resistance by African people to the onslaught of land dispossession and political exclusion, but that again and again our people lost, but never

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surrendered the right to self-determination, to the integrity of their humanity and preservation of their culture, and more.

In order to understand the history of Black Consciousness, one needs to understand the apartheid in higher education and what led to the formation of the South African Student Organisation (SASO) in 1968. *PoliticsWeb* (2012) states that up until 1959 the Afrikaans-medium universities had traditionally limited admittance to whites. The University of Witwatersrand and the University of Cape Town had however remained open to all races. The University of Natal admitted students of all races but segregated classes. Fort Hare meanwhile was a predominantly black institution. By 1970 two new universities had been established for black South Africans (Zululand and the North), one for coloureds (western Cape) and one for Indians (Durban-Westville). NUSAS (National Union of South African Students) was formed in 1924 with the aims of representing and promoting the interest of university and college students. It was only after the admission of Fort Fare and non-white section of the University College of Natal in the 1940s that NUSAS became a non-racial organisation (*SAHO*, 2011).

Biko (1978: 3) states that in the early 1960s there had been abortive attempts to establish non-white student organisations. In 1961 and 1962 the African Students' Association (ASA) and the African Students' Union of South Africa (ASUSA) were established. The Durban Students' Union and the Cape Peninsular Students' Union, which later merged to form the Progressive National Students' Organisation, were fanatically opposed to NUSAS initially. ASA and ASUSA were divided by ideological loyalties connected with African National Congress (ANC) and Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC). None of these organisations survived. NUSAS's power base was on white campuses which meant that it was virtually impossible for black students to attain leadership roles. NUSAS could not speak for non-white campuses, though it often assumed that role. Kaidl (2013: 87) states that SASO came into existence after the UCM (University Christian Movement) Conference in Stutterheim, in July 1968. Biko (1978: 3) explains that the UCM Conference gave blacks a better chance of coming together from all the main black centres of higher education in the Republic to form themselves into a caucus and agreed on the need for a nationally representative black student organisation. Maimela (1999: 109) states that

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SASO was established in 1968 and inaugurated in 1969 at the University College of the North (Turfloop) and Steve Biko was elected as president. One reason for its formation, according to those who helped to found it, was that they were increasingly despondent about multi-racial organisations which were historically dominated by white liberals. The proponents of this move argued that, since blacks were usually in the minority and also disadvantaged in the sense that they were often unable to express themselves properly in English, they could not participate fully in such liberal organisations. Maimela (1999: 105) states that it was Biko himself who realised that black people would never be able to free themselves from the blatantly racist agenda of apartheid if they did not divorce themselves completely from historical white liberal organisations such as NUSAS.

Kenworthy (2007: 41) states that Black Consciousness evolved as a philosophy in South Africa in the late sixties, transcending its initial student-orientated beginnings at an executive meeting of SASO in 1970 where Black Consciousness was discussed and seen as important for the entire black community, not only for students but seeking to fuse intellectuals and the masses. The Black Peoples Convention (BPC) was launched to expand the work of Black Consciousness beyond student and youth groups of SASO and the Black Community Programmes (BCP) was launched as well to give practical effect to the philosophy of self-reliance (Kenworthy, 2009: 41). Moodley (1990: 17) explains that the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) is the umbrella term given to all those organisations (SASO, BPC and BCP) that subscribe to the ideology of Black Consciousness.

Magaziner (2009: 225) states that from the founding of SASO through 1972, in the pages of the SASO Newsletter and other media, student activists defined a new approach to political experience. As they interrogated the category of blackness and demands of consciousness, they developed ideas about what constituted a historically appropriate "attitude of mind," which would in turn generate a proper "way of life." Nengwekhulu (1981) states that the 1972 Policy Manifesto of the South African Students' Organization (SASO) defines Black Consciousness as "an attitude of mind, a way of life whose basic tenet is that the Black must reject all value systems that seek to make him a foreigner in the country of birth and reduce his basic human dignity." The concept of Black

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Consciousness therefore implies an awareness and pride in their blackness by black people and implies that black people should and must appreciate their value as human beings. Biko (1978: 53) elaborates it as the realisation by the black man of the need to rally together with his brothers around the cause of their oppression – the blackness of their skin and to operate as a group in order to rid themselves of the shackles that bind them to perpetual servitude. It seeks to demonstrate the lie that black is an aberration from the normal which is white. It is a manifestation of a new realisation that by seeking to run away from themselves and to emulate the white man, blacks are insulting the intelligence of whoever created them black. Black Consciousness therefore takes cognizance of the deliberateness of God's plan in creating black people black. It seeks to infuse the black community with a new-found pride in themselves, their efforts, their value systems, their culture, their religion and their outlook to life.

Criticism of Black Consciousness was inevitable. Biko (1978: 4) mentions that there were fears of militancy and disappointment from white students who have struggled to maintain interracial contact when SASO was founded. Maimela (1999: 170) gives examples of instances outside campus. Jimmy Kruger, then minister of police and prisons, led the attack on Black Consciousness and slated the organisation for employing a dangerous and destructive ideology which provoked confrontation with whites. Kruger's opinions were received with great seriousness among conservative white South Africans, who viewed the organisation as being both radical and revolutionary. Karl Beyer, a German journalist who had been based on the African continent for over two decades believed that Biko was being used as a political football by the American government, and opined that the United States was using Biko as an instrument to destabilise South Africa. Biko (1978: 4) responds to such criticism that it seems sometimes that it is a crime for the non-white students to think for themselves. The idea of everything being done for the blacks is an old one and all white liberals take pride in it; but once the black students want to do things for themselves suddenly they are regarded as becoming "militant." Biko (1978: 55) critiques white liberals as the greatest racists because they refuse to credit blacks with any intelligence to know what they want. This then is what makes us believe that white power presents its self as a totality not only provoking us but also controlling our response to the provocation. Biko (1978: 27) redirects white liberals to the white community to fight

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the cause of justice within their white community because (Biko, 1978: 25) there is nothing the matter with blacks. The problem is white racism and it rests squarely on the laps of the white society. Biko (1978: 26) is against 'integration' where it is a breakthrough into white society by blacks, an assimilation and acceptance of blacks into an already established set of norms and code of behaviour set up and maintained by whites. Biko is for integration where there is free participation by all members of a society. The culture shared by the majority group must ultimately determine the broad direction. In an African country, the majority of the people are African must inevitably exhibit African values and be truly African in style (Biko, 1978: 26).

Biko (1978: 57) emphasised redefinition and correcting false images of ourselves in terms of culture, education, religion, and economics. It is not only about correcting but to be our own authorities rather than wait to be interpreted by others. The task of redefining is also redirected to the past because a people without a positive history is like a vehicle without an engine (Biko, 1978: 32).This is important because Black Consciousness is an inward-looking process; it is to pump back life into a black person's empty shell; to infuse him with pride and dignity, to remind him of his complicity in the crime of allowing himself to be misused and therefore letting evil reign supreme in the country of his birth. Fergusson (1999: 4) states that there are four themes of Biko's rhetoric on Black Consciousness: black humanity, black unity, black courage and black self-reliance. These themes became part of the ideology behind BCM and stood in opposition to four themes of white dominance: dehumanisation, separation, fear, and control.

Although the contexts of the black power movement and the BCM are not the same, there are similarities in their approaches. An interesting fact is that both these movements were initiated by students who were dissatisfied with how the older generation approached oppression. These students wanted to set the black agenda that would cater to the needs of the people. It came with the rejection of the entire oppressive system that even in their context, civil rights in terms of voting was not a priority. The priority was gaining the power for self-determination and liberation of the black psyche. That was more important than civil rights. Kwame Toure (Stokely Carmichael) and Steve Biko share the same sentiments in regard to liberation. They both rejected white liberals who supported the

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black struggle which they saw as denying blacks to think and do things for themselves. They redirected white liberals to engage their white community rather than suggest to blacks how they should respond to oppression. Black people should define themselves and determine for themselves a way of life without the assistance of white liberals. Although Kwame Toure was against integration because in their context it meant to be accepted in the white community; Steve Biko was also against it on condition that there is dialogue between all parties but emphasised that because we are in Africa, we should do things according to the majority. Both the movements were seen as militant and separatist which would destroy the unity between black and white that the older generation were working towards. Also, a majority of the members of these movements were students, they were seen as disrespectful and intensifying hate by white people. Even so, the battle of blackness is not supposed to be seen as "militant". Being able to define black as beautiful should not be seen as arrogance or a rejection of the other. It cannot be that blackness is seen as unable to think and determine for itself a way of life and that it needs assistance from whites on how to be "human." Both movements were tired of blacks being whipped into assimilation and subjugation at the same time. The movements wanted blacks to have control of their own communities: economics, politics and social life. The crucial one in the South African context is land back to black people and for black people to determine in their own terms and conditions what to do with their land. The ambitions of Black Consciousness were not anti-white but to promote humanness in the world.

What follows in this chapter is Black Theatre which was influenced both by the black power movement in the United States of America and the BCM in South Africa. It has been stated in the chapter introduction that *Son of Man* was first a theatre production and it would be fitting to explore this art which was a vehicle to educate the black community about the black power and the Black Consciousness concepts in their respective contexts.

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### 3.4 Black Theatre Movement

Ngaboh-Smart (1999: 167) states that both apartheid South Africa and white America relied on representation to mediate and distort the identity of blacks. In the United States, misrepresentation dates as far back as 1619, when the first African slaves were shipped to Virginia. In South Africa, the distortion predates 1652, the year Jan van Riebeeck landed at the Cape, but was intensified in 1948, when the Afrikaner nationalists came to an agenda of racial discrimination and separation. The enormous investments in both societies would ultimately create a semiotic ensemble that, while systematically erasing the identity of blacks, posited a white structure of value as the point of reference.

This chapter specifically looks at the response by the Black Theatre Movement that was influenced by the black power movement in the USA and the BCM in South Africa to address the socio-political issues of their time. Barrios (2008: 9) states that from the 1960s throughout the 1980s have been, with no doubt, the most vibrant and prolific decades in Black Theatre both in the United States and in South Africa. A great number of plays burst out like a forceful waterfall of red blood—expression of a long time-held rage and expression of life. The Black Theatre Movement emerged after being gestated for almost three centuries and activated by the Black Power Movements and by the BCM. The plays of the Movement were breathing and pulsating so vigorously because its authors had something important to utter as the black community's representatives.

Shava (1985: 124) in regard to black arts and apartheid summarised by Kavanagh: the reasons why theatre became a crucial area of political activity in the 1970s are self-evident. Conventional political action was illegal and dangerous. The press and radio were in the hands of the white establishment. Publishing was a white monopoly and vulnerable to censorship. Film was obviously beyond the reach of the political artist. Theatre, on the other hand, had many advantages: it was cheap, mobile, simple to present and difficult to supervise, censor or outlaw. Clearly it was the one medium left to the people to use to conscientise, educate, unify and mobilise both cadres and rank and file. Murray (1972: 57) states that in the USA when the black revolution of the sixties swept through the artistic community, it was virtually ignored by the film establishment. Producing a film requires major financial backing and black people at the time did not

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have such financial resources. The means of mass media communication and cinema was owned by whites and films consisting of a black cast was under the directorship of whites. Often, that perpetuated stereotypes and black actors/actresses were in subservient roles.

Clark (1981: 34) states that studies about Black Theatre during the 1970s in the USA and Africa have unearthed, analysed and described performance and texts as diverse as the black world itself. What these books have in common, besides impeccable scholarship and readability, is their approach. They each treat theatre as cultural expression combining literature, art and sociology. Black Theatre was not only a means of entertainment; it was functional to the lives of black people, committed to social justice and shared the communal experiences of black people. Such theatre proved to be a challenging yet was satisfying task for the theatre writer. The role that the black writer must play in a country like South Africa, in Mothobi Mutloatse's opinion, was quite demanding, but also worth it: "It seems to me that he is expected to be a jack of all trades—and a master of all! He has to be tradesman, docker, psychologist, nurse, miner, *matshigilane*, *tshotsa*, teacher, athlete, toddler, mother musician, father, visionary, *imbongi* and—above all—oral historian" (Barrios, 2008: 14). Clark (1981: 35) attests that the key position in the '70s seems to be that audiences can only be responsible for what they know of theatre expression. The theatre historian plays the role of guide, of mentor, even, for the audience, providing a link between work/street reality and theatre world.

### 3.4.1 Black Theatre in the United States of America

Filipowicz (1975: 161) states that theatre in the sixties, the black entertainer or actor was compelled to succumb to the white man's taste. The theatre worker chose to deny his personality because only then could he be accepted and recognised on the white stage, and the acceptance might mean artistic and/or financial success. Pearce (2016) states that the black power movement in the 1960s with its emphasis on collective opposition, self-determination and self-consciousness, resonated strongly with the younger generation, especially among black activists and artists. Barrios (2008: 75) states that before the sixties, W.E.B Du Bois had already formulated what Black Theatre should be,

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proclaiming four points: 1) About African-Americans; 2) by African-Americans; 3) for African-Americans; and, 4) near African-Americans. The African-American playwrights of the 1960s and 1970s gave credence to what Du Bois had foreseen in his early definition. Moreover, Woodie King accentuates that Black Theatre is about the destruction of the traditional role that blacks had played in white theatre. Black Theatre needed to be a theatre that expressed love of one's self and "one's personal, national, and international family." Reed (1970: 54) attests that it was at the point in time where the African-American was not to do his/her own thing, but our own thing – with our people and for our people. In order to create a theatre which regards the truth of the oppressed (read blacks) as the only meaningful reality, equate this vision of truth with one's own ethnic code of ethics, and marry this mystique to aesthetics. Black aesthetics and ethics are one unlike western aesthetics that separate the two. Hill (1979: 29) states that while Du Bois' definition is fairly comprehensive, it omits one important element of Black Theatre that he wishes to explore. Theatre is an art and all art consists of formal and stylistic characteristics that are the result of conscious choice and that give the work of art identity of its own. He does not believe that writing plays about black people and having them acted by black actors before black audiences in black communities will necessarily guarantee a stylistically Black Theatre. That is to say, Black Theatre should be distinguishable as black art in terms of artistic characteristics even though it is made by black, for black and about black. Couch (1985: 98) attests that the representation of black life in the theatre, on stage and screen, is not always safeguarded just because those in charge are black; that, in fact, some of the most distorted and ridiculous depictions of black experience have come from blacks themselves. That calls for characterising what Black Theatre should consist of. Gaffney (1970: 10) gives his perspective of black expression that it refers to a synthesis of black experience in America: protest, identity, achievement, revolt and freedom. In other words, if Black Theatre that does not consist of what has been mentioned, it cannot be regarded as Black Theatre.

Harrison (2013: 72) states that Black Theatre, as a practice, was the birth-child of the 1960s Black Arts Movement. Harrison (2009: 130) asserts that the leaders of the Black Arts Movement in the 1960s were Amiri Baraka and Larry Neal who advocated reclamation of the black heritage and saw black arts as a means of resisting cultural

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domination, and commodification by a rapacious American pop culture. Andrews (1982: 259) explains that the black power movement stressed the need for black people to define the world in their own terms; the Black Arts Movement stressed the same point in the context of aesthetics. The activist artist rejected the "white" or "western" aesthetics as inherently racist and set out to evolve their own set of values – a "black aesthetic." Harrison (2013: 73) elaborates that the Black Theatre practice had a clear aesthetic and social purpose that was driven by a desire for resistance to oppression. The emergence of this ethnically inspired stage experience required an aesthetic formulation to identify its uniqueness as a culturally specific product. Andrews (1982: 259) quotes Larry Neal about a black aesthetic formulation as "a radical reordering of the western cultural aesthetic" which would include "a separate symbolism, mythology, critique and iconology." The need for such reordering emerges from the constant prejudice of black art, or rather, the non-recognition of it as art by western values and principles. Black expression in art derives from the black experience in America and this expression is the desire to be free, being treated as human beings, and maintaining a cultural identity. The expression may be regarded as rage and violent from the perspective of western aesthetics. White America is dismissive of the black experience which has been normalised, especially in the arts. Black aesthetics sought to evaluate its own art and validate it according to black values and principles.

Western aesthetics is also dismissive of black art for not having a universal appeal. Brown (1974: 159) states the definitions of universality by both hostile and sympathetic white critics are equally prescriptive. For they rest upon a familiar incapacity to perceive black humanity as such, except when the black man's identity and literature are placed within the white context of cultural "integration" (assimilation) or of pseudo-universal criteria. According to the South African born K. William Kgositsile, the black revolutionary theatre should destroy existing symbols in order to liberate the black man from old perceptual chains: "we will be destroying the symbols which have facilitated our captivity. We will be creating and establishing symbols to facilitate our necessary constant beginning… All the anti-life crap that must vacate our minds will go up in flames. Jehovah, J.[esus] C.[hrist], capitalism, Hollywood, 'art for art's sake' – the whole jive. All points of reference will emerge from within the black nation" (Brown, 1974: 161). Symbols of black liberation and

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solidarity had to be established while developing and maintaining black cultural identity and black pride.

