

**Re-imagining African Reformed Praxis in theological education:
A Missiological dialogue with the
Northern Theological Seminary (NTS)¹**

*Reginald W Nel
Mpeane K Makofane*

Department of Christian Spirituality, Church History and Missiology
University of South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa

Abstract

In 2008, in the aftermath of a devastating explosion of violence against “foreigners” in the “New South Africa”, as missiologists, we started research on the responses of churches to this violence, in particular the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA). This research was embedded in the broader question of how our emerging missionary theologies from Africa colluded to entrench exclusivist social identities to contribute to this crisis. Some of our work was published in *Theologia Viatorum* (Journal of Theology and Religion in Africa) and *Missionalia* (Southern African Journal of Missiology) in 2009-2011. In this ongoing project, in a context of accelerated migration in a post-colonial Southern Africa, we reflect on how colonial identities from the metropolitan centres continue to shape the responses from church and theological education centres, specifically in Southern Africa. We tentatively and critically suggest signs of hope. In this contribution we revisit the notion of “African Reformed Praxis” by the Northern Theological Seminary of the URCSA as a key contribution towards re-imagining post-colonial social identities beyond that of the black African other as a basis for a Southern African missionary identity and theological education. Our perspectives are informed by an ongoing reflection on the legacy and continued relevance of a particular emerging missionary theology from Africa, ie the South African Black Theology in a post-colonial context.

¹ An earlier version of this article was presented at thirteenth conference of International Association for Mission Studies (IAMS), focusing on Migration, Human Dislocation, and the Good News: Margins as the Centre in Christian Mission, 15-20 August 2012, in Toronto Canada. The financial support from the Unisa College of Human Sciences, College Research and Innovation Committee, is acknowledged.

Introduction

One of the enduring historical legacies of Prof. Takatso A. Mofokeng is his well-known commitment to not only the advancement of African and Black Theology, but also to theological education. In recent years he was directly involved in ministerial formation, first as scribe of the first *Kuratorium* of Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA) and later through the Northern Theological Seminary (NTS) of this church. In previous years he also served as the Moderator of the General Synod of the former *Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk in Afrika (NGKA)*. With NTS, in particular, he continued to explore, with ministry candidates and younger colleagues, what it means to be African and Reformed (URCSA 2005:163-164; 211). This is the focus of our contribution namely a missiological-historical dialogue with the NTS on how, in recent years, they proposed to form African Reformed faith leaders to minister the gospel of unity, reconciliation and justice in a particularly violent [southern] African context.

In 2009, we argued that the explosion of violence against the migrants and economic refugees in some South African townships unmasked not only a deeply flawed myth of post-colonial political reconciliation amongst various [southern] African countries, but also the impotence of our theological legacies (Nel & Makofane 2009:374-399; Nel 2009:138-152). How do we form leaders in this context? It would seem that even our emergent² theologies, like African Theology and South African Black Theology were stunned into silence. In the midst of the violence, some churches (those who did something) tried to organise blankets and food, while others, such as church leaders, walked (with the media!) down the streets of well-known townships like Alexandra³ to meet residents as well as the victims of the violence. Yet it would seem that the key fundamental challenges raised by these theologies over the last few decades, remained. These, as we pointed out in 2009, are the challenges relating to deeply racial, colonial identities, alienation from land and therefore a homelessness in their own motherland under God's mythical rainbow. These were the challenges that the Professor

² In using the term, "emergent" we are aware of recent (mostly North American) movements like the "emergent church movement" (Bolger and Gibbs 2006, McLaren 2004:313-326, Jones 2011) but here we invoke an older tradition as espoused in the work of Torres and Fabella (1978), which was initially called 'The Emergent Gospel: Theology from the developing world' and was published by the Ecumenical Dialogue of Third World Theologians (EATWOT), from their meeting in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania in 1976.

³ Alexandra is a well-known black township in Johannesburg, very close to Sandton, the economic nerve centre of Johannesburg, South Africa and sub-Saharan Africa. Yet Alexandra was one of the devastating flashpoints of the mayhem in May 2008. Alex Eliseev, journalist for The Star daily newspaper writes, 'Outside the bulletproof glass [of the Nyala] something frightening has engulfed Alexandra...The scenes that play out in the streets belong somewhere else. Anywhere but in the new South Africa.' (Eliseev 2008: 28).

(1983:ix-x) aimed to address in his theological work. In the Foreword to his doctoral thesis, published in 1983, he states the challenge in terms of a question that haunted him as a pastor in the NGKA but also as a theologian, namely “how can faith in Jesus Christ empower black people who are involved in the struggle for liberation?”. In this dissertation, under the heading “The Concern of Black Theology ...” he identifies alienation from history, culture and land (Mofokeng 1983:21-23) as critical. More than a decade later, in a chapter entitled “Land is our mother: Black Theology of Land”, Professor Mofokeng (1997:42-55) comes back to these themes and depicts graphically what he calls “the ruthless process of colonial conquest and sometimes stealthy theft of our ancestral land that continues up until today” (Mofokeng 1997:42). In short, these continued challenges, we pointed out in 2009, related missiologically to alienation from God’s “oikos”. At least in South Africa, the initial comfort under God’s rainbow was shattered. Focussing on the response of URCSA, we then showed, drawing on the theological work of Mofokeng, how specific African theological resources like the Belhar Confession and the Accra Document, but also the philosophy of *ubuntu*, might be gifts in guiding a new eucharistic pilgrimage home (Nel & Makofane 2009:388-395).

