

**Black. British and De-Churched: a critical investigation of conservative Bible reading groups
and Afroasiatic diasporic religious movements in London.**

by

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Thesis Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

2022

[Word Count 96,606]

Abstract

This research aims to critically investigate a diasporic religious phenomenon - why are some Black-British Christians leaving the Church and joining other bible-based Black religions that have developed within the Caribbean and American diaspora during enslavement, segregation, and the civil rights era? Furthermore, how have they continued to be an ongoing influence on the fringes of the Black-British Church?

Several interlinked dialogues are crucial to identifying the key concepts that will support my analysis. Black Liberation theologies, theologically and philosophically, subvert mainstream Christianity by politicising the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Christ. However, it is limited in its scope to deal with ethnoreligious claims for genealogical and divine origins. Postcolonial theologies seek to radically dismantle Western Christianity, applying alternative hermeneutical lenses for Bible reading that is inclusive, empowering and allows for the participation of the marginalised; the limitations of this methodology are what I recognise to be core ideals, particularly the postcolonial approach to contextualisation. However, there are two underestimated conversation partners that I want to draw into this discussion. The first is conservative evangelicalism (conceptualised) because my intuition is that the undergirding mechanisms of this perspective have a significant influence on the De-Churched perspective and speak to the gaps that liberationist/postcolonial discussions leave behind when discussing racism, justice and theology. Most significantly, I turn to the teachings of the Afroasiatic religions I have selected: Rastafari, Nation of Islam, The Holy Qubtic Church, and (Black) Hebrew Israelites, as essential conversation partners to understand their influence on twenty-first-century Black-British de-churched. Afroasiatic Diasporic Religions are controversially critical of Western Christendom and its connections to slavery and European colonialism; the challenge then is to understand Afroasiatic religious beliefs in light of their influence on the Black, British and de-churched while conversing with the other dominant methodological approaches.

Dedication

This work is dedicated to the Most High God of the Bible – Supreme and Sovereign over all.

I would also like to dedicate this work to my husband Darren, daughter Ziyah, mother Davinia, and brother Joshua

My daily check-ins - Paris, Jadaine, (Dr) Lulu and Tashanna – who am I without my sisters?

This I also dedicated to those de-churched and working things through. God is faithful to those who truly seek Him.

Acknowledgements

This work has been produced among a community of patient, inspiring and encouraging people, without which I would have crumbled under the pressures of the process. This research has required a course of questioning personal religious foundations, and this work would never have been completed without the sense of purpose from my religious Christian upbringing. I am so grateful for all the encouragement and votes of confidence that have hurled me over the finish line despite the various hurdles of life that are unavoidable.

I am incredibly grateful for my family, who has patiently assisted me throughout this journey and challenged my thinking. My husband Darren, baby daughter Ziyah, brother Joshua and mother Davinia have been key in keeping me going each day and helping balance the research process with my family responsibilities. I am privileged to have sister-friends who checked in and encouraged me every day and every week: Paris, Tashanna, Dr Lubume and Jadaine have spent many hours listening to my ideas or helping me unwind despite their busy lives.

I want to thank Professor Robert Beckford and Dr Gabriella Beckles-Raymond, who encouraged me to take this journey and patiently steered me through a process of illumination. I would also like to thank Rev. Wale Hudson-Roberts and Professor Anthony Reddie, who have taken me under their wing and provided many opportunities for professional development during my years of research. Through these trailblazers, I have developed a network of associates who walked with me on my journey, providing feedback and listening ears as I made sense of a vast amount of information in a short period. At no point in this journey have I been made to feel unwelcome or incompetent – with this community, I have experienced *ubuntu*.

Thank you to Canterbury Christ Church University for accepting my proposal and awarding me a scholarship to complete the research. Also, to Chair - Dr Ralph Norman and Dr Maria Diemling my supervisor who took the reins midway through the process and gave me the time and attention I needed to press on and organise life and my research as a student and new mother.

I also direct my gratitude to the London Baptist Association, BUGB, the Sam Sharpe Project, the late Rev. Steve Latham, and my local minister Rev. Paul Ogunyemi, who supported me by providing access to venues, providing advice and spiritual encouragement, and opportunities to develop my research.

I am most grateful to the participants of my research. There would be no dissertation without your willingness to dedicate your time and energy to engage in **BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS AND CHRISTIAN FAITH.**

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"Although perhaps considerably later than my peers, I had entered a time in my life where cultural identity was becoming increasingly intriguing."

