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Towards Effective Pastoral Caregiving within Contemporary Post-Colonial Praxis in Africa: A Discernment of Care Needs for ‘Now’ and ‘Intervention’ Propositions

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Abstract: Post-colonial Africa and its attendant challenges, including disillusionment during democratic dispensation and racial tensions among black and white people, constitute a problem that calls for interventions from all social actors. Theology, especially pastoral care, is challenged to broaden its vision and focus on health, healing, and human flourishing by adopting a public dimension. Thus, public pastoral care can emerge as a critical approach through which to make a meaningful contribution to fostering holistic personal care. This assumption prompts an examination of the place and role of pastoral care as a science and art of fostering social health and well-being. Public pastoral care practices are used to encourage, promote, and foster ‘coexistence’ and ‘being with’ other people in the same geographical spaces where tension and disillusionment exist. Using the South African lens, this article aims to pastorally address challenges emerging from post-colonial African public contexts by developing a public pastoral care approach. Pastoral care principles of empowerment care, prevention care, conversational care, and care by being with the other in shared spaces of coexistence are proposed.

Keywords: public pastoral care; pastoral care in Africa; post-colonial Africa; African pastoral praxis; pastoral care; pastoral care in post-colonial Africa; public theology



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1. Context and Background

Post-colonial Africa constitutes a complex pastoral ministry praxis, with its hybridity ranging from stable democracies and functional economies like South Africa and Botswana to fragile ones like Zimbabwe, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and others. For this reason, as [Maluleke \(2022, pp. 112–13\)](#) observes, African theological reflection has been entangled in diverse problems that include economics, governance, crime, gender-based violence, engaging the hegemonic remnants of colonialism, and many others. Perhaps the most recent effort to capture the diversity, entanglement, and the broad, ambitious agenda of African contextual theological consideration is stated in the “*African Public Theology*” publication (2020), where the following stance is taken: “African public theology not only asks the questions believers, theologians and the church ask, but it even deals with the aspirations and passions of the African continent, as reflected in the African Union’s Agenda 2063” ([Kunhiyop 2020, p. xiii](#)). Arguably, the suggestion to involve theology in Agenda 63 indicates an unmanageable and ambitious mission, considering the internal burning and unresolved religious problems like theological divides, among others.

The breadth, diversity, and hybridity of Africa and its respective problems across national contexts make the scholarly task impossible and any attempt superfluous. However, there are beneficial post-colonial threads that theologians, and especially pastoral care theologians, would benefit from researching. Thus, reflection on post-colonial pastoral praxis presents an opportunity to open some reflection windows that may not be exposed by other critical approaches. Why and how so? [Lartey \(2022\)](#) usefully explains the utility of post-colonial activities as seeking to “critique, validate, recover, and construct” ([Lartey 2022,](#)

p. 663). He adds that post-colonial approaches aim to “facilitate the formerly colonised person’s authentic participation in scholarly, as well as pragmatic engagement” (Lartey 2022, p. 663). Within the post-colonial activities, the focus of this paper is largely to construct pastoral care interventions in the form of propositions with the intention of responding to pastoral care praxis challenges in contemporary post-colonial Africa. To delimit the reflection, the existential realities of contemporary post-colonial South Africa will be used as a lens to develop a potentially effective pastoral caregiving approach, drawing from the existing social, economic, and interaction challenges and opportunities.

There is widespread disillusionment about current post-apartheid South Africa’s situation. The situation is clearly summarised by Mike Siluma’s two articles in the *Sunday Times* of 21 April 2024, which expose and analyse the white Afrikaner people’s desires, as summarised in the “Joint Afrikaner Declaration”. The first article, “The Afrikaners seek new pact with government” describes the request by the Afrikaner community to have “special cultural zones with a geographical base” (Siluma 2024a, p. 2). The concerns of the Afrikaner community expressed in the article include: fear of being dominated by the black majority, signs of an unhealthy society with no opportunity to build a clear future, treatment of Afrikaner people as second-class citizens, weakening public services and poor service delivery, an inaccessible and aloof government, slow economic growth, having Afrikaner children punished for the sins of their parents through exclusion, and blocked opportunities. The notion of Afrikaner children being punished for the sins of their parents refers to the current exclusion policies among white people, the majority of which were beneficiaries of apartheid. While some of these concerns are particular to the Afrikaner community and most white people, concerns about poor economic performance and social ills, such as corruption and bad governance, apply to all South Africans, thereby creating a cloud of frustration. As a result, both Afrikaners and the broader public are frustrated. The facilitator for the Afrikaner group, Theuns Eloff, stated that there is the same “frustration that other South Africans have about water, sewerage, and governance. But we are not going anywhere” (Siluma 2024a, p. 2).

The second article, “South Africa needs honest discussion about problems not resolved after 1994” is a commentary and analysis of the first article and an analysis of the desire of Afrikaners to have territories for themselves, designated as cultural zones with a geographical base. Siluma (2024b, p. 2) observes that the Joint Afrikaner Declaration is strong in its critique of and challenge to the ANC government. The document is “both conciliatory and confrontational”. It requests separate public spaces, such as schools and universities. Based on this Afrikaner document, Siluma questions whether South Africa is no longer on a “nation building and searching for solidarity and common progress path, but rather on a polarisation path”. There is concern that

[a]s Afrikaners assert their exclusive group interests, the black majority (most of whom have yet to see many of the fruits promised in 1994) also agitate for their interests, irrespective of how the rest of their compatriots are affected (Siluma 2024b, p. 2).

The tension and polarisation described by Siluma above have shattered South Africa’s notion of a rainbow nation. Coined by the late Desmond Tutu, “the rainbow symbol is shorthand for a nation seeking reconciliation and unity after decades of racial and political tensions” (Dickow 1999, p. 75). The notion of the rainbow has been described by many South Africans as an illusion (Buqa 2015; Diallo 2020; Sinha and Mpedi 2021)¹. As described above, the disillusionment and frustration in South Africa arise from many factors, including poor service delivery, corruption, racial tensions, the high and rising cost of living, shrinking opportunities due to unemployment, inequality, and uncertainty about the future. The World Bank (2023) observes that loadshedding, a huge factor that frustrates many South Africans, is one of the biggest economic risks for the country. However, our interest is in polarisation, racial integration, and the challenges of co-existence.