This contribution aims at taking this engagement further. With some other subsequent contributions (Tshaka 2010:124-135; Tshaka & Makofane 2010:532-546; Bookholane 2010:481-493; Phiri & Gathogo 2010:185-206) we now try to understand the ongoing political violence which sparked forced migration in the first place, but which also still erupts violently from time to time. What would the implications of this quest be for a dialogue with NTS on African Reformed Theological Education, or what could also be called interchangeably, “ministerial formation praxis” (URCSA 2005:282; Kritzing 2010:211). As indicated, to focus our attention as missiologists on the transformative encounters in a local context and concrete ministerial formation praxis, we understandably limit our dialogue in this contribution to the NTS, an URCSA ministry formation centre located in the City of Tshwane, in South Africa (URCSA 2005:349-350; Kritzing 2010:211-213). We concede that this is a limited focus because there are other URCSA ministry formations centres, but we hope this will allow for a deeper and critical engagement on its recent history, instead of opting for a broader, perhaps superficial, ahistorical engagement.

In this engagement then, we *first* briefly outline the political and policy context in which the infamous bloody May of 2008 was embedded - the weeks when South Africa experienced the brutal eruption from some townships. In response to the popular reaction from politicians, invoking a common African identity and *ubuntu*, we *secondly* ask the question, what does “African” means in post-colonial South Africa? How has this identification been constructed historically and which, tragically, led to the othering of

the various black African migrants? In a *third* round we relate this to the reflections from the URCSA, particularly from the NTS and then, in terms of a way forward, discuss what a notion of African Reformed praxis might mean in responding to the design of an African Reformed Ministerial Formation practice.

Being African in post-colonial South Africa

Xenophobic vs Afrophobic?

As indicated, in 2008 most of the responses to what were labelled in the media as the “xenophobic” attacks on black African migrants, or “foreigners” (Worby, Hassim & Kupe 2008: 3-6) from various [southern] African countries, reminded the “marauding mob” out there in the townships, “... but we are all Africans” (Mngxitama 2008:196). Here the notion of “African” became the unifying antidote for the crisis. For others (Mngxitama 2008:197-198; Gqola 2008:213; Tshaka 2010:128-132) it was the cause of the violence. Hence, instead of xenophobia they would prefer to speak of either “Afrophobia” or “Negrophobia” as the leading cause for the violence. For Tshaka (2010:124), violence is “no stranger to Christian faith ...” yet the current South African discourse disregards the systematic state violence against its black subjects. In our mind, we generally agree with the main thrust of his argument. However, we would not dismiss the notion of xenophobia at all. The problem was indeed almost exclusively *black* Africans but, in many ways, they were construed (demonised) as the *other*⁴ – the “stranger”, the “alien”, the “foreigner” who contests and steals “our” citizen rights as authentic *South African* Africans. Indeed, it would seem that what it means to be “African” in a post-colonial South Africa is not so self-evident anymore, if ever it was. It seems that there are authentic Africans, and then there are those *other* Africans (“from Africa”) – some of them darker (and therefore on a lower level) than black.⁵ The bloody May of 2008 reminded South Africans that clarifying these meanings is not simple semantics – these distinctions and self-definitions can mean the difference between life and death. It relates directly to the questions about who have the access and the rights to political, economic and symbolic power. What it means to be considered “African” in

⁴ See our extensive argument in Nel and Makofane (2009:374-399).

⁵ The pernicious matter of pigmentation remained one of the identity markers in the bloody month of May 2008. Other factors identifying the targets of the violence were their ability to speak isiZulu, in particular to be able to know the particular Zulu translation of terms like elbow, etc. The darker skin tones, however became the more important indicator, which also endangered the lives of fellow South Africans in the most Northern parts of the country, ie in particular members from the Shangaan linguistic group.

this context is tied to the materiality of the economy and the ongoing (often violent) struggles between life and death.

These life and death distinctions didn't fall from the sky. The understanding and construction of who is an African, at least in the Southern African context, had a period of gestation. This gestation related to the way Africa had been depicted in post-colonial state policy and media, but also, and related to that, in the popular imagination. Therefore, while the relationship between South Africa and the rest of the continent is critical to understanding phenomena like migration, xenophobia and Afrophobia, it is also critical for the meanings of "South Africa", "Africa", "stranger", etc. At least in this context, the phenomena of xenophobia and Afrophobia are closely related to each other. The question is how these meanings were developed, particularly in the context of post-colonial state policy.

