

Chapter

Land Redistribution: A Thorny Issue towards Reconciliation in a Post Apartheid South Africa: A Practical Theological Perspective¹

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Abstract

South Africa is a country with a history of racial divides and those divides are still visible today. One of the many issues that characterise such divisions is inequality with regard to land ownership. The bigger part of the land is still owned by the minority white people while the blacks, who are the majority; or previously disadvantaged people, are still landless. This is evident from the escalation of informal settlements in areas surrounding the cities of Johannesburg and Pretoria, which have millions of black people cramped into small areas in shacks while most whites are enjoying large portions of land with few people to live on it. Many black people even lack land for shelter. On the other hand, the message of reconciling the country is being made loud to both who has the land and those who do not have it. Therefore, it becomes a serious challenge to imagine and look for reconciling strategies while these two camps still have this unresolved issue. The dilemma that is faced with is how will the different camps embrace the same message while they remain in these different situations. It is argued in this article that justice on the land issue should be first attended to so that it serves as a door to reconciliation.

Keywords: reconciliation, black people, poverty, informal settlement, landlessness

1. Introduction

The truth is that since the arrival of Jan Van Reibeeck and his people in the Cape to date, South Africa's land issue has never been as it was and it continued to be a big challenge for the majority of black people. From then onwards, the white people's government was ensuring that the black people are alienated from all forms of owning land, as a way of subjecting and putting them under racial control. It was very clear that if the blacks were allowed to have land, their dependency on the western ways of life would be minimized, which would be a problem for colonization and its intended inequalities to perpetually take away the dignity of the black person. This is the correct argument

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of Resane [1] when contemplating being stripped of the land when a majority of people were removed and dumped into the designated areas demolished their life meaning, their dignity, civil rights, and respect. The agenda of transformation after many years of racial divisions and the subjection of the black majority in South Africa is one of the biggest but most challenging projects that many people can imagine. It is without any doubt that one of the most debated or discussed issues in South Africa in 2018 is land redistribution. It makes sense to also indicate that the transformation agenda in democratic South Africa for the past twenty-five years had been very slow in this regard; reconciliation of the racially and tribally divided nation is ultimately affected by this as part of the transformation. Moosa has the following to say in this regard: “While the issue of land can be used opportunistically by the politicians and their supporters, it is disingenuous to suggest that South Africans are unconcerned. The relationship of the land issue to reconciliation and inequality is visible for everyone to see.” [2].

This is evidenced by the racial and tribal attitudes that continue to haunt the South African society in churches, government departments, and workplaces. There is enough evidence to allude that the land redistribution program had been hit by delays, inaction, and contested political interest, while the ordinary citizens’ interests are being marginalised ([3], p. 1). It should be understood that the issue of whether the expropriation should be compensated or will not be discussed in this paper, but will argue that the land issue is a hindrance between South Africa and reconciliation.

It is therefore the purpose to argue how the land issue continues to marginalise the already marginalised people and open the gap of inequality even wider. It will be a waste of time if I pretend to encourage the political debates and different views which are embedded in the issue of land redistribution in this article; the discussion will generally focus on indicating how the delays in the land issue are a hindrance to the reconciliation that almost all people of South Africa would like to see between the whites and blacks. Despite the fact that the TRC headed by Desmond Tutu targeted a few people, it also did not do much for the reconciliation of the racially and tribally divided nation. My previous paper was on racism and tribalism and I tried to unveil how tribalism remains a thorn in the flesh of reconciliation. This paper also addresses racism which is raising its ugly head in the workplace, churches, and public square [4, 5].

2. Problem statement

We cannot easily identify our problems relating to any attempt of reconciliation project if we ignore to openly clarify that though the rifts of divisions existed in tribal lines, the focus is on the racial divisions by which apartheid managed very well to install successful laws that ensured that blacks were inferior towards the superior whites in many forms. The factors that are delaying the reconciliation of South African reconciliation for almost three decades are very complex, but for the sake of this specific study, the author intended to identify the slow pace at which the land redistribution is being administered as one issue. In discussing that, it will be noted that the difference that exists between the social groups existing in South Africa are in varying degrees, but the promise of the present democratic government even in the freedom charter gave the impression of equating all people that live in the land and promised this as one of the fundamental issues to play a role in the reconciliation process, for instance, *“All people shall govern”* has no restriction for a particular social group within the borders of the country ([6], p. 1). The gist of reconciliation in this country must be seen from that context, particularly for this article.

The president of the republic, Mr Cyril Ramaphosa said:

“We cannot be a reconciled nation for as long as the majority of the people of South Africa continue to suffer from the injustices of the past. Access to land is a fundamental right of citizenship. It just not just empower communities and workers, it enhances food security, especially for people in the rural areas. Despite a comprehensive land reform programme, we have not made significant progress in this issue. Most of this country’s land remains in the hands of a few people in our country.” [7].

The sentiments of the president above resonate very well with his later statement in his first address as a state president when the ANC adopted the policy of land expropriation without compensation in its 54th Conference as he said:

We will accelerate our land redistribution programme not only to redress a grave historical injustice, but also to bring more producers into the agricultural sector and to make more land available for cultivation ... this approach will include the expropriation of land without compensation. We are determined that expropriation without compensation should be implemented in a way that increases agricultural production, improves food security and ensure[s] that the land is returned to those from whom it was taken under colonialism and apartheid.5 [Emphasis added] (1–2) ([2], pp. 1–2).

These presidential statements and views show the clear direction of the ruling party, which is in line with the Freedom Charter, but the implantation is a different story that is met with contestations from different political parties. That on its own makes South African Reconciliation Barometer a public opinion that no one will be sure when it will come to practice.