Viewing these problems from a theological perspective within the post-colonial South African context, the following question arises: what could the role of theology, and especially pastoral care, be? As can be observed from the Afrikaner community's outcry as a minority group and Siluma's (2024b) analysis and highlighting of all South Africans, there is clear frustration, anger, disappointment, and despair among many people. Hope seems to be lost among many people, and there is uncertainty. There is fear about the future. Thus, in such a situation, pastoral theology and care can contribute positively. However, to make a meaningful contribution to such public problems, pastoral care should assume a public role. The call for pastoral theology and pastoral care to perform a public role has been made by many leading pastoral theologians (Louw 2014; Magezi 2019; McClure 2011, 2012; Miller-McLemore 2004, 2005, 2018; Ramsay 2004, 2014). The public role of pastoral care was poignantly stated by McClure (2011, p. 7), who advised that pastoral care and its attendant practices should not merely function as a private good among faiths and within faith communities, but they should function as a public and social good. She maintained that pastoral care "must develop more socially adequate understandings of key concepts, such as the self, health, illness, as well as etiologies of distress—even suffering and what heals". For pastoral care to be public theology, it must "analyse the influence of wider social order" (McClure 2011, p. 7). Miller-McLemore (2018, p. 313) adds that pastoral care should shift to a social ethic that is relevant to public problems. However, shifting pastoral care from dominant individualistic, intrapsychic models to public theology is riddled with fear among practitioners.

In *Moving beyond Individualism in Pastoral care and Counselling*, McClure (2011) observed that pastoral care practitioners fear to lose what they have learned and accumulated over the years from individualistic psychic models. At the same time, they are fearful and uncertain about the possibilities, promises, and opportunities of the shift of pastoral care to focusing on public problems and structures. Therefore, she proposes a synergistic understanding of persons' relationships to each other, the world, and God (McClure 2011, p. 187). The question is how public pastoral care interventions can² be conceived of and practised in post-colonial African contexts, such as the one described above.

To develop insight into the notion of public pastoral care, there should be clarity on the intersection of public theology, practical theology, and pastoral care. Pastoral care is a subdiscipline of practical theology. In a publication authored by leading public theologians, entitled *A Companion to Public Theology*, Kim (2017) usefully provided a definition of public theology that embraces earlier definitions. He defined public theology "as critical, reflective and reasoned engagement of theology in society to bring the kingdom of God, which is for the sake of the poor and marginalised" (Kim 2017, p. 40). Kim added that "throughout Christian history, churches have engaged with the wider society and political institutions both as minority communities and as dominant bodies (Kim 2017, p. 40). Mannion (2009, p. 22) simplified the meaning of public theology by stating that public theology is a shorthand for church in the world. Thus, public theology implies a public ecclesiology.

Browning (1991) and Osmer (2008) defined practical theology by outlining its four elements. Browning (1991, pp. 55–56) described the practice of practical theology as addressing the following questions:

- (a) How do we understand this concrete situation in which we must act? (b) What should our praxis be in this concrete situation? (c) How do we critically defend the norms of our praxis in this concrete situation? (d) What means, strategies, and rhetoric should we use in this concrete situation?

Similarly, Osmer (2008, p. 4) described practical theology as a task that should answer four questions, namely:

- (a) What is going on? (b) Why is this going on? (c) What ought to be going on? (d) What are the strategic steps that should be taken to respond to the situation?

Clearly, from the description of practical theology given by these leading scholars in the field, the fourth element or task, which entails strategic steps and model development,

is the distinctive feature of practical theology. Analysis, discussion, and description are undertaken in other theological areas, but practical theology intentionally and explicitly embeds the development of models and intervention strategies. A clearer differentiation of practical theology and public theology is made by [Jacobsen \(2012\)](#) in his essay “Models of Public Theology”. He concluded that

three principal ways are identified that affirm the possibility of the publicisation of theology: addressing different audiences, such as the academy and the church (model of the audience); articulating itself through a style and an accessible form of argument (apologetic model); and addressing contextual challenges (contextual model) ([Jacobsen 2012](#), p. 7).

Thus, further to description and discussion, practical theology focuses on developing intervention strategies. This theological approach applies to all practical theology audiences. The question that arises is as follows: how, then, is practical theology conceived of as public practical theology? Practical theology becomes public practical theology when it focuses on broader everyday issues than simply church-related and clerical concerns ([Dreyer 2004](#), pp. 919–20). [Osmer and Schweitzer \(2003, p. 218\)](#) added that “public practical theology entails ensuring that the public is one of the audiences of practical theology; that practical theology includes everyday concerns and issues in its reflection including facilitating a dialogue between theology and contemporary culture”. Therefore, to clarify the meaning of public pastoral care, [Magezi \(2020a, p. 67\)](#) stated:

How do practical theology, public theology and pastoral care converge? Pastoral care is a subdiscipline of practical theology. In view of public theology and its parameters, when pastoral care takes an explicit public dimension, it becomes public pastoral care.

However, in its execution, public pastoral care is about public ecclesiology intersecting with the other closely related disciplines, such as diaconal care, Christian development, and Christian transformation. However, public pastoral care focuses on the individual well-being within a person’s social context, while diaconal care focuses on broader mercy ministries in communities.

