Black identity and experience in Black Theology: A critical assessment

Clyde Nicholas Stephen Ramalaine
Student Number: 20501331 Supervisor: Prof. H.J.M. Van Deventer

Dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Masters of Arts (Theology) at the Faculty of Humanities, North—West University (Vaal Triangle Campus)

November 2015

NORTH-WEST UNIVERSITY
YUNIBESITI YA BOKONE-BOPHIRIMA
NOORDWES-UNIVERSITEIT
Acknowledgments

To my Creator, the Triune God whom I profess in Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who equally has extended to me His grace to pursue this research project. To Him my sincerest gratitude for health, insight and the extended opportunity to work.

To my wife, best friend and covenant partner Valencia ‘Lynne’ who has tirelessly listened to the crystallizing of my thoughts on this in both dream and finality expressions. Thanks Sweet—pea for your patience and longsuffering.

To my three growing sons, Leigh-Ran Carlisle, Chandler Le Mont and Chad Lamar Joseph you have proven very patient with me whilst I worked on this project.

To my late dad Lincoln Bradley and my mother Mona Mercy, being raised by a combination of you as distinguished educators, you instilled in me the appetite for critical thinking. I remain heavily indebted to both of you for who I am.

To my Study Leader Professor H. J. M. (Hans) Van Deventer who from the start had an open ear for my thoughts as expressed in ‘ons verkenningsgesprek’. Your professional and academic thrust combined with your undeniable patience and focussed attitude, especially during intervals when balancing the many aspects of my life proved challenging served as a source of inspiration. A huge thank you!

To my friend and colleague Vincent van Breda an astute mind, for the many hours of deliberating and for reading this script, thank you.

To Professor Chris Landsberg a dear friend for our regular planned and unplanned musings on our political landscape and its unfolding characteristics. Thank You!

To Confirmed Word Faith Church Intl, thank you for loving me enough and proving willing to accept my call extends beyond the local assembly into a wider universe.

To Dr. Allan A. Boesak a dear friend and Professor James H. Cone arguably the two main interlocutors for this research, who as pioneers for a black theology notion had inspired this work.
Abstract

This study attempts to be a socio–critical analysis of black identity and experience as advanced in Black Theology. It assesses the influential role of ideology inadvertently exerted on the theology in leading perhaps to the uncritical adoption of a construct of 'black' as denotation for a people’s human agency. Throughout the study the USA and South African experiences are engaged, since this historical reality in both black ideology and black theology is undeniable.

This conflation of identity and experience is tacit in Black Theology and this study argues that perhaps an unforced error was committed with the adoption of the construct 'black' and maybe time has come to revisit it.

Chapter 1 communicates our observation of a tension of a black identity and black experience in black theology and how these often in conflated muddled senses are communicated and defended.

Chapter 2 engages the subject matter of the black identity and blackness how these interact and is understood from a varied angle and trajectory.

Chapter 3 gives a cursory relook at the genesis of black consciousness and black power as the ideological premise and proverbial cradle for a theology defined as Black Theology.

Chapter 4 unpacks the genesis of Black Theology as a mutually shared construct between the USA and South Africa. It assesses as to how its pioneers and those of later generations for and against engage its mandate, aim, purpose and role.

Chapter 5, focuses on the notion of a Black Church, how it is defined, understood, romanticised, engaged and even pleaded in longing for.

Chapter 6 postulates a plausible burden for the continuance and upkeep of a “black” identity. The postulated burden though anchored in the overarching racial classification finds expression in a multiple manifested realities of “black” conflicted psychology, poverty, criminality, self–hate, empowerment, victimology and entitlement.

Chapter 7 reflects on black identity and the Redemptive Work of Christ through a defining text of Galatians 3: 28. It asks what the implications are for identity in which the body of Christ consummates a new reality for description in fullness of articulation for the believer.

Chapter 8 concludes as revisiting the proverbial road travelled in this study.

It is the intention of the study to argue for a revisit of identity construction and formulation, thus a remythologising of what constitutes a black identity in a politically freed South Africa and how this finds expression.
**Samevatting**

Die studie poog om 'n sosio–kritiese analise van swart identiteit en ervaring soos deur Swart Teologie voorgehou, te doen. Dit evaluer die invloedryke rol van ideologie op die teologie wat blykbaar geleë het tot 'n onkritiese ontlenting van die konstruk 'swart' as identiteits–merker vir 'n groep mense se mens--wees. Die studie behandel deurgaans die VSA en Suid Afrika in gesamentlike ervarings, juist omdat die werklikheid van so 'n verbonde geskiedenis in beide swart ideologie en swart teologie rugbaa is.

Die vermenging van identiteit en ervaring is tasbaar in Swart Teologie en die studie beklemt oor dat daar moontlik 'n onvoorsienende oordeelsfout begaan is met die aanneem van die konstruk swart soos ontled vanuit Swart Ideologie.

Hoofstuk 1 kommunikeer ons waarneming opgesom as 'n probleemstelling van die spanning van 'n swart identiteit en swart ervaring in Swart Teologie en juist hoe die twee dikwels in onduidelikheid gekommunikeer en verdedig word.

Hoofstuk 2 besin oor die onderwerp van 'n swart identiteit en swartheid en hoe die twee aspekte met mekaar verband hou, asook hoe dit vertolk word uit 'n verskeidenheid van invalshoek oor 'n bepaalde tydsduur.

Hoofstuk 3 gee 'n verkorte samevatting oor die ontstaan van Swart Bewustheid en Swart Mag as die ideologiese basis en spreekwoordelike baarmoeder vir 'n teologie genaamd Swart Teologie.

Hoofstuk 4 poog om 'n uiteensetting te gee van die ontstaan van Swart Teologie as gedeelde konstrukt tussen die VSA en Suid Afrika. Dit gaan na hoe die pioniers en selfs latere generasies vir---en---teen rondom die teologie besin oor mandaat, doel, taak asook rol.

Hoofstuk 5 neem die konsep Swart Kerk onder die loep, en vra na hoe dit verstaan word vanuit 'n bepaalde geskiedenis, 'n huidige en ook 'n toekomsperspektief.

Hoofstuk 6 beklemt oor 'n gepostuleerde moontlike juk vir die instandhou van 'n “swart” identiteit. Die juk, alhoewel vertolk as geankerd in rasseklassifikasie, vind uitdrukking in meervoudige sigbare realiteite van 'n “swart” gekonflikteerde sielkunde, armoede, kriminaliteit, self--haat, bemagtiging, viktimologie en eie--beregting.

Hoofstuk 7 besin oor 'n swart identiteit aan die hand van die verlossingswerk van Christus Jesus, onderlê deur 'n rigtingsgewende teks soos gelees in Galasiers 3:28. Dit vra
wat die implikasies is vir identiteit nagelang die ligaam van Christus as beskrywend van ‘n nuwe realiteit rondom identiteit vir die gelowige meebbring.

Hoofstuk 8 is ‘n samevatting van die spreekwoordelike pad waarlangs ons gekom het met die studie.

Dit bly die hoop van die studie om gesprek te ontlok rondom identiteitskonstruksie, selfs formulering van ‘n remitologisering van hoe ‘n swart identiteit in ‘n politieke bevryde Suid Afrika daar uitsien en hoe dit juis uitspraak vind.

**Key words:** Church, Black Theology, Identity, Blackness, USA and South Africa
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**CHAPTER 1** ................................................................. 1
**INTRODUCTION AND PROBLEM STATEMENT** ......................................................... 1

1.1 PROBLEM STATEMENT ................................................................. 1
1.2 OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH ......................................................... 6
1.3 HYPOTHESIS .................................................................................. 7
1.4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY .................................................................. 7
1.5 DIVISION OF CHAPTERS .................................................................... 8

**CHAPTER 2** ........................................................................... 10
**BLACKNESS AND BLACK IDENTITY** ................................................... 10

2.1 INTRODUCTION ........................................................................... 11
2.2 UNDERSTANDING IDENTITY AS SUBJECT .......................................... 12
2.3 BLACKNESS EXPLAINED .................................................................. 15
2.4 A CONFLATION OF EXPRESSION OF BLACKNESS .................................. 16
2.5 RETRACING THE IDEOLOGICAL CONSTRUCT OF BLACKNESS ................. 16
  2.5.1 The Black Subject .................................................................... 16
  2.5.2 Blackness as Suffering .............................................................. 20
  2.5.3 The Paradox of a Blackness of Suffering ....................................... 22
  2.5.4 Blackness as a “justified projected exaction” .................................... 26
  2.5.5 Blackness as Philosophy in Black Theology and its Psychological Consequences .......................................................... 29
2.6 WHAT IS IN A NAME? BLACK NATIONALISM’S ARTICULATION OF IDENTITY .................................................................................. 31
2.7 A CONTESTATION OF BLACKNESS ................................................... 31

**CHAPTER 3** ........................................................................... 33
**A CURSORY HISTORY OF BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS** ................................. 33

3.1 INTRODUCTION ........................................................................... 34
3.2 A HISTORY OF SLAVERY IN THE USA .............................................. 34
3.3 ROOTS OF BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS: A USA PERSPECTIVE ................. 36
3.4 A HISTORY OF STRUGGLE IN SOUTH AFRICA ................................... 41
3.5 BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS: A SOUTH AFRICAN RESPONSE .................. 42
3.6 UNDERSTANDING BLACK POWER ................................................... 47
3.7 ADOPTING THE ‘BLACK’ NOTION FOR AN IDENTITY ............................ 50

**CHAPTER 4** ........................................................................... 54
**BLACK THEOLOGY AND BLACK IDEOLOGY** .......................................... 54

4.1 INTRODUCTION ........................................................................... 55
4.2 WHAT IS BLACK THEOLOGY? .......................................................... 55
4.3 THE ORIGINS OF BLACK THEOLOGY .................................................. 56
  4.3.1 A History of Liberationist Thought: A US Perspective .................. 56
  4.3.2 A Genesis of Black Theology: South African Perspective .............. 58
4.4 THE RATIONALE FOR BLACK THEOLOGY .......................................... 59
  4.4.1 The Task of Black Theology ........................................................ 61
  4.4.2 Purpose for Black Theology ........................................................ 61
  4.4.3 Goal of Black Theology ............................................................... 62
  4.4.4 Does Black Theology have a Kerygma? ...................................... 62
  4.4.5 The Struggle Element of Black Theology ..................................... 63
  4.4.6 A Situational Theology ............................................................... 64
Chapter 1
INTRODUCTION & PROBLEM STATEMENT

1.1. Problem Statement

There appears to be a vacuum in thought as well as expression as to a common understanding and definition of the concept “black” as defined in Black Theology. It is not clear if Black Theology draws a definitive distinction or connection between the experience of being “black” and the identity of being black. In addition, there is also no congruence of thought on what constitutes the blackness of the experience. This meshing of identity and experience necessitates enquiry as to what is meant by “black” in Black Theology.

If the experience was black and such blackness necessarily was informed by the oppressor’s original intent and scope of defining a people according to a black skin tone, then the question must be asked, why was it necessary to define a theology as black instead of a “Theology of the Oppressed”? The “black” in Black Theology proves problematic since it fails to unambiguously define “black”, be it as experience or identity. Allan A Boesak (1976:1) notes “Black Theology is the theological reflection of black Christians on the situation in which they live and on their struggle for liberation. Blacks ask what it means to believe in Jesus when one is black and living in a world controlled by white racists. And what if these racists call themselves Christian also?”

According to Itumeleng Mosala, Black Theology as is commonly accepted is a subset of the Black Consciousness Movement and was used as a cultural tool for struggle by young black Africans who endeared themselves to black consciousness in the late 1960’s and 1970’s (Mosala, 1989:1).

Perhaps a critical question here is whether it is possible to be subjugated to a black experience by oppressors who dictate their superiority by way of a “white” impression, without this experience becoming definitive of one’s personal and collective identity?

Whilst appreciation can and must be shown for the historical, evolutionary track of the concept of blackness and its usage by the protagonists of the Black Power and Black Consciousness movements to argue and advocate for the empowerment of a people in an epoch of total white supremacist power, it is necessary to draw a distinction between what the white progenitors of the concept “black” meant or intended with this concept and those who appropriated such, for defence or as a means of resistant self--assertion.
For Boesak, (1976:27) authentic humanity means black humanity. He further asserts that, “Blacks know that racial fellowship and reconciliation will never become a reality unless whites learn to accept blacks as black people.”

It is precisely this sense of finality in defining a people by colour that constitutes the core of the problem, for when black theologians such as Cone (1975a, 1975c, 1985, 1991), Boesak (1976), Mosala (1989), Goba (1986, 1988) and others talk of an authentic humanity being a black humanity, it raises more questions than answers for it suggests that they too had internalised the appellation of black and made it their own when they had equally failed to critically ask what is meant by black.

It would appear that a particular oppressed experience of a particular people ultimately defined the identity of the people as “black”, forever. Seemingly, the intent was to celebrate a new identity in an attempt to make the most of this appellation, for if this is done the power would be wrested from the white oppressor whilst at the same time empowering a disenfranchised “black” people to stake their claim in a hostile environment.

It is the assertion of this study that the existing literature on Black Theology, starts off in an uncritical mode. Such an acceptance constitutes a problem by not questioning or challenging the asserted blackness but uncritically embracing it. The same uncritical acceptance gives impetus, definition and content to, and actualises, a disempowered identity for the human so defined that was supposed to be empowering. The challenge with this uncritical acceptance is that by default it embraces a definition that does not originate from black people themselves, nor is completely understood by them, yet it is used with a sense of certainty by them to redefine their being.

The further challenge with the uncritical acceptance of such a black identity is that it confines a people to narrowly seeing themselves through the lens of colour. As alluded to earlier, Boesak (1976:27) argues that racial fellowship and reconciliation are only possible when whites learn to accept blacks as black people. This notion continues to draw people’s identity as purely informed by colour which remains an arbitrary and random notion and proves unhelpful as it calls for a perpetual embrace of colour to define the complexity of one’s humanity. As much as the veracity of blackness as a means of empowering a people is asserted, it falls short of asking the critical question: who determined this blackness and what is the content of blackness?

This study shall argue that whilst “black”, as used to define a people, in its original conceptual framework had a specific liberatory motive, which we readily acknowledge, this study contends that it resulted in a more destructive and paralysing outcome
because of the uncritical appropriation of an identifier by the very people who were wrongly so defined by their oppressors.

This study will argue that such an appropriation damned a people to be bound to colour in defining themselves ad infinitum. It is, therefore, the appropriation of a black identity on the part of those who were defined as black without their input that proves problematic. The very appropriation of this black identity now in this era proves burdensome. The denotation of “black” proves to be a deformed notion with a plethora of accompanying consequences for a people seeking to define themselves as free from the shackles of such definition. This is in order to be free to be who they decide themselves to be. This is a future task. The focus of this dissertation is to problematise the uncritical use of the notion of “black” in Black Theology.

In addition, the appropriation of this black identity implies the co—existence of an identity of white designation. Hence the assertion of the study is that the perpetuation of a false black identity inadvertently guarantees the livelihood and existence of a false white identity. To support this argument one may quote James Cone (1991:130): “Even when blacks did not share [Martin Luther] King’s faith that whites and blacks were created by God for each other, they nonetheless shared his assumption that blacks were not leaving America and that practically speaking, whites, blacks together (as well as others) must learn how to internalize the principle of mutual respect for each other's humanity or no one would survive”.

This brings us to the notion of identity which must be contextualised so as to derive meaning in relation to the black identity espoused by black theologians. This work recognises that there exists a plethora of definitions on identity and that identity in and of itself is not static but is fluid and informed by a variety of variables. However, for our context dealing with a group (defined as black) we shall be guided by the resource pool of cultural studies (in particular Barker, 2008) to guide us through the concepts of identity, therefore seeking to understand how such identity speaks to the black identity being advanced by black theology.

According to Barker (2008:216), “Identity is best understood not as a fixed entity but as an emotionally charged discursive description of ourselves that is subject to change”. A key question following this definition as advanced by Barker is, does black theology and black consciousness agree that the identifier “black” in Black Theology is subject to change?

Furthermore, in our study the evolution of the self through the perspective of Stets and Burke (2005: 130) shall be our guide. This arguably would mean our view of self is at best a social one that is informed by us interacting with others.
Black identity and experience in Black Theology: A critical assessment

Stets and Burke (2005:130) note, “Thus paradoxically, as the self emerges as a distinct object, there is at the same time a merger of perspectives of the self and others, and a becoming one with the others with whom one interacts. This becoming one is possible through the shared meanings of the objects and symbols to which individuals respond in interaction. In using language, individuals communicate the same meanings to themselves as to others.”

From this it is fair to conclude that the definition of self is both individual and social. Such a definition gives meaning to how the self is sustained as it constitutes the platform for interaction with others and ultimately the social structure.

Moreover, the notion of the salience of identity is necessarily informed by the degree of commitment one has to that identity (Stets & Burke, 2005:135). Such salience of identity must not necessarily be seen in isolation. The key idea is to understand that there is a commitment needed for an identity to take shape. This is particularly noteworthy since this work concerns itself with asking, why “blacks” are committed to the “black” identity. I shall therefore argue that the salience of black identity is directly related to the degree of commitment that “black” people have shown towards such identity.

Given the above technical universe of the notion of identity it becomes imperative for humans, who embody content and structure, to point out firstly for themselves and also equally to others, who they are, for it assists the development of a concept and view of who they are (Stets & Burke, 2005:130).

The abovementioned is important since the issue of identity construction is a social resource sociologists are in agreement that all humans need. This study will argue that the oppressed is rightfully owed the opportunity and space of defining their self—concept and equally to communicate such a self—concept for others to accept. This study will argue that what suffered in the act of the uncritical appropriation of blackness as an identity is a self—crafted self—concept by those who were victims of an oppressed experience.

In order to advance this logically and to synchronise our argument this study consciously operates in the symbolic world of Black Theology. Black Theology is commonly referred to as a sister theology of two other streams, namely Liberation and Feminist Theology. We see this when Thiselton (1992:410) asserts “Latin American liberation hermeneutics, black hermeneutics, and feminist hermeneutics tend to share certain major themes. First and foremost they construct, critiques of frameworks of interpretation which are used or presupposed in dominant traditions”.

Black identity and experience in Black Theology: A critical assessment

Liberation and feminist theologies no dissimilar to black theology sought to articulate the resistance to oppression defined in one economic group over another and one gender over the other. The parameters could be argued to have been the same, namely oppression. Of these three streams of theology, Black Theology appears to be the only one to have embraced the colour notion in defining itself. Towards the end of this chapter we allude to the work of Thiselton as he contextualises liberation theologies and critique their lacking socio–critical reflection while being socio–pragmatic in outlook.

The question therefore is what made those who advanced this theology prefix it with ‘black’ as a means to describe a people’s faith and even later a people’s identity with such finality? Marian Hillar (1993:35) notes that Phillip Berryman described liberation theology in the following terms: “Liberation Theology is: An Interpretation of Christian faith out of suffering, struggle, and hope of the poor; A critique of society and the ideologies sustaining it; A critique of the activity of the church and of Christians from the angle of the poor.”

A careful analysis of the genesis of a Liberation Theology points one to the fact that it was poverty and suffering that was the issue it sought to address, yet when the theologians of Liberation Theology began to define their interpretation of God’s position on poverty they opted to focus on liberation as the predominant theme and an active and appropriate description of their theology. The proponents of Liberation Theology refused to be defined by either colour or economic status, but opted to focus the teleology of the struggle against oppression informed by the concept “liberation”. This work acknowledges the fact that G.O. West (2003) among others in his work in a South African context uses the notion ‘poor’ as he engages the bigger theme of liberation theology.

This study critically explores the question why Black Theology opted to define its theology as “black” and what was meant with such definition in the final analysis.

The key questions therefore are: What is meant by an identity? What is meant by black theology? Does it seek to define the essence of the theology of those who are “black”, in contrast to “white”? Does it attempt to cast light on the God—knowledge of “black people”, who are defined as “black” by “white” people? Is the experience of blackness that finds meaning in the understanding of their God? What is meant with the notion of the Black Church within the present—day non—racial society? Is it the theology of blackness? Is there any burden attached to a black identity in a non—racial society? How does it engage with the redemptive context of being in Christ?

The primary interlocutors for this study will be James H. Cone and Allan A. Boesak. Cone and Boesak it can be argued constitute the axis for the development of a black theology
notion and equally had enormous influence on the later development of the term. In this regard the importance of Cone is underscored by Mosala (1989:14) when he observes “All major black theological studies in South Africa draw in some way on the work of James Cone... For Cone, the Word of God represents one structural pole of the biblical hermeneutics of black theology; while the black experience constitutes the other... the black experience of oppression... provides the epistemological lens through which to perceive the God of the Bible as the God of liberation.”

Thus, the rationale for choosing Cone is the fact that his body of work on the subject of Black Theology is extensive. He also represents the 1960’s, a very active era from a USA context, and stands out as the foremost mind on the notion of a black theology.

Equally, the rationale for choosing Boesak is the fact that he in a South African context had tremendous influence on the subject matter and had helped shaped the core of how the theology was articulated as a representative of the mid--70’s. Again for South Africa this era represents a defining moment in Black Consciousness and Black Theology. Boesak is key for the clarity with which he articulates his point of view on Black Theology. Whilst Mothlabi is credited for his earlier 1974 work on Black Theology, Boesak remains a serious contender for having given a South African equivalent to what Cone did for the USA.

This work acknowledges that Boesak was in conversation with Cone, and this work is in dialogue with both Cone and Boesak because they are key interlocutors for this tradition.

This study seeks to explore whether, since “blacks” did not coin the concept “black” and its content to define themselves, they therefore, owe no allegiance nor duty to defend such an identity burnt into their experience of oppression.

The study will further argue that the perpetual incorrect loyalty on the part of Africans to this appropriated identity defined as black is the fundamental reason for Africans’ inability to transcend their dependence on white economic, social, political and intellectual resources.

1.2 Objectives of the Research

This study will seek to track the history of Black Theology and its appropriation of “black” as a means to define a people and its faith. Furthermore, the study wishes to extrapolate the challenges accompanying such an appropriation. The driving questions of the study are:

• Where did the identifier “black” emanate from?
1.3 Hypothesis

It is the contention of this study that in view of the absence of a clear self—definition of the concept “black” in Black Theology an unforced error was committed by black theologians in appropriating the identifier without investigating it.

Moreover, this study argues that blacks embraced the identity uncritically and became victims of an identity that did not originate from them. Rather, this study suggests that such self—defining knowledge would free people defined as black to primarily see themselves and others through the lens of the singular human race.

Furthermore, this study asserts that those who share the Christian Faith ought to move towards an understanding that people defined as black and white have much more in common because they share the communality of faith in Christ, which gives no space for colour as definitive description of identity in its redemptive narrative.

1.4 Research Methodology

This study adopts the literature study method of research and will necessarily look at a compilation of work which incorporates theology as base. The study further opted to make use of more dated material since it wanted to engage the pioneers in black theology to appreciate their handling of the subject.

This study includes material from a variety of disciplines among others history, cultural studies, sociology and anthropology as departure points to assist the journey. The work besides the many inputs from theology also considered the history inputs of Taylor (2009) and WD Wright (2007), the cultural studies contributions of C. Barker (2008), sociology contributions of Stets and Burke (2005) and the anthropology input of Gordon (2003) and Stuckey (1987). It concludes with the biblical text. The approach to holding the biblical text as fundamental is informed by the firmly held belief that it is accepted by
black theologians no different to those from other streams of ideological frameworks as the infallible word of God.

It is perhaps important to state upfront the intention of the work in its methodology is not to propose a new reading strategy. Rather the aim of this work is to engage with the theoretical principle that informed a reading strategy in Black Theology. Thus, it is primarily aimed to serve as a critique of Black Theology.

This work does not stand alone or devoid of a comparative if the broader family of liberation theologies are considered. To this extent the work of Thiselton (1992) which identifies and engages in feminist and liberation theologies as platforms for what he labels the absence of a ‘socio--pragmatic framework’ for interpretation. When he asserts “... or do they [i.e. various liberation approaches] embody a genuine socio--critical principle which unmask oppression as part of a larger trans-contextual critique” (Thiselton, 1992:410).

Thiselton (1992:410) continues by asking a further question on the liberation and feminist theologies' hermeneutical systems, “do they merely reflect back the horizons of the community of protest in self – affirmation, or do they offer a social critique under which all (or many) communities may experience correction, transformation, and enlargement of horizon?”

This question is critical not just for liberation or feminist theologies but very relevant and functional for black theology too. Particularly so, since this study explores the constructs of “identity” and “experience” of “black” in black theology and how it is perceived, understood, extrapolated, formulated and ultimately communicated by black theologians as constructs that have its own unique disposition, yet not in a vacuum but in salience to what is come to be accepted or advanced as a “white” identity or “white” experience.

This work thus in that tradition of Thiselton in some form attempts to move Black Theology towards this ‘socio--critical framework of interpretation’ which perhaps currently is not clearly formulated.

1.5 Division of Chapters

Chapter 1: Introduction and Problem Statement

Chapter 2: Blackness and Black Identity

Chapter 3: A Historical reflection on Black Consciousness
Chapter 4: Black Theology and Black Ideology

Chapter 5: The ‘Black Church’ Conundrum

Chapter 6: A postulated burden of black identity

Chapter 7: Between Christ and Black Identity

Chapter 8: Summary
“…on the one hand identity politics may be connected with the movement for justice, tolerance and solidarity, as in the US civil rights movement, the feminist movement and the anti--apartheid struggle in South Africa. On the other hand, questions of identity have been a haunting presence behind genocide in Rwanda and Bosnia. Further, the research for identity in an increasingly uncertain world is an aspect of religious movements and individual quests for meaning.”

(Barker 1992:2)
2.1 Introduction

Before we attempt to understand the genesis, context and paradigm of Black Consciousness and Black Power – essentially responsible for the concept of “black” as a philosophy and psychology of black people – we shall first explore the critical notion of identity.

It is perhaps necessary to hear a reflection on identity understood in names, as Stuckey (1987: 193) poignantly reminds us of the poetic expression in words of Tobosun Sowande:

“Ye dark – skinned peoples, are you listening?

Those who gave birth to us, before they start to speak,

they ponder profound matter.

They say: One must first consider one’s tradition and

history, before deciding on a name for a child

They say: One’s name is one’s bridle.

Ye dark skinned peoples listen to me

Our fathers did not play about with names.

To hear their names is to know their origin,

Every name a veritable Testament"

This chapter will attempt to grapple with the concept of identity from an accepted cultural studies and sociological point of view and will ask questions with regard to the identity defined as black. It is not the aim of the chapter to dissect the full ambit of the notion of identity, for that is not the focus, but rather its focus is to understand what is meant by a black identity in the construct of identity as an existing established notion. When we refer to identity as an established notion, we necessarily mean it has been advocated as such by scholars of various disciplines, especially sociology, psychology and cultural studies.

Furthermore, this chapter will attempt to understand blackness from a multiplicity of entry points. It will equally attempt to interpret the “black situation” and seek to revisit the articulation of “blackness” as understood by those who experienced it and those
Black identity and experience in Black Theology: A critical assessment

who interpreted this experience. This is done to understand the possible correlation and causal link between the “black experience” and the identity of those who were subjected to such an experience.

Whilst identity is not a static concept, but rather a fluid construct, the chapter will look at the concept of a “black identity” to critique it as little understood, ill—defined and ill— informed by assumptions, and hardly ever interrogated by theologians. The chapter will conclude in asking why the experience of blackness shapes the uncritically accepted black identity and definition of the same people.

2.2 Understanding Identity as Subject

This work is cognisant that there is a multiplicity of schools of thought as to what informs identity as defined from an anthropological, psychological and sociological platform. However, for our context dealing with a group (defined as black) we shall be guided by the cultural studies notion of identity, as we seek to understand how such identity speaks to the black identity being advanced by Black Consciousness, Black Power and subsequently Black Theology.

Barker (1999:2) acknowledges the vastness of the discourse of identity in stating, “on the one hand, identity politics may be connected with the movement for justice, tolerance and solidarity, as in the US civil rights movement, the feminist movement and the anti—apartheid struggle in South Africa. On the other hand, questions of identity have been a haunting presence behind genocide in Rwanda and Bosnia. Further, the research for identity in an increasingly uncertain world is an aspect of religious movements and individual quests for meaning.”

He asserts in these contexts it is the intent of cultural studies to explore how we come to be the kinds of people we are, how we are produced as subjects, and how we identify with certain descriptions of ourselves as male or female, black or white, young or old; in short, what kinds of identities we adopt.

Identity as defined by Barker (2008:216) “is an essence that can be signified through signs of taste, beliefs, attitudes and lifestyles. Identity is deemed to be both personal and social. It marks us out as the same and different from other kinds of people.” According to Barker (2008:216), “Identity is best understood not as a fixed entity but as an emotionally charged discursive description of ourselves that is subject to change.”

This definition of identity as advanced by Barker, introduces us to the reality of identity not as a static but as a fluid construct. It informs us that identity can be altered and informed by situations, circumstances and cultural changes. It is critical to appreciate
from this definition as advanced by Barker, that identity owes its existence in personal and social contexts to the notion of self.

For Barker, the concept of a cultural identity does not refer to a universal, fixed or essential identity but to a contingent, historically and culturally specific social construction to which language is central.

Moving to the construct of a black identity as advanced by Black Consciousness we shall ask in relation to the black identity espoused, does Black Consciousness embrace the notion of identity as subject to change? This means, can Black Consciousness embrace a conception of identity other than that defined as black?

This study concurs with sociologists that one's response to self as an object of itself is informed from the point of view of those whom one interacts with (Stets & Burke, 2005:130). This arguably would mean our view of self is a shared one that is informed by us taking the role of the other.

Hogg, Terry and White define identity salience as follows: “Identity salience is conceptualized (and operationalized) as the likelihood that the identity will be invoked in diverse situations” (Hogg, Terry & White 1995:257).

The sociologists Stets and Burke (2005:135) note that “the salience of identity is necessarily informed by the degree of commitment one has to that identity.”

This is particularly important since this study concerns itself with a question, among others, why “blacks” are committed to the “black” identity? This study concurs that the identity salience of black identity is directly related to the degree of commitment that “black” people have shown towards such identity.

However, the hypothesis stated above suggests that perhaps the time has come to remythologise the identifier “black” for those so designated. An important first step on this path to remythologise the notion of “black” as an identifier is for the human agents who embody its content and structure to construct for themselves their identity.

The aforementioned articulation of the need to determine a self—concept proves critical since the issue of self—concept advancement is a need sociologists are in agreement that all humans are entitled to meet to live a meaning—filled life. We hear this in the words of Callero (2003:1) where he cites Anthony Elliot, who observes “The emerging direction of contemporary social theory is perhaps nowhere more evident than in the attention it lavishes upon the nature of the self, self—identity, and individual subjectivity.
Callero (2003:1) contends “the past two decades of the twentieth century saw the concepts of self and identity move to the center of intellectual debate in the social sciences and the humanities.”

It must then be deduced from this that the “disenfranchised” are rightfully owed the opportunity and space of defining their self—concept and equally to communicate such a self—concept for others to accept.

If the right to a self—defined name is an inalienable right that all human beings are entitled to, the question is were those who were subjected to an oppressed experience afforded the right to define themselves? An initial unexplored answer to this question can only be no.

Furthermore, such a question may rightfully be posed to the oppressor, yet such a question must be equally posed to the oppressed.

The challenge however for the reconfiguration of a black identity by the oppressed is that it does not engage itself in a vacuum. The oppressed must execute that task cognisant of the constraints of strong theoretical articulations that shaped the conversation over the last hundred years.

For example, according to Cone (1991:10), “nothing aroused the fury of nationalists more than the racial factor in human exploitation. Their identity as black touched the very core of their being and affected their thoughts and feelings regarding everything, especially their relations with white people.”

Furthermore, Gordon (2003:2) says of race as a classification and its attendant colour descriptors, especially “black” and “white”, enjoy “almost universal usage today, though often without the pernicious assumption of the innate physical, mental and moral superiority of one group over another. Race, then is a social category. Still, it functions problematically to homogenize large groups of people and to facilitate the continuation of racism, with its systematic advantage to one group over another.”

Cone (1990:10) states for black nationalists, “their identity as black touched the very core of their being and affected their thoughts and feelings regarding everything, especially their relations with white people”. We thus deduce from Cone that race as an identifier is pervasive and consumes the totality of the core of one’s being, through which one understands and interacts with life as experienced. What Cone is not helping us with is to explain whether black identity is an inwardly (self) or outwardly (others) defined identity. It is the continuous contention of this study that it is an appropriated one.
Gordon (2003:2) asserts, “as blacks continue to pursue their struggle for freedom and justice, the constitution of their identity remains an issue in the incessantly acrimonious debate about race in America.”

This is equally true in the South African context from the point of view of the new burdens accompanying being “black” in our current non-racial social reality (see chapter 6).

This study contends that what suffered in the appropriation is the absence of a self-constructed self—concept on the part of those who were victims of a black experience.

2.3 Blackness explained

We have reached a point where we need to explore the notion of “blackness”. The notion of blackness is not merely a reference to skin colour, but it is rather a symbol of oppression, that can be applied to all persons of colour who have a history of oppression. We hear this as articulated by Boesak (1976: 26) “Blackness is a reality that embraces the totality of black existence.”

Therefore, in discussing blackness we shall incorporate both the US and South African contexts, so as to track the evolution of thought on this notion. For the purpose of explaining the variety of interpretations of blackness in these contexts we shall be guided by the common experience of socio-political and socio-economic suffering. It therefore is not the objective here to draw a distinction between an experience of blackness of slavery as opposed to an experience of apartheid but to see this as one narrative of suffering. This was meted out at the hand of the same type of oppressor and exercised on the same scale. Rather, it is the intention to understand blackness in its totality so as to derive an appreciation and explanation for it.

At the onset it is important to note that blackness, in a conceptual framework of Black Power, Black Consciousness and Black Theology, is understood differently by different groups. It appears that for some this blackness is understood as a blackness of suffering (a subject experience of pain), blackness of philosophical interpretation (a respondent conclusive adoption of value to disprove), and a blackness of rhetoric (a romanticised reduction of meaning) and a blackness of experience (as enacted by those subjected to white supremacist power). We will provide examples in citations of these as we progress in each section of the dissecting of blackness in this chapter.

Whilst noting that blackness is understood from different entry points, the study will henceforth delineate the following four themes, (blackness as suffering and its paradox, blackness as conflicted psychology, blackness as justified projected exaction and blackness as philosophy in black theology and its psychological consequences) to express
Black identity and experience in Black Theology: A critical assessment

its reading of the notion of blackness. We will attempt a chronological order to reflect the development of the construct through time.

2.4 A Conflation of Expression of Blackness

Black Consciousness appears contradictory in its articulation of blackness. There appears to be a conflation of experience and being as referent to this identity. On the one hand, this definition confirms the blackness of experience, making the experience of suffering necessarily a black one served on groups by whites. On the other hand, it proffers to see such blackness as a viable resilient notion for defining identity despite it being coined by white people and despite the full knowledge that this blackness constitutes an experience that is shameful, painful and dehumanising. Therein lies the contradiction.

This mingling of key referents to the identity of blackness needs a critical evaluation. In order to do justice to such an exercise this study shall trace the evolution of the understanding of the “black subject”. In retracing the black subject our first steps take us back to the early nineteenth century advent of Black Nationalism as it evolved in the US context.

At this juncture our task is not to provide a historical overview of Black Nationalism, for this study deals with it in chapter 3. Rather the aim here is to understand the ideology of the notion of blackness in its earliest recorded forms so as to understand the concept of blackness through the lens of the black subject.

2.5 Retracing the Ideological Construct of Blackness

2.5.1 The Black Subject

We will lean extensively on Gordon for his comprehensiveness of covering the subject of identity through a historical notion of black nationalism. Our choice for his work is informed by the fact that it amplifies the work of Stuckey on Black Nationalism beyond the original manuscripts. Gordon in this work perhaps clarifies Black Nationalism by contextualising it in contemporary rhetorical theory and criticism. Thus our choice for him is a conscious and informed one.

Gordon (2003:69) argues that the early nineteenth century marked a period in the advent of black nationalism which saw blacks in America, both ‘slave’ and ‘free’, living in the proud independent nation with very little to be proud of as well as being only dimly hopeful for their freedom in a distant future.
He states, “white supremacist perspectives that demeaned blackness (black intelligence, beauty, ability and character) were pervasive American themes” Gordon (2003: 69). Stuckey as cited by Gordon (2003:69) asserts “still it was within the ironic soil of glorious Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, which promoted the idea of freedom on the one hand and the American practices perpetrated black oppression on the other, that the ‘ideology of black nationalism would eventually take root’.

The citation as captured here helps us understand the context of the black subject in the nineteenth century, when America was celebrating its independence as a nation. The significant reality for the black subject during this period is the fact that this human agent was defined as a ‘slave’ or a ‘free black’. The paradox here is that though blacks were defined in these terms and a sense of difference was suggested, the reality was that mainstream America proved consistent in its understanding of blackness, whether ‘free’ or ‘slave’, as that which represents non–humanity. We also from this citation get an explanation of what the notion of blackness means for Gordon, as he explains it as that which refers to intelligence, beauty, ability and character.

Further, background to the content of the black subject is the framework for the ideology of black nationalism, identified as the ‘tripartite manifestation’ of American racism, i.e. “firstly there was slavery which detained ninety percent of blacks in bondage; then secondly there was the racialistic structure of the society, a moral and social order that privileged whites and stereotyped blacks as either subservient or subversive; and thirdly there is the resurgence of the long–held Anglo American desire for African colonization” Gordon (2003:72). Against this background various events unfolded that gave content to the black human agent.

Stuckey, as cited by Gordon (2003:73) notes that “the major success of the early nineteenth century was the 1808 abolition of the international slave trade”. Another defining moment Gordon highlights is eight years later on January 16, 1816, the Bethel Church in Philadelphia celebrated the establishment of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the first independent black church in the United States.

Against this backdrop, Gordon (2003:78) asserts “early nineteen century black nationalist ideology was fashioned out of the shared black experience of white oppression and especially among activist blacks the sense of a common need to extricate themselves from that experience”.

Gordon (2003:78) continues and cites Stuckey who observed “group traits and preferences” shared by people of African descent as being often demeaned by the larger society. Gordon (2003:78) says “these characteristics included skin color, arts, crafts and general ways of being united among people of African descent.”
Black identity and experience in Black Theology: 
A critical assessment

This is significant to note here for firstly, it helps us understand the timing and development of the ideology of blackness. Secondly and more importantly it identifies the experience as blackness, understood in contrast to white oppression. In the third instance, it keeps blacks accountable for liberating themselves from this oppressed experience.

Another critical component of this early ideological formation which gives content to the subject of the black human agent is the notion of “common need”, which speaks to the fact of an advanced united cohort of people of African descent.

Against this backdrop, Gordon notes that integral to this ideology was the conviction that this group was salient, especially from their white oppressors, and as such should work together to control their own life processes and ultimately their own destiny (Gordon 2003:78). In line with the unity of an experience of oppression, it appears blacks understood their situation was unique, hatched together and contained in their common blackness which must see them work together and in unity to wrest control of their own life processes with the aim of finally determining their own future.

Now, against this backdrop when we talk of the Black Nationalist ideology, two people, David Walker and Robert Alexander Young, stand out as key content providers of the black subject for having penned the Appeal and the Manifesto respectively. For Gordon, the Appeal and the Manifesto constitute the foundations of Black Nationalist ideology (Gordon 2003:79). Neither of them (Young and Walker) is normally given credit for their contributions. According to Gordon there is a misconception that no major Black Nationalist ideologists existed before Martin De Laney, and he cites Stuckey, who contended that such a misconception owes its existence largely to Harold Cruse, and his work The Crises of the Negro Intellectual. For Gordon (2003:79) Cruse in addition to the aforementioned was responsible for Black Nationalism and the ‘back to Africa’ notion.


Gordon cites Aptheker that Walker's Appeal was “the first sustained written assault upon slavery and racism to come from a black man in the United States”. Whilst Gordon agrees with Aptheker on this score, he holds the Appeal’s enduring relevance is due more to its affirmative stance than to what it negates. “brings forward repeated strands in Negro (black) life and history”. (Gordon 2003: 82)
He quotes Henry. H. Garnet’s 1848 assessment, of Walker’s Appeal, that “the work is valuable because it is among the first, and was actually the boldest and most direct appeal on behalf of freedom which was made in the early part of the Antislavery Reformation” (Gordon 2003: 82).

Gordon (2003:82) identifies the major reason for the Appeal’s continued relevance as being that “it was one of the first documents to advance a coherent vision of black self—definition and self—determination”. For Gordon, the social identity of blackness, understood through the process of interpellation and identification, is underscored by the functional rhetoric of Walker’s vision of this literary product.

Gordon notes that the Manifesto is significantly thorough in rhetoric, but it is not as sustained in its attack on slavery nor as comprehensive in its vision of black life. Young’s objective with the Manifesto resonates at a higher level in so far as it wants to raise the black human agent “from its degenerate sphere, and instil into it the rights of men – which shall lead us to the collecting together of a people” (Gordon, 2003: 82).