According to SAPA ([8], p. 1), Trevor Manuel reported: “South Africa has almost the same number of people living in informal settlements now as it did in 1994. This view resonates with Ramantswana’s [9] articulation when saying:

The landlessness of the black masses is evidenced by the continuous mushrooming of informal settlements... To be landless in South African cities is to live in canals, under bridges, under trees, in parks, and in open spaces in front of buildings or shops. Even worse, to be a landless female is to be prey to slave-traders and sex-traders and to be first in line for endless rape. Landlessness sets up our people for dehumanization and exploitation.

This is even though the government provided three million houses during the period.” The minister went on to argue that in reversing this trend, it must also be known that South African cities were designed for the colonial elite; and it is a challenge to maintain that elitist live style with the challenges that are currently facing South Africa. Malema states as follows:

“The time for reconciliation is over. Now is the time for justice,” Malema told the parliament. “We must ensure that we restore the dignity of our people without compensating the criminals who stole our land.” (Business [10]).

The three statements from politicians above inform me of one main thing: we have a problem to reconcile the divided South Africans who have previously been divided and are still divided with the land distribution issue as one of the biggest stumbling

blocks towards this goal. In other words, the reconciliation of this country will remain a dream that will never come true if the land issue is not dealt with properly. It is therefore the gist of this study to research and argue that land redistribution is essential for the stuck reconciliation programme which is part of the transformation agenda to carry on. If I have to use an understandable metaphor I would say that the bus is stuck. One of its wheels is termed “reconciliation; and this wheel is out because one of its bolts, “land redistribution,” has come out. Therefore, to get the bus moving means that we start with the lost bolts, by fixing them then the wheel (reconciliation) will be fitted to the bus and the bus will then start moving on. It does not matter how small or big the bolts are, they can stop the whole bus from moving. The reality is that South Africa is stuck in its transformation agenda, particularly in reconciliation and it demands theological knowhow, among others to try to make us going forward. The resistance and delays we are experiencing with the land issue undermine the broken black people. If reconciliation and justice go hand in hand, there is a great risk that South Africa will not achieve any reconciliation if the justice on a land issue is not dealt with to the satisfaction of the previously disadvantaged people. Let us face the fact that the landless people have lost human dignity, whose lives have lost meaning ([11], p. 3). Not only for pride’s sake, but without owning a land for African is a biggest humiliation one can imagine. For the author, it is like rubbing salt on the wound to speak about reconciliation between those who have land and those who do not have it. It is important to note that this paper did not intend to discuss politics, but to highlight the issue of land as a stumbling block, although unfortunately, the land issue has already been politicised in the country. This can be checked with the comments just above, which are made predominately by politicians.

3. Relevance of practical theology

Meiring [12] confirms that the problem is current and relevant when he says: “We do have to face the fact that South Africa, 20 years after democracy, is still a fractured and a very divided country. Racism, alienation, xenophobia are still with us, as is the case with corruption, greed and endemic violence.” This basic truth is what according to the author of this article dragged most of the transformational projects very slow, hence, for 25 years it looks like most of the citizen’s lives did not move for an inch from what it was before 1994.

It is important to note the fundamental truth in what Hall [13] warns us against when saying: “When we debate racism that it is important that we don’t only look at racism in relation to land as something that just happened in the past, but as an issue that continues to be felt today.” This argument informs us that as much as theology had tried to fight racism in the past, we need to remain alert that the fight is not over because the fight can only be won if all inhabitants of South African have an equal share in all opportunities, including land ownership. While theology is also caught ball watching, the patience of the people it intends to serve is also tried with by this resistance. The organisation called Landless People’s Movement (LPM) has come to alive because of the delay on the issue of land, as they are demanding answers to the very same issue. For me, inequality and any form of sabotage of human dignity is a concern that theology cannot keep silent about. Turning a blind eye on the situation is an indication of the demise of such a theology. One of the fathers of black theology, James Cone, spent much of his time on writing about this issue, when saying that any theology that does not answer the problems of the people at hand must cease to exist

(Cone's theology). According to Bosch ([14], 32–34), Jesus' message on the kingdom includes God's power that attacks the evils of the society in whatever form they manifest. The church of Jesus did not neglect works of compassion as part of proclaiming God's message in totality; hence, pain, disease, demon and other forms of brokenness were dealt with. In addition, the intention of this paper is not to undermine the South African judiciary system and its procedures on issues of land and reconciliation, but to highlight and to unveil that the slow pace at which the process is taking place is not helpful for many landless people. It is the very same democratic government that made the promise to deliver and it is the same government that must be held to account for their promises. For the government to do things legally and according to the rule of law is what everyone expects, but that does not necessarily imply that things must be as slow as they are with regards to the land issue. It is important for the author to mention that it is the very democratic government that must be held an account on the land issue because it is the one that made a promise to distribute the land at least by 2014 which is seven years back [15, 16]. Part of this article's task is to critically highlight that it is the very same promise that must be kept, of course within the confines of the law that is governing the country. The author is not supportive of anything that is done outside the parameters of the law, urges that the required speed is maintained to distribute the land before things get out of hand as signs are already showing by some land grabbing experienced.

4. Limitations and focus of this research

South Africa is one of the countries with young democracy after many years of colonialism and apartheid, implying that some of the changes taking place are still confusing and not perfectly done. The reality is that the challenges caused by inequality are complex and often intertwined, for instance, poverty, unemployment and other social challenges. It will be too ambitious to want to attend to all these in one chapter, but for the sake of this specific study, the author decided to avoid floating around all these problems, but focus on the land issue as a trap towards reconciliation. This does not however mean that land issue will not affect other social problems or be affected by them, but the other social ills will also get their day in another research. This of course is not intended to claim that land issue will solve all the other existing problems, but it will open opportunities to face other realities, for instance, before one has a land it is difficult to imagine the exposure to issues like drought, storm and pest invasion. These are issues for future research.

Our African forefathers left us an idiom that says: "The best way to eat the elephant standing in your path is to cut it up into little pieces." Slowly and patiently taking each problem at a time we will transform our country for the benefit of all who live in it.