This paper aims to pastorally address challenges emerging from Africa’s post-colonial public contexts by developing an intervention-based approach. This reflection is being performed by a black South African academic attempting to contribute to both black and white post-colonial public pastoral care challenges. By positioning this paper’s discussion in my black South Africanness, it is acknowledged that the reflections are interconnected and interpreted within my experiences as a black person attempting to be objective, which is impossible; and yet, the task should be undertaken. [Graham \(2017, p. 5\)](#) opined that the current juncture in practical theology can be described as at a “reflexive turn”. [Graham \(2017, p. 5\)](#) explained the following:

This ‘reflexive turn’ in practical theology mirrors similar trends across the humanities and social sciences. Insights from the sociology of knowledge, including postmodern and feminist perspectives, have cast doubt on epistemologies that lay claim to neutrality and objectivity, insisting on critical attention to the material and ideological circumstances within which claims to truth are constructed. Such an approach repudiates the belief that research can be conducted through a long lens, as it were, in such a way that the researcher themselves is unaffected by the process. Certainly, within the social sciences, such strict objectivity is untenable; anyone dealing with the realms of human value, meaning, and understanding recognises that levels of interpretation are unavoidable; research methodologies take account of the ‘storied’ and hermeneutical nature of human culture. This is not only an individual process of formation but also one that is shared within particular communities of practice.

In his paper “Knowledge, Subjectivity, (De)Coloniality, and the Conundrum of Reflexivity”, [Dreyer \(2016\)](#) agonises about the paralysis and difficulty of undertaking study and communicating research findings in social sciences because every interpretation can be deemed subjective. [Dreyer \(2016, p. 90\)](#) stated that “whatever form the communication of the research results take, it always entails some kind of interpretation and representation of whatever was researched”. [Graham \(2017, p. 5\)](#) advised that reflexivity

is not about reducing practical theology to autobiography but seeing how our own standpoints and concerns have informed our intellectual and academic interests, and vice versa. In the interests of integrity and transparency, the self as researcher, as one who brings particular presuppositions, questions and interests, must be prepared to ‘write themselves in’ to the text of their research. This practice of locating and declaring ourselves is not simply a question of stating who we are as a set of statistical or physical facts, or of inflicting our personal life histories on a captive audience. It involves being aware of one’s own pre-commitments, and how the practices of research may in themselves be challenging or reshaping one’s own relationships to the field. It entails more than simply ‘reflecting’ in the sense of thinking deeply about something, but of identifying how we are simultaneously both the subjects and objects of our own experience.

Therefore, in view of this paper, my reflections are shaped by who I am as a black person whose experiences are shaped by black context. And yet, at the same time, I am a South African who interacts with my fellow white citizens in various spaces, which gives me a window into their life’s experiences and struggles.

2. Presuppositions Informing Public Pastoral Care within Contemporary Post-Colonial Africa

To proceed towards developing a public pastoral care model in post-colonial Africa, five presuppositions should be highlighted. “A presupposition is something that you assume to be true, especially something that you must assume is true in order to continue with what you are saying or thinking” ([Collins Dictionary n.d.](#)).

- (a) First, the meaning and practice of pastoral care should be expanded. Pastoral care (*cura animarum*—cure of souls) refers to a “ministry that is directed not merely to a human being’s inner life, but also to the spiritual care of the total person in all the psycho-physical and psycho-social dimensions (spiritual wholeness)” ([Louw 2014, p. 60](#)). However, pastoral care has been limited to an individualism-operative ideology, which aligns with the white middle class ([McClure 2011, p. 4](#)). The focus has been on an individual person and psychic aspects within the religious realm. Therefore, [McClure \(2011, p. 5\)](#) observed that at the diagnostic and interventional levels, “our overly narrow conceptions of self-hood and suffering obscure real sources of distress and make it difficult to effectively care for all those who seek our support” ([McClure 2011, p. 5](#)). Hence, the goal and purpose of pastoral care is much broader than a narrow individual intrapsychic perspective. An intrapsychic perspective refers to an understanding that “conflicts, or other psychological phenomena arise or occur within the psyche or mind” while downplaying social factors ([American Psychological Association \(APA\) 2018, n.p.](#)). If the primary objective of pastoral care and counselling is to help create the conditions for human flourishing, then “its captivity to an individualist cultural construal may not help it achieve this goal” ([McClure 2011, p. 3](#)). Pastoral care, among other considerations, should include “social and institutional realities that shape our experiences and ourselves” ([McClure 2011, pp. 3–4](#)). These experiences can be pleasant or unpleasant, but they have to be understood and engaged with.
- (b) Second, pastoral care in Africa has tended to focus on black people as if white people are unaffected by problems affecting black people, especially public problems such as service delivery, as indicated by [Siluma \(2024a\)](#) above. This situation has tended to

- leave a vacuum in terms of inclusive pastoral care reflection, where the focus is on problems affecting both black and white people. Thus, this gap should be attended to.
- (c) Third, theology and pastoral care in Africa have tended to focus on the Africa of the past. [Magezi \(2018\)](#) and [Bowers \(2009\)](#) observed that very few African scholars have adopted a progressive stance by focusing on present-day Africa, and they tend to focus on the Africa of the past. Similarly, [Mucherera and Lartey \(2017\)](#) emphasise that African Christian thinking focuses on the Africa of the past, while the current challenges are not being attended to, resulting in a gap in the contemporary situation, which should be addressed.
 - (d) Fourth, as pastoral care shifts to focus on public problems, it becomes fuzzy and unclear, especially when evaluated through the lens of the predominant individualistic intrapsychic models. When pastoral care takes on a public dimension, it tends to appear like broader practical theology and, at times, sounds like public theology ([Leslie 2008](#), pp. 96–97). This fuzziness is typical of public theology, which lacks a clear and distinct methodological orientation ([Kim 2017](#), pp. 60–62). Hence, this might be evident in intervention design. Furthermore, this fuzziness sometimes makes public pastoral care enmeshed with and indistinguishable from other related practical theology disciplines, like diaconal care and Christian development or transformation.
 - (e) Fifth, term publics in public theology refers to spaces where people “cohere in the midst of, and because of, the difference and even conflict they accommodate. It is indeed a forum or agora, a space, which allows and indeed encourages encounter with that which is different” ([Day and Kim 2017](#), p. 12). The publics are characterised by “questioning, doubting and challenging, as well as asserting, confirming and agreeing” ([Day and Kim 2017](#), p. 12). Thus, different from communities where people focus on commonalities, publics are spaces of dialogue to influence one another ([Morton 2004](#), pp. 25–36). The publics were identified by [Tracy \(1981\)](#), p. 5) as the academy, wider society, and the church. Our area of pastoral praxis is wider society. This conception of our pastoral praxis is critical as both black and white people seek to coexist with one another in society.

