


Violent protests as language of agency in a post-apartheid South Africa – A theological pastoral study



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The South African political and social landscape has been dominated and characterised by, among others, a growing number of protests in recent years. Protesting and marching are allowed by the constitution of the country, provided the required permission is granted by relevant authorities. Unfortunately, very few protests and marches end peacefully. Most lead to the destruction of property and even loss of life. Recent violent protests demanding the release of the jailed former President, Jacob Zuma, were estimated to cause losses of not less than a hundred million rand, with shops looted and trucks burnt. Violent protests have become the norm – similar to the period of contestations against the apartheid government. The point of departure of this article is that destructive protests need to be investigated to determine the causes while unveiling the challenges such protests bring to the community and the nation at large. The critical reading of post-apartheid academic and non-academic texts relevant to the topic will be read within the South African context, to determine the causes as we seek ways to minimise or even eradicate the violence that is destroying South Africa. The article will also advance the role of theology, particularly practical theology, in the elimination of such practices.

Contribution: Working towards eliminating and arresting the social ills that are destroying South Africa cannot be achieved without addressing the destructive protests, which are delaying and even reversing the achievements of democracy. It is the role of practical theology, through its pastoral care and counselling, to engage with broken communities in trying to teach, counsel and show them the importance of avoiding vandalism and cruelty when seeking service delivery from their leaders.

Keywords: African traditional religion; authorities; community; hooliganism; protests; theology; vandalism.

Introduction

During the Level 4 coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) lockdown in 2020, the South African government sought effective ways to minimise the spread of the pandemic. It was during this time that the arrest of former President Jacob Zuma happened, sparking violent protests, the destruction of property and looting in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) and some parts of Gauteng province. These protests were characterised by the looting of big shops and the burning of trucks along the N3 (a major route between Durban and Johannesburg). The riots culminated in the loss of 72 lives. Gill Gifford (2021:1) reports that the damage to property amounted to R100 million, as reported by the KZN government, incurred during the so-called 'Pro-Zuma' protests less than a week after he was jailed.

In his article entitled *#FeesMustFall in South Africa*, Mavunga (2019:88) states his case very well by using the slogan 'Violence as a form of agency'. This statement clearly depicts the situation in which protests end in horrible violence and the destruction of property in South Africa. Lancaster (2018:3) argues that more than 55% of protest-related incidents captured by the Protest and Public Violence Monitor (PPVM) between 2013 and 2016 were termed 'violent' or 'disruptive', with many such local protests ending in the destruction of property and loss of life. The increase in such incidents has occurred at such an alarming rate, that fear and anxiety, instead of peace and prosperity, now rule the lives of South African citizens. Johan Burger (2009) is on record as saying:

Over the past few weeks South Africa experienced a wave of protest action across most provinces. According to ANC spokesperson Jesse Duarte there have been protests in 'only' 14 of the 283 municipalities, but other sources put the figure at more than twenty. The strike this week by municipal workers raises

fears that dissatisfaction with municipal service delivery may further increase, and that this might see a spread in protest action. Many of these protests have also turned violent and there are indications that criminals are exploiting the situation. (p. 1)

It is against this backdrop that the young South African democracy finds itself, with violent protests characterising the anger sparked by the dissatisfaction of communities.

There may be different kinds of vandalism, but for the purpose of this study, the aim was to explore vandalism that results from a demonstration or strike of some kind. Using a desktop study and literature review, the aim was to research what is wrong in our communities and to propose some theological, pastoral guidelines afterwards. It should be noted that the intention here is not to argue against protest because it is enshrined within the human rights described in the constitution of this country that people have the right to strike – of course, after obtaining permission to strike legally. That is why the right to bargain is embedded within the right to strike.

Although vandalism does not only take place in the school context, for the sake of clarifying this, that context serves as an example. For Cummins (2003:1), school vandalism has complex and varied reasons. Alcohol, drugs and other substances prompt vandalism at school. As the same children who vandalise school property are members of a community, it seems evident that they will resort to the same ways of resolving their frustrations.

Background

The fight against apartheid pre-1994 made use of guerrilla tactics to render the country ungovernable. In their view, the current government is faced with the dilemma of determining how it would be possible to ask people to abandon the so-called 'instruments of liberation', which include tyres and stones and which compelled the apartheid regime to come to the negotiating table. Many recent instances of vigilantism and rioting emanating from that past are modelled on it. In other words, communities are used to pushing the authorities – by using a show of force – to pay attention to their needs; hence peaceful and harmless protests have become unusual. So-called 'protected strikes' are undoubtedly the embodiment of people's rights to expression, as contained in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). There are different reasons why communities become angry to the extent of resorting to mass mobilisation, which ends up as a protest action by a whole village or town. Many believe that part of the problem stems from our history, where violence was structurally employed as a useful tool for change. While Buss (1958) asserts that 'every frustration leads to aggression', Masango's (2004:996) Soweto-lived experience gives the following evidence:

In South Africa, Soweto's 1976 outburst was the result of the extreme frustration caused by structural violence that killed so many. As youth reflected on aggression and violence, they realized that non-aggressive tactics would not bring change. (p. 55)

This explanation resonates well with the argument that frustration produces instigations to several different types of responses, one of which is to instigate some form of aggression.

