Grooving with people's rage: Public and black theology's attempts at revolutionizing African love

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ABSTRACT

This article offers a comparison between public theology and black theology considered as the two major "players" in the present-day South Africa. Each theological approach is being evaluated in terms of its capacity to embrace a radically prophetic voice, one that could engage the broad public without losing its accountability to those on the underside of history. The main discrepancy between the two approaches lies in the different trajectories of their "revolutionizing effect". Public theology tends to explore the redemptive, unifying and humanizing potential of Christian love, yet fails to thoroughly deconstruct the imperial power structures which are the ultimate cause of the anger of the structurally disenfranchised majority of South African people. Black theology, rooted in a postcolonial rather than postmodern perspective, has the capacity to be vulnerable to the moods of the marginalized and organic with their rage; and yet it lacks coherence and a plan of action. I argue that Christian theology will be poised to play a constructive role in the current social transition in South Africa only insofar as it is capable of revolutionizing people's love while patiently listening to and being shaped by their anger.

INTRODUCTION

African societies deal with their unfulfilled loves and repressed hatreds, in different ways. For South Africans, anger has become one of the basic means of expressing both their hatred and their incapacity to love what they desire to love (and perhaps also *the way* they desire to love). Tinyiko Maluleke, one of the most prolific theologians in today's South Africa, offers a sobering diagnosis:

> Our language is violent and violence is our language... If there is an area in which the Truth and Reconciliation Commission failed, and failed spectacularly, it is in the area of national anger management. We are an angry people. This is an angry nation. Some of the angriest white as well as black people on earth live here (Maluleke: 2011:89).

This article offers the interpretation of the task of theology in the democratic South Africa in terms of *revolutionizing people's love*. In principle, Christian theology revolutionizes love by redefining one's neighbor and thereby empowering subalterns and oppressors alike to become agents of change in the pursuit of the common good. A revolutionized love thus becomes a key drive in cultural, socio-political, economic and ecological praxis. I want to argue that there is no mature Christian theology today in South Africa that would be capable of *revolutionizing people's love while patiently listening to and being shaped by people's rage*. A renewed prophetic theology is in demand, one that could engage the broad public without losing its accountability to those on the underside of history.

There are two candidates in the local theological scene that seem to be best suited to embrace a radically prophetic trajectory, similar to that indicated by the Kairos Theologians in the 1980s: public theology [PT] and black theology [BT]. Through the literature survey I will show that both traditions emphasize the public implications of God's love for the world while pointing to the universal span and range of transformation that the coming of God's reign demands (see Koopman 2010:138; Maluleke 2008a:689). There are certainly areas in which the two schools can act in a

complementary way and learn from one another.[1] However, the focus of my comparison between PT and BT will be critical, not constructive. For I believe that both theological traditions under scrutiny have to make a thorough examination of conscience and clean their own houses, albeit in very different senses, before they can engage in a more fruitful dialogue.

Unlike BT, PT has no wherewithal to deal adequately with "raw, violent, messy and gruesome anger in our streets, in our hearts and in our souls" (Maluleke 2011:89). The main discrepancy between the two approaches, I argue, lies in the different trajectories of their "revolutionizing effect". PT tends to explore the redemptive, unifying, humanizing, and dignifying potential of Christian love (Koopman 2010:131-32), yet fails to thoroughly deconstruct the postcolonial and imperial power structures which are the ultimate cause of the latent anger of the marginalized majority of South Africans. Rooted in a postcolonial rather than postmodern perspective, BT is – or at least has the capacity to be – *vulnerable to the moods* of the marginalized and powerless (Maluleke 1995:11), which nowadays means above all to be *organic with their rage*, and thus it reads the signs of the time from their point of view. And yet, unlike the voices of public theologians, who can be rightly deemed the most prolific theological species in the South African academy today, those of black theologians are scarce and often isolated from one another. So the comparison between PT and BT would remain incomplete and purely theoretical should it fail to deal with the questions: *What has happened to many black prophetic voices after 1994?*

This study proceeds in three steps. First, an illustration from the South African social context is used to explain what I mean by the failure of the currently prevalent theologies to *revolutionize African love* by means of embracing people's anger constructively. Second, I offer a critique of PT in terms of its *a-pathetic* mode of theologizing, its inability (or lack of willingness) to engage with structural (especially macro-economic) issues, and ultimately, its lack of accountability to South African people. This is followed by the account of BT's potential to *patiently groove with* people's rage as a way of *revolutionizing African love from within*. Here I argue that BT has tools to kindle a new passion and a new imagination for what Mitri Raheb labels a "creative resistance" (2014:120-122), but I also question the reasons why its disruptive potential is not being actualized in the midst of the current social crisis. This comparative study is focused on, though not limited to, Nico Koopman's and Tinyiko Maluleke's theological reflections – the two chosen theologians whose work is, in my view, representative of the *mode of theologizing* characteristic of PT and BT respectively in the democratic South Africa.

RAGE, NOT PATIENCE: CHURCH AND THEOLOGICAL RESPONSES TO FALLISM[2]

There is a tension inherent in the Christian vision of reality as it entails both love and revolution or, put differently, both reconciliation and liberation. Let me suggest that this tension manifests itself in the current South African context as the dialectics of rage and patience. Rage can be epitomized by the voices of the youth, mainly black students who since 2015 have been at the forefront of the movement known as "Fallism", a movement that is gaining increasing currency in both South African public life and academic discourse (Everatt 2016; Modiri 2016). The protests to which I am referring in this study include social campaigns such as #RhodesMustFall, #FeesMustFall, Open Stellenbosch and, to a lesser degree, #ZumaMustFall. Violence explodes in all sorts of ways as an expression of that rage, but it is also inherent in the establishment's responses to the social unrest and in the lack thereof when it comes to dealing with the issues that cause the

[1] A number of collaborative-integrative research initiatives involving PT and BT have already taken place (see, inter alia, Buttelli 2012; Tenai 2010; Vellem 2014).

[2] This section is based on my article "Faith of an angry people: Mapping a renewed prophetic theology in South Africa. Journal of Theology for Southern Africa", which has been submitted for publication in *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* (Urbaniak 2017).

protests. As for patience, it seems to be what many postulate but everyone lacks. More or less explicit calls for patience take the form of somewhat desperate "advice" from the higher education authorities, politicians and some spiritual leaders. Paradoxically those coincide with the brutal interventions of the police and private security companies hired by most universities, allegedly to protect the students. The latter amply, and painfully, demonstrate "the state violence continuities between the current and the previous regimes" (Maluleke 2016a).

