

Black African mainline churches and economic struggle: A black liberation perspective on Miriam Makeba's 'A luta continua'

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As part of the ecumenism movement, mainline churches have contributed to, and were in the forefront of fighting the apartheid government, which favoured the interests of white people as opposed to black people. Christian leaders who belonged to mainline churches included Manas Buthelezi, Desmond Tutu, Simon Maimela, Buti Tlhagale, Beyers Naude, Alan Boesak, Itumeleng Mosala, among others. Despite the rich legacy of Black Theology, after the dawn of democracy, the church seems to have gone in seclusion, and shrewd capitalists and politicians are running the show. This article aims to concede that mainline churches have abandoned the struggle after the dawn of democracy in South Africa. In this article, the struggle refers to deliberate involvement in economic liberation, especially the black African population, focusing on mainline churches in the rural and township areas where the majority of the poor population resides and worships. To achieve this, the article firstly explores the realities of poverty in South Africa. Secondly, it examines the ills that continue to be perpetuated by crime to demonstrate poverty and unemployment. Thirdly, it shows the strength of mainline churches in how they, through their leadership and congregations, participated in other struggles in South Africa. Fourthly, the article argues that mainline churches' drive, attitude and fortitude have diminished, especially by exploring the economic disfranchisement of the black South African populace. The article explores Black Theology of liberation and Miriam Makeba's song titled 'A luta continua' to address identified issues, and employs desktop literature review as a methodology.

Contribution: The article concludes that the direct activism that existed within black, African mainline churches has diminished, despite its black, African populace being at the receiving end of the economic injustices in South Africa.

Keywords: African mainline churches; black liberation theology; economic struggle; economy; *A luta continua*.

Introduction

Unemployment and poverty have been identified as disastrous in Africa. Shah (2022:5) paints an inauspicious picture of South Africa, stating that 'South Africa faces three interlinked challenges of high poverty, high inequality, and high labour market exclusion'. Shah's (2022:5) emphasis on using a word 'high' demonstrates how acute these problems are in South Africa. It comes across as a conundrum that South Africa is in an upper middle-income status in Africa, but it has a poverty line similar to poorer countries (Shah 2022:5). Leibbrandt, Woolard and Woolard (2007:1) point out some of the contributory factors of the apartheid government's two approaches, 'race-based geography and race-based policy'. This gives an indication of why certain race groups and geographical areas were and still are poor in South Africa. This again clarifies the economic inequality in South Africa, which was historically and deliberately created by the apartheid government. Therefore, black Africans resided in the poorest geographical areas with less development, whereas the white people resided in the affluent areas which were well developed. Qithi and Mkhize (2023:1020) attest to this historical fact, stating that, post-1994, in search of better economic opportunities black people flocked to urban areas which led to the mushrooming of informal settlement. According to Sibeko (2024:63), in 1994, there were 41 million unemployed and 8.9m employed South Africans. The migration of people from rural and former homelands created other challenges such as issues related to proper housing, running water, electricity, sanitation, schools, a lack of health facilities, and other essential amenities.

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Qithi and Mkhize (2023:1020) further aver that, post-1994, South Africa faces what they call 'triple problems', namely unemployment, poverty and inequality. Mokhutso (2022:19024) further elucidates that in South Africa poverty is predominantly experienced by black Africans.

According to Mahadea and Simson (2010:391), the trends between 1994 and 2003 highlight that there was no significant increase in employment in South Africa. There was a slight increase in employment, as reported by the President in his State of the Nation address in February 2010. The President stated that jobs increased by 480 000. However, the challenge is that those jobs were not long-term, but rather short-term. The harrowing state of unemployment led to the realisation that there was a growing group of South African individuals who are classified as 'discouraged work seekers' whose number had increased to 1.17m during the fourth quarter of 2008 (Mahadea & Simson 2010:391). The bleak picture painted so far does not mean that the new democratically elected government did not put in place programmes to mitigate the poverty and unemployment challenges. These programmes include 'Special Development Initiatives (SDI), the *Umsobomvu* Youth Agency, Small, Medium, and Micro Enterprises (SMME) development institutions, National Skills Fund, the Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs), National Empowerment Fund, Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative of South Africa (ASGISA)' (Mahadea & Simson 2010:391), and many others; however, the rates of poverty and unemployment remain high.

A gap the study aims to fill

In this article, the term *black African mainline churches* refers to established denominations such as the Methodist Church of Southern Africa, the Uniting Presbyterian Church, the Anglican Church, the Uniting Congregational Church, the Lutheran Church and similar institutions. These churches are predominantly black and African, particularly within South Africa's rural areas, informal settlements and townships. It is important to note that this classification does not refer to African Indigenous or Independent Churches.