These presuppositions provide a basis for the proposed pastoral care intervention. However, the development of an intervention requires a clear perspective on the nature and dynamics of the pastoral praxis. Accordingly, two interrelated experiences and dynamics among black and white people in South Africa will be discussed below to gain insight on the post-colonial context.

3. Two Pastoral Praxis Situations in Post-Colonial Africa in Juxtaposition

3.1. Praxis One: White People's Situation in Post-Colonial Contexts

The first area of praxis relates to white people's context and experiences. The challenges include their African identity, feelings of spatial invasion, public spaces with a pluralistic ethos, invisible walls, a sense of fear, and threat to self.

Identity: The African white people's identity challenge concerns a struggle regarding their claim to be an African amidst the categorisation as African from Europe. The situation seems to be characterised by an ongoing subtle tussle between white people's designation as Africans, and their being viewed by black Africans as Europeans. This results in one being caught in the middle. An individual is not viewed as fully African, while at the same time, the person may have no legal identification and status in any European country. This causes one to be in an in-between space, which may result in emotional tension, discouragement, and despair. For instance, the despair is especially evident in countries like South Africa, where there is exclusion of white people from economic opportunities due to policy positions such as Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment ([B-BBEE Commission 2016](#)). This exclusion, coupled with ongoing identity questions, intensifies the question of whether white people are Africans or not, which leads to individuals' confusion. The confusion is compounded by the tension and conflicts that arise from the mixture of white privilege present in some sectors of society, such as the business sector where

white males tend to continue to be preferred and hold senior positions, compared to the seeming disadvantage of exclusion in the public sector. For instance, Statistics South Africa shows that by the second quarter of 2023, “the unemployment rate among black South Africans was 36.8 percent, while the unemployment rate among white South Africans was 7.4 percent” (Cowling 2023, p. 1). While this is most likely based on a lack of skills and qualifications among the former, it will still result in a high level of despair.

The question of ‘Who am I?’ and the resultant frustrations lead to confusion and disorientation. This creates numbness and uncertainty on how one should act in society. It may lead an individual to be unsure about what to say and how to say it in public spaces. It breeds anger because of a feeling of displacement, dislocation, exclusion, and uncertainty. The tension between being an authentic white person versus the expectation to change, transform, and adapt to the majority black people’s ethos create immense existential life pressures. The expectations and pressures to change results in some white people “acting up” or having “choreographed” interactions to fake adaptation and inclusion. This may present itself through learning a few phrases of isiZulu, IsiXhosa, or any other African language phrases that are thrown around to be relevant and avoid upsetting ‘decorum’ of expected behaviour, which can be described as reverse ‘mimicry’ by white people. Mimicry refers to the way “in which the colonised speaks in the very form and voice of the oppressor” (Bhabha 1984, p. 86). To complicate the matter, mimicry “always contains an element of mockery, remains menacing to the coloniser, always causing uncertainty as to what the colonised is actually trying to convey, and ominously suggesting that the colonised may actually have had an edge over the coloniser” (Bhabha 1984, p. 86). Therefore, reverse mimicry results in the unintended effects of white people being resented in their adaptation efforts. Thus, the acting up, which makes one untrue to the self (unauthentic), intensifies internal tensions and emotional turmoil.

Feelings of space invasion: Further to identity challenge, there is also a feeling among white people of spatial invasion. The traditionally white-only suburbs during the apartheid era are now shared with black people, which can result in a sense of invasion among some white people. At a practical level, the ‘invasion’ is resulting in the emergence of a strange suburb culture imported by black people. For example, it is not uncommon in the suburbs to have conflicts between black and white neighbours whereby black people are being accused of breaking the noise by-laws through playing loud music. The increase in the black middle class and migration to the suburbs generates a sense of fear and threat to white identity, self, ethos, and who they are as people. However, these feelings are hidden and suppressed because, if they were to be verbalised, one could easily be accused of racism. At a deeper level, these feelings unconsciously fuel resistance and disdain of the other (i.e., black person). This includes any efforts to intermix because there is a sense of being forced to integrate, while the individual is experiencing a violation of their own space and values. These buried and suppressed feelings in one’s subconscious cause an internal conflict. The expectations of inclusion and integration exert pressure that gives rise to relational dissonance.

Public spaces with pluralistic ethos: Post-colonial contexts involve white and black people sharing public social spaces. These shared spaces provide an opportunity to experience and share in the emerging public ethos from the blending of new cultures. This is evident in schools, religious spaces, restaurants, places of employment, and many other social places. The spaces that used to be exclusively white in the past are now being shared. For instance, in South Africa, some schools that used to be Afrikaans-only schools are moved to be open schools and include non-Afrikaans-speaking students. This is evident through many public discussions and the court case that was lost by the Gauteng Education MEC at the time, Panyaza Lusufi. Child (2018, p. 1) reports the story under the title “Panyaza Lesufi loses fight on English-speaking kids in Afrikaans school”. The traditionally, so-called Model C³ schools in South Africa, which was a semi-private structure used in the governance of white-only government schools, are now multi-racial, integrated schools. The formerly white-only suburban churches are increasingly inclusive, which is giving rise

to the need to transform worship services to incorporate indigenous African practices and songs as more black people move into the suburbs. These trends are evident in all other social spaces, for example in restaurants, work environments, hospitals, and others. These developments are giving rise to new emerging cultures and public ethos, tensions and struggles. For instance, in South Africa, there have been incidences where black children were forced to shave their hair because “the afro-hairstyle is not neat”. [Nadege \(2021\)](#) reports this story under the title “The racist politicisation of black hair in African schools”. There also have been incidences where university students were racially attacking each other, as well as some white students implicated in inhumane acts towards black students. The expected ethos in the public spaces versus the home experiences and struggles of transformation at universities and other sectors can be shrouded in paradoxes, tensions, contradictions, and conflicts. [Jonathan Jansen \(2009\)](#), in his book, *Knowledge in the Blood: Confronting Race and the Apartheid Past*, asked the searching question:

How is it that young Afrikaners, born at the time of Mandela’s release from prison, hold firm views about a past they never lived, rigid ideas about black people, and fatalistic thoughts about the future? ([Jansen 2009](#), p. iii)

These public spaces are characterised by a perception of socialisation and space-sharing being forced by the government. There is a sense of unidirectional social space movement and sharing where black people from townships move to the suburbs to live and access facilities, and not vice versa. This is causing relational paralysis as individuals are unsure about how to act and interact with the other from a different culture and life experiences amid the bombardment and push to integrate and socialise. In these situations, religious spaces such as churches have become contested social and socialisation spaces as members struggle to decide on liturgy, worship songs, and other fellowship problems.