Being an "African" – the dream deferred

The notion of "African" became crucial within the framework of the African Renaissance (Magubane 1999:10-36; Mangcu 2008:2-6). This however continued a particular concept of "African" in relation to South Africa. Former Black Consciousness activist, now politician, Mamphela Ramphele (2009) argues that the new democratic South Africa was projected and expected, by supposedly being the largest economy in Africa, to be a leader⁶ on the continent of Africa. She states:

Thanks to the Gear programme, the country is in a better position to assume its role as the engine of growth for the benefit of the entire continent ... The size of South Africa's economy relative to the youthfulness of its democracy has plunged it in a leadership role beyond its experience (Ramphele 2009:288).

This narrative played into the broader dream⁷ of what the former president of South Africa, Thabo Mbeki, imagined as the "African Renaissance". Ramphele tells the story of how in May 1996 Mbeki framed the adoption of

⁶ Ramphele (2009:288) as well as Vale and Maseko (2002:122), shows how eminent African leaders, like Julius Nyerere, former president of Tanzania, would refer to this leadership role as well as successive South African leaders.

⁷ Ramphele is aware that for some analysts, like Bond (2002: 53-81) and Vale and Maseko (2002:121-142) this was indeed one of President Mbeki's pipedreams, as they argue that the fundamental logic of the particular expression of globalisation assumes unequal outcomes on a global scale. We come back to their analysis of the African Renaissance and NEPAD. For Ramphele, however, the inevitable reality of (neo-liberal) globalisation means that Africa must play within the rules of the game, as best they can.

South Africa's new constitution⁸ within the context of this dream of the African Renaissance. He does this in the poetic words of perhaps his most famous speech, entitled "I am an African". Ramphele (2009:272) states: ... now, President Thabo Mbeki, marked a turning point for the new South Africa and its role in Africa.

In this image, to be an African means to be linked historically with the diverse cultures that make up the South African nation, but also between South Africans and the rest of the continent. According to Ramphele (2009:273), all this is happening with the aim to "win respect for the continent in a globalising world". To be a true African is to rebel in the cause of the African Renaissance. Ramphele, after giving a glowing overview of this dream to be implemented through the aims and programmes of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), concludes with her assessment as follow:

The centrepiece of Mbeki's legacy is likely to be his visionary leadership in forging African unity and repositioning the continent in the interconnected globalising world ... He has shifted the frame of reference from Africa the failed continent to Africa the continent of infinite possibilities and investment opportunities. Mbeki has made it possible for more people to say proudly: 'I am an African!' (Ramphele 2009:294).

This narrative and Ramphele's assessment, was however contested. Vale and Maseko states:

whilst analysts and commentators have trawled the idea of the African Renaissance for policy content, there seems to be very little of substance to anchor an obviously fine idea ... rooted in structuralism and buoyed by the same modernisation theory that inspired apartheid's African ambitions, South Africa's idea of an African Renaissance is abstruse, puzzling, even perhaps mysterious; more promise than policy ... (Vale & Maseko 2002:124).

⁸ The new South African constitution, with its strong human rights base, as an outcome of a long negotiation process, in particular between the ANC and the National Party as embodied in the personalities of Cyril Ramaphosa and Roelf Meyer, is depicted as one of the key pillars upon which the national myth of the "new South Africa" is built, alongside the symbolism and narratives around the person of the late President Nelson Mandela, the work of Emeritus Archbishop Desmond Tutu and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, but for others around the Springbok victory and in the Rugby World Cup of 1995 (Petersen 1997; Hendriks 1998; Maluleke 1999).

Re-imagining African Reformed Praxis in theological education: ...

In aiming at interpreting the idea of African Renaissance, they speak of the “assertive role in African affairs”, and shows that this turn in foreign policy aimed at “South Africa’s African destiny”, is nothing new (Vale & Maseko 2002:122-124). For them, this dream goes further back than the Mbeki era, into the colonial image stating:

Each political epoch has promised to open exciting possibilities of engagement across the continent’s spatial and other divides; ... the logic of this belief has seemed unassailable... this made the idea of South Africa’s continental destiny appear quite natural ... (Vale & Maseko 2002:122).

They quote a speech from South Africa’s Prime Minister, Jan Smuts, in April 1940, who declared:

If we wish to take our rightful place as the *leader* [emphasis added] in Pan-African development and in the shaping of the future policies and events in this vast continent, we must face the realities and the facts of the present and seize the opportunities which these offer. All Africa may be our proper market if we will but have the vision, and far-sighted policy will be necessary if that is to be realised (in Vale & Maseko 2002:122).

This was followed up in the 1960’s and 1970’s, and remained basically embedded in the modernisation theory with the aim of taking over the vast “African market” (Vale & Maseko 2002:124). Vale and Maseko argue that this African Renaissance has been interpreted and outlines two “streams”. On the one hand they discuss the globalist interpretation. In terms of this interpretation Africa is seen as the:

expanding and prosperous market alongside Asia, Europe and North America, one in which South African capital is destined to play a special role via trade, strategic partnerships, and the like. In exchange for South Africa’s role as the agent of globalisation, the continent will offer this country a preferential option on its traditional promise or largesse of oil, minerals and mining (Vale & Maseko 2002:127).

