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RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Untangling the Legacies of Slavery: Deconstructing Mission Christianity for our Contemporary Kerygma

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**ABSTRACT**

This paper arises from a pilot project of the Council for World Mission (CWM) that is seeking to explore the Legacies of Slavery via the archives of the London Missionary Society, the forerunners of CWM. Arguments around the justification of European Christian Mission often focus on the efficacy and utilitarianism of missionary activity, in terms of education, medicine or the removal unethical indigenous religio-cultural practices. This paper seeks to move beyond these justifications to focus on the representational damage imposed on the descendants of enslaved Africans that have traduced Black bodies to "less than" in the body politic of many Western nations in the global North. The denigration of Black bodies has continued beyond the epoch of slavery and finds expression in the absurdity of Black people needing to assert that "Black Lives Matter".

I will start this paper by saying a few words about myself. Like my all-time hero James H. Cone, I believe all theology to be some form of autobiography.[1] In other words, what theologians say and write about tells you more about them and their social location and formative influences than it does about the God they are seeking to discuss in their work. I am part of a wider community. The mass migratory movement of Black people from Africa and the Caribbean in the years following the end of the World War II is termed the "Windrush". This migratory movement commenced with the arrival of 492 Caribbean people at Tilbury docks on the ship *The SS Empire Windrush*, on the 22nd June 1948.

I was born in Bradford West Yorkshire to Jamaican parents who came to this country from the Caribbean in the late 1950s. As such, I am a second-generation Black Caribbean British subject. I was born into and nurtured within the Christian faith from the Wesleyan Methodist tradition, in a large Central Hall, in the city of Bradford. I ply my trade as a Black Liberation Theologian and a decolonial educator within Oxford University but have lived in Birmingham for the past 30 plus years. I am also a part time research fellow and an Extraordinary Professor of Theological ethics with the University of South Africa.

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[1]See Cone, *My Soul Looks Back*.

I have shared these bare details of my life with you because it is my firm belief that all knowledge, and the writing that emerges from it, is embodied. By this, I mean, there is always a relationship between the experiences that have shaped one's life and the resulting ideas and theories that emerge in any subsequent writing. Namely, that all knowledge and truth is contextual; all intellectual insights emerge from and are shaped by specific and particular times and spaces!

Many of the enduring values in my life can be traced back to my formative years growing up in a Black Christian home but living within a predominantly White working class, trade union and Independent Labour Party stronghold of East Bowling. In this context, non-conformism, trade unions and labour party politics went hand-in-hand. I am named after Tony Benn. My Father was an active trade unionist in the 32 years he lived in the UK before he returned to Jamaica when he took early retirement in 1991 due to ill health.

Whilst my formative years were largely pleasant and affirming, what could not be disguised about our existence was the persistent reality of racism that affected the lives of all non-White people in the city of Bradford. I would argue that the consistent and persistent challenge that has faced Black people of Christian faith in Britain has been that of trying to get "White Christianity" to give expression to a non-racist articulation of the gospel, when juxtaposed with the wider indices of racism in the nation. The former, should be different from the latter, but far too often, the two are synonymous. The nomenclature of "Christian" has often meant nothing when differentiating the agency of White people in terms of their proclivity to resist racism and White supremacy. In using the term "White Christianity" I am talking about people of European extraction and descent, who form the majority of the population, who believe in the God revealed in Jesus Christ and seek to give expression to the central tenets of the Christian faith in myriad forms of social-cultural practices.

The existence of racism in Britain today and in many parts of the so-called developed West, as we speak, is testament to the continuance of an underlying Eurocentric Judeo-Christian framework that has invariably caricatured Africans as "less than" and "the other" and often placed White Euro-Americans as the apex of human civilisation. The notion that human beings can be categorised into a fixed set of identities, which characterise human potential and capability; often effected in notions of morality and ethics, can be traced back to the first four centuries of the "Common Era" (CE). It was during this epoch that negative connotations pertaining to Black people as the "other" begin to surface in Christian thinking.[2]

The scourge of racism in Britain is nothing new for Black people. As Beckford has demonstrated, one can chart a genealogy of racism in European intellectual thought that has exerted a disproportionately negative hold on the life experiences of Black people.[3] Scholars, such as Eze, have shown the extent to which the allegedly enlightened thinking of such "luminaries" as Hume and Kant was infected with the stain of White supremacist thought.[4] The construction of the binary of Blackness (as bestial and less

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[2]See Hood, *Begrimed and Black*, 23.
[3]Beckford, *Dread and Pentecostal*, 95.
[4]See Eze, *"Race" and the Enlightenment*.

than) and Whiteness (as the personification of goodness and the opposite of Blackness) is a product of modernity.[5]