(Researcher's Reflection, 2017)

1. Introduction

The last five years have seen significant shifts in conversations about racial justice, many of these shifts occurring during the years of writing this thesis. Although the pursuit of justice for Black and Brown peoples has been a mission for centuries, marginalised conversations and efforts have been brought to centre stage. Social media and its ability to connect people worldwide have been the mechanism through which recent successes and efforts have been constructed. The birth of The Black Lives Matter movement is but one example of how a hashtag was transformed into a movement that inspired changes to institutional policy amendments, brought international attention to American policing of people of colour and provoked the silent majority into participation in a global debate on racism.

In the British context, "The Windrush Scandal" and "Brexit" have been reminders that, although it appears that the wider public's attitudes towards people of colour are shifting, on a systemic and social level, there is still a resistance to recognising the equal value of Black life, Black-Britishness as British and the significant contribution that Black and Brown peoples have made to the building of British society.

Christian Churches have not escaped the criticism of global social movements such as BLM. By recognising the oppression of Black and Brown people as a legacy of European colonialism, many scholars and activists have charged the historical churches with complicity and silence for decades, and now, with the advancement of social media technology, the everyday person can be easily equipped with the language, and statistical data to join the conversation. Leaders and congregations alike have been challenged to engage with racial justice and injustice, often so heavily wrapped in other topical

social-political discussions that it has caused severe divisions within the wider church body. Whilst churches, leaders and theologians are situated on various points of the conservative to progressive spectrum (as it pertains to their view of scripture, applying biblical teachings to everyday living and how they engage as Christians with social issues), it seems that most discussion about socio-political liberation for Black and Brown peoples lies with those on the more progressive end of the spectrum – although this has not always been the case.

This study explores how Black-British peoples are navigating the social, religious and political paradigm of racial justice in the twenty-first century with specific reference to the alternative Black Bible reading religious groups that feature little in twenty-first-century racial discourse but have had a significant presence in the past and continue to do so in the margins of the Black-British Christian body. The Nation of Islam, Rastafari, the (Black) Hebrew Israelites and the Holy Qubtic Church are religious groups that have consistently appealed to Black churchgoers that find themselves in passive, ambivalent or resistant spaces about the issue of racism. Although these religions are no longer topical and arguably overshadowed by BLM, Black celebrity activists and growing Black, progressive and humanist scholarship, this ethnographic research seeks to understand how these Afroasiatic Diasporic Religions maintain influence within the Black-British Christian community. The Black, British and de-churched are Black people who have left the Church or are on the verge of leaving mainstream Christian congregations in Britain and are engaging with these alternative Black religious spaces that centre their beliefs around the biblical texts.

My initial inclination was that the presence of these Afroasiatic Diasporic Religions speaks most prominently to the struggle between conservative and progressive approaches to Bible reading, theology, "right living," and engaging social issues. In this chapter, I support my initial ideas by reflecting on how my own experiences have illuminated critical concepts for this study, and I follow this up with a brief survey of the recent literature published on this recent wave of de-churching during this writing process. Together these serve to give some context and parameters to the overall study.

Before unpacking the inception of this research project, I will clarify my uses of the terms 'Black', 'Black-British', Black Britain and (Black). As a Black-British person, I have a natural proclivity to

capitalising Black; it gives a sense of being someone, belonging to somewhere and some people, despite that beyond my immediate Jamaican-Northern Irish ancestry, I have no knowledge of my African ancestral heritage. Capitalising the B in Black has become a recent fixture in public writing, particularly in America's news and media industries; many institutions seeking to recognise and esteem Black people (Africans and the African Diaspora) as a recognised people group that have historical, cultural and experiential ties. This study engages with those who seek an identity that is not a product of the experiences of the enslaved and colonised Africans, but that illuminates their precolonial ethno-religious heritage. For example, throughout this study, I will refer to Hebrew Israelites as (Black); the use of the brackets is to convey their rejection of the term Black, as they consider their Hebrewness as the ethno-religious and national identity of the descendants of the enslaved peoples dislocated from African nations in the sixteenth century. I offer this bracketed Black as a helpful reminder to the reader that the (Black) Hebrew Israelite communities are generally exclusive and do not include Jews from around the world – including the significant representation of Jewish people in Britain.