5. Definition of some important concepts

The word land redistribution refers to a way in which the commercial land that has been owned by the whites is transferred to black South Africans. The literary translation of reconciliation suggests that it is a restoration of friendly relations; it can also be used as synonyms for appeasement, reunion, conciliation, harmonising and so forth. It is dangerous to use reconciliation a synonym of forgiveness

because, according to Cornell [17], one can forgive, without providing an immediate reconciliation. Reconciliation is a restoration process whereby trust is deeply broken and it may be a lengthy process at times. The process of reconciliation depends on the attitude of the offender; the depth of betrayal and the pattern of offense. The unrepentant heart is difficult, if not impossible, to reconcile; hence, a line of difference should be drawn between restorative and retaliatory reconciliation.

The study made available by Akinyemi [15] on land ownership and usage for agriculture clearly makes a very good understanding of the link between landlessness and poverty. The author does not of course undermine the fact that there are many factors involved with regards to poverty, but since this is not the main intention of the study, it can be argued that having or not having the land can assist in making the separation between the rich and the poor. The author would avoid making generalisation if the division between the rich and poor for other countries also connects to land, but as for South Africa the research mentioned above makes that connection clear [15]. This however does dismiss the argument that every poverty in every country is alluded to land, that is not what this article is arguing or saying.

6. Background

To make the argument of this study more sounding, the Freedom Charter of 1995, from which all the promises were made by the liberation movements particularly with regards to land and governance will shed very important light for the cause of the frustrations that South Africans are having today. Three specific statements in the Freedom Charter are:

1. All National groups shall have equal rights
2. The land shall be shared among those who work it
3. All shall enjoy equal human rights ([6], pp. 2–3)

The Land Audit Report of November 2017 continued to emphasize by quoting the Constitution of the Republic by saying: “South Africa belongs to all who live in it, united in our diversity” [18]. The gist of this paper may be complicated for some readers without the knowledge of the Freedom Charter, which was a helping tool for the governing party and other liberal movements to gain the support of the majority in toppling the apartheid regime. It is on the background of these initial promises adopted in 1955 that the reactions of people on issues of land in South Africa can be attributed to.

There is a confirmation that the 2017 Land Audit Report stats on land reform were just a beginning of the long journey of redistributing the land by saying: “Finally, this exercise has revealed that we have just taken the first steps upon a long journey towards the goal of the sustainable relationship of South African citizens to one another through the effective management of land as a resource and nation-building” ([19], p. 20).

According to [20], p. 1) the land restitution programme which is based on Section 25(7) of the *Constitution*,¹ points that:

“A person or community dispossessed of property after 19 June 1913 as a result of past racially discriminatory laws or practices is entitled, to the extent provided by an Act of Parliament, either to restitution of that property or to equitable redress.” Some of the claims in this regard were attended to, but many are still outstanding and the landless are not aware of what the update is.

The state of affairs according to “The Borgen Project report” with regards to land occupation as in 2021 indicates that: “White South Africans accounted for less than 10% of the population after the apartheid in South Africa ended in 1994. However, 90% of white South Africans owned the land. In addition, about 72% of white South Africans owned farmland in 2017. Meanwhile, black South Africans owned only 4% of land and Indian South Africans owned about 5%. As such, poverty and land reform in South Africa remain large issues ([21], p. 1). This audit is supported by Phaliso [22] who exactly have the same statistics in his/her report dated 2018. The audit shows that whites owned the majority of land at 72%, followed by coloured people at 15%, Indians at 5% and Africans at 4%.

Until today, South Africa is still one of the countries with the highest levels of inequalities, according to World Bank 2019 statistics [23]. The disparities that exist between the rich and the poor is incomparable to most of the countries. From then onwards, the ownership of the land in the country was transferred into White hands, that continued even during the apartheid period [24]. The Natives Land Act which is regarded as apartheid’s original sin saw thousands of black families being forcefully removed from their land and since then onwards, black South African knew no peace with regards to those removals.

The continued removal of black people from the land went on even when homelands were formed in the late 1960s and became is a crack that has not yet mended even after close to three decades of democracy. The forceful removal of black ethnic groups aimed at giving some land for exclusive use had been and will always be blamed for the current inequalities. There is no doubt that the move to democracy in South Africa is challenged among others by the land reform process. This is because some effects of the apartheid regime were the historical unequal allocation of the land ([25], p. 1). These historical injustices should be dealt with for true reconciliation to surface. The truth which is undeniable, according to De Villiers [26] is that in four countries namely; Zimbabwe, Namibia, South Africa and Australia the historical land issues were characterised by the inequality, colonial dominance and discrimination which led to the indigenous inhabitants being forced off their land to the benefit of white settlers, even the ancestral lands where they buried their loved ones were forcefully taken from them. It is an undeniable fact that by whom and how the land is used has a very direct bearing on the growing unemployment as well as poverty statistics [27].

My background discussion starts with a quote by Butjwana Seokoma [28] who said:

“South Africa’s land reform programme, adopted by the African National Congress (ANC) led government in 1994, has a long way to go in redressing the historical injustice of land dispossession, denial of access to land and forced removals.”

It is evident that the problem about land redistribution in South Africa was caused by the attitude of the racial discrimination of the apartheid government, which most of us accept was inclusive of many policies that wronged our people to a great extent. This is when all tribal laws, tribal divisions and forceful removal of blacks from the areas designated for white use exclusively. The dispossession of land from black South

Africans was a key part of the colonial and apartheid strategy of entrenching superiority over the black population, it rendered the blacks unable to live on their land, forcing them to work for the colonial and apartheid powers. It removed people from ancestral land, disabling them from being able to perform cultural rites, visit graves, bury the umbilical cords of newborns and the deceased on ancestral land. [29].