The effect of these developments are fear and uncertainty about how to react, a sense of alienation and being forced, and feelings of being unwanted and unimportant. In response, some white people with the relevant opportunities are emigrating to other countries, while those without the capacity to do so remain, feeling trapped. The shrinking spaces are coupled with exclusionary policies described above, such as B-BBEE, among others. Hence, these developments are affecting people physically, emotionally, socially, and spiritually.

3.2. Praxis 2: Black People in Post-Colonial African Contexts

Praxis 2 relates to black people in the post-colonial African contexts. It is characterised by a tension of living life at an in-between space of being an indigenous African and embracing a Western lifestyle. [Magezi \(2016a, p. 83\)](#) describes it as “a human being who is living a trapped life”. This entails “living life in the in-between, which is characterised by tension” ([Magezi 2018, p. 3](#)). It is a life of see-sawing and being sandwiched in between spaces. The tensions are experienced at the levels of family, public religious spaces, and personal intrapsychic relations.

An individual is caught up in patterns of the Western lifestyle, but with a strong connection to African roots, abiding by and upholding traditional community and extended family systems. The tension of this existential space is evident through a life that is modelled on and conforms to the Western lifestyle, defined by elements that include being an economically and materialistically driven person, as well as an autonomous self. Yet, at the same time, the person is caught up with the need and pressure of social expectation to support and provide for one’s extended family members, including one’s neighbours. For instance, one may live in a city or town with one’s family nucleus, but there is an expectation to have a rural home where most extended family members live. Thus, having two homes is perceived as a normative way of balancing two lives. One’s home, where one resides with the family nucleus in a city or town, is a private family home that should also be used to welcome people from the village, community, or country of origin. In this situation, the tension is undeniable: Should one act in the best interest of oneself with one’s nucleus family only? There is a huge expectation and demand from the extended family and community. This situation can be compared to what [Du Bois \(2008\)](#) called two-soul

of Africans, which refers to a 'double consciousness'. This term refers to an identity crisis of the two-ness of black Americans, whereby they have two warring ideals in one body. This 'two-souls' experience is real also among many black people, even outside America. This concept of 'two-souls' can be extrapolated and applied in our discussion to indicate the internal conflict, dissonances, and social see-sawing of an individual to try to satisfy two systems.

The tension is also noticeable in many black African family relationships, especially so between parents and children. Parents tend to favour and uphold indigenous or traditional community customs and practices, while their children rebel. Children view and experience such indigenous practices as a burden that drags them backwards from economic progress and modernity.

At a personal level, there is a conflict within oneself. The identity question, "Who am I?" attracts two conflicting responses, centring on the "I—autonomous" individual and "we—community and extended family". Humanhood is caught up and entangled in this interrelationship of the "I" and "We" that defines African philosophy. This phenomenon is summarised by the Ubuntu philosophy: "I am because we are" (Tutu 1999, pp. 34–35). Metz (2007) explained that, in this philosophy, a person is a person through other persons. However, Ubuntu as a concept and philosophy has been criticised as unrealistic, vague, and unable to be applied in public policy (Anofuechi 2022; Simba 2021). The main idea is that one can only become a real or authentic (virtuous) person in black African human terms through one's relationships with others. We are mutually dependent. For instance, the actions of an individual affect others, and vice versa. Therefore, Metz (2007) in his extensive African philosophy exposition, theorised that Ubuntu requires or is summarised in two interrelated aspects, namely, identity and solidarity. Regarding identity, individuals conceive themselves as part of 'we' and not merely as 'I'. We understand ourselves to be in this 'business of life' together with others. As it goes with others, so it goes with us. Regarding solidarity, Africans express this by working together for the common good, helping one another and caring for one another. However, while we affirm African philosophy at an ideological level, in practice, many African people live and practise a Western individualistic lifestyle influenced by materialistic and economic factors, which lets them experience unavoidable existential tensions.

Apart from tensions experienced by black people at family and personal levels, there are also tensions that exist in public places, similar to those experienced by white people. For instance, there are increasing tensions in interracial worship spaces, where the following contentious problems are being raised: Should we sing Western or African worship songs? What should be the balance in the number of songs we sing for each language? Should we preach or conduct worship services in colonial languages, such as English, French or Portuguese, or use local African languages? Should we have a black or white pastor? Further to tensions in worship spaces, there is also tension regarding physical geographical spaces. As already discussed above under praxis 1, many black people are relocating to suburbs that were previously spaces reserved for white people. As they move to new places, they learn and embrace a new challenging ethos. These challenges include aspects such as the need to lower music volume against the background of loud music in the townships and the limit imposed on the number of family members by landlords in rented houses to minimise the wear and tear of buildings.

