

MALCOLM X'S THE BALLOT OR THE BULLET SPEECH? ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR BLACK LIBERATION THEOLOGY IN PRESENT DAY SOUTH AFRICA

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Abstract

This article attempts to bring one of the greatest speeches of Malcolm X back to life in a political year in South Africa. Recounting the influences that Malcolm X had on Black Liberation Theology in South Africa, it moves from an inward looking critical theology to one that identifies with the most vulnerable in society. It criticises both the political and economic hegemonies that perpetuate a neo-apartheid in democratic South Africa today. It takes a swipe at party politics which creates propaganda and has no interest of the masses at heart. In the end it asks what Malcolm X would have said about the current South African socio-economic context. It realises that black people are ganged up by both structural apartheid residues as well as pure selfish interests of the current political rulers.

Keywords: *Black Liberation Theology; Violence; Politics; Malcolm X; South Africa.*

Resumo

Este artigo procura trazer de volta um dos maiores discursos de Malcolm X em pleno ano político na África do Sul. Recontando as influências que Malcolm X teve sobre a Teologia Negra da Libertação na África do Sul, se move de uma teologia crítica virada para dentro para uma que se identifica com os mais vulneráveis na sociedade. Critica as hegemonias tanto política quanto econômica que perpetuam um neo-apartheid na África do Sul democrática hoje. Dá uma indireta às políticas partidárias que criam propaganda e não mantêm o mínimo interesse nas massas em questão. No final, pergunta o que Malcolm X teria dito sobre o contexto sócio-econômico sul-africano na contemporaneidade. Entende que as pessoas negras são incitadas tanto pelos resíduos do apartheid estrutural, quanto pelos interesses puramente egoístas dos atuais governantes.

Palavras-chave: Teologia Negra da Libertação; violência; política; Malcolm X; África do Sul.

Introduction

This article is an attempt to bring a speech made in the 1960s by Malcolm X into a critical conversation with the present South African context. Recognizing Malcolm X's critique of white racism and his relentless call for the unity of Black people against the dictates of white capitalist hegemonies, this essay will argue that the speech in question is of particular relevance to the current socio economic and

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political challenges faced by the majority of black people in South Africa. More importantly, it challenges a Black Liberation Theology that is inward looking. A Black Liberation Theology that is inward looking is one which is not able to assess the current socio-economic, cultural and political conditions and to speak meaningfully to such a context. This paper is of the view that Malcolm X's metamorphosis allowed him the opportunity to pause from time to time and to assess the socio-economic and political contexts in which he found himself in.

If Black Liberation Theology is to claim its contextual relevance in present day South Africa it must do two things this article will argue. First and foremost, it must continue to assert its guerrilla nature. This is to say it must never lose sight of structural racism which in essence justified its existence as a means towards understanding why God created differences. Secondly, a Black Liberation Theology that is not inward looking is one that is able to make the needed assessments in present day South Africa. This suggests that self criticism must be encouraged in order for it to assert its contemporary relevance. This means engaging critically with the current hegemonies be they political or economic.

This is how I propose we engage this subject. First, this article will deal with the history and impact of Black Liberation Theology in South Africa. This is done in order to call to task the perception that talk about race is irrelevant and outdated 18 years into our democracy. I realise that Malcolm X, albeit played down in Black Liberation Theological reflection, had indeed contributed extensively towards this theological enterprise both in the USA and in South Africa. Having done this, this paper then moves on to deal with the speech in question. It is the view of this paper that this speech is pertinent to the current political year in which one sees politicians again in the neglected communities.

The paper then engages the future of Black Liberation Theology. This is done in a context where many are claiming there is no need to speak about black and white in the present rainbow context. In debunking this view, the paper draws a little on the classical work of Michelle Alexander who argues against the colour-blindness rhetoric which has percolated all racialised communities.¹ In the end we ask how Malcolm X would have responded to the current South African year of politics.

