

Dialogus cum Filio soli: Tracing and examining Takatso Mofokeng's footprints in Black Theology

**Author:**Mnyalaza T. Masuku¹ **Affiliation:**

¹Research Institute for Theology and Religion, College of Human Sciences, University of South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa

Corresponding author:

Mnyalaza Masuku,
masukumt@penta-net.co.za

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Takatso Mofokeng is a son of the soil and one of the fathers of Black Theology in South Africa. He is one of the towering figures who rub shoulders with the earliest generation of black theologians who had a lived experience of this theology soon after it arrived in South Africa from the USA in the early 1970s. He therefore wrote, spoke and breathed Black Theology throughout his academic journey and beyond. His contribution in this field is therefore momentous. Drawing on existing literature through a qualitative review method, this article therefore unearths and examines his contributions in the field of Black Theology in South Africa. The aim is to locate his legacy by tracing his footprints in Black Theology. The approach to be followed in the structure of this research will outline and examine his Black Theology location and assumptions, as well as unearthing and interrogating his legacy or footprints in the Black Theology of South Africa. Thereafter, the value of his Black Theology praxis in South African socio-political landscape will be reimagined with regard to the present and future implications. A conclusion would be drawn that Mofokeng has left a legacy in the field of Black Theology, which will have a lasting effect in shaping Black Theology debates going into the future.

Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications: The study traces and examines the Black Theology footprints of Takatso Mofokeng to locate his legacy regarding current and future implications for this theology. Although located in Church history, his legacy also has interdisciplinary implications for missiology, anthropology, history, and sociology.

Keywords: Mofokeng; footprints; Black Theology; cross-bearers; hermeneutics; South Africa; Black Christology.

Introduction

Takatso Mofokeng is a black Reformed Christian and trained minister in the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa. He is a scholar of Black Theology whose footprints have left a legacy that could not be ignored. His enormous contributions are grounded in the fact that he experienced the original version of Black Theology. He is further associated with the first generation of black theologians who experienced the arrival of this theology in South Africa (SA) in the early 1970s. Black Theology was well received in SA. However, the USA leads with the maximum number of black theologians. Reddie (2006:3) confirms it, 'If one were to identify ten black theologians in the world, approximately seven of them would be African Americans'. Mofokeng occupied a big space in South African Black Theology. He therefore read, wrote, talked and breathed Black Theology. He is among the first interlocutors of Black Theology who gave it a relevant tone. He is a towering black theologian whose influence was so prominent and had a rippling effect in shaping the current Black Theology and beyond. As Botha (2015:70) acknowledges, Mofokeng's Black Theology will have an impactful element for several years to come.

In unearthing the legacy of Mofokeng, the author will draw on existing literature through a qualitative review method. This research aims to unearth and examine his contributions in Black Theology to locate his legacy and reimagine its meaningfulness today and beyond. Afterwards, a conclusion will be reached, indicating that he has left footprints that will have a lasting impact on shaping future debates.

South African socio-political context through the lens of Mofokeng

Mofokeng (1991) correctly captured and summarised the dynamism of South African socio-political context as follows:

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The context in South Africa today can be defined in many different ways depending on one's colour or race, one's social class, one's gender as well as where one stands in relation to the struggle that is going on at this point in time. How that context is characterised also depends on the tools of analysis one uses. In the black townships, this context is popularly defined by many of those, especially the youth, who do not use any scientific tools of analysis, as the *struggle* against 'the system'. Many other people, including intellectuals, understand our context as that of the struggle against *racism*. (p. 64)

Exposure to the socio-political context of SA, as captured by Mofokeng, is important in understanding his footprints in Black Theology. He describes his context as that characterised by a state of emergency. He observes the intransigence and desperation of the apartheid regime with the large-scale, indiscriminate detention of the oppressed. Mofokeng observes 'the tear-gassing of people in churches and funeral services and the brutal shooting of unarmed school children ...' (1990b:37). He also observes the 1976 Soweto uprisings, which he describes as a watershed period in the modern history of the black liberation struggle (1989:43).

Furthermore, Mofokeng (1993:136) laments the breakdown of African family structure in rural settings, taxation on Africans and loss of land and other means of production that forced Africans to emigrate to urban settlements to sell labour. They became victims of racism, separate ghettos and shack villages. They were forced outside their cultural and religious milieu (p. 136). The new urban emigrants had to be Christianised by white missionaries, who taught them a theology that said the land belongs to God, while ironically, their land was conquered by the messengers of that very God (p. 136). He also highlights the Sharpeville massacre (p. 137). From the above, he reaches this conclusion that 'No consideration was given to the human rights of black people at that stage' (Mofokeng 1989:39). Mofokeng (1990a:173) further observes SA with the vicious racial-capitalist economic system resulting in Africans being the landless, exploited and politically and socially powerless working class.

Mofokeng introduces the theology of his time as one originating from Europe. It had been used to support colonialism since the 17th century. Mofokeng (1993) states:

The nature of Black Theology was determined by the fact that the Christian faith to which black people were later converted, arrived in South Africa as a bedfellow of the violent process of colonisation. (p. 133)

This theology went on to justify racist division and separation of Christians in both church and society (Mofokeng 1989:39).

From the above context, as seen through the lens of Mofokeng, he apparently observed SA at its peak of apartheid brutality. Apartheid elements such as large-scale indiscriminate detention, tear-gassing, shooting of unarmed school children, breakdown of family structures, loss of land, taxation of Africans, exploitation of Africans, etc. may potentially determine and shape the agenda of his Black Theology praxis.