Students' voices that reached and electrified the public during the last couple of years reveal that the issue of injustice, as experienced by the protesting youth, extends far beyond the question of the fees or even that of an economic inequality. Demonstrating students have continually linked their cause to race and decolonization pointing out that South African universities simply do not "reflect the demographics or cultures of the black majority" (Nicolson 2016).

> The cry of the students seems... to be for a dispensation that will make the very best of every aspect of every South African university available to each and every student... Many students have reported feeling as if they are being asked to take off everything they are and everything they know before entering the holy gates of the university (Maluleke 2015c).
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> "We can't breathe" is a phrase often cited by students. Black students have to struggle or be extremely lucky to get into university and face family financial pressures or be lumped with future debt. By their nature, universities reproduce past knowledge systems before they create new thoughts, meaning black students are not only usually taught by whites but taught White. To breathe, or to survive, under financial constraints and repeated cultural domination seems impossible, or at least only tolerable to pay back, pay forward, family investment (Nicolson 2016).

In this context, Maluleke observes, not without a certain sense of excitement, it seems, "Biko is back, baby. The so-called born-frees drink a potent cocktail of Biko mixed with Frantz Fanon" (Maluleke 2015c). The level of impatience and vexation is pointedly reflected in the recent Facebook post by the controversial Oxford University student and Mandela Rhodes scholar, Ntokozo Sbo Qwabe: "Older black people who want to silence us on the basis that they fought against apartheid need to shut the fuck up!!! We are here because you failed us! So please!" (in Forster 2016).

What is fallism all about? What *really* are these social campaigns and movements: #RhodesMustFall, #FeesMustFall, Open Stellenbosch, and the like? Are they an expression of impatience and entitlement of the few angry students who, manipulated by political activists or driven by their own political ambitions, provoke violence and vandalism, and blackmail the others into joining them (or at least efficiently silence their opponents)? The results of the latest poll conducted at the University of the Witwatersrand, which show that 77% of students and staff want lectures to resume immediately, could suggest precisely that (African News Agency 2016). Or are we rather witnessing, to refer to Scott's *infrapolitics of subordinate groups*, a rare historical moment where the *charismatic acts* of young people united in anger and determination to "purge the oppressive remnants of apartheid in pursuit of a truly African university" (Open Stellenbosch 2015) represent "a shared hidden transcript that no one had yet had the courage to declare in the teeth of power" (Scott 1990:20)? The answer lies probably somewhere in between, and demarcating it goes beyond the scope of this study.

The central question is that of the churches', and their underlying theologies', role in the social crisis which the current protests exemplify and disclose. What has been the church's response thus far with regard to the fallism in general and the #FeesMustFall campaign in particular? Has it opted for love or for revolution, for anger or for patience? Christian churches, generally speaking, have been somewhere in between. Their positions vary. Some turn a blind eye (e.g., most Evangelical, Pentecostal and Charismatic churches). Others condemn the use of violence and police brutality against students (that would be the case of most mainline churches). Still others make some attempts at offering solidarity, reconciliatory presence or even mediation (here one could mention both the South African Council of Churches and the National Church Leaders'

Consultation).[3] Finally there are Christian leaders and churches that show the wholehearted support for the protesters (Archbishop Tutu and some Anglican communities have done precisely that).

Among more decisive and unambiguous stances, one should take note of the Statement by Faith Communities and Civil Society Organizations "In responsible solidarity with #FeesMustFall movement in Pietermaritzburg" issued on 30 September 2016. The Theology lecturers from Pietermaritzburg campus, alongside the representatives of other faith communities and civil society organizations, also became directly involved in the protests.

However, in most cases, despite the attempts of certain church leaders to reach out to the students and facilitate the dialogue between them and the state institutions, a high level of mistrust has been shown towards the churches by some of the protesters. North West University Mafikeng campus Student Representative Council (SRC) president Benz Mabengwane's lack of confidence in the SACC, which he deemed "a mouthpiece of government," reflects this trend. "The SACC... came out to condemn violence" – Mabengwane told journalists – "but none of them came out to hold government accountable. They want peace, but we can't want peace in the presence of injustice" (in Tandwa 2016).

Fr Graham Pugin, SJ, who was shot in the face with a rubber bullet as he tried to stop the police from attacking students sheltering at the Holy Trinity Church in Braamfontein, has become a prophetic witness, indeed a "local hero", as many felt that, in the midst of this ongoing crisis, he was exactly where *the church* should be (Whittles 2016; ViralBru 2016). But a few days after the incident the Jesuits from the Trinity Church decided to close its premises from the protesting students. This happened after an outburst of violence in the church during an aborted meeting of the #WitsPeaceAccord on 19 October 2016. Sections of the crowd tried to attack the Vice Chancellor of the University of the Witwatersrand, Adam Habib, and he had to be escorted out of the gathering. As Fr Russell Pollitt explains in his article titled "No peace, no space", the behavior of some of the students present at that meeting violated "the principles by which Trinity made itself available. It violated everything the church on that very spot has stood for in its 119 years of life... [as] a space for dialogue and negotiation" (Pollitt 2016).

One may simply conclude that the Trinity story is just another case in point proving that today's students are "insufficiently literate in the radical social theories they purport to represent, and that furthermore, their undemocratic sensibilities, their thoughtless militancy, and their proclivity for violence... is an outcome of this illiteracy" (Modiri 2016). But whether one deems this an expression of the student's lack of maturity and responsibility or not, it is also, with no doubt, a symbolic expression of the pastoral failure of the church, and a tragic one too. It is as if the old tested methods that once proved successful during the struggle against apartheid are now failing in confrontation with the uncontained anger of the born-free generation of South Africans.

