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Reading Luke from the margins: '*Dialectica Reconciliae*' and anti-imperial optics compared

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This article presents a comparative theological analysis of two South African readings of the Gospel of Luke, each shaped by distinct socio-political contexts. Welile Mazamisa's, 'Beatific Comradeship', developed during apartheid, proposes a '*Dialectica Reconciliae*' rooted in Gadamerian hermeneutics and the *Parable of the Good Samaritan* to foster relational reconciliation. In contrast, Motuku's 'imperial-critical' reading of the Zacchaeus narrative (Luke 19:1–10), interrogates post-apartheid economic injustice and land dispossession. While differing in methodology, both approaches converge in their commitment to a socially engaged Lukan ethic. The article argues that genuine reconciliation in South Africa must integrate relational and material dimensions, challenging spiritualised readings that ignore systemic inequality. By reading Luke 'from the margins', the article repositions the Gospel as a living text that speaks to the ethical imperatives of justice, restitution and solidarity.

Contribution: The synthesis of these two readings contributes to a broader Lukan hermeneutic that is both contextually grounded and theologically transformative, offering a compelling vision for faith-based engagement with structural injustice from the margins.

Keywords: Luke; justice; reconciliation; anti-imperial reading; *Dialectica Reconciliae*; apartheid; South Africa.

Introduction

The Gospel of Luke's profound emphasis on social justice, advocacy for marginalised communities and ethical reflections on wealth has established itself as a significant theological resource for South African scholars engaging with the nation's legacy of oppression and its ongoing efforts towards achieving an equitable society (see Mazamisa 1987; Scheffler 1988; Matsoso 1992; Mothoagae 2021, 2024; Motuku 2023).

This article critically analyses two pivotal South African doctoral theses that interrogate Lukan ethics: Welile Mazamisa's 'Beatific Comradeship: An Exegetical-Hermeneutical Study on Luke 10:25–37' (1987) and my own, 'Economic Justice in Luke 19:1–10: A Post-Apartheid Imperial Critical Reading with reference to the land question in South Africa' (2023). By situating these works within their respective historical contexts – late apartheid and post-apartheid – and exploring our chosen methodologies, '*Dialectica Reconciliae*' and 'Imperial Critical Reading', the article examines our interpretations of significant Lukan narratives, namely the Good Samaritan and Zacchaeus narratives.

Through this comparative analysis, I aim to elucidate the evolution of Lukan scholarship in the South African context through marginal lenses and highlight the enduring, multifaceted call to justice articulated within Luke's Gospel.

The article reveals points of convergence in both theses, particularly our commitment to a socially engaged biblical hermeneutic, while also noting divergences in our (Mazamisa and I) primary focal points – relational reconciliation versus material restitution. Ultimately, I advocate for a marginal reading of Luke that holistically conceptualises the Lukan justice theme and integrates both dimensions while addressing the complexities faced by contemporary South Africa.

Marginality

Marginality constitutes a complex and multifaceted construct that significantly affects individuals and groups across multiple interconnected domains of life (Mehretu, Pigozzi & Sommers 2000:89).

Note: The manuscript is a contribution to the themed collection titled 'Honouring Prof Welile Mazamisa: The Reader, the Text, and Two Horizons', under the expert guidance of guest editors Dr Mphumezi Hombana, Mr Otto Makalima, Prof. Dion Forster and Dr Mzukisi Faleni.

The manifestations of exclusion are not isolated; instead, they intertwine and reinforce one another, resulting in intricate layers of disadvantage. Scholars have developed typologies to classify marginality's diverse origins and expressions according to fundamental causes and mechanisms. Mehretu et al. (2000:89) delineate two primary forms of marginality – contingent and systemic – alongside two derivative forms: collateral and leveraged marginality.

Contingent marginality is characterised by 'competitive inequality' within free-market systems (Mehretu et al. 2000:90). It is often perceived as an accidental or ephemeral consequence of market dynamics, underpinned by the assumption that these dynamics will eventually rectify the associated disadvantages. Contributing factors include social or cultural restrictions in navigating market challenges, locational disadvantages such as inadequate access to resources or behavioural choices whereby certain groups consciously opt for simpler lifestyles.

