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Now you see me, now you don't: subjectivity, blackness, and difference in practical theology in Britain post Brexit

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ABSTRACT
This paper explores the intersection of Black Liberation theology and Practical theology, wrestling with the complexity of human subjectivity and epistemology. Practical theology has often been at the forefront of exploring the relationship between lived experience and knowledge production, often in terms of gender and sexuality. Yet, like other forms of theological articulation, the impact of Whiteness has rarely been explored particularly in relation to the converse visibility of Blackness and its paradoxical absence in the British theological academy. This paper seeks to open up that discussion. The latter part of the paper offers a theological exploration of the underlying forces and concerns that gave rise to the Referendum vote to leave the European Union. In what ways has the phenomenon of Whiteness helped to shape the Brexit vote? What might it mean for Practical theology in Britain if Whiteness was acknowledged, especially in our post-Brexit epoch?

KEYWORDS
Whiteness; blackness; black theology; complex subjectivity; practical theology; post-Brexit

Being visible and invisible

Several months ago I experienced the contradictory dialectical experience of being both invisible and conspicuously visible at the same time while sat in a church meeting. I should stress, quite quickly, that this was neither an unusual or surprising experience. It is one I have experienced all my life, having been born in this country. It is an experience that countless Black people have experienced in terms of our lived realities in White majority, heavily racialised contexts.

In the meeting, which for the purposes of ecclesial niceties shall remain nameless, I sat as the only non-White person in the room. The meeting proceeded on the basis of normative Whiteness, meaning that our 'generic' conversation around issues of mission and the dislocation of the church from the broader cultural context of the nation proceeded on the basis that what was true for White people was indeed the only truth. We spoke about church decline and people (meaning White people but never stated as such) not going to church and we (again meaning White people) needed to find new ways of re-engaging with the broader nation. As my White colleagues were speaking my mind drifted to the plethora of Black churches of all ecclesiological and theological descriptions who are growing and for whom there is no cultural dislocation. I remember a Black Pentecostal

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friend saying to me wryly 'I see many White churches now have messy church, cafe church, pub church, emerging church … Black people still have church church.' Nowhere in the conversation was there any cognisance of the ways in which invisible Whiteness was shaping the discourse of this meeting. And crucially, as the only non-White person in the room possessed of a wealth of alternative epistemological insights, I was invisible as the White people spoke with authority about the wider truths as they knew them, not once recognising other perspectives let alone the fact that they might have something to learn from them.

This remained the situation until the conversation unexpectedly turned to how do we integrate migrants and asylum seekers into the church? Suddenly, my hitherto invisibility was broken as if a giant refracting light had been placed on me. Now, suddenly, I was visible as a plethora of White heads turned in my direction to ask for my opinion on the experiences of 'these asylum seekers and migrants'. Naturally, I was somewhat startled and a little taken aback as in truth my mind had wandered far away from the mundane realities of the meeting and to be frank, I had not been paying attention! So quickly, regrouping my faculties and in Jamaican speak 'doing my best to *style it out*' and disguise my embarrassment, I concocted some form of erudite, long-winded response in order to look a tad less dosy than I felt at that particular juncture. In the famed words of Harry S Truman, U.S. President at the end of World War II 'If you can't convince them, then confuse them' – the dictum of many a scholarly book.

I have shared this story because it marks a commonplace existential moment in the adult life of many Black people. My Blackness was conversely invisible and visible at different moments in the meeting. But the Whiteness of my compatriots was never visible, nor the concomitant assumptions that accrued from their generic, surreptitious White-Eurocentric based forms of epistemology. What struck me at that moment was the apparent anonymity of my White peers and the marked visibility of myself, but only for a specific moment, when the topic turned to one that marked the visibility of assumed racialised difference. White invisibility and normality remain a crucial socio-cultural and political signifier in the construction of Britishness and Englishness within the Body politic of the nation.

Whiteness, belonging, and English identity

Full belonging in Britain has always been connected with the normative power of Whiteness. Paul Gilroy's landmark, seminal text (Gilroy 2002), has proved pivotal in helping to create the overarching framework for outlining the philosophical construct of normative Whiteness and Britishness, within Black British cultural studies – sadly, not within theology.