The chief legacy of transatlantic slavery was the unleashing of the rampageous and ravenous animal that is racism. The construction of racialized notions of fixed identity and restricted perspectives on Black human selfhood were the dangerous offspring of the chattel slavery of the "Black" Atlantic.[6] The outworking of an immutable hierarchical manipulation of humanity did not disappear when the Act to abolish the British slave trade was passed in 1807. The act brought the making of slaves to an end but racism, the notion of White supremacist norms, most certainly did not end.[7]

The backdrop against which Diasporan African Christianity is rooted is one that has had to wrestle with privations of slavery and colonialism. Diasporan Africans have lived for hundreds of years with the continued effects and ongoing trauma of the epoch of slavery. The Maafa (Swahili term relating to the African holocaust) remains a site for deep seated trauma within Diasporan Africans, to which Black pastoral theology and pastoral care has needed to respond.[8] This pastoral response, what Johnson calls "Soul Care", which has its equivalents in other pastoral theology texts written by Black people of African descent,[9] seeks to attend to the deep-seated psychological malaise arising from the epoch of slavery. Delroy Hall, Britain's leading Black Pastoral theologian has undertaken work exploring the pastoral needs of African Caribbean people as they seek to make sense of their liminal experience living in postcolonial Britain. [10] Black Pastoral and Practical theologians have sought to offer some form of amelioration for the suffering experienced by Black and working-class poor across the US and in other parts of the African Diaspora, helping Christian communities to deal with the most deleterious of experiences related to the toxic machinations of neoliberal, global capitalism. These respective theological approaches of Black Practical-Pastoral theologians provide an important, prophetic diagnosis of the wider environmental milieu in which the church is immersed. As the old adage states, it is not sufficient to be in the noble cause of rescuing people from drowning in a river if one is not concerned with those who are deliberately throwing them into the water further upstream.

The impact of neo-liberal economics and capitalism under the aegis of the "Global economy" have continued the long travails facing Black peoples across the world.[11] In using the term "Global economy", I am concerned with the interconnected means by which countries undertake their economic activity. This can be seen in terms of how multi and trans-national companies operate. Quite often the activities of multi-national corporations take advantage of being located within large global markets, where they seek to maximise their profits, using the framework of technological capitalism.[12]

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[5]See Perkinson, *White Theology*, 154.
[6]Hopkins, *Being Human*, 144.
[7]One of the best texts in this regard, from a Christian theological purview is by Reddie, *Abolition*.
[8]Johnson, *Race, Religion, and Resilience*, 101.
[9]See Butler, *Liberating Our Dignity, Saving Our Souls*. See also Ashby Jr., *Our Home Is Over Jordan*.
[10]See Delroy Hall's doctoral work that has explored the psycho-social needs of African Caribbean in Britain and the pastoral implications for this community. Hall *"But God meant it for good"*.
[11]See Day, "Global Economics & U.S. Public Policy," 9.
[12]Perhaps the best explanation for this phenomenon in terms of Black and Womanist Theologies can be found in Keri Day's recent work. See Day "Global Economics and U.S. Public Policy," 9.

The existence of the Global economy emerged in nineteenth century, but perhaps came into its own in the last century. In the twenty-first century it is now commonplace. In fact, it is so much a part of the economic landscape that it is hard for us to remember a time when people did not trade across national boundaries, or that companies did not belong to or have their primary allegiance, to any one country. The national boundaries of so-called sovereign nations have been ignored and are now often overrun by multi-national companies whose primary commitment is making profit for their shareholders.[13]

This paper will critique the role of White Christianity in the Transatlantic slave trade. I am arguing that there existed (and continues to this day) an underlying framework that enabled many Christian churches to construct an ideology, based upon an incipient, racist theology that assisted them in supporting Black chattel slavery, which was unhindered by any faith in God. The outworking of this historical phenomenon is one that has seen the rise and development of Black liberation theology and Black Lives Matter, as religio-political forms of riposte to the continued existence of White supremacy.

## The impact of Christianity on Black suffering

To understand the churches' role in slavery you have to go back to the period of European Expansion around the time of the Crusades and the violent conflict with African (Black) Moors (Muslims) leads to the intensifying of ideas around Christianity = Europe(Christendom)=White versus Non-Christians = Africa(Barbarians)=Black. Black people become the other.[14] The aforementioned is exacerbated by the fact that White Christianity is a violent religion. It is based upon a form of "Closed Monotheism", that is, the Christian God is a jealous and competitive God that will not tolerate rivals and the "other" that worships such God(s).[15] This can be seen in a number of Hebrew bible texts, in which a "competitive" God instructs the people of Israel to commit genocide on others who inhabit the "Promised Land" (See the book of Exodus, chapter 23, Verses 20–33 and the list of peoples' over-thrown in the book of Joshua chapter 12).[16]