In contrast, *systemic marginality* is rooted in disadvantages entrenched within socially constructed systems of inequitable relations (Wacquant 1999:89). This form emerges when a dominant group exercises disproportionate power over subordinate groups, often informed by characteristics such as class, ethnicity, age or gender. Unlike contingent marginality, systemic marginality is regarded as a deliberate social construction by the dominant class to achieve political control, foster social exclusion and facilitate economic exploitation (Mingione 1996:3–40).

The typology further encompasses two derivative forms: *collateral marginality*, which describes secondary disadvantages because of proximity to marginalised populations, and *leveraged marginality*, which arises when dominant stakeholders, such as multinational corporations (MNCs), exploit bargaining asymmetries to extract concessions (Mehretu et al. 2000:89). These derivative forms highlight the ripple effects of primary marginalisation, particularly within globalised economic systems.

This framework is significant as it elucidates the diverse sources and mechanisms underlying marginalisation, indicating that interventions should not only focus on market adjustments or skill enhancement but also necessitate profound transformations, including anti-discrimination legislation and the redistribution of power and resources (Mehretu et al. 2000:90–91).

Pettman (2025:116–117) also argues that marginalisation is not merely a passive condition but a strategic outcome of politicking, where dominant actors use coercion, exploitation and indoctrination to maintain power. This reinforces the systemic nature of marginality and its embeddedness in broader political and ideological structures.

Dimension of marginality

Marginalisation is a multifaceted phenomenon that manifests across various dimensions, each representing a distinct aspect of exclusion and inequality that interacts in complex ways that profoundly shape the lived experiences of individuals and communities (Easy Sociology 2024). Understanding these dimensions is essential for grasping the full scope of marginalisation and the systemic barriers that perpetuate it.

Social marginality refers to the condition in which individuals or groups are systematically excluded from meaningful participation in social life because of socially constructed identities based on ethnicity, gender, religion or cultural background, societal norms and structures that label specific populations as 'other', bypassing the individual's capability through manifest mechanisms such as discrimination, stigmatisation and restricted access to social networks and decision-making processes, thereby reinforcing unequal power relations and limiting opportunities for inclusion and recognition (Easy Sociology 2024).

Spatial marginality is rooted in geography and refers to exclusion based on physical location. Communities in remote or economically neglected areas often find themselves disconnected from centres of opportunity. Urban planning and infrastructure development frequently prioritise affluent areas, entrenching spatial inequality (eds. Wyn, Cahill & Cuervo 2024:515–527).

Economic marginality is characterised by limited access to stable employment, housing, financial services and other economic resources. It often results in poverty and precarious living conditions, reinforcing cycles of deprivation and limiting upward mobility (eds. Brug, Ritter & Roth 2019: 503–531).

Political marginality occurs when individuals or groups are systematically excluded from political processes and decision-making structures. This includes voter suppression, underrepresentation and denial of civil rights. Political marginality undermines democratic principles and silences the voices of marginalised communities (Pettman 2025:116–117).

Cultural marginality involves devaluing or suppressing cultural practices, languages and traditions. Dominant cultures often impose their norms, leading to erosion of cultural identity and psychological effects such as alienation and loss of self-worth (eds. Brug et al. 2019:403–431)

Ecological marginality refers to exclusion from access to natural resources or living in degraded environments. It is often the result of historical dispossession, environmental injustice and development policies prioritising profit over sustainability (eds. Wyn et al. 2024:1169–1171).

Reading Luke from the margins

Welile Mazamisa's 'Beatific Comradeship'

Mazamisa's (1987) doctoral thesis, 'Beatific Comradeship', emerged during one of South Africa's most volatile and

transformative periods. The intensification of state repression defined the socio-political climate of 1987, marked by a nationwide 'State of Emergency' and the unyielding momentum of the anti-apartheid resistance. This context of crisis and polarisation provides the necessary backdrop for understanding Mazamisa's theological and ethical intervention – his call for a '*Dialectica Reconciliae*'. His work was not merely a theological reflection but a deeply contextual response to the mechanisms of state control, the dynamics of resistance and the fractured state of race relations in apartheid South Africa.