Whiteness as a concept is a complex and contested phenomena. A number of scholars have explored the nature of Whiteness and its concomitant relationship to notions of privilege, entitlement, and superiority (See Azaransky 2015; Beaudoin and Turpin 2014; Cassidy and Mikulich 2007, Harvey 2014). It must be noted that some scholars have argued that the seeming homogeneous construct of Whiteness, as being one of privilege, entitlement, and superiority does not take account of the realities of dispossessed and disaffected, White working class and underclass communities often on outer city estates in Britain (Shannahan 2010).

The transcendent impact of Whiteness, however, finds its most corrosive power in the nature of its symbolic rendering as a signifier for that which is normative and acceptable. As the Black British theologian, David Isiorho has suggested, there has long been a symbiotic relationship, for example, between Englishness and Whiteness within the nation state of 'Great Britain' (Isiorho 2007). Whiteness is actually a very fragile phenomenon whose agency is predicated on entitlement, exceptionalism, and notions of superiority. Whiteness has become such an unobserved norm that it lacks any functional agency outside of notions of advantage when juxtaposed against culturally and ethnically marked others. This is especially the case when Whiteness is allied to notions of nationalism, buttressed by Empire, colonialism, and mission Christianity.

The relationship between the British Empire, colonialism, and Christianity, in many respects, remains the unacknowledged 'elephant in the room'. Empire and colonialism found much of its intellectual underscoring on the basis of White, Eurocentric supremacy, infused within the theological import of Christianity, which marked the clear binary between notions of civilised and acceptable and saved against uncivilised and transgressive and heathen (Douglas 2005). There are no prizes for guessing on which side of the divide Black people found themselves relegated?

The power of being White is simply the privilege of not having to think about it or to seek to rehabilitate it from centuries of deleterious and pejorative stereotyping (Beckford 2004).

Whatever the privations that face poor, marginalised White people (which I do not dispute, I hasten to add), these do not include a historic set of symbolic associations surrounding the unacceptability of being White in and of itself. Nor do such negative, symbolic associations find expression in right-wing groups demanding their removal from the country in order that such specious notions of 'purity', 'civilisation', and 'Our Way of Life' can be maintained – again, often synonyms for covert ways of speaking of the normativity of Whiteness.

One of the most recent penetrating critiques of Whiteness written by a White British theologian is Steve Latham who not only challenges the normative moorings of White theology, but explores the subjective, anthropological hinterland of Whiteness that provides the axiomatic, epistemological weight that anchors this phenomenon. Latham writes

> One of the greatest obstacles to the White person realising their own culpability, is that our own 'Whiteness,' is so invisible to us. The problem is always other people. 'They are Black; we are ordinary.' 'They have a culture; we are normal.' 'They are ethnic; but we don't have an ethnicity.' We consider to be 'commonsense' what is actually part of our culture. However, when anything appears natural or 'neutral', then we know we are in the presence of a particular ideology. (Latham 2017, 84)

So Whiteness operates on the basis of stealth, holding pivotal central place for that which is considered normative and axiomatic, the neutral terrain on which and by which all other perspectives are assessed and their epistemological insights judged.

Historical formulations

Documentary research has revealed the existence of a significant community of Africans in England as early as 1500. From that time, the existence of a substantial African population was erased from contemporary histories, in order to suppress knowledge of England's participation in the transatlantic slave trade (Walker 2017). Two generations on into the Tutor

reign of Elizabeth I, saw the growing preoccupation with overseeing the belief in English homogeneity that was predicated on protecting the Protestant English state as its primary concern. Tamara Lewis' research has revealed how, despite national and theological differences, English monarchs and law courts appropriated Roman Catholic pronouncements on the relationship between Blackness and religion. The resultant formula, a forerunner of Enlightenment racialised essentialism, implicitly associated dark or Black skin with evil in defining the African nature as godless (Lewis 2016).

Lewis' research illustrates the extent to which Whiteness as an unmarked signifier for axiomatic normativity became grounded in the body politic of the nation, with Blackness become emblematic as the embodied, transgressive other, much as Catholicism represented the abstract, socio-political, disembodied other (Lewis 2016).