The research problem the article seeks to grapple with is rooted in the historical role of the church – especially black churches in rural and township contexts – during apartheid. At the height of the apartheid struggle, these churches were unashamedly at the forefront of the liberation movement, offering both moral and material support to the black majority. Figures such as Desmond Tutu, Allan Boesak, Itumeleng Mosala, and Stanley Mogoba exemplify this robust and prophetic tradition. This article does not overlook the contribution of other racial groups, Christian and religious groups in the fight against the human rights violation and racial inequality during the apartheid government. However, due to the scope of this article, the focus is solely on the contribution of the black African mainline churches. During this time, black churches were unified and often served as safe havens for political activists, as well as spaces for mourning and resistance, particularly in

burying those unjustly killed by the apartheid regime. This article advances two key arguments. Firstly, although apartheid has officially ended, the struggle persists: the black majority in South Africa continues to face dire living conditions marked by widespread unemployment, poverty and inadequate service delivery in many municipalities. Secondly, the article contends that, since the advent of democracy in 1994, the collective energy and unity once demonstrated by black churches in addressing systemic injustices have significantly diminished, especially regarding socio-economic challenges within their constituency.

Objectives and methodology

This article aims to concede that mainline churches have abandoned the struggle for liberation after the dawn of democracy in South Africa. Mainline in this article refers to the conventional churches which were brought in Africa by Western missionaries such as the Anglican Church, Methodist, Presbyterian, Lutheran Church, among others. The article firstly explores the realities of poverty in South Africa, with specific focus on its historically classified population. Secondly, it explores the ills that are perpetuated by crime to demonstrate poverty and unemployment in South Africa. Thirdly, the article demonstrates how mainline churches, their leadership and congregations participated in other struggles in South Africa. Fourthly, the article also argues that mainline churches' drive, attitude and fortitude have diminished with regard to the economic liberation of the black populace. This article employs a qualitative desktop research methodology and examines Miriam Makeba's song 'A Luta Continua' as a lens to address the identified issues. It reviews literature that critiques the various roles the Church has played, both at the local and national levels, before and after 1994.

Current realities of unemployment, poverty and inequality in South Africa

According to Kingdom and Knight (2001:1), South Africa has the highest rate of unemployment in the world. Statista (2024) reports that South Africa has the highest number of unemployed people in the continent of Africa, with a rate of 29.83%.

Kingdom and Knight (2001:1), while asking the question 'Who are the unemployed?', note that unemployment in SA reflects significant disparities based on race, gender, age, education, and religion. Kingdom and Knight (2001:4) note that black Africans are facing more unemployment than their white counterparts. Taking this thought further to highlight the disparities, Mokhutso (2022:19010) states that the white people, make up 10% of the population, own half of the nation's income, while the majority black people, who make up 40% of the population, only share 7.2% of the nation's income. It is interesting to note that poverty also affects various age groups differently. Younger individuals are more prone to unemployment compared to older individuals.

In most parts of the world, young people are more likely to experience unemployment due to educational, socio-demographic and economic factors (Statista 2004). Similarly, persons with a higher educational qualification are less likely to be unemployed, or rather, their unemployment percentages are far less than those with a lower or primary education. With regard to gender, women are more likely to be unemployed than men (Kingdom & Knight 2001:4). Mokhutso (2022:19011) notes that the unemployed women are black women who make up 36.7%, compared to their white women counterparts who make up 8.6%.

Furthermore, geographically, unemployment is more prevalent in rural areas than in urban areas, due to fewer employment opportunities, as well as a lack of industrial development or trade opportunities in rural areas. This is a historical fact in South Africa as it was a deliberate construction of the then apartheid government. One contributing factor is historical, as laws such as the *Group Areas Act* – which was a segregation policy – mandated that black Africans reside in homelands that were predominantly rural areas of poor land quality and little employment opportunity (Kingdom & Knight 2001:4). In summary, the poor in South Africa are black youths, black men and women. This situation has not changed post-1994.

The effects of poverty, unemployment and inequality in South Africa

Cloete (2015:513) argues that issues such as unemployment and poverty adversely affect young people. Firstly, she refers to human dignity: 'A job can engender a sense of purpose and value and shape a person's identity and self-esteem'. Secondly, Cloete (2015:518–519) highlights the health factors. She notes that unemployment affects mental health, as those affected lack satisfaction, general well-being and self-esteem. This further leads to depression, anxiety, a lack of self-confidence, alcoholism, suicide, stress-related psychosomatic disorders, and so on. Malakwane (2012:79) also notes that unemployment impacts on well-being, which contributes to higher rates of morbidity and mortality in individuals of lower socio-economic status who may be already burdened by multiple health conditions.

Thirdly, Cloete (2015:516) contends that unemployment and poverty impact both individual welfare and societal wellbeing. They lead to issues such as crime and anti-social behaviours. Malakwane (2012:78) further says that unemployment is a major contributor to crime and, according to literature, crime is usually high in countries with a high percentage of unemployment. According to Ikejiaku (2009:452), crime increased in post-apartheid South Africa, especially between 1990 and 1994. Ikejiaku (2009: 454–455) submits that as much as crime affects both the rich and the poor, the poor are more severely affected because they have hardly anything to be stolen and are more at risk of violent crime than the affluent. Ikejiaku (2009:455) takes

this matter further, stating that crime affects the economic development of the country because crime diverts resources to protection efforts instead of investing in creating more job opportunities for those who need employment the most. It is thus obvious that unemployment and poverty have a cascading effect on the country, leading to a significant increase in crime and adversely affecting the national economy. Unemployment and poverty affect not only the individual, but also the entire social fabric of society. This article aims to highlight this as a matter that needs attention not only from the government, but also from the church, because:

... work is an essential part of God's original purpose for human life at creation ... Through their work, human beings represent God's own wise and caring rule over creation, and so they are the 'image' of God in and through their work. (Cloete 2015:518)

The fortitude of black, African mainline churches during the liberation of South Africa

Struby (2018:4) highlights that, historically, the religious civil society has significantly influenced South Africa's political landscape and the civic engagement of its people. During the apartheid era, Christianity was instrumental in providing support and in offering spiritual and moral support to those resisting the apartheid regime. Due to the scope of this article, the focus is only on black, African mainline churches. Dube and Molise (2018:161) highlight a major role played by the church to fight against the apartheid system:

Despite differences in theological orientations, the black church and some English-medium churches, in partnership with the local community (such as traditional leaders), generally played a crucial role in ending the apartheid system in South Africa. During the time there were even tensions that arose where the Dutch Reformed Church and South African Council of Churches were in loggerheads on the legitimacy of Apartheid. (Struby 2018:5)

The black church, which is the focus of this article, went out of its way not only to participate in matches, give pastoral care, and do advocacy work, but also to make theological statements that opposed the apartheid system such as the *Kairos* document which is defined as one of the key documents of the South African Black Theology. Theologies were further developed to anchor their struggle in the scriptures, as something commanded by God. Despite the Dutch Reformed Church's support of the apartheid system, the vast majority of mainline churches were opposed to their views. Black Theology was a by-product of the Black Conscious Movement (BCM) which was as a result of the work of James Cone in USA, as well as the work of Mofokeng and Mosala in South Africa. The black church endeavoured to interpret Christianity and the Bible from the black African people's perspective (Struby 2018:6). Struby (2018:7) further commends the work of African Indigenous or Independent Churches (AICs) in producing African theology whose chief aim was to liberate and embrace African culture as well as oppose white domination. Storey (1998:188) explains that

the church's strength during the apartheid era lay in its ecumenical unity. He notes that if the churches had confronted the regime as separate denominations or lacked the backing of the World Council of Churches and global Christian communities, the end of apartheid might have been significantly delayed. Bompani (2006:1139) elucidates that the anti-apartheid movement was led by ecumenical movements such as Diakonia, Institute for Contextual Theology, and Young Christian Students.

A former drive, attitude and fortitude of black African mainline churches in South Africa

Barber (2015), although writing from an American perspective, shares interesting thoughts about the black church which is also applicable in the South African contexts and what the black African mainline churches have been in various societies where they are found:

The black church in black communities – particularly as it relates to providing resources and opportunities in a racially unequal society. I argue that black churches are filling a gap created by the self-help ideology of a neo-liberal era where addressing the outcomes of contemporary racial inequality is often left to private sector organisations, such as churches, rather than federal government. (p. 246)

This article argues that the black churches – or as referred to in this study, the black African mainline churches – have historically played a vital role in resisting racial injustices under the apartheid regime. Despite limited resources, these churches contributed significantly to the liberation struggle. Pillay (2017:1), affirming Barber (2015:246), reflects on the Church's role during apartheid, stating that it emerged as a source of spiritual refuge for the marginalised and impoverished, offering hope and assistance to families affected by the loss, imprisonment, or exile of their loved ones. The ecumenical movement in South Africa aligned itself with the struggles of the poor by standing in solidarity with the exploited working class. Klaasen and Solomons (2019:1–2) have been very critical of the church's social interventions during the post-apartheid era, especially with regard to issues of social justice, and politics fostering equality and fairness for all. This critique is made because the Church in South Africa has played a crucial role in the formation of democracy in South Africa through formations such as the South African Council of Churches (SACC) (Klaasen & Solomons 2019:3). Kgatle (2018:1) reflects on the nature of the Church during apartheid, noting that the voice of the church spoke against challenges which were faced by the country during the apartheid era. However, post-1994, this voice lowered. The two key terms that stand out in Kgatle's observation are *consistent* and *persistent*. This article contends that such consistency and persistence – in addressing societal issues, particularly those affecting the poor, unemployed and marginalised, who are predominantly black and African – have diminished in the post-apartheid era, especially in relation to economic justice. It is important

to highlight that while Kgatle (2018:2) emphasises the Church's prophetic voice during apartheid, this voice was not limited to rhetoric; it was accompanied by tangible action.

