

Deconstructing the Idolatry of White Supremacy: Embracing a Trinitarian Identity as Solidarity with others

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Abstract

The question that faces communities today has to do with who belongs and who has the right to claim certain identity markers. In contemporary United States of America, whiteness stands as an idol unto itself for it seeks to delegitimise all other identity markers except those it has given legitimacy, and which serve its own interests. One cannot deconstruct whiteness as a racial construct unless one sheds light on its origins and how it continues to validate itself in society. A valid response to the idol of whiteness is to embrace a eucharistic identity; one that speaks of the human as a being radically defined by ethical solidarity with others.

Keywords: Anthropology of surplus, Colonialism, Coloniality of Imagination, Coloniality of Knowledge, Eucharistic Anthropology, Racism, Solidarity.

Introduction

The question that faces communities today has to do with who belongs and who has the right to claim certain identity markers? Ethnic tensions in Africa; racial violence in North America and Europe; the politics of caste in India; the bias for Arab supremacy within the Levant being upheld by the terrorist group ISIS; and the preference for the Jewish State of Israel by the Jewish majority in contemporary Israel, all point to the idolization of rigid identity markers that are constructed at the expense of the other. This work aims to deconstruct identities of exclusion that have come to define whiteness as a mode of being in the world. To do this, a decolonial lens will be used to look closely at how White supremacy has played out in our world as an identity marker radically defined by notions of scarcity and aridity of imagination. This work also aims to articulate new ways of seeing ourselves as citizens for each other in a world that is deeply relational with the intent to address the traumas instantiated by systemic racism and other related structures of discrimination playing out in the world.

It is important to state the following; in this work, whiteness is not to be understood as referring only to persons of the European American grouping of human beings. Rather, whiteness is being used to refer to a social system created to benefit persons and societies that participated actively in the political, religious, cultural, economic and epistemic realities of European imperialism, the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, and colonization of lands and peoples outside of European ancestral domain. Whiteness also embodies the worldview that racializes human societies in a manner that favours those who identify as Whites and those whom they consider their allies in the grand agenda of social hierarchies.

The Pathologies of Whiteness as a Mode of Being in the World

The events of May 25, 2020 that led to the death of George Floyd has forced many to ask the following question: Who in their right mind would kneel on another human being's neck, ignoring their pleas to be allowed to take a breath, until they die? The quick response being given to this question is to appeal to the argument on racism. Officer Derek Chauvin is portrayed as a racist who did not see Floyd worthy of the dignity of being treated as a human being. In my opinion, this response distracts from a deeper understanding of the dehumanising power of whiteness as a mode of being in the world. A credible response ought to be grounded in an attempt to unpack the historicity of whiteness as a hegemonic construct aimed at shaping societies with the intent to exploit the other, whether in the realm of knowledge production, religious heritage, political systems, languages and economic resources. A legitimate starting point for unpacking the historicity of whiteness is the events that took place in the Spanish town of Valladolid between 1550 and 1552, because of the many factors that played out in legitimising the claim of whiteness over notions of otherness. As the story goes, Bartolomé de Las Casas was concerned about the maltreatment of the indigenous people in Hispaniola by the Spanish conquistadors. In defense of the indigenous people, he chose to argue their case before the King of Spain. Juan Gines Sepúlveda, on the other hand, a notable jurist of his day, chose to argue the case of the Spaniards who believed it was their right to maltreat the indigenous people of the newly 'discovered' world. The practice of *encomienda* was at the heart of these abuses. The Spanish practice of *encomienda* in the newly 'discovered' territories in the Americas and in the Philippines consisted of giving "a grant by the [Spanish] crown to a conquistador, a soldier, an official, or others of a specified number of 'Indios' (Native Americans and later, Filipinos) living in a particular area. The receiver of the grant, the encomendero, could exact tribute from the 'Indios' in gold, in kind, or in labour and was required to protect them and instruct them in the Christian faith" (THE EDITORS OF ENCYCLOPEDIA BRITANNICA 1998, Web. N.P). The legitimisation of violence through the Spanish legal system and the sanctification of such violence under the pretense of evangelisation led to a perfect system of exploitation of the indigenous people. This exploitative system put in place by the Spaniards in their engagement with the indigenous people forces one to take seriously the correlation between European sense of self in the Americas and other foreign lands and the sense of right with regard to property.