Gordon continues to note that “a study of these two texts as constitutive rhetorical documents illuminates the early development and materialization of the black nationalist ideology and its inherent black identity for the black human agent”. He furthermore asserts that the positive contribution of these two “rhetorics” ignited “black thought” and action to challenge Anglo—American conceptions of black identity towards their own construction of a notion of blackness. Perhaps the most significant observation that Gordon makes is that the Appeal and the Manifesto “reconstituted the black subject as an active agent of social change in the discourse – it equally in contrast constituted the white subject as the primary agent for black debasement and against black progress” (2003:80).

In summary, the above explanation gives us an understanding of how the black subject in the early nineteenth century was understood and vocalised by Black Nationalist ideologists. It appears that the black subject had a distinct existence in these quarters as proffered by the ideologists of Black Nationalism in opposition to the prevailing Anglo—American mindset.

Gordon identifies that both Walker and Young, in order to achieve their objectives, position their reconstituted black subjects to reveal and confront both the degrading physical conditions of black life and the racist discourse that demeans blackness.

For both, the basis of their claims rests in their assertion that blacks in America are “a people” or should become a people. Young and Walker both in their collective thoughts
Black identity and experience in Black Theology: A critical assessment

– in the face of the very questioning of the humanity of blacks by pro—slavery ideologies and practices – constitute a distinct challenge to the Anglo—American racist depiction of the black subject as less than human, even originally from the tribe of monkeys or orang—outangs.

For Walker, whites perpetuate a continuous audacious lie about blacks “holding them up as a tribe of talking apes void of intellect, incapable of learning”. Against this white supremacist background Gordon says, Walker overcomes the sub—human depiction of blacks, by advancing a black subjectivity that sought to establish the common humanity that blacks shared with whites (2003:83).

Walker’s Appeal refers to blacks as “coloured”, “people of colour”, and “Africans”. Gordon notes that the designation “Negro” is only used in a cynical way in the Appeal. Young’s Manifesto uses “black” and “black Africa”, “African slave”, “degraded sons of Africa”, or “Ethiopian”. Walker takes the time to explain the origins of the term “Negro” in revealing a parenthetical note on “Negro slavery” contained in a speech by slaveholder John Randolph of Roanoake, Virginia: “Niger is a word derived from the Latin, which was used by the old Romans, to designate inanimate beings, which were black, such as soot, pot, wood, house etc. Also, animals which they considered inferior to the human species, as a black horse, cow, hog, bird, dog, etc. The white Americans have applied this term to Africans by way of reproach for our colour, to aggravate and heighten our miseries, because they have their feet on our throat” Gordon (2003:87).

There is, therefore, a difference in what the black subject constitutes for the oppressors and the oppressed. Significant to note is that the black subject exists in the mind of both the racist and the Black Nationalist in a distinct and recognisable fashion and manner.

For the purpose of this study it is important to note that the reconstitution of the black subject is an experience resulting from the hand of the racist white subject. Secondly, black nationalists recognise that the black subject as depicted by the white supremacists is fundamentally flawed and as a consequence the ideology of Black Nationalism responds by refuting this negative and ill—fated notion of the black subject.

What follows are three entry points as black nationalists attempt to remythologise the black subject.

2.5.2 Blackness as Suffering

The notion of a suffering experience is captured by Mofokeng (1983:28) when he asserts that “they suffer ‘innocently’, without having actively provoked anybody. They suffer
simply because they are black people’.” This suffering is an acknowledged reality for Black Consciousness, Black Power and Black Theology.

Although this experience of blackness speaks to the suffering of black people, blackness as expressed by Boesak (1976: 26) and Buthelezi (1974:33) is articulated as that which embraces the totality of black existence.

It is the contention of this study that this notion of blackness defined as the totality of black existence is an ambivalent construct. We shall attempt to raise a few aspects that speak to this ambivalence.

Firstly, the notion of blackness that Boesak and others in the Black Consciousness movement refer to is one that ties in with the acknowledged content of white supremacist western thought on black identity. This means that when blackness is defined it is cognisant of and understands the reality of western thinking, which could also be seen as “white thinking”.

Secondly, the notion of blackness that Black Consciousness espouses that argues for an identity from within, is assumed to come from the same disregarded and debased identity construct. It advocates an awareness of being that is supposed to emanate from this debased human or identity construct from within.

Thirdly, the notion of blackness as defined by Black Consciousness depicts a hopeless situation wherein a people defined as black find themselves, one their oppressors have destined them to.

In the fourth instance, to say that blackness is an embrace of totality of blackness is to argue that the actual blackness is necessarily a trapped context, from which black people have no escape. It would appear from this trapped reality that blacks are expected to eke out a sense of acceptance for themselves, and furthermore find meaning to free themselves.

What makes this blackness even more challenging is the fact that blackness exists in close association with shame. As noted above the shamefulness of such blackness as suffering is accentuated for Mofokeng (1983:28).

Blackness is experienced as “negative, bad, weak, helpless, and i.e. valueless” (Mofokeng 1983:11). The suffering theme of blackness is also captured by others such as Pityana (1972:176) when he echoes this in stating, in apartheid South Africa “civic status is determined at birth and for life by colour”.

Furthermore, this notion of blackness of suffering is captured by Boesak (1977:26) who sees blacks as doomed to live the life of second—class citizens. Being black therefore
means to be a non--person, less than white and therefore less than human (Boesak 1977:27).

 Sparks (2003:288) leans on the Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s “do theology from the lower side”, notion when he asserts “This experience of blackness in suffering is also captured when some, like Beyers Naude, were confronted with the reality that it was not enough to simply disapprove of the status quo as a conscience--stricken member of the privileged class, one had to in other words to cross the bitter—almond hedge both physically and psychologically, to experience the reality of the black world and develop a perception of what apartheid meant from that experiential point.”

This confirms the idea that the notion of blackness carries with it an undeniable component of suffering, wherein black people necessarily experience no respite from being black.

2.5.3 The Paradox of a Blackness of Suffering

Black theologians lament the situation those with the denotation of black for their human agency find themselves in, and this situation is interchangeably defined as blackness, yet the same theologians argue that a meaning worthy of appropriation must be found in an acceptance of such shameful blackness.

It is a key contention of this study that there is a paradox in this notion of blackness, for it suggests a trapped context that the oppressed had been doomed to and yet within that context, the very oppressed must find the “courage to be” (Boesak, 1976:48).

One gets the sense from this notion that it is only from the premise of an acceptance of this blackness as a reality, that the courage to be can be found for those who are doomed to blackness.

However, a more acceptable awakening of consciousness that defines the black identity is explained by Biko when he asserts “the first step therefore is to make the black man come to himself; to pump back life into his empty shell; to infuse him with pride and dignity, to remind him of his complicity in the crime of allowing him to be misused and therefore letting evil reign supreme in the country of his birth. This is what we mean by an inward—looking process” (1979:29).

Black Consciousness refers to this as the courage to be, in the words of Manganyi (1981:169) an “aha experience” which is “radical transformation”. Baartman (1973a:4) refers to this as an “inner liberation”. Thoahlane (1976:8f) captures this awakening as that which results in “a committed and self—assured black intelligence” and an “unblinking self—confidence in the shaping of our destiny”.


Periodically black theologians on the other hand advocate this blackness as something to be proud of. Boesak (1976:27) argues that “for blacks, authentic humanity means black humanity; blacks know that racial fellowship and reconciliation will never become a reality unless whites learn to accept blacks as black people”.

Whilst appreciating the timeline and context of these articulations, the reality suggests that this assertion as a means to advance the course for liberating a people, at best romanticises the black identity of otherness and at worst it exposes the contradiction of the blackness that is a cursed experience yet suggested to be a celebrated psychology that must free the very victim from the shamefulness of such blackness.

To assert that whites must learn to accept blacks as black people, is another untenable convoluted assertion, for it suggests whites have not understood what is meant by black, yet, they were responsible for a system that degraded, obliterated and reduced a people to second—class citizenry by denoting them as black. Similarly, that which constitutes the suffering that Mofokeng and others lament, that suffering which bespeaks blackness which is a curse, it is suggested, must be celebrated.

This assertion, if one understands it correctly, borders on the contention that blacks ought to be thankful for the blackness they were subjected to, for this blackness if celebrated will help whites to appreciate blacks as black people.

It is common cause that the intention here was to argue that whites must see blacks through different eyes, and whites must accept the reality of blacks as fellow human beings, but such beingness is necessarily black, hence other than whites themselves.

It is the contention of this study that the ideal lies in the direction of a common category as a means to describe our identity, and to critique the notion of blackness and whiteness that came by the white supremacist orchestration of the oppressor.

However, it appears to me that the sameness of being of both white and black means that we need to learn to embrace a universal identity only, then a universal identifier would be the ideal. The over—concentration on the black notion, an inadvertent confirmation of white power, therefore reduces oppressor and oppressed to being fundamentally two sides of the same colour coin.

It is a key assertion of this study that the overconcentration on the black leads to an identity informed by otherness, brought on by the same white supremacist thinking, and subjugates a people to a black experience, a black situation and blackness to prove otherness.

In our assessment, Boesak makes the same mistake that he accuses whites of by invoking a sense of otherness necessitated by an experience. The otherness in this case
of Black Theology is informed by an experience, which they had little to do with, but was thrust upon them.

It is the contention of this study that the challenge is: if Black Consciousness confirms the blackness of experience, if Black Consciousness admits the shamefulness of this experience, if Black Consciousness claims that a construct defined by whites in power was responsible for this black experience, then in our view it confirms Black Consciousness could not have determined the black in the blackness.

It is asserted that the above is confirmed through the narrative of the historical genesis of Black Nationalism as captured earlier. This is alluded to by the fact that Boesak (1976:27) cites Joseph Washington, amongst others indirectly conceding that “blackness as a symbol arises from the historic meaning attached to black skin colour in western civilization.”

The problematic nature of this understanding of blackness is evident, for at one level it uses skin colour to define this blackness but at a philosophical level argues that even those who are not black in skin colour may claim an identity in blackness, even when it also claims that those who share the same skin colour may not all be black.

To test this assertion perhaps the question of what blackness means may well be asked of audiences consisting of both the oppressors and the oppressed. This study contends that the oppressors understood at a fundamental level what the central objective was of a black experience – it was to subjugate it. Therefore, Black Consciousness in order to craft a new meaning of blackness is compelled to first deal with such a predetermined supremacist reality which they had little do with.

An important point to make at this juncture is to view this innate suffering as the experience of all blacks, but particularly the masses who have not developed the capacity to articulate their way out of such suffering, even those who advocate Black Consciousness, Black Power and Black Theology theoretical frames.

This is asserted not to draw a distinction in experience between the masses and intellectuals, but to point to a difference in response to suffering. Whereas the masses experience it as lived reality, the intellectuals responded by producing materials in Black Consciousness, Black Power and Black Theology. It is the intellectuals that lead the revolution of thought and praxis as to how the suffering of blackness must be engaged and responded to.

This study also notes the work of Snyman (2005:323) who reminds us of the shift in semantics in which whiteness is seen as a synonym for perpetrator. Snyman (2005:325) laments that “ten years after the advent of democracy in 1994, race and racism continue
to dominate public discourse as twenty five years ago”. He goes on and asks a critical question: “but what are the chances of transcending racialised discourse if the African body remains a black body and the white body always already infused with racist ideology? Has this perception something to do with the way we see our identities, fixed and immutable?”

Snyman communicates his trapped state when he poignantly asks, “as a white male how do I redeem myself from racism? Is it all possible? Is there any hope of redemption when it is even suggested that racism permeates the philosophies one utilises in ones’ thought structures”. One senses the melancholy in Snyman’s cry when he asserts “I experience an utter sense of entrapment and a severe depression in my inability to transcend since each interaction over the colour line starts with the assumption of a white racist identity” (Snyman 2005:325).

Snyman is arguing from the other side of the spectrum for the relevance of a white identity in which ‘whites’ have an identity beyond the narrow perpetrator status often naturally accorded to the group in general setting. One hears him plead for the freeing of a white identity from the trapped status of being a perpetrator of racist ideology.

This study recognises the trapped state Snyman articulates for it is not different in 2015. In June 2015 we awoke to the news of a Rachel Dolezal, a female with the identity marker of white for her human agency. Dolezal who had attended Howard College (a predominantly black institution) stood accused of having for years identified herself in claiming a black identity when her parents shared a marker for their identity as white. Notwithstanding the fact that she had done sterling work as an NAACP official, the claims of identity cheat were levelled against her. A deluge of personal and public attacks from a crossbreed of society expressed their displeasure with her for having cheated on her identity.

No soon has the news broke on this ordinary person and the world was abuzz with those who were condemning Dolezal. In a penned article at the time I identified three divergent groups that denied Rachel Dolezal the right to transcend race. The groups were respectively the white supremacist, the black power / consciousness and the white liberals.

These for an aggregate of no dissimilar reasons including a moralistic stance argued what Rachel Dolezal did was unforgivable. In this study’s assessment the respective three groups equally deny her the transitioning of the race appellation.

Juxtapose this to the transgendering of Bruce Jenner a well-known USA athlete and television public personality with the identity marker of white for his human agency who at the ripe age of sixty opted to transgender into Caitlyn Jenner. Jenner’s transitioning was very generally well received and he was not subjected to half the moralist stance
arguments of deception and cheating. It became clear that the postmodern society of 2015 appears more accepting of gender transitioning than race transitioning.

Citing Snyman and Dolezal in this setting is to argue the need to remythologise identity construction in 2015 beyond the race based and ideological notions that has kept us all entrapped. This study notes it is this reconfiguring even remythologising of identity that can serve as a means to liberate those on both sides of the spectrum with their respective human agencies defined as ‘black’ and ‘white’.

2.5.4 Blackness as a “justified projected exaction”

Having looked at the common experience of suffering as a defining mechanism for the notion of blackness, we will now explore whether this notion of blackness mean something different if viewed from the oppressors’ side.

It is the assertion of this study that the oppressor must have known what suffering was to be exacted. We will choose to call this blackness in this context “justified projected exaction”.

This means the oppressor projected on a people defined as black an experience informed by what the oppressor saw as his interpretation of this human agent. We see this from a citation in which Sparks (2003:281) remarks on “the difference in colour” described by DF Malan in 1954 to a group of Reformed Church clergymen in Grand Rapids, Michigan, who had asked him to explain the harsh apartheid laws then being enacted: “it is merely the physical manifestation of the contrast between two irreconcilable ways of life, between barbarism and civilization, between heathendom and Christianity, and finally between an overwhelming numerical odds on the one hand and significant numbers on the other”. To survive in such a situation, to avoid being submerged in the black heathendom of Africa, Malan said, the white minority had to “throw impenetrable armour of racial purity and self preservation”.

The notions of heathendom, barbarism and civilisation constitute the centre of white supremacist thought otherwise understood as eugenics, and also the separation of Christians from non—Christians.

Malan’s articulation, what we choose to call the “justified projected exaction” of blackness, advances a rationale for the enactment of apartheid laws, draconian as these may have been experienced by those who were subjected to them. His articulation serves as a justification if one looks through the prism of the Afrikaner mind. Warped as
we rightfully could condemn it to be, it still remains a frame of belief at least from Malan’s vantage point.

When we assert it as being justified we are not suggesting a universal justification measured in the morality of the modern humanity of Christian liberty, but rather a mindset that contained and informed blackness as seen from those who are not black and equally who at the time constituted the ruling elites consciously informed by an ideology of white supremacy?

Sparks (2003:282) cites Malan, “apartheid is based on what the Afrikaner believes to be his divine calling and his privilege – to convert the heathen to Christianity without obliterating his own national identity”. This is yet another key tenet of supremacist ideology.

The fundamental premise of Malan’s articulation unequivocally confirms a few critical thoughts held in concert with the Nationalists’ racist counterparts in the USA, as well as notions prevalent in the early days of the evolution of nineteenth century Black Nationalist ideology in the USA.

- It confirms the assertion of the “black subject” as perceived by the racist mind, the prevalence of notions like barbarian and uncivilised, is congruent and in sync with the views and mind expressed by Anglo—American supremacists in their depiction of the black subject.

The narrowness of Malan’s articulation in 1954 lies in the fact that by the time of his articulation of eugenics (a white supremacist philosophy), this was already a defeated and discarded paradigm, at the end of World War 2, with the defeat of Nazism.

This is strikingly similar to how Walker speaks to the constitution of the black subject and identity as reflected in white minds. In this, blacks are seen as less human, void of intellect, incapable of thinking. The barbarian and uncivilised notion advanced by Malan in 1954 is consistent with the imperialist and Eurocentric epistemology from this century which amongst other manifested a racist mindset on blackness, irrespective of whether such a black human agent is free or enslaved. It is the generic view of Africans as sub—human that stands paramount in this view.

This study notes that Walker’s contribution was made at a time when this scientific tradition still held sway; the same applies for WEB Du Bois and other social scientists up until 1945 with the defeat of the Nazis.
• It confirms the emphasis of a fundamental “difference of being” predicated on civilisation being meshed into colour as yardstick. It is important to understand the source of this difference. This means it is Malan, who represents the oppressor, that tells us of this difference of being between the oppressor and the oppressed: the notion of two irreconcilable lives, namely that of the barbarian and the uncivilised. The markers of difference came into intellectual use through the science of anthropology, later taken over by white supremacist social scientists. This is a discarded intellectual tradition.

This study asserts that when Malan in 1954 comfortably responded in the USA to questions raised about apartheid, he was an intellectual dinosaur. Apartheid (from 1948) as a social experiment is now known to have been doomed to failure as it started, yet it had life because the non–racial social paradigm was (and is) still under construction. It is in the period since 1994 that we have the task of giving content to the non–racial social paradigm. Therefore, our current intellectual exploration of identity.

• It also confirms the notion of race, in a relational context, as a means of describing oneself and others. The interplay between ethnicity and race comes into play here, for if ethnicity argues the sameness of being informed by cultural practices, languages and lifestyle then race refers to a sameness of outward physical appearance. Not only is this emphasis on race a vacuum but an emphasis of race defined in political epistemological superiority to the extent of naming the difference as a difference between barbarism and civilization.

The quote of David Walker, as captured by Gordon (2003: 85), is befitting: “They tell us that we the blacks are an inferior race of beings – incapable of self government. We would be injurious to society and ourselves, if tyrants should lose their unjust hold on us; that if we were free we would not work, but would live on in plunder or theft; that they are obliged to keep us in bondage to do us good; that we ought not to be free in America, but ought to be sent away to Africa; that if we are set free in America, we would involve the country in a civil war.” Understanding this citation by Gordon of Carsee’s conclusion on the treatment of the free at the hand of whites as that which constitutes the “criminalising of a people” Gordon (2003: 85).

• It furthermore introduces us to the primal fear and threat that Africans spelled for the Afrikaner. Malan articulates the fear of being overpowered by the presence of those who are other than the Afrikaner, necessarily making the other out to be dangerous to the existence or continued existence of Afrikaner life. This again proves in line with the pro—slavery articulation as captured by slaveholders like James Henry Hammond and Walsh who saw those held by them in slavery as “our
Black identity and experience in Black Theology: A critical assessment

slaves”, while “free blacks” were nothing but a nuisance – lazy, idle, and a threat to American civil society (Gordon, 2003: 84).

- It gives us a clear understanding or perception of how the white supremacist viewed Africa. Africa is seen as a place which the Afrikaner must protect himself against and as a place that will engulf and overpower one, whilst it is the privilege of the Afrikaner to bring the barbarians to a civilised life through making Africans Christians. Thus, it puts Christianity in the position of being part of the white supremacist toolbox for colonisation.

- It lastly rationalises or justifies such exacted pain inflicted.

It is this radical and inherent difference of being, communicated by Malan, which introduces us to the notion of blackness – what a dark skin meant for some of those who considered themselves white.

Blackness as the black subject here can be inferred to mean barbarism, heathendom, and savagery. This is how the oppressors viewed those who were other than themselves. Hence, these barbarians, heathens and savages needed to be contained. This is the basis of the notion of justification for the exaction of blackness.

This notion of blackness is what this study wishes to introduce to the corpus of intellectual material in need of engagement. The aim of it is to liberate the human agents described as “black” towards a self—driven definition of themselves.

2.5.5 Blackness as Philosophy in Black Theology and its Psychological Consequences

The advocates of Black Consciousness, Black Power and Black Theology are in agreement that black people ought to realise that the recognition of their blackness is essential to their humanity. Boesak (1977:26) asserts that Black Consciousness means that the notion of blackness becomes a decisive factor in black people’s expression of their belief in Jesus Christ as Lord. The idea seeks to confirm that the identifier of being “black” – be it in colour or belief or way of life – is one that is directly linked to their faith in the Lordship of Jesus Christ for them.

Whilst acknowledging the historical background for Boesak’s assertion, this study contends that it sounds very un—reformed. In this tradition the emphasis is on nothing but faith in Jesus Christ and nothing more than that is required to be justified or saved from a future hell. Therefore the text in which Paul reminds us, “In Christ there is no Greek, no Jew, no slave, no free man but a new person in Christ” (Galatians 3:20 – NKJV).
Boesak (1977:27) says that although this blackness we speak of is certainly, among other things, a matter of the colour of the skin it is also more than merely that. He asserts that not all who share blackness as colour of skin are also truly black. This blackness is awareness, an attitude, a state of mind. It is a bold and serious determination to be a person in one’s own right. Listening to Boesak we almost want to deduce from this a notion of being “black through mental gymnastics”.

Boesak in tandem with Martin Luther King Jnr, holds that, “Blackness in these terms is indeed more than skin colour. Even though it is a symbol that arises from the historic meaning attached to black skin color in western civilization, it points to beyond mere color to the solidarity in suffering and struggle of the descendants of all enslaved and colonized people” (Boesak 1977:27).

The notion of blackness as a philosophy and belief centres on the ability of blacks to love themselves, yet such love of self is not a hate of that which is white, but rather a hate of oppression, dehumanisation and the deconstruction of a slave mentality. This means being a “black” through claiming a moral high ground.

To understand the notion of asking for blacks to have an awareness of blackness, this means blacks will find their true worth in knowing that they are not mistakes. Neither are they a type of freak accident in the Creation episode that defies the legitimacy of such creation, but they are the completeness of that creation in no lesser form. It is plausible to read this as being a “black” through self—affirmation and self—love which connotes a sense of psychological reconfiguration.

At another level this means, as captured by Boesak (1977:29), asking them to know that they are of infinite worth before God, that they have a precious human personality worthy of manifestation. This suggests being black through claiming that which the supremacist theoreticians in principle deny: a precious human personality.

Having looked at blackness as a philosophy which constitutes the undergirding of the Black Consciousness, Black Power and Black Theology movements, we also advance as earlier alluded to a psychology of blackness that can be gleaned from the narrative of blackness.

When Black Consciousness, Black Power and Black Theology speak of a redress of blackness, to be done from within, they contend that blacks must have the courage to be. They argue that black is beautiful, which speaks to a change of mind. Summarising the above leads us to ask a further driving question.

We hear this blackness of philosophy and psychology again when Mpunzi (1974:137) contends “God affirms my uniqueness, and so my blackness... you (black person) must
affirm yourself as a human being no matter what your situation or what others may say or do to you... You must love the sign of you humanity which others treat as the sign of your lack of humanity. You must love your own black body – your blackness”.

2.6. What is in a name? Black Nationalism’s Articulation of Identity

Gordon (2003:5) argues that “the black identity construction in question is not so much the result of a commitment to a philosophical ideal as it is a contingent, socially constructed reality carved out of the harsh realities of slavery, it is rhetoric, a discourse in action that remains responsive to the vicissitudes of American life”.

This study questions whether this fluid base is viable today or whether there is a need for more firm or certain foundations for our identity project. The aforementioned question suggests our ‘best minds engaged the white supremacists on the fly. It must be understood that the white supremacists had science behind them, however flawed, when they asserted their supremacy of being.

Gordon says this exploration of the rhetorical undertakings of blacks, results in the visibility of and emergence of their self—definition and self—determination. Whilst this study accepts Gordon’s assertion, the question is, does this list of what is needed for a healthy self constitute all of what is required? It is the suspicion of this study that these are activities setting the scene for the important task of living a meaningful life in community engagement, innovatively exploring, creating, contributing and dreaming.

It is important to note that Walker’s Appeal and Young’s Manifesto set the tone for a subsequent strident rejection of white supremacist narratives as part of the continuing struggle over the construction of the identity of blacks. Walker proves conscious of the significance of naming in the crucible of identity formation: for naming and renaming remained an integral part of the struggle over slavery and freedom. Africans are not just oppressed by Anglo-Americans, but are in need of re—naming and constructing an identity for themselves that would embrace and confirm their freedom as active, inherently moral and social human agents.

2.7. A Contestation of Blackness

In closing, it is worth mentioning that Gordon (2003:92) describes the Albany Convention of Colored People held on 18—21 August 1840 in Albany, New York. This gathering was perhaps the first exclusively for black people. He draws attention to the controversiality of this convention, in stating the resolutions passed by the delegates were “factious”
and “faced strong challenges within the black convention movement primarily because of their focus on exclusive black involvement”. He cites a public exchange between William Whipper and Sidney which vocalised the arguments for and against exclusivity. For Gordon this “strident Whipper—Sidney Debate of 1840—41 was an early contestation of the boundaries of black culture and of the limits of black—white collaborative programs, in contrast to exclusively black programs, in the struggle to overthrow slavery and, with it the racism of white supremacy” Gordon (2003:102). Gordon sees this as constituting what he terms a contestation of “blackness (Gordon 2003: 102).

Gordon (2003:102) identifies a resurgence of such a contestation of blackness in the 1990 Shelby Steele’s publication, The Content of Our Character: A New Vision of Race in America. For Gordon, this presented a “new vision of blackness which challenged the old vision of the black civil rights establishment and presented black conservatives as a different but legitimate face of blackness”.

A key aspect worth noting here is that for Gordon the advent of this new conservative blackness is the replacement of the collective black identity pervasive in the civil rights movement with an individual black subject.

One may well duplicate this same exercise in a South African context to understand the implications for identity construction over a period from ancient times. This could include race—based identity construction from 1488–1898, 1902–1928, 1928–1965 and 1965 to the historical moment of 1994. This falls outside the scope of this exploration, and therefore the task is left to another researcher. However, this exploration focuses on the identity politics of the post—1994 context.
Chapter 3

A CURSORY HISTORY OF BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS

“...Black Consciousness is an awareness of black people that their humanity is constituted by their blackness... black people are no longer ashamed that they are black, that they have a black history and a black culture distinct from the history and culture of white people”

(Boesak, 1976:1)
3.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is, firstly, to trace the earliest forms of the notion “black” as used to describe and define a people. In this regard, the study proposes to explore the role of slavery as experienced in the American context, and also to grasp the role of this slavery. This study will secondly explore the evolution of Black Consciousness as experienced in the US and South African contexts. This study will explore at what historical juncture Africans defined themselves as black. Our tentative conclusion is that the term did not originate from African people but was appropriated.

3.2 A History of Slavery in the USA

Quintard Taylor (2009), in “I am Black facts – the time lines of African American History 1601—2008”, asserts that African American history begins much earlier than the arrival of the first Spanish—speaking black settlers in what is now the American southwest in the late 1500s or the first arrivals from the British colonies in 1619. Those arrivals, whether slave or free, came from Africa or were descendants from Africans who resided in Spain or Portugal.

He contends that “the enslavement of Africans in what would become the United States of America effectively began in the seventeenth century. Although the Spanish brought enslaved Africans and free blacks to their colonies in the Caribbean and Mexico in the sixteenth century, slavery became rooted in the British North American colonies (what would become the early Unites States) in the period after the arrival of the Africans in Jamestown in 1619, the year before the Pilgrims first reached Massachusetts” (Taylor 2009:27).

He goes on to assert that these first black settlers came with values, ideas, beliefs and worldviews – what would be known collectively as culture that originated in Africa (Taylor 2009:1).

Taylor (2009:27) notes that whilst most historians usually characterise the enslavement of Africans as beginning with that landing of twenty blacks, brought to Jamestown by a Dutch vessel, in fact slavery in British North America developed in halting, haphazard fashion and was not formally fixed until the 1660’s.
Taylor asserts that by 1675, the time of the Bacon Rebellion, there were only about 5 000 enslaved Africans in British North America. He points out that by 1690 all British colonies in North America had enslaved Africans (2009:28).

The struggle for freedom from enslavement according to Taylor (2009:35) can be traced back to the earliest revolts of slavery which he traces back to 1663, when both black and white indentured servants planned a rebellion in Gloucester County, Virginia. The resultant effect of this led to the execution of all leaders, at the same time Maryland declared all Africans arriving in the colony as presumed to be slaves.

This classification and categorisation of slaves for arriving Africans also meant free European American women who married enslaved men lost their freedom whilst children of European American women and enslaved men were enslaved. This was to meet the case of mulatto children, born of black mothers, in the colony (2009:35).

The tendency in law was quickly adopted by other colonies. The ownership of land in South Carolina was informed by the number of male and female slaves owned by the slave—master. In this instance, a male slave translated to 20 acres of land and a female equated to 10 acres for the slave—master.

Taylor (2009:36) notes that in 1664, “in Virginia the enslaved African’s status was clearly differentiated from the indentured servant status for the first time when colonial laws decree that enslavement is for life and the condition is transferred to the children of slaves through the mother. The terms ‘black’ and ‘slave’ become synonymous, and enslaved Africans are subject to harsher and more brutal control than other labourers.” Taylor is referring here to the law, passed in 1662 by the Virginia Assembly, that children should be held, bond or free, “according to the condition of the mother”.

“The enactment of such draconian laws in the colonies in the USA, was adopted by England when they for the first time enacted in 1667 strict laws regarding enslaved Africans in their North American mainland colonies. The adopted rules now dictated that it was forbidden for an enslaved African to leave the plantation, without a pass, and never on a Sunday. The laws further stipulated that an enslaved African may not possess weapons or signalling mechanisms, such as horns or whistles. Punishment for an owner who killed an enslaved African was set at fifteen pounds. Virginia went as far as declaring that baptism does not free a slave from bondage, thereby abandoning the Christian tradition of not enslaving other Christians” (Taylor 2009: 36).

The first recorded formal protest against the enslavement of Africans in North America came about in 1688 when Quakers in Germantown, Pennsylvania, denounced slavery.
Taylor in his historical tract draws a distinction between African and black slaves. He refers to William Tucker who, in 1624, was the first free–born black child to be baptised in the British colonies. He says Tucker was part of a free black population that originated with the landing of the first twenty blacks in Jamestown, indicating that most of the earliest black arrivals in Virginia were never enslaved (Taylor, 2009: 32).

This distinction of African and black, as used by Taylor, proves problematic. On the one hand one it is not clear if it is informed by historical designation, meaning that the term black was as early as this epoch a commonly accepted identity be it imposed on or advanced by Africans. On the other hand it is not clear if Taylor from a twenty first century mindset is looking back and interpreting the appellation to draw a linkage to what came to be known in African American history as black to describe a people.

Perhaps from this recorded history it is safe to conclude that blackness and slavery became synonymous as early as 1664, we may therefore cautiously here speculate that this meant slaves were black. The slave was associated with an African identity informed by ancestry. This is interpreted to mean that if there was originally a clear distinction between African and black it was condensed in slavery as a synonymous, consummated and even combined identity. Therefore, the African became a slave and the slave became an African, who was necessarily black.

What our historical journey of slavery is not clearly telling us is whether the term black was adopted by Africans outside the experience of slavery or if the identifier of “black” was enforced upon those deemed to be slaves. Equally such history cannot expound on the genesis of the concept as to where it was first used and by whom. However, we cannot dispute the fact that the British promulgation of 1667 made most Africans slaves and slaves mostly African, which in turn made them black. We have to assume perhaps this observation is the biggest contribution to our discussion on the identity articulation of black as it draws a link between blackness and slavery which is an important link we seek to establish.

3.3 Roots of Black Consciousness: A USA Perspective

Having looked at a short historical overview on slavery in the US context, we will now turn our focus to the evolutionary aspects of Black Consciousness and the movement that brought black thought into being in the USA.

Recognising that the nineteenth century ushered in the period of the abolition of slavery, in the words of Taylor, “slavery and freedom were the hallmarks of the nineteenth century, 89 percent of the one million blacks in the United States were enslaved, a
condition that had overwhelmingly dominated black life in North America since the 1600s” (2009:61).

Black Nationalism according to Cone (1991:9) can be traced back to the seventeenth century slave conspiracies. He says such came about “when Africans, longing for their homeland, banded together in a common struggle against slavery, because they knew that they were not created for servitude”.

Cone concedes that there is a vacuum in historical data which makes it impossible to describe the precise ideology behind the early slavery revolts. He states (1991:9) that what is known is that the Africans deeply abhorred slavery and were willing to take great risks to gain their freedom. The early nineteenth century prominence of this nationalist spirit of slave revolts was embodied in the leadership of Gabriel Prosser, Denmark Vesey and Nat Turner.

These revolts did not take place in a vacuum but must be understood in tandem with the emergence of mutual aid societies, the birth and growth of the black—led churches and conventions, and black—led schemes. Cone (1991:9) states that “unity as a people, pride in African heritage, the creation of autonomous institutions, and the search for territory to build a nation were the central ingredients which shaped the early development of the nationalist consciousness”. The aforementioned reasons advanced for the revolts will later prove important and are stated here to give a historical perspective, which I shall return to later when we begin to examine these reasons in the context of the African and black identifier.

It is important to understand that African American history comes richly endowed with many articulate voices and movements of black nationalism, including David Walker and Martin Delaney during the antebellum period and Henry McNeal Turner, Marcus Garvey, Noble Drew Ali and Elijah Muhammed who operated in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

In order to understand the black nationalists we must ask, what makes up their central claim? What constitutes the ideological frame of the black nationalists? Cone (1991:9) asserts that “the central claim of all black nationalists in past and present is that black people are primarily Africans and not Americans”. For the nationalist, unlike the integrationists, mindset, does not define their significance and purpose as a people by appealing to the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, or even the white man’s religion of Christianity. Nationalists therefore on the contrary derive an identity out of resistance to America and their attempt to create a society informed by their own African history and culture.
Cone (1991:9) further asserts, “the posture of rejecting America and accepting Africa is sometimes symbolised with words such as ‘African’, ‘black’ and ‘blackness’.”

He offers the example of Martin de Laney, often referred to as the father of Black Nationalism, who would boast that there lived none blacker than him (Cone, 1991:10).

Cone asserts that the issue for nationalists was not only human slavery or oppression, but also the oppression of black people by white people. It is important to note that according to Cone (1991:10) “nothing aroused the fury of nationalists more than the racial factor in human exploitation. Their identity as black touched the very core of their being and affected their thoughts and feelings regarding everything, especially their relations with white people.”

Cone (1991:10) concludes that “Black Nationalism was defined by a loss of hope in America; its advocates did not believe that white people could ever imagine humanity in a way that would place black people on par with them”.

We have thus far focussed on the history of Black Nationalism, since the concept of blackness features strongly in this stream of resistance to slavery as experienced in the USA. Another stream of thought was that of integrationism.

One of the advocates of integrationism during the nineteenth century was Frederick Douglass. Douglass, a former slave who escaped slavery, earned respect at international level for his speeches and writings in defending full citizenship rights for blacks. Douglass quoted from the US Constitution to affirm the rights of blacks (Cone 1991:5). It is important to note that the acknowledgment of the State proves the key to understanding the integrationist.

The two streams of integrationism and nationalism embodied the intellectual discourse of African American history. WEB Du Bois, the venerated African American intellectual, characterised the dilemma that slavery and segregation created for Africans in the USA as a “peculiar sensation”, a “double consciousness”, “two souls, two thoughts, two un---reconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder” (quoted in Cone, 1991:3). Listening to Du Bois in this sense we deduce that the black person is part of America but not really part of it, almost a sense of anin---between feeling.

These opposing streams found new meaning through the lives of Martin Luther King Jnr, and Malcolm X, who became in the 1960’s the embodiment of the integrationist and the nationalist streams of thought respectively.

This summary of both the claim and issue of Black Nationalism is raised here to sketch a context. The actual argument for such acceptance of identities defined in colour as
advanced by black nationalists requires engagement. The certainty with which the claim of a black identity and even a white identity is made here by the propagators of Black Nationalism is what this study finds troublesome. Such a claim of black and white is made without ever defining such; safe to assume that it already has a firm construct in the minds of those who will engage such concepts.

The issue of an African heritage proves interesting for it is clear black nationalists’ acceptance of Africa constitutes the very rejection of America. Furthermore, the rejection of America is by deduction assumed to be a rejection of whiteness (and we have yet to hear who defined the latter). By the same token, the acceptance of an African heritage is almost naturally assumed to be an endorsement of blackness (also not yet defined). We are reminded again by Cone (1991:10) that identity for the Black Nationalists touches the very core of their being, especially their relations to white people.

It is not yet clear, then, if this black identity referred to here, is a summation of what a people had been subjected to in experience, or if it is an identity that is drawn from being African, or if it is an identity inferred because there exists an identity depicted as white.

If the identity, as argued by Cone (1991:10), of being black for black nationalists went to the centrality of their existence and affected their thoughts and feelings regarding everything, one must ask, is the Black Nationalist not in identity formulation a victim of the black experience he was subjected to? An environment which the black person experienced not as a natural reality by birth but is an asserted artificial reality has determined the identity of one who had been subjected to a “black” experience. What we do know about this black epithet is that is a response to what is accepted as white.

Following on the above, this study follows Wright’s exploration of Cruse’s views on race and ethnicity. Wright (2007:1) asserts that “Cruse, who regarded himself as a Black nationalist at the time of writing of his controversial book, that drew severe criticism from both black and white intellectuals, was engaging in what he thought of as cultural nationalist thought, which centred in ethnicity and not race”. We do this in order to demarcate the difference between nationalists and integrationists more clearly.

He continues to say, “This was not typical of Black nationalists whose thought historically centered in race”.

It is important to see how he draws a distinction between race and ethnicity, technical terms that warrant a clear definition, which as challenged this study, were being freely used in that epoch. In the present, both these themes warrant unpacking.
It is perhaps important to briefly refer to the constructs of race and ethnicity here as a means of assisting our exploration. For the purposes of this study we have accepted the definition of race as defined by Lopez (1994:1) “What is race? When some people use ‘race’ they attached a biological meaning, still others use ‘race’ as socially constructed concept. It is clear that even though race does not have biological, it does have a social meaning which has been legally constructed”.

This study concurs with Lopez (1994:1) when he asserts “the notion that humankind can be divided along white, black and yellow lines reveal the social rather than the scientific origin of race.”

Having in preceding section briefly looked at race and ethnicity we now return to Wright.

According to Wright (2007:1), Cruse critiqued Black intellectuals for really being integrationists and not nationalists, which for him was one of the reasons they were so “susceptible and submissive to the thought of white intellectuals”. He especially criticised Jewish intellectuals and stated that Jews and whites feared a black collectivity. This black collectivity he defined as a strong black ethnic group, a strong black ethnic leadership (intellectual and political), and a strong black ethnic community functioning in America, with its own objectives that were determined considerably by blacks themselves (Wright, 2007:2).

Wright (2007:2) says, “Cruse wanted Black intellectuals to strike out for intellectual independence and build on it, which he felt could not be done, except on a Black nationalist and Black ethnic basis”.

One hears Cruse in his own words and time, yet it is precisely the purpose of this study to arrive at the communality of intellectuals devoid of a description of either white or black. However, Cruse’s point that the intellectual must be on the side of the masses holds.

Further evidence of the context of nationalism is provided by Wright through Baldwin. He suggests that it is important to note that understanding nationalism as a race--based and a cultural--based notion emerges in the 1963 work, The Fire Next Time: “White Americans find it difficult, as white people elsewhere do, to divest themselves of the notion that they are in possession of some intrinsic value that black people need or want. And his assumption – which, for example, makes the solution of the Negro problem depend on the speed with which the Negroes accept and adopt white standards – is revealed in all kinds of striking ways, from Bobby Kennedy’s assurance that a Negro can become President in forty years time, to the unfortunate tone of warm congratulation with which so many liberals address their Negro equals – an achievement that not only proves the comforting fact that perseverance has no colour, but also overwhelmingly corroborates the white man’s sense of his own value” (Wright, 2007:3).
Wright (2007:3) says that Baldwin referred to the phrase “white society”, a racist term to him, as a reference to a “burning house” and asked: who wanted to integrate into a burning house?

Wright (2007:3) says Baldwin was not a black nationalist or a cultural nationalist, as he wrote of blacks as a racial, not as an ethnic group.

Wright therefore introduces us to the two premises of Black Nationalism. The one as advocated by Cruse is that of an ethnic identity informed by culture and independence of thought and the other is informed by the race notion. This is an important difference as captured in chapter 2 in our understanding of the black identity construct.