When you combine problematic tropes around Blackness, with White exceptionalist forms of hermeneutics, linked to White European notions of manifest destiny, you have the ingredients for a toxic residue of epistemology that sees Black people as "the problem".[17] This ethic of White mastery over those who are deemed "the Other" becomes the basis on which the roots of a colonially inspired capitalism is at play, in which Blackness becomes the demonised other that has to be conquered, subdued and economically exploited. Effectively, Black people become removed from the body politic of "civilised Europe" of Whiteness.[18] Our exploitation becomes even more egregious when it is then allied to notions of biblical sanction and the belief that Black subservience is decreed by God's very self. In the pre-modern era when epistemological

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[13]This issue is addressed with great alacrity by the renowned Sri Lankan Liberation theologian Tissa Balasuriya. See Balasuriya "Liberation of the Affluent," 83.
[14]See Hood, *Begrimed and Black*.
[15]Douglas, *What's Faith Got to Do with it?*.
[16]For a critical rereading of the Exodus narrative, which explores an anti-imperialist, anti-hegemonic hermeneutic, see Warrior "A Native American Perspective: Canaanites, Cowboys and Indians," 277.
[17]See Ray, "Contending for the Cross," 53.
[18]See Jennings, *After Whiteness*, 23.

power lay largely in ecclesial hands, the ability to determining the other as less than and a part of an inferior part of God's natural hierarchy, is what enables White Europeans to create an ethic of mastery and control over Black bodies.[19]

The tensions between religion, faith, ethnicity and nationality are then exploited by means of "specious" Biblical interpretation; the main text that resolved the issue of justifying the enslavement of Africans within a Christian framework came from Genesis 9:18-25 – The Curse of Ham. Noah punishes his son Ham by cursing his own grandson Canaan (the son of Ham), condemning him and all his descendants to slavery.[20] Since there was a widely perpetuated belief that Africans/ dark-skinned peoples were the descendants of Ham, this so-called "curse of Ham" was used as biblical evidence that the enslavement of African people was actually willed and sanctioned by God. There was also a similar but less well-known argument based on the biblical story of Cain and Abel (Gen 4: 8-16) where the "mark of Cain", punishment for the murder of his brother, is interpreted as representing Black skin. Again, people of African origin are somehow identified as cursed by God for some past wrong. Here, any notions of blame are removed from the slave owners since it can be said that the condition in which the Africans find themselves as slaves is due to the sins their ancestors have committed in the past, for which God is punishing them. Their Black skin is seen as proof of their sinful condition. Proponents of the Atlantic slave trade constructed such wild and fantastical forms of eisegesis in support of slavery, because of the presence of pre-existing views of Africans as "other" and as being "Cursed by God". [21]

The aforementioned is ameliorated after the Haitian revolution at the end of the eighteenth century. The charge to "Christianise" Enslaved Africans is undertaken on a number of Biblical and theological terms. There is a dichotomy between the body and the soul. This dualism is a particular outworking of Pauline theology. Salvation is achieved solely by faith in Jesus Christ. In the theological construction of Paul, salvation is not dependent on how you act or behave, but largely in terms of what you believe (i.e. faith in Jesus).[22]

This means that if you are a Christian slave owner, you have can faith in Christ and still own slaves, as God is only interested in your soul, which is preserved through faith in Jesus. Your actions on earth are another matter, however. For the enslaved Africans, faith in this same Jesus guaranteed salvation in heaven but not material freedom here on earth for the same reason as that given for the justification of the actions of slave masters. In the theological construction of slave holding economies, Africans could be saved. Given that this underlying framework of European superiority still held sway, however, even when both Black and White were members of the same religious code (The Body of Christ), it is no surprise that even when the slave trade was abolished and later slavery itself, Europeans continued to oppress Africans. It is interesting to note that the "Dash for Africa" in the mid-nineteenth century came soon after slavery was finally abolished in the British Empire.[23]

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[19]See Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, 1.
[20]See Johnson, *The Myth of Ham in Nineteenth-Century American Christianity*.
[21]See Douglas, *What's Faith Got to Do with it?*.
[22]See Reddie, "A Black Theological Approach to Reconciliation" for a more in depth analysis on this issue.
[23]See Morrison, "Reparations." Reddie, Hudson-Roberts and Richards (eds.) *Journeying to Justice*, 149.

## The psychological damage arising from Western Missionary Christianity

African American scholars, such as Asante, estimate that upwards of fifty million African people were transported between Africa and the Americas over a four hundred year period.[24] Inherent within that Black, transatlantic movement of forced migration and labour, was a form of biased, racialized teaching that asserted the inferiority and sub-human nature of the Black self.[25] This form of anti-Black teaching was one of the most pernicious aspects of Western Missionary Christianity. The continued struggles of Black people in Britain that arise from the era of slavery can be seen in the overarching material poverty and marginalisation of Black people across the world.[26]

Anthony Pinn has undertaken detailed work investigating the dialectic of the existential, material realities of Black bodies and the phenomenon that is Christianity.[27] In *Terror and Triumph*, Pinn rehearses the contested and troubled relationship between White slave holding Christianity and Black bodies, outlining the levels of demonisation and virulent denigration that provided the essential backdrop to transatlantic chattel slavery.[28] Outlining the apparent ease and the complicity with which Christianity colluded with the epistemological frameworks that underpinned the machinery of slavery, Pinn writes