Although, de Las Casas attempts to make a case that affirms the humanity of the so-called Indians, he begins with a false premise – the assumption that the European has the authority to decide who is authentically human and who is not. Here lies the pathology of whiteness as a way of being in the world. Even when the claim is made that rationality is the credible quality to ascribe humanity to the other, the question arises; whose sense of rationality? De Las Casas' defense of the so-called Indians reveals a blind spot. Appeal to the human from the perspective of the European becomes the litmus test for ascribing or denying humanity to the other. Human knowledge is always conditioned by one's socio-cultural context. To then universalise the logic of a socio-cultural and political context as though it is a universal truth is itself a hegemonic posturing and a false claim to universal

knowledge. This is always the crisis that whiteness evokes whenever it is appropriated as a way of being. De Las Casas forgot a basic truth, one that opens up an epistemological space for the question to arise: How do these people understand what it means to be human according to their own cultural knowledge? European imperialism, whether secular or religious, cannot allow the space where the natives can voice out their own wisdom. To allow that, is to invalidate the European presence in that space. Consequently, whiteness, as a product of European imperialism and imagination, is a tool for silencing and erasure of spaces of freedom. Whiteness is inherently conditioned to subjugate and never to liberate. It is proper to refer to whiteness as a form of idol because of its inability to mediate surplus of meanings in all that it validates. Rather than create opportunities for flourishing of all, it negates life for all it sees as a threat to its imperialistic agenda. Thus, one can conclude that whiteness embodies deficiency of imagination. It instantiates existential scarcity and hermeneutic deficiency.

Interestingly, whiteness, as an idol, holds captive even White bodies. Its power to hold everyone captive is the very source of its legitimisation in the world it creates. In other words, whiteness is a double-edged sword of subjugation. Since whiteness does not exist in the real sense of the word, it creates a deceptive identity both for those who claim to embody whiteness and those who are its victims. In fact, all are victims of whiteness.

Whiteness is a myth. It aims to create a false sense of holisticness and prosperity. To do this, the realities of poverty that defined many Whites in Europe were systematically prevented from being exported to the colonies in the Americas and other parts of the world, where Europeans invaded during their colonial adventures (STOLER 2010, 36 – 40). Even when poor European Whites were allowed to emigrate to these territories, they were acculturated into the world of whiteness – a world that instantiates a hierarchy of being human (coloniality of being). The myth of whiteness becomes the apogee of such a hierarchy of being human. Since whiteness calls for a false utopia of being human, White women were also acculturated into the myth of whiteness. As a tool of colonialism, anyone who is granted the identity of whiteness becomes a being that embodies the power to subjugate the other.

To speak of coloniality of being, within the framework of whiteness, is to speak of embodied subjugating power over the other who is defined as a being without the protection and dignities inherent in whiteness. Ann Laura Stoler argues that “Racist ideology, fear of the Other, preoccupation with white privilege, and obsession with protecting European women from sexual assault by Asian and Black males were not simply justifications for continued European rule and white supremacy. They were part of a critical, class-based logic, not only statements about indigenous subversives, but directives aimed at dissenting European underlings; and part of the apparatus that kept potentially recalcitrant white colonials in line” (STOLER 2010, 25). Whiteness, as a racial construct of existence in the world created for White bodies, becomes the leveling marker that differentiates those who have been acculturated into that hierarchy of being human from those who are considered to lack the qualities of being human – all who are not-White or who are different. By appropriating a false reading of concrete experiences of poor White persons to buttress the myth of whiteness as an

existence defined by economic prosperity, manipulation becomes an inherent marker of whiteness. Consequently, since manipulation is at the heart of whiteness as a way of being, one can conclude then that whiteness is a bankrupt worldview that never allows for freedom to reign supreme both for those who identify with the humanity it constructs that favours whiteness and those to whom it denies such a humanity.