However, despite this trajectory, I have some uses for the term Black and its capitalisation for this study. Kwame Appiah considers how capitalising Black refers to the social constructed-ness of the social group; Black, therefore, reminds society of 'what white supremacy has created' - a people who have severed links with their religious, cultural and ethnic heritages as a direct result of enslavement, Christianisation and colonisation. It recognises the ontology of Blackness that carries the legacy, stories, experiences, hopes and struggles of enslaved and colonised Africans – and their children. Appiah says, 'When we ignore the dialectical relation between the labels "black" and "white," we treat a bloodstained product of history as a neutral, objective fact about the world. We naturalize the workings of racism.' (Appiah, 2020) Capitalising the word Black is to remember and recognise that racism is still a force in our societies. This consideration is helpful for my study as I investigate those who ultimately seek a pre-colonial identity yet are 'Black' because of this very pursuit.

By framing my participants in the confines of being Black, Black-British and belonging to Black Britain, I hope to adequately account for their ethnocentric agenda that denies the ontological Blackness that generally undergirds conversations about racial justice. I also hope to critically assess the sense of

"unbelonging" experienced among my participants living in Britain. Black Britain describes a world of experiences shared only by Black and Brown people within the wider British society. I am cautioned by the essentialising that often occurs when using these broader ontological terms. However, I feel this is remedied by the self-proclaimed trajectory of the participants in this study – to discover one's pre-colonial ethnic and religious heritage, despite the enslaved's shared experiences and histories and legacies. In the next chapter, I hope to eclipse any unnecessary essentialising by exploring the differences among the Afroasiatic Diasporic Religions and, in turn, the participants of my research.

This critical investigation acknowledges the presence and product of racism and a sense of unbelonging among many Black peoples in Britain. Beyond these sobering realities, capitalising Black conveys the positive presence of a social group whose points of connection (shared continental ancestry, histories, experiences and resulting cultures) acknowledge a determination to thrive and attain socio-political equality, self-determination and, for some, nationalist independence. In light of this definition, I present my definition of Black consciousness, which I refer to often throughout the thesis as the wider community that engages in this discussion but does not qualify as de-churched. Black consciousness refers to the intentional social, cultural, religious and political effort of a person or people to explore and embody 'Blackness' in all its diversity, evolution and complexity. This Black consciousness directly responds to an identity crisis within Black diasporic and African peoples resulting from enslavement, colonisation, and Christianisation. It is both connecting with the past (pre-enslavement/colonisation) and carving out the future for healthy Black identity/ies across the Black Atlantic, hoping that this process will contribute to the betterment of Black life in all spheres of life. Beyond Afroasiatic Diasporic Religions, Black consciousness may be reflected in Pan-Africanism, Black Nationalism, Afrocentrism and other more nuanced expressions.

1.1 Genesis

Growing up, I had been taught about the general claims against the validity of Christianity – evolution, the historical Christ, and the rational case for God but until my twenties had not encountered claims

against the validity of Christianity on the level of ethnic identity. One of the earliest dreams from my childhood featured me walking around and performing day-to-day activities. In the background was this cut-out comic-style image of Jesus standing and watching. It was the typical image of a White man with long brown hair, a white tunic, and a red sash. When I asked my mother what it meant, she suggested, "it may mean that Jesus is always with you", but it is only in recent years that I realised the significance of dreaming of a White Jesus. I never attended churches with images of Christ, yet White Jesus was the Jesus image in my subconscious. As a child, I would often laugh at white (European) men with long hair, beards, and sandals as 'trying to look like Jesus'. Although I considered my initial church experience as colourblind, it defaulted to whiteness. God, in my imagination, was a White man. As I moved between churches, joined a gospel choir, and danced with a Black-majority Hip Hop Christian company – the colour of Jesus never surfaced as a point for consideration. Each environment prioritised the spiritual aspects of God/Christ over His humanity - His risen-ness, His Kingliness, the one who conquers.