Having outlined the context of Mofokeng's time as was observed by him, it is important in the following section to understand him through an analysis of his Black Theology location and assumption.

Mofokeng's Black Theology location and assumption

Mofokeng (1987a:84) introduces himself as a 'black theologian within the Reformed tradition'. Botha (2015:70) further introduces him as the father of a very creative black Christology. He adds that he is from the black Dutch Reformed Churches and studied in the Netherlands, a hub of Reformed Theology. He introduces him as an intersection of reformed and black Theologies (Botha 2015:76). Mofokeng (2018:2) further identifies himself as 'a Dutch Reformed Church pastor ... immersed in John Calvin's Reformed tradition'. Mofokeng (2018) is a friend of Itumeleng Mosala and presents it well as follows:

We embraced warmly and started to call each other *ngwana'mme* (literally; my mother's child) until today. My parents and his, my siblings and his ... knew that Mosala and I were brothers bound together by love and commitment. (p. 2)

They both taught at the University of Botswana at the same time. His teaching opportunity was created by Mosala in a 'controversial' way. Mofokeng (2018) explains the incident well as follows:

Up to this day, I do not know how it came about that I was appointed to teach with Mosala at the University of Botswana because I did not apply for a position there nor did I attend an interview. I assume that Mosala attended the interview on my behalf and performed excellently as only Mosala could do. (p. 3)

Botha (2015:70) further identifies Mofokeng as a member of the *Belydende Kring* (Confessing Circuit), a confessing movement from black Dutch Reformed Churches. The movement fought apartheid from church and society. Botha contends that Mofokeng lived in 'a very productive time in South Africa as far as theological responses and literature against apartheid were concerned' (2015:70).

Mofokeng's Black Theology weighs heavily on the black Christology of liberation. The question is what informed his creative construction of black Christology? In his construction, Mofokeng hermeneutically relates the story of Jesus in his suffering and crucifixion with that of the oppressed (Botha 2015:74). Jesus is portrayed as having chosen the side of the oppressed by being a victim Himself (p. 75). Mofokeng calls on the oppressed to imitate New Testament communities in the construction of their theologies shaped by their different contexts. He indicates how each community in the New Testament consulted the source of their faith. They interpreted the praxis and person of Christ in the light of their situations and questions from their contexts. They did this as they were responding to the socio-economic and ideological

challenges posed by their different contexts, which threatened their faith and praxis. Black Christians need to be truthful to the proven ecclesial legacy of the 1st century Christian communities of the New Testament. New theologies arose when those New Testament Christian communities took their different context seriously and responded to their burning socio-economic questions in the light of Jesus' ministry praxis (1987b:55–56).

Mofokeng's contributions in this field enjoyed acceptance both locally and internationally. This could be located from the number of scholars who researched and wrote about his views from both local and global platforms. Therefore, academic articles, books, dissertations and theses were authored based on his views. He is also extensively quoted across the globe.

It could therefore be concluded that Mofokeng is a black theologian who is informed by a Reformed tradition. He was a trained pastor of a reformed church, who studied in the Netherlands, the heart of John Calvin's Reformed tradition. His association with Mosala, a towering black theologian, could not be ignored. The weight of the black Christology of liberation in his Black Theology praxis stood high. His involvement in structures that combatted apartheid theology in his church is all observable in him. The above picture provided a glimpse of his mind, which could enable one to fully understand his Black Theology approach from his footprints.

Mofokeng's Black Theology location and assumption introduced him, thus paving the understanding of his footprints in Black Theology as traced in the following section. His mind has been outlined.

Mofokeng's footprints in Black Theology of South Africa

Mofokeng is a towering figure in Black Theology. His influence will remain for years as a guide to future generations of black theologians. His Black Theology praxis resulted in some footprints that enable one to locate the nature and size of his contributions. In this section, I am going to locate his footprints in Black Theology to understand his approach, construction and tone. His footprints have been categorised as follows in this section: ecclesiological position, socio-political stance, biblical thought, Christian praxis and agenda and positioning of Black Theology, as well as terminology choices and expressions.

Ecclesiological position

What is church to Mofokeng? He locates it within the liberative work of God. This interpretation could be deduced from Cone who described it as follows: 'The church is that people called into being by the power and love of God to share in his revolutionary activity for the liberation of man' (Mofokeng 2018:51). Mofokeng (1987b) understands the church as a business of the converts:

[T]o the saving praxis of Jesus the Messiah, acting as a community and as individuals who, infused with the power of the Holy Spirit and guided by Him, attempt to imitate Him or translate his liberative praxis into their saving praxis to affect the lives of their fellow men and transform the world around them making it a worthy reflection of the coming kingdom of God. (p. 55)

Therefore, the church cannot be neutral regarding the affairs of this world. In light of the *Kairos Document* and *The Road to Damascus*, the church should be the site of the struggle. According to Mofokeng (1990a) this is:

[T]he only testing ground of the church's credibility as a messenger of God's gift of justice and love to creation. Besides, as a sociological reality, the gospel space in which it can do its own work in isolation no longer exists, especially if mission is no longer done 'out there', on the periphery of the world, but internally. (pp. 177–178)

Mofokeng (1990a:178) thus proposes a new starting point for the church in its relation with the world. He acknowledges that the church traditionally started from its own secluded space in its mission to the world. At that time, churches were still full. He therefore argues for the reversal of this movement, thus calling on the remaining faithful to insert and locate themselves in the social world and move out from there. His understanding of his mission, which is expected to be defined from the inside and not from outside this secular social praxis, is helpful. This mission is to be performed by active participants within the historical project and is to throw light on the reading of scripture and suggest new contents of the mission (Mofokeng 1990a:178). Reddie (2006:4) supports this view. He sees the church as the site for the activation of Black Theology. He contends, 'The black church as the repository for affirming and nurturing the black impulse for freedom has been a key element in the development of black theology'.