Whiteness is radically defined by bondage. It brings about a coloniality of imagination. To understand how coloniality of imagination works within the framework of whiteness, I have to turn to insights from Walter D. Mignolo:

Christian Europeans' conception and image of the world *were only their own conception and image of the world, and not the representation of a geohistorical ontology of the world*. This is what coloniality of knowledge means, and how coloniality of knowledge orients both geopolitical designs and body-political subjectivities (e.g., our senses, our emotions, our cosmo-vivencias). Obviously, Western Christian Europeans had the right to build their own image of the world, like anybody else who had done so before them. But it was an aberration to pretend and act accordingly as if *their specific image of the world and their own sense of totality was the same for any – and everybody else on the planet*. ... (2018, 195 – 196)

On another note, coloniality of imagination is intricately linked to coloniality of knowledge. While the former traps one's cognitive ability within the imprisoned cyclic replication of colonial logic; it is brought about through the colonial violence inherent in the latter. The latter operates through the false sense of universalism. It creates a world with its own logic by intentionally erasing the entire mechanism of knowledge creation of a people or cultures the bearers of such colonial agenda encounter. Once it has replaced a people's cultural production of knowledge with the colonial claim to universal knowledge, coloniality of knowledge holds captive the colonised people's imagination and creativity that are meant to bring about their freedom. As Boaventura de Sousa Santos rightly notes, "There is no European universalism; there is rather a European foundational experience that, due to its overriding economic and military power, imposed itself on other foundational experiences existing in the world and thereby granted itself the prerogative of proclaiming its universal validity" (DE SOUSA SANTOS 2018, 39).

Again, this European universalistic claim to knowledge is itself a weaponised tool intended to bring about a form of disruption in the cognitive power of the one who is sucked into its operating orbit. What do I mean by this? The entrance of Europeans into foreign lands and cultures within the contexts of imperialism and colonialism was never neutral. It came with the ideology of universal claim to knowledge. Knowledge is Europe. Europe is knowledge. These mantras of exploitation are backed up by the ideology of power; the ideology of religious evangelisation; the ideology of commerce; and the ideology of civilization. The French colonial policy of assimilation serves as a perfect example. The colonised is made to think and believe that to be truly human and

worthy of the dignities that come with such an identity, one has to be assimilated into the French culture. The grand lie in this process is that there is no French culture. Rather, there are French cultures; one for the French (White) and the other for the colonised (coloured). To buttress this point, two scholars' insights are worth exploring further. The first is Charles W. Mills. Mills argues that "Colonization has standardly involved the denigration as barbaric of native cultures and languages, and the demand to assimilate to the practices of the superior race, so that one can achieve whatever fractional personhood is permitted" (1998, 115). The non-Whites have no identities in such a world crafted by colonialism, except that given to them by the coloniser. There is a form of linguistic slot that is intentional in the language of colonialism. The coloniser refuses to take seriously the principles of encounter, because true encounter demands that the complex nuances inherent in the encounter be sustained. Rather than do this, the coloniser creates a false sense of relationality; one that is radically defined by racial hierarchy and an erasing principle that diminishes the complex humanity of the other; thus leading to a group identity that the other embodies as creatures who are at best embodying "subpersonhood" (MILLS 1998, 110). In so far as the colonised accepts the logic of the coloniality of knowledge created by the coloniser, they will never be able to escape from the cyclic dynamics of coloniality that instantiate the imprisonment of their imagination, except when they experience the gift of sudden awakening via a disruption in the existential logic of subjugation that colonialism creates.