During my undergraduate studies, I would obtain teaching assistant positions in schools to support me financially. I had managed to secure a workshop leader position for teenage girls on the brink of being expelled from a school in South London. I decided to put together a short documentary-style learning resource that would feature people in their twenties talking about what they would change about their choices as a teenager. I hoped these young people would see that they could turn things around and learn from people's mistakes only a little bit ahead of them in life. So I invited many of my friends and family (mainly Christians) to feature in the filming. One of the contributors I had known as a Christian rapper had become radicalised. He appeared to have undergone a personal religious transformation, and he was clutching a book whilst telling me about a conspiracy against Black people - the evidence that suggested AIDS and HIV were created to destroy Black people through viral genocide. Admittedly, I brushed off his accusations as nonsense; I had developed so much resentment for this type of conversation – as far as I was concerned, slavery was four hundred years ago, and Black people just needed to get over it. Upon reflection, I see that this was an outcome of my Christian upbringing. Black identity, culture and history had not featured overtly and intentionally in my religious upbringing; I

understood the culture in my home to be spiritual and colourblind. We did not have reggae in the house growing up like other Jamaican friends and family; we had some gospel music (which I failed to link to Blackness), Christian rock, and contemporary Christian music (which seemed to be full of what I understood to be Orthodox Jewish references in the nineties), and if we felt like something non-Christian it was Whitney Houston or Kenny G - the saxophonist. I completely disregarded the encounter with this former Christian rapper, I considered him delusional and his views offensive, and I put it to the back of my mind. If I ever spoke of it, it was only to mock the person I knew who had been radicalised by that "Black stuff".

A few years later, a conversation with close friends took an unexpected turn. A friend I prayed with, went to church events with, whom I considered a 'sister in Christ', announced she was no longer sure about this 'Jesus stuff'. Her brother shared videos on the internet that claimed to uncover contradictions in the biblical text and the pagan rituals that the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of England had incorporated into Christianity. As a response, my friend had concluded that Jesus was a "White Man's Religion" that was not for Black people – both Christianity and the Bible were tools that controlled Black people since the time of slavery. As an alternative, my friend had begun to read about Rastafari and occult spirituality rooted in ancient African traditions that would lead one to discover the 'divinity within'. Admittedly, she approached her pastor with some questions about the Bible and practices within this African Pentecostal church and was told not to worry about that "stuff" and follow their teachings. What eventually pushed her out of the Church was the alienation she experienced within the same congregation. Friends and leaders had begun to pull away from and shun the girl who "dabbled in Rastafari". She wanted to be free from control, free from lies, and free from anti-blackness. I was unsure about responding to this announcement, but I felt responsible. I was aware that it would be unhelpful to say that it was the 'plan of Satan' (as was my typical churchy response), not only because it seemed insensitive but also because some of the concerns she had conveyed piqued my curiosity.

I began reading the books and watching the videos my friends discussed, intending to develop an apologetic defence against these racialised lies, but I had not counted on a rude awakening. It was not until I began my formal theological studies at a London college that I experienced significant disillusion

with the church. God at college seemed different from the God I had come to know growing up, and the difference had startling implications on how I felt about my identity. The college primarily consisted of middle-aged, warm and friendly middle-class people of European descent - until we had God-talk. It was my own mistake to think that studying theology was like an intense Bible study, so I was already drowning in history, theory, and convoluted literature – I could not link all this information to our purpose as Christians. I also began to feel like Black charismatic/Pentecostal Christianity was the butt of every joke – the way we prayed, exorcised, "proof texted", and took the Bible literally. I could never understand the God my peers spoke about in class nor connect with their interpretations. So whenever I gathered the courage to contribute 'on behalf of my God', I was often met with silence or politely followed up by the tutor with 'what she means is...'. The penny had dropped – I was Black, theologically inept (intellectually), and critically underdeveloped. This rude awakening presented an opportunity for me to 'come correct'. My faith was unshaken, but my understanding was shattered, and now I could identify with those who had already transitioned from being zombified religious soldiers to Black spiritual vigilantes.

What I felt was needed at the time was a way for Black people to start their theological understanding of the Bible afresh, without interference from this 'White man's religion' or euphoric religious escapism. We needed to ask ourselves some honest questions about Christendom's impact on the Black community, challenge the claims made against the faith honestly and critically, and finally pave a new way forward for future Black generations to experience a conscious, transparent, and empowering Christianity.