Even if one cannot speak of a *total theological vacuum*, what is clear is that, overall, the role of the churches vis-à-vis fallism is not vital. From a broader perspective, the same can be said about their role in the social transformation which is at stake. This is in contrast to the role of the political parties which successfully politicise and, sadly, often divide the protesters, thus hijacking their anger for their own purposes. I want to argue that one of the main reasons why this is the case is that there is no mature Christian theology today in South Africa that would be capable of *grooving with* the anger of the great majority of the people. As professional theologians, we are for most part detached from the rage of the streets. In light of this diagnosis, a number of difficult questions should be considered:

How our theologies reflect or deal with our national anger? Do they even take it into account? Are the current *theological players* in the South African academic scene, in particular PT and BT, equipped for that task? Does a renewed prophetic theology need to overcome the polarization between love (reconciliation) and revolution (liberation) characteristic of prophetic theological

[3] See SACC 2016; NCLC 2015.

voices in 1980s, in particular the *Kairos Document*? Can it embrace an attitude of "revolutionary patience" (Dorothee Sölle) without losing its accountability to those on the underside of history? To these and similar questions I now turn as I probe both PT and BT, especially in terms of their capacity to embrace people's anger constructively.

PUBLIC THEOLOGY AND AN *A-PATHETIC REVOLUTION* IN THE GLOBAL VILLAGE

In this section, I argue that a number of approaches developed by South African theologians under the umbrella of "public theology" fail to constructively engage with African (especially black African) contexts of our day, and in particular with that growing anger of the people which has become a defining feature of social life in the country. As a consequence, contrary to what many public theologians claim, their reflection generally lacks a prophetic dimension, which is to say, it lacks potential to "go beyond the social, political and cultural realities and challenge the existing *status quo* by offering an alternative vision of reality underpinned by the values of God's reign" (Urbaniak 2016a).

To avoid sweeping generalizations, in my analysis I focus on the work of Nico Koopman, the present chair of the Global Network for Public Theology who is based at Stellenbosch University.[4] Over the last two decades or so, Nico Koopman has made an impressive and substantial contribution to theological reflection in South Africa and beyond its borders. Situated within a "confessing" church trajectory, Koopman belongs to a strand of Reformed thought that offered forthright public witness as to the sinful nature of apartheid and emphasized the need for active theological resistance by the churches from within (epitomized inter alia by Beyers Naudé, the Christian Institute and the Belhar Confession). Koopman was also the main driving force behind an interdisciplinary human dignity program set up at the theological faculty at Stellenbosch in 2008, while he was the Dean (Palm 2016:212). As a pioneer of public theology within South Africa, alongside Dirkie Smit and others, in his scholarly activities Koopman strives to embody theology with a liberational agenda that aims to transform reality.[5] Practicing such a critical public theology is tantamount, for him, to bringing about a redemptive, constructive, humanizing and dignifying presence of Christian faith in public life (Koopman 2010:131-32).

The tentative extrapolation of my conclusions concerning Koopman's work into South African public theology at large, revolves around my central claim that, due to a number of factors discussed below, this mode of theologizing lends itself all too easily to a new type of "church theology"[6] which fails "to provide a serious challenge to the economic and political realm" (West 2013:12), and thus falls short of its prophetic calling. This is due, in my view, to four major factors, namely (a) Koopman's choices regarding theological references wherein *Reformed* and *western/northern* dominates far and away over *African Christian*, and *postmodern* over *postcolonial*; (b) his cursory and un-nuanced treatment of African theological notions and insights whereby *the local* is seen as a mere expression of *the global* and measured by its standards; (c) an *a-pathetic* mode of theologizing, detached from people's emotions and thus unable to resonate with and be informed by their anger, which results in a theological reflection that lacks potential for articulating resistance and fostering a transformative agenda; and, (partly) as a result of the latter, (d) inability (or lack of willingness) to engage with structural matters, such as the macro-

[4] This section is based on my article "Probing the 'global Reformed Christ' of Nico Koopman: An *African-Kairos* perspective", which has been submitted for publication in *Stellenbosch Theological Journal* (Urbaniak 2016b).

[5] Public theology can be broadly defined as a mode of doing theology that is intended to address matters of public importance (de Gruchy 2007:26).

[6] I allude here to the three-tier distinction between state theology, church theology and prophetic theology introduced by the Kairos Theologians (*KD* 1985).

economic policy of the ruling party since 1994, and to constructively deal with issues such as economic injustice, land redistribution and structural racism. Elsewhere I discuss the first two factors – (a) and (b) – in some detail (see Urbaniak 2016b). Here I will focus on the latter two, (c) and (d). Lastly, I will comment on the tension between the global and the local and the related issue of theological accountability.

An a-pathetic mode of theologizing: No rage, no resistance

Public theologians in South Africa tend to use the postmodern theory as a framework for their reflection.[7] Still Eurocentric in its conceptual and aesthetic thrust, postmodernity lacks a theory of resistance and generally fails to cultivate a transformative agenda due to its detached attitudes. Hence, public theology's overwhelmingly positive notion of "public" which results in a somewhat romantic, if not naïve, vision of revolution (Maluleke 2011:88). As Maluleke (2011:88) reminds us, many angry southerners live not in a postmodern world described by some public theologians as a benign global village, but in a harsh post-colony.

The un-problematized, narrow and at times somewhat idealistic manner in which Koopman speaks about reconciliation, justice and (non-)violence reflects what I mean here by 'an *a-pathetic* mode of theologizing'.[8] Such an existentially disengaged discourse does not take into account the whole range of contexts and variations wherein these values are tested. It amounts to relying upon "a few stock ideas derived from Christian tradition" (*KD* ch.3) and then uncritically and repeatedly applying them to the contemporary situation – what the *Kairos Document* described as one of the strategies typical for church theology.

To substantiate my claim with an illustration, in his article on "Public theology in (South) Africa: A Trinitarian approach", Koopman conceives of systemic violence as something rooted in apartheid and colonialism on the one hand, and in selfishness, greed and pride characteristic of growing consumerism on the other hand. But then he essentially reduces the expressions of this systemic violence in South Africa today to "criminal violence" or "violent crime" (Koopman 2007a:194-195). In his 2008 article "On violence, the Belhar Confession and human dignity", in turn, he starts with an interesting account of a number of his personal experiences of violence under apartheid; the types of violence distinguished by Reinders help him classify them (Koopman 2008:160-161). However, once again, his analysis falls short of articulating any meaning of *violent resistance*, which has played a significant role in the struggle against apartheid, not to mention other dimensions of violence in the current social contexts, which could be seen as expressions of a *prophetic rage* of the structurally disenfranchised majority of South African people. Such a thin engagement with socio-cultural realities cannot guarantee practical solutions – a "challenge to action", to use the terminology of the Kairos Theologians – that contribute to a life-giving transition towards a just and all-inclusive society.