In summary, it at best appears from what we can draw from Cone and Wright through Cruse and Baldwin that the black nationalist draws a distinction between the experience and the actual identity, for it appears that Cruse sees this identity as established in ethnicity and such ethnicity is denoted as black.

Our problem in understanding the actual identity of blackness is not helped at this stage, for it appears that there is a combination of experience and inherent identity. This makes it difficult to assume what the identity of such a people would have been if such polarised created concepts as white and black never existed.

We still cannot assume that the Black Nationalist coined the term black for if the concept originated from them, then the need arises to ask, did they equally coin the term white? It is the intention of the study to reach a position on this question.

**3.4 A History of Struggle in South Africa**

The objective here is not to provide a cursory history of the black struggle in order to draw the lines of connection between the black struggle and the advent of the Black Consciousness movement in RSA. The Black Consciousness movement did not take place in a vacuum, but evolved through what preceded as the struggle of a people to be free.

For Kritzinger (1988:24) the history of black resistance dates back to the first black opposition to white rule as far back as the early Khoikhoi—Dutch wars (1659, 1673–1677) and the nine wars fought between the Xhosa and the white settlers on the Eastern Frontier of the Cape Province (1779–1877). He notes that the initial form of resistance took a military form, yet such resistance was crushed due to the fact that the weaponry employed by the whites was more technologically advanced. These early days of black struggle generated a cohort of heroes such as Makana (1819–?), Shaka (1787–1828), Moshoeshoe (1786–1870) and Hintsa (1789–1835) whose bravery and heroism served as inspiration for blacks by motivating them to continue their struggle (Biko, 1979:95).
Perhaps noteworthy is Kritzinger’s usage of the term black to describe the human agents (Khoi—Khoi and Xhosa). It is particularly a point of concern because it forces the question as to when the transition took place for the Khoi—Khoi and isiXhosa to become “black”. Even more important is who controlled this transition, and at another level what were the antecedents for arriving at a black human agency?

Kritzinger (1988:24) states: “the students, who formed South African Students Organisation (SASO) in 1969, did not see themselves as the first to oppose white domination in South Africa”. Such a struggle had a long history manifesting in different formats. The students of SASO were aptly aware that they stood on the shoulders of organisations such as the then banned African National Congress (ANC) and Pan African Congress (PAC). Yet the Black Consciousness movement, unlike the aforementioned organisations, did not endorse an armed struggle, as they focussed on the political nature of the struggle.

Kritzinger (1988:24) talks about a history of “black” struggle against “white” domination during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This in historical context must be appreciated for it attempts to help us understand how far back the struggle dates. However, it falls short in that it brings us to understand that the Khoi—Khoi who raised his bow and arrow saw the enemy as “white”. It is not confirmed by historical evidence that the prism of thought of the Khoi—Khoi came clouded with the preoccupation of colour to define their enemy. Equally so it is not confirmed through historical evidence that the Khoi—Khoi defined their struggle as “black”.

Moreover, it would prove interesting to find out how the Xhosa (the enemy then) invasion was viewed, articulated or understood by the Khoi—Khoi and if it had a colour scheme if any, to it. This compels one to ask, how fair is it to read back into history and assume the notion of colour as the prism of thinking to inform the struggle as in the case of the Khoi—Khoi?

In looking at the recorded history of the Xhosa wars against the European incursion in 1779, are we to assume that enemies in this instance were defined as “white”? We must not forget that these wars were fought as a result of land encroachment.

### 3.5 Black Consciousness: A South African Response

To appreciate Black Consciousness in the South African context, one must ask if there were any links between the South African and American context. If so this would mean
there was a cross—pollination of assimilated thoughts between these two societal groups defined as black though divided by the vast Atlantic.

Kritzinger (1988:27) in fact states that there has been close contact between black people in South Africa and the USA since the nineteenth century, with the result that new movements in the USA have always exerted some influence here and vice versa. He further states that the Black Power movement upon arising in the mid 1960’s in the USA made an immediate impact on the powerless and leaderless black community in South Africa. This confirms the fact that there was an exchange of thoughts and interaction between South Africa and the USA as it relates to the conceptualisation of Black Consciousness.

To appreciate Black Consciousness is to acknowledge as in the case of the US counterparts the advent of independent formations. In South Africa one such early independent black—led church was the Zionist Movement. Historically the use of the term Zion derives from the Christian Catholic Apostolic Church in Zion, founded in Chicago in 1896 and having missionaries in South Africa by 1904. That church emphasised divine healing, baptism by threefold immersion, and the imminent Second Coming of Christ.

Its African members encountered US missionaries of the Apostolic Faith Pentecostal church in 1908 and learned that the Zion Church lacked the second Baptism of the Spirit (recognition of extra powers or character); they therefore founded their own Pentecostal Zion Apostolic Church. The vast range of independent churches that stem from the original Zion Apostolic Church use in their names the words Zion (or Jerusalem), Apostolic, Pentecostal, Faith, or Holy Spirit to represent their biblical charter, as for example the Christian Catholic Apostolic Holy Spirit Church in Zion of South Africa. These are known in general as Zionist or Spirit Churches. For more on this consult Isichei (1995:313). Another helpful source is Hofmeyr & Pillay (1994).

Robin Horton in Viswanathan (2006:521) asserts that African Christianity is not the result of effective conversions by the western missionaries, but rather should be viewed as “expressions of African nationalism”.

Allan Anderson (2000:56) concurs with Horton in saying that he believes the rapid growth of African Pentecostalism is rooted in “the spiritual hunger that needed to be assuaged in a truly African expression of Christianity”.

The formation of the Zionist church movement points to the earliest form of independence by black—led spiritual groups in South Africa, leaning towards the nationalist notion.

What is indisputable is that Black Consciousness in a South African context owes its existence to interaction with US—based thinkers. In this instance the thoughts and ideas of people like Stokely Carmichel, Eldridge Cleaver, Malcolm X and others were read and
propagated by South African students (Kritzinger, 1988:27). The emergence of Black Consciousness as a historical manifestation in South Africa owes its being to the formation of a black caucus, by students attending the University Christian Movement (UCM) national conference at Stutterheim during 1968 (Kritzinger 1988:23). This initiated the process that led to the establishment of the South African Students Organisation (SASO), the Black Peoples Convention (BPC) and a number of other Black Consciousness organisations.

Though there were many points of congruence where the two Black Consciousness groups from the USA and South Africa interacted and exchanged ideas – even influenced one another – there were also differences in approach. Kritzinger (1988:29) helps us to see some of these influences. Yet, as noted there were also differences and one is embodied in the fact that the South African movement opted to keep the name Black Consciousness while the US contingency evolved more and more into the Black Power movement. The Black Power movement advocated the organising of self into a formidable pressure group to bargain with the white power structure for full participation in the already established “open society”, based on a non—discriminatory constitution, while always remaining a white majority society (Mothlabi, 1984:115).

Whilst the Black Consciousness leaders of South Africa equally envisaged such bargaining in the South African context the objective would prove different because here blacks constitute a majority. The SASO leadership seminar of 1970 therefore opted to amend the US Black Power premise as advocated by Carmichael and Hamilton (1967:44). For them the concept of Black Power rested on a fundamental premise: “Before a group can enter the open society, it must first close ranks”. The amendment read: “before creating such an open society we must first close our ranks” (Gerhart, 1978:276).

The goals for such an open society as can be seen from these two distinct statements suggest that Black Consciousness envisaged a more fundamental change in the structures of society than those envisaged by the Black Power movement in the USA.

In that sense the words of Mothlabi (1984:114) prove more than appropriate: “Although the Black Consciousness ideologues have drawn on the ideas and writings of Black Power, they are more usefully seen as the heirs to a tradition of cultural nationalism in Africa itself”. It appears that at a particularly point the need existed for Black Consciousness in South Africa to define itself independently as co—equals if not leaders of Black Consciousness world—wide. Biko (1979:69) would concur with this notion in stating, “the growth of awareness among South African blacks has often been ascribed to influence from the American ‘Negro’ movement, yet it seems to me that this is a sequel to the attainment of independence by so many African states within so short a time”. With political organisations such as the ANC and PAC banned, Black Consciousness for a
Black identity and experience in Black Theology: A critical assessment

while sought to attend the liberal formations of National Union of South African Students (NUSAS) and United Christian Movement (UCM), yet these proved rather disillusioning and were slow of pace. This necessitated the formation of Black Consciousness organisations. As such Black Consciousness heralded a new phase of the black struggle.

Sebidi (1986:13) referred to it as a “hefty attempt at severing the psychological umbilical cord that held the black man tied to the slow—moving liberal band wagon”. Gwala (1974:170) understood this Black Consciousness to have to do with “identity” and black solidarity.

A definition of Black Consciousness as captured by Boesak (1976:1), suggests Black Consciousness is “an awareness of black people that their humanity is constituted by their blackness”. This according to Boesak literally means “black people are no longer ashamed that they are black, that they have a black history and a black culture distinct from the history and culture of white people”.

We shall investigate to what extent the acceptance of “black” people that their humanity is constituted by their “blackness”, is a problematic notion. The first challenge with this accepted humanity of blackness is that it draws no distinction between an experience and the identity of those who were subjugated to such an experience. This means when Black Consciousness proponents talk of blackness they seek to give blackness an identity largely influenced from within, yet they acknowledge that such an identity must resonate in another reality which is the same as that experienced as a white reality. As much as Black Consciousness seeks to prove original in articulating the blackness of being as distinct and original, it must contend that it equally admits the experience was black and has been that of shame. This is primarily due to the asserted supremacy of whiteness.

If this black notion is in any sense informed by an experience which was not welcoming, the second challenge with this blackness to define a people as black, is that it disowns the prior identity of a people prior to such experience, be it oppression, colonialism, segregation, slavery, racism or apartheid. The third challenge is that it fundamentally recognises a homogenous “white” identity.

If such a homogenous white identity referred to as white people exists we still do not know from where it emanates. Even more, we still do not know who determined it that “black” people feel obligated to acknowledge it, which in turns confirm their history, culture, state and identity as being accepted as “black”.

The claim of such humanity comes informed by an experience which the Black Consciousness explanation supports. Blacks according to Black Consciousness
propagators need no longer be ashamed that they are black. This if interpreted means that a people defined as black by a set of circumstances not of their own making, for which they were castigated if not defined, until they became the castigation itself, must now no more be ashamed of such definition.

However, admitting the experience as a black one is to admit it was a debased and dehumanising one. A further contradiction is the fact that this “black” identifier is now used to advance a black history, and a black culture as descriptive of consummating the history of a people. Why was it not necessary to refer to a people in an African or even tribal context, but necessarily in a colour context, and who determined it to be so?

Black Consciousness, if the definition advanced by Boesak holds, admits the shamefulness of this “black” experience. The same experience it now ask of those who had been thus subjected, was to celebrate as a definitive liberatory response. If “blacks” were ashamed of their “blackness” (defined in beingness or in a situational experience of oppression), at some point they now must disown the same shame. What informed such embarrassment? In fact, who and what constitutes the architectural framework of such embarrassment?

Boesak (1976:27) concedes that blackness is a symbol that arises from the historic meaning attached to the black skin colour in western civilisation. This blackness defined here admits to the fact that the premise for such a definition comes at best informed by western civilisation. This concession is a major one for it begins to point to the fact that the ascribing of blackness to define a people has definitive links to the western understanding of the world.

Fanon in his work Black Skin, White Masks (1967:135) says Black Consciousness is immanent in its own eyes: “I am not the potentiality of something, I am wholly what I am”. The blackness that Fanon articulates resonates with the thought construct of Black Consciousness where a people seek to define itself from an inward reality as opposed to the prescribed outward reality.

Fanon (1967:133) thus suggests that history must be seen as moving dialectically from the thesis of white supremacy via the antithesis of negritude to the synthesis of a society without racism.

This necessarily must mean that Black Consciousness in its root contemplation acknowledged that it was never an end itself but carried in itself the seeds of its own dissolution into a society defined as free of racism. This awareness of Black Consciousness as a means to an end, is what is often lost in the contention for its existence. The adoption of a black identity informed by a black experience as exacted by the coloniser holds the antithetical hope of a society in which people will be defined
anew not by their situation nor their colour. For it must then be that the experience of blackness from which the identity of being black finds meaning is one not of created reality by those who suffered, therefore not out of choice and definitely not from within themselves.

This lead us to the question, in a synthesised world free from racism and the conditions of colonialism, can the identifiers of black or white whether defined from inward or outward reality hold?

3.6 Understanding Black Power

Boesak notes that the concepts Black Consciousness, Black Power and Black Theology are more than mere terms (Boesak 1976:1). For Boesak, Black Consciousness is an integral part of Black Power. To repeat the earlier stated definition of Black Consciousness, it primarily is awareness by black people that their humanity is constituted by their blackness. Black Power therefore is the forceful affirmation of such consciousness in arguing for a fundamental change in systems and patterns in society that give rise to the oppression of black people. Black Power therefore is a forceful critique of such systems that give rise to the oppression of black people.

What Boesak is not suggesting is towards what end the change is. Equally, would there still be a need and relevance for Black Power once a paradigm of change has been achieved?

Boesak (1976:47) asserts, “The traditional definition of power whilst essentially in the western world perceived and understood to be negative, is also defined by P. Thoenes as a ‘concentration’ of ability. Such concentration Thoenes accepts as purposeful, deliberate concentration. He sees ability as the ability to rule, in other words to control and maintain such control over time, making the ability to create.”

Thoenes’ definition of power as captured by Boesak here could be critiqued for absolutizing the ability to rule as something only of an outward reality and nature defined in a programme, since for Boesak and others this ability also can be interpreted to refer to the inward reality.

However, Thoenes’ definition of power resonates with Boesak in his understanding and articulation of Black Power particularly since according to both, it disowns the supposed traditional negative connotation of power.

One can understand why this definition of power would resonate well with the propagators of Black Consciousness: they necessarily would not want to be equated with the same ilk of the very oppressors who, according to them, only lived from the negative
definition of such power in which their actions became oppressive towards others. The progenitors of Black Power necessarily want to see the conception of such power as positive for it seeks to defy the negative connotation and it empowers a people to appreciate themselves without fear of reprisal.

One may also deduce that such an acceptance of Thoenes’ definition would prove liberating not just for the oppressed but also for the oppressor, who will learn a new understanding of power and by so doing will learn to appreciate his own—ness not as a means of being in relation over others but in relation to others as equals. This however we have come to realise may present too idealistic a picture, for contemporary politics suggests the ‘other’ cannot be an equal.

This is alluded to by Stokeley Carmichel, the renowned Black Panther, who came to prominence in the Black Power movement in the aftermath of the death of Martin Luther King Jnr and Malcolm X. He is considered to have introduced the concept of Black Power into the Black Consciousness vocabulary (Cone, 1969:5). His famous 1969 speech that he delivered at Berkeley, California became the ideological construct of student interpretation across the USA and South African Black Consciousness. For Carmichael, Black Power therefore is the answer to the white power structure. It equally is the answer to racism, degradation, humiliation, exploitation and alienation (Boesak, 1976:56). These were necessarily things experienced by a people defined as black.

Black Power at supreme level would signify a conscious awakening to the reality that the white power structure defines the reality of black life. In other words, when blacks become aware that their reality is a created one in which they have no true say, save for complying with what is dictated by this white power construct, rendering them powerless, they necessarily will empower themselves to define their own reality devoid of such a white power structure. Black Power asserts that white power has a very strong yet willing sleeping partner in the mind of the oppressed. Black Power therefore sees a duality of identity in the race problem; whilst it is a white problem it is also a black problem (Boesak, 1977:57).

To come to grips with the Black Power movement, it is worth including the thoughts of King (1968:59) on this matter. Although labelled an integrationist he proved congruent with the advocates on Black Power, in seeing Black Power to be the “psychological call to manhood”. Such congruence also had a divergence to it. Such divergence for King resonated at two levels, as a philosophy and in its acceptance of violence as a means to attain such liberation. He critiqued the notion of Black Power as undergirded by a “basically nihilistic philosophy born out of the conviction that the Negro cannot win” (Boesak, 1977:60).
However, his biggest critique of the Black Power notion was what he called “retaliatory violence”, necessarily a concept coined by King. For King the retaliation with violence, whose strength he also questions, on the part of blacks would prove black people have become what the oppressor is. King (1968:193) noted, “through violence you may murder the liar, but you cannot murder the lie, nor establish the truth...returning violence for violence multiplies violence, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars”.

In summary, having attempted to present a definition for Black Power as understood by the progenitors of Black Consciousness in both the US and South African contexts, the study concludes that the appropriated definition of Black Power for Black Consciousness ideologists centres essentially on power as an explanatory concept. Black Consciousness propagators did not so much define blackness but defined the power behind it.

From the above it seems that when Black Consciousness advocates articulate their construct of Black Power they defined the power, but did not question the identity of that power, in other words they did not define black for the construct of black already existed and was accepted even as they began to define the power.

It is the purpose of this work to investigate whether, if this already accepted notion for wrong or right reasons did not exist, how would such power be explained or even understood. For that matter, why was it even necessary to advance from the premise of accepted black identity to give impetus to the power definition that would prove liberating for the very oppressed people?

One may even suggest that Stokely Carmichel did not define Black Power in a vacuum but power as anticipated by people that had already been defined, described and accepted to be black.

We have from our earlier discussion concluded that Black Consciousness did not draw a distinction between identity and experience. Hence if we continue along those lines, it becomes questionable to celebrate the Black Power dictum in which a people will now see themselves to remonstrate that black after all is not ugly but beautiful. The challenge with the Black Power notion is that it still uses the definition or identification of people informed by situation and colour as the premise for such power articulation. It is therefore not possible to talk of this power without firstly accepting that it is black; the question is, black by design or black by default? If black by design, is such design an inward or outward reality? If by design, who created the reality of this black experience, from which the power emanates? If the power is black, why is the opposite of such power white? Who determined the whiteness of the oppressor?
It seems fair to conclude the acceptance of an identity of blackness – be such defined as inherent being or experience – remains a challenge to a people long after the abolishment of slavery, oppression, and the end of apartheid. This study in chapter 6 entitled ‘A Postulated Burden of Blackness’ will revisit this assertion in an attempt to point out the dilemma which the uncritical appropriation of this appellation of “black” carries with it.

3.7 Adopting the ‘Black’ Notion for an Identity

We must now ask at what point did Black Consciousness in South Africa adopt the appellation black to define a people and articulate an identity?

Black Consciousness in the South African context adopted the term “black” as part of the confirmed exchanges between the two movements. Gerhart (1978:277) points out that the use of the term “black” to designate identity was adopted under the American influence, in which black denotes not colour per se but the oppressed condition as the outcasts of affluent white society. Kritzinger (1988:29) says the young American militants were looking for an alternative to the terms of “Negro” and “Coloured” and decided to “re–christen” the term “black”; by filling it with the meaning of positive self—affirmation and beauty.

This study therefore notes that the term black existed and warranted a re—christening with the hope of giving it life in positive self—affirmation. We must then accept that black firstly existed in value attribution, regardless to whether that value was above or beneath the proverbial zero line. Secondly it existed in a negative context or it breathed negativity hence the need for re—christening to give it new meaning. We can therefore say the oppressed at best wanted to give an existing term that denoted their humanity its own influence.

Kritzinger (1988:29) further points out that in South Africa where the humiliating terms “kaffir”, “native”, “bantu” and “non—white” (and “coloured”) were still common, the term “black” presented itself as an ideal rallying point: a term chosen by the oppressed people themselves to express their dignity and identity, as opposed to all the dehumanising terms used by whites as tools of oppression. This study notes that whilst it is claimed that ‘black’ as a re—christened term became the ideal rallying point as a chosen term by the oppressed both in the USA and SA with variations to express their dignity, it does not automatically solve the other side of the puzzle of a ‘white’ identity. Neither does it make the relevance of an existing term ‘black’ before re—christening obsolete.
It is important to understand that Black Consciousness in South Africa like its counterparts in the USA adopted the term for the same reasons. We have asserted earlier that the context of “black” to define a people in blackness is one that needs attention for Black Consciousness seldom draws a distinction between the inherent identity and the experience. Gerhardt (1978:277) says the term “black” to define a people was adopted from the American influence in tandem with the evolution of Black Consciousness in the South African context.

In order to evaluate this adoption one must consider how the American thought leaders of Black Consciousness came to accept the epithet “black”.

It was when the term black was re—christened, giving it new content. If Kritzinger is correct about the term being re—christened, than we must accept the term existed. Not only would we have to concur the term existed, but it equally existed in a negative context, at least not appreciated by those for whom it was meant. Once more this is what this study points to: the re—christening, remythologising or re—configuration of a better concept.

The re—christening of the term necessarily suggests that the term was not used by the very people who were subjected to the experience of slavery, segregation and oppression, for why would there be a need to redefine it? As a means of understanding the young militants’ perspective on the terms “negro” in the USA and kaffir, bantu and coloured in South Africa, we must ask who was responsible for the use of these terms to define a people.

The South African context had their own challenges for here the terms “kaffir”, “native”, “bantu” and “non—white” were abhorred by the very oppressed for it was the oppressors’ way of dehumanising the true identity of a people and sabotaging their future by calling them these names, as enacted by Act 30 of 1950 of the Apartheid state.

This study acknowledges that the importance of the self—appropriation of “black” against the backdrop of negro and coloured (USA) and kaffir, native, bantu and coloured (South Africa). However, it is the purpose of this study to explore if this appropriation of “black” is the best we can do today given the changed circumstances.

It is precisely the purpose of this study to give expression to the need to remythologise the content of identity of a people who used to be comfortably called “black” from the mid—1960’s given the new circumstances we are confronted with.

Gerwel (1973:120) calls this non—white epithet a “destruction” by whites, bent on enforcing their stereotypes on blacks. Baartman (1973:18) captures this proclamation of the Black Consciousness thinking when he says, “no more is he going to fit into a non—
white portrait drawn by the white man”. This articulation expressed the fundamental abhorrence of the notion of non–white as experienced by the Black Consciousness thinkers. Thus, the arrival at “black” purports a long and arduous journey through other, clearly less acceptable notions.

However, we must concede that both in the USA and South African context some of the terms such as negro and native were used in the establishment of organisations of the oppressed. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and its chapters referred generously to the term negro. In South Africa, the African National Congress formed in 1912 was first known as the African National Native Congress. This study views these as products of their time.

The oppressors through their ideology, systems, methods and classifications of people necessarily robbed people of their true identity and attempted to shape the scope of identity from their twisted, incongruent and racist notions thereby disowning a people of their rightful identity.

These products of their time served a powerful purpose to rally the down—trodden people. We have established now that the term black was adopted into the Black Consciousness movement of the USA by means of the young militants who looked for an alternative to the terms negro and coloured which also were not appreciated.

On the subject of coloured for a identity we are helped to understand this better for its historical usage in the USA setting when we hear Stuckey (1987:199) asserts, “The use of the terms colored and brown – more perhaps prior to the nineteenth century – reflected a certain disdain on the part of some people of mixed ancestry for the majority of their people, a tendency to look askance at them on grounds of color and class.” He in the same vein continues to assert, “The light–skinned children of such relationships formed much of the free Negro population of the South, and it was within their ranks that early advocates for brown and colored were found”. We note that this resulted in the establishment of the Brown Fellowship Society in Charleston South Carolina in 1790.

As earlier noted, in the South African setting, the existence of peoples of mixed descent though a centuries old reality, the usage of the term coloured as a means to give content to a group’s human agency was formalised with the Apartheid Government’s enacting of Act 30, 1950 Section c, which defined a people as coloured.

We also now know the term had to be re—configured to fit the purpose and aims of the Black Consciousness paradigm and thought construct. We have also established that the concept was adopted by the South African Black Conscious advocates from their US counter—parts with time—specific ends in mind.
The term in South Africa found new meaning for it sought to bring together a composite group of people who were equally oppressed yet separately classified as Bantus, Coloureds and Indians. The time has again arrived to configure another identifier given the new set of circumstances we face in the present time.
“Black Theology is a theology of black liberation. It seeks to plumb the black condition in the light of God’s revelation in Jesus Christ, so that the black community can see that the gospel is commensurate with the achievements of black humanity. Black theology is a theology of ‘blackness.’ It is the affirmation of black humanity that emancipates black people from white racism, thus providing authentic freedom for both white and black people. It affirms the humanity of white people in that it says ‘No’ to the encroachment of white oppression.”

(National Committee of Black Church Men 1969)
4. 1. Introduction

Having explored and understood the notion of blackness, we will now turn our focus to Black Theology to understand the notion of black identity in Black Theology. The aim here is to explore if there is congruence in the ideas of identity as advanced by the Black Consciousness and Black Power movements in relation to Black Theology. The intention is not to extensively critique Black Theology but to understand the issue of the notion “black” in the theology that describes it. This chapter will start by investigating what is Black Theology and proceed to look at the relationship between ideology and theology. Out of this relationship we will look at what critical challenges for identity emanate from this relationship.

By attempting to explore its evolution, this study aims to capture the contemporary thinking on the relevance of Black Theology in relation to black identity. In conclusion this study will explore the possibility of an importation of a concept of “blackness” from black ideology to Black Theology and how this importation has potentially held theology hostage.

4.2 What is Black Theology?

A clear definition of Black Theology was first given formulation in 1969 by the National Committee of Black Church Men in the midst of the civil rights movement:

“Black theology is a theology of black liberation. It seeks to plumb the black condition in the light of God’s revelation in Jesus Christ, so that the black community can see that the gospel is commensurate with the achievements of black humanity. Black theology is a theology of ‘blackness.’ It is the affirmation of black humanity that emancipates black people from white racism, thus providing authentic freedom for both white and black people. It affirms the humanity of white people in that it says ‘No’ to the encroachment of white oppression.”

The foremost voice of Black Theology as an articulated concept is usually seen as James H. Cone, from his book *Black Theology and Black Power*. Cone (1969:117) says, “black theology is primarily a theology for black people who share the common belief that racism will be destroyed only when black people decide to say so in word and deed to the white racists”.

Black Theology is the critical reflection of black Christians and their involvement in the black struggle. Goba (1978:76) defines black theology as a “critical reflection on the praxis of Christian faith, one which participates in the ongoing process of liberation with the black Christian community”.

Black identity and experience in Black Theology: A critical assessment

Black Theology according to Boesak (1977:144) is the “theology of liberation in the situation of blackness”. He further argues that “the hermeneutics for black theology is necessarily political”.

Maimela (1984: 46) gives us another point of view to the definition of blackness when he asserts that Black Theology interprets the oppression of black people “in the light of the biblical witness to a God whose justice requires that the poor, the oppressed, the down-trodden be set free”.

A final dimension of the definition of Black Theology can be drawn from the commonality that Black Theology shares with Black Consciousness. According to Mosala (1989:1), Black Theology as is commonly accepted is a subset of the Black Consciousness Movement and was used as a cultural tool for struggle by young black Africans who adhered themselves to the movement in the late 1960’s and 1970’s.

4.3 The Origins of Black Theology

To trace the history and genesis of Black Theology, from a US perspective is, to ask for the history of liberationist thought, understood over an extended period, which brings us to theology before Black Theology.

4.3.1 A History of Liberationist Thought: A US Perspective

To enquire about the history of Black Theology is to start with the content of slave theology. It is out of this slave theology that black activism was born.

Whilst there are a multiplicity of people that have contributed to the cause of black liberation throughout the course of black history, for our focus we will only mention a few here so as to arrive at the discourse of a theology of the black human agent in a civil rights and post—civil rights context. The first example in the history of liberationist thought is Nat Turner (1800–1831). According to Rhodes (1991:2) Turner is considered the most notorious slave preacher who ever lived on American soil. It is said that it was Turner’s absolute abhorrence of slavery that propelled him to seek freedom by violence. Turner, it is said, killed nearly sixty white people before being captured and hanged in September 1831. Some say this violent revolt marked the beginning of the black struggle for liberation.

A further prominent figure that looms large in black American history is Marcus Garvey (1887–1940). Garvey is regarded by many as the apostle of Black Theology in the United States of America. Martin Luther King argues that Garvey “was the first man on a mass scale and level to give millions of negroes a sense of dignity and destiny, and make the
Negro feel that he is somebody. Garvey was one of the first to speak of seeing God through “black spectacles” (Rhodes 1991:2).

Furthermore, Howard Thurman, in his book Jesus and the Disinherited (1949), saw black life paralleling Jesus’ life because His poverty identified Him with the poor masses. For Thurman, Jesus was a member of a minority group (the Jews) in the midst of a larger and controlling dominant group (the Romans). Thurman is known to have drawn similarities between the life of Jesus and black experience.

The most visible civil rights leader from the period of 1955 until the time of his assassination in April, 1968 in Memphis, Tennessee was Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929–1968). King in the early days of the civil rights movement advocated passive resistance as informed by the philosophy of Gandhi. King therefore did not embrace the strategies of militant Black Power, even critiquing them for being guilty of “retaliatory violence” Boesak (1977:49).

However, later on in his life King became more critical of the American society and would no longer be satisfied with small changes “within the system”. Boesak (1977:68) says King also began to see the struggle in America as not just a struggle between good and evil, but “a decidedly human struggle against a demonic white power structure, a struggle in which the poor of the earth are involved”.

Another key contributor to the Black Theology discourse is Albert Cleage who hailed from Detroit. Cleage was one of the more militant writers of the 1960’s, when he published a collection of sermons in 1968 under the title The Black Messiah. In this sermon compilation he alerted readers to his brand of black nationalism. Cone (1969:116) asserts that “the Rev. Albert Cleage is one of the few black ministers who has embraced Black Power as a religious concept and has sought to reorient the church community on the basis of it.”

In summary, the aforementioned purports not to be a historical account but highlights a few cases who embodied the liberationist thought. The reason for its presentation here is to draw a line that brings us into the formal articulation of Black Theology as a discipline. More than one hundred and thirty years after Nat Turner’s execution, Black Theology emerged as a formal discipline.

Black Theology was born from the Black Power movement in 1966, when black clergy in dominant denominations began to reassess the relationship of the Christian church to the black community. This resulted in black caucuses developing in the Episcopal, Catholic and Presbyterian churches. Hamilton (1972: 140) says “the central thrust of these new groups was to redefine the meaning and role of the church and religion in the lives
of black people. Out of this re-examination has come what some have called a ‘black theology’.

It is said for the first time in the history of black religious thought, black clergy and black theologians (essentially constituted from educated middle—class black clergy) began to recognise the need for a completely new starting point in theology. This discourse produced perhaps the face of Black Theology, namely James H. Cone, who is also known to be the biggest contributor in the volume of his writings and in the actual challenge his theological paradigm posed.

We will later in the chapter engage with Cone’s articulation of Black Theology as the first formal attempt at scientifically crafting a Black Theology.

4.3.2 A Genesis of Black Theology: South African Perspective

There is a close relationship between black struggle, Black Power and Black Theology. Boesak (1977:63) argues, “like Black Theology, Black Power as a concept (for that matter, as a movement – Garvey) is not new. It is as old as creation, although the struggle for black liberation did not always bring tangible political gain, it had an inner authority, a power beyond words (Buthelezi), bearing suffering with dignity and hope, affirming what is more than merely human. In this sense, Black Power is as old as Black Theology and as such it has always had a close relation with Black Theology.”

Black Theology, in a South African context, was pioneered by a paper entitled ‘Towards a Black Theology’ authored by Dr Basil Moore. Moore’s paper (published in 1971) was circulated in the United Christian Movement (UCM), an organisation that eventually, as a result of the positive response to the paper, established the Black Theology Project. Mothlabi (1986:44) celebrates the “pioneering effort” of Moore for bringing Black Theology as an intellectual discipline to a South African context.

Black Theology, or as some refer to it as black protest theology, is contended to have been in existence earlier than the actual usage of the term in professional or academic expression. Boesak (1977:15) argues that Black Theology is as old as the attempts of white Christians to bring the gospel to blacks. Bosch (1974:1) identifies Kimpa Vita, a Congolese woman who is known to have lived in 1700, as the first black theologian. Others consider the rise and establishment of the black independent churches in the late nineteenth century as the beginning of Black Theology in South Africa.

Goba (1986:58) confirms this when he says, “we are actually reaffirming a vision that was born long ago, when some of the early black Christians leaders such as Rev. Dwane and Rev. Mokone decided to break away from the imperial theology that dominated the lives
of the black Christians in this country. There is therefore a sense in which we are involved in a theological pilgrimage that has and will continue to give an expression to our faith within the ongoing struggle for liberation.”

In turn, De Gruchy (1986:156) contends, “in an important sense Black Theology in South Africa began with the revolt of black Christians at the turn of the century, a revolt which found institutional expression in the African Independent Churches”.

4.4 The Rationale for Black Theology

When we talk of the rationale for Black Theology we attempt to understand that which undergirds Black Theology as a theology and as a praxis, as well as its context. This rationale attempts to explain the reason Black Theology exists by exploring what Black Theology is seeking to address. Thus, a critical component of this rationale revolves around the question of the task of such a theology. We will draw, our parameters again as wide as the USA and the South African contexts.

A central awareness of this approach is, as with the Black Consciousness and Black Power movements which evolved in tandem in both political and geographic contexts, that Black Theology no differently owes its existence and development to a cross—pollination of shared experience between the USA and South Africa and their cross—over political experience of oppression, segregation and apartheid.

James H. Cone stands central as the foremost advocate of Black Theology in the US context. No black theologian, in terms of sheer volume, has contributed more to the discourse of the subject. This does not mean there were no other voices, but he, as early as the late sixties, was able to articulate the conceptual framework of a Black Theology in written form. Many have written subsequent to him, yet these all have been leaning on his work, whether in agreement, contextualisation or critique of Black Theology as a liberatory narrative in historicity.

The rationale for Black Theology is captured vividly when Cone (1969:117) says, “Black Theology must take seriously the reality of black people – their life of suffering and humiliation. This must be the point of departure of all God—talk which seeks to be black—talk.” For Cone, the black man who lives in a society permeated with white racist power, can speak of God only from the perspective of the socio—economic and political conditions unique to black people. He asserts that, whilst “Christian doctrine must logically precede the doctrine of man, Black Theology knows that black people can view God only through black eyes that behold the brutalities of white racism”.


Black identity and experience in Black Theology: A critical assessment

Cone asserts any request from anyone to blacks to assume a “higher” identity by denying their blackness is to require blacks to accept a false identity and to reject reality as they know it to be.

Such assessment leads us to the following few critical issues. Black Theology is a theology that emanates and finds meaning from the reality of the suffering of blacks at the hand of a white racist system. Black Theology is a response in tandem, yet born out of the Black Power movement that asks what the response of the oppressed ought to be as they are subjugated to such an evil system. At another level it is asking how black people make sense of their faith and their God for themselves when the very God they claim to be theirs is claimed by the very oppressors. Black Theology, therefore, is a revolt in thinking at spiritual level as it shares the prism of ideological revolt manifested in Black Consciousness.

The challenge for us is the centrality of the “experience” of blackness that becomes the identity of those oppressed. When Cone states that blacks can only see God through black eyes, we are not sure if he is distinctly talking of the condition of blackness as inflicted suffering or whether he refers to this as a black identity as an experience of abuse. The notion of black eyes points to an identity, but it does not tell us if such an identity is one informed by an experience or one of ontological beingness.

Our further challenge with Cone’s experience as a rationale for Black Theology, is his positioning of white racists as the enemy. Our challenge lies not in the condemning of the racists’ attitudes of those who inflicts the suffering, but the firm manner in which he accepts the whiteness of those whose hands hold power. White, in Cone’s articulation, therefore, is firstly a constant that defines the identity of the racist, and white is that which is anti—black. He does not help us to understand the firmness of these two classifications encapsulated in a colour definition to describe being. Neither does Cone as a believer in Christ’s gospel see the need to assist the “white” oppressor to free himself from the wrongful prism of identity defined as white instead of acceptance of a common humanity.

This is not a simplistic argument to denounce the white notion but rather a critique on the part of the victim to have fallen victim to the white notion, without testing such.

The third problem with Cone’s rationale is the reinterpretation of faith. It appears as if it is informed by a limited view of God as relational in humanity, necessarily seeing God as only to be understood through the lenses of colour, where colour even defines the God. It is as if Cone seeks to project a God that is black or could be white, and cannot be neither or both.
When we contend the aforementioned, we are not suggesting that God stands neutral in relation to evil. There is no question that God would be on the side of the oppressed when they are subjected to the pain of racism. Yet God's choice is not a choice against people but against practice. Cone therefore allowed himself to be misled by the very white racist regime to understand his God in a limited colour context, as he seeks to define a black or white colour scheme.

Perhaps the biggest critique against Cone, is what we will choose to call here a glorification of an experience as the premise and prism of one's faith, to the extent that nothing outside the experience can inform identity and faith.

There is, as stated before, a gross combination of experience and identity, prevalent and consistently found in the Black Consciousness and Black Power thinking that permeates the rationale of Black Theology.

4.4.1 The Task of Black Theology

Cone (1969:117) states that the task of Black Theology is to analyse the black man’s condition in the light of God’s revelation in Jesus Christ with the purpose of creating a new understanding of black dignity among black people, and providing the necessary soul in that people, to destroy white racism.

One of the tasks of Black Theology, says Cone, is to analyse the nature of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in light of the experience of oppressed blacks. For Cone, no theology is Christian theology unless it arises from oppressed communities and interprets Jesus’ work as that of liberation. Christian theology is understood in terms of systemic and structural relationships between two main groups: victims (the oppressed) and victimisers (oppressors). In Cone’s context, writing in the late 1960’s and early 1970’s, the great event of Christ’s liberation was freeing African—Americans from the centuries—old tyranny of white racism and white oppression.

Black Theology is primarily a theology of and for black people who share the common belief that racism will be destroyed only when black people decide to say in word and deed to the white racists: “we ain't gonna stand anymore of this” (Cone, 1969:117).

4.4.2 Purpose for Black Theology

“The purpose of Black Theology is to analyze the nature of the Christian faith in such a way that black people can say Yes to blackness and No to whiteness and mean it” (Cone 1969: 117). He goes on to say that “it is not the purpose of Black Theology to address white people, at least not directly. Though whites may read it, understand it, and even find some meaning in it, Black Theology is not dependent on white perception. It
assumes that the possibilities of creative response among white people to black humiliation are virtually nonexistent” (Cone, 1969:118).

4.4.3 Goal of Black Theology

Cone (1969:118) states because Black Theology has as starting point the black condition, this does not mean that it denies the absolute revelation of God in Christ. Rather, it means that Black Theology firmly believes that God’s revelation in Christ can be made supreme only by affirming Christ as he is alive in black people today.

The goal of Black Theology is to prepare the minds of blacks for freedom so that they will be ready to give all for it. Black people must speak to and for black people as they seek to remove the structures of white power which hover over them, stripping them of their blackness.

4.4.4 Does Black Theology have a Kerygma?

To understand the kerygmatic nature of Black Theology it is worth quoting a few black theologians and even those who researched their views. Mothlabi (1984:122) summed up the aim of such a kerygmatic nature when he says speaking of the challenge for black ministers to “come down from the ivory towers and to share in the toil and tumble of their charges”.

Baartman (1973:20) summarised the kerygmatic context of Black Theology in saying “Black Theology ... seeks to inform the preacher in New Brighton, Gugulethu, Chatsworth, Soweto, Garankuwa, Morsga, Dimbaza, Limehill and all other places of deprivation and despair so that he brings the word of God and it ‘becomes Good News’ to these people”.

Kritzinger (1988:84) says this deep concern that suffering people should hear God’s message and be strengthened by it, reveals the kerygmatic character of Black Theology. He goes on to assert that the “basic motivation for Black Theology does not come from a political ideology, but from the genuine Christian concern to say and do something which will really be ‘good news’ to suffering black people”.

The essence of the kerygmatic focus of Black Theology is best summarised in the words of Mofokeng (1983:10) when he, in stark view of the suffering of his people was haunted into asking the question, “How can faith in Jesus Christ empower black people who are involved in the struggle for their liberation?”
As much as the kerygmatic nature and focus of Black Theology is argued by the aforementioned authors, the challenge remains that it is difficult to separate the theology from the ideology which Mosala already conceded unequivocally when he concluded “black theology to be a subset of black ideology” (1989:1). If the theology is a subset that means it originates from the ideology and it is thus difficult to draw a distinction between the two. Secondly, another challenge which we now consistently have raised resonates in the certainty and finality of identity of what a Mothlabi (1984:122) or a Mofokeng (1983: 10) argue as black. This study is still not ready to declare with certainty whether it is correct or defensible to argue an identity in such a colour description. Also it is not clear if the acceptance of identity is common or one that academics have embraced and therefore informed by what a constructed ideology seeks to advance and advocate.

Another challenge one may seek to raise with Mothlabi in his challenge to what he calls the “black ministers”, has to do with why it is assumed that “black ministers” did not already share in the proverbial “toil and tumble” of their congregants. Certainly by way of a common experience served by the same powers these black ministers were not absolved nor excused from the same racist treatment as their congregants.