The second scholar is Frantz Fanon. His apt critique of whiteness as a mode of being in the world is found in his analysis of the French educated Antillean who returns home only to become an incarnation of the French fantasy of a civilized human, but a foreigner to his people, even to his beloved mother and friends (FANON 2008, 18 – 20). The Antillean is trapped in that cyclic world of European discourses of the other. As Achille Mbembe rightly notes: "European discourse, both scholarly and popular, had a way of thinking, of classifying and imagining distant worlds, that was often based on modes of fantasizing. By presenting facts, often invented, as real, certain, and exact, it evaded what it claimed to capture and maintained a relationship to other worlds that was fundamentally imaginary, even as it sought to develop forms of knowledge aimed at representing them objectively" (2017, 12). Coloniality of knowledge operates and legitimises the fantasy of subjugation that the coloniser intends for the colonised. The colonised is always a creature to be examined with curiosity and a gaze that strips them of their basic humanity. Why is this the case? It is because to be human is to be White. To have knowledge is to be White. To be civilized is to be White. Since the other is a product of the imagination of the coloniser, the creature that is created within the sphere of such an imagination cannot possess the same dignities as does the White person. There is always a lack, an existential deficiency in that created creature. Consequently, the assimilated creature inhabits a space and a body that is inherently deformed. Such a creature is trapped in the structural system of coloniality of imagination.

Coloniality of imagination operates with the assumption that the colonised are incapable of possessing epistemic freedom because they are creatures without a history; without a civilization; and without the correct

cognitive abilities to ask questions that lead to liberation. After all, they are simply creatures made from the fantasy of the coloniser. What is so powerful about the structural system of coloniality of imagination is that it does not need White bodies to constantly implement it. Once, the colonised are assimilated into the operating sphere of such a system, the system replicates itself in a cyclic manner. As it validates and perpetuates the intentionality of the coloniser, its victims are drawn deeper into the center of the system where they are systematically stripped of their cognitive abilities to free themselves. Even when they are said to be educated, they are simply educated to be pawns of the colonising logic of the coloniser.

Steve Sabella, a Palestinian artist, describes the operating structural system of coloniality of imagination perfectly well in his analysis of the culture of despotic rule of the Arab world prior to the so-called Arab Spring. In his words:

It seemed back then that people were entrapped and subjected to a new form of colonial power that did not seek to physically occupy the ‘space’ and people, but rather it aimed at conquering their image, leading in effect to a New World Order. In other words, what we were witnessing was the conquering and the colonization of the imagination. This, in my opinion, subjects people to a severe mental and physical paralysis that restricts development and obliterates all notions of personal freedom. Having lived in occupied Jerusalem for the largest part of my life, I suffered from this colonization to the extent that I needed to uproot myself in order to reconquer my imagination, until I reached my states of Euphoria (2010) and Beyond Euphoria (2011) (SABELLA 2012, 10)

Coloniality of imagination affects both the coloniser and the colonised. If there is to be any legitimacy in the claim that humans are creatures radically conditioned by relational connectedness, then any system that attempts to break the relational link by introducing notions of racial hierarchy couched in the false notion of hierarchies of cultural civilizations and so on, does so at the expense of stripping authentic humanity from the creators of such a system. In other words, a racist, while attempting to create a world he/she believes to be in their favour, only creates a world that impoverishes their humanity. The sense of self that was created by the hegemonic agenda of Europeans since the first ships left the shores of Europe to begin exploitative encounters with the natives of the so-called new world was built on a grand lie; a lie that impoverishes the imagination of the European mind. Consequently, the European mind is a mind in need of liberation. The sense of self that has led to the hierarchy of race; where whiteness is seen as an embodiment of true humanity and the non-White is seen as a creature that lacks true humanity is itself a grand lie; one that must be delegitimised and rejected.