This has led to the country facing numerous challenges: 'While post-apartheid is a time of hope and achievement, the country is facing serious social injustices more than two decades into democratic rule'. (Klaasen & Solomons 2019:1). This section of the article examines the drive, attitude and fortitude of black African mainline churches in South Africa – what Kgatle (2018:1) refers to as their *consistency* and *persistence*. During the apartheid era, the Church championed the cause of justice and confronted oppressive political structures with courage and conviction. Kgatle (2018:2) refers to the Church in its various structural formations, both locally through ecumenical initiatives and nationally through bodies such as the SACC. However, he argues that in the post-1994 democratic era, the Church's prophetic voice has weakened. While it continues to respond to national challenges by issuing public statements and engaging with the media, it often refrains from direct confrontation. Kgatle (2018:2) critiques this shift, noting that the Church has not actively engaged in significant moments of social crises, such as the Marikana massacre, the #FeesMustFall movement, the Life Esidimeni tragedy, issues surrounding state capture, or debates on land expropriation without compensation. Pillay (2017:2) notes that among other things that weakened the church was the fracturing of the ecumenical movements post-1994 with the emergence of other organised groups such as the National Initiative for Reformation in South Africa (NIRSA), the Southern African Christian Leadership Assembly (SACLA), and the National Religious Leaders Forum (NRLF), which was an organisation established as per the request of the then President of South Africa, Nelson Mandela. However, the emergence of these organisations demonstrated that there was a fracture in the unity of the ecumenical movement pre-1994.

Struby (2018:6) highlights that one of the biggest contributions of the church was contextual theologies such as the Black Theology and liberation theology, state theology or apartheid theology. This theologising took place during the time when the Bible was used to instigate division instead of unity in society. At this time, black theologians had to find redemptive hermeneutical approaches to the Bible. This time or era saw a plethora of theologising, where scholars such as Mofokeng (1987), Mosala (1987), and West (1991) interpreted the Bible from a black person's perspective as a response to the oppression of the black majority. Black Theology came about as an influence of the BCM whose aim was to advocate for black people's autonomy, and dismantle the racial inequalities within the political space in the country. Mainline churches also acted internally to foster racial unity, exemplified by the formation of the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA) during the early years of democratic South Africa, when the Black Dutch Reformed Mission (DRMC) and the coloured Dutch Reformed Church in Africa (DRCS) merged (Duncan 2025:3). The same applies

to the Presbyterian family where, in 1999, the Reformed Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa and the Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa merged to form what is known nowadays as the Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa (UPCSA) (Duncan 2025:3). In the same vein, Zwane (2020:2) includes the Anglican Church in Southern Africa and the Methodist Church of Southern Africa in this list. All these churches were intent on integrating racially diverse congregations into one body of Christ (Zwane 2020:2).

It is apparent that mainline churches focused not only on the political pushback on the racial laws and policies, but they also fought the racial segregation from within. This did not only apply in mainline churches, but if one may say, it also took place in the mainstream Pentecostal congregations. All the major movements spearheaded by mainline churches in both civil and political areas and within the church demonstrate how deeply involved these churches have been in changing the course of a racially divided South African politics and society. According to Bompani (2006:1137), churches in South Africa are typically associated with two key historical phases in their role as socio-political agents: the colonial era, during which they served as instruments of modernisation and Western influence on indigenous communities, and the period of the liberation struggle, which contributed to dismantling of the apartheid regime. Bompani (2006:1138) opines that, in the post-apartheid era, the church's engagement in the political arena and in matters of civil society weakened. This article aims to pursue the argument, especially pointing a finger at black African mainline churches. Kearney (in Bompani 2006:1140) argues that, post-1994, the churches left the political arena and were in critical solidarity with the governing party rather than with the poor, as it seems the churches were afraid of being critical of the government. Prominent scholars such as Dolamo (2005), reflecting on the first decade of democracy in South Africa, appeal to theologians and the Church, stating:

... I implore the churches and theologians in South Africa to play a more active role in their prophetic and pastoral ministries during the second decade of democracy than they did in the previous one. (p. 239)

Similarly, Pillay (2017:1) observes that the SACC before the dawn of democracy was very strong, and had clarity in their mission, which was grounded on a solid vision and theology. These perspectives – as suggested by Dolamo (2005) and Pillay (2017) – reinforce the central argument of this article: that the Church is no longer as actively engaged as it ought to be.

Exploring the Black Theology of liberation within the South African economic status

Chatterjee, Czajka and Gerthin (2023:1) argue that, post-1994, South Africa remains the most unequal country in the world. This inequality persists despite the abolition of the apartheid regime. Even now, unemployment remains on the rise, and households are indebted. It should be noted that this

inequality was inherited by the democratically elected government from the apartheid regime where race and geography show this reality because of the spatial and racial laws that separated different racial and ethnic groups. Zwane (2020:2) portrays the dawn of democracy in 1994, which was received with scenes of jubilations. The arrival of democracy in 1994 marked the beginning of a new era, greeted with enthusiastic celebration by the majority of black working-class communities. This moment symbolised a renewed sense of hope after enduring decades of political and economic domination under apartheid. Buffel (2017:1) argues that a huge injustice was meted out against the black populace, especially recalling the promises of a 'better life for all' in political speeches, manifestos, and policies of the ruling party. However, long after the democratically elected government, promises made by the ruling party contradict the realities faced by the poor and disfranchised because issues such as poverty, racism, inequality and unemployment are still prevalent in South Africa, and millions of the populations are still segregated in the economy of the country (Buffel 2017:1). Buffel (2017:1) elucidates that, despite the church fighting tooth and nail to demolish racial inequality and achieve political liberation for all, 'the church and its leadership have gone to sleep and disturbingly silent in contrast to the past' (Buffel 2017:1). The church is silent, according to Buffel (2017:1), amid continuous service delivery protests, which highlight that the poor endure a non-existent or poor service delivery especially in the rural and township areas, where sadly the church is invisible unlike during the apartheid era.