¹ Cf. M. Alexander. *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the age of colour-blindness*. The New Press Publishers. New York. 2012. Malcolm X is blunter with this colour-blindness theory. In his

The history and Impact of Black Liberation Theology in South Africa

In a speech given at the Cory Methodist Church in Cleveland, Ohio on the 3rd of April 1964 titled, the ballot or the bullet, Malcolm X takes care to speak of a new generation of blacks who have come of age and refuses to be told what the realities which they inhabit are. In a radical way, he declares that the perpetual *infantilization* of the African has to be brought to a halt. This is a speech that has been ignored greatly by intellectuals across the globe, yet has significant lessons especially for democratic South Africa today. Heavy as this might sound to some; Malcolm X asserts that there is still time for blacks to become self critically of themselves and their contexts with the intention of uniting against the hegemonies that gang up on black people in particular.

It is commonly held that Black Liberation Theology drew its resources from diverse realities. Black Liberation Theology emerged in South Africa during the late 1960s. As a project, it was inspired by the Civil Rights movement in the USA, the prophetic voice of Martin Luther King Jr, Malcolm X's critique of white racism in the USA as well as the pioneering work of James Hal Cone. It was transported from the shores of the United States of America to South Africa as an intellectual project which was made possible by the then University Christian Movement (UCM) in 1971. All this occurred under the directorship of Basil Moore and was first spearheaded in South Africa by Sabelo Ntwasa.²

Black Liberation Theology was expressed under the banner of the Black Consciousness Movement of South Africa which owes its being to students such as Steve Biko, Barney Pityana, Harry Nengwenkulu and others who were galvanized by the then political situation into organising themselves into being a vanguard for the black peoples' total emancipation from the political pangs into which they were plunged into by white racism in South Africa. Although Black theology propagated itself chiefly through means of seminars and ministers' caucuses, it produced some significant publications and continued into the *Kairos* period. A number of the first-generation black theologians endeavoured to develop Black Liberation theology in relation to their confessional traditions. Among these theologians, can be counted the

debate with Baldwin he insists that it is only blacks who seem to be happy to deny their blackness for the sake of integration.

² Cf. J W De Gruchy, 'African Theologies: South Africa' in: D Ford (ed.), *The Modern Theologians*. 2nd edition. Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, 1997: 447

likes as Manas Buthelezi, Desmond Tutu and Allan Boesak. This tradition was continued by theologians such as Buti Tlhagale, Takatso Mofokeng, Bonganjalo Goba and Itumeleng Mosala, to mention but a few.³

It is perhaps fair to describe Black Liberation Theology in South Africa as a guerrilla enterprise.⁴ Let me explain this claim briefly. I describe Black Liberation Theology as a guerrilla enterprise simply because it was never made welcome in Academia as well as in all other South African spheres of life. While apartheid theology (which must be considered as a form of contextual theology in all respects) was political in its very nature, Black Liberation Theology as a response to apartheid Theology carried the brand of being political and this became a justification for discouraging its existence by all means necessary. Thus those that engaged this theology had to find alternative platforms where these ideals could be shared and propagated, hence the black seminars and black ministers' caucuses. The economic disparities between blacks and whites made it even more difficult for black churches to assert their independence and to openly embrace this theological hermeneutic. Some African Traditional Churches came into existence primarily because they were not content with a theology that refused to take the black experience seriously in theological reflection. These churches were considered too radical and were dismissed as mere sects, not to be taken seriously by any 'proper' theological reflection.

It is very interesting to note that these so called sects [African Traditional Churches]⁵ became a dominant perception in the reflections of the very black protagonists of Black Theology. Black churches of the mainline tradition remained and still remain very dependent economically on the so called white mother churches, and so in an attempt to be at least different from the rest there was never an intentional move to align themselves with the indigenous churches as they wrestled to make culture and African world views important elements in their reflections. This is so because for Black Liberation Theology, the struggle was waged more on a political level – for the perception I guess was once political power is gained the economy

³ J W De Gruchy, 'African Theologies: South Africa' 447.

⁴ Tshaka RS and Makofane, MK. The continued relevance of Black Liberation Theology for Democratic South Africa today. in: *Scriptura* Vol 105 (2010:3), 532-546.