To fully appreciate the significance of 'Beatific Comradeship', it is essential to situate it within the socio-political realities of its time. The year 1987 marked a critical juncture in the apartheid era, characterised by the apex of state power and the resilience of a multifaceted resistance movement. The P.W. Botha regime's 'Total Strategy' combined severe repression with superficial reforms (Price 1991:85), while the *State of Emergency* declared in June 1986 laid the legal groundwork for a sweeping crackdown on democratic forces and dissent (Murray 1994:73–79). Mazamisa sought to develop a Lukan hermeneutic within this volatile environment that could articulate a vision of reconciled comradeship amid conflict, censorship and societal fragmentation.

The state of emergency

The State of Emergency, first declared in 1986 and extended into 1987, became the linchpin of the apartheid government's strategy to suppress the growing unrest following years of township uprisings (South African History Online 2015). This period fundamentally reshaped South Africa's legal and political landscape:

- Security forces were granted sweeping powers to arrest, detain without trial and interrogate individuals (TRC Report 1998). Thousands were held indefinitely, often without judicial oversight.
- Public gatherings, political activities and freedom of movement were severely restricted, frequently enforced through lethal means (Seekings 2000).
- The unchecked power of security forces created an atmosphere of pervasive fear and repression (TRC Report 1998).

One of the most alarming consequences of the emergency regulations was imposing a draconian media censorship regime that prohibited the 'subversive statements' and images of detainees or protests aimed to sever internal communication within resistance movements, demoralise activists and project a false image of stability to the international community (Tomaselli & Louw 1991:87–88).

The *State Security Council* (SSC) and its network of *Joint Management Centres* (JMCs) intensified their repressive operations (Sanders 2006:229). Between 1986 and 1989, approximately 30 000 individuals were detained, many of them children and adolescents, highlighting both the youth-led nature of the resistance and the state's brutal resolve (Foster & Davis 1987; TRC Report 1998). Reports of torture and abuse during detention were widespread and deeply disturbing.

The state also exploited and exacerbated divisions within black communities with vigilante groups, often supported by security forces, targeting *United Democratic Front* (UDF) activists, leading to violent clashes in areas such as Pietermaritzburg and Crossroads (Kentridge 1990:7–10). Covert death squads and assassination units operated both domestically and across borders, executing a 'dirty war' strategy aimed at eliminating leadership and instilling fear (TRC Report 1998).

Despite this repression, the liberation struggle intensified with the *Congress of South African Trade Unions* (COSATU) emerging as a powerful force, advocating the 'One Industry, One Union' principle. The 1987 miners' strike, led by the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), which involved over 300 000 workers and lasted 3 weeks, although ultimately crushed by mass dismissals, demonstrated organised labour's formidable strength and political will (Baskin 1991:226–238; Moodie 1994:269). Labour unions increasingly addressed broader community and political issues, filling the void left by banned political organisations (Seekings 2000:61–63).

In spite of sustained state repression, the United Democratic Front (UDF) persisted in its grassroots mobilisation through rent boycotts, anti-conscription initiatives, and support for civic organisations, demonstrating the extent and intensity of popular resistance to apartheid (Murray 1994:169; Seekings 2000:150ff). Internationally, the US *Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act* and global sanctions campaigns further isolated the apartheid regime (Hostetter 2004:154–156). Although facing logistical challenges, the African National Congress (ANC) maintained its armed struggle and symbolic political presence (Ellis & Sechaba 1992:50, 100, 142–148).

The May 1987 whites-only election, which reinforced the dominance of the National Party and saw the far-right Conservative Party become the official opposition, reflected white voters' rejection of reform and preference for hardline security (Giliomee 2003:608, 627). Yet, the regime's violence only deepened black communities' resolve, transforming the struggle into an existential fight (Mufson 1990:105).