> In short, Scripture required that English Christians begin their thinking on Africans with an understanding that Africans had the same creator. Yet they were at least physically and culturally different, and this difference had to be accounted for. As we shall see, a sense of shared creation did not prohibit a ranking within the created order, one in which Africans were much lower than Europeans.[29]

The sense of a deep prevailing anti-Black sentiment replete with notions of Greek antiquity[30] and practiced within Western (particularly English), Missionary Christianity was given added piquancy in the deliberate attempt to use the developments of early Christian theology as a means of reinforcing the essentially depraved and base status of the Black body.[31]

Kelly Brown Douglas demonstrates how a particular outworking of Pauline, Platonized influenced theology (one that downplays the concrete materiality of the body in favor of the abstract and the spirit) was used as a means of demonising Black bodies.[32] Kelly Brown Douglas writes

> Accordingly, it is platonized Christianity that gives rise to Christian participation in contemptible acts and attacks against human bodies, like those against Black bodies. Not only does platonized Christianity provide a foundation for easily disregarding certain bodies, but it also allows for the demonization of those persons who have been sexualised.[33]

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[24]See Asante, "Afrocentricity and Culture."
[25]See Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery*.
[26]See Hopkins, *Heart and Head*, 127.
[27]See Pinn, *Terror and Triumph*. See also Pinn and Hopkins, eds., *Loving The Body* and Pin, ed., *Black Religion and Aesthetics*.
[28]Pinn, *Terror and Triumph*, 1–80.
[29]Pinn, *Terror and Triumph*, 6.
[30]This phenomenon and theme has been explored by Hood, *Begrimed and Black*.
[31]This idea is taken from Kelly Brown Douglas' excellent study on Black bodies and how they have been policed and controlled within the religious framework of Christianity. See Douglas, *What's Faith Got To Do With it?*.
[32]Douglas, *What's Faith Got To Do With it?*, 3.
[33]Douglas, *What's Faith Got To Do With it?*, 37

One can amplify the prevailing sense of an incipient anti-Black strain within the corporate edifice of Western Missionary Christianity when one considers the ways in which Black Christianity itself has imbibed the strictures against the Black body in their own corporate operations of religiosity. Anthony Pinn, drawing on a similar analysis of Platonized, Pauline theology, argues that Black Christianity (largely in the USA, but I would argue the same exists in the UK also) has imbibed the prevalent suspicion surrounding the Black body. It has taught many Black Christians to remain at best indifferent to the material needs of the Black body or to seek to transcend its supposed, despised nature; this demonization emerging from the tenets of White Christian slaveholding, thought and practice.[34]

For many Diasporan Africans, the search for a positive self-esteem has been found from within the frameworks of the Christian faith. Faith in Christ has provided the conduit by which issues of identity and self-esteem have been explored. This search has been helpful at one level, as the frameworks provided by conversion and an alignment with God in Christ has confirmed a new spiritual identity on Black people, but the extent to which this new formulation of the self has affirmed the materiality of one's Blackness is, however, open to doubt.[35]

As I have detailed previously, the transatlantic slave trade has given rise to a form of biased racialised teaching that asserted the inferiority and sub-human nature of the Black self.[36] The effects of such biased, self-serving instruction are still being felt - the continuing tendency of Black people to internalise their feelings of inferiority, coupled with an accompanying lack of self-esteem. The internalisation of this demonised instruction has led to Black people directing the fire of their repressed and disparaged selves onto their own psyche and that of their peers with whom they share a common ancestry and ethnic identity.[37] This can be seen in the growing incidences of lateral violence, more popularly known as "Black on Black crime" in inner city areas in Britain and in the United States.

Delroy Hall has written movingly and persuasively on the Windrush Generation in Britain, describing our existence as one of "existential crucifixion".[38] Hall argues that diasporan African peoples have endured the horrors of "Good Friday" and our existential crucifixions at the hands of White hegemony, through the privations of slavery, colonialism and neo-colonialism, but the exulting freedom of "Easter Sunday" has yet to materialise. In effect, diasporan African peoples are still wrestling with an acute sense of being mired in "Low Saturday" or "Holy Saturday," stuck in a socioreligious and political form of liminality that speaks to the transformative nature of redemptive suffering that has thus far proved to be anything but redemptive.[39] A number of theologians have explored the theological significance of "Holy Saturday" and the liminal positionality of those

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[34]Anthony Pinn "Introduction," 1.

[35]My friend and colleague in the "Black Theology in Britain Movement" Michael Jagessar has questioned the extent to which "Christian conversion" has ever delivered on its intent to provide a wholly new existence and identity for Black people, particularly those of Caribbean descent. He feels that the claims for the new, over and against the old, provide an unhelpful binary between the two modes of being, plus they are usually accompanied by a repudiation of the often folk-orientated, historically developed, religious sensibilities that emerge from the cultures of one's ancestral heritage. See Jagessar, "A Brief Con-version," 300.