In this socio-political and cultural framing, White English Anglicanism becomes the archetypal, embodied ideal that defines authentic notions of being within the body politic of the nation. It is why, for example, in the reactionary, incendiary bombast aimed at Islam, otherwise, non-religious figures on the political right, invoke a cultural version of nominal, Anglicised Christianity as a part of their rhetoric for defending 'Christian Britain'.[1] Christian Britain becomes a synonym for normative, White conservative Britain, which really means Englishness – sorry those of you who are Scots and other Celts, you do not really count!

The constructions of belonging in terms of the body politic of Englishness is predicated on notions of Whiteness, Protestantism, and homogeneity under the paradigm of the Church of England. Kumar Rajagopalan has argued for a greater commitment to racial justice from British Baptists (and other Free Church Non-Conformists), for example, given that they themselves have been recipients of Anglican inspired notions of superiority, predicated on a legislative supremacy dating back to 'Restoration England' (Rajagopalan 2017). The monarch still has to be a communicant member of the Church of England. In short, Whiteness has been embedded within the signifying triumverate of Englishness, Anglicanism, and conservatism. Is it any wonder, then, that the trigger for the Referendum vote emerged from the discontentment of English nationalism from within the Eurosceptical wing of the Conservative Party – historically, one-third of the religio-political repository of the establishment of English nationalism, the other two being the monarchy (coupled with the landed gentry), alongside the Church of England.

So, to recap, historically, the rise of White, English (as opposed to wider British) nationalism has its roots in the sixteenth century. The rise of the 'Fortress Islander' mentality that sees 'us' as different from 'them' really begins during the reign of Elizabeth 1 (1558–1603). The later wars with Napoleon give rise to the triumphant slogan 'Rule Britannia' – British never shall be slaves – while making slaves of Africans and colonising approximately a quarter of the world. All the aforementioned is based on notions of being different to and better than others. Underpinning the aforementioned is a subterranean theology of election that identifies Whiteness as the defining emblematic construct for righteousness and as a signifier for salvation and religious acceptability.

[1]See the following website where the then leader of UKIP, Nigel Farage, clearly invokes a cultural interpretation of Christianity as a means of promoting a reactionary, homogeneous construct of Britain. http://www.secularism.org.uk/news/2015/04/nigel-farage-calls-for-muscular-defence-of-christianity-in-the-uk (Accessed the 9th February 2017).

Subjectivity and being human

The major thrust of this work is that Whiteness can be rethought and rearticulated if it is given opportunities to learn from the complexities of Blackness as understood from within the prism of Black liberation theology. This work is a contribution to Practical theological anthropology and is intended to enable Whiteness to become a more nuanced and complexified phenomenon, capable of promoting greater agency for White people beyond the often facile and fragile notions of privilege, entitlement, and exceptionalism that appears to be its default signifier across the world.

It can be argued that the defining aspect of being a human being is that of subjectivity. The gift of subjectivity finds its substantive underscoring in the Christian doctrine of creation where Christian teaching asserts that human beings are created in the image and likeness of God (Coleman 2007a). God's freedom to act and to be an infinite, transcendent being is bestowed upon humanity, who also possess these very same qualities of self-definition, transcendence, and agency (Baker-Fletcher 2006). To be a human subject is to possess the gift of creating meaning, through art, culture, and science and to reimagine one's world through the prism of religion and its concomitant association with the Divine. 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 (something to which I will return at a later juncture in this paper) and create internalised meaning, seeking to express agency, self-actualisation, and transcendence.

Part of the complexity of being human lies at the heart of this work and I seek to utilise it in my Practical, Black theological work with participants, which I will describe shortly. An important aspect of being human is captured in Anthony Pinn's work and his notion of 'Complex Subjectivity' (Pinn 2003). 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 and ontological value that they are in effect reduced to becoming an object, with no internal, self-defined meaning-making capacities. In effect, they become what others say they are!