At an emotional level, these tensions cause confusion as one struggles to deal with the question of "Who am I in the global world?". This is posed due to some restrictions on freedoms and limitations imposed by community structures, like community by-laws to limit noise levels, as well as the affordability limitations of one's desires due to financial resource constraints. There is also dissonance arising from the need to be one's authentic self regarding individual interests, choices, preferences, and personal spaces, while also having a feeling of being emotionally pressurised by a psychological sense of conforming to Western rules and limitations, and betrayal of one's community. Relationally, the social and community connections and networks, which are a valued heritage, are causing the

retardation of current economic progress and psycho-social pressure. There is a dark mist of wanting to be authentically African and denying existential realities. For instance, there is a debate in South Africa on the notion of ‘black tax’ and some black people resisting the concept of being expected to take on other’s financial challenges, arguing that African people’s way of life and practices cannot be viewed in such derogatory terms; and yet, internally and personally, individuals regret the pressure and burden experienced from supporting many relatives. As [Whitelaw and Branson \(2020, p. 2\)](#) observe, the term black tax is contentious as it can be understood as either Ubuntu or the burden of supporting many relatives. They explain the following:

The term typically refers to financial contributions that black professionals are expected to make to less fortunate family members. While young white South Africans might enter the labour market with generational wealth and additional support from their parents, young black South Africans face an additional ‘tax’ on their income in the form of support [having to be] offered to their families. The term, however, is contentious. A recently published book of essays on the topic, which delves into the lived experiences of the book’s contributors and their kin, queries whether black tax is a ‘burden or Ubuntu’. The contributors’ stories are testament to the prevalence of private networks of support, although opinions vary about whether black tax is a burden or Ubuntu ([Whitelaw and Branson 2020, p. 2](#)).

There is indeed an economic challenge that arises from the reality of the expectations placed on many black African people to support many dependents (community and extended family) using the limited resources from one’s earnings. [Whitelaw and Branson \(2020, p. 5\)](#) note the following:

Although black graduates constitute a much smaller share of the population—just 12 percent of black adults (15+) report a post-secondary qualification—a greater share of graduates remit (30 percent) compared to other individuals (13 percent). Of those who do remit, graduates comprise just over one quarter of these individuals—roughly double the share of graduates in the population.

The expectation to remain connected and united with one’s extended family and community, despite one’s personal choices, is also evident in other areas, such as pluralistic religious practices. One is expected to abide by the extended family’s ethos and practices, despite personal preferences in cases where one is against certain rituals ([Magezi 2016b](#)). An individual can be treated as a family and community deviant by objecting to extended family indigenous rituals and customs. Thus, family, social, religious, geographical space sharing and contestation, post-colonial economic experiences, racial dynamics, and other related factors interplay to create an unstable situation. Individuals constantly find themselves having to advocate, motivate, argue, negotiate, confront, adapt, dismiss and fight for a meaningful life, including their personal and social well-being, and that of their family and community. Thus, as [Siluma \(2024b\)](#) observes, Africans and South Africans are yet to experience the benefits of democracy. This causes anger and frustration where the benefits of a colonial aftermath are evident.

4. From Understanding Post-Colonial Africa Praxis to Pastoral Care

In view of the praxis of both black and white people in contemporary South Africa, what pastoral intervention approaches could be developed? At stake is the question: What model and form can such pastoral care take? How can pastoral care perform a function where such public complex social and community problems exist? From the presuppositions stated above, public pastoral care emerges as a critical heuristic framework. [Greider \(2008\)](#) observed that the ever-expanding scope of pastoral care is a challenge for pastoral caregivers. This broadness can render pastoral care superficial, superfluous, and meaningless. This challenge requires practitioners to make strategic decisions about where to focus on, depending on their social context and demand, which ([Greider 2008, p. 54](#)) called strategic “triaging”. Triage is a medical term that refers to “the sorting of patients (as

in an emergency room) according to the urgency of their need for care” (Merriam-Webster 2024, n.p). Triage also refers to “the assigning of a priority order to projects on the basis of where funds and other resources can be best used, are most needed, or are most likely to achieve success” (Merriam-Webster 2024, n.p). For this reason, South Africa is still racially divided, with clear post-apartheid disillusionment across all racial groupings. Thus, the location and positioning of our public pastoral care should contribute towards finding solutions to this problem.

Pastoral care focuses on care for the whole person—but from a religious perspective, it strives to achieve wholeness. The care is provided in “all the psycho-physical and psycho-social dimensions (spiritual wholeness)” (Louw 2014, p. 60). Within Christian theology⁴, spirituality relates to ontic being in Christ, which influences all other dimensions and perspectives of life (Louw 2014; Magezi 2020b). Caring for the whole person entails dealing with all diverse problems affecting people holistically, which challenges a pastoral caregiver to be what Magezi (2019, p. 5) calls an “expert generalist”. This enables caregivers to address the diverse problems affecting people. McClure (2011, p. 3) contended that the goal of pastoral care is to help people “flourish”. The goal of flourishing extends the goal of pastoral care from focusing only on narrow spiritual matters to partnering with God in bringing, mediating, and embodying. For this reason, metaphors are critical ways of communicating the being of God to people, which is not static, as presented in dogmatic theological thinking. Therefore, Firet (1986, p. 15) and Louw (2019, p. 97) argued for pastoral care as God’s praxis. God’s praxis means that “at the heart of pastoral role-fulfilment is not the activity of a human being, but the action of God who, by way of the official ministry as intermediary, comes to people in his word” (Firet 1986, p. 15). This means the pastoral ministry of God’s business in His world; hence, we have to understand His praxis and participate in its entirety to the extent possible. However, the challenge is to develop theological theory that captures God’s praxis.

To operationalise the praxis of God in public pastoral care, McClure (2011, p. 187) offered what she called a synergistic model or “understanding of persons’ relationships to each other, the world, and God”. This synergistic understanding, as a holistic approach, integrates Gustafson’s (1974) approach. She advises that “pastoral practitioners have a moral and ethical responsibility to embody the roles of prophet, pastor, priest, and participant” (McClure 2011, p. 187). First, the pastoral caregiver as a prophet “stands with God in judgement over and against the existing society and culture, over and against the spiritual and moral ethos of her society in so far as it diminishes flourishing” (McClure 2011, p. 228). However, in performing the task, the prophet is not naïve but understands the complexities of life and systems. The prophet hopes in God to overturn the evil situation and seeks to participate in declaiming oppressive orders. Second, the pastor is empathetic to people in their situations because of their understanding of the complexities of life. Third, as a priest, the pastoral caregiver acts as a bulwark, fighting for the good that exists and defending it against the forces that seek to destroy it. This is carried out through the web of justice, order, law, and peace on earth (McClure 2011, p. 229). Fourth, as a participant, the pastoral caregiver engages in positive social transformation in a critical manner. The participants are conscious and alert because they understand that institutions both support and impede God’s intention for creation. Therefore, the participants’ values are in accord with God’s activity and intention for God’s creation (McClure 2011, p. 229).