For Nkuna and Shai (2018), South African protest actions happen in the form of toyi-toying, the barricading of roads and clashes with the police. A well-known example is that of the Marikana Massacre, which implicated politicians such as the current President of South Africa, Cyril Ramaphosa. Some take the shape of 'stay-aways', where workers do not report to work or report to work but do not actually work. Although Alexander (2010) calls these protests the 'rebellion of the poor', sometimes these events include the rich and working class, as protest actions are often orchestrated by labour disputes or dissatisfaction about service delivery.

A report by the South African Press Association (SAPA 2013) indicated that the community of Malamulele went on a rampage, destroying grader trucks, six cars, two public storerooms, 37 houses and four offices belonging to the Department of Public Works. Although some reliable sources indicated that no fewer than 30 schools were burnt in a poverty-stricken area of Vuwani because protests related to municipal demarcation began, it is evidenced that at least 24 of those schools were destroyed by arsonists. These incidents indicate that there is enough evidence to argue that most protests in South Africa culminate in violence and destruction – a challenge that this article intends to discuss. The topic of vandalism is a complex one. For instance, if a visitor cuts down a tree in a national park, it may be deemed vandalism, but if the same action is performed by a ranger who works in the park, a different definition may be given. In a sense, the author agrees with Bhati and Pearce (2016:1) who argue that vandalism can be perpetrated against nature; hence, the article entitled 'Vandalism and tourism settings' cannot be ignored in this discussion. Their article indicates how tourism in South Africa is being negatively affected by violent protests. According to Lancaster (2018:31), some of the types of protest include the following:

- 'Analysis of the data shows that most collective actions between 2013 and 2017 have not been focussed on highlighting the problems with municipal service delivery but were more often related to industrial strike action (comprising 19% of all events).
- The second most recorded grievance category (accounting for 16% of incidents) consisted of grievances about the police's inability to reduce crime levels or to solve crimes.
- Protests about municipal services made up the third most recorded grievance category, contributing a further 16% of protest incidents.
- A further 11% of the protests or crowd events were related to politics or elections. Other prominent protest concerns related, among others, housing and/or land, transport, other socioeconomic rights, xenophobia and corruption, and unfair business practices'.

These selected few and other kinds of protest usually end in property damage. In a recent protest at the University of the

Witwatersrand, one life (that of a 35-year-old male) was lost while police were shooting rubber bullets to disperse the protesters (Aljazeera News 2021). The investigations relating to this case are still underway.

Problem statement, motivation and relevance of the research

While vandalism and vigilantism-related crimes are escalating, fear, uncertainty and unrest are the conditions to which most South Africans are subjected, particularly in the black townships, where people are subjected to violent protests and related crimes. Shabangu (2011:1) testifies to this when contending: 'Citizens are of the violence that threatens their lives'. This speaks to, among others, the issue of self-hatred, where black people in our communities turn against one another, for different reasons. A study by Linah Nkuna and Shai (2018), entitled 'Service delivery protest', is an eye opener on this subject but does not focus on investigating how such protests turn violent, nor on determining whether there may be a theological aspect to such actions. Staff Writer (2016) indicates that Universities South Africa (USAf) is concerned about the damage caused by student protests which resulted in the burning or destruction of the infrastructure at some academic institutions. According to USAf (Staff Writer 2016), the cost to the damaged institutions amounted to R600m – an amount that could have benefited the disadvantaged if channelled into free education. Two main comments can be made about the problem of vandalism, the first lamenting that property is destroyed, and the second is that some lives are also destroyed by vandals and vigilantes. This calls for practical theologians to no longer continue folding their arms while watching what is happening in this country. Without undermining other disciplines that have tried to elevate and raise these issues, the argument made here is that practical theology also has an important role to play in bettering the situation. No one can doubt that we all desire to have a peaceful country, in which protests may end without any risk to property or life. We therefore need to find ways through which practical theology can contribute, through the church and its pastoral services, to assist communities in curbing or avoiding such destruction and seek the attention of government or employers, as the case may be. Former President Jacob Zuma raised his concerns, which became part of SANEWS report entitled 'Zuma concerned about premeditated violence' (SANEWS 2014).

It is the author's opinion that, unless this topic is discussed, also from a theological point of view, the escalation merely just continues – not only will protesters keep destroying properties but also traumatising people. More than 400 Clicks stores across the country were recently closed after the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) led protests that saw protesters attack and vandalise some of those stores. It is not the intention here to point fingers or determine who caused the damage but rather to ensure that possible guidelines are

made available to prevent a recurrence. The focus is on remedying situations of this kind in the future. According to Alexander (2010:27), both peaceful and unrest-related protests occur, but in this particular study, the focus is on the latter.