Why the separation manifested in what he reads as an “ivory tower” perspective? Is this not perhaps a one—sided perspective that is more informed by an intolerance of others’ views, who very possibly did not believe in the propagated identity exemplified in the black identifier? Mothlabi may argue that this kerygmatic nature is aimed at helping preachers, or as he calls them, “black ministers”, to preach and teach contextually and to make relevant the text in the present conditions and plight of the people defined as black. Yet he, like all Black Theologians, does not afford others who equally shared the pain of such suffering the opportunity to unpack the identity of black which they for ideological purposes adopted as ‘gospel’.

It remains the focus of this work to ask why it was so imperative to embrace the identity of colour with a less tolerant perspective towards those who did not share such a definition of the oppressed human agent.

4.4.5 The Struggle Element of Black Theology

Because the centrality of struggle constitutes a dominant theme in Black Theology, it, therefore, becomes important to ask how the relationship of struggle and Black Theology is interpreted and seen through the lens of the foundational black theologians. Boesak (1978:76) notes that Black Theology is the “critical reflection of black Christians on their involvement in the black liberation struggle”, while Goba (1986:68) understood it as that which undergirds the “emancipatory interests of the black community”.

| Page 63 |
According to Mothlabi (1984:121) the Black Consciousness movement understood Black Theology as that which reflects the “spiritual dimension of its liberation struggle”. Noko (1977:76) took this understanding a step further when he argued that black theologians advance from the awareness that “the Black people struggle for liberation is indeed in accordance with the will of God the Liberator”.

Kritizinger (1988: 87) says if we look at what black theologians say and see in the symbiotic relationship of struggle and theology it is to be concluded that Black Theology is “intentionally political”. He continues to say, “it reflects theologically on the analysis of the structural causes of black suffering and on strategies proposed to eliminate it. In this respect it consciously takes up the tradition of the Old Testament prophets, who never shied away from addressing the political and social ethics.”

He in a sense echoes the views of Goba (1986:66) when he concluded, “Black Theology occurs within the context of the black struggle and inescapably will reflect the ideological interests of the black community. If it doesn’t it ceases to be Black Theology.”

A clear point Kritizinger (1988:88) makes in this direction is when he asserts, “Black Theologians openly and consciously grapple with political questions from the perspective of victims of the South African system and in the light of their understanding of the Bible and the Christian tradition”. One considers this a salient point in that he refers to the suffering ones as victims and the theologians as black theologians. This is a significant distinction to make here.

One is not sure if he makes it distinctly but I choose to interpret this as an acknowledgement that black theologians chose to be black and those who suffer may see themselves only as victims and not necessarily black victims.

It is a fundamental contention that this study wishes to draw, i.e. that what is considered struggle may be viewed from a different or distinct set of interpretations about identity. The question of struggle is not to be assumed as necessarily a colour defined struggle but ought to be considered in an oppressor and victim frame as well. This may be considered a narrow interpretation yet, or however, it affords equal sufferers or victims the right to regard their identities differently and does not assume these to be automatically colour coded.

4.4.6 A Situational Theology

This brings us to the question of whether Black Theology is, as some argue, a situational theology? In order to appreciate this question that may have diverse answers it is again imperative to firstly look at how James Cone understood this theology and the situation
of blackness. Cone (1969:116) asserts that “Black religionists must begin serious thinking about the meaning of Christian obedience in an age of black revolution. We need a theology for the oppressed black people of America aimed at the destruction of racism in the society.”

One almost senses that for Cone, the black situation constitutes the premise for the advancement of the theology, yet it also can be concluded from this statement that the black revolution is seen and used as the premise for the existence of the theology, making the theology per se an ideology-led theology. No different, it may be argued, is what the oppressors did when they exalted their identity at the expense of others. However, this study recognises the important difference that lies in black theology’s moral high ground compared to the theology/ideology of the white supremacists.

Cone (1969: 117) asserts that “Black Theology must take seriously the reality of black people – their life of suffering and humiliation. This must be the point of departure for all God-talk which seeks to be black-talk. When that man is black and lives in a society permeated with white racist power, he can speak of God only from the perspective of the socio-economic and political conditions unique to black people.”

This study repeats these citations here to reflect the aggregate thinking on Black Theology as understood by the ‘father’ of Black Theology. It is the view of this study that these views cannot be left uncontested, but warrant at least an interpretation as we seek to explore what constitutes the situational nature of Black Theology. Others such as Boesak (1976:143) would conclude, “Black Theology’s situation is the situation of blackness”.

To quote Mosala (1989:72), “…when black theology speaks of being critically and firmly based within the black history of struggle, it has in mind the conflicts and harmonies between people and nature and between people and people that revolve around the morality of production for human needs”. Moreover, “black theology seeks to base itself on this economic morality in its attempt to becoming a liberating weapon of struggle, and its biblical hermeneutics must draw especially from the values of a culture that came out of this stage.”

C. Eric Lincoln (1973:315) in his critique of James Cone concludes, “Black Theology is bound to the situation in this sense, that God’s confrontation with white racism is but one aspect of God’s action in a multi-dimensional complex of interaction between man and man, and God and man”.

Boesak (1976: 143) argues that Cone’s mistake is that “he has taken Black Theology out of the framework of the theology of liberation, thereby making his situation (being black in
America) and his own movement (liberation from white racism) the ultimate criterion for all theology.”

If I understand Boesak correctly he is arguing that the premise of Black Theology should be found or located in liberation theology, which is speaking directly to the liberation Gospel of Jesus Christ.

This is an important distinction to make that, notwithstanding the hermeneutic primacy of the situation, such a situation must not be superimposed as a means to define the theology narrowly. The liberation Gospel of Jesus Christ must speak to the situation and serve as the anchor of our prism of thought in interpreting our very situation, so as to speak and challenge such a situation.

The extent to which Boesak disagrees with Cone is an essential point to highlight here: for Cone the black situation defines the God—talk, while for Boesak the liberation hope and message of Jesus Christ constitutes the axis for a Black Theology.

This study agrees with Boesak that if we purely use the situation as the departure point to define Black Theology it runs the risk of substituting the predominant and overarching theme of the liberation message of Jesus Christ that Christians regardless of colour, race or creed must contend with.

The above helps us to understand the relational dimensions of black struggle and Black Theology or otherwise the black people’s situation and Black Theology. There is a consensus that Black Theology finds its roots in the black situation. Black theologians may show a variance in how they understand the departure point of the theology, as the critique of Boesak towards Cone shows. However, for the most part the departure point for Black Theology is rooted in the black situation.

Another challenge this study foresees with Cone’s work is the subject matter of racism, firstly what he calls “white” racism. As important as this may be to describe the context of such racist behaviour at the time, the challenge is what would it have been called if the adjective was not white; for example as we see as in the USA as recent as 2012, the attitude of “blacks” towards Hispanics which also could be considered racist. Even as we see the xenophobic attacks that have visited South Africa from period of 2008, where Africans were killed in what is considered to be a form of racism towards only African migrants.

It appears that Cone is rather conclusive on the identity of a people captured in a colour explanation.
This study concurs with Boesak (1976:143) when he argues that “this means that the liberation praxis is finally judged not by the demands of the situation, but by the liberating gospel of Jesus Christ”.

The issue of Black Theology as being merely a situational theology is perhaps a contested terrain, yet what cannot be argued away is the centrality of the situation, i.e. the black situation or the situation that black people found themselves in. Thus, it is not unfair to argue that Black Theology is a situation theology.

4.4.7 Inwardly Endorsed Reflective Theology

When we speak of a Black Theology as a theology we have established that Black Consciousness as a philosophy and psychology asks of the cohort of people denoted as black to firstly respond to the abuse, vilification and struggle visited upon them by their white supremacist oppressors. Such a response is what Black Consciousness argues is a consciousness at philosophical level and a state of mind that reconfigures itself.

This reconfiguring of self is what can be labelled an inward reflective awareness. When we speak of an inward reflective consciousness in understanding self and group this means to reach inwardly and redefine the essence of one’s existence as free from the accosted identity and persona enforced upon one by an oppressor and an oppressive environment.

The link between Black Consciousness and Black Theology has been established in a previous chapter, in which the opinions of many such as Mosala (1989:2) are captured: “Black Theology is a subset of Black Consciousness”. This clearly delineates that the ideology and consciousness constitutes the scope of understanding Black Theology. This inadvertently also means that Black Theology must of necessity be understood against the backdrop of the ideology of black identity.

In the words of Cone (1969:117) “The task of Black Theology then is, to analyze the black man’s condition in the light of God’s revelation in Jesus Christ with the purpose of creating a new understanding of black dignity among black people, and providing the necessary soul in that people, to destroy white racism”.

This summary of the task of Black Theology underpins the notion of the finding of one’s soul, or as we intend establishing here, the product of an inward reflective awareness – a self-defined identity. Understanding Black Theology in this sense is to ask for a new hermeneutic key informed by one’s sense of being regardless of how wrongly or erroneously this may have been practised, experienced or rationalised until now.
4.5 Black Theology and Black Ideology

We have seen from the abovementioned discussion that the relationship between Black Theology and a black ideology is in the proverbial sense connected hip and socket. It is not the intention of this section to again deal with the issue of nationalism or ideology for we have dealt with it extensively in drawing on the collective histories of black ideology and nationalism as a cross—cutting theme for both the US and South African contexts in chapter 2 of this study. Rather we shall now briefly deal with the tension of this relationship and argue that the ideology proves central for the praxis of the theology.

Althusser (1971:170) helps us to understand the role of ideology in asserting “there is no practice except by and in an ideology”.

The South African theorist, Mosala (1989:1), reminds us that “Black Theology in South Africa first emerged in the context of the black consciousness movement during the late 1960's”. Mosala (1989:1) also said, “it came into being as cultural tool of struggle propounded by young black South Africans who were influenced by the philosophy of the new black consciousness. The immediate target of black theology was the Christian church, and especially Christian theology. The point of disjuncture that motivated its genesis was the perceived acquiescence of the Christian church and its theology in the oppression and exploitation of black people.”

We have established in an earlier chapter (chapter 3) the linkages between the US and South African genesis of the Black Power and Black Consciousness movements as those shared a history of exchange in which the USA influenced the South African context. We have also established that Black Theology as a theology was introduced by Moore to the South African context of liberation thought.

These explorations were embedded in Mofokeng's assertion when he (1987:26) argues that a praxis of relevant theology requires a “rigorous analysis of society”.

In this chapter we want to explore this close relationship to determine if Black Theology could be substituted for black ideology and if this relationship proves functional or lends itself to a precarious context of mistaking one for the other.

In this regard Gordon is our first interlocutor. He (2003:1) argues, “The Million Man March of 16 October 1995 pushed the debate about ‘race’ to the forefront of American public discourse. As such debates engross the nation, some troubling questions are asked, particularly those about the identity, place, and role of ‘black people’ in America.” The more poignant point Gordon raises is when he continues in saying, “not only has the
Million Man March pushed race to the forefront, but even more significant, it has demonstrated the potential black nationalist ideology to unify and mobilize blacks in the face of material and symbolic alienation in the United States.”

For Gordon (2003:1), “the ideology of black nationalism emphasizes black self—definition and self—determination in contrast to the continuing efforts of white Anglo—America to define blacks and determine their role in the debate about race”.

If Black Theology in both the US and South African contexts emerged as a subset of the Black Power and Black Consciousness movements, which essentially advocated an ideology of black identity in response to racism and apartheid, then Black Theology is in a sense an extension of the ideology. This study is seeking to argue that it is clear from the reading of black theologians that the ideology preceded the theology. This presents an untenable situation because it is this study’s contention that theology has to precede ideology.

We must not forget that Black Theology as we have learnt was mainly targeting the church, to conscientise, sensitise and mobilise a new way of thinking informed by a new hermeneutic interpretation of the biblical text and its relevance for the liberation of black people. Biko (1979:94) said of Black Theology that it was a theology which “grapples with the existential problems and does not claim to be a theology of absolutes”. Black Theology therefore speaks to and seeks to address the prevailing social circumstances for it appears dictated to by its oppressive circumstances and needs, instead of a need to develop a systematic theology for its own sake.

This makes Black Theology a specific ‘market’ that Black Consciousness targeted as necessary to engage, with a view to transforming society as an extension of the ideology it sought to advance. It therefore in a sense is no different to arguing that perhaps the ideology had to find a resting place in the academic, health, or spiritual context of what I choose to call the soil for fermentation.

The primary reason for my deduction rests in the critical question, what theology was practised until then by the people that Black Consciousness and black theologians defined as black? This question moves from the premise that by the time Black Power or Black Consciousness emerged there were already Christians, that Black Power and Consciousness came to define as black. These people engaged with their God, practised a liturgy, held out hope for salvation and equally believed and practised a faith until Black Theology emerged as led by black ideology. These questions did not become obsolete with the advent of ‘black’.

Thus, the further question arises, can Black Theology be separated from black ideology? If it is able to untie itself from the cradle of its existence, namely the ideology of black
identity and experience in response to a dehumanised racist experience, would it stand by itself, alone, as distinct and with the potential of longevity?

The question is whether the ideology of black identity defines the theology in a narrow sense meaning that such theology is nothing more than just an ideology for a particular context, which, though relevant now, due to its situational nature may be completely irrelevant in another time. Asked differently, did the black Christian before the advent of Black Theology practise a “black theology”?

Reading some of our leading thinkers on the subject, such as Boesak, one senses at times a defence of what is considered the African’s faith, traditions and cultures which is the same that is being treated as barbaric by racist colonialists who were bent on transforming the African mind and spirituality to embrace a Christianity of the oppressor. On the other hand a clear Christian premise is asserted, where the teachings of Jesus Christ as the Redeemer of all mankind and his redemptive work of liberation of mankind in a holistic sense, is defended.

What is postulated here is not to argue that the African faith which existed before colonialism is diametrically opposite to the Christian faith, but to raise the issue of a combination of two distinct theologies. It is natural to argue that a rejection of the identity of others, i.e. the white supremacists, blinds one to reject even the colonised's faith as that which is barbaric and archaic.

In this study’s assessment this latter transpired as a result of apartheid. It was essential for the oppressor to strip from the oppressed their inherent faith as part of the total experience of oppression and dehumanising. We are not always sure if Black Theology defends the African faith from a faith point of view or from an ideology point of view; hence the argument set out in this study.

Black Theology, it seems therefore, proves inseparable from black ideology. Black Theology derives its meaning from the ideology and therefore proves as in the case of Cone trapped by this ideology for its emergence, its direction and its impact.

4.6 Responses to Black Theology

It would be unfair to see the responses to Black Theology as purely those from commentators denoted as “white”. The record will show that the responses to Black Theology are wider than this group and have included human agents who shared a sameness of experience with the black theologians and their teachings.
Black identity and experience in Black Theology: A critical assessment

Black Theology necessitates a response from whites because it is a theology that speaks against the consequences of oppression, apartheid, segregation and dehumanisation by white supremacists through a systemic and structured effort.

To appreciate responses from the white group of the human cohort in the South African context, it is important to note the work of Kritzinger (1989) when he distinguishes three categories of responses to summarise the white response to Black Theology. Kritzinger (1989:259) categorises the three types of responses as “rejection”, “sympathy” and “solidarity”. The latter he pleads for and sees as being himself of such mind.

Schulze (1975:51) called it “weinig oorspronklik” (seldom original). He, like Oosthuizen (1973:77) reduced Black Theology to “an imported concept as a North American concept and brought to South Africa”.

Crafford (1987:28) defined Black Theology as a “secular and political theology aimed at tempting young Blacks to embrace Marxism” with the potential of engendering violence. Boshoff (1973:5) in perhaps his earliest description of Black Theology concludes in Afrikaans in the following way “dat as die Swart Teologie in sy volle konsekwensies deur swartmense van Afrika aanvaar word, alle moontlikheid tot kommunikasie tussen wit en swart finaal vernietig sal wees” (that if Black Theology in its full consequences is accepted by black people from Africa, all possibilities for communication between white and black finally will be destroyed).

Vorster (1984:134) in his critique on what he terms a neo—marxist political theology asserts, “die skrifbeskouing van die Neo—Marxistiese Politieke Teologie is sekulêr, en dit is die grootste en deurslaggewende punt van kritiek wat teen hierdie rigting ingebring kan word. Die Bybel is die bron van alle Christelike teologiese besinning en wanneer die bron self anders gelees en toegepas word as wat dit self bepaal, moet die teologie wat daarin voorkom in sy geheel bevaalteken word.”

For Vorster, the Neo—Marxist Political Theology’s viewing of scripture is secular. He offered this as the most prominent and convincing point of critique that he levels against this stream. He argues the Bible as the source of Christian theological contemplation, and thus when the source is both read and applied differently as itself determines, the theology it produces warrants being questioned.

He cautions that Neo—Marxist Political Theology chooses politics as hermeneutic entry point which opens the theology up for ideological influence, since ideology always determine politics. Vorster’s critique of the Neo Marxist Political Theology when translated, on salvation asserts that deliverance for this stream is consummated in political freedom. Sin is interpreted as the structural injustices of socio— political oppression. Salvation therefore is understood to be completely delivered from this
structural sin. For this stream Jesus is the historical example of struggle for structural freedom. Reconciliation is reasoned as the strive to world—community and solidarity with the oppressed. Repentance is explained as the involvement of the individual with political change (Vorster 1984:139).

According to Vorster, this departure point brings to question two aspects, namely the teaching of the authority of the Biblical Text and the teaching on the completeness of the Holy Scripture to singularly be the rule of faith, as questionable.

It is important to pause and make sense of what Crafford and Boshoff conclude. Kritzinger (1989:260) in his assessment argues that Boshoff “interprets Black Theology as anti—white”. He accuses Boshoff of being paternalistic when Boshoff (1973:6) asserts, “ons moet probeer agter die skreeu van die kind die pyn te ontdek” (“we must attempt to uncover the pain, behind the scream of the child”). Oosthuizen (1973:77) asks in means of response to Black Theology if it is not “white theology painted black”.

The apartheid government established a Commission of Enquiry into the South African Council of Churches (SACC) under the chair of Justice C. F. Eloff in 1981. The Eloff Commission found Black Theology to be “nothing but a form of Black racism” (Kritzinger 1989:262) The Commission was aimed at harming the SACC and curtailing much of its activities. However, in the end it vindicated the Council and its theological basis in its conclusions.

Even Kritzinger, as an advocate for solidarity with Black Theology, does not question the blackness that describes the identity of a people. The responses against Black Theology were not restricted to only Afrikaners but also English—speaking churches. Dwane (1989:29) records how at a session of the Anglican Provincial Synod in a presidential address, Black Theology and the apartheid theology were rejected as “essentially two sides of the same coin”.

Meiring (1976:97) represents a sympathetic view towards Black Theology when he advocates for tolerance saying, “nederigheid pas ons almal wanneer ons hiermee besig is. Nederigheid, as wit Christene, omdat ons die laaste is om met die vinger te wys, omdat die skim van ‘n wit teologie altyd voor ons opdoem. Nederigheid, as swart gelowiges, omdat ons weet hoe feilbaar die mens is, hoe maklik die mens in sy oormoed die spoor byster kan raak.” (Humility suits all when we engage it. Humility, as white Christians, because we are the last to point a finger, because the illusion of white theology always shows up before us. Humility, as black believers because we know how fallible the human being is, how easily the human being in his excess may loose track).

A critical point to make here as relevant to our discussion on the construction of black identity and blackness is the finality that whites have in the description of a people
deemed black. Whites, it would appear, never struggled nor challenged the idea of referring to a people as black. What one picks up from Crafford with his idea of Black Theology “tempting young blacks” and Boshoff seeing it as aimed at the “die swartmense van Afrika”, is the notion that whites had without any fear or threat to themselves in their own identity defined a people as black. Yet, if whites find some comfort in referring to others in terms of blackness, it is perhaps because they are so convinced of their white identity from where they interpret and define others.

There were also responses to Black Theology other than from white commentators.

In the first place, C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya published a ten—year statistical study of the black church in America under the name, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (1990).

Part of the Lincoln and Mamiya (1990:178—179) study dealt with black liberation theology: “In our urban questionnaire we asked the pastors of 1,531 urban churches, ‘Have you been influenced by any of the authors and thinkers of black liberation theology?’

The responses to the urban questionnaire revealed much; of those interviewed approximately 34.9 percent of urban black clergy said they had been influenced by black liberation theologians as opposed to 65.1 percent who said they had not. Little more than one—third of the black pastors interviewed claimed any influence from this movement! Significantly, Lincoln and Mamiya in their research would challenge the overstated role of Black Theology as that which has influenced the aggregate “black” minister. In their research they found that fewer than 25% of those interviewed could claim a direct influence of the Black Theology philosophy.

Furthermore, some later perspectives and critiques of Black Theology included the thoughts of Ron Rhodes (1991:12) when he suggests, “Theologians who make black experience all—determinative have, in a way, made the same mistake some white racists did during the days of slavery – only in reverse. Just as some whites imposed their ‘experience’ as slave masters onto Scripture in order to justify slavery, so some blacks have imposed the ‘black experience’ onto Scripture to justify their radical views on liberation. Both positions have erred.”

This view is not a new one as was advanced by many even in the South African context. What we see from this is the critical focus for some black theologians to use the black situation or experience as the “all—determinative” focus. We have earlier said that for Cone this was a critical premise, yet Boesak warned against the danger of doing so, when the liberation aspect of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is substituted for a situation.
Rhodes (1991:2) asserts another black theologian, Anthony Evans, also challenges Cone’s methodology by arguing that the black experience must be seen as “real but not revelatory, important but not inspired”.

The Black writer Tom Skinner (1975:112) concurs with Anthony Evans and argues, “like any theology, black theology must have a frame of reference. However, there are some black theologians who seek to make their frame of reference purely the black experience, but this assumes the black experience is absolutely moral and absolutely just, and that is not the case. There must be a moral frame of reference through which the black experience can be judged.” That frame of reference, according to this study, must be Scripture.

This study concurs with Rhodes (1991:12) when he argues, “To produce a biblical liberation theology, Scripture – not the ‘black experience’ – must be the supreme authority in matters of faith and practice. By following this approach, a strong biblical case can be constructed against racism – something I would think should be at the very heart of a biblical black theology.”

This is no different to what Boesak pleaded for when he critiqued Cone for falling into the trap of reducing what he calls a contextual theology for a situational theology in which one’s situation may be absolutised.

Therefore, if the situation cannot stand as the complete foundation for an identity articulation there is a need to seek another base. It is this study’s assertion that any theology finds its foundation in the biblical text as the point of departure. It is this study’s contention that the biblical text remains the only true means for guiding and understanding identity construction for those who share in the redemptive work of Christ.

This work will explore the Bible as a defining text on identity, in chapter 7.

4.7 The Evolution of Black Theology in a Changing Political and Economic Climate

When we speak of the evolution of Black Theology, we are exploring the road the theology has traversed since the late 60’s and early 70’s to the post--apartheid democratic reality and challenges. The attempt here is not to give a historical account but to give an overview to determine to what extent the evolution of the political context has shaped the theology. This we want to categorise as the evolution of Black Theology.
We have established that black theologians are in agreement that the political situation defined the context of the emergence of both black ideology and Black Theology. Not only does the situation lend itself to a political context, but such a political context is not without an economic context, a context where those who oppress, also control and dictate the economic landscape.

The black situation is also sensitive and reflects this economic disparity. It is perhaps noteworthy to cite the deduction of Kreider (1997:7) when he concludes in his paper on Black Theology, labelled ‘Black Theology’s Call for Economic Justice’, “In the beginnings of black theology, while it was just emerging, the first and most evident source of oppression of blacks was white racism. So racism became its primary target, while black theology’s support for socialism remained under the surface. However as black theology developed, writers like Cone and Cornel West (Vol.1:413) recognized the value of a Marxist critique of the capitalist system, and integrated that into black theology and now call for a total liberation of black people from both racism, capitalism, and imperialism.”

This captures an important aspect confirming the evolutionary context of Black Theology that started out as a response to white racism, but later also included the economic justice question.

In South Africa, the system of apartheid with its system of laws tightly woven together was undergirded with a racist ideology that provided the context for a black ideology of resistance. Such a black ideology of resistance is the direct reason for the emergence of Black Theology which asked of black Christians to re—examine what they believe the God of the Bible is saying about their circumstances of suffering. Therefore, it was pleading for a new teaching informed by a liberation notion that finds meaning in biblical language in both Old and New Testament settings.

Whilst it called for the black church to re—examine itself and what it believed about itself, it equally challenged other Christians, white included, to make sense of the fact that blacks as people were equals and therefore were not deserving of the racist attitude and behaviour they suffered.

The political setting of the time therefore gave Black Theology a face and a reality that most probably would be differently applied today. Chances are that it could even be made redundant today. We therefore seek to ask, what is the road it travelled, as we sit now in the second decade of the democratic South Africa and the USA with its first ‘black’ president.

In this regard this study contends that Black Theology, like all streams of liberation theology and theology in general, cannot escape the evolutionary process of development. We have established that Black Theology has as its cradle the Black
Consciousness Movement in South Africa and the Black Power Movement in the USA. Therefore, this study further contends that if this very cradle were to change through the political transformation of the societies in which it had its genesis then the changes in these contexts must have a bearing on the development, stagnation or reclassification of its content.

Lloyd (2011:2) in his work *Paradox and Tradition in Black Theology* argues that the “recent critiques against black theology, from quite different directions have underscored the aporias that result when a theological project starts from secular foundations”.

This study concurs with Lloyd on the genesis of Black Theology as that which was born from a secular foundation. The identified secular foundation for Black Theology remains the ideological parameters that shaped and defined the theology. Lloyd (2011:2) further asserts that “black theology often appears to consist of movement in two directions, one political and one cultural”.

One of the predominant challenges or accusations levelled at Liberation and Black Theology is the claim that the theology is out of touch with the poor and the oppressed, the critical constituency of Liberation Theology.

In capturing what recent reformulations depict, it is perhaps necessary to hear Lloyd (2011:2) citing, Petrella as captured in his 2008 polemic titled *Beyond Liberation Theology* who asserts that “the purported focus on the poor and oppressed which once motivated liberation theology has been lost”. This is indeed a strong claim against Black Theology in its practical dimension because the reality has shifted.

When Petrella argues for a reconscientising of the reason for liberation, this argument as a moving or shifting of the primary focus of liberation theologies in general is also levelled against Black Theology, to have moved from the cardinal aspects to its current state.

Lloyd (2011:3) notes that “the advocates of this revitalised liberation theology level a powerful critique at black theology. When the emphasis of black theology becomes a celebration of black culture, when the de jure racial oppression becomes de facto, and when the black middle class develops in whose interest it is to celebrate black culture while ignoring de facto racial oppression, black theology easily strays from its seminal commitment to the struggle of the poor and oppressed.”

This critique challenges the relevance of the usage of the term “black” as a means to describe the poor and oppressed in the face of empirical evidence that suggests that there are poor and oppressed people who are not black, whilst there are black people...
who are neither poor nor oppressed. We will revert back to this later in chapter 6 where this study suggests that black identity carries a burden.

Cornel West proves instructive in a critical question as it relates to the economic justice mandate of Black Theology when he asks, “Do blacks only seek to imitate middle class whites and permit vast economic inequalities to continue to exist” (West 2002, Vol. 1:413). Or does Black Theology have something to say about “the dual economic exploiting doctrines of capitalism and imperialism” (West 2002, Vol. 1:413)?

As sociologist (West 2002, Vol.1:413) summarised the initial short---sighted focus or emphasis of Black Theology when he argued, “black theology has in the past concentrated more on opposing the current dominant paradigm than on proposing an alternative, and for that reason it has neglected economic justice”.

West argues that class is actually the dominant cause of alienation and this can be seen by the fact that working class whites are also affected West (Vol. 1: 416). For West the “same forces” are aligned behind capitalism and racism against the liberation of blacks (West 2002, Vol. 1: 414).

Mwambazambi (2010:4) in looking back on the evolutionary track of the concept and praxis of Black Theology, argues that “The missiological challenge presented by South African Black Theology can lead to a reconstitution of the ideas of the church and to taking up the responsibility of bringing the Gospel to White people to offer them the joy of belonging to a community that is marked by a known and palpable unity in a dynamic corporate life, which has the power to break every yoke of human bondage”.

Maluleke (2002:154) would argue that “the time has come for Black and African theologians to confront some of the basic presuppositions on which it has been built”.

The evolution of Black Theology also invites a critical look at what in practice some of the erstwhile black theologians failed in. Mwambazambi (2010:5) argues that “the missiological overview of South African Black Theology demonstrates that the first characteristic of this theology is its negation. This negation denounces the prolonged nuptials of the civil capacity and the religious capacity framework of South Africa.” It is common cause that support for a racist ideology has left some church circles tainted in the same way that black theologians denounced those who supported both the cultural and political interests of the oppressor when they equally remain unmoved by the plight and suffering of the poor.

In perhaps one of his strongest critiques of the evolution of South African Black theology, Mwambazambi (2010:5) notes, “unfortunately, some South African Black theologians who criticised Western theology and the theology of apartheid that was
found by sections of the White South African Christian community today support discrimination against non—South African Black, Coloured and White people. Some Black scholars are using the same concepts with which Black Theology condemned apartheid to support social injustice under the Black government.”

From this citation we may deduce that perhaps the goalposts may have shifted and that the proverbial game may have adopted new rules informed by a new paradigm. It appears, if one hears Mwambazambi’s lament correctly, that Black Theology itself became stuck in a paradigm from which it finds difficulty to untie itself in reinterpreting and celebrating the freedom for which it worked. This work identifies this need as articulated by Mwambazambi as a future task for Black Theology.

“Not only that, but a reinterpretation of who constitutes the oppressed, who are the suffering ones now, is required, especially when some black theologians prove silent when oppression is occurring at the hands of the black majority. He pleads for an adaptation of South African Black Theology to the “current African realities to justify the positive transformation of Africa” (Mwabazambi 2010:5).

This plea on his part is for a re—awakening of the greater need and focus that Black Theology underscored in a much earlier history of the struggle of the human agent denoted as black and the struggle of Africans. It is the same human agent who is beset with the challenges of colonialism and racism. Thus, to deny the greater picture of such work of Black Theology in a wider African context is to fail to understand the genesis and purpose behind Black Theology’s beginnings. It is also presenting a missed opportunity where Africans and the human agent denoted as whites equally and together seek freedom.

It is perhaps important in this same vein to note the later work of Mokgethi Mothlabi, who contends “Black Theology has lost its responsiveness to the socio—economic realities that followed liberation”. He furthermore emphasizes that “critical and prophetic participation” by black theologians and other structures remains necessary in addressing the ongoing social issues the country faces, Mothlabi (2008:2). For Mothlabi this is necessary notwithstanding the fact of whatever solidarity exists in working with the State.

It is clear that from Mothlabi’s point of view Black Theology remains firstly relevant. Secondly it warrants a rethink in praxis to be functional in a democratic and politically free South Africa. This study notes that Mothlabi in his more recent work argues for a specific economic redress as the next frontier of black theology’s focus.

However, as plausible and necessary this claim may be it does not assist us in the perpetual defence of the necessity for the ‘black’ in black theology. Perhaps a more
intriguing question in a practical sense may be posed to those who advance the next frontier, economic emancipation, will there ever be a time beyond present and postulated frontiers that we may arrive regardless what, where the need for the theology to remain ‘black’ becomes obsolete? At what stage will the theology just be a theology free from constricted colour—coding irrespective of cause and effect?

4.8 The Black Identity in Black Theology

It is important to note again the centrality of the black subject in both the ideology and theology. The black subject as the sum total of a people is central in the DNA of the Black Consciousness and Black Power philosophies. Due to the nature and very genesis of Black Theology as a subset of the black ideology, and the tightly knit relationship of ideology and theology, Black Theology in concert with black ideology is congruent in viewing the identity of the people that are oppressed as black.

Goba (1986:66) made the relationship between ideology and theology overt when he asserted, “Black theology occurs within the context of the black struggle and inescapably will reflect the ideological interests of the black community. If it doesn’t it ceases to be Black Theology.”

Goba’s assertion conveys a few things, firstly he talks of the inescapability of the reflection of the ideological interests; this means the secular ideology led the theology not only in its condemnation of apartheid, but also in defining the oppressed.

The second issue remains the finality with which the definition of a black community that black theologians have chosen to define is informed by colour at times, and at other times by situation or experience. The issue of defining a people as black remains one that is hardly contested by Black Theology in conformity with its parent, namely ideology.

It is interesting that Black Theology never challenged the black identity but defended it as certainty. The reason for this perhaps could be traced back to what Baartman (1973: 19) said, “to white theologians who are going to use their criteria for assessing Black Theology, my response is go on, but your white standards are irrelevant. The black man is not seeking your approval.”

Boesak (1976:143) pleads for a “contextual theology” and not what he calls a “regional theology”. He critiques Cone for absolutising a situation. He continues to ask a fundamental question: “but in making this the ultimate criterion for all liberation theology, is Cone not wide open for an ideological take over?”.

This is a poignant question for it reveals the challenge and tension of the theology and ideology in practice. This study asserts that, whilst we concur with Boesak on the danger
of absolutising a situation, a more important consideration is, if the ideology determined
the identity of the human agent denoted as black for a people – be it in situation,
experience or being, – as an accepted notion and imported it into the theological
framework, did the ideology not already score its biggest victory there?

Why would Boesak warn of the danger of an ideology and not see that it was the secular
ideological parameters that ultimately determined the identity of the oppressed as black,
the same we have to contend with and make sense of in our ever changing context.

This study asserts that the liberation message of Jesus Christ in the complete deliverance
of all human beings, is, as Boesak argues, what must inform the theology and not the
situation. The questions is thus, are black theologians open to the fact that the liberation
message of Jesus Christ does not discriminate on the basis of colour or ethnicity, but
prognosticates the liberation of the oppressed, steering clear from giving them an
identity in blackness or any other for that matter?

There will of course be those who will argue that it is important to read the entire biblical
story of deliverance in both the Old and New Testament sense to appreciate the truth of
the Gospel of Jesus Christ as a liberation Gospel. This study concurs and argues the fact
that God separated Israel and chose to deliver his people from oppression on various
occasions as the biblical record shows, Israel does not refer distinctly and uniquely to a
people but a type which refers to all mankind.

Even if we can make the case for a group, a people, a tribe, etc., the Bible never speaks
about these as the sole guiding light for His deliverance plan. So transcending is the
liberation message that in this era, God would be on the side of Palestine as the
oppressed.

It is our contention that the importing and adoption of the secular concept defining a
people conclusively as “black” holds inherent challenges for the theological paradigm of
identity and it is no different than the claim of danger Boesak critiques Cone for, when he
says “it leaves itself open for ideological takeover”.

We have established that Black Theology leans heavily on and remains utterly indebted
to black ideology for its usage and appreciation of the construct called black. This makes
the construct an appropriated one for Black Theology. Equally, since the ideology has as
task and mission the redress of injustice done by whites to blacks it adopts the same
paradigm of colour to explain and define the oppressor and the oppressed as colour—
based identities, namely white and black.

It is this work’s conviction that the construct of blackness to describe a people remains
an imported one from the ideology of the Black Power and Black Consciousness
movements, which started off in reaction to how “whites” defined and shaded a people as “black”.

The interesting thing is that the oppressor and oppressed are in agreement on the identity of the oppressed and the oppressor as black and white, respectively.

However, it appears that the respective movements did not expend much effort in understanding the origins of the term and construct of black. When we allow a secular ideology to define our being it may lend itself to criticism because black ideologists and subsequent theologians never afforded themselves the opportunity to critically evaluate the black identifier, but rather appropriated it uncritically. This very identifier today still defines the canvas of identity construction.

4.9 Why Black to Define a Theology?

As this study concludes on the linkage between ideology and theology, it becomes important to ask again why the term “black” appears in Black Theology. We have established that the black in Black Theology is informed by the ideology of blackness inherent in a black subject that is oppressed and suffers at the hand of white racists and oppressive systems. An important point to make is that what we had in South Africa was in fact apartheid theology.

One is not in any sense attempting to give a racist system any credit for what they did, for that will forever be an indelible mark on our history. However, the racists never called their theology white, although it promoted the idea of difference between a white and black identity. This study holds that they proved successful when blacks in a wholesale sense bought into this framework as that which necessarily must be interpreted as superior and inferior in all relational senses.

This study raises the question, why was it then so critical for Black Theology to define a liberation theology with legitimate justification from biblical foundations in an articulation straight—jacketed in a colour code? Whilst black theologians are quick to argue that colour is not the predominant aspect informing the theology but a situation that doomed a people into a blackness of experience, they equally at times do emphasise colour as a means to define their otherness from what is considered whiteness. This is no different from what the oppressor did. We argued that it is the origins in secular ideology that scarred the theology and led it to be held hostage within the ambivalence of a colour—coded framework.

The truth is Black Theology, as Mosala, Boesak, Mothlabi and many others unequivocally stated, was aimed at reconscientising the black preacher and the black Christian to revisit
their interpretation of their God as relevant and functional in their black situation. Such a reinterpretation, black theologians argued, would be the bedrock of a new didache and kerygma that would remove a sense of powerlessness and replace it with a power from within, to combat oppressive systems, in deriving hope from the redemptive work of Christ in a holistic sense.

Goba (1986:66) describes the Black Consciousness ideology as the context for developing a “theological hermeneutic of the oppressed”. This stance represents the one dimension of a Black Theology that argues against a simplistic class struggle but in favour of a unique black situation. Goba (1986:67) therefore asserts, “those who view the black problem as part of the general problem of class oppression make a big mistake because this tragically underestimates the uniqueness of the black situation and black experience as a whole”.

Yet, so important was the influence of the ideology of the black subject on the theology that it ignored the fact that a people they deemed black in concert with the oppressors, could have taken a different direction by building on the foundation of a common humanity in Christ in which colour is not a prerequisite nor a means for defining oneself or the other.

Black theologians, out of the black ideology of resistance, sacrificed the theology on the altar of a secular ideology.

Cone is readily critiqued for having read too much of his personal experience into a definition of his theology. The tension of using the secular as a departure point for that which must define or determine if not articulate the spiritual is what proves problematic.

Boesak (1976:143) warned of this impasse, where one’s situation clouds one’s interpretation, when he expresses “the danger of a contextual theology being overruled by the situational experience and as a result succumbing to absolutistic claims is very real”. One wonders if this remonstration of Boesak as a means of critique to Cone, is not perhaps relevant as we argue the issue of the imported ideological construct of identity defined and accepted as black, without careful examination.

For Cone, Black Theology arises out of a basic human need for significance and worth. Essentially, his theology is about black people affirming their blackness and their allegiance to Christ, and Christ’s inherent allegiance with them in their oppression and suffering.

Black Theology in a sense answered and confirmed an identity of whiteness, which until then was not a blindly “white” theology. The constructs of white and black are liberally
used by both blacks and whites without seeking a common humanity that is defined free of this colour—coded framework.

Perhaps Black Theology should have been called or remained a different brand of liberation theology for it would have answered the apartheid theology that defended segregation and the dehumanising of a people, a direct antithesis of the Biblical overarching theme of liberation.

Is it possible that the modern critique against Black Theology praxis in a changed political and economic context may have been redundant if the subject of liberation remained the cornerstone of the theology?

In a much later work titled African Theology/ Black Theology in South Africa Mothlabi (2008:x) contends “today in South Africa theology in general and black theology in particular seems to have lost its bearing and sense of direction, especially since the political change that took place in the country in 1994”. In that same vein he asserts “black theologians, in particular, have gone into recess”. He continues to remonstrate that “black theology has lost its responsiveness to an input into the new socio–economic problems that followed political change, which still need the critical and prophetic participation of black theologians and other critical church structures.”

Reading Mothlabi in this setting helps us to see him again calling for the preservation and upkeep of a Black Theology even in a changed political setting where blacks now have attained political freedom and democratic. He argues that this new setting is not a perfect one but has its own challenges. The critical area he identifies is contained in the reality of socio–economic challenges. He thus sees Black Theology as relevant and necessary to work for the addressing of these ‘new socio economic’ problems.

4.10 Black theology and its liberatory mandate tension

It seems appropriate at this juncture to introduce later perspectives on black theology and its liberation ethos so as to see how it interacts with the broader body of liberation theologies. We do this to assist our understanding of the possible shifts and reinterpretations of a black theology as a liberation theology and to ascertain how the subject is currently engaged.

Our aim is not to be exhaustive but to highlight some interesting related perspectives and to see how these interact with the core of this study.

Dwight Hopkins (in Hopkins & Antonio 2012:3) draws a distinction between what he terms the “modern context” and the “contemporary context” in which he sees black
Christianity ideologically since physical and both US expressing God York church”. 

Theology, black theology, Antonio, major structures missionaries, He black theology modern theology, theology, theology conceived of God (1955); (the initiative for underdeveloped countries towards self—determination), Ghandian nonviolence (thus expressing solidarity with the world’s darker – skinned people, and the lofty ideals of the US Constitution and Declaration of Independence (concerning the rights of modern citizens).