Amid these divisions, liberation movements such as the UDF, COSATU and the Black Sash upheld the principle of non-racialism, offering platforms for collaborative democratic engagement across racial lines (Marx 1992: 122–123). This counter-narrative challenged apartheid's ideological foundations.

Thus, the South Africa of 1987 – Mazamisa's context – was a nation under siege, governed by coercion, silenced by

censorship and fractured by racial conflict. Yet, it was also a landscape of extraordinary courage and hope. In such a setting, dialogue and recognising 'the other' as neighbour seemed almost utopian. Mazamisa's engagement with Luke's Gospel, particularly the Good Samaritan's boundary-transcending compassion, and his construction of a '*Dialectica Reconciliae*', represent a profound theological act. He sought to draw the intellectual and ethical tools from the biblical tradition to critique injustice and envision a future of 'beatific comradeship' in a post-apartheid society.

Although Mazamisa conducted his research in the Netherlands, it directly responded to the South African crisis. His critique of the prevailing 'white versus black hermeneutics' aimed to dismantle interpretive frameworks that mirrored apartheid's divisions (cf. Hombana 2024:1). His goal was to foster reconciliation and justice through a Lukan vision of mutual recognition and solidarity – an interpretive framework capable of transcending apartheid's dehumanising legacy.

Kenosi Patson Motuku: Post-apartheid (post-1994) economic justice in Luke 19:1–10

South Africa is frequently identified as one of the most unequal nations globally, a status it has maintained both during and after the apartheid period (World Bank 2022). This pronounced inequality is particularly highlighted by income disparities, with the Gini coefficient remaining persistently elevated at approximately 0.63 (World Bank 2022). According to the same report, the wealthiest 10% of the population possess around 71% of total wealth, while the bottom 60% hold a mere 7%.

As a South African theologian and biblical scholar, I find it impossible to engage with the gospel texts without confronting the enduring economic injustices that continue to shape the lives of most of my fellow citizens. Race continues to function as a significant determinant of this inequality; despite some advancements in the post-apartheid context, white South Africans still largely occupy the upper tiers of income distribution, whereas black South Africans predominantly constitute the impoverished demographic (Leibbrandt et al. 2018:17–18). While social grants have established a crucial safety net that helps avert absolute poverty for millions (Seekings & Nattrass 2005:360–366), poverty levels remain substantially high and are characterised by pronounced racial disparities.

Black South Africans, particularly women and those residing in rural regions or informal settlements, experience significantly higher poverty rates (Statistics South Africa [Stats SA] [2021] 2025). These are not abstract statistics to me – they reflect the lived experiences of people in my community, family and church. Compounding these issues is a persistent unemployment crisis, evidenced by rates consistently surpassing 30%, with youth unemployment rates being notably higher, thereby disproportionately affecting black South Africans (Stats SA [2021] 2025). This structural unemployment constrains opportunities for social mobility and reinforces enduring cycles of poverty.

The post-1994 period in South Africa has been characterised by a significant expansion of the black middle class and enhanced educational access for many individuals. Nevertheless, overall social mobility, particularly intergenerational mobility, continues to face substantial limitations (Seekings & Nattrass 2005:304–308; Southall 2016:24). Affirmative action measures have mainly supported the emergence of black professionals and entrepreneurs, *Black Economic Empowerment* (BEE) initiatives and increased opportunities for higher education; yet despite this, the size of this group remains relatively small compared to the general population, and its members frequently navigate unstable economic conditions (Southall 2016:89).

Additionally, enduring educational barriers play a critical role in constraining mobility. While access to educational resources has improved, the quality of education is still markedly unequal, with students hailing from historically disadvantaged, predominantly black communities often restricted to underfunded schools, which limits their pathways to higher education and skilled employment, thus perpetuating intergenerational inequality (Spaull 2013:27–28).

Furthermore, the spatial legacy of apartheid continues to pose significant challenges, confining most black South Africans to impoverished townships and rural areas, where they encounter limited economic opportunities, inadequate infrastructure and excessive transportation costs, severely compounding and restricting their ability to secure employment and enhance their socio-economic status (Turok 2011:471–473).