The privations of 'fixed identity', which is the dangerous offspring of objectification, is the impositions of non-changing and unmediated forms of imposed constructions of self onto marginalised and oppressed peoples (Hopkins 2005). One sees fixed identity in the ways in which racist societies 'fix' Black and other minority ethnic people as being 'less than' and of 'limited agency' in terms of their capabilities and potentialities. A particular pathology of fixed identity can be found in the casual tendency to construct notions of 'repressive representation' (Reddie 2006), as I have termed it in a previous piece of work, in which minority ethnic people are deemed to be representative of all person with whom they share some sense of identity. It is interesting to note, for example, the ways in which Barack Obama, as the 44th incumbent of that office had to endure the repressive representation of all African Americans, in terms of his capacity to lead the country as Commandering Chief, in ways that were not imposed on the previous 43 incumbents, all of whom were White men.

To see White privilege writ large simply observe the welter of academic and electoral experience Obama needed to become President compared to the lack of any demonstrable experience in the present incumbent. And I can guarantee that whatever the shortcomings of the present incumbent, his apparent failings will not besmirch the wider phenomenon of Whiteness and the subjectivity of rich White men who have, hitherto, seen it as their entitlement to run the country.

Drawing on Pinn's notion of 'Complex Subjectivity', provides an inspired model for challenging Black people to wrestle with their multiple forms of subjectivity. Complex subjectivity provides critical insights into the many ways in which we name ourselves and how those various forms of subjectivity give rise to differing perceptions of self. The various ways in which we name ourselves are also indicators of the means by which selfhood and subjectivity are also linked issues of gender, class, ethnicity, sexuality, and of course, religious belonging.

Complex subjectivity has been integral to Black people because it has been our determined attempt to resist being reduced to mere objects and treated as chattel. Drawing on Pinn's notion of 'Complex Subjectivity', is a helpful model for challenging Black people to wrestle with their multiple forms of subjectivity. Pinn argues that Black religion is the deepest expression and yearning of Black people to want express their sense of being complex subjects. Pinn writes

> I would like to define religious experience, in the context of black America, as the recognition of and response to the elemental feeling for complex subjectivity and the accompanying transformation of consciousness that allows for the historical manifest battle against the terror of fixed identity. (Pinn 2003, 175)

Embracing complex subjectivity is to acknowledge that multiple ways of belonging have always been a part of the religio-cultural repertoire of being a Diasporan African human being. We have always been complex in our religious, cultural imagination, and configuration. Pinn's notion of complex subjectivity provides an important framework for understanding the expansive impulse within Diasporan African people to seek, within religion, a means of constructing an elaborate, richly intricate, and textured means of being human. Pinn outlines the material, religio-cultural repertoire of practices and artefacts African Americans, in particular, have developed as indices for Black selfhood. One of the challenges for Black people is how we seek to name themselves in ways that do not conform to the external imposition of racialised identities Coleman 2007b.

Participative-practical black theology and complex subjectivity

Participative-Practical Black theology seeks to distil the central ideas of this liberative movement into teaching and learning strategies for the emancipation of all people. Participative-Practical Black theology is the nexus of Black theological reflection and critical pedagogy, in which the latter is understood as a form of transformative knowledge. My engagement with transformative knowledge has its roots in my commitment to the work of Freire (1970, 1973; Freire and Shor 1987), Shor (1992), and Banks (2006). The latter, describes transformative knowledge as that which challenges the dominant theories and paradigms that constitute normative frames of epistemology (Banks 1996).

Transformative knowledge proceeds from a critical, dialectical inquiry into the very basis of what constitutes knowledge and truth (Habermas 1971). Central to the

epistemological framing of transformative knowledge is challenging of the alleged objectivity of western scholasticism. Banks asserts that 'The assumption within the Western empirical paradigm is that knowledge produced within it is neutral and objective and that its principles are universal' (Banks 2006, 148). Its universality, is in turn, a product of its axiomatic relationship to Whiteness and the privileges accrued through the hegemonic power of White epistemology (Reddie 2006).