Sol Plaatjie, the first secretary of ANC, was quoted reiterating what the colonial ideology was all about saying: “Where will we get servants if Kaffirs (Africans) are allowed to become skilled? A kaffir with a thousand bags of wheat? If they are inclined to her the pedigree stock, let them improve their masters (colonial settlers) cattle and cultivate for the owner of the land, not for themselves.” (Motsoko [30]). Despite that the statement dealt a blow to the dignity and humanity of black people, this statement was manifested by ensuring that black people do not own land in this country; hence, the outcry today comes a long way.

For me the basic human right was violated just here and not much had been done to reverse it, particularly for ordinary people who lack even a small piece of land to erect a shack. On the other hand, “those who were favoured through legislation to acquire productive and at the expense of the disposed black majority were able to use that asset over a time as a leverage for wealth creation- to get ahead materially, to afford the comforts of life, to take their children to better schools, to build social resilience and to bequeath material legacy for future generations of their kin. The experience of the black majority was the complete opposite” (Daily Maverick, 14 August 2018).

It is the acknowledgement of all these wrongs that were supposed to be accompanied by a confession of guilt from those who intentionally benefited from this wrongdoing. From the inception of democratic government in 1994 this had been one of the slowest projects of transformation, since only a small percentage of land had been taken so far. The resistance and politicising of this aspect caused delays that see us losing lives like in the apartheid regime, for instance people whose shacks are being washed away by floods due to lack of proper space to shelter themselves.

No one can deny that the dawn of the first democratic elections in 1994 was harnessed among others by the hope that the disadvantaged people of this country thought that it would change their lives, even in terms of having land to themselves. The honest response is that very little had been done and this, on its own, does not give courage that the ordinary citizens of this country will have land from the country of their birth. The dignity of the other is continuously delayed and denied.

Mr Petros Nkosi said:

“The land, our purpose is the land: that is what we must achieve. The land is our whole lives: we plough it for food, we build our houses from the soil, we live on it, and we are buried on it. When the whites took our land away from us, we lost the dignity of our lives, we could no longer feed our children, we were forced to become servants, we are treated like animals. Our people have many problems, we are beaten and killed by farmers, the wages we earn are too little to buy even a bag of mealie meal. We must unite together to help each other and face boers. But in everything we do we must remember that there is only one aim and one solution and that is the land, the soil, our world.” (18 May 2017), The constitutional court speaks about land and dignity). This is very similar to SAHRC’s position on land reform when they said: “Land is dignity and the restitution of land rights equals to restoration of dignity.”

This is the kind of the enmity and hatred that had been sowed by the issue of land, among others. We cannot continue blinding ourselves to think Mr Nkosi’s mind is

his alone, since many black landless people are singing the same tune although they might not be very vocal. The dignity of a human being is on the land issue from birth to death. The previous state president Jacob Zuma also sang the same song of saying that it will be very difficult if not impossible to achieve true reconciliation until the land question is resolved ([2], p. 2).

If lack of land affects the dignity of the majority of this country, it means that by delaying and trying to avoid a quick movement towards it is also to deny that these people's dignity must be returned to them. Justice delayed is justice denied. Therefore, how do we expect of the landowner to be reconciled to someone who does not even own a space where his/her shack is situated. It is the dignity of our people that is being tarnished by red ants who are evicting them from one place to the next on a daily basis. If my shack cannot give me enough privacy because there is no space between it and those of my neighbours, while the white farmer has enough space even for his dogs, cats and mice to play around, then the dignity of the one living in the shack cannot be equated to the dignity that the dogs and cats have. How is reconciliation possible? Parker ([31], p. 3) is very correct to mention that returning the land means restoring the dignity of the people. It should however be commended that one of the first steps towards land restitution began after the unbanning of liberation movements during the last days of the National Party's rule in which FW De Klerk's government abolished the Racially Based Land Measures Act 108 of 1991 where in a commission on land allocation was established ([26], p. 47). The situation as at 2019 according to [11] indicates that only 13% of South African is owned by black people while 87% of it is owned by whites.

We have two camps with regards to land issue in South Africa, those who have the land and the landless. Their walks of life, worldviews and life experiences still remain the same as it was more than twenty-five years ago; very opposed to each other and the question is: How do they join 16 December annual celebrations in the same fashion, while they remain in this situation? I am of the opinion that the reconciliation of people must not ignore the life world and levels of lives each person comes from. Some will argue that there are rich black people that own the houses that are on the first and second pictures, but I am fully aware that the majority of our people are still in the life indicated in the pictures below and yet they are not excluded from the discussions of reconciliation. To deal with and overcome the historical injustices of the past, where the land was seized under apartheid it is just imperative not to avoid addressing a land issue. That is what Gibson [24] in his book entitled *Overcoming Historical Injustices: Land Reconciliation in South Africa* is trying to argue. The land issue is undoubtedly at the heart of South African politics since it is an important cornerstone towards reconciling the nation that is haunted by racial divisions amongst others.

The first two pictures are of white farmers while the rest portray the living places for most black people living in South Africa.

The safety of the first two houses to natural disasters compared to the shacks in which one lives in fear, should high rainfalls come. This fear has been normalised to be a lived experience in which one is forced to create happiness despite circumstances.

1. Basic services: If one has to walk for kilometres to fetch "unhealthy water" meanwhile someone else's swimming pool is always filled and the water may be healthier than the water the other is going to fetch.
2. Dwellings: The mountainous area is beautified by grass-covered roundavels which cannot even stand the test of some minor storms has become a great home

in which most blacks spend four to five hours to reach and have their happiness there. An area that cannot have any resource at all, but life goes on as usual.