What was Mofokeng's take on African Initiated Churches (AICs)? They are part of the African responses to Western theology. Mofokeng (1988) asserts:

The African Independent Churches emerged as churches of compromise in which elements of Christian tradition represented by the Bible and those in African traditional religion as conveyed by African oral tradition are synthesised. (p. 36)

The AICs are an announcement of black Christians' courage to read the Bible with their own eyes and interpret it as per the guidance of the spirit of wisdom. He commends them for laying the foundation of Black Theology. They are further commended as having bred a form of a theology of hope, which included the restoration of human dignity to the dispossessed (Mofokeng 1989:41). For him, they constituted a transitional form of Christianity as a resistance to missionary Christianity (Mofokeng 1993:135). He praised them as churches that emerged as a response to the emigration of Africans into the urban settings to address socio-religious issues in the new urban environment. In these new settlements, they were Christianised by white missionaries who taught them to love their neighbours, who happened to

be their oppressors. According to him, AICs were a means for spiritual survival and a constant search for sanity in an insane racist society to create a new religious universe. He further maintains, 'They were the masters and mistresses of their own religious destiny in a period of transition from the rural tribal context to the modern industrial society' (Mofokeng 1993:136). They are the early reaction of black people to 'an imposed theology and spirituality of the colonial churches' (Mofokeng 1993:137), which marked the early development of modern Black Theology as it seriously emanated during the second half of the 20th century.

Socio-political stance

Mofokeng warned against the adoption by the African governments and associated ruling elites of the oppressive character of colonial powers. In support of this view, he laments the scenario wherein the new black elites even inherited the name of their colonial masters, such as *bwana* (boss). In the process, because of their political and economic comfort, they inherited the 'ideas and interests as well as thought patterns of the expelled *bwanas*' (Mofokeng 1992:1). He further indicated that these leaders were in a better position to choose good models for economic, political, social and religious systems or arrangements, but they chose those that continued to oppress the poor black masses. Pursuing destructive economic and political systems, they laid the ground (Mofokeng 1992):

[F]or the present reality of political oppression of the working people, defenceless genders and powerless races. Firm ground was laid for the national impoverishment by the rich nations of the world and economic exploitation of the workers by the national petit bourgeoisie in our countries. (p. 2)

Mofokeng also shared his theology of land. He acknowledges that the land is for the black people (Mofokeng 1988:34). Mofokeng (1987c) states:

Black people have been dispossessed of their land, which is the basic means of all production and subsistence as well as a source of power. They have been turned into dispossessed workers whose only possession is their labour power. (p. 24)

Mofokeng (1988) also highlights the old anecdote of colonialism and the land dispossession in Africa:

When the white man came to our country, he had the Bible and we had the land. The white man said to us, 'let us pray'. After the prayer, the white man had the land and we had the Bible. (p. 34)

He understands that land was taken away by force from Africans. He regards African land as materially rich with the minerals that Africans extracted 'through blood, sweat, and tears' (Mofokeng 1993:137) to which they (Africans) were excluded. He sees Black Theology as the necessary tool in the quest for recovery of the land and other related inequalities (1993:134). The importance of land in Mofokeng's mind could further be seen when he acknowledged the line of difference developing among black theologians on class interests, colouring their view of a just and humane society. He draws a line of difference

between those who accepted the liberal democratic ideal, while others rejected the ideal in favour of a social one based on African humanitarianism. Despite this division, he argues that they both agree that the land must be returned to the disinherited African people as a prerequisite for reconciliation among themselves and then their white fellow Christians (Mofokeng 1993:142). Mofokeng (1990) identifies the oppressed with land, for instance:

Blacks constitute the landless, exploited, politically and socially powerless working class of our land. They too are waging, for centuries already, a relentless struggle for land, and for social and state power. (p. 173)

Land forms a strong base for resistance against colonialism. Hence, Mofokeng states, 'Religious resistance could not last long because it was soon deprived of its material basis of resistance when Africans lost their land, cattle, sheep and goats' (1993:135).