Methodological considerations

This research employs a scientific-theoretical approach. This method is inclusive of other approaches such as a critical literature study and a desktop review. The author consulted the available sources dealing with this topic, which included newspapers, government gazettes and eyewitness accounts, to gather relevant information. This specific critical review will provide the critical evaluation and interpretive analysis of the already existing literature on a selected topic to expose weaknesses, contradictions, strengths, inconsistencies and controversies of important issues (Baumeister & Leary 1997). Although the article intends to highlight how violent protests lead to loss of property and uncertainty in South Africa, a case study of the #fessmustfall will receive the event used to demonstrate how this affects the community and its future while making the context of this study as well as theological reflections as a way forward.

Brief literature review

Without claiming to be the first nor only writer on the topic, the author is appreciative of some scholars from other disciplines who also had some views on violent protests that lead to vandalism, while I concentrate on it from practical theological lenses. Netswera (2014) made an analysis of some of the factors underlying delivery protests in the country. It is interesting that his analysis indicated that the kind of violence that is being experienced presently is not very different from those experiences against the apartheid state in mid- to late-1980s. Similar sentiments about the apartheid government were echoed when the Vuwani protests in Limpopo were also articulated so well by Nkuna and Shai (2018). The impact of this specific protest was also explained by Kgatle (2018). A few other scholars shed their light with regard to violent protests that have been destroying the property and life of South Africans (Landman 2011).

The causes of the protests

Lack of, or delays in, service delivery

One of the causes of protests by South Africans is the lack of adequate service delivery. It was indicated that this factor was responsible for most of the protests that took place between 2004 and 2016. Local government administrations were found not to perform their designated tasks and not fulfilling the promises made to the people by providing basic services, such as tap water. Admittedly, the apartheid regime left the country to deal with immense economic inequality and poverty, while the turn to neoliberalism by the ruling African National Congress (ANC) exacerbated existing inequalities, widening the gap between the rich and the poor (Bond 2010). The former Minister of Cooperative Governance

and Traditional Affairs, Sicelo Shiceka, spoke to the South African Local Government Association (SALGA) in East London on 22 April 2009, saying: 'Many of our municipalities are in a state of paralysis and dysfunction' (Staff Reporter 2009). This statement suggests an acknowledgement of the incompetence, corruption and maladministration plaguing local service delivery.

Corruption within government departments

Corruption has been eating into much of the government's budget, presenting a notable concern for taxpayers and ordinary citizens alike. Corruption is one of the leading (but not the only) causes behind a lack of service delivery. A case in point is in Bekkersdal, where protesters accused the municipal officials of being corrupt, for being unable to explain the impediments stalling the Urban Renewal Project. The project included water and sanitation; hence it was questioned as to why there is no progress in that project. There are many similar cases around the country, of corrupt municipal officials depriving communities of services. Even though South Africa's democracy is almost 30 years old, increasing forms of socioeconomic exclusion always spark concerns among excluded communities. For instance, it is generally believed that protests are more likely to arise among people living in informal settlements and townships, where poverty, unemployment and a lack of service delivery are prevalent. As Mike Hough (2008) argues:

While the more immediate problem is linked to the frustration of promises not kept regarding service delivery, the wider problem includes crime, the growing gap between rich and poor, and the deteriorating condition of government departments such as Home Affairs and Justice. (p. 6)

As Pithouse (in Alexander 2010) points out, it is uncommon to find inhabitants of the suburbs protesting, as exclusion and inequality are not much in evidence there.

Excessive use of force by the police during protests

Another reason why some protests turn violent is the reaction of the police. Instead of seeking ways to calm the situation, the police tend to use unnecessary force, thereby turning peaceful marches into violent ones. In her research, Paret (2015) cites the following comment made by an interviewed protester:

You know what happens? Sometimes we take peaceful marches without petrol bombs and things like that. But then cops start shooting at us, pah pah pah. When you start shooting at people who are not fighting, what are you implying? That is when war erupts. But all in all, we would not be fighting with the police, we would be going to the municipal offices. So here in Bekkersdal it is the policemen that provoke the crowds because they think they always have authority to do so. (p. 116)

This observation pertains to an often-ignored side of the situation – how the police use force, which sometimes does not yield the desired results and culminates in the destruction of property and even loss of life. The unfinished story of the Marikana shootings, which claimed the lives of

34 miners and left 78 injured, is well known in this country. This kind of police action served as a reminder of how the South African police used to brutalise black South Africans during apartheid.