I will share the final experience of a documentary called *Hidden Colors* circulating among my peers, an African-American production featuring Black scholars, intellectuals, entertainment artists, and activists. The documentary intended to uncover the hidden history of Black people (pre-and post-enslavement and transatlantic dislocation) and the conspiracy of White supremacists to continue the mental, cultural, spiritual, and physical genocide of Black people in the West. The contributors point back to a golden era of African/Moorish power, intellectual sophistication, and superiority. I remember being filled with such high emotions as I watched this documentary. I felt empowered and inspired by

the information presented until they ventured into Christianity. The conflation between the Church of Rome, the European empire, and the religion of the Bible presented so many problems that I became keen to dispute them. According to Hidden Colors and other resources of this kind, what was vital to Black freedom was anchoring our identity (religious, cultural and philosophical) in Africa. The trend in many Afrocentric resources is to detail the successful and impressive histories such as King Mansa Musa, who at one point was the wealthiest man in the world or the universities in Alexandria and Timbuktu that predate any European university and the relationship between the Moors and the Europeans - a teacher-student relationship. This Afrocentric, pan-Africanist history fascinated me, and it presented an opportunity to create links to what the Bible says about Africa. I soon realised that Black, conscious, apologetic, Christian, academic support for my generation was lacking.

1.2 Initial questions

These experiences generated many questions that underpin the force behind this thesis. Firstly, how could Black Christians form these authentic links - by re-anchoring ourselves geographically to Africa? To acknowledge and enjoy a glorious past was one thing, but what of the Africa of now, this large continent of fifty-two countries, hundreds of clans, and languages – where does a British/African-Caribbean individual begin? Many people who spoke of Africa's glorious past spoke of kings and queens, but what about ordinary people? If I am a descendant of an enslaved African, it hardly follows that they were a king or queen. It seems far more likely that they were enslaved in Africa, so what does this rhetoric say about these realities? To form these mythical links may have therapeutic merit, but can a link back to "Africa" be the answer in the case of enhancing life for Black people? Some diasporans have repatriated, but is this the answer to realising a Black conscious Christianity? Although new to me, Black scholarship has debated these questions for decades; in the penultimate chapter, I will discuss these contributions in light of the findings and analysis of my data.

The second issue I have wrestled with is relocating our religious centres and recovering Traditional African Religions freeing ourselves from the grips of White supremacy. Many resources birthed from the Black Conscious Community are anti-Christian as it is deemed a 'White man's religion' that has been used to subdue and control the minds of Black people over centuries. I accept there is

much to say about how the Bible and Christianity have been considered complicit in the oppression of Black people, and central to the mission of empowering the Black-British Christian body would be to lose ourselves from those mechanisms, but again to conflate Western colonial Christianity with biblical Christianity is problematic and ahistorical. Not only does Christianity predate the European colonisation of African peoples by over one thousand years, but Christianity is also proven to have existed in some areas of Africa from its inception. Moreover, the rhetoric used to invalidate Christianity as an authentic religion has failed to make a meaningful impact on the anthropological, ethnographical, or theological study and mainstream church cultures in Britain – which, in part, I believe are a signifier of the argument's quality. Most prominent is the argument that Christianity has stolen and re-packaged ancient Egyptian (Kemetic) religious beliefs. There have been many attempts to make significant connections between the two religious schools; however, these claims seem to lack the academic competency to provide the necessary evidence.

This thesis has been birthed from my personal experiences, questions, and frustrations. This experience is not unique, but I speak more broadly of a resurgence of interest in the alternative Black religious Bible reading spaces that significantly influence Black Christians on the margins of the Black-British Christian body.

1.3 Recent Publications

Several significant works were published during the writing process that directly engaged with this phenomenon - Black people who have left the mainstream Church to join these alternative religious communities or "mystery cults". African American theologians and pastors, also known as Black Urban Apologists, responded to the challenges that these Black Bible-reading religious groups have brought to the mainstream Church. These are publications that reflect encounters that have been happening on the streets of American inner cities for decades, now made available for accessible reading and the equipping of Christians who want to engage in Christian apologetics.

I can (retrospectively) locate my research as running parallel to these literary efforts; whilst these apologists seek to defend Christian ideas, my research seeks to critically analyse the influence of the competing schools of thought as a means of understanding the desires and hopes of those who seek to remain centred around the biblical text – yet liberated from mainstream Christianity. The literature review in the next chapter will focus on the broader studies on Afroasiatic Diasporic Religions and Black-British contributions to this discussion from a methodological perspective; however, the publications below speak to the very issues that are my focus – why Black people are leaving the Church and joining alternative Black religious groups. What is essential for this chapter is to define how my work, although very closely linked to these efforts, is yet distinct and original.