Again, whiteness evokes a sense of epistemological-ignorance that ought to be engaged in a radical manner, if the victims (those who appropriate such an identity) are to be free from such an existential and cognitive ignorance. Whiteness evokes a sense of false history that creates spaces where the veil of maya reigns supreme. This sense of epistemological-ignorance is creatively articulated in a chapter titled, “Fragments” in the work of Willie James Jennings. Jennings

describes what he saw play out during an interview process intended to hire a new faculty member in the area of biblical literature at his institution. The two finalists were an African American woman and a White male. Both of them were very qualified. However, the blindness that whiteness evokes kicked in during the interview process and the evaluation of their respective dossiers by the committee members who were mostly White men. Jennings, observing his White male colleagues closely and the performativity of whiteness that the White male candidate displayed during the interview made the following conclusion: “He showed himself to be a knower aiming at mastery, a mind striving for possession, and a body in control. He showed himself to be a brilliant performer of white self-sufficient masculinity” (JENNINGS 2020, 26 – 27). Describing the performance of both candidates, Jennings offers the following insights:

They both were working with fragments, but her fragment work flowed around her body illuminating her field and who she was as a scholar working in it. His fragment work coalesced around his body concealing him inside white self-sufficient masculinist form through which he was imagined as one with his field, homoousios, of the same substance as his discipline ...The committee, after careful deliberations and vigorous, honest debate, could see the body of candidate B (for black woman) – but not as a bridge to anything important. But it did see the body of candidate A (the self-sufficient young man) as exactly the body it wanted to be and wanted every student in the school to resemble, intellectually speaking. *How else are we speaking?* (JENNINGS 2020, 27 – 28)

No human is self-sufficient. However, European modernity has elevated the idol of individualism and placed it on the altar of our collective existence. After all, did the French revolutionists on November 10, 1793, not enthrone the statue of the Goddess of Reason on the altar of the Church of Notre Dame de Paris, and declare her to be the touch and guide of the new state created in an attempt to break away from Christendom? (FORD 2017, Web. N.P). Yet, this state that is supposed to epitomise the best of human qualities embodied in the mantras of *liberté, égalité, fraternité* did not hesitate to participate in the lucrative trade of enslaving other human beings and forcefully taking possession of other lands while also introducing despotic rule in those territories. Here lies the paradox inherent in the world that whiteness presents. Whiteness holds captive the imagination of those who appropriate its logic and prevents them from seeing their own deficiencies and the harm they are causing others.

In the United States of America, whiteness reigns supreme; from its beginnings as a political entity crafted by Europeans, it has appropriated, validated, sustained and advanced the ideology of whiteness. Though its constitution speaks of the dignity of all persons, its history reveals something else. Slavery, segregation, structural and systemic policies of discrimination of persons who are not-White, the diminishing of women and other systemic evils have overshadowed such a vision of human dignity. The power of coloniality of imagination reigns supreme on this land. It is through this lens that one has to read closely the events that took place on May 25, 2020, that resulted in the killing of

Mr. Floyd by Officer Chauvin. It is through this lens that one has to analyse what has become the racial dynamics and racial violence playing out in the country since its founding. For White persons, there exist in their social conditioning an existential-blindness that prevents them from seeing themselves as having been acculturated into a mythical world that elevates whiteness as the true expression of human qualities. I make a bold claim here, when I state that all White persons raised in the United States of America suffer from this deficiency because of how whiteness has been radically imbedded into all fabrics of social life in the country. However, not all White persons are held permanently captive by this coloniality of imagination. Many continue to free themselves from it by refusing to embrace the identity constructed by whiteness and intentionally becoming ‘outsiders’ in the world created by whiteness. However, one cannot be an outsider unless one does the necessary work. Such a work entails an ongoing process that cannot end until the empire of whiteness is defeated completely.

For the highly melanated, coloniality of imagination also holds them captive, but in a different way. Again, I make a bold statement here when I say that all high melanated persons raised in the United States of America suffer from the crises inherent in a sense of self that radically plays out in W. E. B. Du Bois’ notion of “double consciousness” – a cry to belong in a world radically defined by erasure. This sense of erasure, a sense of constant doubt and an enduring struggle against structures intentionally put in place to erase a sense of belonging, is at the heart of the socio-cultural and political experience of “double consciousness” (DU BOIS 1903, 2 – 3).