The point of departure and interlocutor of Black Theatre is the black community, Black Theatre shares common experiences in terms of oppression and racism. Wilkerson and Clark (1979: 1) states that Black Theatre must take its cues from its source, the rich tapestry and history of black lives. History is a very important element in order understand the current black experience but also to dismantle systems that perpetuate slavery and domination. Barrios (2008: 27) attests that the call for the black artists was an understanding that “there [were] Black people [there] who [needed] to be touched, who [needed] the spirit that the artist [was] supposed to provide.” Consequently, Baraka placed a great responsibility upon the Black artists in connection to their community. The new black aesthetics entailed a total commitment from African-American artists. According to Baraka, artists must develop and defend what their community needs (the present), in order to create a future. The active role played by the African-American writer in the 1960s was geared towards his/her audience’s engagement into the same commitment and action. The new Black Theatre intended to develop “an active and critical rather than passive audience,” John O’Neal had declared (Barrios, 2008: 75). The audience must be equipped with the necessary liberative tools to take to the real world and make an impact for a better life for blacks. Gaffney (1970: 14) states that the interests of the Black Theatre writers lie solely in reaching black audiences through black plays which are performed, directed and produced by black artists to deliver messages of self- determination, cultural identification and nationhood. The criticism arises from white and black liberals who imply that Black Theatre is militant and cannot be art as it is not universal. Gaffney (1970: 13) quotes Stephen H. Henderson who responds to such criticism: Black writers are "militant" only to white people and to Negroes who think "white," for merely to say "I'm black," in the United States is an act of resistance; to say out loud, "I'm black and I'm proud" is an act of rebellion; to attempt systematically to move black people to act out of their beauty and their blackness in white America is to foment revolution.

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Apart from formulating a specific aesthetic, Black Theatre has a particular function. Jones (1980: 70) quotes John O'Neal that Black Theatre aims to do more than amuse: One of our biggest problems is the notion held by everyone from funding sources to professionals in the business to many people in the audience that the main function of the arts is to provide an escape from reality. Those of us who insist that the arts have an important role in the process of community enlightenment and development are often arbitrarily separated from the arts and called politicians. Of course, all of the arts are involved in politics in some kind of way, but those of us who side with the victims of this society and who use our art to work for social change are looked upon as artistic subversives. Baraka (1965: 6) attests that most white western artists do not need to be "political," since usually, whether they know it or not, they are in complete sympathy with the most repressive social forces in the world today. Bailey (1983: 19) states that Amiri Baraka's stated aim was to use the dramatic arts as a weapon in the struggle for black liberation from the devastating effects of racism. Baraka's plays were written as a weapon with which to confront racism on a cultural level just as other blacks were using other means to confront it in the streets. Gaffney (1970: 12) states that this *genre* of Black Theatre functions as a predominant socio-political force by providing black people with an atmosphere of self-awareness and cultural identity. Baraka (1965: 4) emphasises that the revolutionary theatre should force change, and it should be change. It is not meant to amuse or portray an out of this world reality. Neal (1968: 31) attests that poetry in Black Theatre is a concrete function, an action. No more abstractions. Poems are physical entities: fists, daggers, airplane poems, and poems that shoot guns. Poems are transformed from physical objects into personal forces.

Black Theatre in America acknowledged its rejection in the western art world but sought to create its own world. A world that considers the black experience valid and shares communal values and principles that guide it. There is a similar pattern with Black Theatre and black power that portray it militant when blacks seek self-determination. Blacks were oppressed throughout history that standing up and embracing blackness would seem to be anti-white. The notion of Black Theatre is that the oppressor cannot liberate the oppressed. Black Theatre in America wanted to define for itself instead of seeking affirmation from the western art world.

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### 3.4.2 Black Theatre in South Africa

Rangoajane (2011: 8) states that unlike the white South Africans who owned means of communication, blacks were too poor to own, run or have access to formal forms of media, like newspapers, radio and television, and were compelled to find other means to communicate and express themselves. Theatre was one of those means. The BCM played a major role in shaping art to be a socio-political weapon. Barrios (2008: 146) states that Matsimela Manaka asserted that the BCM challenged the European arrogance of referring to African art as “township art” for this time was characterised by “the portrayal of the black experience as an art of defiance against the superiority complex of white people.” The BCM played a major role in the conceptual development of African art, in which the socio-political situation was revealed to the African artist and he gained consciousness. Steadman (1990: 11) emphasises that Black Consciousness gave Black Theatre an identity. An identity that is rooted in the African history and the resistance to desire to be white or do art that is white. Foremost, Black Theatre was an attack on the apartheid policies. Sole (1984: 54) elaborates that art and literature were seen as ways of raising social awareness and showing the need for a changed society, and black self-expression and control in the arts became a major pre-occupation. There was understanding that not having control of the black arts would weaken its impact of dismantling apartheid. Barrios (2008: 146) gives the African history of art as a socio-political weapon according to Mazisi Kunene who looks back to traditional Africa and asserts that among the Zulu people, the poet was traditionally a social critic. Poet and singer “defined social values, celebrating what was historically significant and acting as democratic agents to reaffirm the approval or disapproval of the whole nation.” In Africa, the social experience of a people is brought to life in art by the African artist. The artist has the liberty to criticise, congratulate achievements and give guidance for the future. In African Traditional Religions, the African artist is gifted with the voice to speak about socio-political experiences.

Among the pioneers of Black Theatre in South Africa are: Matsemala Manaka, Mazisi Kunene, Maishe Maponya, Fatima Dike, Gcina Mhlophe, Percy Mtwa, Mbongeni Ngema and Barney Simon. Barrios (2008: 39) mentions three workshop theatre groups that were

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totally aligned with the Black Consciousness cause: TECON (the Theatre Council of Natal), PET (People's Experimental Theatre) and MDALI (Music, Drama, Arts and Literature Institute). TECON stood for self-reliance, self-respect and strength towards an ultimate liberation of blacks. PET aimed to reassert black pride, dignity and group identity and solidarity. MDALI pursued the same goals as TECON and PET, and used poetry reading as a form of theatre, as well as mixed drama, poetry and music. It was inevitable that these groups would be dissolved due to continuous censorship and/or imprisonment of their members. Black Consciousness was not only an ideology but it was a tool to help dismantle the dehumanisation of the black through art among other programmes. Peterson (1990: 234) gives reasons the plays were performed for township audiences and frequently formed part of the cultural rhetoric and spectacle of political rallies. Furthermore, the social organisation of black performance has, in certain respects, contradicted the policies of the state. Black Theatre was faced with financial challenges and the state could not fund such initiatives unless, in a few cases where the plays are not political, directed by whites and reflect "simple rhythm, primitivism and a gaiety of our culture and simple stories about life in the hills" (Barrios, 2008: 42). Musical plays that consisted of blacks in African attire, singing traditional music and dances were popular in major South African theatres, even internationally because it did not threaten the *status quo*. Such plays projected a colourful and joyous life in South Africa that one even forgets or become aware of the oppression and racism. In order for Black Theatre to thrive, it had to be "underground" discreet from the authorities yet vocal enough to conscientise the black community towards liberation.

Black Theatre was functional art that challenged the *status quo* of apartheid. Black Theatre understands that there is no art that has no ideology. All art and literature have an ideology whether it is to perpetuate the *status quo* or to challenge and eventually dismantle it. Ngugi wa Thiong'o has argued, "because of its social involvement, because of its thoroughly social character, literature is partisan: literature takes sides." And the side which a given work of art, of literature, of theatre takes determines its function in the community to which it is presented (Horn, 1986: 213). The side that Black Theatre takes is the side of the dispossessed, oppressed, and marginalised. By merely taking this side, Black Theatre's function has to be of liberation, self-determination, and self-pride.

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Matsemela Manaka has observed that commitment and responsibility lie on the African artist in creating functional art, highlighting that the African artist "is not just making art but is also part of that art; for [her/] him, art is an extension of self" (Barrios, 2008: 146). The black artist does not make art that excludes his own experiences whether portrayed implicit or explicit. Even though the theatre writer or the artist produces the art, he/she also becomes its audience that must be impacted. In other words, African art is a way of life; it is not an external expression but an integral part to the black experience. Rangoajane (2011: 40) states that black playwrights wrote plays about the oppressive laws and their effects. In most of these plays, the playwrights proposed the best measures to be taken in order to bring about change. This is evident in Mda's work. Carolyn Duggan notes that because Mda wishes to spur people on to action, he requires a reasoned response from his audience. Whatever attitude, policy or ideology he is promulgating he demands concomitant reaction. Barrios (2008: 146) in Manaka's opinion, art had become a tool for liberation, the liberation of Africans, whom he denominated the dispossessed, for African artists had lacked the freedom of expression that causes them to be disarmed, disadvantaged and disabled—like an African farmer who has no right over his/her land. When apartheid was normalised, often brutally, most blacks became complacent for fear of their lives. Black Theatre had to expose the cracks and injustices of the apartheid regime to the black audience in order to give them courage to stand up for their human dignity. Rangaojane (2011: 11) in the words of Perter Larlam states that in many instances the playwrights' aim is to expose the consequences of racist legislation practically applied job reservation, the migrant labour system, the application of the pass laws, and discrimination in all areas of the social, economic and political life of the individual, based entirely on racial or colour differences. Exposing the unjust systems would then conscientise the mind of the black person that it is wrong in the highest degree. When the realisation comes that the black deserves better, it is inevitable that it would lead to action. The playwright does not only increase emotions and abandons the audience but he/she also gives guidance and ideas of how to go about dismantling the system to bring the change.

Black Theatre was committed to the cause of Black Consciousness under the apartheid regime. Peterson (1990: 234) states that Black Theatre emphasised black initiative,

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control, and trans-ethnic solidarity as preconditions for the attainment of liberation. This was important not to compromise Black Theatre as liberation weapon and self-determination. Rangoajane (2011: 11) states that Black Theatre identifies with a set of values and strives to instil a consciousness in its audience of what it means to be black. This consciousness re-enforces identity and human dignity. Barrios (2008: 147) attests in Shava's words, Black Theatre, "inculcated a sense of racial pride in the minds of black people. . . Poets wrote for black people and they wrote about their blackness, and out of their blackness, rejecting anyone and anything that stood in the way of self-knowledge and self-celebration." It was not a surprise that Black Theatre was considered militant in a time when assimilating whiteness meant being a progressive black. When your being is only recognised when whiteness is involved, by merely being proud black was seen as an act of sabotage.

Rangaojane (2011: 11) in the words of Peter Larlam explained that the content of Black Theatre was committed to social and political change. It deals with everyday life in the township or the plight of men fighting for survival, for dignity, for individuality and for freedom of expression and action within a context of racial discrimination and oppression. Black Theatre is thus the soul of black expression, the actor is not just acting, it is their life. Black Theatre is not a mask you put on when you are on stage and take off when you are off stage. Black Theatre is reality in its entirety. Tomaselli (1981: 18) labels it committed theatre and states that it is a theatre committed to the emancipation of a repressed, largely illiterate society. A corollary of its working class position in the South African social formation is that committed theatre grows, expands and is nurtured by the very fact that it is, by and large, oral in tradition, construction and rendition. Black Theatre committed itself to dismantling apartheid by any means necessary.

Black Theatre shared the communal experiences of black people under apartheid. Steadman (1988: 26) states that Manaka's major thematic concern is a call for black unity. With black political resistance being fragmented into different ideological perspectives since 1976, there have been a number of political stances in recent years to undermine black solidarity. Black Theatre in the township had to play a role of bringing black people together and influence their way of thinking because without black unity, there is no way

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of achieving liberation. Sole (1984: 56) states that the black performers and writers still see themselves as the spokesmen, or conscience, of all black people. This goes hand in hand with an often passionate identification with "the people", and a belief that all art must be political in orientation and purpose. The apartheid system treated all blacks the same, no matter how different they were socially and economically. The system made sure that segregation was well instilled in all areas of social and public life. Black people experienced oppression, marginalisation and dispossession, in all spheres of life. Wherever the black went, he was met with a definition of inferiority. Rangoajane (2011: 10) defines "Black Theatre" as referring to the theatre whose practitioners, playwrights, performers and directors are black and the objective is to capture and dramatise as closely as possible the lived experiences of the black masses.

Mazisi Kunene refers to the essential part that symbol plays in African writing including the *genre* of theatre. He asserts that symbol is "the representation of the attitude of the community, and in fact, it is the easiest access to communal expression, for it contains communal meaning" (Barrios, 2008: 146). Symbol is that which a community can easily recognise, share a mutual understanding of and brings people of a community together.

Black Theatre in America and South Africa is art that is communal, committed and functional. It shares the communal experiences of the black community in oppressive and racist systems. It is committed to black pride, self-determination, self-initiative and socio-political change. It is functional in challenging the *status quo* and its ideology is black nationalism. Black Theatre was regarded as "ghetto" or "township" art according to western standards and Black Theatre practitioners saw the need to develop black standards of art. The black artist was suffering from double oppression; as a black person and as a black artist, triple oppression as a black women in arts. Callaghan (1983: 83) states that the black artist discovers that the struggle against alienation and cultural emptiness is nothing but a struggle for liberation – psychological and social.

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### 3.4.3 Black Theatre and the *Son of man*

Barrios (2008: 25) states that Black Theatre was perceived as a totality, in the sense that it needed to be a combination of music, art, drama and dance. In this section we analyse the singing and dancing as well as the art within the film *Son of Man*. Dancing is mostly fused with the singing in the movie unless stated otherwise. We analyse how these artistic elements contribute to make the film communal, committed and functional.

#### 3.4.3.1 Music and dance

It is quite rare to think of a Jesus that sings and dances as our thoughts of Jesus especially cinematically are of a person who is reserved, serious and respectable. The *Son of Man* is not the only film that portrays a singing and dancing Jesus, *Jesus Christ Superstar* (1973) which is a musical drama film does that as well. There may be other theatrical productions of the story of Jesus that include the elements of singing and dancing. We will not analyse if there are scriptural grounds to portray the Jesus story that includes singing and dancing as the New Testament does not focus on the personality of Jesus. What we will analyse is how the singing and dancing portray the black lived experience in a communal; committed, and functional way according to Black Theatre standards. There are various songs and chants in the *Son of Man* selected to serving a different purposes in the scenes.

- The first song is when Mary witnesses a massacre of children in a classroom and receives a message from an angel that she will bear a son and should be named Jesus. She sings the *Magnificat* (song of Mary) which is in Luke 1:46-55. She sings the song in isiXhosa with emotion of heartbreak of what she witnessed and the joy of what is to come. She sings it with determination and renewed hope of the promised liberator for the oppressed.
- The arch-angel accompanied by child-angels announces the good news of a saviour that will be born to young shepherds. The child-angels burst into song: *Ilanga entwasahlobo / liyaku phumel' entabeni / namhla kumkos'omkhulu* (The sun will rise in spring over the mountain. Today we are united, we are one people).The

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song affirms the good news and rejoices on the promised birth of the saviour which sets the tone that there is hope in the midst of hopelessness.

- The third song is a Latin song called *Gloria in excelsis Deo* which is sung in the background by a choir at the birth of Jesus. The promise of a saviour is fulfilled which strengthens the hope of better things to come.
- The fourth song is a chant by initiates that return home from the mountains met by the ululating women who were expecting them in the village. They chant and dance in celebration as they have become men now. The community celebrates and welcomes the young men to be a part of the community.
- Jesus, the disciples, and mostly women are in a tent and they sing and dance traditional songs, it is joyous and communal. *Ndivela khona / inyawo zinodaka / Ndizele, ndizele / ndizele amadodana*. This song is a metaphor that refers to the journey of Jesus and his disciples in evangelising the good news to the community.
- After the women that was caught cheating on her husband was saved by Jesus from being set alight and stoned. She sold her jewellery and bought expensive perfumed oil, poured it on Jesus' feet and washed it with her hair. When Judas asks Jesus why he allowed an unclean woman to do that instead of selling the oil to contribute to the liberation struggle. Jesus responds that he was not greeted at the house and not even given water to wash his feet. The woman did so with her tears and hair. Jesus tells her all she has done is passed and must find peace. Two women comfort the woman in a traditional song and eventually everyone in the tent start singing and dancing *Igugu lethu ne bongo lethu ngakuwe silenzile* (we have been prideful and boastful towards you). The song is remorseful and also welcomes the woman into the community of believers.
- Jesus speaks for the first time to a crowd in a public space. People cheer, sing a traditional song, dance and clap while someone plays the dustbin as drums. The message of Jesus encourages more singing and dancing as a response that they have heard his message. The singing and dancing in this regard indicates agreement to the words of Jesus.
- Women protest outside the government building chanting *yekani abantwana bethu, yekani ukubulala abantwana bethu* (leave our children alone! Stop killing

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our children!). Their voices are in unison as they *toyi-toyi* with anger about the government killing young people. Jesus and the disciples also join in to be in solidarity. The singing indicates dissatisfaction about conduct of the government.

- The community holds a night vigil in honour of Jesus who was made to disappear. They sing, ululate and *toyi-toyi* while burning a picture of the governor of the democratic coalition. *balawula ngesibhamu / basidubulela abantwana / base bancane lonk' ilizwe* (They rule by guns, they shoot our children, they are young in our land). Dissatisfaction towards the government intensifies in song by the community.
- After Jesus was exhumed and placed at the cross for everyone in the township to see. Many witness a man on the cross in the morning. As they make their way to get closer to see what is happening, Mary sings and is joined by the community in song. Gradually there are drums and sudden *toyi-toying* in their anger of what has happened. They sing *awuzweke izulu lima thunz' antaba* (The land is covered in darkness). The singing, chanting and *toyi-toyi* have reached a climax at this point.