Eric Mason, founder and pastor of Epiphany Fellowship in Philadelphia, has released two works of interest. The *First Woke church: an urgent call for Christians in America to confront racism and injustice* (2018) is a text aimed at all Christians in America. Through the framework of 'Woke Church', he says,

'We are called, as the people of God, to wake up. To see what others don't and call it out. The Church in America is not awake to the reality of what is happening in communities across this nation, and we are missing out on our calling to shine the light into these places of darkness for Christ's glory.' (Mason, 2018, p.22)

Mason considers racial justice through a conservative evangelical lens; in this way, he is not outlining new ideas such as the link between justice and the Gospel, lament, and what it means to be woke, but he is reappropriating these ideas for an evangelical American, predominantly White, audience. Anchoring his arguments in plain readings of the biblical text, Mason shows a commitment to the centrality of scripture typical of evangelicalism and less typical of what one might see in Black Liberation Theology – a leading Black academic theological voice. Mason combines a social and historical survey of the Black American experience from enslavement onwards with the core evangelical tenets of the faith to uncover the less trodden path for evangelical America – to be woke, 'a responsibility as believers in Jesus Christ' (Mason, 2018,) and to see the need for justice for Black people as in line with the Gospel. Mason asserts points of action and eclipses this call to action with a

vision of reconciliation through the lens of Christ's Revelation to John in The Book of Revelation. Mason has drawn on many appeal points for the Evangelical reader: a crucicentric gospel, deference to absolute biblical authority on faith and Christian living, conventional family centredness and eschatology. The text sheds light on aspects of American society that affirm the necessity for the type of 'Woke Church' he proposes. Beyond the American evangelical context, this text can appeal to those who hold more conservative leanings in other contexts. Although not the primary focus, it does make mention of the alternative religions under *Lament #9: Not effectively equipping the Church to know how to engage black ideologies* (Mason, 2018, p. 110), and here he reflects on the failings of the church to sufficiently engage with 'black ideologies' and the impact is it having on the theological mind of the Black community, as many come to reject Jesus as Lord and Saviour. In *Urban Apologetics: Restoring Black Dignity with the Gospel* (2021), one can read a more in-depth apologetic enquiry of these alternative religions.¹ This text aims to equip Christians to defend the Christian faith against these religions and features various Black Urban Apologists. Consistent with traditional apologetics, the contributors develop theological, historical, and archaeological arguments (within the frame of logic and reason) to defend a biblical Christianity that is not whitewashed. Apologetic works are naturally combative, and this text has two grounds of combat, the first being the whitewashing of Christianity and the second the Black anti-Christian and humanist sentiments (also found in Black progressive Christian spaces) that aim to discredit the Christian religion. Jerome Gay in *All White Everything* (Chapter 2, Mason, 2021) says,

The whitewashing of Christianity and its Eurocentric focus has led to a growing sentiment among people of African descent, as well as people across the globe, that Christianity is a Western-created, European-influenced, white-owned religion of oppression... The main reason for this growing sentiment is historical and cultural whitewashing, as well as the under-emphasized reality that the Gospel took firm root in Africa, the Middle East, and Asia long before it reached the West. (Mason, 2021, p.15)

¹ Eric Mason has a large collection of online content through his initiative thriving and in collaboration with Black Urban Apologists that engage with the 'Mystery cults' apologetically. The text in question is a summation of the years of debate, enquiry and discussion.

Black Urban Apologists such as Mason and Gay recognise the challenge for Black ministers as one that speaks to a fractured community of Bible-believing peoples; White, Black, Brown, mainstream, cult, separatist, nationalist and apostates, all a result of the European colonising and whitewashing of the Christian faith. In this apologetic paradigm, Mason seeks to debunk what they call mystery cults (this study will term them Afroasiatic Diasporic Religions) and provide an alternative 'gospel-centred' path for those who have concerns about the whitewashing of Christianity. Gospel centred in this sense refers to the salvific work of Jesus Christ at work in people towards full reconciliation with God at the end of days, which is not like a social gospel that seeks to broaden the meaning of the Gospel to the healing of society, rather than a focus on the personal, individual transformation. Mason asserts:

The false teachings of Black religious identity groups will fail to deliver on their promises in the end because the *Gospel* is the power of God unto salvation. Trusting Jesus Christ as savior is the only way a person can experience freedom from these false, demonically driven ideologies and cults. (Mason, 2021, p.234)

Although framed in language that progressive discourses may deem intolerant, exclusive and "colonial", Mason and other Black Urban Apologists are speaking the language of those they seek to engage, which is where, as we shall see in this study, the relativist, hyper-contextual or "cosmopolitan" approaches fail to connect. This common language and the central issues (authoritative interpretation, doctrine, current socio-political affairs in light of eschatology, family and right living) demonstrate these communities' common roots in the African American Black churches and the conservative-evangelical underpinnings of their religious epistemology. My study is not an apologetic treatise; instead, it looks through an ethnographic lens at the appeal and influence these religions have maintained on the fringes of the Black Christian Church. In the twenty-first century, the Black Urban Apologist movement is a signifier of the ongoing quest among the Black religious community to determine absolute religious truths, not contextual/local truths and yet to navigate contemporary Black experiences shaped by colonial religious epistemologies.