Du Bois’ apt reading of the existential experiences of African Americans is further validated when one pays close attention to the structures of the plantations in the Americas where enslaved Africans were sent by the European slave holders. Key elements needed in the construction, articulation and sustenance of sense of self within the social and cultural dynamics playing out in society were themselves stripped of meanings. The enslaved Africans were denied the right to having a spouse; family; religious belonging; and place to call home by their plantation masters in the Americas (ERSKINE 2014, 97 – 100). Consequently, within the core of the process of identity construction lies gaps of conflict that prevent enslaved Africans from articulating who they are as a people. Everything that operates in such a social structure is systematically conditioned to lead to their existential erasure. They exist not as humans defined by freedom but as creatures to be used to serve the capitalistic ambitions of the plantation owners.

Who am I? is a question that is asked by a person of colour who comes to the realisation of the way whiteness plays out in the world. It is also a question asked by White persons who begin to see the evil enacted by whiteness in the world they inhabit when they choose to rebel against the powers of that world. It is a question that begins the journey of liberation and a rejection to bring offerings to the throne of the idol of whiteness operating in the world. Such a question allows those who ask it to inhabit the space of the ‘in-between’; one where the logic of whiteness is absent. Such a space is radically saturated with the grace that comes from “dangerous memories.” “Dangerous memories,” argues Johann Baptist Metz, “interrupt” how we have been conditioned “to see things the way they are” and by so doing, “help to reveal new and dangerous insights for the present” (1980, 171).

For Metz, there is no identity without memory (1980, 66). Michael J. Iafate reminds us that the demon of empire politics can create a false identity disguised as an identity crafted within the domain of dangerous memories. He does this by pointing to how in the United States, “the memory of 9/11 has been used to encourage feelings of fear, anger, and revenge within the population of the U.S., which have, in turn, been used to support further violence and imperial ambition. September 11, as a central memorial event of recent American spirituality, continues to serve as a ‘dangerous memory’ in the literal sense, especially for people around the world who are on the receiving end of the U.S.-led War on Terror” (IAFRATE 2006, 1). To ensure that such a dangerous memory does not slip into the domain of vengeance which leads to death and an imprisonment by whiteness, within the context of Christian faith, I argue that memory is not just about re-membering, it is also about healing. We remember so that we can be whole again.

The space of the ‘in-between’ is not a space of escape. Rather, it is a space of radical reflection and a purposeful resolve to be an agent of social, political, and cultural imagination that will usher in the reign of justice for all. The space of the ‘in-between’ is the place of utmost generosity because it is a space where all persons can invoke dangerous memories intended to heal. It is also a place of lamentation. Lamentation is itself a ritual of cleansing and healing. In ancient times and amongst indigenous communities, lamentation is a ritual of healing and rebirth. To lament is to wash away the stains of death that diminish the existence of the community. Yet, lamentation is itself prophetic because it calls the community to remember their wrong doings while embracing the discomfort that comes from it. To lament is to speak truths that decenter power. To lament is to say, there is a better world out there, one that invalidates the current unjust order. Lamentation is mourning that is grounded in hope for the birth of new life.

For centuries, those who are high melanated have mourned and lamented the endless killings of their people; mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters and children lament the unjust killings of their loved ones. Many low melanated persons have joined in this communal lament to mourn the violence caused by whiteness to Black bodies throughout history. They lament the systems of oppression put in place to diminish the existence of Black bodies. When Black voices remember their experiences in a world defined radically by injustice, their memories ought to make everyone uncomfortable. The more the discomfort, the surer the realisation of the promise of a new world order that rejects the past and affirms the future where righteousness and justice reign supreme for all. Lamentation is a communal ritual of healing. Consequently, when we all lament together as a nation, as an institution, and as one humanity, we usher forth a new dawn of justice for all. The logic inherent in the ritual of lamentation points to the truth that the diminishing of one life is the diminishing of all lives. When we fail to act justly, speak up when persons of colour are discriminated against, or stand up for justice for anyone who experiences injustice in society, our refusal to act slowly leads everyone into a world of darkness.