3. The filth and the sewerage smell cutting across shack area has been normalised into black life in the area, which can be a very serious concern for those living in the first two homes.
4. Space: The first two houses have enough space where even the dogs and cats can enjoy freedom while walking around, but that is categorically different from the experiences of the people living in the houses portrayed in third and fourth pictures.
5. In his unpublished paper entitled: “The power of Babel” Kritzinger spoke of the difference that has not disappeared between Jew and Greek, slave and free being language. The metaphor I would use is that of the language in the sense of the content of what people discuss. My opening question will be, What kind of language will be a talk between the people living in these two extremely different environments, for instance, the word water can mean something for the person whose swimming pool is always full of water meanwhile for the other person who is walking four to five kilometres just to fetch drinking water, a basic resource of life the same water may mean something different.
6. As if it is not enough, those find small space to just erect their shacks to live and are evicted by the red ants in the fifth picture, to add insult to injury..

The above pictures confirm what Siviwe Feketa mentioned in his article entitled: ‘South Africa world’s most unequal society report’ when he reported:

The government has expressed disappointment with its track record of transforming the country after a World Bank report showed that inequality has deepened since the dawn of democracy, with the country being the most unequal society. The results of the probe, which assessed poverty and inequality from 1994 to 2015, revealed that only one in four South Africans could currently be stably considered as either middle class or upwards in terms of means. [32].

In Collins’ article entitled: “No vacant land in Joburg is safe from occupation,” he quoted one landless person in Alexander Township saying: “The empty stand represents an opportunity for dignity, privacy and a home she can finally call her own. It also represents a waste of something she has never had and is ready to fight for.” [33]. This is one example out of many or even the majority of the people in South Africa, whose dreams to have a land of their own in which they can build houses is a dream not coming true. It is difficult to imagine that for almost three decades after the democratic government which had one of its pillars in the freedom charter as to ensure that all people will access the land.

Many other issues can be raised by just comparing these pictures, but for reconciliation’s sake, there are many issues that would have to be attended to before we embark on the language of reconciling the two groups of people, unless the word reconciliation is only on our lips. Even though it is not the focus of this article, it is important to note that there are also squatter camps where white people are living, for instance, Munsieville in Krugersdorp. But it should however be known that this has been and

is still a home for the majority of black South Africans. This has been part of the long history of inequality that was orchestrated by the elements of injustice and racism, among others. Recently, the very hot land debate was revived between the ruling party (ANC) and EFF where the bone of contention was that the government must be a custodian of the whole land while the ANC believed that they want to be custodians only of certain portions of the land in the country [34]. This of course have a close relationship with the argument of appropriation of land without compensation, which has been a headache for the government for a long time now. Of course, this very long debate is not of much interest in this study, but it is touched upon just to shed light as to where we are in terms of land ownership in South Africa, which has serious and should seriously continue to be one of the determining factors towards reconciling this very divided country.

7. Endangered lives continue to be normalised

I became concerned when even some black people who were supposed to have supported the brother in Mamelodi started criticising him and his family for his lost child when the pipes burst. I am referring to the case where Mike Mshiane and his Wife, Vinolia Sikele, lost a child when the water pipes burst below their five-year-old shack in Mamelodi East [35]. For me this incident took the child's life because of the land problem more than anything else. My argument is that if the land redistribution programme had not been delayed and this couple got the land to put their shack or house on good land, their child would still be alive today. They were left without a choice, but to erect a shack in the wrong place because the land issue is still to take more decades to discuss. I do not want to talk about the Alexandra community, the shacks of whom are always washed away whenever floods come through that Jukskei river. The consistent warnings whenever heavy rains and storms are predicted are made to people living in low-lying areas like Alexander and others because it is known that their houses and shacks will be damaged and even taken away. McCain [36] confirms this in his report entitled "Heavy rain causes flooding in parts of Pretoria, with more rain expected." In 2013 some homes of people were swept away by floods alongside the Tugela River in KZN because that was the only piece of land those people would call a home [37]. The lives of those without land remain at risk all the times. Without denying that these calamities and challenges happen in other countries also, the author's argument is that within the context of landless people in South Africa, these would be avoided for some people if they had proper land to build their houses. Without evading the possibilities of natural calamities and disasters like drought, pests and invasions which the author is aware of, it is important to maintain the focus of this specific study, keeping in mind that the future research must attend to those issues for continuity's sake. These are not the only challenges connecting to the topic, but poverty and unemployment as well, but for the sake of space and focus, the author will carry these into the future research.

It is the lives of the landless black people that are at risk there and yet they are expected to talk about reconciliation to someone who stays on a large portion of land. If we take a count of lives that were lost due to this delay of land redistribution, the statistics will show that the life of blacks is not a problem in South Africa. This level of inequality is also exposed during the lockdown due to the corona virus. Nocuze's [38] picture where people were cuing a very long cure to the very small toilet of a certain Nolusindiso Xaka of Khayelitsha is a practical example. These people's dignity

is compromised while the lockdown measures of isolation are hindered. This cannot only be blamed on the lockdown measures, but also to the lack of land in which everyone could try to at least build his or her own toilet. It was also argued in that report that residents refused to move their shacks to make space for toilets, merely because there is no enough space left to do that ([38], p. 9).