  The soldiers fire shots and suddenly there is silence.

  Mary approaches the soldiers and starts singing *awuzweke izulu lima thunz' antaba* (The land is covered in darkness) and the community joins in as they *toyi-toyi* without fear of the soldiers. The community has been liberated from fear and is more determined to seek justice.

- Jesus resurrects and sings *Ilanga entwasahlobo liyaku phumel' entabeni namhla kumkos'omkhulu* (The sun will rise in spring over the mountain. Today we are united, we are one people). Jesus celebrates the fearlessness of the community as he ascends to heaven accompanied by the child-angels.

Barrios (2008: 62) states that the lyrics of songs usually take its themes from matters and events that are of common concern and interest to the members of a social group or community. Moreover, dance, like song, can equally be used as a form of social and artistic communication. The singing and dancing in the *Son of Man* is in the key events

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that happen in the narrative (announcement, birth, rite of passage, celebration and protest). All these events are integral to the black lived experience which are the communal experiences of the black community. This implies that music is not an add-on to black life but it is part of the black life. The singing and dancing signify the commitment to cultural identity and also protest against injustice. The selection of songs is not random but integral to understanding the narrative as well as the experiences of blacks in South Africa.

#### 3.4.3.2 Art (murals)

The murals (wall paintings) in the *Son of Man* are portrayals of the miracles that Jesus performed. Murals communicate a message to the community which even the illiterate may understand. It is art which informs rather than art that is only meant to be admired.

- Although the first healing of Jesus was about the young man who was brought from the roof. The miracle was not painted. It was only after Jesus resurrected a person who was dead for three days that Peter painted it on the wall. The mural is in bright colours and shows a man sitting upright suggesting that he woke up from the dead.
- After Jesus performed exorcism on a young girl a mural was painted on a shack the next day. The mural depicts the evil spirit in white leaving the child's body.
- A mural depicts Jesus speaking to the crowd. The mural is also on a shack with Jesus holding his fist up high symbolising *amandla* (power) while the crowd looks on.
- A painting depicting Jesus on the cross with Mary beside him at his feet and a few people around.

Images play a major role in depicting reality or abstract reality. In the *Son of Man* it is functional art that is not about admiration. It tells of the miraculous events that happened in the narrative. It is committed to black people writing their own history in the form of art. Wall painting has been done in Africa for many centuries and it tells us of how people used to live and the major events that happened. The murals in the *Son of Man* are

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painted in visible places where the community may be able to see them. Although the community is in turmoil with violence and poverty; it is contrasted by the murals that are in bright colours as well as the miracles that are happening in the community. The murals become a reminder and a symbol of hope in the community. The combination of music; dance, and art in the *Son of Man* makes the film a masterpiece. These essentials of Black Theatre in the film retells the story of Jesus in a way that is relatable to the black experience in South Africa.

It has been mentioned before that in South Africa Black Consciousness and Black Theology are two sides of the same coin. Black Consciousness is cognitive and Black Theology is spiritual. This two in one seeks to liberate the black person in his wholeness consciously and spiritually. We will therefore discuss the relevance and relation of Black Aesthetics in Black Liberation Theology of South Africa.

### 3.5 Black Liberation Theology in South Africa

The task of Black Theology in South Africa was not only directed inward towards the black person but also directed towards the dismantling of the apartheid system and any other system that demeaned the black person. The image of the black person was distorted to justify the inhumane things done to them using the Word of God. Black Liberation Theology sets out to liberate the black image from the definitions of the white oppressor as well as dismantle the system that produces the inferior image of the black person. The image of blackness was equated to Satan or evil forces and whiteness was equated goodness; God, Jesus, and angels. These images were used to subjugate the mind of blacks to think of themselves as a cursed people. Makofane and Tshaka (2010: 534) mention that Black Liberation Theology in South Africa was expressed under the banner of the BCM which owes its being to students such as Steve Biko, Barney Pityana, Harry Nengwenkulu and others. Black resistance to white domination in South Africa began right from the start of colonialism when the Khoi people in the Western Cape abandoned trade with Dutch traders as soon as they realised that the latter intended to settle and demand land for their use (Mothlabi, 1987: 3). Even so, Itumeleng Mosala holds the view

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that Black Theology could not have started before apartheid in 1948 although black people suffered under English colonialism and the racism of the United Party and its allies. Apartheid was different because it deliberately defined blacks as less than human while defending itself in the name of Christian theology (Villa-Vicencio, 1996: 213). Using Christianity to dehumanise the image of the black person was not only scripturally contradicting and heretic but it also posed a challenge to the black Christian. The black person was oppressed in all spheres of life; culturally, economically, politically, physically, mentally and spiritually. Black Theology challenged the normalisation of this oppression. Some of the questions Black Theology asked were: what does it mean to be black and Christian in apartheid? Is blackness evil? What is the role of God in the lives of black people? Was the oppression faced by blacks the will of God or the deliberate act of man? How do we read and interpret the Bible in the black experience and in a way that does not dehumanise the black image?

Motlahabi (2005: 1) states that black theology in South Africa followed closely on the heels of American Black Theology and is closely related to it. The two theologies are soul-mates, to use a term applied in a different but related context. Maimela (1993: 100) asserts that Black Theology can be defined as a conscious and systematic theological reflection on black experience which is characterised by oppression and suffering in white racist societies in North America and South Africa. Hopkins (1988: 199) explains that the white power structure in North America in contrast to the persistent use of brutal force by white South Africa, employs a bourgeois democracy and provides a bourgeois theological atmosphere. It provided an illusion of "freedom" for the blacks and encouraged "God-talk" in theology. This perpetuated and normalised oppression, therefore Black Theology in North America sought true liberation culturally and politically. Black theologians could critique the state and academia to be open and recognise blacks as it was within their "freedom." In South Africa, black theologians did not have the privilege of freedom of expression, in fact it was treason to critique the government and the writing of Black Theology could lead to imprisonment or even death. This was so because the apartheid government and the Dutch Reformed Church were one. Therefore a political and theological critique was brutally suppressed. Hopkins when comparing Black Theology in

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North American and South Africa, concludes that both understand political and cultural liberation as the heart of the Gospel message.

James Cone, an African-American is regarded as the father of Black Theology and his work inspired black theological reflection in the South African context. Makofane and Tshaka (2010: 543) mentions that South African Black Theology was also inspired by liberation movements in Latin America and the CRM by the prophetic voice of Martin Luther King Jr. Mosala (1989: 14) attests that all major black theological studies in South Africa draw in some way the work of James Cone. Some of the published work of Cone at the time included: *Black Theology and black power* (1969), *A Black Theology of Liberation* (1970) and *God of the oppressed* (1975). Biko (1978: 96) mentions that in South Africa by the mid-1970s UCM appointed Sabelo Stanley Ntwasa the Travelling Secretary for 1971 with a special mandate to encourage thinking and writing on Black Theology, especially in theological seminaries. A Collection of essays was compiled in the book *Black Theology: The South African voice*, edited by Basil Moore in 1973 became the result of that. This was the beginning of self-definition, self-determination and re-imagine blackness.

The sources of Black Liberation Theology according to James Cone are: the Scripture, black experience, black history, black culture, tradition and revelation. Scholars like Takatso Mofokeng would also add land as source of Black Liberation Theology in South Africa. Aesthetics is that which makes the sources of Black Liberation Theology visible through art and literature. It is through black music that we hear the expression of the black soul. James Cone used Negro Spirituals and the Blues as sources of Black Theology. The lamentations in those songs functioned as hope in God through the struggle of slavery and Jim Crow. It is through aesthetics that we know how blackness is portrayed. Art may be classified as a vehicle of expression and representation which include: music, dance, theatre, paintings, drawings, sermons, sculptures and literature. The image of God and Jesus were made white to normalise the black person's oppression. The task of Black Liberation Theology with regard to art is to liberate the images that God and Jesus are white but most importantly, to liberate the image of blackness associated with evil. It is to liberate ourselves from the confines and definitions

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of others who justify it with religion. Ultimately it is to portray God and Jesus in the images that are relative to blackness.

Hopkins (1988: 378) mentions the cultural sources in South Africa that opposed colonial and apartheid domination. Many of these cultural sources were demonised and made to feel inferior and needed to be liberated in order to liberate the consciousness of the black person. Folktales and folklore of the African Traditional Religions re-enact the memory of an African way of life that was disrupted by colonialism. This memory becomes the foundation of the need for liberation and reaffirms the humanity of the African. Liberation is inspired by memories of freedom and basic essence of being a human being. When treated in inhumane ways, memories invoke insurrection. The diverse African languages were suppressed and the use of the English language was enforced during colonisation and Afrikaans was enforced during apartheid. Communicating in these diverse African languages became cultural insurrection against European domination as well as political resistance in apartheid (i.e. 16 June 1976 Soweto student uprising). The black South African songs – vocal music of the rural areas; popular music such as political *mbaqanga* tunes, crossover, and *marabi shebeen* sounds; and freedom songs – provide theological resources. The songs express the black experience; as comfort to cope in the present oppression and hope for liberation in the future. *Toyi-toyi* is a form of protest songs and dance movements that are done by the masses in the streets to portray dissatisfaction of inhumane conditions. Black cultural practitioners of poetry, theatre plays, short stories, autobiographies, critical essays and novels are sources that continued the struggle for liberation. Black South Africans during apartheid created their own alternative media to disseminate information that was in direct opposition to mainstream media. Many of the work of cultural practitioners were banned because they challenged the *status quo*. Even so, the spirit of resistance in art would not die because it is embedded within the black soul. Public speaking and preaching whether in funerals, churches or public spaces like soccer stadiums was an art form to reaffirm blackness and reassure the masses that freedom will take place and therefore people should not lose hope. These gatherings were the only time a mass of black people could be in one place and not be suspected to be plotting against the apartheid regime. This was an opportune moment to reaffirm blackness and a reminder not to conform to the inhumane standards of living.

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The wealth of cultural sources in Black Liberation Theology of South Africa has not been explored much as the priority was spent on explaining what Black Theology is; debating that Black Liberation Theology is indeed a theology and also formulating ways to do black theology in South Africa.

The first generation black theologians in the 70s in South Africa were beginning to formulate a theology that is grounded in the black experience. Black Theology was met with a lot of confusion and misconceptions as the situation in South Africa was different from North America. Mgojo (1977: 27) explains the perception about those who asked what is Black Theology? The question is often followed by a statement or question indicating that Christian theology has no colour. In other words, the question is often asked with the assumption that Black Theology must be a racist theology. Ironically, other cultural/national groups (British, German, Afrikaner, American etc.) had their own theologies but they were somehow never questioned like Black Theology. The difference with Black Theology in comparison with the abovementioned cultural/national groups is that the starting point of Black Theology is the black experience and the Bible while Christian theology's starting point is the non-believer. Black Theology seeks to liberate the black person from his oppression and marginalised state while Christian theology seeks to convert the non-believer. Even though Black Theology stands in opposition to Christian theology in apartheid South Africa, it was and still is Christ-centred. Boesak (1977: 13) states that Black Theology is a situational theology that tries to transform the compartmentalised theology blacks have inherited from the western world into a biblical, holistic theology. It is part of the black struggle toward liberation from religious, economic, psychological, and cultural dependency. Western theology in this regard is a pie in the sky theology that is far away from the situations of the black people. Tutu (1976: 6) asserts that Black Theology follows the biblical paradigm of being contextual in theologising the experiences of a particular community. Theology can therefore not be universal because universality can only be attributed to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. A theology is limited to its particular set of circumstances. Black theology in South Africa seeks to answer the cries and sufferings of the black community in light of the biblical message that God is a God of the exodus, the liberator God who is always on the side of the oppressed. Goba (1978: 25) attests that Black Theology is a theology of the

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oppressed and operates from a different frame of reference as compared to current western theology. Black Theology seeks to aggressively establish its own authenticity, a theology of brokenness, poverty, shattered dreams, and yet of triumphant hopeful spirit bursting, erupting like a volcano. It is a theology based in the black community to give black people dignity amidst their dehumanisation and give them hope that God will liberate them from the bondage of oppression. For Goba, the content of Black Theology is confessional, political and Christological. That is, confessing the black experience in the black community, rejecting all forms of political oppression towards the black people and Jesus Christ who is understood as a liberator of the oppressed.

Gqubule (1974: 16) attempts to clarify some confusion with regard to Black Theology. Black Theology does not reject Christianity, it seeks to make it relevant to the black experience. Black Theology is in solidarity with all those that are oppressed and marginalised including Africans in the diaspora, coloureds and Indians. Black Theology is not a return to African Traditional Religions nor does it reject it. It is important to know ones history and culture as well as understand that culture is not static. Christianity is universal, it is not tied to any particular culture. Therefore its meaning is based on the experiences of a particular culture as our contexts are not the same. Black theology in South Africa is about that, Christianity from the perspective and experiences of the black community. Other cultures may enjoy Christianity in their own experiences as well while respecting the dignity of others.

The late 1980s saw the emergence of the first *Journal of Black Theology in South Africa* which gave hope that Black Theology was here to stay as there were many banning's of black theological material; the staff of UCM, Black Consciousness leaders as well as black theologians in the 1970s. The journal continued the conversation of political and cultural liberation for blacks as well as delegitimising apartheid and its theological stance.

Two of the most important Christian documents in South Africa influenced by Black Liberation Theology are the Belhar Confession (1982) and the Kairos Document (1985). It would not be strange to align the Belhar Confession and Kairos Document with black aesthetics which is communal, committed and functional. These documents are communal to the black experience; are committed to the cause of liberation for the poor,

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dispossessed, oppressed, marginalised, and discriminated; and are functional documents that invoke action and not just to be admired as beautiful theological writings.

### 3.5.1 Belhar Confession

Adonis (2006: 235) states that in 1982 the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) held its General Assembly in Ottawa, Canada. The member churches of the family of DR Churches were all members of the World Alliance. Dr Allan Boesak of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church (DRMC) was elected president of the WARC at this meeting. The World Alliance also discussed the political situation in South Africa and came to the conclusion that "[t]he promises of God for this world and for his church are in direct contradiction to apartheid ideals and practices". This statement by the WARC is in fact a restatement of the 1978 declaration by DRMC that "the apartheid policy is in contradiction to the gospel". Before it was the Belhar Confession it was declared a *status confessionis,* the member churches that were charged with heresy were the Dutch Reformed Church and the Nederduitse Hervormde Kerk. The *status confessionis* wanted to keep all the member churches in the alliance although there were ideological differences in the South African situation. A draft confession of Belhar was circulated to churches for approval and on the synod of the DRMC on 26 September 1986 the confession was accepted. It is named after the "coloured" township Belhar in Cape Town where the DRCM synod took place. The Belhar Confession sought to re-reform these two churches that Christianised apartheid. Boesak (2008: 2) states that it was the first confession of faith to be formulated in almost 300 years within the Reformed family of churches and the first to come from a church in Africa in modern times. The Belhar Confession follows on the Reformed tradition of confessions which sought to defend the integrity of the Gospel of Christ from systems that segregate, discriminate and subjugate through the use of Scriptures. The Belhar Confession is a call to stand where God stands, against injustice. The main themes of the Belhar Confession are unity, justice and reconciliation.

Tshaka (2015: 193) argues that the Belhar Confession was inspired by the Barmen Theological Declaration (1934) for their similarities but the difference of these two documents is the understanding and interpreting the notion of "confession." The Barmen

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Theological Declaration was opposing the imposition of totalitarianism within the church. Similarly, the Belhar Confession was opposing the theologised politics of the apartheid regime. The Barmen Theological Declaration stressed the Word of God, which is the only Word that must be heard and obeyed. Similarly, the Belhar Confession emphasised the primacy of the Word of God. The Barmen Theological Declaration was economical with the usage of political language; likewise the Belhar Confession opted for stronger theological language in contrast to political language. Plaatjies Van Huffel (2014: 1) states that history shows that the Belhar Confession is growing into a wider tradition. It is a confession for the whole church seeking to be faithful to God, who stands in the midst of suffering of any and all expression. As a church, we need to stand up for the poor, oppressed, marginalised and discriminated against. The Belhar Confession challenged the apartheid government policy of separate development by giving privilege to whites at the expense of black people.

Confessional documents are not strange to Black Theology, in fact Vellem (2010: 4) asserts that James Cone was inspired by the confession of faith in the Barmen declaration and that provided him with a strategy to develop a theology that deconstructs the orthodox notions of confessional theology. Black Liberation Theology is against Christian theology that normalises the *status quo* at the expense of the poor, marginalised and oppressed. The Belhar Confession in a way sought to reaffirm blackness from abuse of the Word of God from the Dutch Reformed Church. The use of Scripture to paint black people as lesser human beings could not be condoned by authors of the Belhar Confession. The confession emphasised the portrayal of blackness with dignity. It also gives an image of the body of Christ that is embedded with justice, unity, and reconciliation in South Africa. The image of the church was polluted by the Dutch Reformed Church and described as the church of the oppressor in the eyes of black people. Christianity in South Africa became the religion of the oppressor and it was contradicting for black people to be associated with such a religion. Black Liberation Theology in South Africa sought to redeem the image of Christianity through the Belhar Confession and expose heretic theologies.