Public pastoral care therefore takes different forms, depending on the problems at hand. However, critical to pastoral care is to understand that it is both a science and an art. Eggleston (2017, p. 1) observes that pastoral care “is an art and a science; it is both at the same time. The minister may be called to shift from one to the other seamlessly, as a dancer moves from foot to foot”. Pastoral care as a science means that there is a method that can be taught and followed in guiding someone. For instance, one can be taught methods, such as establishing contact, listening, analysis, and interpretation; as an art, it entails intuition, gut feeling, hunch, wisdom, imagination, and creativity. However, it is also an art in that it entails imagination and creativity. With real-life contexts, depending on the situation,

pastoral care entails a zig-zagging mentality and approach, rather than linear thinking (Louw 2015).

Therefore, to consider a public pastoral care intervention in the South African contexts, the pastoral care designations of “prophet, pastor, priest and participant” (McClure 2011, p. 187), the invaluable conception of pastoral care as science and art, and the importance of zig-zagging are integrated within African realities.

- **Home-away-from-home pastoral theory:** Public pastoral care in Africa is deeply Christian and theological (Magezi 2020a). Thus, there has to be an explicit theological theory to guide caring practice. A theological conception of the home and citizen is suggested to guide the public. The country, a geographical place in time, is a temporary home for all people, but it is a home and a passage at the same time. Viewing the geographical location in this light presents a perspective of geographical place as a ‘passage’ and a ‘transitional space’, while one waits for a final and permanent home. Therefore, life is a time and space of waiting, while purposefully contributing to goodness of life, contributing to meaning and purpose. Magezi (2017, p. 227) calls this “home away from home”. This understanding contributes to the re-imagination of our places as a temporary shelter. It communicates theologically and practically the limitation imposed on an individual to fight for such a place. One should hold to it loosely and share it while awaiting something more permanent. In a shelter, we all participate in life, share, coexist, and eagerly wait to move on.
- **Empowerment for public functioning and well-being:** Waiting in a shelter to move on is a theological statement (2 Corinthians 5:1). Such a theological language has little meaning in the public space. Therefore, there is a need to translate the theological understanding of the meaning of temporary shelter or the concept of a home away from home to the public for it to have meaning. Public theologians believe that translating theological language to be understood at the public square is one of the greatest challenges of public theology (De Villiers 2011; Dreyer 2011). For this reason, churches and religious spaces should be places of empowerment for public functioning. Such empowerment should prepare individuals to adapt, confront, struggle and cope, negotiate, challenge, embrace, and reject. People should be able to encounter the other person from a different context, and the converse should also be true. Theology should be intensified as a public apparatus. Public theology is about dialoguing to influence one another (Morton 2004); it is about “questioning, doubting and challenging, as well as asserting, confirming and agreeing” (Day and Kim 2017, p. 12). The conversations and debates occur—but they do so within families and communities. Therefore, church leaders should equip people to function and meaningfully engage with this. Empowered individuals should be equipped to ‘zig-zagly’ manoeuvre and assume a relevant role in their situation as the situation demands, for example, being a prophet, pastor, priest, or participant. This will position individuals to be agile and imaginative.
- **Preventive pastoral care as equipping people for public care:** The designation of pastoral care, *cura animarum* (cure of souls), where ‘soul’ refers to individuals and their intrapsychic relations, has sustained the individualistic emphasis of pastoral care, which draws from the Western operative context (McClure 2011). Louw (2005), in “Mechanics of the Human soul”, located soulfulness as thriving within the context of relationships and human beings’ networking. The notion of the ‘cure of souls’ has tended to remove pastoral care as a human relational art influenced by the new ontic being in Christ. This has resulted in an over-emphasis on psychology and a medical model. Within a medical model, prevention focuses on “interventions aimed at reducing risks or threats to health” (Institute for Work & Health 2024, p. 1). Prevention falls into primary, secondary and tertiary categories.

Primary prevention aims to prevent disease or injury before it ever occurs. Secondary prevention aims to reduce the impact of a disease or injury that has already occurred. Tertiary prevention aims to soften the impact of an ongoing illness or injury that has lasting effects (Institute for Work & Health 2024, p. 1).

Therefore, prevention, among other things, is concerned with sharing information (primary prevention) and strategies to live well (tertiary prevention). In pastoral care, preventive pastoral care is concerned with individuals' empowerment through training to prepare people to live well in life, which in our case is a pluralistic context. "Train up a child in the way he should go [teaching him to seek God's wisdom and will for his abilities and talents], and even when he is old, he will not depart from it (Proverbs 22:6)." In the pastoral letters, Paul advises Timothy to "train yourself in godliness" (1 Timothy 4:8). Within the Hebrew tradition, parents are supposed to teach God's ways to their children. "Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up" (Deuteronomy 11:19).

In this light, preventive pastoral care would include developing consciousness and awareness of our existential context in relation to our children, families and communities. For both black and white people, this would entail the exposition and understanding of our history and its current effects. It entails understanding and being aware of the pains, privileges, opportunities, and consequently the resultant tensions affecting both black and white people. Jansen's (2009) observation in *Knowledge in the blood: Confronting race and the apartheid past* is instructive. If children born in post-apartheid South Africa harbour resentment of other racial groups, despite not having experienced apartheid themselves, this suggests that these attitudes are nurtured at home and in the communities where they socialise. Pastoral care is empathetic in such situations (McClure 2011, p. 229). Thus, preventive care is about empowering people to understand who they are and explore constructive and health options of relating and coping within their situation. It entails cultivating a positive mentality, positive spirit, and optimism rather than pessimism. This way, as McClure (2011, p. 230) described, pastoral caregiver as participant in such a context "strives to be realistic without being defensive, hopeful without illusions, and open without being uncritical".