Restrictions and barriers in the flow of resources, including labour, are to be abolished and this competition for markets will lead to profitability, more international confidence and, therefore, a mutually beneficial outcome for all. However, this logic has not been embraced by all and critics like Vale and

Maseko show examples from various African countries of how “transitions underpinned by the market, the military, and the ballot box have done little to dislodge traditional patterns of post-colonial control and the pre-eminence of elites” (Vale & Maseko 2002:128), while what they call “Africa’s uncaptured peasantry” remains left outside the gates. Bond (Vale & Maseko 2002:53-82) also shows that Mbeki’s dreams were close to this globalist stream, presenting a scathing analysis of NEPAD. He argues that the “African” in African Renaissance dream, are the colourless elites who ride the wave of a particular expression of “global apartheid”. To be an African or, better, a South African “African” indeed meant to “rebel” in a cause but, more specifically, to rebel in a cause for obedience to the policy proposals by Mbeki. Xolela Mangcu (2008:2-3) further shows how, under the Mbeki era, the notion of an African went through shifts from the inclusive “I am an African” speech towards, what he calls, “racial nativism”, a racialised political conception where the authentic Africans are construed as the obedient followers of Mbeki’s political dictates. Yet, one can also find glimpses of another, more hopeful, interpretation even though, perhaps, only in the speechmaking.

In this second stream of interpreting the African Renaissance then, Vale and Maseko (2002:128) depict it as “Africanist” and “post-structural”. This rendition calls for a reinterpretation of African reality and history, which transcends colonial, but also neo-colonial, imaginations. In quoting Anthony Appiah, they affirm an African-ness that is “still in the making ... an identity coming into existence”, tapping into the deep layers of African myths and culture. This interpretation envisions a renewal of policies on the basis of this rich layer. In this context the movement, exchange of ideas, cultural elements, which one also finds in Biko’s (2006[1978]:50) interpretation of African culture, assume exchange. Yet the question remains whether this notion of an ongoing reinterpretation, openness and exchange, but then also syncretism of the mixed tapestry of symbols and meaning has been able to find root in the daily patterns of political, economic and social realities of post-colonial South Africa. It seems not.

Burning down the dream

More devastatingly than the critics of the African Renaissance trying to interpret the poetry of Mbeki, in May 2008 his African dream went up in smoke. While the interpretation of “African”, through the aforementioned economic class and cultural lenses, perhaps provides insights into the complexities of the interactions between notions of identity and materiality in post-colonial state policy, we need another framework to better understand the self-destructive nature of the violence meted out against fellow *black* Africans. Mamdani (2009) grapples with this by asking whether the analysis, through a political economic lens, went deep enough to answer the persistent

question on the ongoing, what he calls, “non-revolutionary”⁹ violence, in post-colonial Africa. He concedes the value of the political economic lens (Vale, Maseko & Bond), in countering colonial assumptions in various modernisation theories of development but argues for a “second coming of cultural explanations of political conflict, addressing the political resurgence of ethnicity” (Mamdani 2009:123). In this interpretation, he wishes to critique both Marxists and nationalists for being unable to historicise race and ethnicity as constructed political identities, “undergirded and reproduced by colonial institutions”. He shows that the political violence points to a (necessary!) collapse of the state, and, more specifically, the “political institutions of colonial rule”. We now turn to his understanding of the crisis.

A lens for understanding the crisis.

While it would fall beyond the scope of this contribution to go in too much depth into Mamdani’s (2009:126-132) very illuminating framework, it would suffice to present it as a tool for interpreting the understanding of “African” as well as interpreting the African Reformed Praxis as a critical dimension for African ministerial formation.

For an understanding of “African”, according to Mamdani (2009:126), one needs to understand the logic of the colonial state and what it aims to produce.

The solution [for the non-revolutionary violence-RWN&KMM] does not lie in bringing back the Europeans to address the “state collapse”, or even the “recolonisation” by presumably more benign Africans, as Ali Mazrui once suggested. Nor does the solution lie in redrawing Africa’s boundaries. For no matter how much we redraw the boundaries, the political crisis will remain incomprehensible until we address the political and institutional legacy of colonial rule.

What is this legacy? For Mamdani (2009:126), this colonial state created particular “legally inscribed identities”.¹⁰ Hence, the colonial state developed into, what he calls, a “bifurcated state”. This means that on the one hand, a racialised legal state was under the tutelage of the European colonial ruler

⁹ Mamdani (2009:123) argues that political economy as a framework for political analysis, can only explain violence when it resulted from a clash between market-based identities, i.e. it had to be either revolutionary violence or counterrevolutionary. The question is how violence which “cut across social classes rather than between them”, is to be interpreted, ie for his, “non-revolutionary” political violence.