On a more theological level, one could question whether Koopman's global, cosmopolitan theology for which *all life matters* and which always seems to have the benign ideals of reconciliation and non-violence on its banners, can meet today's South Africans where they are, in their own experiences and struggles, in their anger and indignation, in their "enough is enough". Public theology seeks to bring about a *revolution of love*. But is not an "*a-pathetic* revolution" a contradiction in terms?

No engagement with the macro-economic and other structural issues

The direct implication of the detachment from people's emotions, is the failure of Koopman's

[7] Most local public theologians find their natural conversation partners in the likes of Foucault, Ricoeur, Habermas, Hauerwas and Parker Palmer. See, for instance, Koopman 2007b; Dreyer & Pieterse 2010; Dreyer 2011; De Beer & Swart 2014; Forster 2015.

[8] I am using the term "a-pathetic" in its etymological sense to signify "not drawing from and not affecting the feelings, the emotions".

theology to adequately address the *ultimate causes* of people's rage. In the chapter on "Theology and the fulfilment of social and economic rights" (Koopman 2005:128-140), Koopman investigates the "potential contribution of theology to the process of theology building that serves the fulfilment of social and economic rights... with reference to the dialogue and cooperation of theology with three environments, namely broader society, the academy and religious organizations, specifically *churches*" (Koopman 2005:130). What may not be immediately apparent to the reader of his text is that, in all his proposals, the driving force behind Koopman's *public theologizing* is his willingness to *constructively contribute* to the *status quo*, not to *challenge* it.

To be fair, a number of public theologians in South Africa pointed to the critical tension between civic spirit and public anger. According to de Gruchy, prophetic theology aims not "to predict the future, but to challenge the politics of the present. To say 'no' when we must, but also to know when and how to say 'yes'" (de Gruchy 2015:221). Cochrane asserts, in the same vein, that "it is not constructive to conceptualize a public theology in the southern hemisphere in a way that separates it from the 'anger' of the suffering people" (in Buttelli 2012:101; see also Cochrane 2011:49; 61-62). Public theology that always says "yes" in the reconstruction of a democratic society and which fails to take the cry of the poor into account and say a clear "no" to injustice, "easily turns into precisely the kind of conservative enterprise" – Cochrane argues – "that many critique using the tools of a sociology of power and knowledge (as Foucault does) or subaltern theory (employed by Cayatri Spivak, for example)" (Cochrane 2011:49). Commenting on Cochrane's views, de Villiers points out that

> the split between public anger and public spirit that lies within Storrar's distinction between oppositional and public theologies is problematic... both these moments necessarily belong together and both are forms of public theology... in such a way that the critical, excluded moment of public anger is not opposed to the reconstructive, included moment of civic spirit (de Villiers 2011:16).

Not least, Koopman himself has more recently made a statement that may be indicative of his growing awareness of the importance of *resistance* in public theologizing. At the winter school of the Faculty of Theology at Stellenbosch University, he remarked that to be Christian is *to be involved in protest* (Koopman 2014). The Latin word from which the English term is derived is *protestari*, and it means to *declare publicly*. Christians are called to *bear witness* wherever they see God's hope, but also to *protest* wherever God's hope is absent – indeed, where despair or anger reign (Koopman 2014; see also Forster 2015:5).

But once again, one can hardly fail to notice the gap between the principles and the theological practice. As he strives to "build theories that will hopefully assist South African policy makers in different public spheres as well as individual South Africans in all walks of life to see what is going on around them" (Koopman 2005:140), Koopman shows his ability to *approve* and *offer constructive comments*, but he usually fails when the need arises to *contest* and *challenge the system*.

For instance, when Koopman speaks about *compassionate justice*, wherein "legal justice and the ethos of compassion and sacrifice cooperate to bring forth a life of justice and dignity for all humans and the environment" (Koopman 2005:135), one is left wondering *how* those two ideals can be brought about and reconciled in a harsh postcolonial reality of contemporary South Africa without serious structural reforms of both political and economic systems. While it is agreeable that "the implications of the notion of sacrifice for... political, economic and legal measures of reparation for the higher levels of equilibrium, might be an important part of the discourse on social and economic justice" (Koopman 2005:135), many South Africans today seem to believe that even the *sacrifices of the privileged few* will not be enough, either in an economic or a moral sense, to purge the oppressive remnants of apartheid in pursuit of a truly equitable society; instead they demand a radical overturn of the socioeconomic *status quo*.

Like most public theologians in South Africa, Koopman is certainly not a *theological*

revolutionary. In principle, there's nothing wrong with *not being a rebel*. Without doubt South African society, academy and ecclesia need balanced and (at least allegedly) constructive voices such as his. From a social-theological perspective, one has to ask, however, if the time (KAIROS) has not come for South African theologians to listen more carefully to, and allow themselves to be informed by, the angry voices of those who feel that the post-apartheid socioeconomic system has failed and betrayed them. Some of those voices resonate in the corridors of Stellenbosch University, the institution at which Prof Nico Koopman is responsible for Social Impact, Transformation & Personnel.

> Basically it goes as deep as having to die as a black person to survive in Stellenbosch (in Boshomane 2015).
>
> [As] a collective of students and staff working to purge the oppressive remnants of apartheid in pursuit of a truly African university... We revolt simply because, for a variety of reasons, we can no longer breathe (Open Stellenbosch 2015).
>
> These and similar voices cannot be easily dismissed.

Between the global and the local: Accountable, but to whom?

Needless to say, using postmodern rather than postcolonial framework, being conversant with western/northern theological ideas rather than those from the global south, drawing from the wells of the Reformed tradition[9] rather than those of African Christianities, local public theologians open themselves *in a more obvious way* to dialogue with their western/northern counterparts. This, however, comes at a price. Public theologians may be well accountable to a global network that they form, but often times – when the tension between the global and the local demands picking one's allegiances – they fail to be accountable to their own context, to "the mass of structurally disenfranchised people [who] have the feeling of being treated as 'foreigners' on their own land" (Mbembe 2015).

One of the topical examples of such an either-or situation are the policy decisions regarding the "soul of the university" in the South African reality 22 years into democracy – decisions in which many public theologians (like Nico Koopman) are directly involved. In this context, the authors of the recent "Call for critical engagement" mourn "the way in which some of our South African institutions seem to be more concerned about their position in international rankings than to contributing to the socio-economic-political transformation of deeply unequal South African communities" (Call 2016:3).