There are allegations that violence during protests is sparked when those who are supposed to respond, use delaying tactics. This view is held by most of the protesters whom Paret (2015) interviewed, as is evident in this comment:

It shows the office of the mayor that we are tired, that is why we are burning tyres and putting stones in the road, just to show that people are tired. (p. 116)

As the above utterance shows, communities grow tired of waiting for negligent politicians to take action. Some protesters believe it is necessary to scare politicians a little so that they take such protest marches seriously. In truth, this speaks of citizens' impatience: many of the promises that the governing ANC (a former liberation movement) made to the citizens of this country, when campaigning for the elections even before 1994, have gone unfulfilled. Included are promises related to land redistribution and free education. Many have lost faith in the government, using every opportunity to protest against it. Therefore, the function of violence, as Masango (2004:1003) indicates, is for people to vent the anger and aggression that are part of their lives.

Frustration of perpetual poverty

Another perception that has the potential to fuel protests is when the poor look at the rich, they become concerned and resentful. Terreblanche (2012:114) agrees with Bond (2010), who states:

The inequality gap between the very rich and the very poor in South Africa is so monstrously big that it is necessary to reflect on the luxurious and extravagant lifestyle that many of the very rich permit themselves in comparison with the lifestyle [which] the very poor [are] doomed to live. It is undeniable that the government's neoliberal economic policies also amplified [the] poverty and inequality which [are] evident today. (p. 19)

When conspicuous consumption, wastefulness, greediness and deprivation are the order of the day, fair-minded individuals must be shocked by the vulgarity and repulsiveness of the lifestyle of the rich. Are the rich and the poor really citizens of the same South Africa? The perception is that divisions are entrenched by marked inequalities, causing the poor to vent their anger towards those who are wealthier, particularly those in power, against whom protests are normally directed.

Political jealousy between politicians

Some claim that certain protesters are personally motivated individuals who fail to make it to the ANC candidate list before local elections. As Mike Hough (2008:6) argues, a concept such as 'revolution' is often loosely used and abused,

to justify hooliganism. This kind of attitude seeks to render the country ungovernable, out of anger for not being listed and thereby earmarked for a prime position.

The argument has been made that any death during a protest is the result of a lack of training or even simple incompetence on the part of the police. Former President Zuma was quoted by SANEWS (2014) as saying:

Loss of life is not a small matter. We need to know what happened, why it happened. Any wrongdoing must be dealt with, and corrective action must be taken. Police must always act within the ambit of the law. As we hold police to account, we should be careful not to end up delegitimizing them and glorifying anarchy in our society. (p. 1)

It cannot be ruled out that, veiled as they might be, some forms of vandalism are purely opportunistic theft. Dzansi, Rambe and Mathe (2017) dismiss claims of vandalism when it comes to the theft of electricity cables. Although the intention of the thieves' actions might be clearly and reasonably laid out, some loot so that, when the dust settles, the blame will be put on the protesters. In addition, it is noted that vandalism – particularly in schools – is not a new practice in South Africa.

The after-effects of violent protests in South Africa

On a personal note, one night in 2016, when fetching my daughter who was a student at North-West University's Mafikeng Campus at the time, in dismay I witnessed the burning of the Science building, imagining all the equipment that is so vital to securing the future of the sons and daughters of this country, going up in flames. This was after university management had called on parents to fetch their children, so as to close the institution for the safety of everyone during protests. Less than 300m from the burning building, a scooter and a BMW sedan, belonging to university employees, were also burning. The costs of the arson totalled millions of rand. This loss is usually felt when the next generation of students has to 'pay' to rebuild infrastructure. For me, this is a sign that something is amiss in our society if people destroy that which they are supposed to maintain and protect. The cafeteria was also destroyed that same day, leaving many workers without jobs (Staff Reporter 2016).

As Staff Writer (2016) reports, the costs incurred by the #FeesMustFall campaign were estimated at around R800m. This protest was started by university students who among other things were demanding that free education, which was promised in the Freedom Charter be practical, while the other issue was a demand for the decolonisation of higher education curriculum. Below is a breakdown of the costs incurred by some universities:

UJ – R120295000
 UKZN – R82000000
 NWU – R54046169
 Nelson Mandela University – R6600000

TUT – R5073747
 University of Zululand – R4500000
 UCT – R3200000
 UFS – R2800000
 WITS – R2044000
 Rhodes – R250000

The enormity of these numbers indicates that government budgets are being spent on recovering or rebuilding what was lost and destroyed, rather than on developing new infrastructure and keeping up with technological advances.

In 2015, a burnt and partially destroyed building at Malamulele High School, as well as the burnt municipal offices across the road, is testimony to the violence of riots. Repairs to the municipal offices amounted to millions, while the school has yet to be refurbished. This protest was about the people of Malamulele needing to have their own municipality instituted against being part of the Thulamela Municipality. The majority of the 30 burnt schools in Vuwani, which the researcher visited, have not yet been repaired and no one knows when it will be done. Even though the government ended up giving the people the status of having their own municipality, which is a sign that they had genuine concern, it does not justify the burning and destruction of the existing properties. Kgatle (2018) points out that the kind of protest action witnessed in Vuwani had a serious negative impact on children's use of their right to basic education.