Mofokeng also highlighted the concept of organic intellectuals in Black Theology. He called on black theologians to become organic intellectuals (1992:3). He calls them 'organic theologians of the oppressed' (Mofokeng 1990:175,177) and argues (Mofokeng 1992):

[O]ur location inside the organised struggle of all victims of our societies should develop and strengthen our emotional sensitivities and intellectual awareness of the religious text of the victims and their preferred uses and interpretations and not ours. (p. 3)

He urges theologians to be 'in the company of the victims of society' (p. 3). The benefit here is the ability to hear the choices of their biblical texts and to observe their reaction to texts that hurt and humiliate them. In this position, theologians will be able to detect texts prone to abusive interpretation (p. 3). Mofokeng (1993:134) believes that the organic theologians qualify to reflect on the concrete situation and particular events that produced theological questions during each historical phase. Reddie (2016) supports him as he argued that being organic:

[S]eeks to displace notions of theology being 'distant' and unresponsive to the needs of ordinary people in this world and is less concerned with the metaphysical speculations about salvation in the next. (p. 17)

Van Wyngaard (2023:13) also supports this view when he underlines the relationship between the intellectuals and the oppressed by foregrounding the slogan: 'We the people ...!' (2023:13). Having said this, he acknowledges that every class has the potential to produce its own organic intellectuals. Moore (1992:2) also defines Black Theology along these lines: 'Black Theology implies its organic connection with the liberation struggle of South Africa'. Moore continues to critique some black theologians who conduct liberation struggles from libraries, and that they listen to each other rather than to the heartbeat of the struggling masses (Mofokeng 1992:10). Cone's (2018) support is clear from his statement:

Where Christ is, there is the Church. Christ is to be found as always where men are enslaved and trampled underfoot. Christ is found suffering with the suffering. Christ is in the ghetto there also is his church. (p. 53)

Cone believes that the church's task is twofold: preaching the Word of liberation and joining Christ in his work of liberation. Küster (2023) supports Mofokeng:

Even though my witnesses, like the men of the first generation, have enjoyed a Western academic education and belonged to a cosmopolitan theological elite, they are nevertheless at the same time organic intellectuals who are interconnected with the work of church women and with the women's movement of their countries. (p. 155)

Mofokeng also reflected on gender. He cried that black theologians did 'not address it and for this gross neglect black theologians have to hang their heads in shame and ask for God's forgiveness and that of our mothers and sisters' (Mofokeng 1987c:25). He calls for recognition for black women for the role they played in the struggle for freedom. He acknowledges that they too suffered. Mofokeng (1987c) advocated for gender equality and asserted it thus:

Black women who have tasted equality in the battle, in suffering and in victory are not prepared to return to their former status in the community and at home after combat or when the struggle is over. (p. 25)

Mofokeng notes that black women constitute the majority in churches and that their material support to the survival of the church is enormous. He laments the fact that women are objects of a power structure and theology created and monitored by men. He notes that though women are in the majority in churches, they are not allowed to exercise power.

Mofokeng (1991:67) also reflects on the ethics of human value as related to the market. He contends that we live in a market society in which humans are commodified. He holds that commodification is linked to the dimensions of human lives. This phenomenon touches on our being, thought patterns, social attitudes and attitudes towards material things, speeches and values. In this instance, 'human beings are valued in terms of their usefulness financially, academically, politically, etc.'. To increase their power, they form alliances against each other. He thus presents the example of this adoption of human modes of social behaviour as follows: 'Gold in South Africa, for example, is known to sometimes team up with gold in the Soviet Union in spite of political tension among politicians in the two areas of the world. They declare war against other commodities in their struggle for domination of a particular market, for example, electricity against coal and synthetic materials against natural materials' (Mofokeng 1991:67). The market society also presents us a language, for instance, in which the value of humans is attached to terminologies used to value them accordingly, such as male, female, black people and white people and their relationship with nature as humans. In this market society, humans are important only if one can benefit from

them. Their existence is attached to value. This commodification distorts the meaning of being human. In this, sexuality is also turned into prostitution, in which affection has to be maintained financially. For instance, a man who does not have money is not attractive and is valueless. Mofokeng (1991:69) thus advises that the correct principle is that 'human beings are valuable beings simply because they are human, have been removed from the centre of thought and action. The same applies to nature'. Commodification of humans is foreign to the message of Jesus Christ. Mofokeng thus maintains that humans are valuable based on their humanity (Mofokeng 1991:69). His positive theological anthropology that emphasises the centrality of the *imago Dei* for all humanity is foregrounded at this point (Mofokeng 1989:44). According to Africa, for Mofokeng, this means 'self-understanding of the black community' (Africa 2024:30).

Mofokeng also reflects on what he called an epistemological explosion and rupture that emerged as a response to apartheid (1989:42). He credits black theologians for announcing an epistemological rupture with dominant Euro-American theologies (Mofokeng 1990a:176). Among the epistemological explosions, he identified the Alliance of Black Reformed Christians in South Africa, which in 1981 declared apartheid a heresy through a new definition of heresy articulated by Allan Boesak. This concept was defined as a situation in which the Word of God is used as a divisive means to separate human beings from each other and God. It means the use of the Word of God for some interests that are opposed to God's love and communion with Christ (Mofokeng 1989:41). The South African Council of Churches adopted this declaration in 1982. This event was followed by the birth of the *Belhar Confession of Faith* in the *N.G. Sendingkerk* (Dutch Reformed Mission Church) in 1986, committing the church against racism. *The Kairos Document* also appeared in 1985, hitting hard on apartheid theology. On socio-political context, the 1976 Soweto uprising formed another weapon in the fight against apartheid. The church had to react both politically and theologically (Mofokeng 1989:43). Another onslaught on apartheid was the emergence and rapid growth of trade unions among the black workers, the majority of whom were devout Christians. The church, through all this, was forced to ask theological questions (Mofokeng 1989:44).