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### 3.5.2 Kairos Document

The Kairos Theologians (1986: 61) state that on June 1985 the crisis in South Africa was intensifying, as more and more people were killed, maimed and imprisoned, as one black township after another revolted against the apartheid regime, as the people refused to be oppressed or to co-operate with oppressors, facing death by the day, and as the apartheid army moved into the townships to rule by the barrel of the gun, a number of theologians who were concerned about the situation expressed the need to reflect on this situation to determine what response by the church and by all Christians in South Africa would be most appropriate. The Kairos Theologians are a group of people that consist of theologians, lay theologians and some church leaders. The theologians are anonymous because it was regarded as "the people's document." Musya (2012: 163) explains that in Greek there are two words that express time: *chronos* and *kairos*. The term *chronos* refers to the chronological or sequential time, while the term *kairos* signifies any intervening period of time during which something special occurs. The term *kairos* implies the "right" or "opportune" moment during which God creates an opportunity for the church to fulfil a particular assignment in its community. Indeed, in South Africa was a *kairos* moment for liberation and justice.

MacBride (1988: 216) asserts that more and more Christians were calling the South African government illegitimate as it forcibly removes blacks from more productive parts of the country and assign them to desolate wastelands. Christians were standing with the people in the black townships in protesting against the detentions, torture, and killings of adults and children by police and soldiers. This was the moment of truth for the government and the church.

The moment of truth is the realisation that the church is divided, Christians both black and white worship and praise the same God but there is division. The moment of truth exposes the government and church for what it really is. Whether the church seeks liberation or maintains the *status quo*. In analysing the different theologies the Kairos Theologians categorise three types of theologies in South Africa: State Theology, Church Theology, and Prophetic Theology. Kairos Theologians (1986: 63) explain that State Theology is

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simply the theological justification of the *status quo* with its racism, capitalism and totalitarianism. Church Theology are the “English-speaking” churches that criticise apartheid and claim to be official representatives of majority churches. The critique about Church Theology is that its criticism of apartheid is superficial and counter-productive because instead of engaging in an in-depth analysis of the signs of our times, it relies upon a few stock ideas (reconciliation, justice and non-violence) derived from Christian tradition and then uncritically and repeatedly applies them to our situation without a proper social analysis. There was thus a need to analyse State Theology and Church Theology in order to propose an alternative theology that would boldly address the social injustices of the time. Prophetic Theology reads the signs of time, a social analysis of what the situation in South Africa is. It is action-orientated, does not “repeat generalised Christian principles” and seeks to dismantle apartheid by any means necessary. It speaks out to the current and specific situation in which people find themselves in and boldly takes a stand against systems of oppression. It maintains that God is the God of the oppressed and acts as their liberator.

Vellem (2010: 3) perceives Prophetic Theology to be an inherent theme of Black Liberation Theology. The assertion that black theologians among others produced the Kairos Document clearly makes an important connection between a Black Theology of Liberation and the Kairos Document. He argues that in South Africa a “protest model” and a “confessional model” are prophetic instances in Black Theology. The protest model is evident in the critique against colonisation by black Africans and the emergence of the Ethiopian Movement of which black Africans formed their own churches (African Initiated Churches) and political movements. The protest model challenges the Christian church in normalising the *status quo* through the Christian faith. The confessional model was influenced by the Sharpville Massacre in 1960 which led to the Cottesloe Conference. A confessional critique of institutional racism and its violence was discussed at Cottesloe and declared as a sin against God. Confession is not only a statement of faith or a corrective articulation of faith but it is a political praxis. This is so because the church and state were intertwined to fulfil the project of subjugation.

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It is therefore not farfetched to say that The Belhar Confession and the Kairos Document are interlinked with Black Liberation Theology. Aesthetically the document affirms black is beautiful and blacks should not be reduced to sub-humans that should be murdered to keep them "in their place." The Kairos Document rejects the image of Christianity that is associated with "State Theology" that maintained subjugation and "Church Theology" that acted as if it knew the black experience. Prophetic Theology was the image of the church the Kairos Theologians portrayed in order to challenge the *status quo*. The oppressed articulated in their own words their lived experiences and means to protest. It was a moment the black church embedded the image of liberation, became prophetic and boldly stood up against power.

The majority black people were Christians and when Christianity was used to legitimise the *status quo*, it normalised their oppression. Black theologians played an important role in the writing process of these documents that changed the image, understanding, and interpretation of Christianity for black people in South Africa. Black Theology portrayed Christianity that would liberate the oppressed. It was an affirmation that God is on the side of the oppressed which imagines a black God. A God that is not foreign but who looks like the oppressed that worship him. Black Theology put the necessary pressure to delegitimise apartheid and exposed its heretic theology. The black person was dignified and given hope that the total liberation of the black person is not just a dream but a reality. Black theology in South Africa proclaimed the aesthetic notion that black is beautiful and set out to reclaim blackness as the source of liberation.

### 3.5.3 The relevance of Black Theology in post-apartheid

On the 27th of April 1994 the first democratic elections took place in South Africa which saw the abolishment of apartheid. That in some way suggested that there would no longer be a need for a Black Liberation Theology because political liberation was attained. Bentley (2013: 1) states that the churches in South Africa took a prominent social position from colonial times, right through to the end of the apartheid era. During the apartheid era, the churches were more vocal against the apartheid system even drafting documents such as but not limited to the Cottesloe declaration (1960), the Belhar Confession (1982)

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and the Kairos Document (1985) to oppose it. Many scholars agree that in the post-apartheid era, the churches became less vocal or could not have a social position as South Africa became democratic, multi-religious and secular. The challenge to the churches, as Bentley (2013: 2) states is that South Africa became a constitutional democracy in 1994 owning a constitution that is considered to be one of the most liberal and progressive in the world. The constitution paved the way for the South African democracy also to be a secular democracy, not giving any preference to a particular religion or belief, but structuring society on the understanding that the constitution itself would safeguard the rights of each individual or group falling under its authority. Chimhanda (440) asserts that the challenge of Black Theology in post-apartheid would face the need to redefine black identity, black theologians have to grapple creatively with the gospel and culture(s) to come up with a black contribution to a multicultural, interethnic and fast evolving techno-scientific environment. Black Theology needs to engage in a multi-sectorial dialogue with culture, politics, and the global free market economy. Makofane and Tshaka (2010: 537) question the legitimacy of democracy in South Africa, if it really solves the core problem in the community. Writing one of his best contributions to the economic debate in South Africa, Terreblanche argues that “post-apartheid South Africa has maintained a version of democratic capitalist system that is at best dysfunctional and fails to address the dismal legacy of inequality, imbalances and injustices accumulated during the first systemic periods of unfree labour.” This implies that even with political power in the majority, the economy is still in the hands of apartheid beneficiaries. This is a make-believe system that something is being done for the majority black people but in actual fact there is minimal change.

The South African constitution legitimises colonialism, apartheid and institutional racism. There were no reparations for all the atrocities throughout history against black people. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission was giving amnesties to all that came forward to narrate their involvement in committing the most gruesome crimes during apartheid. Maluleke (1997: 59) states that in July 1995, the Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act, which gave birth to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), was passed by the South African parliament. Basic to the entire TRC process in South Africa is the pursuance of the notions of “national reconciliation” rather than vengeance

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or justice in the judicial sense of the word. Lephakga (2015: 129) argues that the TRC made an oversight when it identified individuals as either perpetrators or victims. This choice means that they ignored gross crimes, namely human rights violations perpetrated collectively and systematically against millions of black people under white political domination and racial capitalism. This oversight suggests that the problem with apartheid was only racial discrimination that individuals committed and not institutional racism that the apartheid system perpetuated. Therefore structures and institutions of oppression were excused and carried on business as usual.

Tshaka (2015: 1) states that in order for Black Liberation Theology to prove its contextual relevance in democracy, it must do two things. First, it must continue to assert its rebel nature. That is to say, it must never lose sight of structural racism. Second, a Black Liberation Theology that is not inward-looking is one that is able to make the needed assessments in present-day South Africa. This suggests that self-criticism must be encouraged in order for it to assert its contemporary relevance. It boils down to engaging critically with the current hegemonies, be they political, economic or cultural. The challenge of Black Liberation Theology is that it must constantly explain its continued relevance in post-apartheid which distracts it from addressing issues that really matter. Tshaka (2015: 8) admits that it must be said outright that there is no future for Black Liberation Theology in South Africa unless this theological enterprise creates its own space and dictates its own terms for its continued relevance and survival. This is inspired from Malcom X's the ballot or the bullet speech that "…black nationalism only means that the black man (to be understood as *mensch*) should control the politics and the politicians in his own community."

Makofane and Tshaka (2010: 532) refer to Simon Maimela who explains the ontology and symbolism of Black Theology which would make Black Liberation Theology relevant in post-apartheid. The ontology refers to the experiences of black people and symbolically it refers to every human being who is either marginalised, subjugated, oppressed and enslaved under the ruling elite. Maimela thus manages to address the universal without compromising the particular. This analysis of the universal and particular in Black Theology makes it relevant under post-apartheid democratic South Africa. Democracy

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does not mean that marginalisation, institutional racism, and discrimination no longer exists. In fact, capitalism in democratic frameworks should not be ignored. Black Liberation Theology is relevant in a democratic South Africa as the struggle of a black person is not over. Although we are in a democracy, the black majority is still landless, economically deprived and in poverty.

**3.6 Conclusion**

The purpose of this chapter is about reclaiming the glory of blackness in the affirmative phrase "black is beautiful." Black Power and BCM sought to redefine the image of black people from being regarded as inferior. These movements were aware that the oppressor had perverted ways of going into the past and distort history. History is where our black image was in its glory and a distortion of history makes it seem as if blacks were always inferior. The task is thus to re-write history in our own words and not rely on the history as taught by the oppressor. The movements proclaimed self-affirmation and self-determination. Black Theatre as influenced by the two movements became the vehicle which the ideology of those movements could be expressed artistically. Black Theatre conscientised; educated, unified, and mobilised black people in the community. Black Theatre also follows the ideology of black nationalism; that Black Theatre is for blacks, by blacks, and about blacks. Black Theatre is functional, communal, and committed to the black lived experience. It is an art of defiance against western standards of art and against oppression. Black Liberation Theology sought to liberate the image of blackness that is associated with evil. It also sought to liberate the images of God; Jesus, the church, and Christianity as white and religion of the oppressor. Black Liberation Theology portrays that image of God and Jesus as black to signify a God in the image of the oppressed because God is on the side of the oppressed.  Black is beautiful is the image of dignity which liberates the black person from accepting oppression that is; physical, mental, spiritual, cultural, socio-political, and economic.

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# CHAPTER 4

# STEVE BIKO CHRIST-FIGURE

## 4.1 Introduction

Dornford-May, the director of *Son of Man* not only wanted to retell the narrative of Jesus Christ as we know it, but he was also inspired by the life and death of Stephen Bantu Biko. Chattaway (2006) states that in adapting the story for film, Dornford-May said he was not interested in studying other retellings of the life of Jesus. Instead, he was drawn to accounts of Steve Biko. Steve Biko is given a Christ-figure around four key things in the *Son of Man*: non-violence, ideology, disappearance and death. We will last discuss Black Christology in light of the *Son of Man*.

## 4.2 Biko Christ-figure

### 4.2.1 Non-violence

Initially the ANC attempted non-violent means to attain land and freedom since 1912. The PAC is a breakaway party from the ANC due to ideological differences regarding the Freedom Charter in 1955. PAC was also a non-violent political party until the Sharpeville Massacre on the 21st of March 1960. Both ANC and PAC decided to approach the liberation struggle by responding with violence. Military wings for the political parties were formed: *uMkhonto we Sizwe* (MK) for the ANC and the Azanian People's Liberation Army (APLA) for the PAC. Even when both the political parties were banned, they continued the armed struggle underground in exile. The BCM operated during the banning of ANC and PAC. Biko (1978: 151) states that Black Consciousness was committed to achieving their goals through non-violent means. Every programme under the Black Consciousness umbrella always maintained a peaceful approach to the oppressive system. They understood their legal limitations of their operation, putting their lives in danger by being banned and arrested. Even so, the belief was that whites will eventually listen to the black voice without using violent means. The main goal was liberating the black person from an inferiority complex and to have black pride. The other is for the black person to be self-dependent economically and have self-determination for their own destiny. More (2004:

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213) explains that the BCM had a two-phased strategy. Phase one was psychological liberation and phase two physical liberation. At the time, a militant movement was suicidal and would inevitably be defeated by the apartheid regime. Black Consciousness on the other hand survived and gained support from white liberals as well as international exposure through its non-violent means. Biko as an individual believed in verbal communication, when confronted as he would be "bound" to communicate verbally but would respond differently when they adopt "rough stuff". Biko was not afraid to hit back when being hit, recalling an incident when he was arrested, he says, "we had a boxing match the first day I was arrested. Some guy tried to clout me with a club. I went into him like a bull" (Biko, 1978: 173). Biko's viewpoint was that the only way to deal with policemen was to be as unhelpful as possible and not allow them to carry out their programme of fear and intimidation faithfully.

Jesus in the *Son of Man* also used the method of non-violence as a means for liberation when he asked his disciples to handover their guns because "we do not need weapons to fight this battle." Jesus conscientised the people with regard to the existential situations in the community such as poverty, overcrowding and lack of education of which the occupiers and elders blamed the people for the unrest in Judea. Jesus emphasised "we must prove to them (the occupiers) that we are committed to non-violent change" in dealing with poverty, epidemics and thuggery. Human life is very important and violence should not be used as an alternative to secure long lasting solutions. Judea was also under strict governance with a militia that often used violent forces towards any group of people that responded with violence. At some point, innocent people in the community were murdered in order to make a point that any attempt to destruct the process of a democratic coalition would be death. The Jesus movement operated discreetly in small groups before it became public. Jesus would say to a small group of people "we must not be a suspicious group. We must believe in the inherent goodness of man. Together we shall lead ourselves, be it to glory or to destruction." When Jesus addresses a larger crowd for the first time, the militia approaches the crowd to disperse because it is an illegal gathering. When Peter picks up a stone to throw at the soldiers Jesus responds "Do not do it. Put that stone down." Although disappointed by the dispersion, Jesus attempts not to lose his calm.

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Jesus is arrested, taken to an isolated place, and tortured. Jesus is told to join the elders so they may share power. Jesus responds "it is no good trying to beat me into agreement, it would not work." These are the similar words that Biko used when he was interrogated by the police, “do not try any form of rough stuff, because it just would not work” (Biko, 1978: 173). A Biko Christ-figure does not want to give in to fear and intimidation. They stay true to what they believe in and become unhelpful to the interrogators. Jesus does not fight back but remains unhelpful. Biko wanted to be tied in order for him not to fight back by saying, “you have got to handcuff me and bind my feet together, so that I cannot respond. If you allow me to respond, I am certainly going to respond” (Biko, 1978: 174). A Biko Christ-figure knows that they would die for what they stand for but have to overcome the thought of their own personal death. The ability to be fearless of death becomes a victory. Jesus uses the words of Biko when he is told “I will kill you” and responds “how long will it take you?” (Biko, 1978: 174). A Biko Christ-figure is committed to the cause of social justice even to death.

#### 4.2.2 Ideology

A Biko Christ-figure is not keen on addressing personal morality but is focused more on institutional morality. Black Christians during apartheid South Africa were preached a message of self-condemnation and blaming oneself for misfortune. It made black people point the finger to themselves rather than the oppressive system of apartheid. Personal morality was an emphasis rather than the structural morality of apartheid. This meant there was nothing wrong with apartheid but there was everything wrong with a black person’s personal morality. Biko (1978: 61) states that stern-faced ministers stand on pulpits every Sunday to heap loads of blame on black people in townships for their thieving, housebreaking, stabbing, murdering, adultery etc. No one ever attempts to relate all these vices to poverty, unemployment, overcrowding, lack of schooling and migratory labour. Jesus in the *Son of Man* was very frank about this when preaching to a small crowd in a house, "we are too busy with moral trivialities, as if they are the most important things. If you constantly find fault with yourself, you will lose the struggle against real sin. All authority is not divinely instituted. If you follow me we will have peace." A Biko Christ-

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figure prioritises the core of the societal problems that are not God's will but man-made. The problems in the township were not created by blacks but white people who were economically greedy and institutionalised the poverty and land dispossession there.

A Biko Christ-figure understands that there was a history of colonisation and a distortion of that history by imperialists especially when it comes to the current problems of Africa. Jesus in the *Son of Man* preaches to a small group that, "when those with imperial histories pretend to forget them, and blame Africans' problems on tribalism and corruption while building themselves new economic empires, I say we have been lied to. Evil did not fall." A Biko Christ-figure understands that Europe stands today because Africa was plundered of its resources and Africans dispossessed. Jesus knew the importance of land and emphasises it on two occasions as a child and as an adult. The first scene as an adult, Jesus is tempted by the devil who promises him the world if he worships him but Jesus pushes Satan away telling him to get behind him and proclaims *eli lilizwe lami*, "this is my land/world." The second instance as a child, when children were massacred, Jesus is given an opportunity by the angel to flee with him but Jesus refuses and says this is his land/world. Maimela (1999: 173) also indicates that Biko was given an emigration opportunity by officials to the United States of America but refused because he did not want to collaborate with those governments which, directly or indirectly, continued to facilitate the survival of the apartheid regime even though he knew his life was in danger. There is a sense of commitment to the land, an attachment. Poverty, unemployment and overcrowding in Africa is a product of colonialism.