⁵The usual reference to African Tradition is problematic in a certain sense. The fact that they have been considered only as sects justify why its referenced as some religion. The author here purposefully refers to them as church as well because church for me is not only the mainline church by a congregation of believers.

would simply conform to the dictates of politics. Thus not much has been done in terms of economic and cultural democracy.⁶ That especially the element of culture was ignored in the struggle for the assertion of blacks as human beings became one of the greatest criticisms by our West and East African counterparts.

The fact that Black Liberation Theology was a guerrilla enterprise, posed significant challenges for its endeavours of percolating the very black communities it intended to empower. First, since Black Liberation Theology was chastised as 'improper theology', the apologetics of Black Liberation Theology resulted in an obsession with theological method instead of dealing with the concrete particular realities of black peoples in SA. There has been no theological enterprise in South Africa that obsessed with theological method as Black Liberation Theology did, hence my statement that the early protagonists of Black Liberation Theology developed it along their confessional affiliations. A clear example of this can be found in Boesak's *Black and Reformed* and others.

Secondly the question of economic dependence played a major role in the inability of this theological enterprise to percolate the black communities and to result instead into an elitist enterprise in some instances.⁷ The question of economic dependency had shown how in the case of South Africa a very well meaning and imperative initiative such as Black Liberation Theology can evaporate into an elitist project that is used as a spring board to personal well being.

When taking the different role players in the emergence of Black Liberation Theology in South Africa into account, one cannot but wonder whether the suggestions today that this theology is irrelevant, were not to be expected.⁸ To begin with, Black Liberation Theology was an initiative that to some degree enjoyed the patronage of some white liberals. Because of their involvement with Black Liberation Theology some of them felt they equally had the right to determine the direction of this theology for the future. The likes of Steve Biko remained very critical of the

⁶ H. Cruse. See Harold Cruse, *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual: A Historical Analysis of the Failure of Black Leadership*, (New York: Morrow, 1967).

⁷ S. Terreblanche. *A History of Inequality in South Africa: 1652-2002*. Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press. 2005.

⁸ It is a well know fact that this theological project was supported by white liberals. This is not necessarily something bad as is argued in this paper until those who have been aligned with this project feel they have a right to say when black and white language becomes divisive. Many examples can be cited but the work of Charles Vila-Vicencio is of particular significance in this regard. Cf. C. Vila-Vicencio. *A Theology of Reconstruction: Nation building and Human rights*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1992.

involvement of our white friends in the affairs of blacks. His statement, “black man you are on your own”, gives credence to his view that whites who are sincere about structural racism can only help the black course when they engage white racism and privilege in their respective circles.

It is unfortunate that the black conscious element in black theology dwindled and ultimately disappeared totally from black theological discourses in post apartheid South Africa. This is evidenced by the move away from Black Liberation Theology to contextual theology in the late 80s and early nineties. The 1999 multi-event⁹ held in Cape Town is in my view one event organised and by our white liberal friends in conjunction with some black protagonists of black theology to chart a new direction for critical theology. It adopted a language that is friendly to all in the new South Africa. There is in my view nothing wrong with such an approach until the particularity of the black reality is compromised.

James Cone credits the relevance of this theological reflection to the works of both Martin Luther King Jr as well as Malcolm X. While the former has been recognised extensively in the Americas and elsewhere, it seems that it is the influence of Malcolm X (henceforth referred to only as Malcolm) has not received the same kind of engagement. It is however my opinion that this is not by chance. King has always been hailed as the peace maker, the one who pickets because he is of the view that hegemonies are inherently good and it is only a matter of time that American hegemonies will accept black folk as equals. Keeping the hope alive in the much oppressed masses is something that is encouraged by all means in the theology of King.¹⁰ This talk and thinking is of particular significance for the real masters of societies because it makes reconciliatory talk sounds feasible. Antonio Gramsci speaks of the consent given by the oppressed and this bear direct relevance to situations where the oppressed believes that the hegemonies are not so bad even if this is to their own demise.¹¹

Contrary to King who dreams positively about the American civil system, it was Malcolm who was plagued with nightmares because of the injustices which were imbedded in the American civil system because of its inherent racist design. For

⁹ Accessed on the 1st august 2012. http://web.uct.ac.za/depts/ricsa/confer/me99/me99_in.htm

¹⁰ Cf. S. Oates. *Let the Trumpet Sound: A life of Martin Luther King, Jr.* New York: HarperCollins Books, 1994.