Biblical thought

Mofokeng wrestled with the dialectical realities posed by the Bible. He foregrounded the paradoxical nature of the Bible. It accommodates both good and bad in creative tension for the black South Africans. The paradox of the Bible as a problem and a solution are highlighted especially in SA where 'the overwhelming number of people from both races are Christians who swear on the Bible and pledge allegiance to Jesus the Messiah and his teachings' (Mofokeng 1988:36). He further states:

We have to admit that the Bible which was a great problem as well as blessings to millions of our ancestors for two or more centuries, still constitutes a problem and blessing to millions of our contemporary African people. (p. 36)

He highlights the anecdote of the Bible and the dispossession of land by the colonisers wherein they requested blacks to close their eyes and pray after which they found themselves holding the Bible and their land taken away. In this instance, the role of the Bible in the colonisation project, the paradox of blacks accepting the religion contained in the Bible which they found to be a powerful tool in their fight against oppression (1988:34) constitutes these dialectical realities of the Bible.

Mofokeng also reflected on biblical hermeneutics. He maintains that some texts support oppression and some support liberation, including the oppression of women. He advises that there is no unity of the Bible, and that it could not be assumed to be a book of liberation per se, as some 'identified their texts and used them to the exclusion of others' (Mofokeng 1988:38). Such texts lend themselves only to oppressive interpretation and oppressive usage that no amount of hermeneutics can change. Yet, there are hopeful stories that enable the oppressed to (Mofokeng 1988):

[R]esist dehumanisation and the destruction of their faith in God the liberator. It is this noble Black Christian history that helps to bring out the other side of the Bible, namely, the nature of the Bible as a book of hope for the downtrodden. (p. 38)

Black Theology works from the liberative aspect of the Bible as a book of hope for the oppressed. In this case, hermeneutics is linked to the context in which there is an interaction with the Bible text. Mofokeng (1993) further indicates that:

[T]he nature of Black Theology was determined by the fact that the Christian faith to which black people were later converted, arrived in South Africa as a bedfellow of the violent process of colonialism. (p. 133)

Christian praxis

Mofokeng identifies two different forms of Christianity that emerged as a response to white theology, that is, black colonial Christianity and African independent Christianity, which were related to the social conditions (Mofokeng 1993:137). The divisions of the black pastors along these lines were also visible in their approach to their ministry to the oppressed. For instance, Mofokeng identified a black pastor from one of the liberal white churches who was asked to leave the funeral he was conducting for the victims of the Sharpeville massacre when he preached from the book of Job, touching on the part that said, 'God has given, and God has taken'. He was told that if he did not know who took it, he had to ask the white police (p. 137). This situation also ushered in a period in the struggle for theological creativity among black theologians. Black theologians, according to Mofokeng (p. 138), 'were committed to a radical discipleship in service of the black church and black people in general'.

Mofokeng (1987c:21) also underlines the suffering of the oppressed and relates it to Christ's *stigmata* of the cross. This doctrine is understood by Africa to function as the

motif for an identity that creates a sense of identification between Jesus Christ's experience and that of the oppressed. In further interpreting Mofokeng's mind, Africa contends that it has a function of empowering the faith of the oppressed in their quest for justice. The question of theological anthropology is also linked to these hermeneutics of Mofokeng's Christology (Africa 2024:30). Ullrich (2021:62) takes this debate further as he sees Mofokeng calling for the hermeneutic of identification. This hangs on two pillars: one element of this identification being on Jesus' suffering and another on that of the cross-bearers. He further argues that the relevant paradigm for a liberating black Christology is grounded on two poles, one identifying Jesus and another identifying the black Christians. Mofokeng foregrounds the doctrine of *Christus praesens*. Christ's presence in today's oppressive challenges is centralised. The suffering of Jesus mirrors that of the oppressed. The Good Friday event comes to mind, wherein the oppressed suffer an extended Good Friday for the rest of their lives. According to him, 'the capture, torture, humiliation and crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth' (Mofokeng 1989:47) relate to the oppressed. The oppressed suffered racism, capitalism and settler colonialism (Mofokeng 1991:64–65). Additionally, the suffering involves indiscriminate detention of black leaders and activists, the tear-gassing of people in churches and funeral services, the brutal shootings of unarmed school children, the forced retreat and lower level of resistance because of increasing repression and harassment. Masuku (2024:2) refers to the 'wrath of unspeakable torture' from the powers given to the police. The suffering of Christ also brings comfort to the oppressed (Mofokeng 1987c:21). His emphasis on the doctrine of the *Christus praesens* comes to the fore. This connection and reciprocal affectivity of the two realities of suffering and dying are affirmed very strongly, especially in Black Theology circles (Mofokeng 1989:47). The fact that black churches are packed with people during Good Friday also indicates how the story of this period relates to them, especially on capture, torture, humiliation and crucifixion as cross-bearers themselves. That is why Mofokeng could say, 'The crosses of the oppressed people cannot but remind us of the cross of Jesus at Calvary' (Mofokeng 1989:46). In this situation, Black Theology kicks in. In the words of Reddie (2016), the incident seeks to:

[S]peak to the realities of Black suffering. It has been the attempt by oppressed Black people to utilise a contextualised re-interpretation of Christianity in order to make sense of their dialectical, existential struggle. (p. 17)

Boesak (in Küster 2023) adds to this argument when he reasons that:

For blacks, Jesus Christ is the Messiah who is present in the suffering of the poor and oppressed blacks of North America and South Africa, and who restores to them their own dignity before God. (p. 130)

The reality of the historic Jesus is thus linked with the reality of his presence in the world today; he suffered like them.