Towards an Imagination of a New Way of Being Human: A Case for a Trinitarian Anthropology of Surplus.

For Christians, the starting and ending place for any discourse on what it means to be human must necessarily be the Eucharist. By Eucharist, I do not mean a whitewashed understanding of the theology of the eucharistic meal that speaks solely of the resurrection without a radical engagement with the scandal and trauma of Good Friday. The Eucharist is a ritual of awareness of the power of evil done by the powerful to the innocent. The Eucharist is the place where the community of the followers of Christ sits with and allows itself to be an active victim with the suffering innocents of the world. It is a ritualised place where our solidarity with others becomes the source for experiencing the fullness of our humanity as a gift that can only be attained when we choose to become one with the victims of the systems of erasure.

A Eucharistic humanity is Trinitarian at its core. What do I mean by this? There is always a trifold movement in the realisation of such a humanity. The first movement is remembering one's connectedness with the totality of our history. While whiteness presents a false history of domination that speaks of a utopic past that never existed, memories of the past become the ethical command and guide for those who embody a Eucharistic humanity not to repeat the evils of the past era. The second movement needed to realise a Eucharistic humanity is the gift of eschatological relational connectedness with that which is in a future that is already unfolding before us. The gift of the eschaton is the realisation of a divinised humanity; one that is radically defined and connected with all that God shall usher into the new era of existence for all of God's creatures. While the second movement is radically defined by the virtue of hope, the third movement is defined by the rituals of thanksgiving and gratitude. A Eucharistic humanity that grounds itself in an *anamnetic* connection with all of history, and which looks at the horizon that is opening up in the future, is made to become aware of that which is before it; that which is before it invites one to be ethically responsible. Consequently, a Eucharistic humanity is a humanity radically defined by ethical responsibility for all. A Eucharistic humanity is a humanity that experiences the fullness of life only when these three movements of existence are fully operational. Such a humanity is a gift that comes to one only through an encounter with the God who reveals Godself through the medium of the other.

Furthermore, if authentic humanity is to be realised, a Eucharistic humanity must necessarily reorient us to a hermeneutic framework that is centered on what M. Shawn Copeland calls "difference and interdependence rather than exclusion" (2010, 89). Our humanity must also be grounded in "solidarity with the exploited, despised, [and] poor 'other'" (COPELAND 2010). This radical reorientation entails not just how we conceive and perceive our humanity, it invites us to embrace new ways of understanding how God operates in God's world. The entire story of salvation history must be retold in ways that reflect this new orientation. The dominant narrative of salvation, that speaks of the salvific work of God in a sinful world, without the demand for the active cooperation of humans in this graced process of redemption, must be discarded. There can be no passivity in how we understand, tell, and live out our lives in this *Kairos* moments of salvific encounters with God in and through our neighbours in God's world.

Those who inhabit the space of the in-between where the gift of Eucharistic humanity can be found, embody that humanity that Pontius Pilate called *Ecce Homo* – Behold the human! (Jn. 19:5). These words reflect the type of human that God became when God chose to be incarnate, as noted by Jürgen Moltmann (2015, 295). Moltmann makes the following claim: “There can be no theology of the incarnation which does not become a theology of the cross” (2015, 294). I would add to Moltmann’s claim by arguing that there can be no eucharistic humanity that does not lead back to the *Ecce Homo*! What are the implications of this claim I make here?