¹¹ A. Gramsci in: D. Forgacs, (ed.), *The Antonio Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings 1916-1935.* New York, New York Press, 2000.

Malcolm, reconciliation is not something that will happen because of the benevolence of white folks. No picking and sit-ins will bring about genuine change, but only the critical unity of black people themselves. South Africa shares similar realities with the USA especially. Like the USA, it became notorious for its treatment of blacks. In fact there is a school of thought led by Giliomme¹² which is of the view that apartheid proper was imported from the USA and not from Europe as commonly held. Like the USA, it also drew from the sources of Black Liberation theology as espoused in the theologies of King and Malcolm X.

What has remained something which is of interest today is especially the speech that we wish to engage in this article. While South Africa is governed by blacks, one could be forgiven to think that the challenges faced by thousands of blacks in the USA are not challenges faced by the majority in South Africa today. In fact, it will be argued in this article that the brutality of the police is something that has been inherited from white racism in South Africa and remains prevalent in present South Africa because it has been perpetuated by the white racist attitudes of apartheid South Africa.

Not only was the brutality of white police inherited, the same political language which obfuscate the majority remains in force. The current political leadership banks on the vulnerability of the majority. It is therefore because of this abuse that political language seems to be tuned towards the majority only during election years. Malcolm X was very aware of the fact that the real enemy is white capitalism. This lecture will indicate clearly who Malcolm came to see how black leaders allowed themselves to be used by this diabolical system. However having pointed this out, Malcolm does not rush to give whites a clean slate. He does this because he is first convinced of how whites in particular have become dependent on this system.

Police brutality is usually symptomatic of bigger societal sicknesses. Malcolm spoke of this when he was interviewed by Mike Wallace on June 8th 1964. In that interview he made it clear that the frustration of black people has led them not to be afraid of the police any longer.¹³ On the flip side, violence has become so habitual that a reaction is elicited with the slightest provocation from one's fellow brother.

¹² Cf. H Giliomee, *Rediscovering and Re-imagining the Afrikaners in a new South Africa: Autobiographical notes on writing an uncommon biography*. Leiden: Grafaria, 2004: 9.

¹³ Malcolm X (1964). *Malcolm X speaks*. [CD] Police brutality. Harlem, New York.

He is not alone through in addressing this matter. Fanon had this to say about the internalization of the save mentality, he observed, “while the settler or the policeman has the right ... to strike the native, to insult him and to make him crawl to them, you will see the native reaching for his knife at the slightest hostile or aggressive glance cast on him by another native, for the last resort of the native is to defend his personality vis-à-vis his brother’.¹⁴ We shall have cause to return again to this later. For now let us consider police brutality on the masses in South Africa.

It is a well known fact that service delivery protests are now more rampant in South Africa than they were during the legal apartheid era. This is not to be misinterpreted as a justification of the apartheid era and to credit it. On the contrary, the current service delivery protests must be understood in the context of the legal apartheid era albeit partly. These protests have become so violent that many have died. The death of Andries Tatane¹⁵ shocked the nation.

I shall be careful not to refer to the entire speech although it remains a classical speech in its own right. I will merely point of the issues that are relevant to us in South Africa with the intention of illustrating how those in powers continuously fools those on the margins. This is so because they remain aware of the valuable votes which place them in positions of power. Through the analyses of Ramose, we will see how political games are played to secure votes for those in power.¹⁶

A brief synopsis of the speech and its correlation with South Africa

The speech in question is about 50 minutes long and covers an array of issues related to the black context of the USA. While Malcolm X asserts his religion as Islam, he is emphatic in suggesting that religion be left in the closet. This is so because he had come to realise that religion at its best separates instead of unites. For him, this division interrupts the attention that must be given to the structures and systems that oppresses blacks in the USA. It is significant on another level to note why he insists that he is still a Muslim.¹⁷ When this speech was given, Malcolm X was already marginalised by the leader of the nation of Islam and was in essence

¹⁴ F. Fanon. *Concerning Violence*. New York: Penguin Books. 1965, 22.