This context promotes the relevance of black liberation theology (BLT) because poverty and unemployment in South Africa remain predominantly challenges faced by the black population. The gap of social inequality is still prevalent, where the white people remain privileged and the black people remain marginalised and underprivileged. 'Blacks still live in poverty and whites in wealth' (Buffel 2017:2). Instead of a better life for all, as it was envisaged and promised, sadly the democratically elected government adopted the colonial economic system and continues to perpetuate the injustices of the system. Buffel (2017:2) argues that there are two extremes in post-1994 South Africa. Extreme wealth is still in the hands of white people, and extreme poverty remains in the hands of black people, despite the democratic government rule.

Despite this, scholarly perspectives on the role of the church in post-1994 South African society remain nuanced. Bompani (2017:1138, 1145) asserts that churches continue to serve as a vital component of civil society, actively engaging in issues affecting vulnerable populations, including victims of rape, abuse, gender-based violence, and challenges related to education, healthcare, employment and housing. Smit (2017:93) reflects on the apartheid era, noting that the church was more unified and the ecumenical movement particularly strong due to a shared opposition to a common adversary. In the post-apartheid context, however, the church's collective voice diminished as it shifted focus to

denominational concerns and social issues such as the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) or acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) crisis. Rather than opposing the state, churches increasingly collaborated with government initiatives, such as the Reconstruction and Development Programme and the Moral Regeneration Movement. Jentile (2024:1) expresses concern over the limited discourse regarding the church's effective engagement, particularly the role of the SACC, during the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. The SACC, comprising Evangelical, African Independent, Mainline, Pentecostal and charismatic churches, played a significant role in guiding the faith community and ensuring compliance with government-imposed restrictions. Given that the majority of South Africa's population is black and African, Jentile (2024) contends that the SACC's leadership was crucial during this period. Collectively, the perspectives of Bompani (2017), Smit (2024), and Jentile (2024) suggest that the church has not been entirely silent in the democratic era. Rather, it continues to contribute meaningfully and remains an active participant in addressing social challenges.

According to black theologians such as Boesak (in Buffel 2017:3), Black Theology reflects questions that black Africans ask themselves amid pain and suffering. What does it mean to believe in Jesus Christ? Mofokeng (in Buffel 2017:3) mentions that Black Theology asks questions such as 'How can faith in Jesus empower Black people who are involved in the struggle for their liberation?'. Black Theology is understood as 'a theological reflection on the situation of poverty, which causes suffering and pain in the lives of millions of South Africans, the majority of whom are black' (Buffel 2017:3). Buffel (2017:4) further argues that Black Theology is still relevant and necessary in South Africa to help black people reflect on their impoverished circumstances, because, he insists, '[t]heology must always be about liberation, and when it is not about liberation, it is not worth pursuing'. This is what the father of Black Theology, James Cone (Burrow 1993:65) advocates for when he identifies Christianity with black power and the black struggle for dignity and freedom. Cone argues that Black Theology is critical, or the gospel preached by the Christian faith is useless and should be isolated (Burrow 1993:65). For Cone (Burrow 1993:65), one should do a theology that is informed by one's own sociocultural and religious heritage. Cone's message and observations still persist, especially within mainline churches in South Africa. For this reason, Zwane (2020:1) argues that Black Theology is more relevant at present than during the time of apartheid because of the triple challenges, namely chronic unemployment, abject poverty, and an increasing income inequality among the black South African populace.

Vellem (2015:1) asserts that one of the defining characteristics of Black Theology is its orientation as a discourse of life. While it is often categorised as political, Black Theology of liberation is fundamentally concerned with a critical engagement of Scripture in relation to the lived experiences of the poor and oppressed (Buffel 2021:2). In this vein,

Tutu (1979:2) emphasises that liberation theology, perhaps more than any other theological framework, emerges from the context of human suffering and distress. It is born out of the lived experiences of poverty and systematic oppression. This theological perspective seeks to interpret and respond to the reality of suffering, particularly when that suffering is the result of deliberate exploitation and marginalisation. It addresses the dehumanisation of individuals, those denied their dignity and worth as people made in the image of the Triune God, redeemed by Jesus Christ, and sanctified by the Holy Spirit. Another central concern of Black Theology, as Vellem (2015:2) notes, is its critique of modernity, which has deliberately and forcibly excluded black African perspectives from the mainstream production of knowledge. Chimhanda (2010:1) further argues that as long as the black majority in South Africa remain unfree – economically, socially and politically – the liberative mission of Black Theology remains incomplete. According to Chimhanda, the core focus areas of Black Theology include:

- Affirmation of black identity.
- Economic empowerment.
- Promotion of black leadership and values.
- Addressing service delivery and advocating for a sustainable economic environment.
- Supporting the development of African democracy.