- **Public conversations as conversational pastoral care:** A common feature in South Africa is public tension characterised by the unwillingness or limited ability to listen to one another. This is evident in supposedly small incidents that are blown beyond proportion. There seems to be an incapacity to listen to one another. Listening to one another communicates respect and positive regard for the other person. Therefore, it is important to create a space for conversations and listening to each other. By therapeutic conversations, we are not necessarily referring to "discussion with an individual that will directly activate a healing effect on the physical and emotional well-being of that individual" (Sharma and Gupta 2023, p. 1). It refers to creating a conversational care space. It means creating a safe space for conversations, and for venting and lamenting with one another. Conversational pastoral space is different from the notion of publics, which is characterised by dialoguing, debating, "questioning, doubting and challenging, as well as asserting, confirming and agreeing" (Day and Kim 2017, p. 12). Conversational pastoral space is modelled on a conversation café, which is a space where "people have calm and profound conversations in which there is less debating and arguing, and more listening" (Liberating Structures 2024, p. 1)⁵. In a conversational space, people openly express their views without fear of being judged or misunderstood. Individuals from different racial groups can journey, discuss, explore, and listen. Conversational care is both a process and an end. As a process, it equips people to be empathetic, unconditionally listen to the other, learn to understand, and respect the other person. As an end, it creates a healing space. In situations where people do not feel listened to and feel fearful or numb to express their feelings and concerns, conversational spaces provide a healing oasis or a fresh breath of social air.

- **Being with the other in shared spaces as coexistence negotiation:** The empowerment to function in public assumes going to the spaces where people are. One of the current shifts in pastoral care is its shift in emphasis from a counselling room to caregiving, which implies a movement to where people are (Magezi 2020b). Louw (2022) advises that pastoral care should assume a “pavement caregiving and streetwise compassion”, which entails “befriending neighbouring, based on the notion of compassionate being-with”, which “contributes to informal forms of friendship, the cornerstone for establishing social coherence” (Louw 2022, p. 1). However, as people engage in cross-cultural contexts, such as the ones in South Africa, there are important principles to consider. Magezi (2020b, pp. 7–8) posits that, as pastoral care is practised across contexts, this entails “being with the other” people. To do so, the following useful and relevant principles should guide the caregiving process: “interparthy, vulnerability, respect, positive regard of other human beings, humaneness, connecting, genuineness, creativity”.⁶ Mistakes will be made when one crosses racial boundaries, but the sense of humanity and sincere desire to be with the other overrides any cynicism. Our common humanity encourages us to accept, embrace, and pursue being with the other. Thus, the art of shifting from one’s place ‘to be with the other’ in their ‘street and pavement’, both physically (geography shared spaces) and through a cognitive effort to understand the other in order to co-exist ‘interparthy’ (Augsburger 1986, pp. 29–30) stand out as critical approaches to encourage care.

5. Conclusions

The paper considered pastoral care in a post-colonial African context, using South Africa as a lens. It presented pastoral care as an embodiment of God in different contexts in a manner that presents God’s holistic care (where *cura animarum* is whole-person care). It maintains that the whole-person care process entails participating in the praxis of God. This way, a pastoral caregiver exerts effort in embracing and embodying, thinking, and understanding God in terms of the infinity of God’s image (Louw 2019). Viewing God in terms of infinity terms entails conceiving and performing pastoral care incarnationally. To perform this role among disillusioned people who are racially divided, the pastoral caregiver assumes a pastoral role that integrates prophetic, priestly, and participant approaches. These approaches are not rigid, but they are applied ‘zig-zagly’ in a versatile and agile manner to relate, adapt, negotiate, connect, and infuse hope among people. A theology of home away from home is proposed as an undergirding theological theory to encourage a constructive perspective on geographical location and place. To the end of instilling holistic human flourishing within the public settings where people exist, pastoral care is proposed to promote empowerment, prevention, conversational care, and being with the other in shared spaces for coexistence.

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Notes

¹ For a discussion of apartheid see A History of Apartheid in South Africa. South African History Online (<https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/history-apartheid-south-africa>), accessed: 30 April 2024, South Africa: Twenty-Five Years Since Apartheid, and many other sources.

² The meaning of public pastoral care is somewhat confusing as observed by Leslie (2008, pp. 96–97) who admitted that, at one level, public pastoral care appears to be practical theology and, at times, sounds like public theology. For a detailed discussion and articulated definition of public pastoral care, see V. Magezi (2020a).

- ³ A Model-C school is “a state school in South Africa that used to be for white children only and is now mixed. Model-C schools are generally considered better than township schools” ([Macmillandictionary.com](https://www.macmillandictionary.com) n.d.).
- ⁴ I use the terms Christian theology or Christianity in this article to refer to all Christians whose identity is defined by being followers of Jesus Christ as taught by Christian faith despite variations among Christian churches such as the Roman Catholic, Protestant and more recent Pentecostal church traditions.
- ⁵ A detailed discussion on Liberating Structures and Conversation Café are described in [Lipmanowicz and McCandless \(2014\)](#).
- ⁶ “(1) Interparthy, which entails “a process of ‘feeling with’ and ‘thinking with’ other people from different contexts” ([Augsburger 1986](#), pp. 29–30); (2) Vulnerability entails exposing oneself to being stupid and failing, and yet in that process, the lessons you learn are priceless. In vulnerability one is being real about limitations of knowing the other; (3) Respect entails approaching other people with a positive regard, including accepting them unconditionally and acknowledging God’s image in them, which results in positive human interactions; (4) Positive regard of other human beings entails being conscious that differences and diversity make us fully human; (5) Humaneness is a quality that makes us human. It is about solidarity and communion as human beings. To be truly human is to be intricately connected to other human beings. Humaneness is a drive to reach other human beings; (6) Connecting refers to developing skills and mastery in relating to people who are different from us. Connecting with people who are different from us does not occur naturally. The art of connecting is about making an effort to learn and understand other people who are different from us; (7) Genuineness entails genuine concern for the other, which translates to warmth and unconditional embracing of the other person; (8) Creativity entails imagining ways of relating to others in a sensitive way. It means having an awareness that each individual is unique and has unique expectations and needs” ([Magezi 2020b](#), pp. 7–8).

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