A Biko Christ-figure values humanity and expresses principles of humaneness towards others. Biko (1978: 51) states that the great powers of the world may have done wonders by giving the world an industrial and military look, but the great gift still has to come from Africa – giving the world a more human face. A human face is that of grace, mercy, love, kindness and care. Jesus upholds that, "each human is important" and material should not have more value than the life of a human being. When the adulterous woman is chased in the streets and caught by community members who want to set her alight and stone her because she is a "whore, spreads disease and corruption," they ask Jesus if they should punish her or not. The militia disperses the crowd and Jesus asks the woman

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where her accusers are? She responds, “they are gone.” Jesus tells her to go because he does not accuse her. A Biko Christ-figure believes in the inherent goodness of man. Community takes precedence over the individual because many things can be achieved through unity and solidarity. When the unrest is intensified and the government imposes Marshall law on the community "to restore peace we must use force." Jesus and the disciples stand in solidarity with the women who protest outside the governmental building about the killing of their children.

A Biko Christ-figure has a view about how integration should work. In the movie it is in the form of an “interim government” which is sharing power with the occupiers. A liberal idea of integration is living together (black and white) and sharing the same human rights without segregated public spaces. A Biko Christ-figure rejects integration according to the standards and conditions of the occupier. It does not ensure the total liberation of the oppressed. Jesus responds to the elders when told not to destabilise the peace initiative "interim government? It is designed to create a sense of false hope to make people believe something is being done." Biko (1978: 70) states that in reality the artificially integrated circles are soporific to blacks while salving the consciences of the guilt-stricken white. The liberal does not take colonialism and land dispossession into cognisance. Its rhetoric is “let us move on and not be stuck in the past.” The black person will have human rights and enjoy being in previously European-only public spaces but no rights about getting their own land back which would lead to their economic liberation. Integration is only meant to appease the conscience of the white liberal. When Jesus is told that he is just a tiny minority and they will not allow him to upset the process of an interim government, Jesus responds, "No group possesses the monopoly on truth and intelligence. The occupiers need a man like you (referring to the elders) to ease their conscience"

#### 4.2.3 Disappearance and death

Zwink (2011) states that during the white terror-regime it was common to beat Anti-Apartheid activists to death and secretly dispose of them somewhere. Thus, it was a crucial part of the resistance to unveil the atrocities and accuse the regime by keeping

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the missing dead alive through a public display of photos or even the dead bodies which were found. Giere (2011) asserts that disappearance here is located in the political reality. While there is not a white face in the whole of the film, the film is a commentary on the era of apartheid or its residue. Many people "disappeared" during apartheid, others' whereabouts were known through the TRC in 1996 but others are still unknown to this day. Jesus was realistic about what was happening when activists "disappear" but he was also prophetic about what will happen to him "when you are told, and you will be, that people "disappear" you must say we have been lied to and evil will fall." Jesus takes up the narrative of Biko, his abduction, "disappearance," torture and death. The filmmaker says those particularly familiar with Biko's death will notice that "*Son of Man's*" Jesus is carried to his grave in a truck, known in South Africa as a bakkie, similar to the one that transported Biko" (Zwink, 2011).

In the film, Jesus dies from torture during interrogation, buried and shot several times for certainty of his death. Mary and the community make their way to interrupt a speech by the occupier to find out what happened to Jesus while the government denies being involved in his disappearance. Mary is told at the night vigil, a protest in honour of what had happened to Jesus. Mary exhumes the body of Jesus and places him on the cross at night for all in the community to see. This indicates making known to the community what happened to Jesus when he "disappeared". Biko's death which was claimed was from a "hunger strike" is similar to Jesus' prediction that people should not believe that people just "disappear," "we have been lied to and evil will fall".

Biko's death caught the attention of the international community, which increased the pressure on the South African government to abolish its detention policies and called for an international probe on the causes of Biko's death. Evidence presented during the 15-day inquest into Biko's death revealed that during his detention in a Port Elizabeth prison cell, he had been chained to a grill at night and left to lie in urine-soaked blankets. He had been stripped naked and kept in leg-irons for 48 hours in his cell. A scuffle with security police caused brain damage. He was then driven, naked and manacled in the back of a Land Rover to Pretoria. He died in a cell unattended on the 12th of September 1977 (SAHO, 2016).

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The public display of the body of Jesus on the cross and Biko's body on the media became an awareness of how brutal the system was to whoever challenged it. A Biko Christ-figure becomes a symbol of bravery, courage and standing for social justice no matter the consequences. The death of a Biko Christ-figure is not that of defeat but victory, because he does not give in to intimidation and becomes unhelpful as possible to the authorities. The death of a Biko Christ-figure gave renewed energy of bravery and fearlessness to Mary and the community members of Judea. Mary and the community members protest around the body of Jesus and come in direct confrontation with the militia. Even when the militia made warning shots, Mary and the community members were not intimidated and continued to protest. The film expresses the important role women play in the struggle for liberation which is often overlooked. Mary led the community in protest and becomes the heroine of the film.

### 4.3 Black Christology and the *Son of Man*

Simon Gqubule, one of the first generation black theologians in South Africa recalls his experience and analysis when watching films about Jesus and relating it to Black Theology, we thus quote him at length (1974: 18):

> "I remember how, some years ago, I was horrified by a religious film in which Jesus was made to speak with an American accent. His gestures, movements and his whole attitude seemed to me to be American. I went home feeling that this was horrible, how can Jesus be depicted as an American? As I thought further on this experience, it occurred to me that in films when Jesus was presented as speaking with an English accent I had never questioned this, because I had grown to accept it as such. If Christ could speak English with an English accent why should he not also speak with an American accent? If he is to speak to the American in his situation then he must speak to the American in an accent which the American will recognise as his own. In the same way if Christ is to be relevant to the Black man he must speak with the accent of a Black man, through the life experiences of the Black man, reacting to life situation in ways that would be recognisable to the Black man as his own. This is the essence of what is called Black Theology."

Gqubule acknowledges the universality of Christ and asserts that Black Theology is not an attempt to localise Christ but to make Christ relatable to the black experience. Black Theology also encourages other races, cultures, or tribes to relate Christ in their own life experiences. W.E.B Du Bois in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) maintained that the

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problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the colour line – the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea. The colour of the skin has been an issue of debate for centuries, even so, there is no scientific evidence that a race possesses the monopoly of intelligence, truth and beauty. Somehow, it has been socially constructed to suggest that a race can be superior and another one inferior. Kelley in *Racializing Jesus: Race, ideology and the formation of modern biblical scholarship* (2002) contends that the west developed a racialised philosophy which influenced a racialised biblical scholarship. It is therefore important for blackness to be taken seriously and for Black Theology to participate in the debate and articulate a way of analysing films, especially a film about a black Jesus in the black experience.

McGrath (2011: 265) states that Christology is the Christian doctrine of the person of Christ. The classical Christian account of the significance of Jesus of Nazareth is framed in terms of the concept of the “incarnation” and the doctrine of the “two natures” of Christ – divine and human. The nature of Jesus Christ was highly debated by the early church it was only in the Council of Chalcedon in 451 that there was an acceptable way of describing Jesus as “truly divine and truly human.” Dwane (1977: 4) asserts that the Council of Chalcedon in A.D. 451, did not formulate a creed of its own, but merely assigned to itself, the humble role of defending and upholding the Nicene faith. Dwane examines the ideas of Athanasius from the Alexandrian school of thought since he was the chief architect of the Nicene teaching. Athanasius articulates that salvation is divinisation. Only God can provide salvation to the created as the creator and salvation finds man wherever he is. Christ is the one that mediates salvation from God to man which would make Christ fully divine. This Christology is based on eternity, on how Christ reconciles us to God. The incarnation of Christ is the reversal of the fall of man in Genesis and in order to be restored, Christ deifies us into himself in order for us to be saved.

Dwane (1977: 8) critiques the Alexandrian soteriological principle of divinisation because it is a promise of a pie in the sky for many black people. It implies that it is foreign from addressing the black experience in that it is directed to the salvation of souls. Dwane (1981: 30) explains that liberation theology is theocentric and soundly biblical in so far as

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it points out that God does not luxuriate in God's eternal bliss, but reaches out to man and to the world. Dwane holds the view that Athanasius' Christology ignores the beauty of all creation and puts emphasis on the man's soul. If God is the creator then the entire cosmos should be redeemed. This contradicts the notion of community within the Bible as well as within the African community and takes a western stance of individualism. Black Theology identifies with the Jesus that was born poor, humiliated and suffered and his message focused on liberation to the poor. This is often ignored in western theology which is concerned with the middle and upper class man in the western society. The life of Jesus Christ is relatable to the black experience, a people who find themselves dehumanised, dispossessed, marginalised and oppressed. Dwane (1977: 10) states that we must rediscover the humanity of Jesus, and the fact of his poverty led to a new understanding of his work of salvation as liberation and humanisation. For the black person this is not individualistic but communal to the black experience which requires "radical liberation from all misery, all despoliation and all alienation". Jesus Christ affirms our humanity and dignity. When we consider Simon Maimela's ontology and symbolism of Black Theology which ontologically refers to the experiences of black people and symbolically refers to every human being who is either marginalised, subjugated, oppressed and enslaved under the ruling elite. Dwane (1981: 31) implies that symbolically from a biblical perspective God is the Father of the fatherless, the husband of the widow, and the one who sets at liberty those who are captives. Liberation theology is here to remind the church that through God's exercise of God's power and sovereignty over the creation which he loves with steadfast love, both the oppressor and the oppressed are set free, and brought to the liberty of the sons of God wherein the masks and the partitions of the Old Babel are demolished and a new humanity is born. It reminds the Church of the Cross, and that in consequence of it there can be no cheap reconciliation. Dwane relates Christology specifically to apartheid in South Africa that in order to be a new Christian community: the white person must be free from possession, love of comfort which makes them ignorant to look beyond their security and self-interest but to die to all forms of racial prejudice. The black Christian should equally be liberated from the hatred of the oppressor that seeks revenge in the quest for justice, self-pity, bitterness and seek God's healing and ability to forgive when radical change comes.

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Moving from the ontology of Black Theology as suggested by Simon Maimela to address the particularity of the black experience we turn to Takatso Mofokeng's *The Crucified among the Crossbearers: Toward a Black Christology* (1983) who reverses the starting point of classical Christology which begins with the Bible and then the human experience to the black experience and then the Bible. The Christological question comes from Jesus Christ himself when he asked his disciples "who do you say I am?" (Matt. 16:15; Mk. 8:29). Mofokeng's reverse question is created, provoked and guided by the "anthropological" question of the oppressed black South Africans who struggle for liberation: "who does Jesus Christ say that we are and how shall we become ourselves, our liberated selves?" This question deepens the struggle of blacks and their encounter with Christ in order to rediscover their true humanity and dignity. The question is a historical process of liberation in the midst of historical oppression.

Black Christology is thus liberation from the present moment of inhumanity and in the future glory of the coming of Christ. Mofokeng (1983: 228) reflects on the words of Allan Boesak that man was created by God to be a creator and he has been given power which he has to utilise creatively in himself (self-identification) to nature and for sustenance and promotion of fellowship among people. Humanity and power are thus correlated, "to share power and to share in power is to be fully human" and "to be denied power is to be denied the right to be human." And since the world in which man lives is organised, man shares in and utilises power in the entire socio-economic and political dimensions to express, to live and to achieve his God-given humanity. During apartheid, the black person shared no power in his own life and everything around him. There was no freedom of self-determination in all spheres of life but his socio-economic and political life was decided for him without his input. Embracing blackness was an act of violence and affirming their black humanity was an act of treason.

In order for black humanity to be realised, his liberation to be holistic and to have the power of self-determination there are three things that need to be discussed. Mofokeng (1987: 7) mentions that the interlocutor of Black Christology necessitates the inclusion of black history, black culture, and land in Christological reflection as elements that inform

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the self-understanding of the black community, continuously and rapidly transforms its quest as well as enlighten its reading of Scripture.

### 4.3.1 Black history

Mofokeng (1983: 235) states that Jesus Christ is the Lord of history and time by virtue of being raised by the Father to live eternally and reign eternally in the world, is the first and last word of black people's life and praxis. This means that Jesus Christ still lives among the oppressed, stands in solidarity with the poor, preached the kingdom of God and was crucified and accepted the cross and death as the final act for the dehumanised. Mofokeng (1987: 7) asserts we have to go further and affirm his presence and victorious activity in our past, including our distant African past. As Jesus Christ traversed the way from Bethlehem to Golgotha, creating new black men and black women in our African past, they were converted to him and to a liberative praxis in their time and world. African "founding fathers" were fighting for liberation from colonialism and imperialism. Names such as Shaka, Moshoeshoe, Sekhukhuni, Hintsa, Makana and others continued the liberation praxis of Jesus Christ in their time. Biko (1978: 32) emphasised the importance of rewriting the black history and to produce in it the liberation heroes who form the core of the African background. This would become the counter-action towards the disfigured, distorted and negative black history portrayed by imperials. A people who are not aware of their history or who learn a distorted one produced by imperials; will despise African history and its heroes and when that happens there would be no sense of black pride.

Gqubule (1974: 17) clarifies that Christianity is not a white man's religion but it just happens that Christianity was brought to South Africa by white missionaries. The whites (Greeks, Romans, Spaniards, French, Germanic tribes, Britons, etc.) were converted from their pagan religions to the Christian faith just like many other nations. The negativity of Christianity in South Africa during colonialism was that it was the religion of the same coloniser and during apartheid was how it was used to systematically oppress and marginalise Africans. There is thus nothing wrong with Christianity but everything wrong on how it is interpreted by people to justify subjugating a nation through its application. It has been said that first there was the missionary, then a trader and then the conqueror.

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Steve Biko asserts that the first people to come and relate to blacks in a human way in South Africa were the missionaries (Biko, 1978: 103). Even so, their missionary approach was invasive, demonised African religion and confused the people with their new religion. As a matter of fact the first coloniser came in 1652 and then the first missionary came in 1737. There was always a difference between the attitude of the missionary to the black man and the attitude of the colonists. Even so, Christ was ever present in the black history of South Africans. The many black heroes that resisted white domination were doing so in the presence Jesus Christ while creating, evoking and empowering a corresponding liberative undercurrent in our African history (Mofokeng, 1987: 7).

Mofokeng (1987: 8) asserts that this history of black suffering at the hands of white racists and capitalists who subjected black people of all shades to inhuman oppression and merciless exploitation could not but provoke black Christians of the past to translate this experience into theological and religious questions. It was this very struggle that inspired the exodus from white churches to establish African Initiated Churches (AIC). It was this very struggle that inspired black Christians to critically analyse the black experience through the lens of Scripture and developing Black Theology. It was understood that God is the God of the exodus, he hears the cries of black pain and will liberate them from oppression and marginalisation. The African Christians who were before us fought for their human dignity and land that was taken from them. Mofokeng (1987: 8) states that as a matter of fact it is these liberative elements in the wide and deep pool of black history that have verified the truth of the Christian message of salvation and consequently sustained the faith of our Christian forefathers. It is noted that black history is not only limited to the battles our Christian forefathers fought to liberate themselves from imperialism but there is also general history that includes many other subject matters that are not in alignment with Black Christology. Just like many other cultures in different nations, there are both positive and negative elements within a culture.

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#### 4.3.2 Black culture

Tlhagale (1985: 27) explains that culture has various different definitions but can be broadly defined as, "a way of life" that expresses meanings and values embedded in institutions and in human behaviour; culture is also understood in terms of literary and artistic works. In this section we look into culture as an expression of meanings and values. The South African context gives a peculiar perspective of culture considering South African history. During colonisation, African culture was regarded as pagan therefore needed to be replaced with western (civilised) culture. Westernisation of the African began threatening the political and economic well-being of the dominant (Anglo-Boer) groups. Apartheid saw the convenient recognition of the existence of the difference in ethnic nature, ethnic custom, ethnic development and civilisation. Separate development was then aimed at retaining political power with whites and preventing economic competition with blacks. Biko (1978: 44) states that somehow Africans are not expected to have any deep understanding of their own culture or even of themselves. Other people have become authorities on all aspects of the African life or to be more accurate on *Bantu* life. This implies the inability for self-determination and self-preservation. Also meaning that the *Bantu* is not capable of being a human without the guardianship of other cultures. Even the response to the experience of the *Bantu* life was monitored and even channelled on how to appropriately respond to their oppression.

According to Mofokeng (1987: 9) black culture in its visible and invisible, material and immaterial, audible and inaudible forms is the net result of black experiences and creative efforts as black people eke out an existence from an oppressed nature under the scotching heat of the sun. Black culture is thus the expression of the black experience. In the apartheid context it is the expression of oppression, survival and resistance. Resistance to economic, political and cultural oppression is referred to as black culture. Biko (1978: 50) calls it the modern black culture; a culture of defiance, self-assertion and group pride and solidarity. This is a culture that emanates from a situation of common experiences of oppression. It is also a culture that is responsible for the restoration of our faith in ourselves and therefore offers a hope in the direction we are taking from here. This expression is evident in our music, dance, art, dress code, and lingo among others.