Former MEC, Dikgang Moiloa, of the Rand West City Municipality condemned the violent protest that left some properties damaged in Mohlakeng, just outside Krugersdorp, when he angrily said:

Damaging property, whether government owned or private property is a NO! NO! It is further alleged that about 90 houses in the area were allocated to people who never applied for such houses. These concerns, genuine as some may be, are no justification for the destruction of property. (SAG 2018)

It is on record that the higher education ministry condemned the burning of buses at Wits, while damage to property also occurred at North-West University (Badat 2016). According to Bawa (2016), the UJ suffered damages exceeding R100m, during violent protests. Sometimes these acts of vandalism are exacerbated by the clash between protesters and the police.

The cost of service restoration is significant: repairs may be more expensive than purchasing a new alternative for the damaged property. Moiloa confirmed this, arguing that repairing and replacing damaged infrastructure would lead to further delays in other developments, such as the allocation of housing to the deserving poorest of the poor in the community (SAG 2018). Through violent protest action, we are delaying the development of our own communities. When the Vuwani protesters burnt in excess of 30 schools, the future of more than 2000 matric students came under threat, as their preparations for the examinations were compromised.

The community was deprived of having those matriculants complete school, before ploughing back into their communities, after completing their tertiary studies by serving the nation in their different capacities.

If transformation projects are delayed, they become more costly: whenever the budget for transformation is channelled towards repairing destroyed properties, the transformation process is halted. Placing mobile classrooms on a terrain where a school building was destroyed is an unforeseen expenditure that drains the budget. To Khambule, Nomdo and Siswana (2021:1), the destruction of public infrastructure is like burning the bridge people would cross to access a better life.

According to South African law, a suspect remains a suspect or alleged perpetrator, until proven guilty. This rule also applies to those striking for a particular type of service delivery – their targets cannot be guilty of incompetence until proven so by the rule of law. In most protests targeted at particular individuals, however, mob justice tends to gain the upper hand, sweeping people into action even if they do not understand what their target did wrong. Some ministers and MECs live in fear of being targeted by a mob for failures in service delivery. Such threats to life, and vigilantism in general, traumatise people in many ways. The side effects of violence, as expressed by Goldbaum (2014:6), include loss of life and property, general instability, suspicion and opportunistic theft. Coakley and Woodford-Williams (1979:1) argue that burglary and vandalism are so stressful that such incidents can precipitate a major health crisis among older or senior citizens – to the extent that they need to be admitted to hospital.

Theological guidelines as a way forward

According to Kgatle (2018:3): The violent nature of the #FeesMustFall movement is a sign of a society living in violence. Most of the black students go to sleep hungry every day. These students use overcrowded trains to reach the campus. They risk their lives by hanging on the doors of the train. These students hang on trains going to a violent place, the townships. Students are robbed on their way to campus. Female students are sexually harassed by their male fellow students and lecturers (Maringira & Gukurume 2016:41). It is from this practical example that most of the discussion and theological input of this article will use this as a case study but not limited to it.

In 2021, more than 300 people lost their lives in South Africa, while several shopping malls were torched during violence in both KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng when former President Zuma was incarcerated. The collective South African Bishops said to all this: 'No to violence, but it is urgent to tackle the inequalities that feed it' (Agenzia Fides 2021). Violent attacks all over Africa have become the norm, and the relevance of theology to such a situation is thus also called into question.

Importantly, for black theologians and black theology, James Cone (1997) points out that God is on the side of the poor and the oppressed. Besides the fact that God is not and will not be prepared to tolerate social institutions in which one race is oppressed by another, it is a call to the church to abandon its false neutrality and commit itself to human liberation, according to Magezi and Tenai (2017:67). To understand this, there is need for some form of liberation to happen, which makes liberation theology the ideal starting point.

Theology and violence or violent protest

Many passages from the bible teach us about the injustices and oppression being the cause of violence, either between people or nations as well as between God and His people. From those kinds of injustices, revolution as well as invasion and destruction used to follow. Without saying that is God of violence, there are situations when God was also angered by His people that He reacted in violence, for instance, the Babylonian captivity resulted from His anger and the destruction of even His temple was mentioned. Some scholars are in agreement that sometimes violence was done to Jahweh.

For Sutton (2019:39), there is evidence from Psalms that violence erupts when the voices of the oppressed and marginalised fall on deaf ears. Sutton wrote a balanced article that indicates how the cry of the Psalmist began by calling upon God's justice against human injustices, portraying God as a perfect judge. The complaint of the Psalmist continues by highlighting how enemies of justice manipulate legal procedures. It also emphasizes how the guilty often continue to persecute the oppressed in order to justify the prayer for justice (Sutton 2019:49). This is supported by Cottrill (2012) who also argues that Psalm 109 depicts the anger of the oppressed person. It is interesting to note that the failure of human justice prompted a call for God's intervention to restore order. Trying to understand #FeesMustFall within the Psalmist context, one finds the poor students who are socially oppressed by the escalating prices of school fees within South African Universities, while the government of the day just kept watching their suffering. James Cone's famous saying 'God is on the side of the poor and oppressed resonates very well within Psalm 101:31 in which God is promising to think about the maids. When for some the Exodus of enslaved Israelites from Egypt was seen as a religious move, for others it was a political move against the injustices of the time, showing God as a liberator of the oppressed.'