According to Hopkins, the theology of King and African American church practice were both new, since they made the fight for freedom the defining objective of Christianity and summoned faith communities to actively change the world, even at the risk of physical harm. This change on the American Christianity of praxis proved revolutionary since it impresses upon the American minds a consciousness of others when it ideologically was promoting profit and individualism.

Hopkins and Antonio (2012:3) assert Black theology of liberation interweaves three related experiences. “Theology” signifies the long tradition of various forms of Christianity beginning with the life of Jesus in, what we today call north east Africa or
west Asia. “Liberation” designates the specific mission of Jesus the Anointed One on earth; that is to say, liberation of oppressed communities to attain power and wealth. And “black” means the multiple manifestations of black people's socially constructed world—views, aesthetics, and identities. He sees black theology of liberation in summary “to answer the question: how does Jesus’ Gospel of liberation throughout the Christian tradition reveal itself in black culture?” Ultimately, arising out of the particularity of the black experience, the goal is to help craft healthy communities and healthy individuals throughout the world”.

Antonio (in Hopkins and Antonio 2012:33) asserts “Black theology like other liberation theologies claims to be committed to fighting social injustice of every kin, everywhere: homelessness, unemployment, racism, sexism, homophobia, lack of access to health—care and education, the marginalisation of indigenous peoples, declining mortality rates, economic and social impediments to ownership of property, hunger, economic inequality within and between nations particularly between nations of the North and those of the South, human rights violations, discrimination of religious minorities, malnutrition and under nutrition, as well as environmental degradation and its impact on the poor”.

For Antonio whilst the above list of injustice may not prove exhaustive, he asserts “black theology is “related” to liberation theology, or is indeed a theology of liberation by virtue of its commitment to resist and eradicate all the injustices in the list”.

This study notes the extensive nature of liberation theology as in a sense all encompassing as it relates to include the social, political, economic, environmental, cultural and religious injustice as manifested and equally appreciates the symbiotic relation of a black theology as a theology of liberation.

Antonio helps us further to appreciate a “pluralistic understanding of the modes of oppression”, which he in turn divides into two categories: “struggles for recognition” centred on issues of race, identity, gender, sexuality and other forms of cultural injustice and “economic oppression” centred on so called “material inequality”. This capturing of Antonio fits the long-standing social theory of oppression which is also understood in both an economic class struggle and a social recognition struggle.

He asserts as captured (in Hopkins and Antonio 2012:34) “…the conclusion that black theology is “related” to liberation theology, or is indeed a theology of liberation by virtue of its commitment to resist and eradicate all injustices listed earlier, turns out both to be somewhat premature and to fail to tell us anything about how black theology undertakes its struggles against various forms of oppression. Does it do so on the basis of the struggles for recognition” or on the basis of economic oppression, or again on the basis
of both? And if recognition is the desired starting point, the question becomes, which recognition is the desired starting point? Is it recognition of race, sexuality, or gender.”

This emphatic assertion brings us closer to ask again what the true mandate for black theology is within the ambit of a liberation dictum. It also proves piercing in moving past a romantic notion of liberation but seeks to locate black theology at its injustice address.

It asks where black theology derives its liberation mandate from be this the social or economic or both domains of injustice address? It also challenges black theology to articulate how it goes about giving content and life to its liberatory mandate. It is perhaps the same duplicity that modern South African theologians wrestle with as earlier alluded to in Mothlabi (2008:x) where he bemoans the relevance of black theology in a context of political change but economic truculence. It appears for Mothlabi black theology straddles the social and economic contexts for its liberatory mandate, yet Mothlabi does not answer the critical challenge that Hopkins and Antonio raises on methodology and approaches as to how South African black theologians no different to their counterparts elsewhere proves challenged to articulate their methodology for their liberatory mandate.

Hopkins and Antonio (2012:34) remind us that “the practitioners for black theology at sometimes disagree both among themselves and in their conversations with Latin American liberation theology about what starting point to privilege.” Hopkins and Antiono (2012:34) observes that the “field of liberation theology is marked by a wide – ranging methodological pluralism’. He observes that the evidence for this methodological pluralism is a global phenomenon.

He continues to explain that this methodological pluralism is not merely a matter of fashion, style, or variation in emphasis among practitioners of liberation theology, but rather a reflection of genuine differences of history, content, experience of injustice, and of methods and approaches for identifying, analyzing, resisting and overcoming the oppression that causes such injustice”. For, Hopkins and Antonio (2012:34) the dissimilarities mirrored in this pluralism in turn lead to serious differences in how the concept of liberation itself is understood and deployed”.

These differences of history, content experience of injustice and methods and approaches for identifying, analyzing resisting and overcoming oppression that causes such injustice as highlighted by Hopkins and Antonio assists us to argue for an openness of mind to accept the classification of ‘black’ theology may prove challenging because of a pluralism of experiences etc.

Therefore it becomes necessary to reinterpret, even remythologise the construct of a ‘black’ theology and ask how relevant it is in its authentic liberatory mandate when that
context has shifted from a quest for a racial identity to a class--based identity that manifests the growing gaps of gross inequality in a democratic South Africa where political power is defined as black.

We are reminded of the words of Leonard Boff (1988:11) who asserts, “Liberation theology makes a preferential and evangelical option for the oppressed; it tries to look at society from the standpoint of what will help in their liberation, and through their eyes”.

This study notes when Boff asserts “what will help” in their liberation, it understands him to be conscious that the liberation of the oppressed is intrinsically linked to the liberation of the oppressor. Thus the need for liberation is not a singular dimensional or mere self--serving act in which one group (the oppressed) is freed. Nevertheless liberation imbibes and prognosticates the equal importance of the liberation of the oppressor, for he too is oppressed for not seeing the wrong of his barbed--wire actions.

This study asserts the hermeneutical entry point and its continuum of a black theology must therefore remain conscious and sharp to work for the liberation of those who hold on to a white supremacist mind. Black Theology in its hermeneutical interpretation warrants being sensitive to the bigger picture in which a humanity less defined in claims of ideological colour--description or its equal responses cannot afford to be held hostage when it works for liberation.

It is this cognisance and awareness that must propel a black theology to self--critique, to question itself in history of appropriation, to revaluate the ideology that shaped the theology and to realign itself informed by the new reality of a changed political context in which need for a freed humanity remains effervescent.

4.11 African Theology or Black Theology

In order to appreciate the subject matter of an appropriate name for the theology in both a historical and an evolving sense it has become perhaps important for this study to consider the descriptions of African Theology or Black Theology used in both synonym or an antonym settings.

We cite this here to assist the thought development of the anchor tenant of our core contention, as to why it was necessary to define a theology as black. It is not our intent to be exhaustive on this longstanding and crucial debate, but rather to capture the debate as it relates to the subject of a name--relevance of black theology. We therefore glean from the later thoughts of one of the pioneers of black theology. Our intention in this regard is to firstly ascertain the context of this debate, so as to it interacts with the overarching problem statement of this study.
Mothlabi (2008:43) contends “the classical debate on Black Theology and African Theology in South Africa originated with the questions posed by Manas Buthelezi in an article ‘A black Theology an African Theology’”. Mothlabi, thus reinterprets the question to mean “in other words, if there were a choice between the two names for such a comprehensive theology, which of the two would be considered more appropriate for South Africa with its distinctive problems at the time?" 

Mothlabi helps us to understand the evolving debate at its earliest moments in which the works of Buthelezi and Tutu proved the cradle for this thought provocation. Whilst Buthelezi sees an ease of replacement of names in interchangeability, Tutu’s article “Soul Mates or Antagonists” which was not necessarily a direct response to Buthelezi but part of a developing perspective, asking its own questions. 

Perhaps more poignant is what Mothlabi deduces when he asserts, “the focus of the question here is less about the method or content of this theology than about a suitable name for it in the African context”. It is for Mothlabi important that whatever appropriate name for the theology in an African context is arrived at, such name must necessarily prove as incorporating the concerns of both African Theology and Black Theology. 

Whilst we may not hasten to conclude in ease of comfort what Mothlabi with this latter assertion means, we may deduce that this at best attests a nuanced uneasiness with the terminology of a black theology. We may also deduct that the plausibility of the reflection of the name black theology is herewith inadvertently interrogated as problematic. Particularly since he advances the subject of the suitability of ‘name for the theology in the African context’. We are not clear what is meant with suitability if such is anchored in geographical or ethnographical sense. 

This study notes that though this may be considered a point of progress in theology, it may attest more of a moment of reflection as to how appropriate the notion of a ‘black’ theology really is. It would appear that Mothlabi recognises the challenge of the name which is a central argument for this study. 

The contribution to this new debate appears anchored in the words of Itumeleng Mosala as cited by Mothlabi (2008:42), “Without a creative re—appropriation of traditional African religions and societies (sic) both African and Black Theologies will build their houses on sand. A black theology of liberation must draw its cultural hermeneutics of struggle from a critical re—appropriation of black culture just as an African Theology must arm itself with the political hermeneutics that arise from the contemporary social struggles of black people under apartheid capitalism”.

Black identity and experience in Black Theology: A critical assessment

2015
Perhaps the most interesting observation that this study makes from the work of Mothlabi is the casual and interchangeable usage of African Theology and Black Theology as synonymous. Mothlabi (2008:44) asserts, “Buthelezi’s challenge focussed on and identified two approaches to Black Theology. The first approach, which he attributed to African Theology, he referred to as the ‘ethonographical approach’. The second, which is followed by Black Theology, was referred to as the ‘antropological approach’. According to Mothlabi, Buthelezi favoured the antropological and was opposed to the ethnographical approach as conceived by foreigners and not Africans, there it was suspicious to have been produced predicated on false assumptions.

Mothlabi (2008:44) notes “Buthelezi concluded that inasmuch African Theology was identified with the former, it could not be a suitable theology for South African black people. Since black theology answered to the requirements of the antropological approach, it was the proper theological method for South Africa”.

It is perhaps worthwhile to note two things at this juncture from Buthelezi’s conclusion. Firstly, we are not clear what he means with ‘suitable for a South African black people’, we are not helped to appreciate his usage of suitable, since we may also ask suitable for what, and if this is functional in historic, present or future situation?

The second observation vacillates on Buthelezi’s confirmed uncritical acceptance of the denotation of a people’s human agency as black. Again the words of Neville Alexander (2013:2) rings true when he asserts: “...societies and the global village have changed so radically that to continue to analyse and describe things as though we were still in 1848 or 1948 or even 1984 is to be woefully blind and self – defeating.”

In concluding Mothlabi (2008:48) asserts, for logic would seem to demand that a relevant theology for Africa as a whole should – in name, at least – be African theology, particularly if its primary goal is to relate to the overall needs of all the peoples of the continent”. He re–echoes this when he contends “a relevant theology for Africa must not only arise out of the total reality of African life from south to north of the continent, it must also be ‘African’ in name.

He contends “the American approach to Black Theology was more relevant and inspirational to South Africans in South Africa and to African–Americans. However the situation has changed. African theology has been significantly rehabilitated and must continue to be rendered more responsive to the existential problems of all African Christians.”

Reading Mothlabi in this assertion we are still not sure what Mothlabi means with ‘relevant’, is it relevance in response to, or relevance with an ontological premise for departure point in history? He however uses the term inspirational which for us may be
more grounded since the African struggle in interpretation of their faith in oppression sought a benchmark and found the American experience as a source of inspiration. Yet we are still not closing the proverbial gate on what he means with relevant.

Mothlabi (2008:49) asserts “what remains is for black South African theologians to thank their black Theology colleagues in America for allowing them to use their name and theological method until African Theology had reached its relative maturity. It was a good loan, indeed, with no strings attached and no interest claims”.

This assertion for us says more than what meets the eye. It is as if Mothlabi is categorically arguing South African black theology has reached a place to cut the umbilical cord or the borrowed surrogate womb of an American black theology in both name and methodology. We gather this from his interlude “what remains...”.

He proves conclusive, that such borrowing occurred because African Theology the actual proverbial womb of South African black theology was still in development stage and not matured. In a sense of unbridled candidness he disowns the borrower in this case the USA any rights to further keep South African black theology potentially hostage to the term to describe its theology. We see this when he uses the following words “indeed with no strings attached and no interests claims”.

It is not the purpose of the study to engage the efficacy or veracity of this latter claim yet it may be important to ask in a future research, can South African black theology ever truly claim a no strings and interests attachment from its USA counterparts in a historical setting and future uphold of black theology? Particularly since black theology according to Mosala (1989: 1) “remains a subset of black consciousness” which in turn remains an ideology no different to the USA Black Power movement and who shared intrinsic relations that manifested in notable exchanges that have perhaps permanently shaped the notion of a black theology.

A further interesting observation we must make here is the perpetual uphold of the identifier black for the human agency of a people be it in USA or in South Africa. We thus see a dialectical tension which may manifest a form of rhetoric in Mothlabi’s parting shot. The tension lays in the fact that he is advocating for a African theology as legitimate, appropriate and relevant to describe South African black theology – therefore expressing a sense of discomfort with the term black to continue defining South African black theology, yet he does not find the same appellation black obtrusive enough to completely break with it the same he has reached on the notion of black theology as borrowed from the USA.

We must ask why it would be so important for Mothlabi to insist that the fulcrum has been reached to authentically speak of an African Theology for black in South Africa, thus
a remythologising of the construct black theology. However, why does he remain essentially trapped not to part with the same identifier for a South African human agency? This when we by now know that black theology imported the term black as borrowed from its ideological parent black conscious and black power movements? This is an important observation for this study.

In a parting shot Mothlabi (2008:49) concludes in asserting “In the final analysis, the issue is between a more relevant or a less relevant theology, that is, an African Theology or a black theology. It is not whether one of the two theologies is better than the other or not. The issue here is only one of choosing a more appropriate name, bearing in mind that South Africa is part of Africa and shares many of the problems and concerns of Africa and its Christians. Inasmuch as the people are all one by virtue of their common continent, it is only fitting that their common theology be named ‘African Theology. For one Africa, therefore, there must be one theology”

This study has in its methodology consistently discussed the USA and South Africa as in conversation in sharing experiences, exchanges terminologies and practices for Black Consciousness and subsequent Black Theology. This relationship between the USA and South Africa throughout the trajectory of the development of a Black Theology in thought process appears more than relevant when we attempt Mothlabi’s plead for a African theology, instead of an appropriated black as borrowed from its USA counterparts.

This study notes that perhaps this forward looking to a African Theology as expressed by Mothlabi is perhaps the biggest step in arguing that the original appropriation of a black for theology as borrowed from the USA has reached its expiry date.

We remain cognisant of the emphasis of Mothlabi on finding an appropriate term to describe a theology. The study welcomes this progressive intend for it supports the overarching aim of this work which seeks to assert an uncritical adoption of the term black to either describe a people and ultimately its theology as an unforced error.
Chapter 5

THE ‘BLACK CHURCH’ CONUNDRUM

“... The black church has not always been without ambivalence in its understanding of what it is and why”. (Eric C. Lincoln)
5.1 Introduction

Having in the previous chapter focussed on the relationship between black ideology and Black Theology as it relates to the construct of “black” as a means to define a people, we concluded that as much as the term black is claimed by the Black Consciousness Movement, it truthfully was inherited in a double—edged exchange from the US Black Power Movement into the bedrock of Black Theology. We also concluded that the use of the term “black” to describe and define a people was also transferred to Black Theology in a conclusive sense.

In this chapter the study turns its focus to the common theme of the “black church” so as to understand what the concept means and to assess if any migration has taken place, from the early days of such a construct to the modern era of the twenty first century. This chapter seeks to understand both the US and the South African trajectory of the construct of the “black church”. Ultimately, the aim is to hear the conversations about and views on what the “black church” means in our era.

This adumbrated look into the black church will be understood through the lenses of nineteenth century intellectual Tiyo Soga’s “Kafir Church” and WEB Du Bois’ “Negro Church”, as well as the twentieth century views of James Cone’s “Black Church”.

Flowing from this historical overview, we will interpret current modalities for a claim for a black church. We will also look at how the black church is understood in the twenty first century, and listen to some contemporary interpretations of the construct.

The ultimate aim of the chapter, as related to a consistent theme of understanding the construct of “black” in Black Theology as a means to identify a people and a group, is to ask is there any relevance in claiming the black church as the repository of Black Theology in the twenty first century. From a generalised statement of the notion of a black church as it relates to the central exploration of this study we seek to project the particular idea of the church as the community of Christ.

The further aim of the chapter is to understand how the black church’s blackness is interpreted and what it means in the second decade of the twenty first century. Out of such an understanding, we will seek to look at whether there is a burden or a blessing associated with the term “black” as a means to define the church of Jesus Christ.

Being cognisant of the new reality, it asks: Is there a plausible reason for which blacks in the USA should remain “black”? The chapter at another level asks whether blacks are not perhaps using the label of black for the wrong reasons, when the Missio—Dei has changed and altered with the influx of a growing, Hispanic minority in for example, Los Angeles. It
looks at blackness as it exists in the USA where blacks have remained a minority, and are claimed to be potentially racist towards other minorities.

The chapter then looks at South Africa in the twenty first century as a constitutional democracy in its second decade, with what is termed a black--led administration. It seeks to ask, out of this experienced reality, if there is a reason to argue that blacks need to let go of the appellation black as a means of describing themselves. It also asks how black people experience, live through and appreciate the current dilemmas of inequality and their struggle under a black administration, where it appears the challenges of the apartheid legacy and new realities are proving challenging to contend with.

5.2. The “White Church” and the premise for a “Black Church”

It is perhaps important at this juncture to pause and ask what could be a plausible explanation for a “black church” construct, in its fundamental sense.

It appears there is a golden thread spanning the evolution of Tiyo Soga's “Kafir Church”, WEB Du Bois’ “Negro church” and James Cone’s “Black Church” and even later Eddie Glaude’s “Black Church”, and this thread remains the assumed existence of a “white church”.

For as long and as far back as the historical lines of the construct of a black church may be traced, the underpinning, silent and perhaps undeclared theme remains the existence of the notion of a “white church”. Bascio (1994:6) helps us to appreciate this when he asserts, “One might expect that the resources that were available to the American theologians associated with the mainline churches, resources which include major Universities such as Harvard and Yale, would have produced a social Gospel that did not exclude the very group of Americans most in need of its saving grace”. He goes on to quote John C. Bennet of Union Theological Seminary, New York as in agreement with those who “charge that classical theologians neglected the problem of black oppression”.

Bascio (1994:6) leans on the German philosopher David Friedrich Strauss, who wrote not long after slavery had become illegal. He cites Strauss, who maintained that “the abolition of slavery need not be assumed to be a result of humanitarian or religious efforts on the part of the Christian Church, but rather the result of the intellectual analysis done by the much--malignled Enlightenment. He further asserts that “human rights is a philosophical rather than Christian concept”.

Even more striking to note is what Bascio (1994:6) concludes when he says, “The fact that the Christian churches of the colonialist period were unable to inform the European--American conscience with a respect for the dignity of human beings who just happened to be black is a phenomenon worthy of theological and, ultimately, social analysis. That this theological analysis did not take place until representatives of the victimized race acquired theological expertise, speaks to the continued lack of interest among white
Christian theologians in a theology that addresses itself to the great moral questions related to the rights of the human person.”

Bascio helps us understand the premise for a “white” church, in its role as basis for the emergence of a “black” church. The challenge as rightly shown by Bascio, resonates in that the white Christians constituting a white church proved totally insensitive, unmoved, almost insulated from the reality of what it means to be black and oppressed. “Their very Faith and the Biblical dictum of humanity escaped their contemplation, consideration and praxis in a marauding and undeniable fashion, that inadvertently though blatantly confirmed a white church that is absolved from the demand of the Gospel to embrace all of humanity” (Bascio 1994:6).

Not even the resources the white church presided over could compel them to think outside the cocooned environment and context as reflecting on the church was waylaid by a need to be superior. This confirms that the institutionalised white church failed the message of the Gospel as that intended for all of humanity equally informed by God’s love for all.

It is almost as if white Christians defined themselves first as white before they understood that they were the church. This truculence and a sense of nonchalant attitude was normal for those who regarded themselves as white, denying the white church an opportunity to honestly reflect and conclude on the challenge of a humanity exemplified in inclusion of others who were not wrongly defined as white.

If Soga identifies a Kafir Church as that which describes his kinsfolk including himself, if WEB Du Bois talks of a Negro Church as the “soul” of struggle, if James Cone gives us the first black theological perspective of the Black Church in an academic sense in the 1960’s, it is informed by the presence, relevance and existence of what is called a “white” church. When black theologians in the late 60’s and early 70’s talked in South Africa of a Black Theology it was in tandem with or in recognition of what was called State Theology.

In the South African context, this premise is further accentuated and supported by the 1986 Kairos document, a religious response produced in a critique of the then status quo. It articulates its observation in the following way: “The South African Apartheid State has a theology of its own and we have chosen to call it ‘State Theology’. State Theology is simply the theological justification of the status quo with its racism, capitalism and totalitarianism. It blesses injustice, canonises the will of the powerful and reduces the poor to passivity, obedience and apathy” (Kairos, 1986:2).

Understanding the Kairos document, “State Theology” is best understood as that which represents those in power and they were defined as “white”, as a means of description. Thus, State Theology works for the upkeep of the white identity. State Theology, therefore, may otherwise be defined as “white theology”, therefore, the theology of a
“white” church. This is a significant aspect to highlight for it captures the train of thought, experience, and interpretation through the prism of a “white church” notion.

James Cone (1969:71) confirms this when he asserts, “If the real Church is the people of God, whose primary task is that of being Christ to the world, by proclaiming the message of the gospel (kerygma), by rendering services of liberation (diakonia), and by being itself a manifestation of the nature of the new society (koinonia), then the empirical institutionalised white church has failed on all accounts”.

He goes on to argue that this institutionalised white church “has certainly not rendered services of reconciliation to the poor. Rather it illustrates the values of a sick society which oppresses the poor” (Cone, 1969:71).

Cone is even more scathing when he argues it “has failed miserably in being the visible manifestation to the world of God’s intention for humanity and in proclaiming the gospel to the world”. For Cone (1969:71), the white church is not God’s redemptive agent but rather an agent of the old society. As this agent of an old society, the white church was directly involved in the slavery and racism of America.

Cone (1969:72) cites a progressive white Kyle Haselden who speaks from within as he pronounces, “we must ask whether our morality is itself immoral, whether our codes of righteousness are when applied to the Negro, a violation and distortion of the Christian ethic. Do we not judge what is right what is wrong in racial relationships by a righteousness which is unrighteous, by codes and creeds which are themselves immoral?”

Cone (1969:73) reminds the white church, “to be racist is to fall outside the definition of the Church”. He traces the racist attitude of the white Christian to a time of slavery when he asserts “at first the white Christian questioned the Christianizing of the slave because of the implications of equality in the Bible and because of the fear that education might cause the slave to fight for his freedom” (Cone, 1969:75). Therefore, racism has human rights and economic implications or antecedents.

Cone (1969: 81) leans on Bornkamm when he quotes him in saying “to lay hold on the salvation which is already at hand, and to give up everything for it”. He calls the white churches to a place of repentance in which they will show a willingness to surrender self in pursuance of obedience to God, and implores them to attempt a “radical reorientation of their style and in the world towards blacks”.

Cone (1969:73) also cites Loesher in stating that “the very existence of the white church as an institution is a symbol of the ‘philosophy of white supremacy’”.

When we understand Cone on the “white church” it is clear that he blames the white church not just for its compliance with and silence in the face of the demonic aspect of racism as a practised reality for many with an ultimate disastrous impact for those he regards as “black”, but as leading the charge for racism.
He, therefore, not only identifies the white church as the culprit for its complicity in the perpetuation of the practice of racism against blacks but lays it squarely at its door. It is as if Cone is arguing for the white church to experience a moment of metanoia (repentance) in which obedience to God is held sacrosanct and this repentance-obedience theme is underpinned by a changing of heart towards blacks.

In summary, this study raised the above points, firstly to point out that it is impossible to talk about a black church in and of itself without firstly acknowledging the reality of a white church. The white church may or may not be institutionalised but proves at the forefront of racist conduct when institutionalised. The institutionalised white church forms an integral part, if not the cardinal aspect, of the emergence of a black church focussed on resistance.

It, therefore, becomes difficult to talk of a black church and not to firstly understand the existence of a white church. This white church is usually institutionalised in an ideology of racism and coloured by a recognition of a fundamental inequality of being. This notwithstanding the reality that the church as referred to in the Bible is crystal clear that the identity of being is less about colour but about the essence of equality due to all human agents being afforded equal createdness, in likeness and image of God and in the redemptive work of Jesus Christ.

In the second place this study raised the above to point out that whilst the oppressors consistently never referred to themselves as the white church, the experiential reality of the oppressed confirm this white church notion.

5.3 Unpacking the Construct of the “Black Church”

The “black church” is a term that in the American setting has come under scrutiny and critique, and elicits a variety of opinions. Lincoln (1974:113) underscores this dichotomy of definition and meaning when he asserts “the black church has not always been without ambivalence in its understanding of what it is and why”.

Whilst such claims could equally be made in a South African constituency, the debate is less vibrant, visible and active in South Africa, hence we will for the greater part of our discourse on the construct of the black church focus on the USA as base.

We feel justified in doing so, for in earlier chapters where we dealt with the historical perspectives on both Black Power and Black Theology we showed the influences of the USA on the South African domain. Hence, our assumptions on the emergence of the black church notion are in a sense borrowed from its historical expression in the USA.

My reasons for examining the views of two historically distinct individuals, namely Tiyo Soga and W.E.B. Du Bois, respectively from South Africa and the United States of
America, are to continue the comparison of the understanding of what has come to be known as the “black church” in a historical context. Both these men in their own right helped – and equally confuse – us in understanding the interpretation, meaning and definition of the construct of the “black church”, albeit they did not at all times directly use the adjective “black” to describe the church or the formation of the people that comprise such church.

5.3.1 Tiyo Soga’s “Kafir Church”

The term black, Negro and even Kafir, as used in the South African context, remain a peculiar descriptive means and lens through which the church is understood. It is true that the meaning of these adjectives in describing the church is not only restricted to what is commonly and generically referred to as the “white mind”, but also the very human agent denoted as “black”, “negro” or “kafir” who proudly uses these in a description of what defines the church. Our consistent challenge in this work is to understand if these are constructs that emanate from the very people they describe. It remains our premise that these terms are not original in that they emanated from the people they describe, and that those have at best appropriated these descriptions as a means of finding if not redefining their identity.

It is exactly at this juncture where the nineteenth century South African priest and now celebrated scholar Tiyo Soga (1829–1871) stands out.

The story of Tiyo Soga, a nineteenth century preacher, journalist, and songwriter, remains an intriguing one. Intriguing for the many different angles his character has taken over time. His contribution to the expansion of Christianity is celebrated as “an outstanding product of the Presbyterian missions” Latourette (1945: 355).

According to the African Dictionary of Christian Biography, Soga studied at the Theological Hall, Glasgow, and on 10 December 1856 was licensed as a minister of the United Presbyterian Church (Williams, 1978:25).

According to David Calhoun (2010:11—12), Soga is memorialised in his epitaph, which was drawn up by Dr Anderson in Scotland, as follows: “Sacred to the memory of the Rev. Tiyo Soga the first ordained preacher of the Caffre race. He was a friend of God, a lover of His Son, inspired by His Spirit, a disciple of His holy Word. A zealous churchman, an ardent patriot, a large—hearted philanthropist, a dutiful son, an affectionate brother, a tender husband, a loving father, a faithful friend, a learned scholar, an eloquent orator and in manners a gentleman. A model Caffrarian for the imitation and inspiration of his countrymen.” The words, written in Xhosa and English, are a fitting memorial to his ministry.
Black identity and experience in Black Theology: A critical assessment

Bickford-Smith (2011:1) explains that “the ‘true’ identity and supposed historical significance of Tiyo Soga (1829–71) has changed through time. His first biographer (John Chalmers) lauds Soga as ‘A Model Kafir’, someone who lived an exemplary life in terms of the ‘civilizing mission’ through becoming the first Xhosa minister and tireless missionary to his ‘countrymen’. Soga has subsequently been hailed, one might say claimed (or reclaimed?), in succession as the first ‘New African’; ‘the father of black nationalism’; the progenitor of Ethiopianism and the ANC; and the ‘founding father of black modernity’.”

Williams (1978:125) who wrote a biography on Soga titled Umfundisi notes, “It was impossible to get at the cause, and yet, perhaps, it was the fact that he stood alone . . . He lived on a frontier – territorial and psychological – which accepted the Western educated Christian black as much as it did the white. But beyond that frontier lay black pagan society on the one side, and white Christian society on the other. Tiyo Soga had strong bonds, which made him the slave of both.”

Calhoun (2010:12) quotes Chalmers when he writes, “his hymns shall be sung as long as there are Kafir Christians to celebrate in the sanctuary, or in the home, the victories of the cross of Christ”. Chalmers continue when he also says, “I have come into contact with Christians of all denominations and I have seen them all loving the same Bible, and holding it as the one rule of faith and practice. I have, as a Kafir, often wished that these good friends of all denominations had never perplexed my countryman with the isms that they had come here to evangelize the heathen, bearing only one name, and having only the one distinction of being Christians.”

Most peculiar to our present identity sensitivities, Soga proudly referred to himself as a “Kafir of Kafirs” as can be seen in the author’s note in Williams (1978: xi). The tension in interpreting Soga remains a cumbersome exercise. The aim here is not to analyse Soga but to draw from his usage of the term “kafir” in referring to himself and his kinsfolk and the church groups he founded and eventually led.

What contributes particularly to this tension in interpreting Soga is the fact that Soga in a self—avowed sense was comfortable with his self—designation of being a “kafir”. He called and referred to himself and his kinsfolk in that manner, if the biographies on him attest to the truth (Williams 1978: xii).

Williams (1978:126) asserts that Tiyo Soga was the progenitor of Black nationalism in Southern Africa. This view is later supported by among others Ndletyana, (2007.17) who contends, “Soga’s ideas were the precursor of nationalist thought, and sowed the seeds of black consciousness and black theology in South Africa”. This interpretation on the part of Ndletyana is perhaps rooted in the latter life of Soga when he increasingly
through his newspaper, the *Indaba*, articulated the disjuncture and challenge of the dire state of his people.

We also see this pointed out by Thabo M. Mbeki (2007:1) in his address entitled “We are children of a rich heritage” when he claims that Tiyo Soga in his maiden publication of the newspaper *Indaba*, emphasised “the critical importance of having an African newspaper. He saw such a newspaper not only as a truthful reporter of relevant news to the African oppressed, but also as a vital weapon in the struggle to reassert the identity and the pride of the African people.”

This is perhaps drawn from the progression in his personal thinking. This progression in the thinking on the part of Soga is shown as he more and more proved vocal on the agony of the kafirs, for which he in recent times has earned the right to be called the father of Black Nationalism.

In understanding Tiyo Soga as the celebrated intellectual we may behold today, we are confronted with the challenge of interpretation, particularly since he chose to accept, embrace and internalise the concept of “kafir”, as a means to describe and refer to himself and his people, even the churches he established. The challenge resonates in that it must be accepted that Soga did not coin the term kafir, as a means to define those of a darker melanin tone, but rather it would appear that Soga too was introduced to the concept by amongst others European missionaries who had their own definition and meaning for such a definition.

Soga’s appropriation of the description of people, himself and those of African designation, regardless of how we may symbolically seek to romanticise him as perhaps the father of nationalist–intellectual thought in South Africa, proves a challenge and confirms the true impact of what the colonial mind left as legacy in even the most astute of minds.

Soga of course in his later years had a mind—set change and proved more vocal in expression on the oppressive nature of colonialism. Williams (1978:91) captures this in what he terms the “emergence of black consciousness” when he asserts, “1865 was a seminal year for Black Consciousness in South Africa. Two important events (the February article penned by Chalmers and the Colonial Government’s intention of removing the Ngqika across the Kei River into Gcalekaland) occurred which affected Tiyo Soga deeply, and acting as a catalysts on his accumulated frontier experience, produced the most significant thoughts, which had yet been generated on the subject, momentous in their implications” (Williams 1978:91).

He refers to the following: “in February an article by John Aitken Chalmers appeared in Indaba, entitled “What is the destiny of the Kaffir Race?”. This article also appeared in the
King Williams Town Gazette and Kaffrarian Banner on April 3 as a reprint. According to Williams (1978:91), “by March of the same year the Colonial Government had indicated its intention of encouraging the removal of Ngqika across the Kei River into Gcalekaland. Tiyo Soga's response to these events was to produce the first writing, which reflected Black Consciousness and laid the foundations of negritude in South Africa. Black Moses had verily brought the tablets down from the mountain.”

In order to appreciate Soga’s change of mind with these two events, namely the article of Chalmers and the colonial government’s intention to encourage the removal of Ngqika, it is perhaps important to read what Chalmers wrote.

Williams (1978:91) quotes Chalmers’ blunt assertion: “either this people are to rise in the scale of civilisation, and play an important part in the history of this Colony, or else every year must witness their extinction until at last they pass away and be forgotten forever”.

It is clear that for Chalmers, according to Williams (1978:91), “The Kaffir was doomed to extinction because their ‘indolent habits’ were a ‘barrier to their progress’. Since their needs were few and simple, and since they gave no thought to their future, they ‘encased themselves in a shell of idleness and careless indolence out of which no human skill and ingenuity can extricate them’. This is perhaps the ground zero of the colonizer / colonised moment of impact, in which two worlds occupy the same space but with different paradigms. The one being the emerging modern social project and the other the ancient social project, and given the disparity in science and technology the ancient social project was doomed to extinction.

Williams (1978:93) holds that Chalmers was already disillusioned about blacks as early as 1862. After he and Soga attended the burial of the chief Namba, he penned to John Ross the following, “I am sure if you had been a spectator of the same scene we witnessed, you would have wept over the sad ruin of one of the noblest uncivilized races – Soga does not mention it but Anta was quite drunk – There was a strong anti—English feeling manifested and even strongly expressed and it is evident that the Caffres still have some hope of extricating themselves from the thraldom of the white man – it is but the last flicker of an expiring torch.”

Williams (1978:94) states that it is reasonable to assume that Chalmers’ remarks hurt, for by now Soga was very sensitive to statements of this kind – which made Chalmers’ action all the more puzzling in view of the fact that he was later to be the author of Soga’s biography. Chalmers is further quoted in the Indaba: “...when a Kaffir youth has got a smattering of knowledge.... His ambition then is to be a gentleman, a sort of peacock bedizened with ornaments of gaudiest hue”. These words propelled Soga to become more vocal on the Gaika removal beyond the Kei. Williams (1978:94) quotes a vocal Tiyo
Soga as saying, “The Gaikas cannot move beyond the Kei.” Though these intentions of removal of the Gaika clearly and visibly upset Soga, according to Williams (1978:95), “there exists no evidence that Soga ever raised this with the Government”.

There is little doubt that Soga was grieved by the utterances of his friend as documented in the Indaba.

Therefore, reading Chalmers in these expressions it proves impossible not to question these remarks as potentially laced with a racist connotation or at least a claimed superior mind. What is further noteworthy is the clear understanding of what constitutes civilisation as that which is European based. Perhaps another aspect to raise is the distinction that for Chalmers the construct of “white” was a means of describing the European and “Kafir” the means to describe the African as uncivilised, barbaric and indolent.

Perhaps Soga, in seeing and hearing the mind of the oppressor immanent in close association with the religious institutions, came to an awakening of a blinded mind that the term “Kaffir of Kafirs”, which he comfortably appropriated, was a reflection of the incendiary and destructive nature of the missionary purpose of Chalmers and others. This may have left Soga aggrieved and perhaps deeply disappointed.

Soga responded to the Chalmers article when it was republished in the King Williams Town Gazette. He responded on April 25, and essentially questioned the incorrect assumptions and unjustifiable conclusions in the article (Williams, 1978:95). Soga’s journal entry expressed his deeper emotions and is the stronger statement:

“One of our missionaries – wiser than his predecessors, has pronounced in an article in the Native periodical – Indaba – on the doom of my Race – Without disputing his superior Sagacity and foresight, I should like to know – for myself – Whether in this doom is included the Kaffir Races of Tambookies – Mapondos – Mapondo–misi Mabomvana – Galekas – Zulus – Maswazi – These races are all pure Kaffir races – one in language and manners – with but slight differences – If in his doom is included all these races – I venture to say process of destruction will take a very long time to accomplish its work – The Bible is the only Book whose predictions to me is law – Africa God had given Ham and his descendants – My firm believe (sic) is – that nothing shall ever dispossess them of this inheritance – that God will keep the Kaffir in his Southern portion of it – and that God will so overrule events as always to secure this.” (quoted in Williams 1978:95)

This response of Soga shares his convictions as one who has given thought to the views expressed by his companion Chalmers. He raises the challenge of this conclusion on the part of Chalmers by citing the many groups constituting the so-called Kafir groupings as a defence that its existence is virtually impossible. He argues that the life and times of the
very Kafir group are subject to only God’s preference thereby dispelling the claimed arrogance of a Chalmers, the missionary who has almost assumed a god—status for himself by declaring this doom over a people he had hardly understood. We therefore herewith are allowed access to the epistemological frame of reference of Soga, when he invokes the Bible.

This is perhaps the earliest recorded expression of Black Consciousness yet it also comes with the challenge of why it was necessary and remained imperative for Soga to continue seeing himself and his kinfolk as kafirs. He does not evolve to challenge the description, which we shall argue remains like “black” an appropriated term, and does not originate from Soga or those that are considered black, but from those who sought to see in themselves and their whiteness a supremacy affording others a blackness of experience.

The study notes that faulting Soga for being comfortable with using the denotation kafir may be traced back to him merely using the material of the dominant culture of his day. Thus the appropriation of the denotation of kafir in self—description appears an inadvertent appropriation.

To accentuate the influence and impact of colonialism and later apartheid on the minds of its collective victims, Archbishop Desmond Mpilo Tutu’s anecdotal quote proves a classic example when as Chancellor of the University of the Western Cape in one of his addresses he talked of an incident in which he boarded a flight in Kenya: upon entering the aircraft, he said, he took one good look around him and saw the cabin crew was black, the cockpit black and the voice on the intercom came through in blackness, and his first and immediate thought was “Good Lord, are we going to land safely?”

This champion of human rights, a Nobel Laureate, who in some circles has attained a place second to the deity, often shares this anecdote as a means of jest, yet this perhaps reflects the deeper impact and contamination of the minds of many, since the colonial and apartheid mind succeeded in stripping the African of his own identity and who he was and moulded him in its own image.

When we explore the dynamics around Soga it is not to prove dissentious and attack him for that would be an unnecessary attempt at diminishing the man, his role and stature, but to ask, to what extent was Soga the African human agent modern African scholars claim him to be if he was firstly made by the system, produced by the conundrum of a conflict of identity. Against this backdrop he comfortably declared himself a ‘Kafir of Kafirs’. Reading Soga, one is forced to admit the growth in radicalism from the young man to the editor of Indaba where he sounded much more radical towards the colonial influence that came wrapped in Christianity to which he remained committed.
Understanding Soga therefore in his description of self, his identity and those that surround him even in the churches he planted, leads one to a troubling conclusion that if Chambers speaks of Soga as a self—avowed Kafir, even his epithet attests to this description that perhaps defined him eternally for many of us. We must therefore conclude that even though it may be argued that even if Soga teased his colonial friends by referring to himself as Kafir of Kafirs, he never fixed this appellation as a means of describing himself and fellow Africans since he did not craft this construct but inherited it from those who made up the colonial face of African oppression. It thus renders the claim of kafir similar to black as an appropriated term and not of African origin.

What remains a challenge and less understood is why this description, adopted by Soga back then, which with time received an increasingly negative meaning from what it contained at the beginning, became a means to describe Africans in the most derogatory sense of evil. For even if the description ‘kafir’ as is argued really meant ‘non—believer’ (in an Islamic context) it still does not alter the truth that the very description of non—believer which could have been easily used to describe anyone who does not believe found its true meaning in the South African discourse as that which is derogatory and subhuman ironically attested to by those who started to believe in Jesus Christ.

Even more noteworthy, if it was only affirming the status of a non—believer why would a believing Soga and his followers or the land of their dwelling be eternalised in the terms Caffaria, caffre, kafir or kafir of kafirs? It appears it was convenient for the coloniser at the time because it served their purpose of remoulding the human agents to their own purpose from this unwieldy ‘savage/ barbarian’ to the mutable and civilised sub—human – a kafir.

Africans were supposed to have had their own means and description of the term for a non—believer, if the sanguinity of the construct was the premise.

The Kafir Church, as much as it is claimed to be the invention of Soga, was not coined by Soga. Rather, he adopted the term without questioning it and thus contributed to the enslavement of his own people, regardless of how militant he towards his death may have sounded and pronounced himself.