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Black culture emerges in the midst of dehumanisation, oppression, marginalisation and racial discrimination. It seeks to affirm black human dignity in the midst of domination. As long as there is oppression of blacks in any form, there will be resistance. Mofokeng (1987: 9) asserts that as long as the vanquished black people still exist and are not exterminated by a total genocide, they will retain the memory of freedom hidden in the dark corner of their subconscious. This memory keeps the spirit of liberation at heart and encourages those who give in to rise up. Liberation by any means necessary is legitimate as freedom is a basic human desire. Mofokeng (1987: 10) relates the resurrection of Jesus Christ to be in continuous solidarity with the oppressed blacks in their struggle to free themselves to become children of God and brothers of Jesus. This implies that the black brothers of Jesus Christ produced a liberating culture in struggle which in turn adds dynamism and energises their exodus of hope then we should be confident that God accepts their culture as his instrument. The black culture is thus a necessity and the will of God for the black oppressed.

**4.3.3 Land**

Jesus in the *Son of Man* declared “this is my world (land)” when the angel offered him an escape from violence. Jesus committed himself to staying in the land of his birth and to resist oppression from those who occupied the land of his birth. The struggle for freedom in South African history has always been connected to the recovery of stolen indigenous land. This struggle emerges when the black South Africans became foreigners in their own land. The land question is one of the most sensitive issues to engage on in South Africa as there are different historical accounts which will not be engaged at length but we will analyse how Mofokeng relates land as one of the Christological themes for Black Theology. Mofokeng (1987: 11) explains the significance of land for black people: (a) land is the mother and we are the sons and daughters of the soil; (b) it is not sufficient to regard land only as a means of production in a narrow sense, it is more than this; (c) land gives black people an identity and in turn receives an identity from them; (d) land is the source of livelihood for Africans and has to be cherished and cared for; (e) our land is the source of individual and communal health; (f) land is of religious significance as there are

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locations of sacred places in the mountains, ponds, streams, and bushes; (g) the land is socially and psychologically significant as a locus for our habitation, where we sink our roots and derive our freedom to move around the country freely; (h) the land is the bedroom where we put our departed loved ones to bed; (i) it is the house of our ancestors where we go and dialogue with them because without them we lose our sense of continuity and history; and (j) there is an emotional bond to the land of our birth. The emphasis lies in the fact that without the land there is emptiness within the African who ends up becoming a wanderer with no roots. Mofokeng (1983: 232) relates the African dispossessed with the Old Testament Israelite wanderers. The God of the Israelites the creator of his people for himself as well as the owner of land, promises and eventually gives the land – Canaan – as his saving act of his people. The Promised Land would be a society where there is fellowship in freedom and equality, humanity and equal power for all his people. The critique about this is that it justifies land invasion that the oppressors in the South African context used to take land from the African natives. The same concept does not apply when the African natives seek their land back. Mosala (1996: 18) attests that the rest of the history of the biblical communities from the Davidic and Solomonic monarchical era to the Babylonian exilic period and the subsequent New Testament time under Roman rule, has been the history of the struggle over land. Wealth and poverty in the biblical experience are a consequence or result of ownership or lack of ownership of land. The wealth or poverty of South Africans depends on the ownership or non-ownership of land. The struggle for land in South Africa is endorsed biblically and should therefore be returned to the native owners.

It has been said before that South Africa is a capitalistic society within a democracy. The first question that arises on the subject of land is what will black people do with the land or would the economy of South Africa grow if the land is in black hands? The significance of land to Africans has already been given by Mofokeng that it is more than a means of production. Mosala (1989:36) gives an approach from the premise that there is no such thing as a politically and ideologically neutral reading of the Bible hence liberal scholarship has spent a lot of sweat trying to prove that Jesus was not a revolutionary. Mosala maintains that unless Christians are socialists they cannot be Christians. Before there

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was capitalism, people produced what they needed and if they produced more than they needed they exchanged with somebody else for something they wanted. Capitalism on the other hand is an exploitative system that cares more about profit-making than the well-being of people and land. It produces for exchange and not for use. It turns labour into a commodity which can be sold and bought and thrives on unemployment, as poor and desperate people are willing to do any job at any pay. South Africa has a majority black people that are landless, poor and unemployed. They find themselves in a system that exploits and dehumanise them due to desperation. This has been happening since colonialism and it still happens in a post-apartheid democratic society.

Mosala (1989: 34) argues that socialism is also a biblical concept because socialism is the social ownership of the means of production that would be production first and foremost for meeting human needs. Mosala (1987: 27) mentions that means of production refers to land, cattle, trees, rivers, tools, machines, etc., plus human labour. Mosala (1996: 18) points out that Micah 4:3-4 is probably the only real socialist part of the Bible " ... They will beat their swords into ploughshares, their spears into pruning knives... Each man (sic) shall sit under his vine, under his fig tree; and no one will be terrorised, for the mouth of Yahweh of hosts has spoken. "In other words, land should not be owned by a few individuals to enrich themselves and keep widening the gap between the rich and poor but it should be owned by the people in order to close the gap of inequality and prevent the exploitation of people. Mofokeng (1983: 234) agrees that socialism would be a community of people who share equally the toil for life and the fruits of their communal toil.

The reverse Christological question, “who does Jesus Christ say that we are and how shall we become ourselves, our liberated selves?” is answered when the black community is understood through their black history, black culture and land. In order to “become ourselves, our liberated selves” we must continue with the total emancipation of blackness. An alienation from these essential things is being distant to the very ontology of being black. The task of the present generation is therefore to continue the liberation praxis which was started by the African “founding fathers.” Mofokeng (1987: 12) states that it is for this that Black Christology cannot ignore the issue of land as informer and

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transformer of Christological thought. He is convinced that it will deepen Christology and expose the wealth of materialistic reading of, especially, the gospels.

**4.4 Conclusion**

A Steve Biko Christ-figure is possible on three things: non-violence, ideology, and disappearance and death. A Biko Christ-figure is committed to a non-violence means to achieve the goal of liberating minds of the oppressed and dismantling the institutions that cause the oppression. The aim was to conscientise the masses about their existential situation that it is not the will of God but the deliberate action of man. The strategy is to become unhelpful when interrogated and not to fear dying. The ideology teaches that subjugation and the cause of poverty is institutional and not based on personal immorality. It reminds the masses that colonialism plundered Africa and continuously contributes to their misfortune. Activists were killed and disposed in secluded areas which gives the notion of "disappearance." A Biko Christ-figure understands that people when you speak out against power you will "disappear." Even so, a Biko Christ-figure is committed to liberation even if it means facing death. Black Christology in the *Son of Man* is based on black history, black culture, and land. Black Theology identifies with the Jesus that was born poor, humiliated and suffered and his message focused on liberation to the poor. Mofokeng reverses the Jesus' Christological question "who do you say I am?" into "who does Jesus Christ say that we are and how shall we become ourselves, our liberated selves?" This question deepens the struggle of the blacks and their encounter with Christ in order to rediscover their true humanity and dignity.

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# CHAPTER 5

# THE SON OF WOMAN – AFRICAN WOMEN THEOLOGY

## 5.1 Introduction

The role of women cannot be ignored in the *Son of Man*. Mary the mother of Jesus is considered as the heroine of the *Son of Man*. It is thus appropriate to focus this chapter on the role of Jesus in the life of women. We will first discuss the development of the Circle of Concerned African Women theologians (the Circle) and their Christology. We will finally discuss the portrayal of Mary in other Jesus films as well as in the *Son of Man*.

## 5.2 The Circle of Concerned African Women theologians (the Circle)

A Circle expands forever
It covers all who wish to hold hands
And its size depends on each other
It is a vision of solidarity
It turns outwards to interact with the outside
And inward for self-critique
A circle expands forever
It is a vision of accountability
It grows as the other is moved to grow
A circle must have a centre
But a single dot does not make a Circle
One tree does not make a forest
A circle, a vision of cooperation, mutuality and care
(Mercy Oduyoye, 2001)

African theological women's voices in Africa have been striving for the redefinition of African women in Christianity both in the grassroots faith communities and in academia. LenkaBula (2007: 2) states there were concerns and search for gender justice in the church and society in Africa which stirred the development and enunciation of feminist

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theologies in Africa. Phiri (2009: 105) mentions an initiative by African women theologians who launched the Circle of Concerned African Women theologians (the Circle) in Ghana, 1989. The Circle is a community of African women theologians who come together to reflect on what it means to them to be women of faith within their experiences of religion, culture, politics and social-economic structures in Africa. The main founder of the Circle is Mercy Amba Oduyoye. Phiri (2004: 16) explains that African women's theology belongs to a wider family of feminist theology, it is however the context that makes them vary. African women theology is also within the family of African theology and liberation theology in which the critique is that there cannot be a liberation theology without the liberation of women. The Circle is an initiative for African women to define themselves and have their own voice and be critical towards African religio-culture that subjugates and oppresses them. No longer should women be in the confines of the definitions of patriarchy and their experiences only being valid through the mouthpiece of men. The oppressor cannot articulate the experiences of the oppressed.

Oduyoye (1995: 7) attests that all the varieties of Christianity in Africa are riddled with androcentrism and misogyny. For women to be at home in Christianity, they suspend belief that it is androcracy that dominates them and not the will of God or their own special innate sinfulness arising out of being women. These challenges attribute to the silence of Christianity in Africa on the oppression, violence and marginalisation of women. African women are thus oppressed thrice; being an African, being a woman, and being a Christian. Oduyoye (1989: 195) states that theologians from South Africa have already begun by affirming that we can meet God as women and men in our African culture. She acknowledges the importance of African culture and that individual elements of each and every culture and tradition are to be purified or enhanced by the gospel. Missionaries that came to Africa could only see African culture and tradition as idolatry. It is important to note that Oduyoye does not reject African culture completely but seeks to embrace African culture and "purify" elements that marginalise and are oppressive especially towards women. Oduyoye understands that not all elements in African culture are oppressive and not all are liberating as well.

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The myth of creation in Genesis is androcentric when it comes to gender where the male is created first and then the female after. The suggestion that a female caused the fall of mankind became a burden for women even today. Violence against women is often justified on the basis that women were the vehicle of sin in the world. The perspective of a male God reduces women to the subordination of patriarchy. The gender of God becomes the measure of dignity. Oduyoye (2001: 42) states that in the alternative theological myths from Africa, God the Supreme Being and ultimate origin of all that exists, defies the gender category. Most of Africa has no images of God, so where there are no gender-specific pronouns it has been insisted that God is supra-gender. This is liberating for women not only in Africa but other feminists in the world. Nadar (2009: 138) attests that gender is a social construct. The construction of gender is patriarchal, male and female are equal and the creation myth in Genesis reflects the patriarchal context in which it was written. African women theologians embrace the African culture and acknowledge how cultures attach certain roles to male and female but continue to regard women as less important. Phiri (2004: 17) states that African women theologians are calling men and women in the religions of Africa and society to examine their cultures again from a gender perspective.

The Bible is the source for theological reflection and the difference in any theology is hermeneutics. Phiri (2004: 21) states that the Bible for African women theologians is seen and read from a woman's perspective to enlighten their role in the struggle for human dignity and Christian womanhood - particularly the stories of women in the Bible and their life- giving encounters with Jesus and his response to women in the gospels. The way Jesus and his message are understood hermeneutically influences how we treat people that are considered “other”. African women theologians seek to understand Jesus and his message towards women in particular. Oduyoye (2001: 64) states that the outrage of Jesus against oppressive cultures encourages women not to condone oppression. The life of Jesus from the manger, cross, and his resurrection is metaphorically relevant to the daily realities of African women. The life of Jesus does not end with suffering but his resurrection gives hope to oppressed women in Africa to rise up from their oppression. Phiri (2004: 21) attests that African women’s Christology comes from the gospels focusing on women’s relationships in life and teaching of Jesus, who reveals God. Jesus brought

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liberation from all forms of oppression, including patriarchy. Jesus is in solidarity with oppressed women and also liberates them from all that oppresses them. This is how African culture should be "purified" from oppressing women in the name of culture and it is also a way in which the body of Christ can be realised when it is free from oppressing women and children.

It is also important for African women theologians to engage films about Jesus and how he relates to women. The portrayal of women in film can either be liberative or continue subjugating women to keep them "in their place." The voicelessness of the women in the *Son of Man* would be of great concern to African women theologians in the Circle. Ayanga (2016: 2) explains voicelessness as indicative of a lack of dignity born out of the fact that the voiceless one has no means of expressing even her or his own dignity. It implies the failure or the lack of interest of those around such an individual to listen or at least pay attention to what he or she has to say. It is thus necessary to analyse how Mary the mother of Jesus is portrayed in films.

### 5.3 Portrayals of Mary in other films

Mary the mother of Jesus is active in the childhood of Jesus and in his adulthood. Her presence in films cannot be ignored as the chosen woman who would give birth to the long awaited Messiah. She is the virgin that resembles purity and a desire of being devoted to God. Reinhartz (2007: 68) states that Mary the mother of Jesus is present in almost all the biopics about Jesus and plays the female leading role which is far more present on the screen than she is within the gospel narratives themselves. Although she has a prominent role in films about Jesus, her portrayal differs according to several films. Reverence is mostly portrayed with the character of Mary even when the character of Jesus can be drastically different from film to film. We will discuss the role of Mary in Jesus' childhood and her role in Jesus' adulthood that are portrayed in other Jesus films.

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### 5.3.1 Mary in Jesus' childhood

*From the Manger to the Cross* shows a scene where Jesus and his parents depart Jerusalem after the festivities and Jesus goes missing. They frantically search for him everywhere while panicking and eventually find him in the Temple (Reinhartz, 2007: 72). The scene highlights the concern parents have for their child and the joy of being united as a family. *The Messiah* gives a scene of Mary and Jesus in Jerusalem. Mary then helps her young son get dressed. She tends to him tenderly but briskly, explaining earnestly:

> This is a very important day for you. For the first time in your life you will be allowed into the house of the Eternal, to be blessed in his name. For the first time you will dedicate a sacrifice to Him. Here, this is your *tallith* [prayer shawl]. Do you know what a *tallith* is? A thousand years ago our people were slaves in Egypt until the joyous day Moses our father, blessed be his name forever, liberated them. And for forty years with the rain and the sun beating down our people walked and walked having as their sole protection a white shawl made from sheep's wool. Since then, every man in Israel has his *tallith*.
>
> (Reinhartz, 2007: 74)

Mary teaches Jesus the traditions of Judaism and speaks to him as a child. Mary's role is to prepare Jesus for adulthood and for him to live according to the law of Moses. She continues to speak to him: ''As of today you also are a man. And having become a man, with your head covered by your *tallith*, you will be able to speak with doctors and teachers who have studied the Holy Law. Because from now on you belong to the Law, my son, as you know, and the Law belongs to you.'' It would be expected that Joseph would be the one to teach Jesus the Jewish tradition but the father-son relationship is minimal. Mary and Jesus share an intimate mother-son relationship that is evident throughout the *Messiah* film. The portrayal of Mary as the first teacher of Jesus is also evident *in From*

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*the manger to the Cross*. Reinhartz (2007: 73) highlights a scene where Mary and Jesus are looking intently at a scroll together. She appears to be reading to him or with him, and explaining as she goes. Joseph on the other hand is busy with carpentry. Again, we see Mary actively involved in the education of Jesus and shaping his young mind about Jewish ways of life. Reinhartz (2007: 74) states that only Zeffirelli's *Jesus of Nazareth* portrays Mary participating in organised Jewish ritual and worship. In this film, Jesus has his coming of age ceremony (*bar mitzvah*) in the Nazareth synagogue. Jesus' mother, standing at the back of the synagogue, peers at him through the barrier (*mehitzah*) that separated the women's section from the main part of the sanctuary, reserved for the men. Although Mary is part of every important event in the childhood of Jesus, she remains in her place in regards to the patriarchal society.

The role of Mary in the childhood of Jesus is more prominent than that of Joseph. Joseph may be present in some instances but his presence does not directly influence Jesus. Mary assumes the role of a teacher about the Jewish tradition and nurturing Jesus into an adult life.

### 5.3.2 Mary in Jesus' adulthood

In Nicholas Ray's the *King of Kings*, the important female character which has her role greatly amplified is Mary, the mother of Jesus (Walsh, 2003: 144). Mary's prominent role is that of advisor to several characters (a camel driver, Lucius, John the Baptist, Mary Magdalene, and Jesus) in the *King of Kings*. She is a mother figure that has a deep love for Jesus and the people around him. Joseph is absent in most films when Jesus is an adult. There are no explanations as to what happened to him, it clearly indicates that his role is not essential to the plot of most films. Another reason could be that his role is also not so prominent in the gospels. There are differences on the relationship of Jesus and his mother particularly when Jesus preached and healed people in various areas. Reinhartz (2007: 78) attests that most movies handle Jesus' apparent rejection of his family by ignoring any scriptural threats to family harmony. One exception is Pasolini's *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew*. As in Matthew, Mary and her children come to where Jesus is and ask to see him, but Jesus refuses and turns his back on them. Mary's

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anguish at her son's denial of family ties is obvious in her facial expression. In Martin Scorsese's *The Last Temptation of Christ* Jesus bluntly tells his mother: "I do not have a mother. I do not have any family. I have a father, in heaven." These actions by Jesus towards Mary were heart breaking considering raising a child that denies their maternal relation. Filmmakers are faced with a challenge of contradictions with the gospels of an account about Jesus and decide to choose narratives that would suit the message they want to portray. Reinhartz (2007: 79) mentions that most Jesus biopics simply ignore the problematic aspects of the gospel accounts and instead portray an ongoing loving relationship between Jesus and his mother. There are also instances where Jesus visits his mother to portray the ongoing relationship. These visitations also indicate the final moments Jesus would be spending with his mother before he is arrested, tortured and crucified.