Significant disparities in wealth and land ownership starkly illustrate the enduring legacy of apartheid in South Africa, with wealth inequality more pronounced than income inequality, primarily because of historical disadvantages that have hindered the majority of black South Africans from accumulating assets, including property, businesses, savings and investments (Orthofer 2016:13–20). Consequently, wealth continues to be disproportionately concentrated among white individuals, corroborated by recent research (World Bank 2022).

In this context, land ownership remains a highly contentious and symbolically significant national issue (Hall 2009:1). Despite nearly 30 years (now over 30 years) of land reform initiatives aimed at restitution, redistribution and tenure reform, the ownership structures established during colonialism and apartheid have shown remarkable resilience, with white farmers and corporations still dominating the ownership of commercial agricultural land (Land and Accountability Research Centre [LARC] 2021).

The government's land reform programme has encountered numerous obstacles, including insufficient funding,

bureaucratic inefficiencies, corruption allegations, elite capture and heated political debates over the 'willing buyer, willing seller' principle compared to proposals for expropriation without compensation (Hall 2009:5–6; LARC 2021). Consequently, the slow progress and limited effectiveness of these reforms signify that, for many black South Africans, the aspiration of reclaiming ancestral land and achieving economic empowerment through agriculture remains largely unrealised.

This context of persistent inequality, limited mobility and stark racial disparities in wealth and land inequalities forms the fertile ground from which my thesis emerges. Writing nearly 30 years after 1994, I chose to employ a post-apartheid imperial critical reading because I believe that the structures of power and economic relations in South Africa must be traced back to deeper imperial and colonial roots. The focus on economic justice speaks directly to the lived reality of millions for whom political liberation has not translated into material well-being. Furthermore, the specific reference to the land question targets the heart of historical dispossession and ongoing structural inequality in South Africa.

By bringing Luke 19:1–10, the Zacchaeus narrative, into this context, I explore how a biblical text born under empire can offer resources for critiquing contemporary economic injustices and envisioning a path towards genuine restitution and transformation. I am convinced that this passage, often read as a simple story of personal repentance, holds radical implications for how we think about wealth, justice and restoration in a society still haunted by its colonial and apartheid past. My work implicitly argues that any meaningful Lukan ethic in 2023 [2025] South Africa must confront these deep-seated economic and land-based inequalities head-on, pushing beyond narratives of mere political reconciliation to demand material redress.

This thesis is situated within the context of post-apartheid democratic South Africa, a nation still grappling with profoundly entrenched economic and social inequalities rooted in colonialism and apartheid. The formal abolition of legal apartheid did not equate to the realisation of economic justice or resolving the pressing land issue (Madonsela 2024). Consequently, my work engages with the 'unfinished business' of liberation, critically analysing the concept of 'empire' as it exists both in the ancient Roman narrative and its contemporary neo-colonial manifestations. This framework serves as a vital lens for comprehending the continuing dynamics of economic exploitation and land dispossession, underscoring the importance of developing a Lukan ethic that directly confronts these persistent structural injustices.

Methodological frameworks

The distinct contexts in which Mazamisa (1987) and I, Motuku (2023), have written significantly inform our respective methodological approaches to interpreting the Gospel of Luke.

Mazamisa's methodology is fundamentally rooted in exegetical and hermeneutical principles, notably influenced by the philosophical hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer (1960, 1989). His primary contribution, the '*Dialectica Reconciliae*', symbolises a process of reconciliation that transcends academic technique. It represents a sincere theological and ethical commitment, encouraging a dynamic, dialogical interaction among the biblical text, the interpreter's socio-historical context and diverse interpretive traditions. The goal is not a superficial consensus but a 'fusion of horizons', leading to a new and enriched understanding. For Mazamisa (1987), this approach is essential for overcoming the hermeneutical impasse created by apartheid and for realising Scripture's potential to foster what he calls 'beatific comradeship'.