To achieve these aims, Black Theology places black lived experiences at the centre of its theological reflection. It seeks to interpret the Bible through a liberative lens, presenting a God and Christ who stand in solidarity with the poor, the oppressed and the marginalised (Chimhanda 2010:235). Accordingly, Van aarde (2016:1) emphasises that Black Theology reaffirms the dignity and identity of African people. As Motlhabi (1972:56) affirms, the agenda of Black Theology is to assure the marginalised and poor that Jesus Christ does not only care about their soul, but is deeply concerned about their present needs and struggles. The dilapidating infrastructure and persistent issues related to electricity and water service deliveries cannot be an acceptable way human beings should live their lives. It is in such context where children drown in rivers while going to school because there are no adequate bridges, and where children die falling into pit toilets because there are no adequate toilets. The next section of this article explores Miriam Makeba's song which serves as a reminder to black African mainline churches that the struggle continues.

A call to continue the struggle

Zwane (2020:3) submits that the poor continue to remember the unfulfilled promise of a 'better life for all'. The recurring service delivery protests, often intensifying during election periods, reflect this persistent memory among marginalised communities. As long as the socio-economic hardships faced by black South Africans persist, black liberation Theology will remain a vital framework for theological reflection and engagement within the South African context. Makofane and Botha (2019:90) highlights

practical examples that show that post-1994, the church focused on their normal activities such as preaching and counselling and left public issues to the politicians. Makofane and Botha (2019:90) cites a recent incident where the President of African National Congress refused to adhere to the remedial action of the then public protector Thuli Madonsela upgrades unrelated to security at Nkandla. During this time, some Christian leaders were at loggerheads with the SACC who were calling for his resignation. Lephakga (2024:11) further notes that the church became very silent during what was named state capture commission which was led by the then Deputy Chief Justice Raymond Zondo. Lephakga (2024) says the church, during this commission, was reluctant in holding the state accountable for the rot, corruption and mismanagement of state funds which was uncovered during the commission. Mkhize (2024:2) highlights some of the key issues which are facing South Africa such as income inequality, unemployment, misgovernance and mismanagement, issues related to safety and security, lawlessness and moral decay. Mkhize (2024:4) says that with all these issues, the church remains quiet; hence this title advocates for the 'Breaking the silence: Is the church failing to address South Africa's socio-political problems?' Although the issues raised in the highlighted article, it does not necessarily mention the black mainline churches as per the discourse of this article. The issues of South Africa stem from the unfair historical policies with regard to demographics and land demarcation which privilege white people and marginalise black people. Black African communities in rural areas and townships are the most affected, thereby requiring of the black African mainline churches to be more vocal regarding unemployment, crime, a lack of service delivery and corruption.

Dalamba (2006:3) avers that Miriam Zenzile Makeba was born in Johannesburg on 04 March 1932. She started her singing career as a member of a group called Cuban Brothers. She became famous while a member of a group called Skylarks where she was known as Miriam Makeba. Miriam Makeba, like most of her contemporaries, left South Africa to exile during the time of apartheid where they were known as cultural activists and alerted the international community about the plight of black Africans under the apartheid government (Xaluva 2009:1). According to Xaluva (2009:1), Miriam Makeba was not only a musician, but she is also credited as an icon of political and social significance because of her role in championing the cause of black liberation in South Africa. Her musical genre is classified as both jazz and traditional African style (Xaluva 2009:3). Below are the lyrics of a song by Miriam Makeba titled 'A luta continua' which means 'the struggle continues' (Mutere 2021). The song originated during the times of the armed struggle led by Dr Eduardo Chivambo Mondlane, the first President of the FRELIMO Liberation Front in Mozambique. Chimhanda (2010:437), reflecting on South Africa 16 years into its democracy, argues that despite the progress made by the democratically elected government, many black South Africans continue to experience overt racism and systemic oppression.

They remain disproportionately affected by poverty, high levels of illiteracy and landlessness. According to Chimhanda (2010:437), these persistent socio-economic challenges are, in part, the result of an 'emergent black elite' that constitutes much of the current black leadership – often accused of corruption, nepotism, poor service delivery and a lack of expertise. The song calls for a continued struggle which this article proposes to black African mainline churches amid the economic struggles to which black people are subjected, and due to forgotten promises by the ruling government.