8. Deprivation to basic services

The 06h00 am news on Wednesday 05 November 2019 from Munghana Lonene (SABC Tsonga Radio Station) included a painful story of people who are starting to dig their wells to get water in Hamanskraal, just about 30 minutes-drive northwards of Pretoria. This is an entirely black township. It should be noted that a large inequality across South African provinces regarding basic services such as piped water, toilets, formal dwelling signals how the structuring of this poverty was meant to benefit the white dwelling places. According to Gradin [39], this was structured so that it could also enhance the racial disparities and seriously deprive the black people from economic opportunities. It sounds like a joke to expect someone without a toilet or a bucket toilet to reconcile with someone who has more than five toilets in a house in which only two people live. Practically, there is no equal lifestyle there that can draw these two different families closer to one another. The dignity of the other is undermined from the onset. I will close this section by quoting Gradin : “In summary, the legacy of apartheid and colonisation has left Africans with several drawbacks that make them more likely to be poor, such as living in rural areas or in the poorest provinces, higher fertility, less education, and poorer labour market outcomes, even if it is difficult to determine which of them is more relevant than the others.” ([39], p. 194). In one of its broadcasting stations called “Munghana Lonene FM” the SABC indicated that in Merwe, a village outside Malamulele, people are sharing drinking water with their domestic animals (Munghana Lonene News, 06h30 on 11 October 2019). Another report from Limpopo indicated that a young girl, Humbelani Mudzanani was attacked by crocodiles and her body was found floating in the dam. This was because she was supposed to fetch water from the stream since they do not have water in the Tshitomboni village ([40], p. 9). The unfortunate and sad moment for this village is caused by the lack of delivery of one of the basic public services. It should be noted that while some are being killed by crocodiles for fetching water, others are not even fetching water since it is in their houses, and yet, we expect the two kinds of people to reconcile. It is difficult if not impossible to expect the person who sleeps in a linking shack with the one whose dogs are sleeping in a house with ceiling and air conditioner to be on the same level of live, let alone reconciliation. That is in line with what Feely, ([41], p. 1) argues when saying that dignity in every human being is intrinsic and cannot be separated from a human being. There is a clear indication that reconciliation which comes along with justice must not neglect the lost dignity of those who were stripped of the land by those who have the land. Although, the examples given to highlight the lack of service delivery may seem to be of a particular social or ethnic group, the author thinks that these are just examples, but the reality is that all ethnic groups are affected by this delivery. All nine provinces of South Africa have communities that are having such issues as water, sanitation and roads services. The most general one is that of the load shedding, which affects every citizen as well as visitors of the country. This can be summed up by Mazamisa’s ([42], p. 213) who called the situation “ a devastating effect on many communities and individuals.”

9. Fuelling of xenophobic attacks

I am convinced that whenever the land and resources are less than the consumers, the likelihood is a conflict in the form of xenophobia or afroforbia. There is one biblical story that can be used to explain this further. In Mark 6:35–40 the disciples of Jesus Christ had only five loaves of bread and two fishes, while the estimated crowd on the day were about 500. Since it was humanly impossible for the available food to feed the large number of listeners, the disciples were quoted saying:

“This is a remote place,” they said, “and it’s already very late. Send the people away so that they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat.” This was a way to evade the responsibility of being a brother or a sister in terms of sharing the resources. (Mark 6, pp. 35–36).

The spirit of Ubuntu of sharing the little we have can often be challenged by the size of the resources we have. There are many ways of trying to evade responsibility when the challenge is that of sharing very limited resources. The current state of affairs in South Africa is characterised by the fact that it is those in the majority that do not have land. It does not mean that it is not a right for everyone to have a piece of land, but the government is in the same corner which the disciples of Jesus found themselves in when confronted by a large crowd with very little food. It is possible to think of solving the problem by sending the crowds home to enjoy the little resources without being faced by hungry people. Hatred among South Africans can also be fuelled by lack of land while others have it in abundance.

One of the reasons given for the xenophobic attacks in South Africa was that the foreigners are taking their jobs because they are ready to be paid peanuts. This is because the locals have trade unions that give the farm owners a tough time and instruct them to pay the workers decent living wages as well as giving them living conditions in their workplaces. Among others, many farm workers have been complaining that they stayed on the farms for many years and yet they do not have the right to own the land on which they can bury their loved ones. The experiences of the clash between residents and municipality law enforcement staff like those reported from Mfuleni has become a normal order of the day because the majority of black people do not have a piece of land just to put their houses or shacks. This is exactly what Merten [3] refers to in her report with sad pictures of the people with their belongings without roofs since they were buildings were destroyed, when she said: “Land ownership in South Africa remains a contentious issue, while calls for redistribution grow louder.” Marten also believes that an access to land is one of the keys to uplift unemployment. It is suspected of course, that one of the reasons the land distribution is a very slow issue it’s because the government loves money and they expect people to pay for the land, meanwhile the majority of the poor in the country are poor and unemployed. Veli Hlatshwayo [43] was quoted saying: “The attacks against blacks by South Africans show that there is a need to continue the revolution. Until wealth and land is equally distributed among the citizens, such story will continue.” This is a clear indication that the reconciliation that is being expected in South Africa is still trapped in the web of the issue of land.

Besides xenophobic violence, the black local people often engage in battles over the land issue. In the programme entitled “Tiko axi etleri” the SABC Radio Station Munghana Lonene reported that one man was hospitalized as a result of the shooting that occurred between the two local village leadership over a land dispute outside

Tzaneen. This is the village under the local chief Nkuna and the Mkgolobodo village which fought about a land grabbing until guns were used. The destruction of people's homes and their goods was also mentioned (SABC, Tiko, 19 January 2022: 06h00-07h00).

10. Landlessness must be treated as a violation of the human right

The research by Naidoo and Naidoo [44] entitled "The erosion of human dignity in the New South Africa" explains amongst other things how humanity, particularly black humanity was unjustly robbed of their dignity and yet expected to embrace love. There is no way a land issue cannot be the top of the agenda of all sorts of injustices that put the black people in their adjacent poverty as they are today. Although some want to argue that we keep blaming the pre-1994 government whereas the country is now democratic, the author's argument is that those who are still mourning their loss must be allowed to do so until such time when they realise that the reversal of the wrongs has been done. [45], p. 215) added to this argument by indicating that the very slow pace at which land reform is being done is cause for land grabbing since many are losing patience to the process. For Goolam [46] the foundation of democracy, which is human dignity is attained by the equality of all people's human rights and freedom. This clarifies why the argument that reconciliation is still an uphill to climb when other people's dignity through the stripping of the land is still at stake.