¹⁰ ‘Legally inscribed identities’, are based on the law, hence they can be enforced by the state and, for Mamdani, reproduced by institutions, which have the power to “distinguish citizens from other residents and structure citizen participation within the state” (:126).

while parallel to this, on the other side, there were tribal councils or customary power. This structure was administered in such a way that the maximum profits for the colonial power were to be ensured by the colonial administration. On the other hand, there was the fragmentation of the customary power structure into constructed ethnic identities (mostly on the basis of differences in language or dialects) which was entrenched. This gave rise to the contesting, allocation and control of primarily land and labour. Hence, the whole population were divided into “races” on the one hand and “ethnicities” or “tribes” on the other side. The racialised legal state was characterised by a hierarchy, which determined access to rights while the various ethnic identities existed side by side, excluded from access. This structure, Mamdani argues, continued after independence, except for the de-racialisation of the legal state. The rules for the competition for scarce resources and livelihoods therefore changed politically, but still the new (post-colonial) rulers had to compete for control within the context of ethnic identities which held territorial power. The challenge is therefore how these socially constructed (essentialised) identities – linked to access to resources – are to be transcended in a post-colonial context. What is the place of an African Reformed Ministerial formation to be in this quest? In this respect we therefore introduce the one case study of the NTS, as it aims to embody the notion of an African Reformed praxis and ask the question whether it offers the possibility of transcending the historical legacy of the racialised legal state.

African Reformed praxis within URCSA

Tshaka (2007:537) rightly points out that a rebirth of Africa poses a number of challenges for, specifically, the Reformed Church¹¹ in Southern Africa. As a result, Reformed African Christians can no longer afford to ignore the issue of Africanisation in their congregations and ministerial formation. Kritzinger (2010:227) also shares Tshaka’s sentiments by appealing for a ministerial formation curriculum in the URCSA that should bear an African Reformed stamp. It is in this context that NTS plays a role. In this contribution we focus on those dimensions relevant to the topic under discussion, ie addressing the challenges of migration and, as a result of that, xenophobic and Afrophobic violence from the perspective of transcending the historical legacy of racialised (colonial) identities. The kind of ministerial formation NTS re-imagines over its short history is relevant by being consciously undergirded by an ethos of equality, inclusion and unity but, more pertinently, an

¹¹ We are aware that this challenge is not only for the Reformed tradition. In this respect the work of Ntsimane (2009:219-235) from a Lutheran perspective as well as Richardson & Leleki (2010:235-247) from a Methodist perspective, shows that many historic missionary churches are re-imagining their ministerial formation or training.

“African-and-Reformed ethos” as their “theological focus” (URCSA 2005:350). In our view this is, relevant as an attempt to overcome, among other things, the legacy of ethnic division and exclusion as indicated in earlier sections. We introduce a dialogue with NTS aware of the fact that Mofokeng and Kritzinger act as individuals with others, but are some of the key drivers¹² within the NTS. Our interest is however that they are not only consciously involved, but are the key scholars developing policy and a body of theological literature to self-consciously foster an African Reformed praxis through ministerial formation. We find this approach relevant in responding to the challenges raised earlier in this article.

As we argued in 2009, for us the praxis approach of a missiological historical dialogue highlights the need for a constant interplay between dimensions of agency or identification with the questions who am I or who are we, but also understanding or analysis of the social context, ie questioning what is really going on here. Further dimensions of this dialogue will be biblical interpretation (What does the Christian tradition say in relation to these issues?) but also strategies, ie what can we do about this? We limit ourselves to the two dimensions of agency and strategies due to space. In the previous section we already dealt with the social context within which, in our view, NTS can discern its mandate and calling. In following this approach, we therefore appropriate this tool to understand the praxis of the NTS as it responds to its mandate. We start therefore with the notion of agency or identification and conclude in the last section with a few critical comments on its strategies.

Agency/Identification

NTS is to be understood as the continuation of the Turfloop Theological School, which was one of the ethnic schools for the mission churches of the white Dutch Reformed church (Crafford 1982:503-506; URCSA 2005:349-350; Kritzinger 2008:175-178; 2010:212; See also Kriel 1979:23-29). After the unification between the former *Nederduitse Gereformeerde Sendingkerk* and the *Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk in Afrika*, in 1994, a new journey for theological education was explored by the new URCSA (VGKSA 1997:146-152). Reflecting on its agency Kritzinger (2010:216) notes that the notion “Uniting” in the name of the particular church, immediately denotes

¹² Kritzinger is the current chairperson of the NTS Seminary Management Committee (SMC) and has also been directly involved since 2004 in the development of the policy of Ministerial Formation within URCSA (URCSA 2005:282; Kritzinger 2010:212), but is also involved as a key author in some scholarly reflection on the praxis of NTS. As indicated, earlier Mofokeng, served on the first *Kuratorum* of the URCSA, and as the head of the Turfloop Theological School (VGKSA 1997:142). In future this dialogue might open up to more colleagues involved in or institutions formed through NTS.

that historically its founders were advocating for an ongoing and widening unification process that also included [southern] Africa. Unfortunately this dream is yet to be born due to a number of internal, pressing issues – such as legal and financial matters- which have preoccupied URCSA since its inception (VGKSA 1997:142; URCSA 2001:189; URCSA 2005:282). Despite these challenges and factors, the place of URCSA, in the broader [southern] African vision, in boldly re-imagining a particular African Reformed praxis in theological education cannot be underplayed. Kritzinger (2010:217) is hopeful that if this African vision materialises and when meeting regularly with fellow students from other [southern] African countries, URCSA will be in the best position to form ministry students who are sensitive to forms of exclusion such as xenophobia and Afrophobia. Kritzinger identifies at least three dimensions in the URCSA curriculum (URCSA 2005:304-307), namely, praxis-based, focussed on diversity, and, as indicated earlier, a specific language policy in the quest for an African Reformed ministerial formation (Kritzinger 2010:222-226).