The truth is he did not invent the term kafir (for this is as old as the Arabian colonisation of Africa) as a means to describe his church or that which is now described as the black church. He thus appropriated the construct, though its deeper meaning in origin as experienced by the quotes of a Chalmers may have left him uncomfortable, and he inadvertently remained trapped in acceptance of an identity crafted not by his own efforts or his own genesis.
5.3.2 W.E.B. Du Bois’ Negro Church

WEB Du Bois (1886–1963), born after Soga and on the other side of the Atlantic divide, mused on the church, religion and struggle for freedom and social cohesion and is credited with coining the term “Negro Church”. According to Marilyn Mellowes (2010), the term “the black church” evolved from the phrase “the Negro church”, which was the title of a pioneering sociological study of African American Protestant churches at the turn of the century by W.E.B. Du Bois. Du Bois is important for the exploration of this study’s aim, since he is the first trained sociologist to do research on the human agent denoted as “black” in the USA.

Mellowes (2010) notes that, “In all these denominations, the black preacher stood as the central figure. WEB Du Bois immortalized these men in his famous essay, ‘Of the Faith of the Fathers’, that appeared in his seminal work, The Souls of Black Folk. Du Bois described the preacher as ‘the most unique personality developed by the Negro on American soil’, a man who ‘found his function as the healer of the sick, the interpreter of the Unknown, the comforter of the sorrowing, the supernatural avenger of wrong, and the one who rudely but picturesquely expressed the longing, disappointment, and resentment of a stolen and oppressed people’. Du Bois thus identifies the preacher as an active human agent that thrived in the midst of the structural lifestyle of poverty.”

From this, we may accept that for Du Bois the Negro Church is in centrality assembled in the preacher as the institution that contained both the history and future of the Negro people, the pain and peace, the desperation and the hope, the sadness and the laughter. A consummation of all things out of which the prophetic future of a possible Canaan is interpreted and understood. It is important to note that Du Bois as a sociologist and not a theologian had a social end or result in mind and not a biblical teleology.

To assist us to arrive at a “Negro Church” as coined by Du Bois, it is perhaps important to contextualise the term Negro as Stuckey (1987:198) reminds us that, “In North America as in the America’s generally, the word Negro was closely associated with slave and slavery. Although the two words were virtually synonymous in parts of the Americas, they were not in North America, at least not for a great many people, which in part accounts for a tendency among slaverholders to refer to slaves as African”. An even more interesting observation is made by Stuckey (1987:198) when he asserts, “ in debates among blacks over what they should call themselves, one finds few complaints that Negro was a synonym for slave”.

Mellowes (2010) cites the historian Anthea Butler as one who observed that “the church has been profoundly shaped by regional differences, North and South, East and West, yet in both the private and public spheres, the church was, and remains, sustained and animated by the idea of freedom”.

Furthermore, Mellowes (2010) equally argues of the construct “Negro Church”: “In its origins, the phrase was largely an academic category. Many African Americans did not
think of themselves as belonging to ‘the Negro church’, but rather described themselves according to denominational affiliations such as Methodist, Baptist, Presbyterian, and even ‘Saint’ of the Sanctified tradition. African American Christians were never monolithic; they have always been diverse and their churches highly decentralized.”

Today the “black church” is widely understood to include the following seven major black Protestant denominations: the National Baptist Convention, the National Baptist Convention of America, the Progressive National Convention, the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, and the Church of God in Christ.

According to Frazier (1974:13), Du Bois is known for having articulated the following on the Negro Church: “The Negro Church is the only social institution of the Negroes which started in the African forest and survived slavery” and that “under the leadership of priest or medicine man, afterward of the Christian pastor, the Church preserved in itself the remnants of African tribal life”.

Social scientists such as Frazier draw from this observation of Du Bois, when they advance an opinion on the historical reality or definition of the construct of a Black Church. There is no distinction being made between a ‘negro’ and ‘black’ church. This is to be understood in the evolution of description on the part of a people, firstly the term Negro was used, which literally interpreted means black, and later in the civil rights era the term black was used in rejection of the term Negro that also had a variety of conjoined expressions such as the infamous “nigger”.

Mellowes (2010) states, “According to Professor Jonathan Walton, for more than 300 years, the Black Church in America has provided a safe haven for black Christians in a nation shadowed by the legacy of slavery and a society that remains defined by race and class. Inspired by the story of Exodus, African Americans can think out, pray out, and shout out their anger and aspirations, free from the unstated yet powerful constraints that govern dialogue with the larger white society. In the pulpit and the pews, in choir lofts and Sunday schools, the black church continues to offer affirmation and dignity to people still searching for equality and justice, still willing to reach out for a more inclusive, embracing tomorrow.”

5.3. 3. James Cone’s Black Church

For Cone, it is impossible to disassociate the Black Church from its cradle of slavery (1969: 91). He says it symbolises a people who were completely stripped of their African heritage as they were enslaved by the Christian white man.

Cone (1969:92) argues that the “black church was the creation of a black people whose daily existence was an encounter with the overwhelming and brutalizing reality of white power”. He goes on to say that during the days of slavery it was “the sole sense of personal identity and the sense of community” (Cone, 1969:92). For Cone (1969:92), the
black church became the “home base for revolution”. He asserts the church fulfilled various roles, one of which was to transport slaves to less hostile territory.

Understanding Cone’s Black Church construct is to understand that it is a church in response to or as result of white supremacy. Cone concedes that the Black Church is a created construct and entity. It is important to cite this for if the black church is a created entity then it also means that there is a distinction between the black church he argues for and perhaps other streams of thought that did not respond to nor define the church informed by slavery in such a colour—coded definition. This further helps us understand that there is no uniformity of this construct, but the black church for the likes of Cone is intrinsically tied and linked to the black struggle inherent in the slavery experience.

Cone (1969:92) asserts “the black church was born in protest, in this sense it is the precursor of Black Power”. Cone draws a distinction between the white church and his black church by arguing that the “black church’s reality stemmed from the eschatological recognition that freedom and equality are at the essence of humanity, and thus segregation and slavery are diametrically opposed to Christianity”. Thus, this study notes the Christian faith inherent in this sabotaging centre, as it sabotages the white supremacist project from within.

If we read Cone on the black church, it appears it is always in relation to what he deems the white church, as noted above. He also appears obsessed to prove distinct from the white church through the lens of good and evil wherein the evil is necessarily white, and the good that which is construed as the Black Church. Cone’s presentation of the black and white churches, whilst perhaps an honest reflection of his point of view, poses more challenges in understanding the notion of church.

It appears that for Cone, the descriptions of “black” and “white” prove more paramount if not more significant than the term “church”. It could also mean that he is knowingly or inadvertently trapped in a paradigm of defining the church only through a colour definition and that the relevance of the church is only possible because of these adjectives. Cone’s obsession with these colour—based definitions does not help us with a meaning of church outside the borrowed robes exemplified in his colour coding. This colour coding further limits, if not robs us, in engaging meaningfully in our quest for the Church of Jesus Christ.

According to Cone (1969:94), “freedom and equality made up the central theme of the black church and protest and action were the early marks of its uniqueness as the black man fought for freedom”. This study will note that this description of the black church is limiting.
5.3.4 Franklin Frazier's Negro Church in America

Frazier (1974:11) argues, “it is evident, then, that the manner in which Negroes were captured and enslaved and inducted into the plantation regime tended to loosen all social bonds among them and to destroy the traditional basis of social cohesion.”

Frazier sees the impact of the Negro enslavement “as not only destructive in the traditional African system or kinship and other forms of organized social life, but it made insecure and precarious the most elementary form of social life which tended to sprout anew, so to speak, on American soil – the family”.

It appears Frazier seemingly disagrees with Du Bois who held that the “social cohesion among the slaves was not totally destroyed”, when he asserts “it was not what remained of African culture or African culture or African religious experience but the Christian religion that provided the new basis of social cohesion. It follows then that in order to understand the religion of the slaves, one must study the influence of Christianity in creating solidarity among a people who lacked social cohesion and a structured social life” (Frazier, 1974:14).

Frazier (1974:19) makes a fundamental claim of what the Christian Faith symbolised for the Negroes who were exposed to it, according to him, “the Negro slave found in Christianity a theology and a new orientation toward the world at large and in doing so he adapted the Christian religion to his psychological and social needs”.

It is for this reason Frazier claims that “the invisible institution” of the Negro Church took root among the enslaved blacks. An understanding of the invisible church may be reflecting in the following words of an ex—slave:

“Our preachers were usually plantation folks just like rest of us. Some man who had a little education and had been taught something about the Bible would be our preacher. The colored folks have their code of religion, not nearly so complicated as the white man’s religion, but more closely observed... When we had our meetings of this kind, we held them in our own way and were not interfered with by the white folks.” Anderson (1927:22)

This perspective shared by Frazier proves vital if we want to draw the initial link of church for the enslaved African who becomes introduced to the Christian faith. This very same Christian faith consequently shaped to a large extent the Negro’s lens of theological understanding, the courage to draw a means of rationality and a capacity to hope for a changed reality.

It is therefore important to understand the roots of the Negro Church that is interchangeably referred to as the black church, to its first connectedness with a Christian means of church definition. It can be accepted that Frazier is correct that though the enslaved negro had come to the colonies of America with semblances of his
own culture, beliefs and practices, even his faith and the interpretation of such faith found a new if not true meaning with the encounter with his master's Christian faith.

If the Negro later on developed a new social cohesion to replace that which was obliterated when he was violently moved against his will from everything he knew, it is best understood that such a new, necessary and longed for social cohesion was made evident through the Christian faith. The same Christian faith gave them education, retraced the boundaries of community, reconnected them to the DNA of being--ness born out of a hope to be free as the biblical dictum of redemption found, and rang true for them.

The Negro Church in this early setting in its initial understanding was subjected to an evolving reality defined in periods of institutionalisation, economic parity and ultimately what can be accepted as a Nation within a Nation. The Negro church understood in the terms of an “invisible institution” and an “institutional church” in emancipation experiences a necessity to merge for the burden of freedom brought its own challenges when as one educated mulatto minister captured the experience in saying:

“The whole section (in the neighbourhood of Charleston, South Carolina) with its hundreds of thousands of men, women, and children just broken forth from slavery, was, so far as these were concerned, dying under an almost physical and moral interdict. There was no one to baptize their children, to perform marriage, or to bury the dead. A ministry had to be created at once – created out of the material at hand” Steward (1915:33).

For Frazier (1974:35) this “material at hand” represents the Negroes who were “called to preach.”

Frazier (1974:36) notes that the merging of the invisible Institution (for the enslaved) and the institutionalised church (essentially defining the church for free slaves) resulted in a tremendous growth spurt in the Negro church organisation. The ultimate and perhaps most clear was the emergence of the “structuring or organisation of Negro life to an extent it had never been before”.

Noting that the life of the African prior to enslavement was obliterated, in plantations in the colonies, under the emancipation and subsequent merger of the “invisible institution” and the “institutionalised church”, the resultant effect was a more structured and organised Negro life that defined the new identity of the black.

Frazier (1974:36) attributes the coming into existence of a structured and organised social life among the Negro masses to the organised religious life. This is a critical observation for it is this coalescing of identity made evident in a community of being from the Black Church which is held as fundamental.

The interwovenness of identity exemplified in the black church as the institution that defined a people holds sway and remains a recurring theme for many. Distinct moments
in an evolving history prove to either challenge or attempt to eradicate, yet seek to understand, the concept of the black church as a means of mitigating the challenges faced by the same people.

5.3.5 Eric Lincoln’s Black Church

Our reason for leaning on C. Eric Lincoln to assist with our discourse of the black church is informed by his contribution in the academic sphere on the subject matter. Lincoln has also collaborated with amongst others Frazier and Mamiya respectively on the subject and has described constructs of the “black church” from a variety of angles.

Lincoln (1974:113) argues that the “black church is itself a creature of the counter currents of American racial proclivities”. He further asserts that the “black church has not always been without ambivalence in its understanding of what it is and why”. To corroborate his contention the black church in looking in the proverbial mirror of identity “at times sees itself as a lesser counterpart of the white church, striving in parity of perfection”. He equally asserts that whilst the aforementioned could hold, the black church on the other hand “has been much maligned for being a ‘nigger institution’” (1974:113). For Lincoln the black church’s perception of self serves as “self—demeaning” whilst for the white mind it remains a “nigger institution”. When Lincoln makes this analysis of the black church, one may call it harsh in an inward—looking and outward observation of others.

This perhaps helps us to understand the confluences of church definitions as informed by the ideology of race as a necessary means of description. These ideological entrapments prove in a sense inescapable for the black church’s self—image and equally for those who look at the church with a sense of disrespect for its blackness.

Lincoln (1974:113) argues, “the implications have always been that whatever the shortcomings of the Black Church, they could somehow be removed or ameliorated by getting rid of the stigma of blackness. This essentially would mean if black Christians could only be somebody other than themselves, what fine people they would be.”

Lincoln (1974: 113) categorically asserts, “to be or not to be is not always the question. The Black Church decided two centuries ago that it had to be, now it has been pushed by fate and circumstance into deciding what to be and how.” He accredits Martin Luther King with having made the black church aware of its power to effect change. The black church according to Lincoln (1974:127) has always been the “repository” of Black Power.

Lincoln (1974:115) makes a fundamental point, namely that those who intend “understanding the Black Church and its equal power must first understand that there is no disjunction between the Black Church and the Black community”. He asserts that the church is the “face of the Black Community”.

This study notes that this is a critical consideration for if the understanding of a black church is not located in the congruence and proximity of its community a
misrepresentation of the black church is made. This means the construct of the black church lives and breathes in a community from which it derives its innate power and thrust.

For Lincoln (1974:116) the black church is in a sense a “universal church” claiming and representing all blacks out of a long tradition that looks back to the time when there was only the black church to bear witness to who or what a man was as he stood by the bar of his community. This description of the black church as an all—encompassing identity that lends a sense of meaning, worthiness and being to individuals clearly speaks to the heart of what this black church construct inculcates for those who consider themselves black in a shared experience.

Again this centrality of personal identity is derived from an interaction or interplay of cross—pollination between a social collective meaning of identity and a personal identity in which there exists not much tension, at least from those who constitute the community defined as black. This collective identity wrought in social means of definition is also shaped by a commonness of experience, the golden thread of sameness. Lincoln (1974:116) continues to assert “no one can die ‘outside the Black Church’ if he is black”.

Lincoln (1974: 124) summarises by pointing to the inward challenge of the black church that has often chosen to struggle with the problem of whether to struggle at all with the powers and principalities of this world, and whether such a struggle might not question the righteousness and sufficiency of God, who on His own and in His own time sets all things right.

Lincoln (174: 134) concludes, “the church may be ordained of God, but it is a creature of society. As such, the needs and aspirations of the people who comprise it may be read in much of what the church does, or refuses to do.”

Lincoln and Mamiya (1990:6) assert, “the Black Church was the first theatre in the black community. Like the Greek theatre its functional goal was catharsis, but beyond the Greeks, the Black Church was in search of transcendence, not a mere emptying of the emotions, but an enduring fellowship with God in which the formal worship service provided the occasion for particular periods of intimacy.”

When Lincoln and Mamiya talk of this catharsis, one may understand this as a soul cleansing and redeeming moment; not only is this to be understood as a soul cleansing moment but there is a need to extend this moment of serenity until it crystallises in a reality of existence where black life is one’s service, signifying freedom. It could mean that the black church experience, if the service on a Sunday or any other day was the barometer, was the moment of freedom in which nothing could restrain them from an intimacy of worship. An intimacy of worship they sought and hoped they could live in and ultimately confirm their true state in God, that of being free notwithstanding the chains of slavery.
5.4 The Black Church as Sacred Cosmos

Lincoln and Mamiya (1990:2) in talking of the black church identify three pillars constituting the character and nature of the clack church. These are: 1. “the Black Church as a sacred cosmos”, 2. “the Black Church as central institutional sector and partial differentiation” and 3. “the dialectical model of the Black Church”. For Lincoln and Mamiya (1990: 2), the religious worldview of the African Americans is called the “black sacred cosmos”.

Lincoln and Mamiya (1990:2) cite and agree with Durkheim’s thesis that states “religion is a social phenomenon, a shared group experience that has shaped and influenced the cultural screens of human communication and interpretation”. According to Lincoln and Mamiya (1990:2) the sacred cosmos for African Americans relates to their African heritage, which envisages the whole world as sacred, and to their conversion to Christianity during slavery and its aftermath. This argument suggests that African Americans have always been conscious of creating their own distinctive forms of culture and worldviews, less in response to what they have been exposed to but in parallel with others.

According to Lincoln and Mamiya (1990:3), “For African American Christianity, the Christian God ultimately revealed in Jesus of Nazareth dominated the black sacred cosmos”. A pertinent point made by Lincoln and Mamiya (1990:3) is their claim that “while the structure of beliefs of black Christians were the same orthodox beliefs as that of white Christians there were also different degrees of emphasis and valences given to certain particular theological views”.

To accentuate this point is to recognise the significance and importance the term “freedom” has for the black Christian. Lincoln and Mamiya (1990: 4) claim that “throughout black history the term ‘freedom’ has found a deep religious resonance in the lives and hopes of African Americans”.

The concept of freedom throughout the history of slavery has taken on various distinct meanings, yet, it always meant the “absence of any restraint which might compromise one’s responsibility to God”.

The progression of what freedom means as an evolving construct permeates equally in other settings. While this may be true for the African American’s grasp on the meaning of freedom, the reality is true for the South African black mind too. Freedom at some stage meant for the Khoi-San warriors the defence of their land, later it would mean the need to allow Natives to be organised to resist the Native Lands Act of 1913. This freedom in later years meant the Defiance Campaign from 1956 when blacks defied the use of the
“dompas” as a means of identification. This meaning of freedom gave rise to the taking up of the armed struggle as a means to fight apartheid. Yet in the post–apartheid context, freedom takes on new meanings manifested in service delivery protests where ordinary people take to the streets to demand their freedom from those in power. Freedom in this epoch means access to basic services as a constitutional prerogative and right.

Yet freedom for whites in the American context receives a complete different emphasis. Freedom for whites has to do with a form of celebration of “individualism”. In the words of Lincoln and Mamiya (1990:5), “to be free to pursue one’s destiny without political or bureaucratic interference or restraint.”

5.5 The Black Church as Central Institutional Sector and Partial Differentiation

Lincoln and Mamiya (1990:7) note that “the assumption that the Black Church constitutes the central institutional sector in black communities is common in the American understanding of the black subculture”. There is consensus that the church is perhaps the one institution that survived slavery and in the antebellum period of reconstruction the blueprint for its central and dominant institutional role was set when churches became the focal point for numerous black communities in the south that were formed as former slaves were separated from the plantations. For Du Bois, from a sociologist’s point of view, the establishment of these churches was the first sign of economic freedom or emancipation.

Lincoln and Mamiya (1990:8) argue that “the black church has no challenger as the cultural womb of the black community, for it not only birthed new institutions such as schools, banks, insurance companies and low income housing, it also provided an academy and arena of political activities, and it nurtured young talent for musical, dramatic and artistic, development”.

Lincoln and Mamiya (1990:9) assert that the twentieth century also saw the emergence of black secular organisations like black college fraternities and sororities starting in 1907, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People in 1909, and the National Urban League in 1911. Independent black newspapers, which began in the early nineteenth century, also multiplied in urban areas during the twentieth century. Lincoln and Mamiya (1990:9) go on to conclude, “these black secular organizations” in a symbiotic sense “also allowed the clergy and church members to influence the institutions and political processes of the larger society without raising questions about the constitutional separation between church and state”.
Key to note is that in most instances the “founding” formations and establishment of these critical institutions took place with “the help and support of black church leaders” Lincoln and Mamiya (1990:9). This claim is a historical one that sees less a separation between church and society defined in their entire spheres but often the reason for the progressive development of society.

In a South African context the relationship between society and the church however defined, such as Tiyo Soga’s Kafir Church of the early nineteenth century, the emergence of the independent African Zionist churches in the early twentieth century or the much later Black Theology school of thinking of the 1960’s–1980’s, confirms that the church underpins the society in all expressions and ultimately takes on the form of strong institutional dominance in the definition of society.

Let us not forget it was the same Soga as told by Williams (1978:101) who later on proved vocal in the Indaba newspaper in an article titled ‘Ipepa—le—Ndaba Zasekhaya’ (‘A National Newspaper’) he engaged with the aspect of social discourse and community consciousness among the “kafirs”, as a means of resistance no different to that of Steve Biko in the mid—70’s.

It is important to again pause and look at this very visible influence of the church on the discourse of society in the South African context when we look at the history of the ANC. It was formed first as the South African National Native Council (SANNC) in 1908 in Waaihoek’s Methodist Church. The nucleus of those who first gathered comprised a group of intellectuals, chiefs and a strong Christian clergy component. This gathering organised to bring all tribes together to resist the land question, and later became the ANC in 1912. The consistent influence of the Church remained ever—present until in its centenary year 2012, it was celebrated that all twelve presidents of the ANC subscribed to a Christian faith to various degrees.

In some instances, like Tambo and Luthuli, it was almost a fundamental persuasion. Luthuli at his acceptance speech of the Nobel Peace Prize remarked, “…as a Christian and patriot, [I] could not look on while systematic attempts were made, almost in every department of life, to debase the God—factor in man or to set a limit beyond which the human being in his black form might not strive to serve his Creator to the best of his ability. To remain neutral in a situation where the laws of the land virtually criticized God for having created men of colour was the sort of thing I could not, as a Christian, tolerate” (Luthuli, 1961)

Callinicos (2004) reminds us of the words of O.R. Tambo in his address at Georgetown University, when he asserts, “I had other plans for my life. I wanted to be a minister of the Anglican church with Bishop Clayton. After we married, I was going to train for the
ministry in Cape Town. But God had other plans for me. God’s plan was for me to fight in the political liberation for my people”.

Fundamental above does not refer to the term “fundamentalists” as understood in society today but in its original context, where one’s faith and beliefs are non-negotiable, confirming one’s persuasions as rarely up for discussion.

The influence therefore of the church on the black struggle and the development of the response to what can be termed the blackness of an experience in colonial and apartheid forms, is clearly that of the Christian church.

This chapter explored this theme to underscore the relevance and importance of Lincoln and Mamiya’s claim for the black church as the epicentre of black life in society, for the American context as for our South African context.

It is here that we may appreciate E. Franklin Frazier’s (1974:35) caption of the Negro Church as “a nation in a nation”. Perhaps a fundamental deduction to draw here is the intra—dependence of the black church on its political, economic, social, and cultural context, prevalent and necessary for its establishment, yet the independence to carve out a new definition and meaning for it to warrant its future existence in the black communities’ plight and destiny.

This suggests that the black church though dependent on and in relation to others had its own life, defined in all spheres and levels of what constitutes and makes up a society. One must therefore appreciate the role and context of the black church in the context of what is deemed the black community as the axis of that which constitutes life, and for that matter black social life. Understanding Lincoln and Mamiya and even Frazier here is to appreciate the contribution of the black church, in the creation of a black society, naturally and consciously and with the expressed purpose of the continuity of existing black life.

It was Paul Tillich (1963:158) who helped us appreciate the symbiotic relationship between culture and religion, when he asserted, “Religion is the substance of culture, culture is the form of religion”. This conclusion of Tillich holds true for many communities and expressions of religious formations and is central in the history, life, and existence of the black church in both the American and South African contexts.

Lincoln and Mamiya (1990:10) conclude their input on the black church as a central institution by asserting, “Our contention is that such a view of complete differentiation when applied to the Black Church confuses the historical uniqueness of that institution, and leads to a misinterpretation of the data and to misunderstanding of black churches and black culture.”
This study concurs with this assertion, for any separation of the black church and the secular state is a difficult exercise and not realisable in practice. Not only is it challenging but it impinges on the true reflection of the history of church and society defined for a people of colour. This may also not just be limited to the people defined as black but may also hold true for European societies and those who found their equal status outside of the eurocentricity of a white supremacist.

Lincoln and Mamiya (1990:9) further correctly hold that “the view of partial differentiation also emphasizes the fact that the black religious tradition forms a central part of the black cultural heritage and continues a dynamic with the secular forms of black culture”.

Therefore the relationship between the church and the institutions, and organisations it helped form and gave birth to, is often maintained as helpful to reinterpret the current context of the people making up that society. This holds for both the American and South African contexts as historically understood and currently called for.

5.6 The Five Models of the Black Church

Lincoln and Mamiya (1990:10) lean heavily on the work of Hart Nelsen and Anne Kusener Nelsen who in their notable work ‘Black Church in the Sixties’ give three different types of interpretive schemes or social scientific models found in the work of past researchers of the black church.

Nelsen and Nelsen (1975:8) identify three models of the black church and advance: the “Assimilation Model, the Isolation Model and the Compensatory Model.”

The Assimilation Model adopts the view that the black church is a stumbling block for the future and public good of blacks, and therefore needs to be done away with. It also regards the black church as “anti-intellectual and authoritarian”. This model advocates the necessity for the demise of the black church in pursuit of true freedom.

The Isolation Model sees the black church as “characterized by involuntary isolation”. This for Mamiya (1975:11) is directly linked to the predominantly lower—class status in the black community. Those who propagate this model argue, “Isolation from civic affairs and mass apathy are the results of racial segregation in ghettos. Thus black religion is viewed as being primarily lower class and worldly.”

The Compensatory Model argues that “the church’s main attraction is to give large masses of people the opportunity for power, control, applause and acclaim within the group which they do not receive in the larger society”, (Drake and Cayton (1993:423). Lincoln and Mamiya (1990:11) agree with this claim.
For Lincoln and Mamiya (1990:11), there is a relation in this view with that of Gunnar Myrdal’s perspective in An American Dilemma, “that the black community is essentially pathological and black culture is a ‘distorted development’ of general American culture so black people compensate for this lack of acclaim and for lack of access to mainstream society in their own institutions.”

Lincoln and Mamiya (1990:11) assert that the Nelsens made their own contribution to the discourse on a black church model as a fourth alternative, which resonates with what they define as the “ethnic community—prophetic” model. Lincoln and Mamiya (1990:11) agree with this model in congruence with the Nelsens as representative of a “more positive perspective of interpretation of the Black Church”. This model emphasises the significance of the black church “as a base for building a sense of ethnic identity and a community of interest amongst its members”. This model “accentuates the potential of the Black Church or its minister as ‘prophet to a corrupt white Christian nation’”.

Lincoln and Mamiya (1990:11) added their own contribution to the black church debate in agreeing with the Nelsens yet presenting their own, fifth interpretation explained in what is termed “the dialectical model.” This model advocates that “black churches are institutions that are involved in a constant series of dialectical tensions. The dialectic holds polar opposites in tension, constantly shifting between the polarities in historical time.”

They argue against any claim of a Hegelian synthesis or ultimate resolution of the dialectic.

Lincoln and Mamiya (1990:12) identify “six main pairs of dialectically related polar opposites, namely the dialectic between the priestly and prophetic functions, the dialectic between the other—worldly versus the worldly, the dialectic between universalism and particularism, the dialectic between the communal and the privatistic, the dialectic between the charismatic versus bureaucratic and finally the dialectic between the resistance versus accommodation”.

The citing of the three models as advanced by Lincoln and Mamiya assists our understanding of the core focus of this chapter in which we attempt to understand the notion of a black church. We gain insight as to how the black church is understood, as a stumblingblock for the future and public good of blacks, as isolated in an involuntary manner and as a means to afford people power and right to lay claim. This is both relevant and important for it lends credence to the view that the black church is not a homogenic construct but has a multiplicity of meanings and concomitant interpretations.
5. 7 The ‘Black Church’ is Dead – Eddie Glaude

Our pursuit to better understand the notion of a black church, brings us to more recent thoughts and views. One of the most recent debates on the relevance, meaning, and essence of this concept of a black church was initiated by the article ‘The Black Church is Dead’ by Professor Eddie Glaude of Princeton as published in the Religion section of Huffington Post (April 2010).

Glaude’s essay is premised on three fundamental reasons for the death of the black church. His first argument refers to the “conservative nature” of the black church throughout its history: “Conservative black congregations have always been a part of the African American religious landscape. After all, the very existence of the Progressive Baptist Convention is tied up with a trenchant critique of the conservatism of the National Baptist Convention, USA. But our stories about black churches too often bury this conservative dimension of black Christian life.”

Glaude’s second axis for his theory on a dead black church is informed by his claim that “African American communities are much more differentiated. The idea of a black church standing at the center of all that takes place in a community has long since passed away. Instead, different areas of black life have become more distinct and specialized — flourishing outside of the bounds and gaze of black churches.” He argues not that “black communities have become wholly secular; just that black religious institutions and beliefs stand alongside a number of other vibrant non—religious institutions and beliefs”.

Glaude’s third leg which he sees as the most pertinent one of the three on which his theory is predicated argues that “...we have witnessed the routinization of black prophetic witness. Too often, the prophetic energies of black churches are represented as something inherent to the institution, and we need only point to past deeds for evidence of this fact.

Sentences like, “The black church has always stood for..”, “The black church was our rock...” and “Without the black church, we would have not...” abound. In each instance, a backward glance defines the content of the church’s stance in the present — justifying its continued relevance and authorising its voice. Its task, because it has become alienated from the moment in which it lives, is to make us venerate and conform to it.

Glaude (2010) concludes poignantly when he contrasts the assumed historical institutional definition of the construct of the “black church” with its current definition: “Prophetic energies are not an inherent part of black churches, but instances of men and women who grasp the fullness of meaning to be one with God. This cannot be passed down, but must be embraced in the moment in which one finds one’s feet. This ensures that prophetic energies can be expressed again and again.”

Glaude (2010) furthermore contends “The death of the black church as we have known it occasions an opportunity to breathe new life into what it means to be black and
Christian. Black churches and preachers must find their prophetic voices in this momentous present. And in doing so, black churches will rise again and insist that we all assert ourselves on the national stage not as sycophants to a glorious past, but as witnesses to the ongoing revelation of God’s love in the here and now as we work on behalf of those who suffer most.”

This study has consciously chosen to incorporate Glaude’s articulation on the black church into our discourse for four primary reasons.

Firstly, it gives a contemporary perspective on a construct that has come to mean different things to different people however central to the overall black identity. Thus continuing in the aforementioned vein of the variety of interpretations, the construct assumes the stance of the observers.

Secondly, it gives a particular interpretation of what the ‘black church’ means although hitherto defined in civil rights form. Thus helps us further confirm the prevalence in meaning as innately linked to a particular epoch and experience.

Thirdly, in looking back it seeks to understand the existing American conception of the “black church” through the lens of a particular epoch and solicits a yearning for a return to a form of vibrancy, almost militancy, with the 1960’s as the main symbol.

Lastly, this notion of the black church embodies a cry for its re—awakening that would lead the battle charge against the prevailing challenges. It is the understanding of the black church in a historical setting that warrants a call in a new era to address new issues affecting people in this time.

It appears that Glaude is pleading for a rebirth of the black church, the same that mirrored the period of the vibrant 50’s to 70’s. This need for a cry and call is necessitated by the pressing challenges confronted by black people today. These challenges across a myriad of platforms warrant prophetic voices to rise above the chatter of those who have succumbed to the incantation of orthodoxy.

5. 8. Reasons for Yearning for a ‘Black Church’

5.8.1 USA: A Snapshot

Understanding the history of the black church and its manifold meanings for the community denoted black helps us understand its roots, its highs and lows. When the human agent denoted as black talks of the black church it is out of that meaning of the church, the community it comprises, and the purpose it holds in time. To hear contemporary thoughts on a black church’s relevance or irrelevance is to appreciate the protracted history and meaning of the construct in a practical sense for those who have accepted their identity as black.
Black identity and experience in Black Theology: A critical assessment

It, therefore, comes as no surprise that for many of the human agents denoted as black the black church embodies the centre of black struggle, the spiritual consciousness of a community and equally the source of its collective hope for change. When change is a necessity those who are identifying with this community of the black church look naturally and instantaneously to the church to take up the charge to raise the flag and to marshal the community in an expression of resistance.

If Americans (US citizens) today debate the relevance or irrelevance of this institution, it is out of such historic memory of the “invisible institution” or the “institutionalised church”, which in context defined the structure and organisation of black life. The human agent denoted black therefore will always seek to understand, argue and debate its relevance because it serves as the centre of their being and the apex of value expressed in the fight for survival and their need to be recognised.

However, in the present, African Americans remain a minority and their very minority status is threatened by a diminishing shared minority space with the growing Hispanic population. Gains made under the Clinton administration (advancement of affirmative action and many other interventions), subsequently have become eroded under both the Bush and Obama administrations. Notwithstanding the USA having as 44th President a son of Kenyan descent, the human agent denoted black has experienced no significant improvement for in its advancement as a people and group.

The stubborn and persistent challenges inherent in a gross economic disparity along racial lines, the socio-economic challenges of the previous and present black communities locked in social degradation, moral decline and the destruction of the family unit, amplified by the high disproportional inmate percentage split along racial lines, along with many other challenges, warrant some to ask for the resuscitation or revival of the black church.

The black church yearned for is the one that, in a historic context, stood as the repository of identity, social and economic development, and family defence. Therefore, it is only natural for blacks to yearn like souls looking back with desire to see the strength of the black church as the bastion of the black community and buffer of resistance against those who seek to attack this community.

However, the current global economic situation, and in particular, in the USA with a 7.6% unemployment rate as cited in the October (2013) edition of the USA Bureau of Labour Statistics, points to a multiplicity of challenges faced at domestic level that warrant a call for the epicentre of historical struggle (the black church) to respond to if not lead the new battle.
Even those who claim the death of the black church do not do so without the hope of having it resuscitated. In fact, it is out of such conviction that it has a place to rally people to a unity of action that inspires all and sundry, both intellectual and foe, to yearn for that institution which in the immediate post slavery context shaped the life of blacks.

When the human agent denoted black is saddened by the absence of the black church, it is because it is the accepted indisputable bastion of what defines the core of the black community in all spheres of social life be it social, family, morality, economic or education.

5. 8.2 South Africa: A Post---Apartheid Snapshot

Equally, the human agent denoted as black in South Africa calls for a “black church” to again rise in engagement and to prove vocal in this season of post--apartheid democracy, knowing, unlike its US counterparts, that blacks constitute a majority. Yet, despite this majority including its presidents in the post--apartheid context all being black, the fruits of this democracy have yet to be experienced in their lives.

If the “black” church is called for, it is to warn all spheres of government that the shame of, for instance, the Moqaka and Khayelitsha toilet sagas is a gross impingement on the constitutional rights of the black masses. It is in recognition that the formation of the ANC in 1912, was led by a group of intellectuals of which many included the clergy, as a means to unite the tribes in solidarity against the onslaught of colonial and later apartheid forces which worked for the erosion of a people’s identity, humanity and dignity.

When South Africans ask today for the resuscitation of the black church, it is to recognise the role and the significance the church fulfilled in the critical periods of this nation’s struggle against colonialism and apartheid. South Africans are asking today where the church stands when shantytowns appear perennial, when black life remains cheap, when the black child does not receive an appropriate and affordable education. and when the new system benefits only a small group of the new black elite. As moral decadence is an experienced reality and crass materialism is shaping the new canvas of the South African reality there are calls for the black church to rise.

These calls yearn for the influence of the black church to push back the prevalence of corruption, manifested in multiple forms, i.e. the greed of the owners of the means of production and the fact that the economy remains still glaringly controlled and owned by apartheid benefactors.
When some in South Africa ask for a remobilisation of the church today, it is to seek answers to the challenges of a failing education system, and a jobless and painstakingly slow growing economy. It is to ask why HIV and AIDS remain the inheritance of South Africans and why manufacturing as a necessary reality and injection of economic development remains so insignificant. If South Africans ask for the black church and its rise, it is to acknowledge the fact that South Africa’s minerals remain exported and its ownership and beneficiation a pipe dream.

The black church is called to live again and lead the struggle against the backdrop of more than 100 years since the Native Land Act of 1913, in which the ownership of land remains divided in a grossly disproportional way along racial lines, in which 86% of the land is still owned by 12% of the citizens and these are denoted “white”.

If the resuscitation of the black church is called for, it is done with a romanticism of the yesteryear of struggle where the church and the clergy leadership understood their place to prognosticate and pronounce on the evil of apartheid. It is a calling for the vibrancy of a presence to lead the social cohesion discourse to leave the pulpits and join the masses in march and protest against the scourges of gross inequality with its twin manifestations in poverty and unemployment.

5.9 Summary

In summary, the objective of giving these brief reflections on the black church is not to engage them individually but to point to the varied interpretations of what constitutes a definition of the black church, as often wrongly conflated to mean a variety of things for an equal variety of interpreters. The explanation of what the black church means is approached from its historical, evolutionary, academic and contemporary meanings. This study contends that the black church has a distinct meaning with, at times, conflicting expectations and reasoning on its existence, irrelevance and even death for this epoch.

This study agrees with Lincoln and Mamiya that the construct of the black church emerged in the tension of its time in history and its functions were predetermined by a specific expectation of the black church. This means that often the black church holds polar opposite meanings for those who draw meaning, role, and purpose from its existence. At the same time, the expectations are rarely the same in practice, often in conflict with one another in descriptions of the competing interests of its interlocutors who often prove competitive and not all complimentary.

Hence, the interpretation of what such a black church construct means and assumes is never consistent, though its manifold roles are not denied. The meaning and content of
the black church, therefore, remain a subject open for debate and continues to grip many minds seen through those who claim its existence, non—existence, relevance, irrelevance and even its death.

The content and meaning of the black church, it appears, is about what point of view one takes, where one finds oneself and what experience one is subjected to, that gives the construct a meaning.

The historical precedent of the black church, as captured by both Soga and Du Bois, lends itself to much question. In their distinctive interpretations the black church takes the shape of the ‘Kafir’ and ‘Negro’ church respectively. These constructs although accepted by the erstwhile and celebrated leaders are not free from the influence and impact of the descriptions that were appropriated instead of originating from the oppressed.

We can accept that the human agent denoted black does not think in a uniform manner on the construct of a black church. To anticipate such uniformity of thinking for the different eras despite its unique experiences may well lend itself to an interpretation and re—interpretation of the construct that is unhelpful. However the understanding of the construct of the black church appears extracted from or in tandem with the notion of a white church.

Whilst proponents of the black church argue against the ideologies of a white church as a practised reality reflected in racism, they do not extend the same commitment to arguing for the eradication of a black church as a logical consequence. On the contrary their claims for the black church may also be accused of the same shortcoming, which is a form of exceptionalism.

In recent times, the black church has proved reluctant to interact with the reality of the changed Missio—Dei (the immediate surrounding communities) and opted to model the white church supremacy, to engage with those not similar to itself as foreign and never to be automatically integrated into the mainstream life of the body of Christ – the church.

Rather, it attempts to find expressions of separate worship experiences, primarily because it fears being challenged to change. It is at this juncture that this study asserts the notion of being “black for the wrong reasons”.

Where the immediate surrounding communities’ Missio—Dei or mission field has shown change and proves discomforting in challenging our history, culture, symbols and aesthetic values of language, we are constrained by searching questions. Shall we prove immovable, almost stubborn, and not respect the move of the Holy Spirit in constructing the Missio—Dei for the purposes of the Kingdom to which all professing Christians have to adjust and allow the Kingdom of God to rule over our preferences regardless of how we value it? It appears the black church, whilst condemning the white church for its
stubbornness in accepting the identity of the church along the lines of ethnicity, culture and language in this epoch, remains equally trapped by the narrow secular notion of identity.

Those who ask for the revival of a black church do so out of a desperate cry for its institutional reinvigoration in the black community. Equally, those who declare it dead, really seek to re—ignite its meaning in a prevailing experience of desperation based on its meaning between slavery up to the civil rights era.

The black church in institutional formation as precedent and reality is undeniable, yet its interpretative value for this epoch remains challenging and contested. This is particularly noteworthy since it lends itself to a dialectical tension in which we have to contend with the reality of the imported state of a black identity and the current socio—economic and socio—political realities. The same identity, which ultimately became the description of a people oppressed, and perhaps now has eternalised them in a situation of blackness from which it is impossible to escape, must now be the springboard from which to engage the myriad socio—economic and socio—political realities of our time.

It is furthermore this study’s submission that the black church runs the risk of proving black for the wrong reasons when it fails to understand Jesus Christ as a celebration of a multiplicity of cultural expressions, multiplicity of language definitions and multiplicity of ethnic origins brought together by the impetus of the work of Jesus Christ.

This study recognises the major strides made by the black church across the USA in opening their doors, and making their church buildings available for Hispanics for fellowship in their own time slot, dialect and liturgical setting. This warrants acknowledgment as an important step, particularly in comparison to the model of the white supremacist where complete separation of the community of faith in both the USA and South Africa was practised. In South Africa for a long time this practice of separate fellowship in the white Dutch Reformed Church still held sway, and continues to do.

However, this study asserts that this meaningful attempt on the part of the black church cannot be seen as the full and final deal, for our striving must always be to align ourselves in fullness with the expression of scripture and compliant to the demands of the church of Jesus Christ that dictates a oneness, in abhorrence of racial separation.