¹⁵ Andries Tatane was a man in his early thirties who died during a service delivery protest in Ficksburg, in the Free State of South Africa. Tatane was shot by the police. There are a number of similar cases where dogs have been trained on black people. The sad thing is that many of the white police who are involved in these activities derive pleasure from this.

¹⁶ MB Ramose. *Faces and phases of racism in South Africa*. Paper soon to be published with Unisa press

¹⁷ Malcolm X. (1964). *The ballot or the Bullet*. Malcolm X speaks [CD] Cleveland.

gagged from speaking in public. This is what let him to establish his own movement called the Muslim Mosque Inc.

Realising that it was white capitalism which ganged up against black people, Malcolm X calls for a political Philosophy of Black Nationalism.¹⁸ For him put simply, 'black nationalism only means that the black man (to be understood as *mensch*) should control the politics and the politicians in his own community'.¹⁹ This is not a diabolical idea as many within the so called rainbow South Africa would like to believe it to be. To say that the black *mensch* must control and own the politics of his or her community is a means of self realization and autonomy. Once this is achieved, the black *mensch* will be able to talk with the white *mensch* as an equal.

He has this under great authority because he has seen the trickery of the white capitalist economy. Malcolm writes, 'the white man (*mensch*) is too intelligent to let someone else come and gain control of the economy of his community. But you [blacks] let anyone come in and take control of the economy of your community, control the housing, control education, control jobs, control the businesses under the pre text that you want to integrate'.²⁰

For him however, Black Nationalism is an attempt to chastise all this folly of the white American civil system and to unify black people against the dictates of the white American Civil system which remains capitalistic at best. In a way that speaks directly to the flight of the black self, Malcolm X ridicules what blacks are fond of doing once they get a bit economically strong - flying from their real black selves – Malcolm X proposes Black Nationalism as a means of countering that flight from the black self. He argues that

'the political, the economical philosophy of Black Nationalism only means that blacks have to become involved in a program of re-education to educate our people into the importance of knowing that when you spend you dollar out of the community in which you live, the community in which you spend your money becomes richer and richer; the community out of which you take your money becomes poorer and poorer...the Man is becoming richer and richer and you become poorer and poorer...the community in which you live becomes a slum. It becomes a

¹⁸ Malcolm X. (1964). The ballot or the Bullet. Malcolm X speaks [CD] Cleveland.

¹⁹ Malcolm X. (1964). The ballot or the Bullet. Malcolm X speaks [CD] Cleveland.

²⁰ Malcolm X. (1964). The ballot or the Bullet. Malcolm X speaks [CD] Cleveland.

ghetto. The conditions become run down. And then you have the audacity to complain about poor housing in a rundown community'.²¹

He argued that 1964 was going to be the year of the ballot or the bullet. This is so because he was sure that the common black folk have become aware of how hegemonies work. More so he had made an assessment that black common people are aware of how the black spokespersons for the white hegemonies are used as the intermediaries between the masters and those on the margins. The masses have become disillusioned with these yeah sayers to the hegemonies. And they have become frustrated.

Malcolm put it poignantly when he argues that, these younger black men and women 'have become disillusioned. They have become dissatisfied and all of this has built up frustration in the black communities that makes the black community throughout America today more explosive than all of the atomic bombs the Russians can ever invent.'²² This is so because politicians are not seen until it is the election year.