11. Practical theological guidelines on land injustices

Theologically speaking, the God who created the land amongst other things is the same God of justice. Any theology that tries to evade responsibility by not listening to and addressing the cries of its immediate recipients is not only irrelevant, but must also cease to exist. The God of theology that we read about in the Bible is the creator of heavens and earth. He also created human beings in His own image before placing them in the garden, which is part of the land (Genesis 1, pp. 26–28). If God wanted people to be landless He would not have placed them on land and instructed them to subdue it (Gen.1:28). The creation was all perfect when the inclusion of human being placed on the land was part of the creation story. In other words, the statement that it was very good in Genesis 1:31 was vocalised after the placing of human being on land was included as part of the plan of God. The author's interpretation is that the creation story is incomplete or imperfect without the man being given the land to subdue it. For that reason, it became a painful part of history when human beings were expelled from the allocated land after the disobedience of Genesis 3. In practical sense, this implies that it is the very same Creator who has powers to remove from any part of land whoever He placed, not another human being.

It is clear that some researchers pointed out that there was a serious role that religion, particularly John Calvin's Reformed theology legitimized the policies of racial segregation that put all the ([47], p. 9). This on its own suggests that as much as the religious and faith communities have played a role in using their doctrines and other influence for this unjust practice to be perpetuated, they are not to be left out when reversing the very same issues they were supporting. The author of this article sees the importance of revising and unteaching that which was taught as an essential tool towards the different that will topple down the inhuman segregation, including

on land issue. In that way the wrong role of the church will be reversed and it is not only about writing of confessing, but also by involving the church into these negotiations. The rebuilding of the community through restoration of human dignity is not only political move, but a moral and ethical obligation for which the church has a part to play [48]. For mobilisation and socialisation of the community faith community must play their part, for example through documents like that of Smith [49] which was circulated in the Dutch Reformed Church Synod around 2002. The document was entitled: Land Reform and the church ([47], p. 12). Such documents do not only influence the community, but they also can be given a chance for suggestions to the policy makers for consideration in rebuilding the nation as the advancement of the land redistribution is called upon. The influence of organisations like SACC is still respected amongst faith-based organisations and that is a positive point, they should use their influence to get involved and not stay back when these negotiations as well as land grabbing are taking place. Using the scriptures the task of advocacy and prophetic voice in challenging the state about this may make the difference. Making of submissions and petitions to portfolio committees and the relevant government ministries falls within the democratic right of every organisation and individuals, these opportunities have not been much exploited.

For ([11], p. 1) besides its political controversies, the land has also emotional and religious attachment to African people, hence theology cannot afford to be left out in the issue of land. It is for this reason that the author's understanding links very well with that of Mlambo when indicating that the struggle for land is a struggle for justice because these two have been tied together ([50], p. 1). Theology is incomplete if it avoids including the issue of land as part of its discourse. The thoughts of the late Prof ([51], p. 2) when he aimed to look at the characteristics of land theology, which is one of the most important catalysts of black theology of liberation. There is no way the colonial justice of cultural domination and oppression that forcefully took the land can be justified. God has and will always been on the side of the poor and the oppressed, hence it is convincing that He cannot be the author of such injustice. If the unjust taking of the land from black people is one of the causes of oppression that demanded a revolutionary struggle, then the very logical argument is that there cannot be a reconciliation without liberation ([52], p. 6). This is very in line with Chimhanda [53] who has seen that black theologians have recognized the connection that exists between achieving authentic peace, liberation and reconciliation. These concepts plus justice cannot be separated in political terms, but they should move together for true reconciliation to be achieved. According to Takatso Mofokeng [54] in his chapter "Land is our mother" the symbolical mother is ready to save her child at all costs. The clear lesson we can learn is of the suffering of the child who is orphaned by the loss of the mother. This is the kind of toleration landless and poor South African had been subjected to for all these years. It only makes sense to understand the land as an integral part of African view of life [51].

There is a need for Liberation theology to play its role. The liberation of Israelites from Egypt was incomplete before the occupation of the promised land; hence, God continued to move with them through deserts into Canaan. This is why God was still actively involved with His chosen nation during the conquest of Canaanites inhabitants under the military leadership of Joshua to ensure that they indeed settle on the land. It is my understanding that the 1994 democratic elections were just phased one of victory, but phase two must still take place where the complete restoration of the land to the black people must happen. God knows not to rest until the land occupation is still not on the side of the black masses who are still landless in South Africa. One of

the fathers of Liberation theology, James Cone [55] wrote much about the liberative message of God where he argues that God is on the side of the poor and the oppressed. In John 10:10 we read: “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.” It is a contention of the author of this article that life is not in its fullness to those who do not have land, rights dignity and respect they deserve.

If there was a painful part in the history of Israel as a chosen nation of God, it was that period of exile. One of the main reasons why being exiled was a painful experience was that people would be removed from the land of their own into a foreign land. It has always been a prayer and desire for Israelites that would be returned into the land of their own, the land promised to their ancestor Abraham. It was for the reason his ancestral land and its gates were destroyed that Nehemiah (1:1–5) sat down and wept.

From a theological point of view there are clear biblical stories that tell that God the Creator dislike and punishes those who wrongly take the land in support of those who lost it. According to ref. [1] (p. 184) the biblical story of how Ahab’s greedy over the vineyards of Naboth makes a lot of relevance here. While king Ahab was insisting that Naboth should sell him his vineyards he continuously indicated to him that it was against his tradition to give away his inheritance. Our theology must teach us that there is a close relationship between the land and what our forefathers left for us. The anger of God on those who forcefully take the land of others was demonstrated when God pronounced a judgement in I Kings 21:19, which was fulfilled in 1 Kings 22:37–38. This judgement can be justified by Deuteronomy 19:14 which says: “Do not move your neighbor’s boundary stone set up by your predecessors in the inheritance you receive in the land the LORD your God is giving you to possess.” True theology must teach and confront people of South Africa, including the government with this reality. According to James Cone, God is always on the side of the poor and oppressed, in this context, on the side of those who does not have land meanwhile their forefathers were citizens in the same country. Theologians and the church must be able to inform the government that it is both an abuse of power and against God’s will to keep landlessness a normal way of life ([56], p. 53).