This study therefore points to the question of whether the “black” church can be exclusive by valuing its history as more important, no different to the “white” church in a time of slavery and segregation, and even continuing in some instances. It appears the black church is particularly stubborn not to relinquish its liturgical uniqueness rooted in slavery – a situation of blackness thrust upon them which replaced the Gospel of Jesus Christ as a gospel for the black church.
This study questions whether we can afford to be either “black” or “white” for the wrong reasons as the church of Jesus Christ. It also questions whether we will in time become “Hispanic” for the wrong reasons, in a time when the God of the Universe expressed His love for a humanity less defined like ourselves by melanin, culture, history, linguistic articulation, experience or an exclusive exceptionalism.
Chapter 6

A POSTULATED BURDEN

“Human beings have been thrown into a situation where almost everything, from religion, politics to economic systems to what we refer to as values, has to be revisited, reconceptualised and re-articulated in a language that frees us from clichés and shibboleths of the 19th and 20th centuries. The essential principles of what facilitates egalitarianism, as opposed to unequal social conditions and life chances, have not changed. But societies and the global village have changed so radically that to continue to analyse and describe things as though we were still in 1848 or 1948 or even 1984 is to be woefully blind and self – defeating”

Neville Alexander 2013
6.1 Introduction

In the preceding chapter we looked at the notion of the Black Church as a phenomenon which lends itself to various interpretations with a variety of meanings and shapes. We have equally shown that the construct proves a conundrum regardless to who refers to it and for what reasons, and therefore a uniform meaning is hardly possible.

This chapter of the study attempts to postulate the upkeep and maintenance of identity markers for the human agency in denotations of colour—coding may engender the presence of a multi—layered burden in this epoch. This postulated multi—layered burden associated with the definition of a black identity in the contemporary context is perhaps worth unpacking.

We continue in the now standard if not consistent vein of drawing the proverbial borders wide to include both the USA and South African experiences in tandem in our attempt to identify this multi—layered burden. The intention of this chapter is not to engage extensively on these identified burdens but to introduce thinking which can and may be used by others in the future to give content in a multi—disciplinary research initiative. Therefore we will at best unpack these postulated burdens but not exhaustively conclude on them in finality.

6.2 Unpacking the Postulated Burden

It is important to give an explanation of this study’s notion of “burden”. The word burden is the summary of a load carried by those who did not incur the debt for which they are held accountable.

The term burden as understood by the Merriam—Webster’s Dictionary is defined as “something that is carried”, “something emotionally difficult to bear”, “a source of great worry or stress; weight”. It can also mean “a principle or a recurring idea”. Burdened thus means “to cause difficulty or distress to distress or oppress to load or overload” Merriam—Webster (2015).

This study arrived at the usage of this concept to articulate the ongoing challenge of identity for the human agent denoted “black” in history, the present and the future.
To advance the content of what we regard as a burden we shall first explore what constitutes the burden of a “black” identity.

It remains the aim of this work that in appropriating the construct of a “black” identity, inadvertently the construct of a “white” identity to define others remains paramount.

Furthermore, this study argues that this burden vacillates in that not only does an appropriation of a black identity lends meaning and credence to the existence of a white identity, it also excludes the definition of identity informed by common humanity, thereby leaving people constricted in a colour—coded social paradigm.

Our departure point is to argue for the prevalence of a burden with the experiential reality of “black” life with the associated challenges attached to it in the present time.

Furthermore, our study suggests the burden of blackness warrants a defence of an identity from a people who were subjected to an experience of blackness, the very notion used to define them. This study now needs to attempt unpacking the burden of a black identity and suggests that it perpetuates the entrapment of a constricted humanity. This identity of the human agent is understood outside of the notion of equality of creation but defined in terms of white supremacist ideology.

Therefore, when this study explores what it means if we talk about being “black” in our time, it sets out to wrestle with the challenge of blackness that has multifaceted and varied consequences. Again, our exploration continues with our use of the USA and South Africa as our guiding lights to understand this multifaceted burden. As before we shall refer to both these two contexts concurrently.

Hochschild (2007:86) reminds us of this burden when she notes, “Dark skinned Blacks in the United States have a lower socio—economic status, more punitive relationships with the criminal justice system, diminished prestige, and less likelihood of holding elective office compared with their lighter counterparts.”

Hochschild explains the colour paradox in citing “blacks’ commitment to racial identity overrides the potential for skin color discrimination to have political significance. That is because most blacks see the fight against racial hierarchy as requiring their primary allegiance, they do not see or do not choose to express concern about the internal
hierarchy of skin tone. Thus dark skinned blacks’ widespread experience of harm has no political outlet – which generates the skin color paradox.”

Davis et al (1946:137) defined this problem of colour in the following way: “What is really crucial behind the color point is class; the implication that light color goes with higher status and the Negroid appearance with lower status, is what makes these characteristics so important” as a social marker.

Perhaps the words of Wolf Blitzer, the CNN anchor in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina’s devastating run on Florida in September 2005, express this burden best. Blitzer remarked that the most devastated victims of Katrina “are so poor and they are so black” (Blitzer 2005).

We may take issue with him for the audacity of his pronouncement, yet we should not hastily condemn Blitzer for the observation he had the temerity to share, until we have examined the fact that the faces that were screened on television in the aftermath of the hurricane identified this very poor and very black of the social group defined as black. Therefore, one further task is to explore calmly and with presence of mind what does the phrase “very poor and very black” really mean.

Thinking through the notion of a burden of blackness this study will now identify a few areas in which to advance this notion.

### 6.3 The Burden of Black Race Classification

It is commonly accepted that the notion of race as a formal construct has been with us for thousands of years almost since the beginning. Yet close examination as highlighted by Nina Jablonski and captured in Brockman (2015:80—83) informs us that “the first person to formally define races was the noted philosopher Immanuel Kant who in 1785 classified people into four fixed races, which were arrayed in a hierarchy according to colour and talent. Kant had scant personal knowledge of human diversity but opined freely about the tastes and finer feelings of groups about which he knew nothing”.

Jablonski (as captured in Brockman 2015: 83) continues to assert that “for Kant and his many followers, the rank—ordering of races by skin color and character created a self—evident order of nature that implied that light—colored races were superior and destined to be served by the innately inferior, darker—colored ones”.
Black identity and experience in Black Theology: A critical assessment

Reading Jablonski on the subject of race confirms the formal construct of race definition of people is really less than two hundred and fifty years old. We must hasten to add that by the end of World War II in 1945 Eugenics as belief system was declared defunct in utter lack of scientific evidence therefore redundant.

She continues to assert “Despite the strong objections of many of Kant’s contemporaries, his ideas about a fixed natural hierarchy of human races, graded in value from light to dark, gained tremendous support because they reinforced popular misconceptions about dark skin being more that a physical trait. The preference for light over dark – strictly speaking white over black – was derived from the pre—medieval associations of white with purity and virtue and of black with impurity and evil”.

We may therefore deduce that race is not authentic and an equal term, but one that in formal sense comes loaded with ideology and laced in prejudice and manifesting in racism.

Equally our usage of the term ethnicity is borrowed from the primordialist approach which is accepted as the oldest in sociological and anthropological literature. Ethnicity, for them constitutes something given, ascribed at birth, deriving from the kin— and—clan—structure of human society, and hence something more or less fixed and permanent (Geertz, 1963; Isaacs, 1975; Stack, 1986).

The human agent denoted as “white” constitutes a departure point for arriving at a conclusion on the burden of a “black” identity. We have in the course of this study suggested that it is impossible to understand or make sense of a “black” identity devoid of the ever—present “white” supremacist identity paradigm. It is also our contention that the two identities in describing a people share a symbiotic and very salient relation.

While each attempted to exist independently in the articulations of identity, the one depends on the other for its own sustainability not just from an agreed point but more from an embedded experiential and ideological reality. If we talk of a “black” identity – be it a philosophical or experiential reality – it is intrinsically linked to that of a “white” identity. This white identity is the elusive ideal for blacks as the measurement of a true being, upheld, searched for and equally fought against at various levels of engagement.

The reality of the co—existence of both black and white identities, whether denied or not, attests to their core nature. Stating this as our first burden appears to be obvious; however, it is the acceptance of it that gives rise and content to others.
Black identity and experience in Black Theology: A critical assessment

Therefore by anchoring the genesis of the black burden in the reality of the co—existence of a white identity with the black identity, we find that it stretches beyond just a skin colour but also in economic and social strata, opportunities, and every sphere of societal life.

To suggest this to be a burden is to assert that black existence is in measurement against or in balance of this white identity as much as white identity lives off the premise of what a black identity signifies. Both end up being unable to define people as human first. Therefore, the burden is the racial classification of people, which is cemented in an internalised colour coding never to be unlearned unless we face the stark realities of the unacceptable results of this colour coding and the task to replace it with an acceptable paradigm identity construction.

The pervasive presence of racial classification and the task to replace it is highlighted by an ACLU report to the UN which in its introduction makes the following emphatic: “Racism and racial discrimination have profoundly and lastingly marked and structured American society. The United States has made decisive progress... [h]owever, the historical, cultural and human depth of racism still permeates all dimensions of life of American society” (ACLU Follow-Up Report 2009:9)

Furthermore, to underline this reality the words of John Coyners (a US Republican) helps us again to see the tension which this study asserts to be a burden: “Since September 11, our nation has engaged in a policy of institutionalized racial and ethnic profiling If Dr. Martin Luther King Jr, were alive today...he would tell us we must not allow the horrific acts of terror our nation has endured to slowly and subversively destroy the foundation of our democracy” (ACLU Follow-Up Report 2009:9)

Whilst these statements are made referring to the USA, this study notes that the very same can be said of the South African society.

6.4 The Burden of a Conflicted “Black” Psychology

Based on the white supremacist identity of race classification, the “white” and “black” categories constitute the heart of the assertion of our second burden, meaning that it also finds expression in a conflicted psychology of “black” and “white” mind—sets.

In order for us to appreciate the notion of a conflicted psychology we lean on Erik Erikson’s theory of psychosocial development. For Erikson, “a conflict is a turning point during which an individual struggles to attain some psychological quality”. He goes on to
say, “sometimes referred to as a psychosocial crisis, this can be a time of both vulnerability and strength, as the individual works toward success or failure” Erikson (1997: 61). 

This may well be what Biko (1979:29) pleads for when he calls for a “coming to himself” of the black man, to “pump life into his empty shell to infuse him with pride and dignity and to remind him of his complicity in the crime of allowing him to be misused and therefore letting evil reign supreme in the country of his birth.”

When we assert the notion of a conflicted psychology we remonstrate if a “white” identity is held up as the standard for humanity as the challenge to a “black” person presents in a three-fold sense. Firstly he has to fight the racial classification that demeans him to a second-rate human, whilst he has to strive to become “white” or what this identity represents if he has any desire of being accepted. As if that is not enough, he secondly has to rise above the “black”, denigrated identity, to thirdly, contest the “white” identity which he is forced to admire and to find his own space free as a human in which he sees himself and those defined as “white” as equals.

We earlier contended that Black Consciousness suggests a psychology of renewal, a new way of thinking about self. It necessitates the “black” human agent to see himself free from the entrapment of a colour-coded identity. It is our contention that notwithstanding what Black Consciousness as a psychology and a mind-set hopes to attain, it cannot succeed by the time the revolution of thinking is called for, as a racial mind-set is already in place, layered in colour coding of how the human agent denoted “black” sees humanity and ultimately how they see themselves.

Biko’s Black Consciousness at the height of apartheid identifies what he calls a black cohort consisting of what is defined in the racial classification of Africans, Coloureds and Indians, yet this cohort in post—apartheid South Africa seemingly think differently about a “black” identity.

In South Africa, we must ask why we are increasingly confronted with the reality that whilst the Constitution delineates a definition of blackness for Africans, Coloureds, and Indians, Indians have sought a deeper affinity with being Indian while Coloureds have shown an appetite to be defined in a reclaimed Khoi—San definition. Does this in a sense signify a rejecting of the “black” description of identity? This rethinking of the black identity by Biko’s black cohort lends more credence to the argument that the black identity contains a potential burden for at least the Indian and Coloured partners of the cohort. This does not automatically confirm that the African cohort is not grappling with a reinterpretation of this black identity. This may well be the case and it is the hope of this exploration that dialogue partners from the above cohort will present themselves.

This study notes that the non—racial identity must still be filled with content. In the absence of a new paradigm the old race—based paradigm remains the prevailing paradigm.
Can we deduce and afford to conclude that even among the black cohort there has been a moving away from a uniform identification of a “black” identity informed by what “black” means in this time? We cannot argue a unity of black identity informed by a uniform psychology. However, presently we must accept a plurality of description of what a black identity is even among the traditional black cohort.

It is the intention of this study to set the tone for the beginning of the processes of reinterpretation of black identity.

This tension—riddled struggle ought to lead to a challenge to this conflicted psychology. This is what the study aims to achieve. The duality of the tension is what reverberates in echoes of self—fatigue and ultimate rejection of self. It then becomes possible for the human agent denoted as black to firstly feel trapped in a colour, that equally articulates his lifelong handicap, rendering him perpetually incapable of escaping who he is and in a perpetual conflicted attempt to become what he never can be i.e. ‘white’. This tension of a conflicted inner world postulates a burden. It lends itself to self—rejection as its natural outcome.

To conclude: The burden of a “black” psychology appears to be confirmed in what Biko (1979) defined as an “...empty shell”. The empty shell syndrome that Biko identifies is really an emptiness of self—acknowledgment, self—appreciation, self—knowledge and self—love, and therefore a resigned state of second—class identity subjugated to a “white” identity as predetermined by such white identity.

6.5 The Burden of “Black” Poverty

The legal enactment of race classification was not an innocent accidental event with no consequences in history but has led to concrete economic and resource disparities of people defined as “black” or “white”. The combination of race and psychology as postulated above also leads to an economic classification. The observation of Blitzer (2005) that people are “so poor and so black” drives this assertion home.

According to the US Census Bureau (2013), African Americans were 13.2 percent of the total population of the United States in 2013. The Census Bureau reports that whites (including Hispanics who self—identify as white) were 72.4 percent of the population in 2010.

Black family income as compared to white total income as a family according to each government’s respective 2008 census is 18.46% for South Africans and 65.74% for Americans (CIA, 2008). What this shows is that although both the United States and South Africa have emerged from past socio—political exclusions and are attempting to remedy racial prejudices, the income gaps are still significantly wide. South Africa’s economic disparity is especially so, with over 3.5 times greater inequality by race.
This statistic makes the concentration on women’s exclusion from the economy a suspicious activity in the Republic of South Africa at this present time. It is as if it has become the fig leaf behind which white supremacists have taken a position at the expense of a meaningful concentration on “black” economic liberation.

The poverty of blacks in both South Africa and the USA constitutes a national tragedy. However, with blacks constituting four—fifths of its population, the magnitude is greater in South Africa than in the United States.

Our third burden therefore, points to the reality of an economic meaning for the “black” identity. This study contends that black people have a reduced stake in the economy. It articulates that being black brings one naturally into the circumference and space of poverty as a natural consequence and in contrast to being white.

Campbell (2014) asserts, “Twenty years after the end of apartheid in South Africa, the 9 percent of the population that is white is richer per capita than the 80 percent that is black”. He continues to argue, “But, with the coming of democracy and affirmative action programs, it is getting better for blacks. The improvements in townships with respect to water supply, housing, and roads is for all to see. Similarly, a common assumption in the United States is that while black poverty persists, more African Americans are moving into the mainstream, so much so that affirmative action programs are being dismantled.”

Campbell cites Nicholas Kristof in his New York Times column of August 31, (2014) that sees a “similarity in the relative position of blacks and whites in South Africa and in the United States. Citing 2011 census data, he notes the average net worth of a black household in the United States as $6,314, while for a white household it was $110,500. In Kristof’s estimation whites in the United States own about eighteen times as much as blacks, while in South Africa in 1970, at the height of apartheid, the ratio was fifteen times” (Campbell 2014).

He concludes that the “gap between white and black incomes in the United States is about 40 percent higher than it was in 1967”. Campbell (2014) continues and says “Kristof furthermore sees a similar trajectory in South Africa where the gap between white and black incomes proves greater in the current context if compared to the advent of non-racial democracy in 1994”.

Charles Tilly (2000:782) defines inequality as “a relation between persons or sets of persons in which interaction generates greater advantages for one than for another”.

Prather (2010:1) notes, “Inequality can be seen in a variety of social arenas, but one of the most pressing and relevant is that of race. In particular, many countries of the world exhibit high levels of income inequality by race, meaning that specific groups within each country are economically disadvantaged in their earnings due to their country’s racial categorization scheme.” This study concurs with Prather that the growing and alarming
inequalities in a South African society can be clearly divided along racial lines. Those racial lines are defined in clear—cut terms of South African black and white identities, where blacks even in democracy continues to remain poor.

Campbell (2014) contends “Kristof in his column goes some way toward demolishing those comfortable assumptions. Referencing the police’s fatal shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, he cites a Harvard and Tufts study in 2011 that shows many whites believe that anti—white racism is a bigger problem than anti—black racism”.

One may well ask how to account for the persistent racial inequality and black poverty in both countries? There are obvious differences: levels of incarceration are much lower in South Africa and South Africa has a much more developed social safety net than most parts of the United States. But, there would seem to be similarities.

These include the persistence of racial prejudice and, harder to measure, the stress on family structures. Apartheid labour practices were notorious for destroying family units, and many of them persist, even if the underpinning ideology is gone. We may also consider the opportunity for entrepreneurial activities in both settings as another means of accounting.

For Campbell, the third factor is the failure of the educational system to prepare blacks to participate in the modern economy, resulting in unemployment rates of some forty percent among black men in South African townships and widespread black youth unemployment in the United States. The persistence of black poverty would appear to be a largely unspoken element in the rioting in Ferguson, Missouri. Poverty as a driver is explicit in Julius Malema’s Economic Freedom Fighters, a South African anti—white party that calls for the expropriation of white—owned farmland without compensation.

The OECD Economic Surveys (2013) contends that “45% of the South African population resides in the townships, the spend in Soweto alone per annum is estimated to be around R45 billion”.

According to a study by the University of Cape Town’s Unilever Institute of Strategic Marketing Study of 2007, black spending power was estimated at R335 billion compared to R235 billion for whites per annum.

When we cite black spending power here it is to underscore two fundamental conclusions. One, the human agency denoted as “black” has spending power in South Africa, yet that spending power is often unfocussed in mistrust of its own entrepreneurial efforts.

Thus, in the evolving context of a changed political setting for both the USA and South Africa, the black human agent has economic value, yet that economic value manifests a pattern of distrust in the self which links to the notion of self—hate.
Thus, the burden of a black identity is a lived reality in the economic space, in which the white human agent is evidenced as more than advantaged in economic terms and lived reality. This is underscored by democracy, be it post—slavery and segregation for the black human agent in the USA or post—apartheid for the South African black human agent. The economic disparity evidenced in undeniable patterns along black and white lines communicates the burden of an unequal economy which translates to the burden of a black poverty.

This study contends that wealth creation starts with a self—defined identity as a key building block among others.

6.6 The Burden of a “Black” Criminality

This chapter asserts that for the human agent denoted as black, social life is burden—filled. This burden extends to various aspects that define black social agents in the USA and South Africa. The societal context of the black person as a lived experience in both these contexts mirrors a reality in which being black has a close affinity with forms of criminality.

This is our fourth asserted burden that gives content to what it means to be black.

Lissenberg (2011:9) in an article in De Academishche Boekengids captures the notion of the association of blackness with crime when he observes, “Zwarten in de Verenigde Staten zijn oververtegenwoordigd in de misdaad, als daders maar ook als slachtoffers. Al ruim een eeuw wordt gezocht naar verklaringen voor dit sterke verband. Volgens sommigen weerspiegelen de criminaliteits cijfers een ‘kleurenblinde’ werkelijkheid, anderen zien de omvangrijke misdaad van zwarten als het gevolg van hun ongunstige sociale omstandigheden, weer anderen wijzen racisme en discriminatie als oorzaken aan.

In 1884 noemde de Amerikaanse paleontoloog en geoloog Nathaniel Southgate Shaler de aanwezigheid van de zwarte bevolking het grootste onheil dat de Verenigde Staten was overkomen. Onder invloed van het vooruitgangs—gelooof tijdens de Progressive Era (1890—1920) nam hij in 1900 een genuanceerd standpunt in; hij riep de liberale krachten in het noorden op om zich uit liefde voor het vaderland in te zetten voor de daadwerkelijke emancipatie van zwarten.”

Lissenberg (2011:9) contends, “De armoede van de zwarte bevolking zorgde voor achterstand, segregatie en criminaliteit.”

When Lissenberg cites a causal link that poverty for the black population is the reason for the backlog, segregation and criminality we must contend that there is a burden to be extrapolated from this. This study concurs that a combination of all the above assertions stands.
Reading Lissenberg, one can identify a burden of poverty which identifies a black identity as an outflow of the economic disparities and unhealthy social circumstances blacks find themselves in. An observation is that it appears, whether in Compton, California or Manenberg, Cape Flats, there is a common reality where poverty rules, and social deviance evidenced in criminality manifests.

Crime therefore appears more prevalent in the presence of poverty and because “blacks” are defined by poverty and their - ondraaglike indien nie haaglike sosio-ekonomiese omstandighede -, it produces a prolific soil for criminality, the same that defines a black identity.

This study notes that while the population demographics and percentage of the USA for blacks points to a minority and for South Africa a majority, the circumstances remain the same notwithstanding. Thus, the experiential reality of a black identity as defined by white supremacists remains the same. Perhaps another burden is the fact that not only will “blacks” be committing the crimes but they will also be the victims of such crime.

This must therefore present a double—edged—burden, one pointing to poverty and the other to an unhealthy socio—economic context as a natural association for blacks that leads to deviant behaviour manifesting in crime, mostly directed inward.

The ACLU (2009) cites the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Profiling as having highlighted the importance of combating racial profiling in its general Comment XXXI on combating racism in the administration of criminal justice system.

Therefore the need to delegitimise the racial classification of crime in the USA underscores this postulated burden of a black identity by drawing the causal linkages between black identity and crime as evidenced in the following articulation, “Data and anecdotal information from across the country reveal that racial minorities continue to be unfairly victimized when authorities investigate, stop, frisk, or search individuals based upon subjective identity—based characteristics rather than identifiable evidence of illegal activity. Victims continue to be racially or ethnically profiled while they work, drive, shop, pray, travel, and stand on the street” (ACLU 2009:9).

This ACLU (2009) report decries the practice of racial profiling as a conscious means of attaching crime to a racial identity which extends the claim of crime occurrence as a racial reality and construct. The existence of this report evidences the reality that blacks as a minority experience criminality as a means of special classification.

This study notes that the expansion of the USA prison population shows a particular consequentiality for blacks: “The incarceration rate for young black men in the year 2000 was nearly 10%, compared to just over 1% for white men in the same age group” (USA Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2001).
6.7 The Burden of “Black” Self—hate

Caroline B. Murray in her article on “Selfhatred” as captured in the International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences of (2008) explains that “Much of the psychological research in the area of self—hatred owes its origin to the work of the American philosopher and social psychologist George Herbert Mead (1863–1931) and his idea of the ‘looking—glassself’.”

The individual, according to Mead (1934:255), “can enter as an object [to himself] only on the basis of social relations and interactions, only by means of his experiential transactions with other individuals in an organized social environment. Self—consciousness is the result of a process in which the individual takes the attitudes of others toward herself, in which she attempts to view herself from the standpoint of others. The self—as—object arises out of the individual’s experience of other selves outside of herself. The objectified self is an emergent within the social structures and processes of human intersubjectivity.”

Is it possible that “blacks” out of their own experience of a blackness have internalised a conscious and unconscious self—hate until the body—bags attest to the communities where blacks live and dwell?

Mead (1955) claimed that people pay attention to the view that others have of them, and when that view is largely negative, a person can internalise it and develop self—hatred. It is at the hand of Mead that we seek to extrapolate our next burden.

It is our contention that the human agent denoted black over a protracted period of exposure to colonialism, segregation, slavery and apartheid and its manifold manifestations of disenfranchisement unconsciously imbibed a negative view of being black and internalised this negative view of his identity.

This perpetual exposure to a negative view of an identity defined in terms of blackness by an oppressor points to the fifth burden.

This self—hate as the fifth leg of our contention for a burden, manifests not only in how blacks see each other through a borrowed prism of how whites see blacks, but also in self—annihilation of the human agent denoted as black through crime.

The sociologist Erving Goffman presented the fundamentals of stigma as a social theory, including his interpretation of stigma as a means of spoiling identity. By this he referred to the stigmatized trait ability to “spoil” recognition of the individual adherence to social norm in other facets of self (Goffman 1986).
C.B Murray (2008,138) asserts “Goffman claimed that ethnic (and other minority) groups were often “stigmatized” by society’s negative symbolic interaction and that the internalisation of such stigmatisation (often termed “racism”) is a major cause of self—hatred.” Whilst Murray uses “ethnic and other minority” groups and a US context as her departure point for his definition of “self—hatred”, her point holds even in societies where a white supremacist minority group ruled as in apartheid South Africa. This study thus concurs with Goffman that it is “internalised stigmatisation” that lends itself ultimately to self—hatred.

Murray in the same article on “Self—hatred” asserts Sander L. Gilman, (1990) “has gone so far as to suggest that persecution is inherent in a society's language.”

Mead, in his research, placed a strong emphasis on the social role of the human agent and language in society. A number of later researchers pointed out that American symbols were major conveyers of negative views of blacks and other ethnic groups.

In another context, Charles (2003:1) notes that “the afrocentric view concerning Jamaicans who bleach their skins is that they suffer from self—hate, a result of lingering psychological scars of slavery”.

It appears that the social agents denoted black have internalised the mindset on what black is as seen from the prism of a white supremacist mind, with the added assumed responsibility of the need to eradicate that which is black. It appears blacks do not trust blackness. Blacks remain suspicious of one another and of themselves based on the dominant white supremacist ideology itself.

One may even argue that blacks have become preoccupied with destroying one another regardless of platform, place or situation be it through gangster violence or in the context where some have made economic advances at the cost of others.

This self—hate notion transcends the admiration of what is defined as white, and manifests in a distrust of self.

**6.8 The Burden of “Black” Empowerment**

This study suggests that the burden of a “black” identity in post—apartheid South Africa is given further impetus in the legislation adopted to redress institutionalised racism. These various laws articulate and plead for economic empowerment for the human agent denoted as black. However, the interpretation and application of this legislation carries with it challenges that strengthen the burden of a black identity even in the midst of opportunity.
Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) was emphasised by the African National Congress (ANC) government soon after it took power in 1994, in a bid to redress the economic imbalance of the apartheid era, in which black people were effectively excluded from the boardroom. Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (BBBEE) is probably one of South Africa’s “most critical business imperatives, now and in the future. Without it business can expect to experience a steady drop in turnover that will ultimately have a detrimental effect on the national economy” Retief (2010).

The burden is understood when black advancement is regarded by some as tokenism and a lowering of standards in which blacks are led to believe they are the products of empowerment.

### 6.9 The Burden of Victimology and Entitlement

McWhorter (2000:7) defines victimology in drawing a distinction between a constructive approach to victimhood as opposed to claiming victimhood “where it barely if at all exists”.

He asserts, “approaching victimhood constructively will naturally include calling attention to it, and it is healthy. However, much more often in modern black American life, victimhood is simply called attention to where it barely exists if at all. Most importantly, all too often this is not done to forge a solution, but to foster and nurture an unfocused brand of resentment and sense of alienation from the mainstream. This is victimology.”

He continues in asserting that the result of this practice “is the cult of victimology, under which remnants of discrimination hold an obsessive, indignant fascination that allows only passing acknowledgement of any signs of progress” (2000:7).

Reading McWhorter in this sense leads us to extrapolate a claim for the burden of victimology. This finds root in the reality that despite progress and advancements made by a group defined as black, it appears blacks have remained victims of their oppressed past. It is perhaps interesting to note that often those who complain ensemble the empowered. That means those who have benefitted are likely to make the most noise.

When we raise the possibility of a burden of victimhood that translates to a cult of victimology, it is to consciously contend that beyond what we choose to call a rightful victimhood which has to be an acknowledged reality, victimology attempts to claim such victimhood devoid of the acknowledgement of achieved progress or advancement.

We therefore contend that notwithstanding the reality of a definite changed context of political transition, exemplified in legislation, be it against slavery or apartheid, there exists for some a tendency to conveniently claim victimhood.
What has to be acknowledged by blacks in the USA or South Africa is that whilst the challenges of racism still manifest in various shades, it would be dishonest to argue that things have not changed. Often the victimhood claimed attests a dishonest reality which is advanced as truth.

Thus, the challenge of holding onto a black identity presents and is manipulated to serve the interest of the cult of victimology, as McWhorter (2000:212) describes: “the tendency to exaggerate the degree of black oppression regardless of progress made”.

6.10 Summary

In this chapter we have attempted to postulate a burden directly associated with the definition of the human agent denoted as black. We have anchored the notion of burden to a racial classification of people as the pivot of this exploration. With this as base we have extrapolated a variety of streams or layers constituting this suggested burden.

It is not the overarching intent of this exploration at this stage to populate and give detailed evidence for these layers, nor to argue on the conclusivity of these since that may be the task of others in follow—up research. What is of pertinence for this exploration was to extrapolate and postulate the plausibility of a burden in black identity as an experiential reality? This burden as postulated in this work manifests in a multiplicity of layers and a plethora of societal interactions across categories and hierarchies.

We have shown that the racial classification manifests in a plethora of definitions of a conflicted black psychology, black poverty, black criminality, black self—hate, black empowerment and ultimately a black victimology.

We had not attempted to be exhaustive on any of these aspects for the intention was to introduce the notion of burden and unpacking the axis of the postulated burden in its multi—facets. This study has attempted to capture the plight of those who carry this denotation of black for their human agency at an experiential reality as an everyday reality.

Arguing for this postulated burden prevalent in manifested platforms of societal description is anchored in the need to again question the uncritical adoption of the term by those who advance a ‘black’ identity in black theology. Those who defend a black identity as a conclusive identity devoid of question on both sides of the spectrum.

We are going to explore in the pre—final chapter of this study, the interpretation of a key defining Biblical text with a perspective on identity made possible through the redemptive work of Jesus Christ and what such identity may present for a means to identify believers in unity.
Chapter 7.

BETWEEN CHRIST AND “BLACK” IDENTITY

“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

(Galatians 3:28 NKJV)
7.1 Introduction

In this, our penultimate, chapter we seek to unpack the content of human identity through the redemptive and complete work of Christ Jesus. It is perhaps important to advance the logic for this chapter as located within the scope of this text at this particular interval.

We had in the earlier chapters deliberately and consciously sought to engage the theoretical arguments for identity, black, blackness, whiteness, black church and experience as evidenced in ideology, the same that had an accepted enormous influence on black theology. We thus consciously sought to close out with the biblical text as a final word since black theologians no different to those of the white supremacist ideology claim an uphold of the biblical writ as sacrosanct. Therefore the intent is to give the text the final authority on the subject of a Christian identity as wrought in the redemptive work of Jesus Christ.

In this exploration we shall attempt to investigate whether the notion of colour as social identifier is continuous or discontinuous with the redemptive work of Christ. It is the contention of this study that no identity holds sway but that which is defined in Jesus Christ.

Our assertion has as its foundation the methodological acceptance of scripture as the fundamental source for social life. Our choice from Scripture is informed by the work of the redemptive work of Christ and how those whom He redeemed are understood to be the church. Throughout this study we have asserted the notion of church to mean the body of Christ, despite the various historical expressions we have encountered. Therefore it is important to explore defining texts from scripture that will help us to come to an understanding, through the work of Jesus Christ, of human identity.

In order to assist us to grasp the primacy of a human identity in Christ we consciously read Galatians 3:28 to argue against the maintenance of tribe, race, gender, culture or ethnicity as modern—day notions through which to identify fellow human beings. On the gender aspect we also lean on Hove (1999:18) when he asserts “Our study of the context of Galatians 3:28 has shown that Paul was not reflecting upon relations within the body of Christ when he had the text penned. He was thinking about the basis of membership in the body of Christ. This means that it is an error to say that ‘all one’ in Christ means that there are no distinctions within the body”. It should be noted that Hove disputes an equalitarian interpretation of the passage albeit that his core focus is the role of woman in the church.
With it we seek to remonstrate not only with the proponents of a “white” identity who erred in the maintenance of such a notion beyond Christ’s redemptive work for all mankind, but equally with the proponents and defenders of a black identity, for neither can hold these positions and still proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord.

To assist us with the interpretation of this text we shall make use of a crossbreed of commentaries. Some of the commentaries used as in the case of Barnes, Poole, Ellicot, Henry and Gill, due to being dated works were sourced from the internet, therefore page numbers are not always reflecting, we have indicated the singular internet source in the bibliography for these.

Three elements informed our choice of the selected commentaries. Firstly, the commentaries were chosen as the basis from which to argue for an overarching understanding of an identity informed by the redemptive work of Christ. Secondly, those selected inculcate more dated and more later ones to provide a balance of interpretation conscious of the passing of time. Thirdly, the commentaries were selected because they both support and challenge the contention of this study, so as to solicit a variety of views on the interpretation of what we choose to refer as the defining the text.

Thus, it is this study’s postulation that an identity defined in Christ, not in one’s skin colour, culture, or tribe, is what ought to inform our lives as we seek penitence and repentance from false prisms of identities.

We shall continue to argue against the relevance of a colour–coded notion of identity whether in description, definition or appropriation as a means to define self or others. In order to do justice to our attempt we will look at one definitive piece biblical text, namely Galatians 3: 28.

7.2 Overview and Background of the Biblical Text

7.2.1 Background on the Epistle of Galatians

Galatians 3: 28 “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

This study has considered the work of John MacArthur (1997:1786) as captured in the MacArthur (NKJV) Study Bible.
Galatians, as the title suggests (pros Galatia) is from the region in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey) where the churches addressed were located. It is the only one of Paul’s letters addressed to churches in more than one city (1:2, cf. 3:1, I Corinthians 16:1). The authorship of the epistle is generally and readily accepted as being ascribed to Paul.

The Galatians text signposts the power of the Gospel to make men one in Christ. There is general consensus that the Apostle Paul wrote Galatians (1:1, 5:2). Chapter 2 of the epistle helps us with an estimated dating for the epistle. Paul describes his visit to the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15, hence he must have written the Galatians epistle after that event. It is generally accepted the Jerusalem Council was dated around AD 49, which affords in likelihood a date for Galatians shortly thereafter.

Paul was born in Tarsus, a city in the province of Cilicia, not to distant from Galatia. Paul was a protégé of the famous rabbi Gamalial and received in depth training in the Hebrew Scriptures and in the Rabbinic traditions of Jerusalem (Acts 22:3). As a member of the ultra—orthodox sect of the Pharisees (Acts 23:6); he was one of first century Judaism’s rising stars (1:14; cf. Philippians 3:5, 6).

In the time of Paul, the Galatia comprised two distinct meanings. Galatia in a strict ethnic sense was thus the region of central Asia Minor inhabited by Galatians. They were a Celtic people who had migrated to that region from Gaul (modern France) in the third century B.C. Rome conquered the Galatians in 189 B.C, yet allowed them to have some form of independence until 25 B.C. when Galatia became a Roman province, incorporating some geographical regions not inhabited by ethnic Galatians i.e. parts of Lycania, Phrygia and Pisidia. Thus in a political sense, Galatia came to describe the entire Roman province, not merely the region that was originally inhabited by the ethnic Galatians (MacArthur 1997: 1786).

Paul founded churches in the southern Galatian cities of Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe (Acts 13: 14—14:23). These cities while part of the Roman province were not in the ethnic Galatian region. There is no record of Paul’s founding of churches in the less populated northern Galatian region. Therefore the distinct two uses of Galatia renders it more difficult to ascertain who the original recipients of the epistle were (MacArthur 1997: 1786).

A strict interpretation from a racial setting causes some to contend that this epistle addressed to churches in the northern Galatian region, inhabited by the ethnic descendants of the Gauls.
The recorded versions of Acts 16:6 attests to the fact that Paul on at least two occasions entered the northern region yet there is no evidence that he had any evangelistic outreach work or that he founded any churches in this region. The support for the epistle being addressed stems from the fact that neither Acts nor Galatians mentions cities or people from northern (ethnic) Galatia, it thus is reasonable to accept that this epistle was addressed to the churches located in the Roman province but outside the ethnic Galatian region (MacArthur 1997:1786).

It would appear that Paul wrote the epistle to counter judaizing false teachers for undermining the central NT doctrine of justification by faith. This group was ignoring the express decree of the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:23–29), for they spread their precarious teaching that Gentiles must first become Jewish proselytes and submit to all the Mosaic law before they could become Christians (1:7, 4:17, 21; 5:2–12, 6:1,13). Paul clearly stunned by the Galatians’ openness to that damning heresy (cf.1:6) wrote this letter to defend justification by faith, and warn these churches of the severe consequences of abandoning that essential doctrine (MacArthur 1997:1786).

The typical Galatian churches of the southern region comprised a gathering of those assembled out of the most diverse elements of the cosmopolitan world of the day, namely Jew and Gentile, slave and freeman, male and female, who had all contributed to the composition of the churches. When Paul therefore addresses the churches in Galatia, which he did not establish, he is cognisant of their constitution as a cross—section of people with diverse backgrounds, economic dispositions, cultural expressions and dialect.

7.3. Understanding “Greek”

Barnes (1905) helps us understand the term “Greek” in Galatians 3:28 the following way: “The word ‘Greek’ here is used to denote the Gentiles generally; since the whole world was divided by the Jews into ‘Jews and Greeks’ – the Greeks being the foreign nation best known to them. The Syriac renders it here ‘Aramean’, using the word to denote the Gentiles generally.”

We note that the commentary from Ellicot (1873) includes an aspect of background as to how through the exploits of Alexander the Great, Greece advanced itself and its language into new and foreign territories. The spread of the Greek race through the conquests of Alexander, their ubiquitous presence, and the use of the Greek language as a universal medium of communication, led to the name “Greek” being applied to all who were not Jews. “Jew and Greek” is thus intended to be an exhaustive division of the human race, just as are “bond or free” or “male and female.”
Whilst this input from Ellicot may be an attempted logical deduction we must caution ourselves against this simplicity and rather look at Act2:9—11 that clearly introduces us to a multiplicity of languages on the day of Pentecost as more elaborative for the subject of both ethnicity and language.

7.4 Expositor’s Commentary

Findlay (1888:35) by way of introduction to the third Chapter of the Epistle to Galatians notes “This letter deviates from the Apostle’s devout and happy usage. Not “I give thanks,” but “I marvel;” not blessing, but anathema is coming from his lips: a surprise that jars all the more upon one’s ears, because it follows on the sublime doxology of the preceding verse.”

His expositor’s commentary asserts, “having now established the temporary and subordinate function of the Law, the Apostle finally repudiates every claim, whether on that or any other ground, on behalf of any distinct class to superior sanctity in Christ. All Christians, whatever their antecedents, are one in Christ. The legal barriers and social cleft which severed freeman from slave, even natural divisions as deep—seated as those of gender, disappear in the presence of the all—absorbing unity of the body of Christ.”

The Expositor’s Commentary is unequivocal in its interpretation of the text as indicative of a conclusive assertion of what constitutes identity for the Christian. This identity is firstly accepted in oneness or defined in a singular identity. It posits an indivisibility of being one in Christ.

The deciding and determining factor is not the person, the human agent him or herself, but the person of Christ. Thus, it argues that upholding distinctions informed by creed, race and even culture is incompatible with the true identity in Christ. If we, therefore, accept an identity in Christ, then any other identity outside Christ cannot stand. By implication once in Christ other normative distinctions are nullified and thus cannot continue to exist for it would defy the identity and work of Christ. This study remains cognisant that others argue in the opposite of this.

Thus, it becomes unacceptable to justify an identity outside of Christ as reflective of the church, the ekklesia. For the church derives its meaning, purpose and orientation, its identity, from the epicentre of its being, namely, Jesus Christ.
It is important to note that for Ellicot (1905) the use of Greek and Jew is primarily and perhaps conclusively aimed at confirming the unabridged gulf of differences. One can almost say the antithesis of the other in which the Jews assumed an identity and value not equal to that of the Greek. This would have fed the divisive rhetoric of racism premised on the distinction of culture, religion and praxis. When we read Ellicot here we are introduced to the notion of a sonship contained in a quality of identity only possible in Jesus Christ.

This study notes that Ellicot, supports the persuasion that Galatians 3:28 imbibes that all Christians alike, regardless of race, status, or sex, and therefore share the same base or premise of sonship before God. Therefore it is a unity or solidarity in the Christian body making that which is true of one as true of all.

For Ellicot, it is the true significance of who Christ is in His redemptive work that renders any distinctions informed by creed, race or culture as artificial distinctions. Regardless of how strong these may become in tradition, once introduced to the Christ of Calvary such distinctions pale into insignificance.

He asserts, “this verse marks the immense stride made by Christianity in sweeping away the artificial distinctions which had been the bane of the ancient world that prevented any true feeling of brotherhood springing up in it. Christianity, at one stroke, established the brotherhood and abolished the distinctions. Thus, it is a social innovation that Jesus Christ brought through his work on the cross.”