For Malcolm the year 1964 was going to be explosive year simply because black people and become aware of the trickery of whites hegemonies. He intimates that, 'this is the year when all of the white politicians are going to come into the Negro (sic) community. You never see them until election time... They are going to come with false promises, and they make these false promises they are going to feed our frustration and this will only serve to make matters worse'.²³

The future of Black Liberation Theology

The first democratic election of South Africa in 1994 is perceived as the best miracle to happen to a country fraught with contradictions. Some prefer to see it as a clean slate and intentionally prefer to discount a history of the exploitation of black peoples in this country. I subscribe to a school of thought which is of the view that Capitalism and democracy are contradictory. Sampie Terreblanche argues that 'while democracy emphasizes joint interests, equality and common loyalties, capitalism is

²¹ Malcolm X. (1964). The ballot or the Bullet. Malcolm X speaks [CD] Cleveland.

²² Malcolm X. (1964). The ballot or the Bullet. Malcolm X speaks [CD] Cleveland.

²³ Malcolm X. (1964). The ballot or the Bullet. Malcolm X speaks [CD] Cleveland.

based on self-seeking inequality and conflicting individual and group interests'. What is more important notes Terreblanche, is that 'the legal system that protects both democracy and capitalism is based on the principle of equality before the law, but maintains inequality in the distribution of property rights and opportunities in the capitalist system'. For him the logic of capitalism – given the unequal freedoms and unequal rights upon which it is based goes against the grain of the logic of democracy. It is important for me to point this out simply because democracy is invariably thrown in like a cat among the pigeons. We are to forget about a capitalist and exploitative history which is largely responsible for the current problems and struggle and defend democracy with our lives if necessary.

Our obsession to want to be relevant and to illustrate that Black Liberation Theology is indeed genuine theology has done tremendous harm to us. We had become alienated from our contexts, and in some instances we had been assimilated into the very structures of oppression that Black Liberation Theology was struggling against. What must be said outright is that there is no future for black liberation theology in South Africa unless this theological enterprise will create its own space and dictate its own terms for its continued relevance and survival. Creating such space and dictating its terms for survival suggests that black liberation theology will have to continuously ask the critical and uncomfortable questions that affects those still on the underside of history. Today more than ever, Black Liberation Theology must give answers to those questions of those on the underside who want to make sense of what their citizenship means in present day South Africa if they are not able to gain access to the basic necessities for surviving. Above all it needs to find ways of helping them reconcile God with their present situation of need.

We acknowledge that nobody can do for Black Liberation Theology what it must do for itself. We realise that there is a serious contest taking place, where Black Liberation Theology is contesting for a space to engage critically the assumptions that the only time when Black people can participate in the divine design is when they come to terms with what they were designed to be—not totally human.

2012 the year of politics? Why does 2012 looms to be an explosive year for South Africa?

The causes of the frustration of the black masses which Malcolm X speaks of so eloquently are of particular relevance to the South African context. Here as well, politicians are not visible until an election year when the leaderships of the governing political parties go door to door in search of the votes of the most vulnerable. In South Africa nothing captures the frustration of ordinary people like the service delivery protests. These protests have escalated since the dawn of democracy in South Africa.²⁴

The government of the day is failing the very people that it is intending to ameliorate their conditions. Ramose captures this game which is played to garner votes well in a paper that is soon to be published. The title of his paper reads *Faces and phases of racism in South Africa*.²⁵ In this paper, Ramose refers to the South African local government elections of May 2011 as “the toilet elections”. This is so because of the toilets which were built both in the Democratic Alliance (DA) governing area as well as in the African National Congress (ANC) governing areas. What stood particularly out of these toilets was the fact that they were not covered. This meant that the human dignity of the people for whom these were built was compromised. If black human dignity was not considered during the local elections, one can only imagine how much more damage will be done to garner votes for the national elections.

The present government of South Africa seem not to be able to deal with the nervous conditions that have been created by white capital. I have argued elsewhere that the nervous condition among the majority of black people is primarily the result of two factors: (1) a promise that democracy was going to provide all the privileges that blacks had always dreamt of; and (2) the depressing realisation that these promises remain unfulfilled for the majority.²⁶ I remain aware of the legacy of apartheid which had made it in some instances difficult to legislate laws that are

²⁴ According to Wikipedia South Africa has been dubbed the protest capital of the world and has one of the highest rates of public protest in the world. During the 2004/5 financial year about 6 000 protests were officially recorded while there were a number of protests which were not legally reported.