In contrast, my approach – developed in the post-apartheid context – adopts an imperial critical framework. This methodology integrates insights from postcolonial theory, critical race theory and critical biblical studies to deconstruct the imperial ideologies and power dynamics embedded in the Lukan text. I begin with the recognition that Luke wrote within the context of the Roman Empire, and I read the text with an awareness of how the empire continues to shape our world today. For example, I interpret Zacchaeus as a native collaborator representing Roman economic interests, a figure whose wealth and status were intimately tied to imperial structures of exploitation.

My work also critiques the enduring legacies of empire, colonialism, apartheid, and neo-colonialism, as they manifest in contemporary South Africa, particularly in the areas of economic inequality and land ownership. I seek to recover the counter-imperial and liberative potential of the biblical text, not merely as a historical curiosity, but as a living resource for advocating systemic change and economic restitution. This approach maintains a critical stance towards dominant narratives and aims to amplify the voices of those historically marginalised by imperial power. It is a profoundly personal and theological commitment to justice, rooted in the belief that Scripture must speak meaningfully into the lived realities of our time.

The choice of the micro-narrative texts (Pericopae)

Our choice of Lukan micro-narratives (pericopae) reflects our central theological and ethical concerns. For Mazamisa (1987), the *Parable of the Good Samaritan* (Lk 10:25–37), viewed through the lens of '*Dialectica Reconciliae*', becomes a call to transcend socially constructed barriers, embrace active and costly solidarity and foster relational transformation. His reading of the Samaritan's actions goes beyond emotional sympathy; it involves genuine care, personal risk and financial sacrifice. This, for him, exemplifies the kind of

dedicated action required in a world marked by suffering and division. The parable becomes a blueprint for healing a fragmented society, emphasising ethical interaction and mutual responsibility over entrenched animosities, challenging us to redefine 'neighbour' not by ethnicity, religion or social status but by our shared humanity and response to injustice.

My engagement with Luke focuses on the Zacchaeus narrative (Lk 19:1–10), which I interpret as a paradigm for transformative economic justice. I contend that Zacchaeus embodies the mechanisms of systemic exploitation. As a chief tax collector, he did not merely collect taxes – he profited from an imperial economic structure that deepened the impoverishment of his community (Corbin-Reuschling 2009:72). His wealth was not neutral; it was symptomatic of a broader system of economic violence.

The encounter between Zacchaeus and Jesus is a pivotal moment that radically reorients economic values and practices. Zacchaeus's response is not limited to personal piety – it manifests in concrete, quantifiable economic actions: the divestment of half of his wealth and a fourfold restitution for his past injustices (Lk 19:8). This is what I describe as *costly reconciliation* (cf. Boesak 2008:640). It is the kind of reconciliation that demands more than words, it requires material redress. Zacchaeus's transformation mirrors the needed type of reconciliation in post-apartheid South Africa, where former white beneficiaries of apartheid must reckon with the economic and social legacies of that system. In this context, reconciliation cannot be abstract; it must be tangible.

Therefore, this narrative speaks directly to the pressing need for restitution in contemporary South Africa, particularly concerning land reform and broader economic redress. The Zacchaeus story challenges us to imagine what it would mean for those who have benefited from unjust systems to take responsibility through confession and reparative action.

Consequently, I argue that the pursuit of genuine reconciliation and societal healing in South Africa is inextricably linked to addressing the material injustices that have emerged from historical dispossession. Without this, reconciliation remains incomplete. My reading of Luke 19: 1–10 is thus both a theological and political act, an attempt to bring the liberative voice of Scripture into dialogue with the unfinished business of our democratic transition.

South Africa's enduring social justice deficit

The inaugural *Social Justice Summit and International Conference* report (Madonsela & Lourens 2019) brings into sharp focus a reality that I, like many South Africans, live with daily: the country's profound and persistent social justice deficit, a phenomenon deeply rooted in the enduring legacies of colonialism and apartheid, legacies that continue to shape our society in visible and invisible ways. The most striking manifestations of this imbalance are evident in the extreme inequality, widespread poverty and persistently high unemployment rates that define the socio-economic landscape of contemporary South Africa, which follows the contours of our historical injustices, especially those based on race and gender.