The tension between the global and the local was also tangible at the recent Consultation of the Global Network for Public Theology held at Stellenbosch University.[10] Barney Pityana opened the conference with the keynote address which many (including this writer) found one-sidedly critical, not to say dismissive, of the student protests and fallism in general. Dirkie Smit studiously summarized the characteristics of public theology in his talk on "Theology that matters". William Storrar, one of the founding fathers of the Network, sketched a compelling task lying ahead of public theologians around the globe, namely that of, together, dreaming and bringing about "a planetary ethics that would be a turning point for public anger on a new voyage to hope for democracy and social justice" (Storrar 2016:4), with discipleship, citizenship and bioship as its threefold organizing principle. But a few lone voices of discontent, if not anger, questioned the contextual-transformative value of public theologizing in light of its cosmopolitan aspirations and elitist tendencies. Perhaps the most blunt among them was that of Felipe Buttelli who juxtaposed the way of "doing theology" epitomized by the GNPT's gathering in Stellenbosch with living out

[9] This is true for most South African public theologians, albeit to a varying extent.

[10] *Democracy and social justice in glocal contexts*, Consultation of the Global Network for Public Theology [GNPT] (Stellenbosch Institute for Advanced Study in South Africa [STIAS], Stellenbosch University, 24-26 October 2016).

the principles of public theology, as epitomized by his colleague from the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal Clint Le Bruyns who was supposed to attend the conference, but decided to stay with the students in the midst of the crisis and ended up being arrested due to his involvement in the protests.

It is worth stressing that such *prophetically-loaded* (sometimes angry) voices come from theologians who identify themselves, though not uncritically, with public theology as an optimal way of doing theology in South Africa today. Some of them offer valuable self-critical perspectives. The same Felipe Buttelli, in his 2012 article, states that

> a public theology that does not take seriously the contextual and prophetic heritage of our theological traditions cannot contribute to the further development of theological discussion, and can easily be used as a new state theology or an office theology (i.e., theology in office) (Buttelli 2012:106).

The reality of the threat to which Buttelli alludes can be epitomized by those interpretations of public theology which are based on the assumption that in a democratic society there are no demands for liberation and thus there is no need for a prophetic discourse anymore (Buttelli 2012:91). Seeing public theology as either a successor or a fulfilment of liberation theology is a logical implication of such an idealistic view of democracy; and it is rightly opposed by contextual and liberation theologians, including black theologians such as Maluleke (2011:82).

Cochrane emphasizes, in turn, the significance of the postcolonial framework in Christian theologizing as a major "corrective to the project of modernity" (1999:156-157).

Not least, Storrar's recent reflection on doing public theology in a time of public anger (Storrar 2016), indicative of his *attunement* to the signs of the times, may give an impulse to public theologians in South Africa to engage with the reality of people's anger. In his talk, Storrar used an imaginative metaphor, rooted in his personal story – a metaphor of a journey between the two capes:

> I am standing on an invisible Meridian line in my life which runs between two Capes, the Cape of Good Hope here at the southern tip of Africa, and Cape Wrath in the far North of Scotland, where the Atlantic meets the North Sea in one of the angriest stretches of water in the world... Here's the image from the land of my ancestors that I want us to carry away from this evening...The name at the Northern end of this Meridian line does not mean Cape Anger. In the Old Norse language of the Vikings who named this Cape in their voyages around the Scottish coast from Scandinavia, a "wrath" meant "a turning point". Cape Wrath was a navigational point where the Vikings would turn their ships. Are you now with me...? Standing together on this line between the two symbolic capes..., can we dream of a planetary ethics that would be a turning point for public anger on a new voyage to hope for democracy and social justice? I think we can.

How, if at all, does this image and this invitation resonate with my critique of an "*a-pathetic* revolution" of the South African public theology? Talking about anger is, no doubt, a step in the right direction. But it may not be enough. Questions remain as to whether public theologians focus primarily on *the vision* (such as "a planetary ethics") or on *the bodies*, above all angry black bodies. To what or to whom will they be accountable in their theologizing in the end, to their globally shared ideals or to their fellow African people? This may be well a false dilemma if one's theological reflection remains purely speculative. But PT aims at *praxis*, that is, "a practice that is informed by theoretical reflection" and "a theoretical reflection that is informed by practice" (Groome 1980:xvii). This entails, in South Africa today, a theological reflection informed and shaped by the experience of anger. Of course, Cape Wrath must never be a final destination of Christian theology. However, if the ships start *turning around* too hastily, without thoroughly engaging with the rough waters of people's rage, PT will lose an opportunity, once again, to *embody* what it teaches.

BLACK THEOLOGY'S *AFRICAN REVOLUTION*... WITHOUT A PLAN OF ACTION

After situating Tinyiko Maluleke's work against the backdrop of the prophetic theological tradition and giving an overview of the chosen aspects of his theological reflection,[11] this section seeks to offer some tentative directions of BT's engagement with people's anger in South Africa today. This will be done in recognition of the crisis in which this theological trajectory finds itself at least since the dawn of democracy; one factor that may account for the crisis in question will be briefly discussed.

Drawing from African wells: People's anger located in the hidden transcripts

Among theological approaches developed in the democratic South Africa, few could claim to reflect the *kairotic* commitment to the context and the critical-subversive edge inherent in the prophetic tradition of the BT of liberation whose climax was the *Kairos Document*.[12] Tinyiko Maluleke's theological work stands out as a notable exception. Maluleke is one of the most productive black theologians in a democratic South Africa. He challenges the accusation, raised by some, that BT "has slept through the revolution" (Maluleke 1995:21) and he posits that becoming "more academic and intellectual" in nature does not necessarily imply that today's BT is by definition anti-grassroots (Maluleke 1995:22-23). The main task facing BT in our day, in his view, has to do with defining African culture and reflecting critically on how it can be engaged theologically in the pursuit of liberating African people from the various forms of oppression and marginalization they still experience (Maluleke 1995:26). In many of his works, he probes African forms and appropriations of Christianity and insists that "our task is to study and not to suspect or control" African Christianities, for through it, "we may gain valuable insights into the shape and form of religion and religiosity in the world today" (Maluleke 2010:379).