²⁵ MB Ramose. *Faces and phases of racism in South Africa*. Paper soon to be published with Unisa press.

²⁶ RS Tshaka Do our Theological methodologies help us to deal with situations of violence in black communities, specifically Afrophobia. In: JTSA

intentionally aimed at dealing with the divide between rich and poor which is essentially a divide between white and black. Language of race is not well received in this context. This is so because in the negotiated settlement a constitutional democracy was adopted. The South Africa government therefore finds itself in a tight corner and crumbs are given to some to create the impression that all is well with a rather sick and generally racist society as the service delivery protests attesting. It is worth noting also that in all of the service delivery protest one finds only black people.

The South African context is not unique when it comes to race and the construction of race was imported to this country from the USA. Writing from her American context Alexander argues that 'what has changed since the collapse of Jim Crow has less to do with the basic structure of our society than with the language we use to justify it. In the era of colour-blindness, it is no longer socially permissible to use race explicitly as a justification for discrimination, exclusion and social contempt so we don't.'²⁷ The same is especially true of South Africa. The African National Congress has adopted a non-racial rhetoric which is flawed and nonsensical as it feeds the very colour-blindness that Alexander is belabouring. The service delivery protests clearly suggest that the present government has failed the masses. However there is a bigger aspect which must not be ignored and that is the economic sphere which to a great extent dictates the political direction of his country.

Why are the majority still stucked where they have been some 18 years ago? The answer lies in the fact that the ANC government with all its African allies has been out manoeuvred in the Kempton park negotiations.²⁸ This fact is referred to by prominent minds in the South African context. Malcolm puts this out manoeuvring succinctly when he argues, 'the first thing that the cracker does when he comes in power, he takes all the Negro leaders and invites them for coffee to show that he is alright. And those Uncle Toms cannot pass up the coffee. They come away from the coffee table telling you and me that this man is alright...'²⁹

This is not a new tactic and was employed in South Africa during the negotiated settlement which led to the now the new South Africa. Gumede speaks about how the ANC was ill prepared to negotiate and how members of the

²⁷ M. Alexander. *The New Jim Crow: Mass incarceration in the age of Colour-blindness*. The New Press: New York, 2012, 2.

²⁸ S. Terreblanche. *A History of Inequality in South Africa*. 2005

²⁹ Malcolm X. (1964). *The ballot or the Bullet*. Malcolm X speaks [CD] Cleveland.

negotiation team where wine and dine.³⁰ Having pointed this out, it would be irresponsible of me to give a sense that the previous regime was better and has nothing to do with the current inequalities. To the contrary, the previous regime was aware that apartheid was systematic and they have applied it in such a way that the ripple effects will be felt for many more years to come.

The frustration that Malcolm is referring to is unfortunately ill directed in South Africa towards foreigners who are black and comes especially from other parts of the Southern Africa. The competition over lack of sustainable jobs has created a nervous condition for black South Africans as well as Africans from other parts of the continent. This is indeed the racial powder keg of which Malcolm spoke of so eloquently of in this aforementioned speech. That we have a black government does not suggest that we are not to speak about race anymore. The ANC prides itself as an organization which strives to eradicate racism and sexism yet

What would Malcolm X say about South Africa today? A conclusion

Malcolm X's greatest disappointment was with the very black people who could not see that they are taken for a ride by both dominating political parties in the USA. In the aforementioned speech he took a swipe at a government which was giving the impression to blacks that it has their best interests at heart. Malcolm X writes,

Any kind of activity that takes place on the floor of congress or the Senate, it's the government. Any kind of dilly-dallying, that's the government. Any kind of pussyfooting, that's the government. Any kind of act that is signed to delay or deprive you and me right now of getting full rights, that's the government that's responsible. And any time you find the government in a conspiracy to violate the citizenship or civil rights of a people,³¹ then you are wasting your time going to that government expecting redress.