On a similar note, it is understood that the author of the book of Amos in Chapters 1–2 sides with the victims of the time (Kessler 2018). The amazing part of this is that even though some scholars would define the acts of the other nations against Judah and Israel in words such as 'transgressions, misdeeds, crimes and violations' from Hebrew *paesa*, the nations were not judged against Israel (Kessler 2018:207–209). This indicates that God does not use colour, race or how we appear to him to judge us, but he is always just. The example

of #FeesMustFall that we have as one of the most disturbing factors since 1994 demanded some justice from the authorities and hence without the authorities coming to address them, it turned into violence. Although it is not the purpose of this article to make a judgement as to where God sides in this case, one can point out that the cry of the students can be justified by what the Freedom Charter promised the people long before 1994, only to find the patience of the students running out at least more than 10 years after the democratic government was put on the throne. The heart of the matter is that God's people need to be addressed by their authorities while in crises, while it is also advisable or encouraged from a theological point of view that God must be the absolute judge. Kgatle (2018) is of the opinion that the church (the architect of theology) has a socio-political, socio-economic and sociocultural role to play within the violent uprising like that of #FeesMustFall. For the author of this article, theology can do more than just that because it is also seen by many people as a custodian of peace and justice. This brings us to portray theology as the source of lasting peace instead of only addressing the issue at hand because violent protests have been hitting the country even before this most tragic experience. For theology to seek ways to be involved in education curricula, which will include some moral and ethical teachings to restore the violent minds of our children. Lederack's (1998) 'Building peace' should be relevant in assisting theologians to take a leading role in assisting the change that will try to evade or minimize such horrible incidents. Zylla (2017) is also correct in thinking about theology that should teach people about the value of inhabiting compassion. He or she went on to use the parable of the Good Samaritan as an opening example to emphasise that there is a need for human concern about the other (Zylla 2017:1). He or she emphasises this by saying: 'Any pastoral theological response to suffering calls for a reassessment of our moral responsibility to see, to acknowledge and to act' (Zylla 2017:4). In addition to this the author of this article would join Sverdick (2008:2) who adds by arguing that compassion is a distinctive moral emotion, which includes the desire to relieve the suffering of the other. In this context, theology needs to concertise those who have a responsibility to listen and respond to the protesters with compassion. A British Systematic Theologian, Oliver Davies, is one of those who wrote extensively in developing some good ideas on the theology of compassion, depicting it from the person and the reaction of Jesus while confronted by situations where the poor and the oppressed needed assistance (Davies 2001). A study by Lorenzo Magnani (2011) exposes a good balance between the relationship that should exist between morality and religion, bearing in mind that for many African societies, religion is another tool for morality among others. In other words, human moral capacity is influenced by religion and culture. Therefore, with a good theological perspective on the ground, the shaping of human morality should be that of avoiding violence with respect to human life and property. He went on to indicate how silencing the truth becomes naturalised to dominate the alternative ways of knowing (Magnani 2011:8).

Practical theology may minimise the violent protests in the country

This section is to briefly argue that Practical theology particularly the section on pastoral care and involvement can bring some difference in trying to curb the violent protest. Pastoral services are an opportunity to engage with the community in different ways, for instance, funerals, weddings and others. We have seen how the theology that carried the late Archbishop Desmond Tutu throughout the Truth and Reconciliation programme assisted in bringing some stability to the country after many years of racial divides. Even though the TRC did its part on the elementary level, we can still see the positive efforts it attempted to heal the nation. The healing of our past and present cannot ignore the role of theology (Mouton 2014). The suggestion of Landman (2011) in her article about the possible relationship between the church and the state can open up another positive role of theology through the church in society. Theology of non-violence, which was practised by Martin Luther King, is still remarkable in America and around the globe today. This is an influence that theology, especially practical theology, can make in attempting to reduce the violent protest that is very destructive. The following are some of the subtopics in which Practical Theology can be useful towards this challenge.

Practical theology as a theology of liberation against self-hate

Nico Vorster (2012) holds the view that liberal rights, freedom and any form of equality struggle need not neglect human life and dignity. This means that any protest that is aimed at correcting the wrong or liberating the oppressed must not neglect the value and the importance of human life. The parallelism that Robin Fox uses to describe and explain different forms of violence, as well as their causes, makes one understand some of the human thinking in an attempt to understand why people resort to violence (Fox 2020). This kind of analogy is very important when one is searching for possible liberating aspects theologically. Theology must, among other things, be able to open the eyes of to see that self-hatred could potentially hamper their own transformation. This aligns with the eyes of Jesus's disciples on the road to Emmaus being opened when they listened to him (Vesley-Flad 2017:191). Theology must stop protecting and projecting Western thinking and start paying attention to the African situation. This involves the need to challenge Western theologies and Africanize them, in order to address the needs of Africans within their own immediate context. Neglecting our own context when practising theology is the first turning point if we are to theologise like Africans without fear or favour. The training of theologians must include, among other things, issues relating to leadership, because without pastors and ministers playing their role in community leadership, it is unlikely that we will win the fight against destructive protests. It is for this reason that Lederack's (1998) 'Building Peace' becomes an important book because it discusses some of the ways in which fragmented societies