Lyrics (Mutere 2021):

'My people, my people open your eyes
And answer the call of the drum
Frelimo, Frelimo
Samora Machel, Samora Machel has come

Maputo, Maputo
Home of the brave
Our nation will soon be as one
Frelimo, Frelimo
Samora Machel, Samora Machel has won

Mozambique a luta continua
A luta continua, continua

And to those who have given their lives
Praises to thee
Husband and wives
All thy children
Shall reap what you sow
This continent is home

My brothers and sisters stand up and sing
Eduardo Mondlane is not gone
Frelimo, Frelimo
Your eternal flame
Has shown us the light of dawn

Mozambique aluta continua
A luta continua, continua

In Zimbabwe, mama aluta continua
A luta continua, continua

In Botswana, aluta continua
A luta continua, continua

In Zambia, aluta continua
A luta continua, continua

In Angola, aluta continua
A luta continua, continua

In Namibia, aluta continua
A luta continua, continua

In South Africa, a luta continua
A luta continua, continua'

Tshaka and Makofane (2010:538) argue that apartheid was a system that fundamentally undermined the citizenship and

belonging of black South Africans. When examining their current socio-economic conditions, it becomes evident that a reconfigured version of past injustices persists suggesting that the legacy of colonisation and apartheid endures, merely disguised in a different form. Tshaka and Mokofane (2010:538) precisely describe the state of affairs of the black African majority who, to this day and age, cannot enjoy the fruits of the land of their fathers economically. The black African majority cannot find employment, feed themselves and their families, and worse still, they do not even have a land as they were dispossessed by the apartheid government. The black African majority cannot peacefully live in their homes, because of the fear of crime. They are frustrated by the persistent lack of service delivery as a result of corruption, mismanagement and misappropriation of the state-owned resources by the politically connected elites. It is on this point where Miriam Makeba pleads when saying 'My people, my people open your eyes...' The song calls not only the church, but also persons in leadership to be attentive, aware, and conscious of the fact that the lives of the black African majority have not changed as promised and anticipated before 1994. The song calls on those in leadership to see the pain, suffering and inhuman state in which the black majority live in. Furthermore, this song says 'And answer the call of the drum'. A drum in African communities plays a significant role, one of which is communication (Ushe 2013:95). The drum communicates to others about important ceremonies such as festivals, ceremonies and installation of kings or chiefs and also calls for consciousness when wrongs were committed. In knowledgeable societies, drums possess the power to mobilise Africans to action. Similarly, this song serves as a symbolic 'drum call', urging black African mainline churches, as well as civil and political leaders, to respond to the cry of pain, humiliation, and suffering. It is a rhythmic summons that demands both action and meaningful change (Ushe 2013:95).

Although Miriam Makeba's song addresses the context of Mozambique, its chorus - 'A luta continua' translated as 'the struggle continues' - resonates profoundly with the core message of Black Theology of liberation and the state of affairs in Africa, especially South Africa. It echoes the call for ongoing resistance against oppression and injustice. Chimhanda (2010:1) poses a critical question in this regard: 'Are the majority of (South) Africans truly free, and thus the liberation agenda of Black Theology complete, so many years after independence from apartheid and colonialism?' This plight extends beyond economic marginalisation to the broader conditions of rural and township communities, where many not only live but also gather for worship. Koma (2010:114-116) outlines the challenges facing local municipalities in these areas, including significant service delivery backlogs - such as inadequate water supply and poor infrastructure. He attributes these problems to a lack of capacity in key areas:

- *Individual capacity*, where the necessary competencies are often absent.

- *Institutional capacity*, referring to deficiencies in human resources, leadership, infrastructure and financial management.
- *Environmental capacity*, encompassing socio-economic and natural resources, political will, legislative frameworks and social capital - all contributes to the municipal successes or failure.

These conditions directly affect the black African mainline churches, as they operate in these under-resourced communities, which remain home to the black majority. Therefore, the repeated chorus in Makeba's song, 'A luta continua', emphasises the urgency and relevance of the continued struggle for liberation. Black Theology of liberation insists on a theology that restores, empowers, and defends the dignity of the poor and marginalised. It proclaims a God who sides with the economically oppressed, offering hope in the face of despair. The boldness and prophetic voice demonstrated by the black church during the height of apartheid are still urgently needed today - to challenge political parties that continue to make unfulfilled promises, while public services and institutions decline. Makeba's lyrics serve as a warning to black theologians and black African mainline churches: if they fail to respond to the urgent challenges confronting the black majority, then, as her song elucidates:

'Husband and wives,
All thy children,
Shall reap what you sow,
This continent is home.

The rural and township communities, where these churches are embedded, are indeed home to the black majority. Through a Black Theology of liberation, the moral, social and economic decay brought about by poverty, unemployment, substance abuse, gender-based violence and crime can be addressed. Silence and weakened activism only deepen the crisis - ultimately leading to a future where, as the song warns, 'All thy children shall reap what you sow.'

Again, Miriam Makeba's song says:

'My brothers and sisters,
Stand up and sing
Eduardo Mondlane is not gone'

Darkwa (1987:131) elucidates that a song in African communities plays a significant role, it is not just something for entertainment, instead it is a tool used to lament, or for emotional expression of inexpressible thoughts and ideas. Therefore, as advocated by Black Theology, standing up is a call to reject a permanent state of victimhood because of black African majority cannot remain victims forever. The song calls on the black mainline churches to stand for the rights of those who are oppressed and poor:

'Frelimo, Frelimo
Your eternal flame
Has shown us the light of dawn'