[36]See Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery*.

[37]West, *Race Matters*, 11–15.

[38]See Hall, "The Middle Passage as Existential Crucifixion," 45.

[39]Hall, "The Middle Passage as Existential Crucifixion," 46.

stuck between the promises of "Easter Sunday" and the visceral pain and terror of "Good Friday". [40]

The continued marginalisation and suffering of Black people has raised an important, if not seemingly insoluble, theological problem: trying to correlate the agency of an omnipotent God with the ongoing negation of faithful peoples who have repeatedly called on God to end their existential travails, but to no avail. The Windrush Generation have not been able to fathom the mysteries of God's seeming inaction in the face of Black suffering any better than many of the luminaries of Black theology and religious studies in Black religion. I believe, however, that their learnt and rehearsed repertoire of religio-cultural African retentive beliefs and practices operated as a bulwark against the avalanche of vituperative rhetoric and racist policies that constantly called into question the mysterious presence of the divine.[41] In effect, where is God when you most need a God to shield you from the mendacious and sometimes vicious operations of White hegemony?[42] For many of the Windrush Generation, the religio-cultural patterns of their practices of faith and spiritual disciplines played and continues to exert a form of psychological meaning-making that provides coping mechanisms for those mired in the pit of racialised forms of existential despair.[43]

It is in this context that the theological apparatus of dialectical spiritualities of Black Caribbean people in seeking to hold in tension suffering and negation alongside hope and transformation acts as an existential marker against the persuasive Black theodicy critique of William R. Jones.[44] Jones has argued against the dogmatic certainties of God having any particular or special relationship with Black people that is predicated on God's active involvement in Black peoples' lives.[45]

When Caribbean migrants came to Britain in the post-Windrush era they brought with them this legacy of spiritual wisdom from Africa, via the Caribbean. Upon arrival in the UK and encountering the hardships of economic deprivation and systemic racism,[46] what enabled many of them to cope with their experiences of rejection was a direct sense of God being with them; this "God with them" was seen in the form of the spirit that offers alternative ways of interpreting one's experience and dealing with the reality of marginalization and oppression.[47]

In short, Black bodies, particularly those of the Black proletariat of the Windrush Generation represent the alternative constructs for what constitutes Christian normality in Britain. In their evocation of the politics, faith, and the theology of difference, they embody a critical resistance ethic to the blandishments of empire and its toxic memory and the neo-colonial constructs of imperial mission Christianity.[48] Prior to

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[40]Other theologians have explored the theological significance of "Holy Saturday' as a liminal space in which the unresolved search for redemption continues. See Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 45. See also Von Balthasar, *Heart of The World*.
[41]See Willis, "The Pilgrim's Process," 210.
[42]See Goatley, *Were You There?*.
[43]See Turner, *Overcoming Self-Negation*, 130.
[44]See also Jones, *Is God a White Racist?*.
[45]See also Calloway, "To Struggle Up a Never-Ending Stair," 223.
[46]See Barton, *Rejection, Resistance and Resurrection* for perhaps the best scholarly, first- hand account of the experiences of Black and Asian peoples' experience of dealing with racism in the Church of England.
[47]"A Dialectical Spirituality of Improvisation: The Ambiguity of Black Engagement with Sacred Texts.' Anthony B. Pinn (ed.) Black Religion and Aesthetics, 153.
[48]In using this term, I am speaking of a historical phenomenon in which there existed (and continues to this day) an interpenetrating relationship between European expansionism, notions of White superiority and the material artefact of the apparatus of Empire. This form of Christianity became the conduit for the expansionist paradigms of Eurocentric

the emergence of "Black Lives Matter", Black people whose socio-religious formation had been shaped by the Christian faith were already in the business of seeking to refute the specious, biblical basis of their suffering.

## Black Lives Matter

The existence of the *Black Lives Matter*[49] movement is testament to the contested nature of Black existence. As Dwight Hopkins has shown, the nature of recognition of Black humanity by White hegemony is relatively recent and indeed, is a novel epistemological insight for some White people.[50] The trauma experienced by the Black body can be seen in the towering work of James Cone as he outlines the visceral nature of lynching, is a reminder of the existential travails faced by Black people in the United States.[51]

Black and Womanist theologians have wrestled with existential challenges of being a Black human being in a world that has often been indifferent (at best) and incredibly unjust (at worst) in its treatment of Black people. In more recent times, increasing focus has been placed on the "Black body" as a site of epistemological struggle in post-modern Black theological discourse. In making the point of departure the sub-textual nature of the Black body and the performative hermeneutics of style, as an alternative vista for a resistance ethic that is replete within Black religion, Anthony Pinn has made a major epistemic break in the means by which Black religious scholars seeks to understand the very intent of this elemental phenomenon. When I began my doctoral studies in the mid 90s, the accepted primary goal of Black religious studies, even more so in Black liberation theology, was the necessity of rehabilitating the damage unleashed on the Black psyche by the vicious nature of White supremacy. One of my earliest forays into the field work that would later become my doctorate, was to explore the work of Black psychologists, as they sought to offer Black children and young people alternative narratives in order to rethink their existential identities in postcolonial Britain.[52]