He shows that even though the *praxis-based* curriculum cannot prepare ministry students for every possible situation or challenge, it is essential to develop a viable method of practising contextual theology and ministry by gaining not only essential theological knowledge, but also ministerial skills and kingdom values that will empower them to “think on their feet” in any kind of situation. Practical ministerial experience is therefore crucial for all students at first-year level under the guidance of a senior URCSA minister as mentor. This experience of ministry can take the form of, among other things, exposure to a variety of urban and rural ministry contexts, ecumenical service agencies or NGO’s, which could include, amongst others, ministry to migrants. At best, such a curriculum can help students to face challenges and questions in the initial stages of their ministerial formation. They are able to see the practical usefulness of the theological insights they encounter in lectures or books. By interacting with people at grassroots-level students never lose sight of their organic relationships with their communities. We think such an approach can be a helpful in equipping African Christian leaders as they grapple with phenomena such as Afrophobia or xenophobia in local communities, whether it be townships or in rural areas and also with the more subtle forms in suburban settings. More importantly, this praxis-based approach can help with a thorough understanding of the dynamics which inform such phenomena. The challenge is to re-imagine African-ness in all its diversity locally, within the struggles of communities but, more importantly, to be challenged to go beyond the colonial scheme which inevitably leads to a descent into political violence. The question is therefore how diversity is given prominence in the curriculum.

In our estimation, one cannot resist focusing on the dimension of *diversity* when dealing with situations of subjugation such as Afrophobia or

Re-imagining African Reformed Praxis in theological education: ...

xenophobia. According to Kritzinger (2010:224) one of the ways NTS aims to do justice to diversity is by affirming the ethos of the metaphor of roots and wings. This metaphor is borrowed from a Jewish proverb, which surmises that parents must teach their children two things in life: roots, ie a language, sense of identity, history and belonging, but also wings, which speak of the confidence to reach out, to travel, to explore, to discover and also to be open to the possibility of learning from strangers. What is of fundamental importance in this proverb is that children should grow up knowing how to hold these two dimensions in creative tension, that is to be *as* rooted *as* they are winged. This would mean that students from a particular church would not give up their faith, language, culture or tradition, but will be encouraged to affirm those roots. Similarly, they should not be allowed to affirm their roots in an arrogant fashion; they should at the same time learn to spread their wings to fly. This would mean meeting people without a sense of superiority or inferiority. It is in such interactions and encounters that the African ministerial formation praxis, as envisaged by NTS, can open safe but also risky spaces. Such spaces have the potential to embrace the other. This point is made by Kritzinger (2010:225) succinctly:

This means that we open our arms to others in a gesture of welcome and invitation (since we are incomplete without them), that we wait for them to open up to us in response (since acceptance cannot be forced or imposed), that we hold them gently in a mutual embrace (since embrace is about reciprocity and respect for the otherness of the other).

In this respect it is of interest to note that the URCSA General Synod of 2005 affirms that this otherness is also related to linguistic diversity. It has implications for language policies. In the Belhar Confession that this church confess, this variety is affirmed not as a problem but as an opportunity for mutual service and enrichment. It is stated:

We believe ... that the variety of spiritual gifts, opportunities, backgrounds, convictions, as well as the various languages and cultures, are by virtue of the reconciliation in Christ, *opportunities for mutual service and enrichment* within the one visible people of God ... (Belhar Confession 1986 – emphasis added)

In line with the vision from the unification discussions on theological education (NGKA 1991:275), it was therefore decided that as a requirement all students should pass “at least one year in an indigenous African language other than the students’ mother-tongue” (URCSA 2005:305). However, if the broader southern African vision takes off, this will mean that students from

other parts of southern Africa can also be encouraged to enrol for at least one South African indigenous language and *vice versa*. The purpose will be to enhance understanding and communication, but also a transcending of colonial identity constructions among students in the broader southern African Reformed cluster of Dutch Reformed churches. However, it also remains critical, apart from the issue of the language requirement, to evaluate how the curriculum can play its role in this respect.

Even though Tshaka (2010:126) reminds us that such ideals were absent in the scandalous events of May 2008 when black South Africans meted out violence to their fellow Africans from other parts of the continent, we would still imagine (with NTS) that this post-colonial ministerial formation which is underpinned by a culture and individual lifestyles of embrace. This remains crucial in the context and praxis of people who are experiencing different forms of exclusion. In conclusion, Kritzinger suggests some creative and practical strategies for such a dream to be realised. In our concluding comments we highlight some of these suggestions.