can be rebuilt into unity. In 2013, Saint Stephen's parish in Gqeberha (formerly Port Elizabeth) assembled the community and gave the then Minister of Justice, Jeff Radebe, time to engage with them on issues of violence. After those meetings, the violence seems to have been subsidised. It is important for theologians and ministers to try and bridge the gap between government leaders or politicians and local communities to ease the tension that exists because of economic challenges (Baloyi 2015:7). Liberation theology must teach that, after liberation, some things must be done differently from before. This is where the theology of stewardship comes in.

Practical theology on stewardship

Theology must be able to teach us that humankind is God's property, and as human beings, we are expected to be each other's keepers and protectors. Vorster (2012:2) argues that the concept of *Imago Dei* (image of God) is a principle within which we should build our own relationships. In addition, the author of this article is of the opinion that he who respects that which belongs to God depicts a respect he or she has for God, the Creator. This must form some basis of our theology in addressing issues that pertain to our lives. In their 'Christian view of stewardship' article, Boaheng and Korankye (2022) exposed that stewardship cannot be complete without honesty, accountability and responsibility. For them, the concept of 'owner' or ownership is very foundational to having a better understanding of a steward. It is imperative, from a biblical point of view, that Christians be reminded not to neglect their calling as stewards of God, tasked with caring for his creation. Biblically, a steward is '[s]omeone entrusted with the general administration of affairs'. Peter and Paul in 1 Corinthians 4:2, Titus 1:7-7 and 1 Peter 4:10 explain the requirements and characteristics of a steward as trustworthy, blameless, respectful, charitable, self-controlled, upright and disciplined. Ministers and pastors are community leaders by virtue of their position. There are instances where some pastors do not involve themselves in community projects or challenges. Ministers have a role to play in the lives of black communities. It is imperative that pastors do not hesitate in assuming their community leadership roles. Their views and contributions to community gatherings and projects can give sound direction as to how communities should react to unpleasant situations such as a lack of service delivery. For Boaheng and Korankye (2022), the steward is:

[O]ne who has been given the responsibility for the management and services of something belonging to another, and his office presupposes a particular kind of trust on the part of the owner or master. (p. 163)

Being a steward requires some amount of leadership.

Practical theology on leadership

Current political and community leadership in South Africa requires a strategy to demilitarise the country, which is currently heavily militarised. Many who were born pre-1994

will remember that the armed struggle was part of the strategy used to frustrate the apartheid regime, yet it has continued even though the government is in the hands of black leaders. Clear plans are needed to ensure that the weapons that were used against the enemy are not used against us on our own. On 16 June 1976, schools and government buildings were burnt in opposition to the white government. Current school curricula need to touch on these issues in a more constructive way to eliminate the kind of vandalism that is costing this country dearly. Education is one of the possible weapons that can be used to change the thinking and lives of people. Communities also need to start thinking about the kind of leadership they need to stabilise a violent population (Lederach 1998:37). The church must exploit all possibilities when it is given time to lead to make its influence felt by bringing the message of peace and hope to the hopeless. This is called a caring church.

Traditional leadership, as custodians of the spirit of ubuntu, needs to use local traditional meetings – indabas, khoro or dzulo or xivijo – to start making their influence felt within communities. When they speak about violence, it may raise awareness among the youth that vandalism is not a solution to their every frustration (Baloyi 2015:6). As the government does not apply harsh punishment to end vandalism and vigilantism, these trends have flourished. It is worth reminding the political leadership to ensure that offenders take full responsibility for restoring what was lost during acts of vandalism. The author agrees with Shabangu (2011:1) that we, as citizens, are increasingly afraid, of being subjected to various negative experiences. This calls for the healing of the nation.

Two examples of politicians who advocated for peaceful protests are Albert Luthuli and Robert Sobukwe. It is said that 'the Sharpeville protest was non-violent in nature but turned violent by police opening fire on a crowd of protesters, killing 69 and wounding 180 (SAHO 2011)'. This had been a Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) march under Sobukwe's leadership. Another political hero, Chief Albert Luthuli, received the Nobel Peace Prize in Norway on 10 December 1961, for advocating for a peaceful struggle against racial discrimination. This kind of traditional leadership information cannot be left out of discussions; there should be ways to impart it to the next generation, notably by decolonising our education system.