The agenda and positioning of Black Theology

Mofokeng reflected on the agenda of Black Theology. He agrees with Motlhabi (2005; Masuku 2024:3) in recognising that racism was the initial agenda but acknowledges that it needs to expand to embrace other social ills. Mofokeng (1987c) states:

Black theologians recognised that racism is not the sole problem facing blacks and that capitalism posed a serious problem and that it has to be addressed theologically, combated socially as well as politically and eradicated simultaneously with racism. (p. 24)

Reddie (2016) emphasises the same point when he clarified the agenda:

The struggle is one between the contemporary realities of racism and the general, unremitting poverty that afflicts millions of black people the world over, and the faith-based promises of eternity, in which they will be free. (p. 17)

How does Mofokeng view the future of Black Theology? Cone (2018) provides guidelines that align with Mofokeng's view when he advises that though the battle over racism has been won, the war could not be over yet. Cone (2018) further compares this continuity situation with the war in Europe, which continued for months after it was 'won' at Stalingrad and El Alamein. Supporting this view, Mofokeng (1993) maintains that the future of Black Theology is determined by its reflection on a praxis of liberation. He sees the future development of Black Theology as something that cannot be divorced from its current nature. It is understood as a theology of struggle, whose agenda is to reflect on the conditions affecting the lives of black people and their subjective responses from their position as black Christians. Already in 1993, in his projection when judging by the attitude of the apartheid government to the black people, he did not see any radical change to the material conditions of black people. He projects that it will take time for black people to be liberated. In his own words, Mofokeng (1993) asserts:

[S]ince liberation will not come soon, then it goes without saying that the struggle for recovery of our land, equitable distribution of economic and political power as well as social equality will continue and necessitate the polemical, critical and projective (prophetic) functions of Black Theology to be continued for a long time. In that response, Black Theology will be continuing what it is presently doing and learning from its successes and weaknesses. (p. 134)

Mofokeng (1987c) further advises:

While standing firmly in the present, we have to re-examine the past to fashion a better and more crisp and sharp theological language that can cut open the door to a future of liberation for black people of South Africa. (p. 22)

Mofokeng (1987c:22) also outlines the relationship between Black Theology and Black Consciousness. He viewed Black Theology as a theological articulation of Black Consciousness within the religious realm. With Black Consciousness in

mind, Black Theology played an important role in conscientisation. He states, 'It continues to play an important role in the ideological formation of the black political agents'. Mofokeng (1993:138) contends that the emergence of Black Consciousness movement brought Black Theology to the crossroads. Christianity was criticised by Steve Biko and other black communities, including the youth who called for decolonisation to be accompanied by dechristianisation. Black Consciousness challenged the Christian faith not to do business as usual. Through Black Consciousness, Western theology was challenged. Black Christians, in response to this challenge, had to (Mofokeng 1993):

[C]reate a new theology that was destined to perform a crucial function of delegitimization of white theology that had blessed the guns and the soldiers of the racist state and the industrial machine of capitalism. (p. 139)

Black theologians began formulating responses to question the meaning of being made in the image of God and dealing with the alienating effects of industrial capitalism that produced a politicised labour movement. Mofokeng (1989:44) also highlights the theological anthropology that injected positivity among the oppressed in the 1970s and early 1980s. The message that the blacks were created in the image of God affirmed their humanity. The injected attitude of self-love and self-respect demanded that they change their socio-political and economic situations accordingly.

Mofokeng (1990a:174) also reflects on contextual theology that Motlhabi (2005) admits that Black Theology viewed it with suspicion. Mofokeng joins Mosala in critiquing it based on three grounds: firstly, that it promotes political neutrality in a class and racist environment. The oppressors and the oppressed are made comrades in executing this theology. The deepest concerns of the powerless are ignored. Secondly, it is normally assumed that all theology is contextual; the distinguishing factor of a relevant contextual theology is its engagement with the socio-political context and the interests it advocates, taking into cognisance the context of the victims of society, standing on their side and elevating their dreams. Thirdly, it is the ability to read the signs of the times accurately. What is important here is that the *timing* or *historical consciousness* enables one to determine theological themes and their prioritisation. Contextual theology within the space of Black Theology has a strong liberative element as it takes the oppressive socio-political context seriously. That is why Reddie (2006:7) could proudly identify himself as a contextual theologian, even referring to black theologians as contextual theologians.

Terminology choices and expressions

Mofokeng popularised various terminologies with reference to the victims of oppression. His leading terminology is 'the cross-bearers', which became popular when addressing the issue of theological anthropology (Mofokeng 1989:44). He further refers to them in various other areas in his interlocution of Black Theology (Botha 2015; Mofokeng 1990a:179). Other terminologies he employs are 'powerless,