This has implications for our modern social context. If nothing else it points in a direction that is fundamental to the unequivocal unity of humanity. This has implications for all the excluded social categories in our day, i.e. gay, lesbian, transgender, poor, workers, the developing world, the physical environment, and last but not least the human agent denoted as black. All of the above excluded categories are included into the body of the Christ – the new community, the ekklesia in Christ.
7.5 Matthew Henry Commentary

For Henry (1708–1710), “real Christians enjoy great privileges under the gospel; and are no longer accounted servants, but sons; not now kept at such a distance, and under such restraints as the Jews were. Having accepted Christ Jesus as their Lord and Saviour, and relying on him alone for justification and salvation, they become the sons of God. But no outward forms or profession can secure these blessings; for if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.” Whilst Henry underscores the subject from servant to sons, we must caution that we not hastily accredit Paul with perhaps much later theology formulations.

Henry helps us to appreciate the centrality of the baptism as a means of believers to be incorporated in sonship of Christ. This therefore cannot place a focus on outward imitation but the new birth which demands a complete change.

This study notes, that Henry contends the “things of this life are but trifles” and thus the believer must look forward to the future heaven as “the portion or child’s part”. This contention of Henry identifies him in his paradigm where he refuses to let the identity of Christ count as paramount in defining the human agent. He is almost pleading for those affected by the trapped designations of Greek, slave and women to accept their lot and discharge their duties in accordance with these designations for he identifies these as duties. What Henry is not dealing with is the fact that one human defined another as other, and exacted that designation upon the other for it fit their paradigm.

He advances the “pie in the sky” notion where a future Heaven is where this equality of identity in Christ will find meaning, but until then equality is to be seen as figurative and pointing to a future. This despite the fact that the Kingdom (Basilea) of God has come and is coming to the earth with the dispatching of God’s only begotten Son, thus heaven has come and must be realised here and now.

If one listens to Henry in this articulation we almost hear a silent and subliminal defence of the status quo, in which supremacist identifiers for the human agent remain unchallenged as to be imported and to co–exist with the redemptive work of Christ and its identity construction. Yet, Henry is not alone in this because black theologians also interpret the use of these words by Paul himself to accommodate this dualism of identity here and in a figurative future.

This resigning of the human agent to his/ her lot as up to God, denounces the active role God has in creating a new human agent through Jesus Christ.
This study contends God the creator has always seen in man an able and empowered partner for the cause of redemption in its manifold manifestations, as an active participator and contributor to the aims and purposes He foreknew (Henry, 1708).

7.6 Barnes Bible Commentary

For Barnes (1905), there is neither Jew nor Greek implies “all are on a level; all are saved in the same way; all are entitled to the same privileges. There is no favouritism on account of birth, beauty, or blood. All confess that they are sinners; all are saved by the merits of the same Saviour; all are admitted to the same privileges as children of God.”

The meaning is that whatever was the birth, or rank, or nation, or colour, or complexion, all under the Gospel were on a level. They were admitted to the same privileges, and endowed with the same hopes of eternal life.

Yet, Barnes holds that this does not mean that all the civil distinctions among people are to be disregarded: “It does not mean that no respect is to be shown to those in office, or to people in elevated rank. It does not mean that all are on a level in regard to talents, comforts, or wealth; but it means only that all people are on a level ‘in regard to religion’. This is the sole point under discussion; and the interpretation should be limited to this. It is not a fact that people are on a level in all things, nor is it a fact that the gospel designs to break down all the distinctions of society.”

This study notes that for Barnes, Paul is advocating through this teaching that preference and disadvantage of any in the Kingdom of God is no man’s claim regardless to ethnicity, gender or class or economic status, because the cross, the communion table as served by the same grace equalizes all as redeemed by the same blood of Jesus Christ. This equality made possible through redemptive work of Christ affords all a hope of heavenly future as on equal level without any reverence for their current external placing in society.

It should be noted that the usage of Christianity, on the part of Barnes, as a means of interpreting the text, proves interesting and questionable. It appears that Barnes’ interpretation of the Church is lost in a definition of Christianity which suggests an ideological point of entry.
Barnes furthermore asserts, “I do not see any evidence that the Christian religion designed to abolish slavery, any more than I do in the following phrase, ‘there is neither male nor female’, that it was intended to abolish the distinction of the sexes; nor do I see in this passage any evidence that there should not be proper respect shown by the servant to his master, though both of them are Christians, any more than there is in the following phrase, that suitable respect should not be shown in the contact with the sexes ... But the proof is explicit, that masters and slaves may alike become Christians on the same terms, and are, in regard to their religious privileges and hopes, on a level. No special favor is shown to the one, in the matter of salvation, because he is free, nor is the other excluded because he is a slave.”

Barnes identifies three areas that anchor his understanding of the text in its practical manifestation as the following:

“That they should sit down to the same communion table. There should be no invidious and odious distinctions there.”

“They should be regarded alike as Christian brethren in the house of God, and should be addressed and treated accordingly.”

“The slave should excite the interest, and receive the watchful care of the pastor, as well as his master. Indeed, he may need it more; and from his ignorance, and the fewness of his opportunities, it may be proper that special attention should be bestowed on him.”

It is this study's assertion that perhaps the challenge with Barnes’s interpretation is that it fails on this score to accept the radical equality of heaven to have an impact, consequence and relevance in present--day social life leading up to that future. It is as if Barnes contends for those who are currently oppressed to accept their position of equality in Christ but wait for the actualisation of such in a future heaven where equality less possible here and now rules. It is challenging to accept this notion of an acceptance of equality yet not work for its full realisation in actual practice in this life. It should be noted that Paul’s audience as comprising the entire Roman region not merely the ethic Galatia may have been offended with this narrow and conclusive ideological stance adopted by Barnes. Thus we cannot concur with Barnes on this score.
7.7 Jamieson---Fausset---Brown Bible Commentary

The Jamieson—Fausset—Brown (1871:3698) commentary notes that verse 28 confirms:
“There is in this sonship by faith in Christ, no class privileged above another, as the Jews under the law had been above the Gentiles (Ro 10:12; 1Co 12:13; Col 3:11). Bond nor free—Christ alike belongs to both by faith; whence he puts ‘bond’ before ‘free’. ... Neither male nor female—rather, as Greek, ‘there is not male and female’. There is no distinction into male and female. Difference of sex makes no difference in Christian privileges. But under the law the male sex had great privileges. Males alone had in their body circumcision, the sign of the covenant (contrast baptism applied to male and female alike); they alone were capable of being kings and priests, whereas all of either sex are now ‘kings and priests unto God’ (Re 1:6); they had prior right to inheritances. In the resurrection the relation of the sexes shall cease (Luke 20:35).”

This study concurs with Jamieson et al, that the text is explicit in denouncing all forms of identifiers for a designation of privilege for the human agent in the context of Christ’s redemptive work.

7.8. Matthew Poole’s Commentary

For Poole (1680) “There is neither Jew nor Greek; means in the business of justification, the case of Jews and Greeks is the same. This he says, that the Galatians might not think themselves disadvantaged from their not being under the law, as the schoolmaster that should lead them unto Christ. There is neither bond nor free; neither doth Christ consider the qualities and circumstances of persons, whether they be servants or free men, for though they be servants, Christ hath made them free (1 Corinthians 7:22 Ephesians 6:8). There is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus: neither hath Christ any respect to sexes: the male children under the law had many privileges; but it is all a case under the gospel, whether persons be males or females, Jews or Gentiles, rich or poor, servantsormasters,bond—menormanfree—men.”(Poole,1680)

It should be noted that for Poole, whom we concur with the work of redemption as achieved and wrought in Christ Jesus, becomes the true qualifier and defining equalizer of all humanity.

7.9. John Gill’s Exposition on the entire Bible

Gill (1796) helps us to appreciate that when the text articulates ‘There is neither Jew nor Greek’, it must be understood “that there were such in being; and in the
churches of Christ, for the primitive churches consisted of both; but the meaning is, that there is no difference between them, the middle wall of partition being broken down, and that, in the business of justification and salvation, it signified nothing whether a man was a Jew or a Greek; he was never the better for being a circumcised Jew, nor never the worse for being an uncircumcised Gentile; both by nature are equally sinners, and stand in need of the justifying righteousness of Christ, and the regenerating grace of the Spirit. The Gospel was equally preached to both, and was made useful to some of the one and of the other; and who, believing in Christ, had a right to the same ordinances and privileges of the Gospel, and shared in the same blessings of grace.” (Gill, 1796).

This study notes that regardless of any past separation however informed on the interpretation of a human identity outside the activity of the redemptive work of Christ, His work broke down these walls of separation. Thus, it obliterated the presence of any further separation between social agents. The redemptive work of Christ is conclusive in defining a new identity with no regard for any previous accepted identities. This means the designations of Jew, Greek, etc. as identifiers for the human agent stand outside the redemptive work of Christ and are not accommodated in the Christ.

Again this study recognises that the churches in Galatia consisted of people who had been defined or identified as “bond and free...”, yet these are subjected to the redemptive work of Christ who was no respecter of persons, but embracing a singularity of identity.

For Gill (1796), asserts it is the intention of the apostle Paul to show the “common right of believers, of every nation, condition, and sex, and to encourage the Gentiles, and demolish the pride, vanity, and boasting of the Jews, their men especially, who valued themselves upon these ‘three’ very things which the apostle here makes no account of; as that they were Israelites and not Gentiles, freemen and not servants, men and not women; and in their public prayers they give thanks to God in this form, ‘blessed be the Lord our God, the King of the world, that he hath made me an Israelite; blessed be the Lord, &c. who hath not made me a Gentile; blessed be the Lord, &c. who hath not made me a ‘servant’; blessed be the Lord, &c. who hath not made me a ‘woman’.”

This study notes that the Jewish mind integrally linked and centred as informed by three aspects of being (Israelites not Gentiles, freemen not servants and men and not women), is being dealt with and addressed by the apostle in this text. It becomes easy to interpret this mind as racist, dominant, and sexist. When Paul addresses the Galatian mind he is addressing age—old challenges which in this era still stand: the issues of prejudice, abuse as the owner of means and as male over women. This mind is called to repentance to appreciate the other as not lower but equal, not of lesser value and importance but of equal importance.
On another level, the apostle's message is for those who suffered at the hand of this prejudice, abuse and dominance in declaring them no longer victims of the oppressor. This new paradigm as Paul asserts is made possible through the redemptive work of Christ who came to set the Jew, Greek, bond, free, male and female free, to embrace no longer an oppressor or oppressed identity but one of equality if they seek to identify with the church as the body of Christ. Paul’s message thus is instructive, it is non–negotiable, and it is equally liberating. Liberating for it firstly must liberate the Jew, who uses himself as the anchor tenant of identity from which they define all others.

Liberating for the fact that through this activity of rendering others powerless, they have enslaved themselves in falseness of importance at the expense of fellow human agency.

Liberating because it sets not only the oppressor free but it also frees the oppressed to accept, embrace and actualise this equality in every sphere of his / her social life. Christ thus frees both the victim and the perpetrator for the perpetrator had no knowledge of how bound he is for holding onto these identifiers of a human agent who is equal in Christ.

This brings us to the emphatic statement – “one new man in Christ” – we understand this as – for ye are all ‘one in Christ Jesus; being alike chosen in him, united to him, redeemed by his blood, justified by his righteousness, regenerated by his Spirit, the children of God by faith in him, and heirs of the same grace and glory’, regardless of the existing differences in both categories and hierarchies.

We thought it appropriate to incorporate a number of more contemporary and recent approaches advanced to read Galatians 3:28 so as to appreciate the intrinsic value and complexity of its interpretation. To this end we have included the advanced Intersectional approach to reading Galatians, the Argumentative approach and the Post Colonial Queer approach.

When we cite these here it is to prove extensive in our understanding of the text and to hear others from different streams deliberate their stances which become their respective exegetical entry points and commentary of the text in question.

The aim once more is not to be exhaustive and detailed but to highlight critical aspects of the various approaches that are being advanced so as to assist our engagement with the text.
7.10. H N Ridderbos

This study notes the contribution of Ridderbos in particular on the subject of sonship as made possible through baptism.

For Ridderbos (1953:147), asserts “Verse 27 as a further motivation for verse 26 which is twofold in character.” He identifies the two—fold character firstly, the ye all is explained. All have been baptized in Christ.”

He draws this from the words “as many of you as were baptised” this for him refers to the whole church. Ridderbos (1953:147) asserts “the intention, however is to show that in baptism lies the evidence that all sorts of people (cf.verse 28), without any discrimination, share in the grace of Christ. Just as little as baptism discriminates between Jews and Greeks and the like, so little can the sonship be limited to that of the natural children of Abraham”.

This study notes for Ridderbos the subject of baptism is a central theme for an argument of non discrimination and serves as an undeniable equalizer of all. Believers were not just baptised but they were “baptised in Christ”. This is significant for it’s Christ that gives the baptism content, thus the baptism as an equalizer is so because believers were baptised in the oneness of Christ.

Ridderbos (1953:148) goes on to say, “the baptised person is added to Christ as His own, is reckon to His account, shares in His benefits, and the closeness of the relationship is confirmed by the exegetical expression, “to put on Christ”. He labours the point in contending when he says “so the person baptised in Christ is quite entirely taken up in Christ and in the salvation brought by Him”.

For Ridderbos, “...Paul wants to indicate by his objective – sacramental mode of expression, and by appealing especially to baptism for establishing the sonship of the believers”. He thus draws a direct link in interpreting Paul’s articulation as present in bringing the dynamic almost natural connection between baptism and sonship.

The second aspect Ridderbos helps us is made evident in his assertion “ Now the ‘ye all’ of verse 26 and ‘the many of you’ of verse 27 are more particularly explained. In Christ there is no descent, rank or sex.” We clearly see the contrasts expedited by Paul when he states neither “Jew nor Greek”.

Ridderbos (1953:148) argues this aforementioned distinction, “...it to be taken in a religious rather than a national sense”. His validation for his assertion is made bold when
he asserts “the gulf between these two was regarded as being so fixed and wide, not because the Gentile belonged to another nationality, but because he was uncircumcised and therefore was not an heir of Abraham”. For Ridderbos (1953:149) interprets Paul to be saying that “this gulf does not exist in Christ but has been bridged in him. He is the seed of Abraham, and faith alone is necessary to share in the benefits of that seed”.

Ridderbos identifies two further sets of contrasts, which he argues referring to the “tremendous separation which social inequality and the differentiation of sexes brought with them in ancient times.”

He asserts “True it is the religious contrast that is the bone of contention between Paul and his opponents, but the oneness between master and slave, too, and the oneness of man and woman, in Christ.” For him this oneness illustrates how completely the bond with Christ conquers all things and establishes them, also the removal of the first opposition (cf, 6:15, 1 Cor. 12:3, Col. 3:11) (Ridderbos 1953: 149).

This study notes and concurs with Ridderbos’ observation of the subject of circumcision as a religious practice among Jews as the cardinal point of distinction for some to argue others gentiles or not of the faith. Furthermore it recognises the centrality of the identity Christ as the epicentre for an identity of those who are of the faith, made possible through the sacrament of the baptism. Thus sonship eclipses the contrasts evident in Jew and Greek, master and slave and man and woman.

7.11. D Guthrie

To assist us further in understanding the text of Galatians better, it is perhaps important to hear Guthrie (1970:1099) as he engages the subject of sonship as raised in verse 26. “it is full sonship, not custody”.

This is an important observation to make that those who share the ‘in Christ’ status do not do so as being in Christ’s custody with a plausibility of being separated from Him at one possible future stage, but shares a full sonship. Hearing Guthrie in this is to observe he qualifies the sonship with full, therefore there is no challenge to the believer’s status once in Christ.

Guthrie as in the case of Ridderbos confirms that the ‘in Christ’ description “means united to Christ personally (2 Cor. 5:17). He furthermore asserts, “the only way to share the inheritance of promise is faith—union with Christ”.
As earlier observed with Ridderbos this is only made possible through the sacrament of baptism.

For Guthrie (1970:1099) verse 28 of Galatians is best understood “in the new life all ethnic, caste and other old distinctions are destroyed, in favour of complete equality within union with Christ.

This study notes the use of words “destroy” and “old distinctions” as key for Guthrie when he interprets the verse as a levelling of all manifested in a “complete equality”. We note the use of adjectives to describe the nouns, as he used them in “full” sonship, and “complete” equality.

It as if Guthrie is conscious to leave his reader in no doubt on how he understands ‘sonship’ and even the advocated equality by using these adjectives to describe them as nouns.

The study concurs with Guthrie on the completeness of the new man in Christ as free from the former labels that describes his / her identity. The central theme remains Christ who is the unifier as made possible through the gift of faith and actualised in the sacrament of baptism that confirms a sonship less a custody of description which confirms an equality free from former confines.

7.12 . A Modern Intersectional Approach to Galatians

We lean on the work of Marianne Kartzow (2010: 364–389) as captured in the Biblical Interpretation when she helps us to appreciate “that the social relations and their ideological underpinnings in the world of the New Testament were characterized by differentiations and hierarchies”. She asserts Galatians 3: 28 has been “called the Magna Carta of the new testament, or a Credo for those who search for liberating powers in the Pauline letters”. For Kartzow, the text takes part in negotiations over status, gender, sexuality, and reproduction, categories that all seem to be crucial when identities were contested and hierarchies constructed.

Kartzow suggests that discourses about identity and hierarchy were rather complex. She illustrates this in asserting that “a person could be at the bottom of one hierarchy and the top of another”. Since “cross cutting ties, multiple loyalties and diverse combinations of identities may describe the Roman Empire at the advent of Christianity, several identity categories were subject to constant renegotiation, and identity reconstruction often seems to be work in progress”.
A significant observation that Kartzow makes is that “categories did not operate in isolation but interacted with and influenced each other. Some of the identity markers were challenging to combine, and they were sometimes dangerous, illegal or impossible. Indeed early Christian discourse reflects a context of cultural complexity”.

She offers intersectionality as perhaps the most fruitful means to investigate cultural complexity. Intersectionality is a primary analytic tool that feminist and anti—racist scholars deploy in theorizing identity and oppression. The concept of intersectionality has been used to demarcate how various categories of women face multiple conflicting experiences of subordination.

Kartzow asserts Galatians 3:28 is a complex web of social categories and what Paul is arguing is disputed. She offers one possible interpretation to be that the social hierarchy is of less importance in baptism since all are one in Christ. She (2010:375) asserts “using categories in social life expressed relatedness in a rather fixed and given hierarchical structure, i.e., free over slave and male over female, Paul seems to construct a different reality”. According to Kartzow the plausible “effect of this argument may be that although they are all one they also separate, different and unequal in all other areas of life”. She asserts in this perspective Paul does not challenge the social hierarchy of his society, but rather uses it with a twist in order to construct a new spiritual world order.

Kartzow helps us further to appreciate that the ‘interpretative tradition of Galatians 3:28, nationality / ethnicity, class, and gender are often seen as three separate categories. If the categories in Galatians are combined in a new way, a more complicated structure appears” This lends us opportunity to ask what gender or social class could Jews and Greeks have? 1. Jewish slave male, 2 Jewish slave female, 3. Jewish free male, 4. Jewish free female, 5. Greek slave male, 6. Greek slave female, 7. Greek free male and 8. Greek free female. Kartzow poses the question “did it make sense to consider a slave either Jewish or Greek?

She concludes (2010:377) and asserts “the relation between slavery and ethnicity / religion was rather complex. Whilst free is above slave as male is above female in the ancient Mediterranean world, we are not sure who holds privilege and who is subordinated in the relation between Jew and Greek”. For Paul, ...Jew is not meant to be a derogatory term, and neither is Greek. She asks “Are the terms Jew and Greek to be understood for males and females alike as ethnic categories, or religious or racial?” She illustrates this in saying “Jew and Greek are not necessarily mutually exclusive, since there were several Greek speaking Jews in the ancient world.”

The study notes the contribution of Kartzow for it helps us to understand that the categories as defined in Galatians namely Jew, Greek, male, female, free and slave cannot
be understood without the varied complexities it inherently holds for the particular dispensation and time of its usage.

This complexity that speaks to a varied categorisation of the descriptions for identities lends itself to closer examination and scrutiny and assumption of natural hegemony may not be useful to assist the interpretation. It would therefore mean that terms like Jew must be closer understood as a Jew that speaks Greek for example and how that identity would play out as mentioned here by Paul.

Equally to talk about female or male we must resist the temptation to conflate experiences as the same for males or females. It also helps us to be conscious of the degree of complexities in the stated appellations and cautions us to prove more circumspect when we are tempted to assume. Furthermore, in the final analysis it assists us to appreciate that when a separation of race, gender, sexuality, class, age as separate categories of oppression are made we may employ intersectionality to ascertain how these categories mutually construct one another.

7.13. Modern South African Approaches to Galatians

7.13.1 BC Lategan

Interpreting Galatians is not as straight forward as often assume. Reasons for this appears contained in the diverse methodologies used by interpreters which in turn forms their entry points to the text. BC Lategan as captured in the Neotestamentica volume 26 (2) of (1992) helps us with the argumentative situation of Galatians as means of interpretation. He asserts the first line of enquiry to consider is the anticipated audience of read of the letter. He identifies a minimum of 3 categories of readers constituting the audience.

- Firstly, he identifies those who are still uncircumcised and contemplating taking this step (Galatians 5:2). These equally share a history of not knowing God, a history of them being slaves of gods who were no real gods.

- Secondly, the group of Jews who were not gentile sinners (Galatians 2:5)

- Thirdly, Paul identifies a universal audience. Lategan asserts from Galatians (2:17—20) Paul uses the first person, not in a personal, autobiographical sense, but as an uberindividuelles ich’, which transcends the confines of a specific historical setting and which assumes certain timeless quality. For him, Paul is also addressing —by accident or design – contemporary readers of the letter.
This distinction in audience proves essential for it helps us to dissect the groups of audiences in a larger constituency of audiences.

Lategan contends the complexity of the audience is a complexity of the argumentative situation and serves as a warning to the interpreter to proceed with caution. He reminds us of the words of Barclay (1988: 37) who again reminds us that we are dealing with a polemical work of Paul in this epistle. Noticeably the Apostle Paul is not giving a comprehensive and disinterested expose of his opponents’ position instead he comes at them employing every weapon to his disposal.

7.13.2 J Punt

Jeremy Punt cites Hogan (2008:2, 193–195, 201) that argues a recent study of the reception of Galatians 3:28 in the first four centuries of the early Christian church concluded that among the many different interpretations of this text emerging in this period, three interpretations which would later become popular are not found among such early readings. These include: 1. The text was not interpreted as a charter text for an egalitarian programme. 2. Neither was it taken to suggest Christ as androgynous Saviour or the re–enactment of the original androgynous human. 3. Nor was it developed as part of the baptismal liturgy.

Punt (2010:143) asserts that instead of the above the “rather, in this early formative years of the Church the understanding of Galatians 3:28 can best be summarised by the following three positions: Identification with Christ in baptism, Focusing on the transformation through union with Christ, either in the present world or the future dispensation, or both; Or as a commentary on Genesis 1:27 expanding on the nature of the first human as divine likeness, or even of the nature of God.” In summary therefore Galatians 3:28 was interpreted to be a statement resolving difference in unity with Christ. He continues to assert Galatians 3:28 was evidently considered to be a text with considerable importance for the social life of (early) Christian communities since its early times.

He pleads for a rethinking of Galatians 3:28 from its now entrenched charter text function for issues connected with what broadly can be called race or ethnic/religious, class or legal status and gender. He argues that the joint three sets of opposites in the text is a reminder that the opposites and the hierarchy each represents are not challenged the validity of the different elements or the existence of contrasts of the binary relationships not questioned, they are simply combined or joined in “Christ Jesus”. He argues Paul provided neither a sustained challenge nor any fuller, theological rationale that would challenge the identities or the boundaries on which they relied.

Perhaps the critical conclusion Punt raises is “whether the difficulty in coming to terms with a text like Galatians 3:28, beyond a literalist affirmation of emancipatory value or an equally literalist insistence upon its anachronistic uselessness for contemporary thought about social issue, is not due to the use of inappropriate tools”
This study appreciates Punt on the subject of the earliest interpretations of the Galatians along the three premises he advance, namely the text was not interpreted as a charter text for an egalitarian programme or suggesting Christ as androgy nous Saviour or the re-enactment of the original androgy nous human and neither developed as part of the baptismal liturgy.

7.14 Galatians: a Political Interpretation.

Buell and Hodge (2004:235) contends “in most modern interpretations of Paul’s writings and early Christian history, ethnicity is implicitly defined as natural, inherent, immutable or otherwise “given”. They continue to assert “Paul’s letters are often read to support the view that the identities of Christ – believers, in contrast to other Jews, transcend fixed, bodily characteristics we associate with ethnicity and race. They remonstrate this verse is frequently invoked to support reconstructions of an inclusive and egalitarian impulse in the Jesus movement. This student notes that Buell and Hodge set out as goal to challenge the conceptualizations of race and ethnicity in such interpretations of Paul and early Christianity.

This study further notes, their proposed model seeks to encourage a rethinking of traditional interpretations in which understanding of ethnicity or race as “given” operates as a foil for non-ethnic, all inclusive Christianity.

Furthermore, they make an interesting observation when they assert, “if Paul is interpreted as having defined religiosity as distinct from ethnoracial identifications, then Christian practices and structures that contribute to racist and ethnocentric oppression can be viewed as contravening universalistic and egalitarian ideals inherent in earliest Christianity.”

Perhaps one of the bigger contributions they make is to argue “if we interpret Paul by viewing ethnicity as a dynamic discourse that negotiates between poles of fixity and fluidity, then Galatians 3: 28 can be seen as an attempt to define a communal vision in terms of ethnicity – not over against ethnicity” (Buell and Hodge 2004: 235).

According to Buell and Hodge, Paul thus constructs his arguments within the scope of ethnoracial discourse but shifts the terms of membership and the relationship between existing groups – Greek and Judean – such that they can be brought into ethnoracial relationship with one another.” This study notes in this sense ethnic reasoning offers a model of unity and connection among peoples yet it does not negate the prevalence or maintenance of differences.

It is important to note that Paul’s Christianity identifies a “universalism” which is defined especially in contrast to “ethnoracial particularity”.
7.15 Summary

Having listened to a cross breed of commentators on the chosen defining text of Galatians 3: 28 it is perhaps time to conclude and advance conclusions this study draws.

As indicated in the introduction of this chapter, our choice of the text was in a sense natural for its historic value attached on identity in a broad sense defined in ethnicity, gender, class status. We concur with those who plead for a contextualisation rooted in the understanding of historic reality of societal expression in hierarchies and categories against which background the text is presented.

We also appreciate that these hierarchies as advanced by those from the intersectional approach are interlinked where one's identity in ethnicity can be different in class or gender and vice versa. Here we think of a Greek speaking Jew, a free Greek, and a slave female as examples of these intersections.

We furthermore concur that Paul is not in attempt of eradicating otherness as part of the reality in which he addresses the letter, neither is he denouncing the factuality of an acknowledged difference, instead he is cognisant of the binary relational opposites and therefore uses these to educate and argue for an identity that supersedes the natural limited opposites.

Paul in our understanding is conscious of the day in which he lives but is not at pains to refute the realities of the complex hierarchical society yet his aim is to introduce a spiritual reality in Christ that transcends these hierarchies and categories. This study notes that whilst it may be contended that Galatians 3:28 was not intended to be a Magna Carta of social justice informed by a identity, it does afford an opportunity to argue for a reading that sees the true identity of believers as evidenced in the functional oneness of the body of Christ in oneness.

Reading Galatians therefore as a liberatory text in assisting a rethink on identity as that which is consummated in Christ, conscious and despite of an awareness of otherness cannot be incorrect to make of a society. It is our submission that Paul is pleading for a new ethic on the universal identity made possible through Christ. He is not arguing against the history of separation defined in a plethora of expressions of hierarchies and categories.

In our assessment Paul is arguing for an acknowledgement and acceptance of an identity in Christ, the same which we contend should supersede that as advanced in the study as “white”, “black”, “poor” or “rich”, “male” or “female”, “unemployed” or “employed” and “slave or “free”.

Paul thus by means of stating in recognition of the differences really points to the identity made possible in unity of the Body of Christ, the same all can claim without any
fear of reprisal. We therefore contend it is still relevant to use the text to argue a common identity in Christ that all believers whilst conscious of their otherness or differences can claim for themselves and equally not deny others.

It is the fundamental conviction of this study that the task and responsibility remains that of all believers however defined in differences of otherness (including of white supremacist, black theologians, economically advanced and those destitute as well as beyond gender description) to rise above their differences of otherness and to let the acknowledge identity as made possible through the redemptive work of Christ in new spiritual reality count.

Thus the egalitarian notion for an identity in Christ that permeates a new society exemplified in a newness of identity as claimed by others is supported by this study.

The words of the feminist Booth (1975:17) is perhaps relevant here, when she asserts, “If this passage does not teach that in the privileges, duties, and responsibilities of Christ’s Kingdom, all differences of nation, caste, and sex are abolished, we should like to know what it does teach, and wherefore it was written.”

This study concludes in asserting, the transcending work of Calvary, the holistic and complete redemptive work of Christ that confronts all and sunder, points those it encounters to come to a newness of thought of self and others in which the overarching rationale remains the one body of Christ expressed in its members that consciously differ in design, function, role and placing yet never can be separated in a singularity of convenience or ideology.

Given our exploration and the conclusions we have arrived there is seemingly a need for a new identity construction for the human agency denoted as black in the theological tradition.

This is a future inter—disciplinary task that must at least include theologians in maintaining relevance.
Chapter 8

SUMMARY

...The Road Travelled...
SUMMARISING CONCLUSIONS

We have reached our final chapter in our exploration. In this concluding chapter we will attempt to summarise in starting by tracing the path of our contemplation necessarily drawing linkages between the distinct chapters and themes in a short summary to provide a contextual base for advancing a position that will give credence to our hypothesis as stated in the introduction chapter.

Our endeavour remains to highlight the emerging and consistent question of what this study calls an unforced error committed by Black Theology in appropriation of the denotation “black”, which is assumed to be uniform and unchallenged. It equally attempts to conclude that holding on to a defence of identities defined as “black” and “white” be it in ontological or reactionary sense contains in postmodern society perhaps an inherent burden.

Our search for an understanding of what the black of Black Theology means to define a people has taken us through a proverbial forest of challenges and landmines that we now seek to recap in concluding the burden of black identity in relation to the redemptive work of Christ.

This study has moved from the premise that Black Theology’s existence remains anchored as a subset of Black Consciousness, which is premised on a black ideology. This study follows Mosala (1989:1) in his confirmation that Black Theology is a subset of black ideology in as far as it is “a cultural tool for struggle by young black Africans who endeared themselves to Black Consciousness in the late 1960’ and 1970’s”.

We have attempted to argue that if there is a Black Theology it owes its cardinal existence to the ideology of a black identity. This is further supported by Boesak (1976:1) when he advanced that “Black Theology is the theological reflection of black Christians on the situation in which they live and on their struggle for liberation.”

Our search necessitated us to explore identity as understood in the cultural studies paradigm of Barker (2008). The need for an understanding of identity became crucial when Boesak (1976:1) on the subject of identity asserts, “blacks ask what it means to believe in Jesus when one is black and living in a world controlled by white racists, and what if these racists call themselves Christian also?”
Thus, the designations of black and white as a means to define identity for black theologians such as Boesak are confirmed without questioning the notion itself. This study as earlier alluded and now again restated has argued that Black Theology as a subset of Black Consciousness and its proponents committed an unforced error in defining a theology without properly investigating the “black” of Black Theology except by almost resigning themselves to an automatically uniform and accepted identifier of “black”.

We have learned from Barker (2008:216) that “identity is best understood not as a fixed entity but as an emotionally charged discursive description of ourselves that is subject to change”. Thus, by itself it is not a static construct but it is subject to influences in which change is and remains inevitable. Stets and Burke (2005:135) helped us to appreciate that the salience of identity is necessarily informed by the degree of commitment one has to that identity. Following the above, it is at this juncture that we contended that the salience of a black identity is directly related to the degree of commitment that “black” people have shown towards such an identity.

Fundamentally, we found that when we unpacked the notion of “black” as an identity it only becomes plausible in relation to what is defined as a “white” identity. Therefore, essentially the reasoning for a “black” identity in black ideology mirrored a constructed “white” supremacist identity.

Firstly, this makes the black identity reactionary in original purpose. Furthermore it is potentially an ambivalent response to what was advanced in defiance of a common humanity along the lines of a white supremacist anthropology. One may well call it a forced birth only because its parent (the white supremacist identity) warranted such a birth. Secondly, this genesis rendered the notion of black identity uniquely dependent on this white supremacist notion of identity.

It is a particularly significant assertion of this study that regardless of those who on the one hand attempted to describe a people's otherness to themselves as a means of justifying an oppressive praxis and those, on the other hand, who argued for an equality of acceptance of being, this interdependence means we have to acknowledge the constricted colour–coding used to define a people denoted as “black” or “white”. This study in this ultimate chapter points to this inevitable limitation on identity for our present time as constituting a burden.
Thus, in a white supremacist world the oppressor and the oppressed strangely share a common identity such that neither could rise above the self—inflicted toxic state of being, a trapped self and trapping others in this confining symbolism of colours in a never—ending cycle.

Our exploration coursed through a path that stopped at the subject of blackness as a reality. We sought to ask for a definition of blackness and demonstrated that there is no uniform definition of blackness. Thus, this study highlighted the paradox of black identity co—existing and evolving as a blackness of suffering, a blackness of justified exaction, a blackness of philosophy and a blackness of psychology.

The notion of blackness experienced as suffering is suggested by Mofokeng (1983:28) when he asserts, “they suffer innocently, without having actively provoked anybody. They suffer simply because they are black people.” Black Consciousness, Black Power, and Black Theology acknowledge this theme of suffering.

This study concluded that the problem with this notion of blackness defined as the totality of black existence is the ambivalence of this notion, which lends itself to resistance and yet embraces this trapped state of shame from which those defined as black have no escape. Pityana (1972:176) confirms this when he says, “civic status is determined at birth and for life by colour.”

Furthermore, we have contended that black theologians lament the situation blacks find themselves in within a white supremacist state, a situation interchangeably defined as blackness, yet the same theologians argue that meaning must paradoxically be found in acceptance of such shameful blackness. Biko (1979:29) pleads for this “coming to himself” of the black man, to “pump life into his empty shell to infuse him with pride and dignity and to remind him of his complicity in the crime of allowing him to be misused and therefore letting evil reign supreme in the country of his birth”.

Still, we have contended that it is imperative to understand the blackness of suffering through the point of view of the oppressor. This led us to conclude that the oppressor must have known what suffering they exacted. This study has defined it as justified projected exaction. This notion suggests that the oppressor projected on a people defined as black an experience informed by what the oppressor saw as his interpretation of the black human agent.
Sparks (2003:281) helps us to understand this point of view of the oppressor’s mind when he cites a response from D.F. Malan in 1954 to a group of Reformed Church clergyman in Grand Rapids, Michigan: “It’s merely the physical manifestation of the contrast between two irreconcilable ways of life, between barbarism and civilisation, between heathendom and Christianity and finally between overwhelming numerical odds on one hand and significant numbers on the other to survive in such a situation, to avoid being submerged in the black heathendom of Africa, the white minority has to throw an impenetrable armour of racial purity and self—preservation.”

Malan is not alone in this interpretation. We read similar sentiments coming from the missionary Chalmers, when he asserts, “the Kaffir was doomed to extinction because their indolent habits were a barrier to their progress. Since their needs were few and simple, and since they gave no thought to their future, they encased themselves in a shell of idleness and careless indolence out of which no human skill and ingenuity can extricate them” (Williams, 1978:91).

This study has argued that not only has the notion of identity permeated through the lens of ideology but it scoped a people’s religious praxis in an equal colour—constructed manner, leading to the acceptance of notions such as a Kafir, Negro and ultimately a Black Church. Therefore, we saw that, though today celebrated as a beacon of African Nationalism and intellectualism, Tiyo Soga in reference to self and his church, could not escape the appropriated term used by those who sought to define his kinsfolk as “kafir”.

Whilst it can be argued in his defence that the construct of “kafir” in its original sense referred to non—believers and only later gained a derogatory connotation, the reality remains that the description of kafir by the European missionaries in Soga’s time remained in reference to people of a darker skin regardless of their acceptance of the Christian faith.

Thus, we must accept that “kafir” stuck as the designation of a people notwithstanding whether they were believers or not. Soga equally did not make that distinction for even in his later years when he proved more militant and rejecting of the ideological perspectives of the colonial missionaries he still stuck in this definition of self and his people as “kafir”.
We have looked at the troublesome aspect of the accepted term of a black church and its accompanying ambivalence and concluded that if there is a black church, it is informed by the premise of a white church. Cone (1969:92) argues that the “black church was the creation of a black people whose daily existence was an encounter with the overwhelming and brutalizing reality of white power”. He thus traces the racist attitude of the white Christian to a time of slavery when he asserts, “at first the white Christian questioned the Christianizing of the slave because of the implications of equality in the Bible and because of the fear that education might cause the slave to fight for his freedom”.

Therefore, this study asserts that those who defended the definition of a black church, and those who advance the existence of a Black Theology premised on a black identity, derive its defence indirectly from the paradigm of a white church. The departure point remains the existence of a white identity felt in brutal exaction of suffering and oppression expressed in a white church that defies the biblical dictum of a common humanity in Christ Jesus, the same that underscores the implications of equality as advocated in the biblical text as Cone earlier alluded to.

Our journey to understand the notion of “black” defined in identity, ideology, theology and church has led us to enquire about its ongoing prevalence and relevance in our times. Furthermore, the study explored whether there are any implications and ramifications for maintaining these constructs.

It is the assertion of this study that beyond the conflated aspect of a black experience / identity defined, blackness and a subsequent romantic appreciation of the term black to describe a people lays the reality of a multi—layered burden attendant to its appropriation. This is relevant in the current contexts of both the USA and South Africa. This study identified seven distinct yet interwoven burdens. The study identified the burdens respectively as race classification, conflicted psychology, poverty, self—hate, criminality, black empowerment and black victimology.

In dealing with the subject of identity for believers in the redemptive work of Christ which both the oppressor and oppressed consciously share as the departure point of their faith it became essential to look at a defining biblical text so as to derive meaning for identity in membership of the body of Christ. We have used Galatians as an instructive and unequivocal text to engage on the relevance of identity formulation and articulation.
We considered a number of approaches to the text interpretation and concluded that whilst the descriptions of identity evidenced in Jew, Greek, male, female, slave and free is used one must be conscious of the hierarchies and categories of that particular. Such categories may not be as straightforward but may intersect at various levels that render the description for example Jew not as different from Greek. Yet these categories whilst it’s confirm a new spiritual order and unity in Christ, does not negate the reality of difference. Equally the otherness of each other does not render one superior or inferior to each other, rather it is a depiction of a society that is now bound by the redemptive work of Christ in which the identity of the Christ supersedes all categories and hierarchies.

It would appear that Paul is conscious of the categories and hierarchies and thus use these to emphasize a new spiritual reality that confirms the identity of those in body of Christ.

We concluded that membership to the body of Christ as made possible through His redemptive work, does not afford a discrimination of identity premised or defined in race, gender or culture. Thus for the oppressor or the oppressed to continue the identity markers wrought in ideology is to be opposite to the dictate of the biblical text as it relates to identity in Christ.

The study is categoric in its assertion that the identification of these burdens as contained in chapter 6 neither pretends to be conclusive or exhaustive but an attempt at engaging the implications of an uphold of the identity markers of ‘black’ and ‘white’. It will be the task of others in future research to unpack these. It therefore only identifies these burdens and in a cursory sense engages them. Our exploration has led us to conclude that there was an uncritical appropriation of the construct black to define a people's humanity and such appropriation was perpetuated rendering a people victims of an identity of ‘black’ they may have had no hand in crafting.

If we may restate what we concluded on in chapter 7, given our exploration and some conclusions drawn it is our firm conviction that the time for the remythologising of a new identity construction for the human agency denoted as ‘black’ in particular within a theological paradigm has come.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Black identity and experience in Black Theology: A critical assessment


Black identity and experience in Black Theology: A critical assessment


Chikane, F. 1983. ‘Revisiting’ Black Theology. Background to the Seminar. Black Theology Revisited. pg. 1—4


Cousins, H.T. 1899. From Kaffir Kraal to Pulpit: The Story of Tiyo Soga. London. S.W. Partridge Publishers


1 (Revisited sites just before submission to ascertain whether they are active)


Black identity and experience in Black Theology: A critical assessment


Black identity and experience in Black Theology: A critical assessment


Black identity and experience in Black Theology:  
A critical assessment


Black identity and experience in Black Theology: A critical assessment


Skinner, T. 1975. If Christ is the Answer, What are the Questions? Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House


Black identity and experience in Black Theology: A critical assessment