Perhaps the central task of this work is that of using the frameworks of transformative knowledge, as a form of Practical theology coupled with Black Theology, in order to critically re-evaluate the complex meaning of Blackness as it is juxtaposed with the monological reified construction of Whiteness. Perhaps the centrality and import of this task can be perceived in the following quotation from Gayraud Wilmore, who writes

> If I had a choice before I was born to be one color or the other, which would I prefer and why?" The pejorative connotations continued in the English vocabulary where we continue to speak of "blackmail", "blackguards", "black sheep of the family", or of having one's reputation "blackened". All these and many more found in the dictionaries, are negative images that reflect on Africans and their Diasporic descendants. On the other hand, whiteness has been consistently presented to the world as something positive – something connoting goodness, cleanliness, beauty, holiness, and purity. It would be much fairer to make the case that we are *all* somehow "obsessed" with color than to single out the psychology of black people as unfortunate. As much as we may deplore it, the color symbolism of our language in Great Britain and North America gives the whiteness/blackness dichotomy ontological significance – at least, up to the end of the twentieth century. We must wait and see what happens now in the twenty-first, but not look for any startling changes. (Wilmore 2004, 142–143)

At the heart of Participative-Practical Black theology is the use of exercises and games that enables participants to reflect critically on self through the enaction of the central activity. In order to provide an embodied reality for the practice of performative action that lies at the heart of Participative-Practical Black theology I have created a number of experiential exercises in which adult participants can explore the dynamics of encounter within a safe learning environment.

This particular piece of performative action operates within a defined learning environment in which religious participants are asked to complete a series of sentences that are identical. Each individual is given a sheet on which is written 20 identical sentences. Each sentence starts with the words 'My name is … and I am … '. Each person is asked to fill in the two blanks. The assumption is that the first space remains the same for people as they largely use their given and familial name as preferred form of personal identifier. So in my case, my name is Anthony George Reddie. The second space is somewhat more complicated as each person is then invited to insert into it anything they wish as a means of describing themselves. In effect, they are offering a quintessential 'I am' statement. The test is for each person to put down 20 different I am statements on their sheet as a means of defining themselves as a person in terms of their subjectivity.

The point of the exercise is to help people make sense of their complex subjectivities. The challenge of how we live across our tangled and complicated lines of ethnic and cultural differences is one that is essential if human beings are going to be enabled to hold in dialectical tension the intercultural notions of self that resound within each individual. In the exercise, the different participants are challenged to determine their individual agency as they name themselves using 'I am' statements. The exercise juxtaposes the seeming

fixity of their name with the mutating and shifting ways in which each person names themselves whether in terms of role, gender, activities, religious belonging, characteristics, personal traits etc. The exercise invites participants to reflect on and interpret their different I am sayings for meaning and truth. What does it mean to say that 'I am a man' or 'I am a woman'? How does one understand what it means to say 'I am a Christian' or for the few that do so, to understand 'I am White' alongside other I am statements such as 'I am British' or 'I am English'?

In using this exercise, reflecting on the challenge of complex subjectivity over against the limitations of fixed identity, it has enabled me to hold in tension my various 'I am sayings' that exist in my lived consciousness, in terms of 'I am a Christian', sitting alongside 'I am Black' 'I am male' or 'I am a Methodist' or 'I am a descendent of Africans', 'I am the child of Jamaican parents' 'I am British' 'I am from Yorkshire' etc. How do all these sit together and in what ways do they make me similar or different to others? In what ways am I similar to some White people who are also of working-class backgrounds in West Yorkshire and are also Methodists? When I am naming my 'I am statements' in light of complex subjectivity, in what ways am I expressing my transgressive self that disrupts notions of fixed identity, particularly in terms of my Protestant evangelical Christian upbringing and the often narrow doctrinal frameworks that are often bound up in this form of Christianity? For example, is 'Jesus the only way' as understood in an evangelical reading of John 14:6?

When using this exercise with mixed groups, it challenges all participants to reflect critically on their naming strategies in relation to others, particularly, if the other is someone from another continent. How do predominantly White people from the dominant north learn from and engage with the self-naming strategies of those from the margins of the global south? In what ways do White working class people have more in common with migrants from the global south than they do with rich, privileged White people who run the country? I shall return to this point at the conclusion of this paper for it speaks to the very heart of the Brexit phenomenon.

This approach is one that challenges participants to own the multiple ways in which they name and define themselves, utilising the concept of complex subjectivity in order to overcome the old colour blind adage of steadfastly refusing to see 'race', ethnicity, and difference (Reddie 2005), but does not essentialise these notions into unhelpful and restrictive boundaries and borders (Anderson 1995).