Explaining what motivated the participants of the Kairos process, in mid-eighties, to speak up, Nolan points to two major factors (1) the seriousness of the crisis and (2) the anger and frustration of the people (Nolan 1994:213). This is something worth emphasizing: the anger of the people as a *locus theologicus*, as a theological site – indeed, the source par excellence of prophetic theologizing. To understand better the role that anger has played in the Kairos process one has to emphasize a subtle difference between prophetic theology and people's theology (West 2012:8). It was at the stage of discussions, brainstorming and arguing in groups (people's theology), whereby ministers, church workers and trained theologians shared their experiences and reflected on their actions, that their common anger had been initially articulated. The great challenge that trained theologians face when they are confronted with people's theologies consists in *transposing* them *into* the language of prophetic theology *without betraying* their original spirit, without sanitizing and domesticating them, and this means also – without taming the anger inherent in them (Urbaniak 2017).

Maluleke's way of doing theology, I want to argue, stems from and remains faithful to this tradition of black prophetic theology in South Africa. This is expressed through (1) his consistent focus on African culture as a *valid* and *creative* "host" and "container" of Christian faith and (2) his efforts to explore the *hidden transcripts* of African Christianity as a way of *prophetically articulating* people's theology.

The key word behind the South African phenomenon of fallism is "decolonization". Without taking into account the students' quest for the rediscovery (or re-invention?) of their stolen and

[11] This section is based on my chapter "What makes christology in a post-apartheid South Africa engaged and prophetic? Comparative study of Koopman and Maluleke", which is currently in publication (Urbaniak 2016a).

[12] Published in 1985, it was described by Borer as "the definitive statement of contextual theology in South Africa" (1998:108).

abused identities which underlies their #FeesMustFall campaign, one cannot adequately understand what is going on (Ndlovu-Gatsheni & Zondi 2016). In this context, it is worth noting that Maluleke's insistence on the role of culture(s), cultural differences and power dynamics inscribes itself perfectly into the prevalent social and cultural sensibilities in South Africa today, even though he does not speak as much about "decolonization" as he does – in more constructive terms – about "Africanization" and "rediscovering the agency of Africans" (see, inter alia, Maluleke 2000a; 2004; 2010). His multifaceted reflection on the urgently needed epistemological shift is, in my view, the most significant contribution he has made to African theology at large. In the conclusion of his 1994 article, Maluleke writes:

> White (and black) African Christians, theologians and churches must begin to situate themselves epistemologically and contextually in Africa. For this to happen, Africa must cease to be something out there. This has implications both for the churches and theology. Both need to effect a kind of *epistemologica ruptura* from the West (Frostin 1988)... Africa... its culture, its (pre-colonial) past and present as well as all its peoples must be taken seriously as a valid and creative 'host' of Christ. This means challenging and going beyond Euro-Western conceptions of Africa even if these are held by Africans (Maluleke 1994:62).

This acknowledgment of Africanness as a proper *locus theologicus* translates into Maluleke's choices of theological conversation partners (see Urbaniak 2016a).

Maluleke also critically probes the concept of multiculturism. One may be tempted – and many South African public theologians today succumb to that temptation eagerly – to situate one's theology against the multicultural, "color-blind" or "rainbow" background. But talk of multiculturism or a "rainbow nation" does not eliminate "the disproportionate power relations and power realities between various cultures" (Maluleke 1994:60). Thus the romantic and harmonious notion of multiculturism becomes a "cover-up" for the actual religious, socio-political, economic and power basis of cultural differences (Maluleke 1994:60; 63).

Only after considering the preliminary questions about Christianity and culture(s), does Maluleke examine some features of specifically (South) African expressions of Christian faith. Situated in such a theoretical framework, his theology does not degenerate into some kind of folk- or ethno-theology which can easily become flat and elusive (Maluleke 1994:61). In his search for the *African* appropriations of Christianity, Maluleke recommends the shift of focus from what he calls, following James Scott, the "public transcript" towards the "hidden transcripts" (Scott 1990:4-5). In several papers, Maluleke embarks on the analysis of a language of the so called "popular religion" – "a rather trivializing and inadequate appellation", as he notes (Maluleke 2000b:83). Still far from being fully decoded by theologians, this language can be found in African lay-preaching, testimony-giving, singing and in many spontaneous liturgies – the diverse media of what Malueleke calls the "hidden transcripts". To access those transcripts one has to visit the garage-services, house-churches, tree-churches, train-churches, women's churches and youth-churches which are the "natural home" of the liturgies celebrated by African churches (Maluleke 2000b:83).

As he explores those incipient theologies, Maluleke inevitably comes across, not only the particular expressions of people's anger, but also African believers' creative ways of embracing this anger in their faith experience. Two illustrations can serve as an example.

Maluleke points out that African women, who must deal every day with the overwhelming patriarchy inherent in various cultural contexts, have learned to draw the liberative resources from their faith in Jesus the Lord, and thereby transform their anger and indignation into pride and praise.

> It is the realization that human beings do not and cannot adequately match Jesus in the glory of his brokenness that has given many African women leverage against African male power. Thus they sing: *"Ke Morena Jesu Yo a re Dumeletsing go Tsamaisa Evangeli"* – it is the Lord Jesus who has authorized us to preach the good news. The implicit message is that if the Lord

> Jesus authorizes them to do it then male church leaders should know that they are wrong to restrict and discredit the work of women in the church (Maluleke 2000b:86).

In his 2015 article Maluleke refers to the disruptive potential of the African representations of the Parousia, as he compares Jesus of *Woza Albert!,* a political satire play that imagines the second coming of Christ in apartheid-ridden South Africa, written in 1981 by M. Ngema, P. Mtwa and B. Simon, with Jesus of Jacob Zuma and the ANC.[13]

> The Jesus of *Woza Albert!* lands in the township among the poor and the marginalized. Such is his shock at this situation of dehumanization, he not only joins the people in their struggle but ends up getting arrested like so many others at the time… The play ends with Jesus calling the great heroes of liberation – Albert Luthuli, Steve Biko, Lillian Ngoyi, Robert Sobukwe and many others – back to life, resurrecting them one by one (Maluleke 2015a:35-36).

Against this background, Maluleke depicts the return of Jesus who "finds a country not only battling with the triple challenges of poverty, unemployment and inequality, but also with the challenges of corruption, bad religion and toxic leadership" and who is "furious at the way things are – the poverty, the hunger, the corruption and deceit that reign while the innocent suffer" (Maluleke 2015a:36).