The report clarifies that pervasive inequality lies at the heart of this social justice deficit. South Africa has earned the grim title of 'the most unequal country in the world', a deeply entrenched condition, sustained by 'continuities from colonialism, apartheid, patriarchy, and other historical injustices', which remain insufficiently addressed and continue to uphold structural and systemic inequality (Madonsela & Lourens 2019:2). As someone who engages with these realities both academically and personally, I find this continuity not only troubling but also morally unacceptable.

Thuli Madonsela (Quoted in Madonsela & Lourens 2019: 17–18) powerfully underscores the growing racial polarisation that stems from these persistent structural inequalities, inequalities that are not only racial but also gendered and ableist. Her reflections resonate deeply with my observations of a fractured social landscape, where the promises of our democratic transition remain unfulfilled. Despite the progressive ideals enshrined in our Constitution, there has been a glaring 'failure to deliver on the constitutional promise of creating a society rooted in social justice and fundamental human rights' (Madonsela & Lourens 2019:17). Madonsela (in Madonsela & Lourens 2019:17) does not mince words when she identifies this failure to translate constitutional vision into lived reality as 'the greatest failure of the last 25 years', attributing it to the unaddressed 'continuities of apartheid, colonial, and patriarchal injustices'. In my work, I personally share this assessment. It is a sobering indictment of our collective journey and a call to action for those committed to justice.

The report also highlights how historical disadvantage continues to shape contemporary realities. It details how the apartheid regime deliberately fragmented the public sector into 11 separate systems of governance, resulting in intentionally unequal and underfunded public services in Bantustans and townships (Mthembu 2019:21–27; see Madonsela & Lourens 2019). Mthembu's assertion that 'it is no coincidence that these indicators [inequality, poverty, unemployment] remain persistent challenges in South Africa' reminds us that our present is inextricably linked to our past. His observation that 'wealth distribution in this country is still predominantly racialised' speaks to a truth that many of us experience daily, whether in the classroom, the workplace or the communities we serve.

The enduring impact of spatial apartheid is another critical obstacle to social justice. The report notes that 'apartheid city planning was expressly designed to ensure that black workers lived far from well-resourced white areas' and that

the consequences of this design 'are still very much present today' (Socio-Economic Rights Institute of South Africa 2016). As someone who has lived in and visited expansive black townships and leafy white suburbs, I can attest to the stark contrast. The townships, often surrounded by informal settlements and lacking basic amenities, starkly contrast with the well-resourced, green and secure historically white suburbs. This spatial inequity is not just a matter of geography, it perpetuates cycles of poverty and severely limits access to economic opportunities for those confined to poorly located areas.

These historical and structural factors have produced the socio-economic inequalities plaguing South Africa. The report explains how poverty and inequality disproportionately affect specific populations, with marked disparities in socio-economic opportunities based on race, gender and age. These disparities are not accidental; they are the result of unjust laws and policies that, during colonialism and apartheid, systematically privileged white individuals over black individuals (Madonsela & Lourens 2019). As a scholar and citizen, I find it imperative to name these injustices clearly and to work towards dismantling the systems that sustain them.

The report also draws attention to the ongoing inequalities in access to rights and freedoms for women, which are further compounded by intersecting factors such as disability, age, the urban-rural divide, disparities between townships and suburbs, nationality, sexual orientation and other forms of human diversity. These intersections have historically been exploited to marginalise and oppress individuals, and they continue to do so today. This layered oppression demands a nuanced and intersectional approach to justice that I strive to incorporate into my academic work and public engagement. This is framed within the broader context of South Africa's incomplete transition from apartheid.