Although Mary knew how special Jesus was and that he had a mission ordained by God, she did not know that Jesus would go through so much suffering. In most films Mary is concerned about the safety of Jesus seeing that he is drawing a lot of attention to himself and operates his divine mission in opposition to the temple. During the visitations of Jesus, Mary does not suggest Jesus stop what he is doing but she affirms that Jesus must fulfil the will of God. When Jesus is eventually arrested and trialled, Mary is helplessly emotional. There are movies that show the procession to the cross and others skip to the part of the crucifixion.

Reinhartz (2007: 82) attests that Jesus movies exploit Mary's presence at her son's crucifixion for all of its dramatic potential and emotional impact. These scenes emphasise the mother expressing pain of seeing her son suffering. The camera shots focus on the emotional expressions of Mary and the crucifixion of Jesus. This implies that Jesus had more of a special bond with Mary than anybody else. *The Passion of the Christ* has Mary so close to the cross that she is spilled with the blood and water of Jesus. "Even more striking is Rossellini's *Pieta*` scene. The camera dwells on her suffering face as she watches him die on the cross, and then on the *Pieta*` scene in which she cradles the dead Jesus in her arms after he is removed from the cross" (Reinhartz, 2007: 82). Rossellini portrays a Mary that is actively involved in the suffering of Jesus. The expression of the

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suffering Mary emphasises the extreme suffering of Jesus on the cross. Mary in most films is conservative and is the important female character in Jesus films. Mary is the first teacher of Jesus in regard to Jewish traditions in his childhood and prepares Jesus for adulthood. The adulthood of Jesus sees Mary playing the role of an advisor and concerned about the path of Jesus. When Jesus suffers on the cross, Mary is present, suffering together with Jesus. The expression of Mary's pain is the highlight of most films to portray the intimate mother-son relationship. The suffering of Jesus is also seen through the pain Mary expresses.

### 5.4 Portrayal of Mary in the *Son of Man*

Mary in the *Son of Man* is portrayed in a way unique from the other films about Jesus. Her first appearance is running from the militia and entering a classroom where she witnesses children that were massacred in a classroom. Gilmour (2009: 158) states that by Mary laying with the massacred school children in the comer of the classroom, is impregnated by her identification with the existential suffering of humanity embodied by this carnage. Upon surviving the brutality of the militia, an angel appears and tells her she is highly favoured by the Lord and shall conceive a son who shall be called Jesus, the Son of God. Pemberton (2003: 82) quotes Oduyoye's essay from 1988 asserting that Christ is above all 'the liberator' for African women. His liberation for women was achieved not on the cross, but by being 'born of Mary.' In a patriarchal society where a woman is seen as nothing but property, God chose a woman for God's incarnation. That implies that Jesus became a liberator of women even before he was born.

The coming of a saviour in the film is not about personal sin but structural sin caused by the government. Mary sings the *Magnificat* in celebration of the good news and the scene makes a transition to Mary and Joseph taking a journey to find safety from the militia. Oduyoye (2001: 58) describes the *Magnificat* as a cardinal hermeneutical key for African women's Christology. The childbearing of Mary is also anchored on real life experiences of African women. There is no dialogue between Mary and Joseph at all in the entire film. Joseph is only present in the infancy and childhood of Jesus. He fades away in the film without any explanation when Jesus is in his youth.

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Oduyoye (2001: 51) states that childbearing is central to African women's self-image and the story that characterises African women's Christology is the story that is usually referred to as 'the visitation' where Mary visited Elizabeth about her pregnancy. That the younger woman paid a visit to the older one to share her strange experience signifies for them the solidarity that women crave in times of crisis and in other significant moments of their lives. In the *Son of Man*, Mary does not pay a visit but there are two older women who are present in the birth of Jesus. This also signifies the type of relationship African women aspire to have in the Circle by sharing their experiences in the various spheres of their lives. Mary is seen communicating with Jesus as an infant, scenes of laughter and joy as she holds Jesus in her arms. The child Jesus was always with Mary wherever she goes, there is even a scene where Mary is ploughing with other women and Jesus is also right there observing. African women are compassionate when they raise their children even when their context is surrounded by poverty and violence.

The child Jesus is never out of the sight of Mary even when he plays. Jesus is never seen playing with any other children except with the child angel. Jesus as a child enabled his mother to know that he can predict the future when he tells her of three men that will visit them. This confirmed to Mary that Jesus is indeed the Messiah. Joseph appears again with Mary and Jesus when they decide to take a journey but witness the murder of children which they escape. This is probably to show Jesus of the current realities in which they live. Mary shows the child Jesus the massacre of those children. Mary shows her protectiveness of Jesus on the violence that surrounds them. Mary speaks for the first time and expresses her anger towards the massacre of those children "why? to the children!" African women see other children as their own and her words reflect her compassion towards the child Jesus. It is at this point that we see Joseph for the last time.

Jesus comes of age and Mary together with other women await the young men in the community. In the other movies, Mary teaches Jesus about Jewish traditions and prepares him to adulthood. In the *Son of Man*, Jesus is taught about the isiXhosa tradition by men in isolation from the community and women. This was the first instance where Mary had no influence on Jesus but Jesus had to go through the initiation in order to be a man and have a voice in the community. Seeing as this film is aligned with the isiXhosa

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culture and tradition in South Africa; there is a rite of passage for boys to become men which implies having a voice that is legitimate in the community. Girls on the other hand also have a rite of passage but that does not translate into having voice in the community. Women's rite of passage in the isiXhosa culture is silence in the midst of patriarchy.

Mary is ululating together with the other women to express their joy of seeing the boys including Jesus become men. Later in the film Jesus sends his farewell to Mary and makes his path to Judea where Mary escaped the massacre in her first appearance of the film. This is the other instance where Mary had to let Jesus go where she would not be present. Mary was left worried about the safety of Jesus but did not stop him from fulfilling the mission that God sent him to do. Mary like many African women in the rural area who are widowed and children embark on journeys to the city remain lonely and vulnerable in the community. Women are vulnerable in the film and are silenced from contributing to the socio-political and economical situations. Women throughout *Son of Man* do not have a voice with regard to how they think about the *status quo* and their experiences with the challenges that they face as women. Women in the film are portrayed as emotional and weak. Although women are ever present in the film, their contribution becomes about putting their bodies on the line for the men and children in the film.

Mary is not present in the ministry of Jesus but appears later when she goes searching for Jesus. Mary the mother of Jesus is met by Mary Magdalene on her arrival in Judea. Mary is seen washing the dishes and Jesus sees a vision of himself on the cross but simply stares at his mother without a word. Jesus did not want to worry her about his death. Mary in the kitchen implies that she still sees Jesus as his son and her role as a mother is still present. When Mary hears that Jesus was abducted, she angrily takes a framed photo of Jesus and rushes out of the house followed by other women to disrupt a press conference about the interim government. It is as if she knew where to go about her grievances. Mary led her first protest against the interim government. Her character has changed from being a reserved woman to a radical woman following the footsteps of Jesus.

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Mary and the community have a night vigil about the "disappearance" of people who challenge the interim government. When Mary is told that they killed and buried Jesus, she bursts out in tears screaming when she heard the news. Giere (2011) compares this with the TRC when Mahundred (the Centurion) one of the killers of Jesus tells Mary where they buried Jesus. Mary is taken to the place where Jesus was buried with three other women and Mahundred (the Centurion). Mary is left alone to grieve as she exhumes the body of Jesus with her bare hands. Mary is seen holding the dead body of Jesus in her arms at the back of a *bakkie*. Mary together with the three women carry Jesus and place him on the cross at night. In the morning people from the community flock to see what has happened to Jesus. Mary starts a song of protest *awuzweke izulu lima thunz' antaba* (The land is covered in darkness) until the militia arrive to stop the protest. Gilmour (2009: 159) states that the filmmaker takes the most universal symbol of Christianity in the last thousand years, the cross, and transforms it into a symbol of a stance against oppression. The cross in *Son of Man* exposes oppression and the abuse of power. It is where Mary and the community members make a protest statement about injustice and violence in the community. "Every rape is a crucifixion - suffered in the body of women, every battering a crucifixion of the humanity of women. Every deprivation and marginalisation sends women beyond the gates of the city to the dumping ground where three crosses still stand - there where we find the majority being women" (Mercy Oduyoye, 1989). The cross is a powerful symbol for African against injustice. It is also a call for African women to stand up – *tallitha cum* and proclaim enough is enough.

Oduyoye (2001: 64) states that African women refuse the cross as the end of life's experience, for without the resurrection, faith in Christ would no longer be unique. The cross is thus seen as oppression, marginalisation and suffering of African women which should be conquered. The protest in the *Son of Man* illustrates the refusal to be in continuous subjugation, oppression, and suffering. Phiri (2004: 22) attests that women with Jesus to look beyond the cross to the community of liberated people.

In the scene warning shots are fired, everyone lies down on the ground and Mary stands up and looks at the cross as if she is draws strength from it. She proceeds to sing and

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protest while the others follow her lead. Mary's character developed to that of bravery in her last scene and she no longer fears the militia as compared to her first scene. Gilmore (2009: 154) attests that Mary is a heroine who grasped the implications of Jesus' message and was willing to act in accordance with her faith in Jesus' teachings. Mary did not weep upon the cross but used the cross as a symbol of solidarity with everyone that is oppressed and victims of violence in the community. Mary embodied a mother that is concerned about the dignity of others. Jesus is thus the Son of Woman, standing in solidarity with all the oppressed women.

### 5.5 Conclusion

African women theologians seek to redefine being a woman in the African context and not in the confines of patriarchy. Their theology seeks to liberate the Bible, Christianity, and African culture from oppressing: marginalising, discriminating, subjugating, violent, and demeaning women. They want to become their own voice and speak out for themselves the trials and tribulations of being a woman. Jesus is seen as the companion of women who challenges cultures that oppress women, children, and the powerless. Mary in the *Son of Man* is different with the Mary of the other Jesus films. In the Son of Man, she embodied the teachings of Jesus and challenged the powers that be without fear. The cross is the symbol against oppression and the resurrection gives hope to oppressed women in Africa to rise up from their oppression

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# CHAPTER 6

# THE CROSS AND INSURRECTION

## 6.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the meaning of the cross from the black theological perspective and how the *Son of Man* portrays the cross in the film. We will also explore the resurrection as insurrection and the reappearance of the Steve Biko Christ-figure in contemporary South Africa.

## 6.2 Black Theology and the cross

The cross is the universal symbol of Christianity to signify salvation. It is the symbol of God's love "for God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" John 3:16. The cross through Jesus on the cross redeems the world for himself. Buthelezi (1977: 51) explains that the Romans reserved crucifixion to execute criminals of the worst description. The cross that decorates the churches and worn as accessories seems to ignore the violent nature of the cross. Cone (2011: xiv) attests that the cross has been transformed into a harmless, non-offensive ornament that Christians wear around their necks. Rather than reminding us of the "cost of discipleship," it has become a form of "cheap grace," an easy way to salvation that does not force us to confront the power of Christ's message and meaning.

The message of Christ according to Black Theology is that of justice for the poor, dispossessed, marginalised, oppressed, and discriminated. It aligns with the first sermon of Jesus "the spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free" (Luke 4: 18) which is a quote from Isaiah 61: 1. That implies that the cross is not just a symbol of salvation but that the cross reminds us of what it means to be followers of Christ. It translates not being silent in the midst of injustice. The cross is the burden of speaking for the voiceless against the powers that

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be. The cross is the "cost of discipleship" for following Christ. That is what the cross means for black theologians, risking your life for others to proclaim justice.

James Cone's book *The cross and the lynching tree* makes a connection between the cross of Jesus and the lynching of African-Americans that took place in the south. Cone emphasises that in order to understand the meaning of the cross of Jesus it is important to see it in the perspective of lynching in America. It was ironic how a Christian country like America would do to African-Americans what the Romans did to Christ. There was a paradox in being Africa-American and Christian in the midst of the lynching era (1880-1940). What inspired James Cone to write the book was the question: how did African-Americans survive the lynching era? Just like Jesus on the cross when God abandoned him, so it was like for the African-Americans; there was no protection from the federal state and there was no place to hide. Being black in America was lonely and it was living in constant fear. Black people would be lynched for no reason at all. "Both the cross and the lynching were symbols of terror, instruments of torture and executions – the lowest of the low in society. Both Jesus and Blacks were publicly humiliated, subjected to the utmost indignity and cruelty" (Cone, 2011:31). Black Christians saw the cross as a mystery and what kept them going was the blues and the spirituals that ignited hope within the black soul. Most of the sermons emphasised the cross because lynching was part of their daily realities. The hope was that the God that resurrected Jesus would also redeem them from white supremacy and segregation. This was the faith of the black community, beyond human understanding.

Although the situation in America and South Africa was different, they are symbolic to each other. Takatso Mofokeng's book *The crucified among the crossbearers* gives a perspective of the cross from black people, the South African perspective in the midst of the colonial legacy and apartheid. He considers Good Friday as the most important day in the black church and churches are normally packed at this time. The torture and crucifixion of Jesus is so emotional that it becomes a reflection of their own lives in apartheid brutality. The black church narrates the suffering, humiliation, and cries of Jesus on the cross in song and dramatic preaching because it is so close to their daily

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oppression. Mofokeng sees the cross and resurrection as one event and should not be separated. He points out that there was no visible sign of victory on the cross because Jesus died with a loud cry of protest against his abandonment by God. The same cry blacks felt in the midst of the brutality of apartheid. Blacks were dispossessed of their land and had no say with the political and economic affairs of their own country. It would feel like God has abandoned blacks in South Africa. South Africa was a Christian country just like in America, but it was also a paradox of being black and Christian when they were subjected to inferiority on the theological basis of Scripture to support these inhumane acts. The black condition was certainly not the will of God but the deliberate act of man. It was only when Jesus was resurrected that his victory became visible. What was meant to be an instrument of violence, became a vehicle of divine love and restoration to new life.  Mofokeng sees liberation movement as a series of resistance from the past, present and future. He understands that liberation may not be achieved in one generation but each generation has a role to play in order to reach true liberation. Hope must not be lost because in the end there will be an ultimate victory.

Both Mofokeng and Cone see the cross as the symbol of burden that one carries when they challenge the powers that be. They understand that challenging the powers that be means sacrificing your life. This is parallel to how Jesus also challenged powers that be by speaking for the marginalised, poor, and oppressed he had to die on the cross. Those that created and benefit from the *status quo* are willing to protect it from anyone who tries to disrupt it even if it means death. The lynching in America mainly targeted black leaders that challenged the *status quo* and in South Africa leaders were abducted, “disappeared” and killed. That is the paradox of the American and South African situation. In America lynching was public and in South Africa the killings were secluded. Even so, this was to instil fear in others who try to challenge the *status quo*. The torture and killings of black leaders were used as an example to whoever follows them that the same thing would also happen to them. Jesus on the cross was also an example to his followers that the cross would also be their fate. Cone mentions Martin Luther King Jr. who bore the cross of the oppressed in the segregated south. “The cross of Jesus is the key to King’s willingness to sacrifice his life, not only for the freedom of black people but also for the

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souls of whites and the redemption of America" (Cone, 2011:82). Mofokeng mentions martyrs like Robert Sobukwe, Mapetla Motlapi, and Steve Biko who also bear the cross of the oppressed in South Africa. "Motlapi is said to have paid an instalment towards the liberation of others" and Biko also saw and spoke about the function of death of a struggling person. Biko spoke of, "your method of death itself can be a politicizing thing" (Mofokeng, 1983: 40).

Bearing the cross is symbolic to laying down your life for others "greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends" (John 15:13). That's the meaning of the cross in Black Theology it is parallel to the black experience. Cone emphasises that the people that expressed the cross better are the cultural practitioners; the artists, poets and writers. Although Mofokeng does not make this connection in particular, he broadly admits that the black culture was key to the resistance of oppression.

Jesus in the *Son of Man* is not crucified but placed on the cross by Mary. The film follows an unconventional way for Jesus' death. Jesus is tortured during an interrogation, shot several times, and buried. Many activists were abducted, killed and buried in secluded areas never to be seen again during apartheid. People that fought for the liberation of the people simply "disappeared". Jesus is parallel to what happened to black activists who challenged the powers that be. Sobrino (1978: 216) differentiates the death of Jesus with that of religious and political martyrs that the latter died with the spirit of enthusiastic heroism. They died with the intention that their death should be their last resistance. Jesus on the other hand did not die a beautiful death, he preached about the nearness of God but was abandoned on the cross by God. Sobrino questions the will of God and argues that even the resurrection of Jesus does not explain the abandonment. In fact, it leaves an open question about God. Cone would answer that by saying it is the mystery of the cross, beyond human understanding.