Vince Bantu has also made two significant literary contributions to this conversation. The first is *A Multitude of All Peoples: engaging ancient Christianity's Global identity* (2020); in this text, Bantu

charts the growth of Christianity and contributions to its development within Africa and the Middle East. Bantu provides evidence that counteracts the claims that Christianity is a White man's religion. Evidence is an essential factor in conversations with those I term the de-churched. As I shall demonstrate throughout the study, desk-based historical, archaeological, genealogical, scientific and theological research (also known as "receipts") is vital in building knowledge and constructing an apologetic for one's belief. These spaces are occupied by many individuals who read both broadly and deeply to uncover the true origins and meanings of the scriptures, focusing on the unfolding narrative of Black and Brown peoples in the West. Bantu engages with this need and method by providing a detailed, historical and geographical survey that builds a more accurate picture of early church history. What is essential about these recent publications is that they do not shy away from the significance of ethnicity and culture in the Church's history but instead emphasise their significance as vehicles of the Gospel. This approach, again, engages directly with the interests of the de: churched. For example, in the chapter 'The first Christians of Africa, ' Bantu says,

It is important to note, however, that Muslim sources in Arabic indicate continuing Christian presence in North Africa for centuries after the conquest. Interestingly, one of the most common terms for Christians in Arabic sources is *afariqa*- indicating a significant degree to which "Christian" and "African" were synonymous concepts. (Bantu, 2020, pp. 117-118)

Bantu has a second focus, which speaks primarily to theologians and scholars:

Christianity is and always has been a global religion. For this reason, it is important never to think of Christianity as *becoming* global... there has been an implication that global diversity is exclusively a twentieth-century innovation of the Christian movement. (Bantu, 2020, p.1)

This focus is critical because it challenges the current missiological scholarship around *global* Christianity; readjusting one's gaze to see Christianity as always having been global seems to reflect the historical evidence better and also better decenters the "Western, white captivity of the church" (Soong-Chan Rah, 2009, p.22 in Bantu, 2020, p.1).

The second publication to highlight is Bantu's *Gospel Hymanot: a constructive Theology and Critical Reflection on African and Diasporic Christianity* (2020). Bantu and emerging Black scholars explore the Christianity of the Black Church, one that is theologically orthodox and seeks liberative justice for the oppressed. This is a timely task and connects itself to the earlier publications that fill the void in current Black theological scholarship that voices the majority-Black Christian conservative/orthodox perspective on the Bible and social justice. He provides two important terms for this theological pursuit, the first 'Gospel Hymanot',

The name *Gospel Hymanot* is in reference to the living faith tradition of Black descendants of the victims of the Transatlantic Slave Trade, which hold firmly to the authority of the divinely inspired Word of God and its call for justice for all of God's creation. (Bantu, 2020, p.8)

And the second 'Gospelist reading',

A Gospelist reading of scripture is informed by the interdependent relationship between truth and justice. Gospel Hymanot holds firmly to the biblical priorities of orthodoxy and social action without prioritizing one over the other; moreover, Gospel Hymanot rejects any alleged distinction between the two. (Bantu, 2020, p.9)

Bantu grounds his framing in ancient Ethiopian theological literature (Ge'ez); upon this, he has built a theology not determined by the Western Evangelical standards of orthodoxy but one that is African and holds historical rigour. By reclaiming the Gospel as holistic, Bantu has carved out a way for twenty-first-century Black theologians to build bridges between contemporary lived experiences and a gospelist reading of the ancient biblical text without necessarily defaulting to Western theology's input. I unpack this type of decoloniality in my conceptual framework (de-colonisation) as a standard method for negating the necessity of Western scholarship and theological imagination by the Afroasiatic Diasporic Religions.