Madonsela (in Madonsela and Lourens 2019:1-2) invokes Nelson Mandela's reflections on this 'unfinished transition from a racially oppressive, painful, and divided existence among its populace to a democratic society grounded in social justice and human rights', as envisioned in our Constitution. Mandela's words from 1994 remain hauntingly relevant. He reminded us that true freedom had not yet been achieved; instead, we had gained the opportunity to pursue it. He said freedom is not merely the act of breaking chains, it is the commitment to live in ways that respect and enhance the freedoms of others. Standing at the metaphorical mountaintop, his reflection was not one of triumph but of vigilance. He warned that the journey towards complete liberation was far from over (see Mandela 1994).

The report also critiques the limited scope of the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission* (see Motuku 2023:242–248). While it addressed physical abuses, it failed to adequately consider the social, economic and psychological effects of apartheid. As Madonsela (in Madonsela & Lourens 2-19:17) notes, many systemic repercussions of historical injustices remain unresolved. This omission has left a gaping wound in our national consciousness that continues to fester in the form of inequality, exclusion and despair.

In conclusion, the report highlights a significant social justice deficit intricately woven into South Africa's historical narrative. The enduring structures and consequences of colonialism and apartheid continue to shape our socio-economic realities. As someone who is both a product of and a witness to these realities, I believe that addressing them requires more than policy tweaks or rhetorical commitments. It demands comprehensive and systemic interventions, rooted in truth, justice and a deep commitment to transformation. We can only close the gap between our Constitution's promise and people's experiences through genuine reconciliation based on repentance and restitution.

Conclusion

The Gospel of Luke, renowned for its focus on marginalised communities and its radical economic principles, continues to be a vital resource for South African scholars committed to exploring the enduring impacts of oppression and the ongoing quest for social justice. Within this context, the theses of Welile Mazamisa (1987) and my own (Motuku 2023) represent significant contributions, even though they were developed in different eras. Our approaches and immediate socio-political concerns differ, shaped as they are by the shifting landscape of South Africa, from the height of apartheid to its complex and often painful aftermath. Yet, when examined together, our distinct yet complementary perspectives underscore a shared commitment to a Lukan interpretation that centres the experiences and voices of those historically oppressed and silenced in South Africa.

Mazamisa and I anchor our interpretations of Luke's Gospel in the urgent realities of our respective South African contexts. He addressed those marginalised by what he termed 'hermeneutical apartheid', drawing attention to the experiences of individuals affected by immediate violence and social exclusion, such as the man left half-dead in the parable. His dialectical method brings these overlooked perspectives into meaningful and transformative engagement with established interpretive traditions.

Similarly, I focus on the experiences of the economically dispossessed, those impacted by enduring imperial and colonial power structures, particularly regarding land and wealth. Through an imperial critical lens, I interpret the Zacchaeus narrative as a story of justice for those exploited by such systems. My interpretation suggests that a reconciled community cannot authentically emerge from a foundation of ongoing economic exploitation and historical dispossession.

Together, our work challenges disengaged, spiritualised readings of Luke's Gospel that ignore the tangible realities of suffering and injustice. Mazamisa critiques hermeneutical

approaches that were indifferent to the systemic violence of apartheid, while I challenge any notion of post-apartheid reconciliation that sidesteps the critical issue of economic justice. We advocate for a holistic vision of reconciliatory transformation as articulated in Luke's Gospel, one that encompasses both the relational and ethical dimensions Mazamisa highlighted and the structural and economic changes I have emphasised.

This approach transforms Lukan interpretation from a purely academic exercise into a pressing ethical imperative. It calls for concrete actions to alleviate suffering, dismantle oppressive structures and foster a more just and equitable community. Our divergent yet complementary approaches substantially enrich South African Lukan scholarship. We demonstrate Lukan ethics' dynamic and multifaceted application to contemporary socio-political challenges and underscore the necessity of a faithful interpretation of Luke's Gospel that responds meaningfully to the specific demands for justice articulated by marginalised communities.

Collectively, we advocate for a Lukan ethic that is both relationally transformative and structurally radical, one that promotes a 'beatific comradeship' reflected in economic justice and the equitable distribution of national resources. Ultimately, our scholarship reaffirms the enduring relevance of Luke's Gospel as a potent and provocative resource for South Africa's ongoing pursuit of holistic freedom.

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Author's contribution

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