Dube (2005:135) understands this verse of the song to mean salvation is not only in Jesus, biblical texts or

the church, but instead from the African liberation movements such as Frelimo. It is therefore a message emphasising salvation, which means change may come from unexpected spaces, and Frelimo has been an important example. Black liberation theology still calls on the church and theologians to continue with the struggle for the oppressed, in this case the black African population who continue to suffer despite the democratic dispensation which they thought would liberate them from poverty. Black liberation theology calls on the Christian community to keep challenging the oppressive economic system that continues to enrich the rich and make the poor poorer. Black liberation theology calls on the church to be true to its faith, as Zwane (2020:3) opines that ‘... it is inconceivable to reflect on faith without the recognition of economic and political injustices ...’. According to Zwane, BLT calls on the black church and the church in general to be true to the gospel they are preaching. A gospel that ignores any form of injustice and pain of the poor does not have credibility. Therefore, mainline churches should be reminded that *A luta continua*, and that democracy does not mean that liberation has been fully achieved. The song of Miriam Makeba, especially the phrase ‘This continent is home’ is a serious reminder and a call for action.

Recommendations

The following recommendations may be considered to advance the ongoing liberation of the black African majority.

Economic development programmes

If black African mainline churches are truly attentive to the realities within the communities they serve, they cannot remain indifferent to the socio-economic challenges facing these areas. Vellem (2015:3) argues that Black Theology begins with a critical analysis of the lived experiences of black people, considering this as a foundational aspect of doing theology. Consequently, these churches must resist the temptation to turn a blind eye – both in prayer and in practice – to the pressing issues around them, such as persistent power outages, sewage overflows in rural and township streets, rampant and senseless violence, and the tragic deaths of children resulting from consuming contaminated food sold in local shops. Genuine economic development initiatives must emerge not only from a recognition of these injustices but also from a theologically grounded commitment to transforming the status quo in the name of God.

Workshops and collaborations

This article has demonstrated that post-1994, there are areas which changed while others worsened, and one of those is the economy. This means this is an issue which cannot be solved only by the government alone, but by a collaboration of all constituencies in the country. As much as the church is not a profit-making organisation, it has human capital in the form of their members who are business persons, academics,

politicians, etc, who can share their experiences and skills by conducting workshops for the unemployed and poor. Moreover, the private sector as well as government entities such as the State Information Technology Agency (SITA) which offers various skills can contribute to the change in the lives of many.

Sermons and teachings

The church’s focus should extend beyond themes of heaven and hell; sermons must also address the pressing challenges facing the nation. Scripture contains numerous texts that offer guidance on practical matters such as financial stewardship, the value of hard work and perseverance – for instance, Proverbs 13:11, Colossians 3:23, Proverbs 14:23 and Ecclesiastes 9:10. These passages should inform sermons and teachings that speak of resurrection and hope, fostering a mindset that affirms personal agency and reject the notion of socio-economic hardships as an unchangeable reality. Moreover, such teachings should cultivate a spirit of civic activism, encouraging congregants to hold political leaders accountable. As Miriam Makeba once asserted, ‘This continent is home’ – and it is the responsibility of its people to protect and shape its future.

Conclusion

This article attempted to concede that the mainline churches have abandoned the struggle for liberation after the dawn of democracy in South Africa. This argument is advanced by exploring the economic struggle, and marginalisation of the black majority in the rural and township communities. The article focused on the black African mainline churches in rural and township areas, where the majority of the poor population resides and worships. The article firstly explored the realities of poverty in South Africa, with specific focus on its historically classified population. Secondly, it explored the ills that are perpetuated by crime to demonstrate poverty and unemployment in South Africa. Thirdly, the article demonstrated how the mainline churches, their leadership and congregations rigorously and boldly participated in the fierce struggle against apartheid. Fourthly, the article has also argued that mainline churches’ drive, attitude, and fortitude have diminished with regard to the economic liberation of the black populace as compared to the struggle against apartheid. The struggle in this article refers to deliberate and aggressive involvement in achieving economic liberation, especially within the black African population who are on the receiving end of the social inequality and poverty. Focusing on the mainline churches in rural and township areas, where the majority of the poor population resides and worships, the article submits that the drive, attitude, and fortitude of the black African mainline churches have diminished, especially by exploring the economic disfranchisement of the black South African populace. The article explored Black Theology of liberation and

Miriam Makeba's song titled 'A luta continua' as lenses relevant in addressing the identified issues. The Black Theology of liberation calls for prophetic theology, and a church that continues to be an activist for the poor and needy, because *A luta continua* – the struggle continues – or as Mirriam Makeba contends:

'Husbands and wives, all thy children
Shall reap what you've sown
This continent is home'

As argued by Chihandana (2010:435), Black Theology of Liberation takes the black experiences as its point of departure. Therefore, Black Theology of liberation calls on the black African mainline churches and the entire Christendom to reclaim that bold voice which brought the apartheid government to its knees for 'this continent is our home'. This call to action involves the established of economic development programmes, workshops, and collaborative initiatives focused on entrepreneurship, investment, and financial literacy. It also includes sermons and teachings that instill a spirit of activism and self-reliance. The struggle for the economic liberation of the Black African person continues, and as demonstrated in the past the church, as a powerful institution, can play a significant role in transforming the current socio-economic status quo.

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