There be very little doubt that black people of South Africa are now tired and have come to the conclusion that they cannot find redress to the same government that they have been voting into power since 1994. In their anger and frustration, they are taking it to the streets by means of service delivery protests which are deadly.

³⁰ W. Gumede. *Thabo Mbeki and the battle for the Soul of the ANC*. London: Zed Books, 2007, 79ff.

³¹ Malcolm X. (1964). *The ballot or the Bullet*. Malcolm X speaks [CD] Cleveland.

That a comparison is made begs that I first paint a picture of the present day South African context. It is one which has yet to shed its racist past. This is so because apartheid has been structural and systemic. The economic disparities between blacks and whites are still too glaring. I have argued elsewhere that the violence that is perpetrated against some citizens of South Africa is actually perpetrated by the state itself.³² It is significant to note that this phenomenon is not yet well understood in present day South Africa. The very citizens seem befuddled by the violence that are targeted against Africans from other parts of the continent yet can't see that the nervous conditions in intentionally been created by those who still real masters of south Africa - the ones who still control the economy.³³

While the nervous condition is chiefly created by the glaring economic disparity between whites and blacks secondly must be mentioned the stereotypes that have become entrenched in the minds of those who are citizens of this country. One of the great contemporary South African poets Mzwakhe Mbuli speaks of how possible it is in this country today that black people can be killed by whites and be mistaken for baboons and wild pigs. Informed by the current disparities, he laments the fact that it is only black children in South Africa who still learn under trees. That it is only one race – black people wearing blue overalls on the back of pickups in South Africa.³⁴

The dawn of democracy brought with it promises which soon turned into huge disappointments. When political organizations were banned during the legal apartheid era, it was indeed the civic groupings which filled that political vacuum. Gumede is correct to argue 'that the normalization of south African politics in 1994 saw many once formidable civic groups run out of steam'.³⁵ One such formidable civic organization was SANCO.

For a very long time self critique of leadership styles was reserved for when comrades were by themselves. This was important given the stereotypes that were assigned to leaders of African descend by whites. Yet in a context where one is increasingly confronted with matters that are not only as a result of structural

³² RS Tshaka Do our Theological methodologies help us to deal with situations of violence in black communities in: *Journal of Theology in Southern Africa*. Vol 138, November, 2010

³³ Black liberation theology has ignored to explicitly engage capitalism in its critique of white hegemonies. For a brief reference to that see T. Murphy. The Influence of socialism in Black and Womanist Theologies: Capitalism's relationship as source, sin and salvation. In: *Black Theology: An International Journal*. Vol 10. Number 1. 2012, 28-48.

³⁴ Mbuli, M. Amandla: Struggle songs...songs of freedom [CD] CCP records co. 2012

³⁵ W. Gumede. *Thabo Mbeki and the battle for the Soul of the ANC*. London: Zed Books, 2007, 352.

apartheid but also as a result of pure self interest, a critical theological reflection such as Black Liberation Theology ought to pause and consider if self critique is not essentially now. This is simply since this theological reflection prides itself as standing with the poor and marginalised in society.

From what can be deduced from the service delivery protests which have plagued South Africa since the dawn of democracy, it is clear that black liberation theology must at the same time become more self critical. This is so because we have witnessed how the ANC had managed to eviscerate all agents that could have played significant roles at keeping it in touch with the masses.

At almost all public opportunities where one would have loved to see an acknowledgement that the struggle against apartheid was a collective one, it has rewritten history and has itself as the only custodian of black people's liberation in South Africa. In essence, it has become an amorphous mess, assimilating all those agents that can keep it honest and attuned to the cries of the most vulnerable who happen to be black. This government is failing its people – that is what Malcolm X would say of it.

Both James Cone³⁶ and Michelle Alexander are adamant that the new Jim Crow is manifested in the incarceration of black young males in present day USA. I am of the view that the neo-apartheid is manifested in the nervous conditions experienced as a result of the lack of basic service delivery to the most vulnerable in our country.

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³⁶ J. Cone. *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*. Maryknoll, Orbis books, 2011.

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