Strategies towards an African Reformed Ministerial Praxis

Universities and seminaries (like NTS) can appoint theologians, lecturers, visiting scholars and research associates from the various parts of the continent in order to create a greater awareness of the rich and multi-varied heritage of African theology, of the problems facing Christians on the continent but also encourage creative approaches adopted by new and long-standing African churches and communities in addressing today's post-colonial challenges. Such initiatives can help to arrest tendencies by some South Africans to define themselves outside Africa. In this respect Kritzinger (2010:228) warns us to guard against a myth that if one wishes to be a serious theologian, one must only read the "classics", by which are meant European theologians like Karl Barth, Thomas Aquinas, and so on. This kind of assertion assumes that African classics are non-existent. There is a great volume of African classics which Reformed tradition can tap into if it is to make any lasting contribution on the continent or be relevant for local communities within the URCSA and the broader Reformed community. If the classics of African theology do not yet exist, Kritzinger (2010:229) is leaving the honours to South Africans of the Reformed tradition to start producing them. This strategy is, of course, not to suggest that the European classics are useless, but merely pointing out that their relevance needs to be tested, and serves as a critical reminder that the various African cultures and churches have indeed produced classics in their own right.

Lastly, if we need to serve justice in the context of the legacy of exclusion and division, as indicated in earlier sections, we also need a spirituality that is rooted in grace, which is inclusively African, reconciling, crea-

tion-affirming, anti-racist and ex-centric (or missional). A spirituality of inclusion means reaching out to people who are othered because they are different and consciously thinking them into our lives as part of our worldview. In other words, ministry leaders must see themselves as becoming part of the collective whereby, for instance, they would refrain from saying “those poor black communities have the problem of Afrophobia”, but rather saying, “We struggle with a hatred of foreign African nationals in some of our communities” (Kritzinger 2010:229). By this shift in language, we become aware of our connectedness, while the bonds of solidarity with all people around the continent, but also internationally, will be strengthened. One can also speak of a mission as solidarity. Only living a spirituality of inclusion and learning a new common language of solidarity can unify us. However such inclusivity should be further qualified as self-consciously African. One of the cornerstones of African philosophy which we raised in our earlier paper (Nel and Makofane 2009) is the notion of *Ubuntu* (personhood or humanness). *Ubuntu*, as Gathogo (2008:40) rightly points out, apart from being exploited in many instances, like “African” in terms of globalist, neo-liberal or racialised political agendas, however entails, among other things, the notion of hospitality. This hospitality is ideally extended to all people: friends, foes as well as strangers – in this respect and linked to the notion of solidarity-one can speak of nurturing a spirituality that fosters radical friendship. It is also extended to all dimensions of life (Makofane & Nel 2009:392). One of the most disturbing scenes during the attacks in May 2008 was to see a man being set alight and, more embarrassing, some of the locals laughing while the police tried to extinguish the flames. The question arises: what has happened to our sense of common humanity, where, even though we might not “know” each other personally, we still share a common humanness? Thus, when looking at *Ubuntu* as affirming personhood or humanness, and respect for all human dignity as an aspect of African hospitality, one would find it difficult to come to terms with such unjustifiable acts of violence. However, this has to be held in tension with the transcending of racialised notions of difference. Tshaka (2010:134) concurs with this view by claiming that an ahistorical approach to issues of racism encourages an apolitical approach which, in turn, breeds indifference to this problem. We have shown in this deadly paper how notions of race and ethnic identity have been constructed as a political identity, hence an anti-racist spirituality, admit to the shortcomings of our racialised identities in Southern Africa over the centuries and an anti-racist spirituality will be informed by three strands, ie a) a joyful self-acceptance, coupled with an affirmation of all other people as image-bearers of God; b) a resolute commitment to dismantle all attitudes, habits and structures that reinforce the oppression of people on the basis of racial or ethnic characteristics, African country of origin and to defend the

weak against the wicked; and c) an identification with Christ in the crucifixion and resurrection (Kritzinger 2010:232).

Indeed, it is in being reformed as servants of hope, between the creative tension of the mayhem of the cross and the surprise of the resurrection amongst cross bearers, where a local, yet resilient African renaissance becomes a possibility. This is what Professor Mofokeng worked for.