In the case of the second illustration, it is BT itself – here through Maluleke's imaginative improvisation upon *Woza Albert!* – that offers a way of *theologically* engaging with the justified anger of the poor and dispossessed. As he takes the side of the vulnerable and the sinned against, Jesus simply shares their anger. The speculations about whether or not (or how long) he will allow the innocent to suffer, are not allowed to overtake the story. Instead, the experience of solidarity in anger, between Jesus and his fellow-African cross-bearers, enjoys the pride of place. It is through celebrating this solidarity, and not any cerebral operation, that trust in freedom's final victory is born. It may call to mind Audre Lorde's famous, and much contested, phrase: "The white fathers told us, *I think therefore I am*; and the black mother in each of us – the poet – whispers in our dreams, *I feel therefore I can be free*" (Lorde 1994:38).

Lost paradigm & identity crisis: Black theology without a plan of action

My positive account of Maluleke's contribution to the post-apartheid BT may suggest that this is where all the answers and solutions to the current social-political crisis lie. Unfortunately, the truth is much bitterer.

BT has shared the fate of other local theologies, especially those outside the academic sphere, which lost their paradigm as a result of changed conditions in the country since the fall of apartheid and, more specifically, due to a shift from the church struggle to *church struggles*, in Steve de Gruchy's felicitous phrase (2004:223-60). Unlike PT, which thrives around the country and globally, South African BT is today in the state of dormancy according to some and in "a paradoxical state of non-existence" according to others (Motlhabi 2009:171ff). Maluleke suggests that BT lives (*and feeds?*) on a permanent crisis and thereby its decline must not be announced too hastily (Maluleke 1995:27). It is a huge *therapeutic project* dealing with the societal and spiritual diseases affecting African people, and in this sense, he claims, it will never *run out of job* (Maluleke 2016b). Post-apartheid publications of Maluleke, Vellem, Tshaka, West and the members of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians like Dube, Nadar, Phiri and Hadebe among others, may all bear witness to the fact that "BT still has 'a lot of life in its belly'" (Maluleke 1995:27). And of course these scarce contributions of black theologians should not be dismissed. However, it has to be said that these *lone voices in the wilderness* can hardly, at this point in time, create a theological choir that could crack open Christian imagination and contribute to a revolutionary drive for transformation and transition towards a just and all-inclusive society. What

[13] Maluleke alludes here in particular to President Jacob Zuma recurring suggestion that "the ANC will rule until Jesus comes".

is missing, and missing strikingly, is a coherent "plan of action".

Sadly, South African black theologians who contribute actively to the academic and social debate, as few as they are, generally seem not to read each other, not to be interested in listening to each other's voices. This applies especially to male theologians, even those based at the same academic institutions. The Circle, currently chaired by Dr Nontando Hadebe, is doing better in this respect: women's voices are more integrated, and a new generation of the African women-theologians is being intentionally mentored by the more experienced scholars. But occasions where black theologians speak unanimously for or against something are scarce. For example, the recent "Call for critical engagement" was signed, in its original published version (Call 2016), by 145 people, most of whom are professional theologians working at state universities in South Africa. While the names of public theologians, leading and young academics alike, are plentiful, Allan Boesak, Vuyani Vellem and Rothney Tshaka are probably the only figures, commonly recognizable as black theologians, whose names are found on that fairly long list. The absence of Maluleke's name is telling, if not alarming.

The litany of complaints about the current condition of BT in South Africa could continue. Answering the question, *What went wrong when it comes to BT's diminished role in the social transition after 1994?* would require an in-depth historical-theological analysis which surpasses the scope of this study. I will limit my diagnosis to one very tentative insight which is not new. It comes from Itumeleng Mosala's *Biblical hermeneutics and black theology in South Africa* (1989), and can be thus considered as a self-critical observation of one of the leading black theologians of that time. Here is what Mosala writes,

> On the one hand black theology represents a revolutionary rhetoric against social discrimination and oppression. On the other hand, it is the mechanism through which black theologians try to deal with their identity crisis occasioned by their exclusion from the privileges of white culture despite their secret admiration of and class qualification for it (1989:13).

This is a bitter critique, and only black theologians, in their own conscience, can discern whether it is relevant to their situation in the post-apartheid (still) white-dominated academia or not. As Mosala suggests, the tension "between a critique of oppression and a hunger to occupy and control the institutions of power that produce this oppression" was inherent in black theologians' attitude already in the late 80s. As I watch today's response of BT (or lack thereof) to fallism, as I listen to Barney Pityana's account of student protests as an expression of nihilistic and selfish agenda, undemocratic sensibilities and thoughtless militancy undergirded by political illiteracy, and most significantly, as I witness a terrifying *capture of imagination*, whereby commentators, including black theologians, seem to be unable to see beyond the immediately available options (necessarily limited by the neo-liberal, capitalist model of higher education imposed by both the universities and the government), I am left hoping that the identity crisis that Mosala speaks about can be overcome by the born-free generation of black theologians, now in the making.

Beyond the capture of imagination: Wounded soldiers regrouping

Through my examination of the selected aspects of and themes in Maluleke's theological reflection, I sought to suggest that BT, as fragmented and affected by an internal crisis as it is, has a potential to kindle a new passion and a new imagination for "creative resistance" (Raheb 2014:120-122). More importantly, it has a capacity to do so by resonating with the deep anger of the marginalized majority of South Africans. But it does not play a role it is poised to play as yet. To close the loop, I want to offer three more constructive proposals in respect to BT's *potentially* revolutionizing effect on African love.

First, as Maluleke insists now and again, BT is by nature *realistic* in its ways of grappling with the human and the divine alike, for it is born out of the real experiences of real Africans. As a

therapeutic project dealing with the societal and spiritual diseases affecting African people (Maluleke 2016b), BT emerges, first, spontaneously, as black people's theology on the ground, and then intentionally, through the prophetic language of theology, be it in a pastoral or an academic setting. But essentially it emerges every time Africans face a threat to their humanity, a threat to the all-encompassing community of life, whether it comes from outside or is self-imposed. An undercurrent of tremendous social, political and economic problems weighing heavily on the people of the continent constitutes the natural environment for BT (Maluleke 2016b).