In terms of the religio-cultural framing of Black people and their existential struggles, it is difficult to under-estimate the significance of W.E.B. Dubois classic text *The Souls of Black Folk* first published in 1903. Dubois detailed a phenomenon he termed "Double Consciousness". In using this term, Dubois articulating the psychological struggle at work in the consciousness of African Americans seeking to reconcile two opposing realities at war within the Black psyche.[53] This dialectical struggle was one between competing notions of truth, whether determined by a self-affirming internalised form of subjectivity, what Pinn calls the quest for "complex subjectivity"[54] (to which greater comment will be made shortly) against which, there is an externalised form of negation

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models of Christianity in which ethnocentric notions of Whiteness gave rise to notions of superiority, manifest destiny and entitlement. For a helpful dissection of this model of Christianity, particularly, the British version of it, see Gorringe, *Furthering Humanity*. See also Hull, *Towards the Prophetic Church*.

[49]Black Lives Matter is a global protest movement that came to prominence after the murder to Trayvon Martin in 2013. Although it started in in the United States it has become a global movement protesting against the existence of systemic racism that impacts on the lives of Black people across the world. For further details see the following link: About - Black Lives Matter

[50]See Hopkins, *Being Human*, 118.

[51]See Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*.

[52]See Maxime, "Identity and Consciousness," 13.

[53]See Dubois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 3.

[54]Pinn, *Terror and Triumph*, 82.

and objectification. Dubois' most memorable comment in this book that has to a great extent, helped to define Black Diasporan discourse over the course of the last century, was that the "the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the colo[u]r line".[55] Dubois argues that this dialectical struggle, between these two "unreconciled strivings"[56] have continued to fight their tumultuous struggle within the battlefield of the Black mind. Pinn's theorising on the Black body as the site for theological reflection has been an intellectual transformation, that has created an alternate vantage point for assessing the agency of Black people. His acute dissection of the machinery of torture and oppression of Black bodies and its impact on Black subjectivity, is a dramatic scholarly breakthrough.[57]

Pinn's reflections on the transgressive nature of the Black body has opened vistas for later works that have focussed on the corporeality of the Black body and its theological significance. One can see this significance in the later developments in Womanist theology and ethics, in which womanists such as M. Shawn Copeland,[58] and Eboni Marshall Turman,[59] for example, have developed scholarly work reflecting on the intellectual significance of Black women's bodies.

As I have stated previously in this essay, I believe that to belong to British society and to engage with White Christianity, for a Black person, necessitates at some intuitive level, a denial of one's self. To be Black is to have one's experiences, history and ongoing reality ignored, disparaged, and ridiculed. It is to be rendered an insignificant presence, amongst the many who are deemed one's betters and superiors. The continued ways in which Black bodies are objectified speaks to the enduring challenge evinced in Black theology, namely, to retain a sense of one's human subjectivity. Pinn reminds us that to be a human subject is to possess the ability of creating meaning through art, culture, and science, and to reimagine one's world through the prism of religion that inspires the imagination of the human subject. Subjectivity is the ability to create meaning and be a constructive being in creating and remaking one's world. Objects are acted upon and are named, but subjects name themselves and create internalised meaning, seeking to express agency, self-actualisation and transcendence.

Complex subjectivity is the attempt by humans to become more than the simple objectified fixed entity oppressive structures try to make them become. Subjectivity is in contradistinction to being an object. An object has no internal meaning in and of itself. The only meaning it has is that which the owner or possessor of it gives it. Objectification is the process of delimiting the power of a subject and so reducing their agency so that they are in effect reduced to becoming an object. The privations of "fixed identity", which is the dangerous offspring of objectification, is the imposition of non-changing and unmediated forms of imposed constructions of self onto marginalised and oppressed peoples. Pinn's notion of complex subjectivity speaks to continued struggles evinced by Black people to proclaim a form of humanity that is not compromised and confined by the limits placed on it by the existence of systemic racism and the dominance of White supremacy.

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[55]Dubois, xxxi.
[56]Dubois, 3.
[57]Pinn, 27.
[58]See Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom*.
[59]Turman, *Toward a Womanist Ethic of Incarnation*.

I would like to remind us of the searing contradiction to Diasporan Black life, caught up in two brief descriptions of the Black condition. First, from perhaps one of the greatest artist of the twentieth century, Louis Armstrong and his 1929 Recording, *Black and Blue* – the words are as follows:-

Cold empty bed, springs hard as lead

Feel like Old Ned, wish I was dead

All my life through, I've been so black and blue

Even the mouse ran from my house

They laugh at you, and scorn you too

What did I do to be so black and blue?