One of the outcomes of the exercise has been the way in which many White participants often fail to name the contextuality of their Whiteness. I have not encountered many White people whose self-naming refers in any significant sense to their Whiteness. This emotional and psychological failure reflects the wider failings of most White British theologians, Practical or otherwise, to write about Whiteness. White Practical theologians may reflect on the fluid complexities of what it means to be a human being, but they rarely foreground their own embodied reality as a White person as they do so. For too long now, many White theologians have written as if their very Whiteness (or maleness) carried no ethical or epistemological weight in their attempts to undertake constructive God-talk.

In Practical theology, the two exceptions in more recent times have been the work of Webster (2008), and Beaudoin and Turpin (2014). Tom Beaudoin and Katherine Turpin's essay looking at White Practical theology is an important critique of the generalised, universalism, and normative ubiquity of Whiteness in much Practical theological work in the

field, particularly, in the US. Their essay draws on the ground breaking theo-ethical work Perkinson (2004). Beaudoin and Turpin's essay is excellent in terms of exposing the axiomatic epistemological privilege that underpins White, Practical theology. Unlike, Webster's work, however, the implications of Whiteness on their own embodied subjective self is not interrogated. Webster's work, constructing around a series of reflective narrative vignettes, outlines the implications of her own subjective understanding of her Whiteness as a child of the Methodist manse, an LGBT activist, a lay theologian, and a Christian. Her work does not make the often common mistake of many well-meaning White progressive theologians who are content to name and articulate the subjectivity of the other, with whom they are seeking to be an ally without ever deconstructing their own Whiteness and its concomitant reflexivity, in terms of the privilege that allows them to undertake their scholarly work in the first instance.

Many Black and minority ethnic people stood back as we watched ourselves continually racialised whilst our White colleagues and peers had the luxury of writing as disembodied spectres. Most of the Black participants have consistently found naming strategies that speak to the constructive challenges of being a full human being in a world that has rarely accorded them that status.

This form of theological undertaking is based upon a liberative Black theological ethic that calls upon White people to look critical at their Whiteness and to reflect upon the ways in which White supremacist thought and action has exerted a profound and corrosive influence upon the Christianity faith. The historical thought forms that have arisen from White normativity have not only advantaged White people, but also exerted unimagined pressures and negative traits upon Black people (Byron 2002).

So what does this mean for post-Brexit Britain?

I believe that the Brexit vote clearly demonstrated the barely concealed exceptionalism and sense of entitlement of predominantly White English people. The clear xenophobia underpinning the leave campaign reminded many of us that 'True Britishness' equals Whiteness and that those who are deemed the 'other', be it 'migrants' living in the UK or 'foreigners' in Europe are distinctly less deserving in the eyes of many White British people. It can be argued that the romantic push for the nostalgia of the past (when Britain had the biggest empire the world has ever seen), is predicated on the intrinsic value of Britain being superior to others, often seen in terms of groups such as 'Britain First' or other groups on the political right who want to 'Make Britain great again'. To quote the Black British social commentator Gary Younge

> Not everyone, or even most of the people who voted leave were driven by racism. But the leave campaign imbued racists with a confidence they have not enjoyed for many decades and poured arsenic into the water supply of our national conversation.[2]

It is my contention that the vote for Brexit was very much based on the presumption of White normality and the belief that the needs of poor, disenfranchised White people would be better served if the numbers of other poor minority ethnic people and others

[2]For an insightful left-wing critique of Brexit that challenges class-based notions of privilege and explores notions of White entitlement and racism, see the following link. https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/jun/24/eu-vote-uk-diminished-politics-poisoned-racism (Accessed 23rd May 2017).

from outside of the UK were reduced. The fact that so many poor White people believed such blandishments can be explained, in part, by my presumption that Whiteness remains a site for privilege notions of belonging and its concomitant subjectivity is one embedded in paradigms buttressed by superiority and entitlement.

The exercise is designed to help participants see that all human beings are sites for complex subjectivity. For Black people, this means that our notions of self are ones that are transcendent of the privations of fixed identity and the constrictions of objectification. For the White participants, the exercise is an invitation to see their own subjectivity as a complex and nuanced set of constructions that transcends the illusory paradigms of superiority and entitlement that have often bedevilled Whiteness. In effect, all people are subject to some form of fixed identity and objectification.