Works consulted

- Bond, P. 2002. Thabo Mbeki and NEPAD: Breaking of shining the chains of global apartheid, in Jacobs, S. and Calland, R. (eds.), *Thabo Mbeki's world: the politics and ideology of the South African President*. Scottsville: University of Natal Press, 121-144.
- Crafford, D. 1982. *Aan God die dank* (Deel 1). Pretoria: NG Kerkboekhandel Transvaal.
- Gathogo, JM. 2007. Revisiting African hospitality in post-colonial Africa. *Missionalia*, 35(2), 108-130.
- Gerloff, R. 2010. The African diaspora and the shaping of Christianity in Africa: Perspectives on religion, migration, identity and collaboration. *Missionalia* 38(2), 307-320.
- Gqola, PD. 2008. Brutal Inheritances: Echoes, Negrophobia and Masculinist Violence, in Hassim, S; Kupe, T and Worby, E. (eds.), *Go home or die here: Violence, Xenophobia and the reinvention of difference in South Africa*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 209-224.
- Guma, M. & Milton, L. (eds.) 1997. *An African challenge to the church in the 21st century*. Cape Town: Salty Print.
- Gumede, W. & Dikeni, L. (eds.) 2009. *The Poverty of ideas: South African democracy and the retreat of Intellectuals*. Auckland Park: Jacana Media.
- Hassim, S; Kupe, T & Worby, E. (eds.) 2008. *Go home or die here: Violence, Xenophobia and the reinvention of difference in South Africa*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press.
- Jacobs, S. & Calland, R. (eds.) 2002. *Thabo Mbeki's world: the politics and ideology of the South African President*. Scottsville: University of Natal Press.
- Kriel, CJ. 1979. *Seuns in sy wingerd*. Paarl: Paarl Drukkers.
- Kritzinger, JNJ. 2008. Starting with Stofberg: A brief survey of hundred years of missionary theological education in the DRC family, 1908-2008. *URCSA*: 171-185.
- Kritzinger, JNJ. 2010. Ministerial formation praxis in the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa: In search of inclusion and authenticity. *Missionalia* 38(2), August, 211-234.

- Kritzinger, JNJ. 2012. Unpublished Report on a visit to the Department of missiology in the Faculty of Theology at the University of the Free State.
- Makgoba, MW. 1999. *African Renaissance: The new struggle*. Tafelberg: Cape Town.
- Mamdani, M. 2009. African intellectuals and identity: overcoming the political legacy of colonialism, in Gumede, W. & Dikeni, L. (eds.), *The poverty of ideas: South African democracy and the retreat of Intellectuals*. Auckland Park: Jacana Media, 122-142.
- Mngxitama, A. 2008. We are not all Like That: Race, Class and Nation after Apartheid, in Hassim, S; Kupe, T & Worby, E. (eds.), *Go home or die here: Violence, Xenophobia and the reinvention of difference in South Africa*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 189-208.
- Mofokeng, TA. 1983. *The crucified among the cross bearers: towards a Black Christology*. Amsterdam: JH Kok- Kampen Uitgeversmaatschappij.
- Mofokeng, TA. 1987. A basis for a relevant theology for Botswana. *Mission Studies* 4(1), 55-61.
- Mofokeng, TA. 1997. Land is our mother: A Black Theology of land, in Guma, M. & Milton, L. (eds.), *An African challenge to the church in the 21st century*. Cape Town: Salty Print, 42-56.
- NGKA 1991. *Agenda, Skema van Werksaamhede en Handelinge van die Agtste gewone vergadering van die Algemene Sinode van die Verenigende Gereformeerde Kerk in Suidelike-Afrika*. 9 Julie e.v.d. Pretoria.
- Nel, RW & Makofane, MP. 2009. The black African other, *Oikos*, and inclusivity: Reflections on the response of URCSA to SA's Xenophobia crisis. *Journal of Theology and Religion in Africa* 33(2), 374-399.
- Nel, RW. 2009. Finding a place under the African Sun. *Missionalia* 37(3), 138-152.
- Ramphele, M 2009. *Laying ghosts to rest: dilemmas of the transformation in South Africa*. Cape Town: Tafelberg.
- Tshaka, RS. 2007. Africa, you are on your own! The need for African Reformed Christians to seriously engage their Africanity in their Reformed theological reflections. *Scriptura* 96, 533-548.
- Tshaka, RS. 2010. Do our theological methodologies help us to deal with situations of violence in Black communities, specifically Afrophobia? *Journal of theology for Southern Africa* 138, 124-135.
- Tshaka, RS. & Makofane, KM. 2010. The continued relevance of Black Liberation Theology for a democratic South Africa today. *Scriptura* 105, 532-546.

- Tshaka, RS. 2014. On being African and Reformed? Towards an African Reformed theology enthused by an interlocution of those on the margins of society. *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 70(1), dx.doi.org/10.4102/hts.v70i1.2070. Available: <http://www.hts.org.za/index.php/HTS/article/view/2070> .
- URCSA 2005. *Agenda of Fourth General Synod of the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa*. 26 September - 02 October 2005. Pietermaritzburg.
- URCSA 2008. *Acts of Fifth General Synod of the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa*. 29 September – 5 October. Hammanskraal.
- Vale, P & Maseko, S. 2002. Thabo Mbeki, South Africa, and the idea of an African Renaissance, in Jacobs, S. & Calland, R. (eds.) 2002. *Thabo Mbeki's world: the politics and ideology of the South African President*. Scottsville: University of Natal Press, 121-144.
- VGKSA 1997. *Agenda, skema van werksaamhede en handelinge van die Tweede Algemene Sinode van die Verenigende Gereformeerde Kerk in Suidelike-Afrika*. 14-20 April. Bloemfontein.
- Wilson, HS., Poerwowiedagdo, J., Mofokeng, TA., Evans, RA. & Evans, AF. (eds.) 1996. *Pastoral theology from a global perspective: a case study approach*. Orbis Books: Maryknoll.