I'm white - inside - but that don't help my case

Cause I can't hide what is in my face

How would it end? Ain't got a friend

My only sin is in my skin

What did I do to be so black and blue?[60]

Slavery is long gone but anti Black racism has long outlived the institution that helped to breath it into life. In our contemporary era, the underlying framework of Blackness which still symbolically is seen as representing the problematic other, finds expression in a White police officer placing his knee on the neck of a Black man and despite the plaintive pleas of "I can't breathe" the officer remains unmoved and maintains his violent posture until this Black man dies.[61] One cannot understand the futility of this death unless you understand that this is no new phenomenon. White power has viewed Black flesh as disposable for the past 500 years. The reason why Black theology came into being was simply to assert that our lives mattered in an era when we were viewed purely as chattel and objects to be placed on a financial ledger

And before anyone suggests that this is a purely American phenomenon, then let me recall the death of Clinton McCurbin, an African Caribbean man who died of asphyxia at the hands of the police in Wolverhampton on the 20th February 1987, having been arrested for using a stolen credit card.[62] Eye witness accounts spoke of seeing McCurbin gasping for breath as White officers pinned him to the floor and crushed the air out of his body, regardless of the fact that his body had grown limp for several minutes as he lost consciousness. Later that year, despite the cautionary words from my very law abiding and hyper religious and respectable parents to focus on my studies (I was in the last

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[60]See Armstrong, "(What Did I do to be so) Black and Blue." See the following link for details (Accessed 19th January 2021). Black and Blue (Fats Waller song) - Wikipedia

[61]On the 25th May George Floyd, an African American was murdered by a White police man who placed his knee on Floyd's neck for 8 mins and 46 s. For further details see the following link: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Killing_of_George_Floyd (Accessed on the 3rd March 2021)

[62]Press details on Clinton McCurbin's death can be found in the following link: https://www.holdthefrontpage.co.uk/2020/news/deputy-editor-reflects-on-similarities-between-george-floyds-murder-and-an-incident-early-in-his-career/ (Accessed 3rd March 2021)

year of my degree course in Church history at Birmingham university), I nevertheless, travelled to Wolverhampton along with thousands of others to protest the death of Clinton McCurbin.

That was my very first march. No officers were ever charged with his death. The Coroner ruled it death by misadventure. Black people across the Midlands protested, sang songs of defiance, we railed with anger, but White power, whether in the shape of the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC), or the Coroner, or the media (McCurbin had a criminal record, so presumably he deserved to die), they all had no problem in ignoring our pleas for justice, because in the final analysis, Black bodies and people who inhabit those bodies simply do not matter. Our existential pain at the futility of Black life remained raw, visceral and unheeded by the strictures of White entitlement in Britain.

This brings me to the curious case of the toppling of the statue of Edward Colston in Bristol as part of a Black Lives Matter protest on the 8th June 2020. It can be argued that the pulling down or removal of statues has become a distraction against the wider issues of systemic racism that need to be addressed more than the removal of historic artefacts often ignored by most people in their daily activities. And yes, that is correct if the focus is solely on statues in and of themselves. But let us consider the point of the Black Lives Matter Movement in first place. The "Black Lives Matter" movement emerged in order to counter the patently obvious fact that Black lives do not matter. This is not just a question of economics or materiality; it is also about seemingly "ephemeral matters" like the impact on our psyche and associated questions of representation and spirituality. The latter attending to the ways in which our ongoing trauma as Black people, many of us the descendants of enslaved peoples, continues to be experienced in postcolonial Britain.

It has been interesting observing the concern of many White Christians for matters of law and order and governance and property re: the tearing down of the Colston statue in Bristol. Property and capital have always mattered more to the British than respect and justice for Black people, as the settlement for the ending of slavery demonstrated in 1833. White slave owners were awarded 20 million pounds for giving up their enslaved Africans who were deemed as chattel.[63] Enslaved Africans and their descendants received nothing.

Black people, many of whom are the descendants of enslaved peoples, have lived in that city with the sight of a statue built in honour of slave trader. It is hard to explain the subterranean existential trauma felt having to witness the sight of a heroic statue built in honour of a slave trader! If one wanted a tangible example of the ways in which the body politic of the nation has always exerted a wanton disregard for Black people and our feelings, then the Colston statue is a classic representative form of state sanctioned Black negation. Polite petitions to move these and other statues were ignored. Long before a so called mob tore this one down, activists asked for it to be moved to a museum where those who deliberately wanted to see them could, but saving those of us who didn't, the ignominy of having the lives of our oppressed ancestors constantly insulted. White authority ignored our claims because Black lives and our resultant feelings do not matter. Black Lives do not matter in the face of White

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[63]See Reddie, *Abolition*, 200.

complacency and disregard. Therefore, I find it interesting that following the pulling down of a statue, we had the usual furrowed brow of some White Christians sharing their ethical concern for law and order and the dangers of mob rule.[64]