Looking at the complex 'I am statements' of poorer, marginalised, and disaffected White people often reveal responses that demonstrate the illusory characteristics of Whiteness and entitlement that is a reminder of the obfuscated nature of the rigged and biased construction of British society that has never served them well. Conversely, the 'I am statements' of some rich White people reveal responses that are ensconced in entitlement and social advantage. Given these experiential subjective constructions, one has to query the extent to which we can believe the veracity of accounts that assert that rich White conservative politicians are in solidarity with their disenfranchised, White counterparts.

Quite frankly, I find this to be a risible, ridiculous, and reactionary proposition. The reasons why many poor White people are poor has very little do with other poor people from the global south or from Eastern Europe. Rather, it is a result of a skewed system that was never set up for many of them to succeed in the first instance. In short, poor housing or even the shortage of it is not the fault of migrants of minority ethnic people. There has always been a shortage of affordable and acceptable housing for those at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder. The paucity of skilled, accessible jobs is, again, not the fault of migrants. Neo-liberal forms of capitalism are at fault and this economic paradigm has never been concerned to confer dignity on those at the bottom of the social ladder, whether they are White British or the other. Yet, rather than permitting ordinary people to see the rigged system of British society for what it is, namely, one built on White middle class, often public school-based privilege, it was easier to blame our social ills on minorities and 'foreigners' and to tap into a historic framework of xenophobia and scapegoating of those who are othered as opposed to critiquing a biased and discriminatory system (Girard 2013).

The use of scapegoating to blame those who are different is not new. Black scholars have shown the extent to which the White establishment has always used the presence of those not seen to be part of the mainstream as a means of deflecting attention away from those with power and privilege for whose benefit Britain has largely been run (Lewis 2016, 107–120). The reasons for the Brexit vote is undoubtedly contested, so it is important that I acknowledge that my following remarks are my reflections on this subject, in the context of my analysis on this phenomenon. I believe that the success of Brexit was a carefully orchestrated piece of political theatre that convinced many ordinary people not to look at the rigged system of British social, economic, and political life that has always been run for the benefit of a few.

So the 'winners', the predictable figures such as Michael Gove, Boris Johnson, and Nigel Farage, succeeded in this as they do in many other aspects of British life, by deflecting attention from themselves and onto the scapegoats, namely minorities, especially those who have migrated to this country.

The exercise at the heart of this paper utilises a model of Participative-Practical Black theology that creates a process of assisting White participants in deconstructing their often unmarked, subliminal modes of Whiteness. In this context, the exercise provides an experiential bridge between lived experience and theoretical analysis.

Can a participative-Practical Black theology become a resource for assisting Whiteness to become a more nuanced ally for those who are the objectified other? The exercise and the reflections that emerge from it attempts to enable White participants to tap into the complex and nuanced ways in which human subjectivity has been explored in terms of Blackness and the contested ways in which Black bodies have been represented for centuries. Can this form of work enable White participants to understand their own Whiteness as a fluid construct that resonates to notions of complex subjectivity that transcends the illusory fixed identity of entitlement, normativity, and superiority that has imprisoned White people just as racism as objectified Black people?

It is my theory that Brexit emerged, in part, due to subterranean, unmarked construction of Whiteness, which in its post-imperial melancholy, needed a scapegoat on which to blame its palpable fragility (Gilroy 2005). The exercise at the heart of this paper and the broader work of 'Participative-Practical Black theology' cannot pretend to have all the answers, for no theory or practice can attain that level of perfection. The pedagogical practice of this work offers a methodological proposal for Practical theologians to reflect on the qualitative, subjective dimensions of the discipline. This approach to exploring and deconstructing theological anthropology is one that can lay bare the concealed nature of Whiteness that has been oftentimes too much of an obfuscated phenomenon for White Christians in the UK. The exercise can be repeated by many practitioners with individuals and groups, as a means of assisting White people to become potential, anti-racist allies to Black people and those who are othered within the UK. Anyone skilled at group work can use the exercise and I hope that they will. It is conscious attempt to explore subterranean White human identity.

I believe this worked example is one that can see the potential for seeking to educate and empower ordinary people to see the world more clearly, so that in the salient words of Pete Townsend of the Who, we 'Won't get fooled again' (The Who 1971).

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