Based on this view of BT, one should conclude that there already is (there must be!) a black theology, for instance black students' theology, in the midst of the current crisis. The role of professional theologians is to listen to it and to articulate it *prophetically*, without compromising on the anger inherent in its grassroots expressions. But professional theologians cannot wait for incipient theologies to knock on the doors of their offices; they need to be pro-active. What is required for a renewed prophetic theology to emerge in our day is a concrete commitment made by particular theologians, those – like myself – who have discerned a need for rooting themselves more deeply in the context of *faith of an angry people*. Gerald West offers a truly *kairotic* hint in this regard: As trained theologians, we should locate ourselves alongside the organized social movements of our time, thus joining a noble tradition of the Kairos Theologians (West 2013:13; see also Urbaniak 2017).

Second, this collective theological effort can be thought of in terms of a struggle against dehumanization whereby all hands must be welcomed on deck – those of uneducated, marginalized people and their communities (this is where incipient theologies are born), those of public theologians, those of non-Christians and unbelievers, etc. But again, BT may have a special role to play in this shared effort. Maluleke points out that Africans do not enter this struggle as healthy warriors ready for battle; rather, they come at it as *wounded souls at the risk of further injury* (2016b). BT seems to be particularly well equipped to remind other players (PT among them) about this woundedness, which often goes hand in hand with the latent anger. As *wounded active soldiers* in the battle for social justice and dignity, especially in its spiritual and cultural dimensions, black theologians – till recently themselves champions of patriarchy! – should be also mindful of the fact that our own wounds often threaten to poison everything. In this context, Maluleke calls to mind the extent of self-deprecation and self-harm manifested in the worship of violence and other deadening practices, as well as the virulence of patriarchy, misogyny, xenophobia and homophobia in many African societies (2016b).

Third and final, BT in the democratic South Africa stems from the prophetic tradition which not only exposed the sinfulness of the apartheid regime, but also powerfully challenged the church's complicity in this structural sin. Faithful to the legacy of the *Kairos Document*, BT has tools, and obligation, to denounce the promotions of aspirational hedonism and fatalism disguised as faith in South African reality today. As Maluleke warns, in a continent that is home to El Shabab, Boko Haram, Anti Balaka, Seleka, and the Lord's Resistance Army, with several countries still struggling with the legacy of oppressive colonial religions, the legacy of the cultural havoc that followed, coupled with the subjugation of African knowledges, we cannot pretend that the salvation of Africa will only come from religion – even if our own expertise is as scholars of religion (2016b; see also Maluleke 2015b).

Thus BT's task and responsibility entails inciting in people awareness and the justified anger against the manipulative use of religion, whether it is done by the pastors who make their congregants eat grass and drink petrol (Maluleke 2014) or by the politicians who claim divine anointment for power (van Onselen 2016).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Are we, theologians in South Africa 22 years into democracy, capable of recognizing our KAIROS, "the moment of truth... the moment of grace and opportunity, the favorable time in

which God issues a challenge to decisive action"? (*KD* ch.1) Are we capable of recognizing it in the midst of anger and indignation experienced by our own people?

In much of our theologizing and church life, the tendency is to stifle or sideline anger for the sake of rational, constructive arguments on the one hand and pastoral-spiritual program aimed at forgiveness, healing and reconciliation on the other. Generally, PT in South Africa succumbs to that tendency more eagerly than BT. In the face of uncontained anger and social unrest, PT has tendency to focus on "getting back to normal" (Chakravarti 2014:74-75). BT, on the contrary, has a natural predilection for "challenging the system" and seeking radically new avenues for organizing social-political life. Vulnerable to the moods of the marginalized, angry people, BT seems to understand better that South Africa finds itself, perhaps more consciously than before, in the period of transitional justice. A great number of people – today especially through the voices of the students – demand that the social contract be redrawn and political obligation reconsidered (Chakravarti 2014:135; 176). In times like these, anger and its place in religious experience and theological reflection must also be reinterpreted.

With fallism having become an enduring part of the social-political horizon of our South African context, we are living in a paradoxically split reality, torn between the hunger for a total revolution and a denialist wish that things get back to "normal". The demarcation line between the two attitudes runs across races and social classes; many, if not most, find themselves somewhere in between.

South African public theologians like to talk a lot about love, forgiveness and reconciliation. Denialists, both among us and within us, tend to interpret this message along the lines of preserving the *status quo*. Does it mean that PT is, in principle, anti-revolutionary? Not necessarily. But very often the only thing it has to offer to the revolutionaries is the insight that their revolution must be permeated with love, for in the end it is all about love.

South African BT, on the other hand, proved in the past that it has a potential to revolutionize African love by redeeming it from the sentimental and naïve distortions such as the absolute and unproblematized notions of reconciliation, forgiveness and non-violence (*KD* ch.3). Can in do the same today with regard to the notions of democracy, non-racialism and the "rainbow nation" myth? Perhaps even more importantly, does it have resources to contribute to the *ongoing revolution of African love* so that love itself is not seen merely as the moral requirement for Christian life, as such always concealing asymmetrical power relations, but (also) as a social force aimed at transforming the unjust social-political structures? Painfully aware of the persistence of the hegemonic cultural narratives, BT knows that *even when all races and cultures are equal, some are always "more equal" than others*. This is why, in the face of oppression and injustice, BT has been able to actualize the public and political potential of love, allowing it to reveal itself as a social force of resistance, fierce in its capacity to *hate what harms*, especially what harms the most vulnerable (Jones 2016). In Cornel West's felicitous phrase, "justice is what love looks in public" (2009:232). In short, BT has a potential to *revolutionize African love into a prophetic anger*.

Africans, *wounded soldiers* forced to fight over and over again for their right to a life of dignity, continue to theologize their lives and live their theologies. For good or for ill. Without a prophetic theology capable of articulating both their justified anger and their vulnerable hope while disclosing the abuses of corrupted leaders – snake-pastors and Nkandla-politicians alike – far too many of them fall prey to the imperial mechanisms of exclusion and exploitation, some of which are home-made while others derive from geopolitical and cultural marginalization, including self-marginalization (Maluleke 2016b). In 2008, Maluleke wrote an insightful chapter titled "*May the Black God stand please!*: Biko's challenge to religion". Today, as an outsider deeply concerned and caring about South African people in the age of fallism, I dare to appropriate his call and I plead, *May black theologians stand please!*

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