When the military or the police force abducted you, no-one could save you. Jesus was abandoned to face torture alone. The same with lynching in America and "disappearance" in South Africa, it is a lonely death. Jesus is placed in the shoes of those who bear the

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cross for the oppressed. The film does not follow the classical Jesus who died for the sins of the world, nor is there claim that he is the Son of God. The divineness of Jesus is shown in the miracles that he performed. When Judas shows the elders videos of Jesus performing miracles as proof that Jesus might overthrow the government, they simply reject it and one of them said "turn it off! This proves nothing, it is mumbo jumbo for children! We need proof of his political ambitions". Jesus is thus killed for challenging the *status quo*.

Black activists knew that death was inevitable for them and thus had to prepare themselves for anything that might happen. The need to bear the cross was stronger than the fear of death. The portrayal of Jesus as a black activist (Steve Biko) is an artistic Christological expression of Black Theology. In the film, Mary exhumes the body of Jesus and places it on the cross for everyone to see. The cross exposes the deeds of powers that be about the "disappearance" of black activists. The cross displays the brutality of the powers that be. The cross in the film empowers the community to protest and removes the element of fear within them. The victory in the film is a community that will keep on protesting for their human dignity. The film aligns with the perspective of Mofokeng that liberation is a series of events from generation to generation. Jesus began the process of liberation; Mary and the disciples are the next generation to continue where Jesus left of. They now understand the teachings of Jesus about justice for oppressed and know that they would be risking their lives for continuing to follow in the footsteps of Jesus. The cross prepared them to face death head on.

### 6.3 Resurrection as insurrection

Mofokeng sees the cross and resurrection as one event and does not dwell much on the implication of resurrection in the black experience. He also admits that the black church does not participate much on Easter Sunday compared to the packed pews when it is Good Friday. The cross is very significant in the black church, more than the resurrection of Jesus. Black people see the crucified Christ in their own daily lived experiences. The resurrection is thus outside the paradigm of the black experience. Even so, Mofokeng (1983: 263) states that the resurrection of Jesus means the resurrection of the community

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of those who suffer with him and struggle against powers that maintain subjugation. He raised this community with the story of his life in which he goes the way, “from Jordan to Golgotha,” in which he identifies with the oppressed and the poor today and solidarities with them in the situation of crucifixion in the world.  Cone (1997: xviii) states just as Jesus' resurrection was born out of his apparent defeat on the cross, so too the poor are born anew out of their resistance to suffering. The resurrection becomes the continuous act of liberation to the oppressed. The resurrection of Jesus is thus the symbolic presence of Jesus in the contemporary struggle for true liberation.  Cone (2010: 4) attests that the resurrection conveys hope in God. Nor is this the "hope" that promises a reward in heaven in order to ease the pain of injustice on earth. Rather it is hope which focuses on the future in order to make us refuse to tolerate present inequities. The resurrection affirms the life of Jesus of being in solidarity with the poor and gives freedom to the oppressed to resist subjugation.

Boesak (2015: 30) states that the resurrection is Jesus' *apanastasia*, rebellion (the New Testament word for “resurrection”), Jesus' rebellion against death and its power, against evil and its hold, against fear and its paralysing grip on our lives.  The words rebellion and insurrection are used interchangeably. The resurrection of Jesus was thus the Jesus' insurrection to death itself. “But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him” (Acts 2:24). Jesus' insurrection means the removal of fear of the brutality of the cross when striving to liberate from the powers that be. Following Jesus means challenging systems of oppression that have been normalised and knowing that it would lead to socio-political and economic death but keeping on resisting because victory is certain. Victory may not be realised now but it becomes an instalment towards the process of true liberation of the oppressed.

Vellem (2016: 153) states that according to Luke 23: 2, Jesus was killed because he was an insurrectionist, and in Mark 15: 7-15, the two men who were crucified with Jesus, were referred to as insurrectionists. The crucifixion by lynching was thus reserved for insurrectionists who challenged segregation in the south and the crucifixion by “disappearance” was reserved for insurrectionists who challenged the apartheid system.

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In other words those who truly follow Christ are by nature insurrectionists. One cannot be Christian and maintain subjugation on behalf of powers that be. Insurrectionists cannot keep silent when subjugation is taking place but rather speak up despite the dangers of death. Vellem (2016: 155) notes that this alternative view entails that insurrection is the cause of Jesus' death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ is in itself a rebellion against death. Those that are inherent beneficiaries of systems that subjugate are redeemed when they rebel against benefitting from those very institutions. Only then can they be followers of Christ. Throughout history those that are from the oppressor camp were marginalised by the oppressor when they rebelled from the camp of the oppressed.

### 6.4 Reappearance of Biko Christ-figure

The resurrection of Jesus implies his presence in the contemporary insurrections of our time. Although many activists were lynched or "disappeared" that was not the end of insurrections. In fact contemporary insurrections are motivated by the insurrections of the past and affirms the cause of insurrection. The Biko Christ-figure challenges systems of oppression without fear of death and remains committed to the act of liberation. The reappearance of the Biko Christ-figure is seen in the contemporary insurrections that protest for the dignity and humanity of the oppressed and marginalised. The understanding is that the contemporary insurrections are connected to historical insurrections. In South Africa it comes from colonial and apartheid subjugation that appear in different forms in the democratic South Africa. In America the insurrections that happened also derive from the history of slavery and segregation which is in a different form today.

#### 6.4.1 Rhodes must fall and fees must fall

It is important to note that the student protests in South Africa regarding decolonising the African university (#RhodesMustFall as referred to on social media) and the protest for free quality decolonised education (#FeesMustFall as referred to on social media) are influenced by the BCM which was also a student movement. The ideology of Steve Biko played a key role in understanding "black is beautiful" and the need for dignity for black students in the higher education institutions. #RhodesMustFall is more than just the statue

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of Cecil John Rhodes' statue to be removed from the University of Cape Town but the statue was a symbol of the legacy of colonialism that is still perpetuated in institutions of higher learning in a democratic South Africa. Although we are in Africa, the spaces in higher education institutions are quite European. Decolonising the African university refers to education that is Afrocentric instead of Eurocentric. It refers to making spaces in universities resemble Africanness, the feeling of belonging and not merely accommodated. Education forms part of our epistemologies and at present there is an epistemecide of African knowledge. The erasure of African knowledge in African universities refers back to the humanity of the African. That the African is not a rational being and has nothing to offer when it comes to knowledge. Western epistemologies cannot be the standard of measure in African universities while African epistemologies are subjugated. #RhodesMustFall calls for decolonisation so that the university in Africa can truly be African.

#FeesMustFall is linked to #RhodeMustFall as well because colonialism and apartheid benefitted white people in South Africa. The doors of higher learning in previously white and Afrikaans institutions were officially open for blacks in the democratic South Africa. Coming from a past of subjugation university fees is what most black parents could not afford. Fees are a systemic way of keeping black students out of university because majority blacks are from disadvantaged backgrounds. In order to undo the injustices of the past, education should be free for those who are affected by apartheid. Education should not only be free but it should have quality and be decolonised.

Students were referred to as “hooligans” and “criminals” for protesting for free quality decolonised education. Private security and police were deployed to universities and protesting students were intimidated. When students protest for their human dignity it is fighting against systematic oppression. Powers that be respond with violence when a people rise up and demand dignity. The Biko Christ-figure has reappeared in the present and continuing the protest to dismantle subjugation in higher education institutions. The student protest are in line with the insurrection of the Biko Christ-figure.

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### 6.4.2 Marikana Massacre

The Biko Christ-figure reappeared at Marikana protesting for the dignity of mine workers. One of the main reason of colonisation in South Africa was because of the fertile land. The land was and still is considered very good for farming and very rich in minerals (gold, diamonds, platinum, steel, etc.). Colonialism comes with capitalism which is a system that is obsessed with mass production and making profit at the expense of exploiting people and the environment. An interesting fact is that the Lonmin mine is formerly known as Lonrho (London and Rhodesian mining) which is connected to Cecil John Rhodes.

The massacre that happened in Marikana on the 16th of August 2012 was the first massacre by the police in post-1994 democratic South Africa. This horrific event reminded people of the massacres under the apartheid regime but the difference was that it happened 18 years after the onset of democracy. There were 34 mineworkers that were shot dead and 78 were injured by the police when they protested for salary increase and for better living conditions. The mineworkers used protesting as a way of voicing out the unfairness and injustices that the mine had perpetuated. Marikana is, a place with a lack of infrastructure and lack of service delivery. Although the mines in Marikana make billions of Rands in profit, the place itself displays the opposite of the wealth the companies make. Residents of Marikana face challenges in many aspects of life that keeps them poor; unhealthy, lack of social life, illiterate and deep in debt. The miners demanded dignity for the hard work they are doing and also the environment in which they live.

The Biko Christ-figure reappeared in the mining industry that Africans are still regarded as cheap labour in the democratic South Africa. The colonial and apartheid legacy still apparent and need to be addressed in order to achieve liberation. The denial of dignity for the African in Africa still shows that democracy did not change systematic oppression but only gained civil rights. Civil rights does not equate to justice and equality but merely legitimise the legacies of colonialism and apartheid. The rainbow nation that was promoted in the dawn of democracy is an attempt to cover all the atrocities of the past and becomes business as usual.

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### 6.4.3 Black lives matter

The Biko Christ-figure reappears in America with movement #BlackLivesMatter. Although slavery and segregation were abolished in American, the daily realities of present African-Americans remains the same. African-Americans find themselves being murdered by police and vigilantes on a daily basis for no apparent reasons at all. It seems being black is an object of violence in America. The killing of blacks in America is rooted in the lynching of blacks in the past. The #BlackLivesMatter movement was sparked by the killing of the 17 year old Trayvon Martin by a police officer named George Zimmerman who was not held accountable for the murder. This was the same thing that happened in the distant past where blacks were lynched and even though the murderers were known, they were not held accountable. #BlackLivesMatter is an affirmation of black people's humanity that should be dignified and respected. The lives of black people are systematically killed like it is business as usual.

The Biko Christ-figure reappeared in the #BlackLivesMatter movement in America to protest against subjugation and reaffirm black lives. The movement encourages "black is beautiful" and becomes a reminder that the violence on black bodies is not the will of God but the deliberate act of man. The movement refuses to remain silent about the daily realities of African-Americans living in constant fear for their lives. This is the same fear black people had in the lynching era because your day to be lynched can be anytime.

Within the #RhodesMustfall, #FeesMustFall, and #BlackLivesMatter movements there is an internal struggle with black members who are LGBTI+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex). The LGBTI+ are marginalised and subjugated within these movements by black heterosexuals and patriarchy. The LGBTI+ critique these movements that claim inclusivity but remain homophobic. The lives of the LGBTI+ matters and heterosexuality should not be the norm. The liberation of the LGBTI+ in the movements and society is a legitimate and the Biko Christ-figure reappears in it to protest their human dignity. The Biko Christ-figure affirms protest of people that are marginalised and oppressed based on their race; gender, sex, class, and, age. As long as there are people that are oppressed and marginalised the Biko Christ-figure reappears to affirm their protest.

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### 6.5 Conclusion

This chapter explored the meaning of the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The cross signifies the “cost of discipleship” that those who follow Jesus should bear. The cross is the cost that one pays when fighting for the justice of those that are poor; dispossessed, marginalised, and, discriminated. The cross is the burden that one carries for speaking for the voiceless against systems of oppression. Bearing the cross is symbolic to laying down your life for the liberation of others. The resurrection of Jesus is actually the insurrection of Jesus. That implies that insurrection is the cause of Jesus’ death and the resurrection of Jesus is in itself rebellion against death. The Biko Christ-figure reappears in contemporary times in the form #RhodesMustFall, #FeesMustFall, Marikana massacre and #BlacklivesMatter. These are but a few protest movements that challenge the legacies of the past. The protest continue the insurrections that put Jesus on the cross and went further to rebel against death itself.

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# CHAPTER 7

# CONCLUSION

## 7.1 Integration

The first chapter introduces the concept of black aesthetics and the purpose of this dissertation. The purpose is to read the *Son of Man* film from a black theological liberation perspective in order to view the film as a social justice film. Although western aesthetics regards art as non-ideological, black aesthetics rejects that notion and emphasises that all art has an ideology which can either maintain the *status quo* or challenge it. Black aesthetics suggests that western aesthetics maintains the *status quo* with art, therefore denying the social justice intentions of art. Black aesthetics is a concept that strives for self-determination, self-definition, and embraces blackness in a world where blackness is undesirable. The *Son of Man* is a black-centred film that ascribes to the themes of black aesthetics that is overall about social justice.

The second chapter debunked western philosophy of its view about African philosophy. Western philosophy, the chapter argued, has the tendency of monopolising philosophy and to deny any other philosophies that arise from other continents, especially Africa. Aesthetics is a branch of philosophy that deals with art and beauty and without African philosophy; black aesthetics is incomplete or better, left limping. African philosophy rejects this notion that Africans are not sophisticated enough to reason and therefore cannot philosophise and was employed in this dissertation to interpret the *Son of Man.* In this regard, an *Ubuntu/Botho* aesthetics and ethics presented in the research, suggested a re-creation of the image of an African in this film and reclamation of African culture for a revolutionary aesthetics of decolonisation, social justice, Pan-African solidarity and liberation.

After debunking western philosophy, the following chapter affirmed that black is beautiful. Black is beautiful is an affirmative phrase that seeks to liberate the black person mentally; spiritually, politically, and culturally. The black person should define himself/herself and not perceive themselves according to the definitions of the oppressor.

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The Black Power and BCM ideologies were made pragmatic through art, especially through Black Theatre the chapter argued. *Son of Man* was first a theatre production "The Mysteries - *Yiimimangaliso*" before it was adapted into a film. As a film, *Son of Man* was interpreted as art that is communal, committed and functional to liberate black people. In relation to Black Liberation Theology as the spiritual aspect of the BCM, the liberation of the image of blackness that is associated with evil is argued in this research. In the same way, the liberation of the images of God; Jesus, the church, and Christianity could be attained through black aesthetics and art.

The Christological dimensions of the *Son of Man* was then explored. The film not only uses a black image of Jesus but also a Biko Christ-figure is implied. Three motifs: non-violence, ideology, death and disappearance paint a picture of a Biko Christ-figure committed to non-violence without giving in to fear and intimidation. A Biko Christ-figure is not keen on addressing personal morality, but addresses institutional morality. A Biko Christ-figure understands that problems in the lives of many black people were created through colonialism and apartheid. These problems are man-made and not the will of God. Many activists including Steve Biko "disappeared" during apartheid and so does Jesus in the *Son of Man*. A Black Christology in the *Son of Man* is based on black history, black culture, and land that might "re-appear". As Mofokeng reverses the Christological question from "who do you say I am?" to "who does Jesus Christ say that we are and how shall we become ourselves, our liberated selves?" The "re-appearance" of the paradigm of black history, black culture, and land are some of the Christological promises we discerned in this film.

We argued next that Jesus is not only the Son of Man but he is also the Son of Woman. Women play a vital role in the film and Mary is considered the heroine of the *Son of Man* film. Black African women theologians seek to redefine being a woman in the African context and not in the confines of patriarchy and in the film, Jesus is seen as a companion who is in solidarity and advocates for gender justice. Mary in the *Son of Man* grasped the implications of Jesus' message and protested injustice without fear.

The cross is not seen as defeat but the cost of discipleship when following Jesus Christ. Anyone that is committed to the demise of systems of oppression, marginalisation, and

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discrimination will bear the cross. Christianity is not for the meek because meekness accepts the *status quo* which implies being in favour of the *status quo*. The resurrection of Jesus is seen as the insurrection of Jesus. Jesus is killed because of insurrection and rebels against death by resurrecting. The insurrection spirit continues in the resurrection of Jesus. We are given an instruction to keep insurrection fire burning in our current struggles.

The *Son of Man* according to black aesthetics is not a film for entertainment but a film that affirms our current struggles for social justice. It is a reminder that bearing the cross of Jesus means death but that our hope is in the insurrection we should remain committed to, namely, the task of liberation from systems of subjugation. Black Liberation Theology and black aesthetics are a good combination to analyse images of blackness in regards to religion and the secular. The film affirms the human dignity of Africans in the diaspora and African women. Symbolically it also affirms the human dignity of LGBTI and anyone that is systematically oppressed.

### 7.2 Recommendations

For black liberation theologians to continue having relevance in a post-1994 democratic South Africa, analysing the media, pop culture, and arts might be indispensable. The image of the black person is often used to perpetuate subjugation and normalise their oppression. It is thus important to re-create and redefine ourselves as blacks in images that liberate and maintain our dignity. This study, which focused on black aesthetics, demonstrated that imagination, and Black Theology of Liberation as in the arts, is a field that requires to be harnessed. The development of justice films and artistic imagination will need further exploration, but also the images of African philosophical categories and their in future.

To conclude, in the context of a world that is driven by image today, images of Christianity, images of politicians, images of the church and many others, the propulsion of the 'beauty of blackness' through aesthetics within a war of images remains important a field for the construction of liberating images today in our open society.

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