dispossessed and chained' (Mofokeng 1990a:169), 'the poor and politically weak' (Mofokeng 1990a:169), 'the subordinated industrial workers' (Mofokeng 1990a:171), 'African workers and peasants' (Mofokeng 1990a:172), 'African people' (Mofokeng 1990a:172), 'downtrodden of Africa' (Mofokeng 1990a:172), the 'marginalised and dispossessed people of the continent' (Mofokeng 1990a:172), 'the landless, exploited, politically and socially powerless working class of our land' (Mofokeng 1990a:173), 'black working class' (Mofokeng 1990a:173), 'comrades' (Mofokeng 1990a:174), 'the nobodies of this world' (Mofokeng 1990a:179), 'those who have suffered seriously' (Mofokeng 1990a:179), 'the working people, defenceless genders and powerless races' (Mofokeng 1992:2), 'victims of society', 'submissive objects of the actions of the powerful' (Mofokeng 1990a:179), the 'poor, the weak and the despised' (Mofokeng 1987b:57), the 'oppressed blacks, downtrodden genders, exploited and impoverished workers and peasants in Africa' (Mofokeng 1992:3), the 'defeated and dispossessed people' (Mofokeng 1993:133), 'our people' (Mofokeng 1993:136,139), 'struggling black masses' (Mofokeng 1993:141), 'toiling industrial masses of black people' (Mofokeng 1993:141), 'people who were no people' (Mofokeng 1987:58), those 'who were struggling to be human' (Mofokeng 1987:58), those 'who assert themselves to gain recognition and affirmation of their humanity' (Mofokeng 1987b:58), those 'at the lowest stratum of society' (Mofokeng 1987b:58) and the 'underdogs in society' (Mofokeng 1987b:57). At times, he also referred to black theologians as organic theologians of the oppressed (1990a:175).

Which terminologies did Mofokeng popularise with reference to the oppressors? Among his preferred terminologies are the following (Mofokeng 1992:6-10; 1990a:169-179; 1993:141): 'bourgeois society', 'western capitalist societies', 'opposing forces', 'the powerful in society', 'the rich and the powerful', the 'ruling classes', 'South African rulers', 'the powerful, the rich and the free', 'the land owners', 'the perpetrators of social discrimination', the 'somebodies' and 'enemies of black humanity'.

Was Mofokeng a sexist in terms of the language he employed? A sexist language could be detected in his Black Theology. For instance, referring to the transformation of society he states, 'the birth of a new man and a new world' (Mofokeng 1987b:55-57). He refers God who 'became the poor man Jesus (incarnation) as his historical act of solidarity with man who was lost and involved in self-destruction by destroying his fellow man'. He refers to Christ's suffering and death as 'his ultimate actions aimed at converting man to God his creator [...]'. He reflects on 'God in whose image this communal man is the Creator who has created man to become a co-creator' (Mofokeng 1987b:60). He acknowledges his audience: 'brothers, sisters, comrades, and friends' (Mofokeng 1990a:175). He refers to Christ's 'discipleship that aims at creating a new man who responds to God and his fellow man and transforms the world to make it a home for his creatures [...]' (Mofokeng 1987b:57). Other black theologians like Cone also echoed sexist language, for instance, 'When that man is

black and' or 'Though the Christian doctrine of God must logically precede the doctrine of man [...]' (Cone 2018:78). Cone's (2018) description of God's relation with the world has sexist language:

Mythically the interrelation of God, man, and the world is presented in the Genesis picture of the man and the woman in the garden. Man was created to share in God's creative activity in the world. (p. 51)

The sexist language in Mofokeng is also acknowledged by Petersen (2022:13-14). Petersen quotes him among other sexist reference where he identifies God as 'God-man', 'God became man', 'God's action for the suffering and fallen man', 'God's intention in history was the creation of a new man'. Petersen goes further in being influenced by Mofokeng where reference is made to 'Jesus as a true man'.

Mofokeng highlighted different names for black theologians. At times he calls them, 'Third World Theologians' (Mofokeng 1992:2-7). He additionally calls them 'cultural theological workers', 'priests and theologians'. At some point, he also borrows from Karl Marx who called them, 'religious police of the church'. He goes on to call them as follows: 'organic cultural-religious workers', 'trained cultural workers', 'theologically initiated', 'committed theologians', and 'African theologians'. He seems to limit the term Black Theology to refer to an African contextual version, especially SA, because beyond the limits of the African continent, he adds Latin American Liberation Theologians and Asian Liberation Theologians on the list.

How strong was the element of radicalism in Mofokeng's approach? His expressions and the language he employed become useful analytical tools for judgement in this regard. Mofokeng (1990a) defines a relevant theology as that which:

[S]hould seriously attempt to read the historical text written on their scarred and bruised bodies and souls, on their disrupted social structures and relations, and derive leading questions from the heart of that involvement. (p. 172)

The social location of the oppressed is defined as 'the struggle for economic justice, social equality, cultural freedom, and state power that is being waged in most African societies by the marginalised and dispossessed people of the continent' (Mofokeng 1990a:172)

Mofokeng pictures SA as being 'characterised by a vicious racial-capitalist economic system in which predominantly African people [...] constitute the landless, exploited [...]' (p. 173). Referring to the struggle of the oppressed, he echoed, 'They employ all material, religious, and ideological resources at their disposal' (p. 173). He says that the SA mission theology should 'become a mission theology of liberation' (p. 173). He interprets the youth uprising of 1976 as 'a watershed of South African political, economic and religious history'. It marks 'the beginning of a frantic search for new ways of distributing material prosperity and political power' (Mofokeng 1987a:85). He asserts that Africans 'continued to endure many forms of harassment and discrimination by the

white state until the present era' (Mofokeng 1993:136–137). With reference to the impact of the Sharpeville massacre in changing the attitudes of black adherents of colonial Christianity, Mofokeng (1987a) refers to this situation as one which:

was terminated by the tragic events of Sharpeville when the hatred that white Christians harboured against fellow black Christians boiled over and resulted in the killing of 69 unarmed Africans who were protesting the dehumanising practice of carrying the passbook as a badge of black inferiority. (p. 137)

Where do these views place him on whether he was radical? However, a generic reflection on his utterances carries more moderation than radicalism does.