First, if to be human is to be radically defined by solidarity in difference and oneness with the hypostatic reality of the Second Person of the Trinity, then the pain and suffering of the marginalised ones of our world stand as a witness to how God conceives of our humanity when God chooses to be one with us in a world defined by evil. James H. Cone is correct when he argues that: “The blackness of God, and everything implied by it in a racist society, is the heart of the black theology doctrine of God. There is no place in black theology for a colorless God in a society where human beings suffer precisely because of their color... Either God is identified with the oppressed to the point that their experience becomes God’s experience, or God is a God of racism” (2010, 67). For Cone, Blackness is an *epiphany* of the Johannine *Ecce Homo*! Blackness, in contemporary global society, and especially in the global north, reveals “the tension between life and death” (2010, 11). In other words, Blackness prompts the question that Black people ask themselves; “How are we going to survive in a world which deems Black humanity an illegitimate form of human existence?” (CONE 2010, 11). Again, for Cone, Blackness, in a world where racism defines what is to be considered human, reveals a “crisis of identity;” just as it is with regard to the *Ecce Homo*! (2010, 13). For those who only embody empire identity (whiteness), the *Ecce Homo* is a scandal and a crisis to be avoided. For those who inhabit the space of the in-between, the *Ecce Homo* is the source of new life. It evokes in them the triple movement inherent in a Eucharistic humanity. It inspires them to remember what has happened to the *Ecce Homo* in the era of empire dynamics. It invites them to look to the horizon that opens up in the eschaton where death shall not have the last word in defining the destiny of the *Ecce Homo*. It compels them to take seriously the realities of the here and now and become agents of social transformation so that no one can be treated as has the *Ecce Homo*.

Second, a Eucharistic humanity that leads back to the Johannine *Ecce Homo* must necessarily begin with concrete human experiences. To speak of being human in the image of Christ without accounting for the suffering Christ and suffering humans in the nowness of their existence is to fall into the idolatry of whiteness that both Cone and Copeland invite one to reject if one is to understand what it means to be human in God’s world. In other words, the starting place for any discourse on what it means to be human must not be the locus of power. Rather, it must begin with the experience of powerlessness. The God-human *kenotic* existence that Paul speaks of in his letter to the Philippians reveals the true identity of humanity; one of letting go of the trappings of power. To experience powerlessness, as Blackness has come to represent in the world created for and by

whiteness, is to receive a prophetic invitation to position oneself against the structures that dehumanise. This leads to a very important insight worth keeping in mind as I explain the third implication.

Third, while Blackness calls for solidarity with all who suffer as the *Ecce Homo* has become in Christian salvific history, whiteness speaks to individualism and greed. Again, to remind my readers, whiteness is to be understood as a way of positioning oneself in the world; one that prioritises power over solidarity, exploitation over sharing, and individualism over community (MILLS 2015, 217–227). Katherine Fugate offers a helpful insight into the dynamics of Blackness in comparison to whiteness in the following words: “For a black person to say, ‘Black is Beautiful,’ a white person first said Black is Not Beautiful. For a black person to say, ‘Black Lives Matter,’ a white person first said, ‘Black Lives Do Not Matter.’ Perhaps we’ve said enough for a while. Perhaps it’s time to listen” (2018, Web. N.P).

Conclusion

White fragility is a mindset that demands existential, hermeneutic, discursive, economic, and political comfort of White people. With such a mindset, any form of suffering must be avoided or at best delegitimised. In a country where its history, identity, cultural worldview, political, economic, and religious positioning are radically defined by racism, it is not shocking that such a nation finds it uncomfortable to engage honestly with its own original sin. Perhaps, the admonition given by James Baldwin, in his work, *The Fire Next Time*, can be helpful to address this sad reality: “I do not mean to be sentimental about suffering – but people who cannot suffer can never grow up, can never discover who they are” (HOOKS 2001, 210). In line with Baldwin’s admonition, Bell Hooks writes: “Growing up is, at heart, the process of learning to take responsibility for whatever happens in your life. To choose growth is to embrace a love that heals” (2001, 210).

Finally, it is important to state that a eucharistic humanity that is centred on Blackness must necessarily be hospitable. Just as the *Ecce Homo* reveals a type of fragility that evokes in the one who encounters it a response of solidarity, so also are all who are made in its likeness when others encounter them daily. Both in the gospels and in Christian devotions, one notices that the *Ecce Homo* of Good Friday evokes in those who encounter it a response of solidarity. To say that the *Ecce Homo* reveals to us our true humanity is not to say that we should be complacent in the face of evil. Solidarity is deeply rooted in a prophetic response to undo the structures of evil.

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