There is amongst others, one biblical example of justice towards the issue of the land that was wrongfully taken from its owner. The story of the Shunamite woman whose land was unjustly taken was restored and her dignity was restored in 2 Kings 8:5–6 which says: And while he was telling the king how Elisha had restored the dead to life, behold, the woman whose son he had restored to life appealed to the king for her house and her land. And Gehazi said, “My lord, O king, here is the woman, and here is her son whom Elisha restored to life.”⁶ And when the king asked the woman, she told him. So the king appointed an official for her, saying, “Restore all that was hers, together with all the produce of the fields from the day that she left the land until now.” This is in line with Cone’s theology when he says that God is always on the side of the poor and afflicted. The South African situation of the black masses on land issue is not exceptional. If the South African government is serious about reconciling South Africans, their dignity should be looked at also in the lenses of land issue as a matter of urgency. The current South African context demands that we have the kind of prophetic liberative theology like the one we read above. The government should take the lead in ensuring that before the land is grabbed like it was happening recently, justice is done on the issues of land redistribution.

Reconciliation demands that both parties should move from their own comfort zones and meet at the middle point. In other words, readiness of reaching

compromise should be encouraged from both sides, those who have it and those who do not have it. ([4], p. 5) argues that reconciliation can be achieved by trying to give more than what one receives. White landowners must come out instead of remaining in the dark and let the politicians only fight their battle. Jacob and Esau met at a middle point for reconciliation to take place. The nature of reconciliation comes with the recognition and confession of the wrongs of the past to embrace a new future. The defence mechanisms that we are seeing in South Africa will never yield the reconciliation that we need to see. Baloyi further indicated that the power of faith, sacrifice and moving from comfort zone into the meeting point of the divided people would help towards reconciliation ([5], p. 6). It is important to note that as difficult as the situation is, there are some people and churches that give land to people as a way of bringing peace and this should be commended. These people are willing to lose what they have to at least play role in bringing peace.

Paul also touched on the issue of reconciliation in his teachings. According to [57], p. 1), Paul's doctrine of reconciliation involves individual, corporate, cosmic and eschatological dimensions. According to Paul, reconciliation becomes the objective work of God through Jesus Christ in 2 Cor.5:19. In Colossians 1:19–21 it is written:

For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behaviour. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation.

The word reconciliation finds its roots in the Pauline letters in the Bible. The hostilities that existed between the Jews and Greeks are also dealt with in a reconciliatory spirit from Galatians 3:28. He uses the basis of this reconciliation on the work done on the cross. Basically, the important argument he uses is that reconciliation and salvation should move alongside each other [58–60].

Although, it does not necessarily mean that the one will cause the other, I support Louw's ([61], p. 9) opinion that forgiveness and reconciliation should go alongside each other. If the South African societies have not forgiven one another, just like it is being evidenced by racial attacks in churches, workplaces and public squares, it remains very difficult to conceptualise some form of reconciliation. It is just a pity that, according to Volf [62], the churches are presumed to be instruments of the peace we want to see become the enemies of that peace by influencing conflicts. Wielenga ([63], p. 7) suggest that the churches should plan to have story-sharing encounters around a meal or braai in the church regularly.

According to Stamps ([64], p. 1812), the death of Jesus on the cross to reconcile people with God must be a lesson to teach us that the church must stand up and fight for justice and reconciliation. Although forgiveness and reconciliation are not the same things, they should move along [62]. I must add that it becomes difficult, if not impossible, to expect reconciliation and forgiveness where justice did not prevail. To add on this Wielega ([63], p. 9) urges the churches to plan an open space where people can freely express and share their past stories as a healing method.

Lederack's model of reconciliation- From the Algerian unequal context Lederack's proposals can also be discussed in trying to shape how reconciliation in the divided South Africa can be mapped going forward. Without detailing much of what he said, it is important to make use of concepts like "mercy", "peace" and "justice" must be

allowed to play an important role in intensifying reconciliation and unity into a fragmented society like South Africa ([65], p. 30). The author of this paper suggests an inclusive approach when addressing the issue of land redistribution. This is because there are evidences that their processes of land are often frustrated by lack of proper consultation with all the interested parties, from both black and white people of this country. Kgatle [66] indicated in his research entitled.... that racial comments keep on being posted even in our social media, which play a role in frustrating the process since unfounded general labelling can cause resistance from those who can meaningfully contribute to the discussion and process. Although Kgatle [66] argued this in the context of the Faith Mission Church in South Africa, the bigger context of the country is also characterised by what he meant. Instead, the author would advocate for the spirit of accountability towards another human life. The Biblical message of being each other's keepers apply also to this issue. Those with land, particularly unused land should start thinking about other human beings whose shacks and houses are planted along the river beds while others are cramped in a line of shacks without basic service because of being in a small space.

Pastoral leadership can also play a role by influencing the local traditional leaders to call upon people to strategize together towards land reforming instead of participating in unofficial land grabbing. Traditional leaders have an opportunity to raise these issues to the government officials who always come down to seek their influence for political elections.

12. Conclusion


The disparities and inequalities between the previously disadvantaged South Africans and those who were privileged by the apartheid regime are still a visible one today. Not much had been done to close the gap between those who had life and those who did not have it. Therefore, when starting to talk about reconciliation we need to be careful since the two classes of people are practically far from each other. The main item at the centre cannot be ignored, land redistribution which will enable the previously disadvantaged to start climbing the ladder. Ignorance to this issue is like sitting on the wheels of the transformation agenda of reconciliation. The reality is that besides it being a political agenda, there is a strong need for reconciliation to the "still" divided South African nation. It should be noted that reconciliation is part of the bigger transformation agenda which demands the reversal of "all" the injustices of the past. These injustices include the land issue which remains a thorn in the flesh of many South Africans. It is humanly difficult to imagine how the society with such a great inequality can be reconciled without serious consideration of basic issues like land redistribution, which is a serious need for the black majority.

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