Practical theology on decolonising education systems

The curriculum, to decolonise our people, should include teachings that will discourage harmful and dangerous protests. Just as education was once used to marginalise people, so changes to education can work towards rebuilding our demoralised nation. It is worth bearing in mind that, at the forefront of the protests, were youths and schoolchildren. The aim should be to unlearn what has been taught. This is in line with the observation by Koen, Cele and Libhaber (2006), who argue:

That is, both groups have difficulty in controlling the actions of 'unruly' students because there are no real sanctions against violence, or vandalism. (p. 6)

The contention put forward here is that even if there are difficulties in containing anti-social behaviours, socialising and bringing new ideas to our education, based on the knowledge of the past (indigenous or not), will help upcoming generations through times of change. From a pastoral viewpoint, listening is an art to be considered, particularly by the entities that are targeted by the protesters. So-called attentive listening – listening without judgement, before making any response – is advocated. Mangcu (2016) advises universities to be listeners when students opt to protest. At times, it may be harsh to abandon any defence and call on the police, rather than listening to the protesters. From a political point of view, listening can be strengthened. As Vanclay and Hanna (2019:6) note, '[t]o be human rights compliant, it is generally expected that vulnerable groups be given special attention so that they can have equal access to their rights'. In her introduction to the book *Hearing Beyond the Words*, Emma Justes (2006) indicates the importance of the relationship between listening and hospitality. It is important that leaders who are targeted by protesters listen with hospitality to hear their case and then offer a solution to the problem. Such listening will give hope, and protesters will always do it, positively in the knowledge that they will be heard and that their problems will be attended to (Justes 2006).

Biblical reflection on reconciliation forgiveness, peace, respect of life and property

In his book, 'Peace Building', Lederach (1998:30) indicated that the meeting point between justice, truth, mercy and peace is a starting point for reconciliation to take place. As there is a need to foster unity and reconciliation, theology must be vocal on these four biblical concepts. The United States Institute of Peace also echoed that the reconciliation process demands that truth, justice, peace and mercy meet somewhere. He went on to argue that not only economic nor material support alone is resourceful for peacebuilding, but some elements of socio-cultural resources must not be neglected as well. This is why theology must also take into account the context and the community within which it aims to bring the difference. Krug et al. (2002) say:

Human dignity being respected and upheld creates an environment of equality, respect and justice, which are all essential for building peace. The World Report on Violence and Health states that violence is a complex issue influenced by various factors, including social, economic and cultural determinants. (p. 1085)

Whereas violence disrupts peace, freedom and equality, dignity and respect for the other can be tools to use against such violence. The theological role of the church and its pastors needs to also target being instrumental in changing people's perception about life, reconciliation, love and

justice (Baloyi 2020:7). African ubuntu is another very rich concept that helps in fostering forgiveness, reconciliation and peace. Lorenzo Magnani in his book 'Understanding Violence' gives a very simplified sophisticated but directive way of understanding how concepts such as culture, religion, morality and structural violence that keep getting civilised through developments need to be curbed or dealt with from a biblical point of view. It is among other things a question of trying to understand from the philosophy of violence how truth is often silenced from the ways of knowing as it paves the way for domination (Catley 2003; Magnani 2011:8–11). For Sohail (2005), the contrast and the conflict that existed within the minds of those icons of peace because of wanting peace, but still being prevented from having it until some sort of violence had to be enforced occupy central discussion. He used the theological terms prophets of violence and prophets of peace in referring to struggle stalwarts such as Nelson Mandela, Frans Fanon and Che Guevara. The discussion is that initially, these people were seeking peace and justice, but in a sense because of the nature of the resistance that they faced, some form of force was applied to twist the arms of those in power to seek ways to understand that peace should be the norm, whether it takes violence or not. In this way, he calls them prophets of both peace and violence. In other words, by the fact that they wanted to advocate for peace, they were under circumstances found using violence for peace to be gained. For instance, the freedom that South Africans as well as Cubans cherish today came from a lot of bloodshedding which was not the initial plan of these so-called prophets (Sohail 2005).

Conclusion

Vandalism has been internalised to push for a response from the authorities in the new South Africa. As the research indicates, local protests usually become violent, leading to a loss of lives and property. Indeed, this is not to underplay the serious problems that need attention from different levels of authority but to indicate that the way these protests are handled often leads to more problems than solutions. It is imperative that protesters learn to follow the government's rules and regulations and confine their protests within constitutional prescriptions. The findings revealed that there is a need for a prophetic kind of theology, by which the church approaches political leaders and government officials to ensure that service delivery and other causes of continuous destructive protests are addressed. The church must, however, also seek ways to teach people to become responsible citizens despite their anger and the reasons for their discontent. Pastoral caregivers and church leadership must also be involved in their communities as stewards and custodians of peace while seeking justice where necessary. It is important to note that real theologians cannot idly watch the destruction of property and lives. Peaceful marches or protests can help us to become a better society. This demands the sober involvement of everyone, starting with the leaders of this country, to every stakeholder who can assist in bringing destructive marches to an end.

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Author's contributions

M.E.B. declares that they are the sole author of this research article.

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