The above 21 areas of Mofokeng's Black Theology footprints qualify him as the doyen of Black Theology. The categorisation of his thoughts into six streams, that is, ecclesiological position, socio-political stance, biblical thought, Christian praxis, the agenda and positioning of Black Theology and terminology choices, and expressions present a concise picture of his mind. His views on different themes have been located and examined. This activity paved the way for an analysis of the value of his footprints today and beyond in the following section.

Reimagining Mofokeng's Black Theology today and tomorrow

Mofokeng's Black Theology footprints are helpful in addressing the current and future socio-political challenges theologically. For instance, his view on the mission of the church in SA, where the church is blamed for silence amidst injustices, is helpful. His argument that the church cannot be neutral in the face of injustice is important (Mofokeng 1990a:177–178). Mofokeng's positive view towards the AICs is helpful for ecumenism (1993:137). The above three areas of footprints, as contended by Mofokeng, will not only be important today but also going into the future. The call for the church to always be prophetic against injustice, to avoid neutrality and to embrace cooperation with the AICs will remain important towards the future.

Mofokeng's (1993:134) call to widen the agenda for Black Theology to embrace other aspects of injustices is significant to cover the different contexts. His argument that Black Theology should focus beyond racism is important in an unjust world (Mofokeng 1987c:24–25). For instance, his theology of land is necessary in oppressed communities for them to reclaim their lands. He believes that Black Theology is necessary for the recovery of land. The same goes for his support for gender equality. He urges black theologians to address gender issues. He acknowledges the role of women in churches. It is, however, interesting to note that while Mofokeng is active on gender issues, especially on women's equality, he employs sexist language in his Black Theology praxis.

Apart from the initial focus on racism, other social ills such as corruption, poverty, lack of service delivery, crime, etc. will need the attention of Black Theology going into the future, as well as beyond the borders of SA.

Mofokeng's take on biblical hermeneutics that springs from the liberative aspect is necessary not only today but also going into the future. The challenging contexts and the dialectical nature of the Bible in addressing them will remain part of human existence going into the future. This impact is seen when he warns of the texts that support oppression and those supporting liberation, no matter how one tries to interpret them. Yet, there are hopeful stories in the Bible, which bring hope to the oppressed (Mofokeng 1988:36, 38). Black Theology thus works on the liberative aspect of the Bible. That is why he outlined its dialectical realities and paradoxical nature as an intersection of problems and solutions, that is, the spiritual home for both the oppressor and the oppressed.

Mofokeng shed light in several contexts. The doctrine of *Christus praesens* in suffering of the oppressed brings comfort to them as they share in the *stigmata* of the cross (Mofokeng 1987:21). Apparently, this view ended with the victims of oppression before the dawn of democracy in 1994. Voices in support of this view could not be heard among the victims of oppression post-1994. Once more, it is interesting that Mofokeng seems to emphasise the meaning of Christ's *stigmata* of the cross in relation to the oppressed over the meaning of resurrection to them. He calls upon black theologians to be organic intellectuals and insert themselves into the situations of the oppressed. This gesture is important as some black theologians limit themselves to their offices, away from communities (Mofokeng 1992:3). For Black theologians to be relevant in communities they serve, it is therefore necessary that they be organic intellectuals. Mofokeng (1991:67) further highlights the human value linked to market value. Humans are valued by their usefulness. He argues that this fact is contrary to Christian principles, which emphasise that human beings are to be valued based merely on their humanity. The theological anthropology of Mofokeng (1989:44) kicks in here. This concept is important in the post-apartheid context in which the oppressed suffered an inferiority complex and self-hate. The future of Black Theology is guaranteed with Mofokeng as he holds that its future is determined by its reflection on a praxis of liberation (1993).

Conclusion

The author has succeeded in tracing no fewer than 21 Black Theology footprints of Mofokeng. These footprints were categorised into six streams as ecclesiological position, socio-political stance, biblical thought, Christian praxis, the agenda and positioning of Black Theology, as well as terminology choices and expressions. They could all be regarded as guidelines he provided for Black Theology praxis today and tomorrow, in SA and beyond. The 21 footprints discussed are as follows: the meaning

and role of the church, the position of AICs, his theology of land, the future of Black Theology, role of organic intellectuals, gender, meaning of suffering, human value, sexist language, relationship between Black Theology and Black Consciousness, dialectical realities of the Bible and Christianity, agenda for Black Theology, contextual theology, terminologies for the oppressed, terminologies for oppressors, radicalism, different names for black theologians, two forms of Christianity identified by him and the issue of the oppressed adopting oppressors' attitudes.

Mofokeng's footprints form a great package, which becomes a useful tool in Black Theology today as well as in future contexts, in SA and beyond. The identified themes he reflected on acquired new meaning as sharpened by his mind through his wealth of experience. It could therefore be concluded that Mofokeng left a legacy in the field of Black Theology, which will have a lasting effect in shaping Black Theology debates going into the future, in SA and beyond.

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Author's contribution

Mnyalaza T. Masuku is the sole author of this research article. The author confirms that this work is entirely their own, has reviewed the article, approved the final version for submission and publication, and takes full responsibility for the integrity of its findings.

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