In 2007, I along with many others, campaigned for a national monument to mark the epoch of the slave trade and the countless millions who died under the yoke of British slavery. We were peaceful, respectful and went through the usual democratic and representative channels and first the Labour government under Blair, then The Coalition government under Cameron and finally May's government all dismissed our pleas. We were courteous, respectful and restrained, making our entreaties in time honoured and peaceful ways. But we were ignored because Black feelings don't matter, because ultimately, Black lives do not matter. We campaigned for an apology for Britain's involvement in the Slave Trade and Blair gave us deep sorry but no apology because the slave trade, sanctioned by greedy White mercantile interests, said it was legal at the time. So, no apology and certainly no reparations.

Once again, we were not hectoring or behaving like a mob. We made our arguments, some of us have written books, essays, and articles,[65] and it has still made no difference. So, we continue to live with the psychological and spiritual damage of witnessing monuments to the people who made billions from peddling the Black flesh of our ancestors, and this is before we even get to the tangible manifestations of economic hardship and the social deprivation facing Black bodies in postcolonial Britain as revealed by Covid 19.

The task of challenging the toxicity of White privilege is necessary if the universality and inclusivity of the church is to be continually realised. Christian discipleship must continue to work within an ethic of postcolonial, anti-racism and deconstructive Whiteness. Then and only then, will catholicity and Christian discipleship begin to express its praxiological intent that has been lacking all these years in postcolonial Britain. Black people of the Windrush Generation have been loyal to Britain, the so-called "Mother Country" of Empire. Our commitment to British Christianity across all the major denominations has demonstrably exemplified across several centuries, more latterly across the last 70 years of our stay in postcolonial Britain during the Windrush epoch.

Undoubtedly, life in Britain for the Windrush Generation has been one of travail, but it has not been entirely without its benefits and compensations. Many of the 2nd Generation Windrush people, like myself, have prospered and exceeded the dreams of our parents who came as migrants with little, hoping for a better life in the so called "Mother Country" of Empire. These successes, however, have come at a heavy cost for the bulk of our numbers and it takes no account of the non-material, existential and ontological struggles to be self-determined people whose lives have been imbued with a positive sense of belonging within a country that has not always affirmed our presence.

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[64]This comment is reflective of the push-back of "some" White Christians on social media responding to the threat to law and order and property. It is important to acknowledge the many Black Christians who have also shared their disquiet at the dangers of mob rule and the desecration of public monuments. I am forced to acknowledge that there are obvious dangers of untrammelled "violent" direct action of this sort. My comments are not an absolute endorsement of this action, but a criticism of the complicity of the authorities in the city to side with the blandishments of White supremacy that is exemplified in the maintenance of a statue of Edward Colston in the first place.

[65]For an example of a scholarly attempt to address the legacies of slavery, see Reddie, *Black Theology, Slavery and Contemporary Christianity*. The book contains essays written by scholars from the UK, the US, the Caribbean and South Africa, all exploring the legacy of slavery and the lack of "repair" or reparations for the horrors experienced by Black people in the years since the ending of this vile institution.

For Black people of the Windrush Generation to express gratitude for their lives in Britain, the nation will need to deconstruct its addiction to White privilege and entitlement and recant of the anti-Blackness ethic that is replete within Mission Christianity that has created the template for the corporate notions of Britishness, from which we have often been excluded. One hopes that a new epoch awaits! If racial justice and equity can be generated for Black people, then perhaps my own sense of gratitude for being British will rise? Maybe then, after a lifetime of social, political, and cultural negation, I will feel differently about this nation. It is my hope that a new future awaits us all. Time will tell if this is going to be ever realised!

## Notes on contributors

Professor *Anthony G. Reddie* is the Director of the Oxford Centre for Religion and Culture in Regent's Park College, in the University of Oxford. He is also an Extraordinary Professor of Theological Ethics and a Research Fellow with the University of South Africa. He is the first Black person to get an "A" rating in Theology and Religious studies in the South African National Research Foundation. This designation means that he is a leading international researcher. He has a BA in History and a Ph.D. in Education (with theology) both degrees conferred by the University of Birmingham. He is a prolific author of books, articles and chapters in edited books. His latest book is the co-edited *Intercultural Preaching* edited with Seidel Abel Boanerges with Pamela Searle. He is the author of *Theologising Brexit: A Liberationist and Postcolonial Critique* (Routledge, 2019). This book is the first intercultural and postcolonial theological exploration of the Brexit phenomenon. His previous book was *Journeying to Justice* (Paternoster Press, 2017) (co-edited with Wale Hudson Roberts and Gale Richards). He is the Editor of *Black Theology: An International Journal*. He is a recipient of the Archbishop of Canterbury's 2020 Lambeth, Lanfranc Award for Education and Scholarship, given for "exceptional and sustained contribution to Black Theology in Britain and Beyond".

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