The final text I would like to consider is Esau McCaulley's *Reading While Black: African American biblical interpretation as an exercise in hope* (2020). Here McCaulley demonstrates the holistic sophistication of everyday African American Bible interpretation that has often been denounced as

simplistic, emotional and uncritical. By combining his lived experience with theological reflection on the scriptures, McCaulley defines the theological space for conservative Black Bible reading that is socially conscious and faithful to the Bible. McCaulley speaks of his personal struggle to locate himself and African American Bible reading in White evangelical spaces, White and Black progressive spaces. Between colourblind theologies, deep suspicion of the Biblical text, and politics of power in all three spaces, McCaulley rightly concludes that another space must be defined for those concerned for Black lives and yet hold scripture as the highest authority on faith and Christian living.

There is a well-worn path of Black affirmation in white conservative spaces if one is willing to denigrate Black Theology (and the Black church) full stop. But the converse also occurs, namely that white progressives have often weaponized Black progressive voices and depicted them as the totality of the Black Christian tradition for reasons that suit their own purposes, which have little to do with the actual concerns of Black Christians. (McCaulley, 2020, pp.15-16)

In this body of works, we can see an assertion from Black conservative Christians carving out a space that absolves the dichotomy between conservative attitudes of scripture and the ability to read and theologise contextually for the betterment of the Black community. Black Urban Apologists engage with alternative Black Bible-reading religions with common language and topics, demonstrating the strong influence of Black Christian upbringing in America. The contributors also engage in the decolonisation process through apologetics: looking to history, archaeology, genealogy, exegesis and contextual theology to detach biblical Christianity from colonialism, and finally, these scholars defend Black Bible reading (of the majority of Black American Christians) as faithful, meaningful and robust without the need for reducing the authority of the sacred text.

As Black, conservative, Christian scholars, it seems we have all had similar ideas about the phenomenon of those I term de-churched. My contribution to this study is to provide an ethnographic perspective from the Black-British experience; whilst the literature above responds to the phenomena by countering the claims made, this study seeks to understand it from within. However, my research does not seek to defend Christianity and delegitimise the claims of the alternative Black religions but to understand why

these religious groups remain so influential and what their teachings reveal about the needs and desires of the de-churched.

1.4 Aim of the research

This project aims to investigate this phenomenon critically - why are some Black-British Christians leaving the Church and joining other bible-based Black religions that have developed within the Caribbean and American diaspora during enslavement, segregation, and the civil rights era? Furthermore, how have they continued to be an ongoing influence on the fringes of the Black-British Church?

This research is an ethnographic study that directly engages participants who have had similar experiences to mine; the aim is to make sense of the driving factors and appeal to what I have come to describe as Afroasiatic Diasporic Religions. Several interlinked dialogues are crucial to identifying the key concepts that will support my analysis. First, Black Liberation theologies, theologically and philosophically, subvert mainstream Christianity by politicising the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Christ. They seek new ways of liberating those considered oppressed, inspired by themes within the Christian Bible; however, it is limited in dealing with ethnoreligious claims for genealogical and divine origins. With all its subdivisions and related critical branches, a postcolonial theology seeks to radically dismantle Western Christianity, applying alternative hermeneutical lenses for Bible reading that are inclusive, empowering and allow for the participation of the marginalised; the limitations of this methodology are what I recognise to be core ideals, particularly a postcolonial approach to contextualisation, are at odds with the core convictions of Afroasiatic religions. In light of these, I want to draw two underestimated conversation partners into this discussion. The first is Evangelical Conservatism- conceptualised. My intuition is that the undergirding mechanisms of this perspective have a significant influence on the de-Churched perspective and speak to the gaps that liberationist/postcolonial discussions leave behind when discussing racism, justice and theology. Most significantly, I turn to the teachings of the Afroasiatic religions I have selected: Rastafari, Nation of

Islam, The Holy Qubtic Church, and (Black) Hebrew Israelites, as essential conversation partners to understand their influence on twenty-first-century Black-British de-churched. Afroasiatic Diasporic Religions are controversially critical of Western Christendom and its connections to slavery and European colonialism; their apologetic approach to knowledge building is often critiqued to lack the scholastic rigour needed to support their claims which, it seems, has been one of many reasons for their underrepresentation in the academic decolonial discourse despite their social advancements. The challenge then is to understand Afroasiatic religious beliefs in light of their influence on the Black, British and de-churched while conversing with the other dominant methodological approaches.

1.5 The importance of this research

Black majority churches (BMC) in Britain are growing significantly, whilst church attendance of white Christians is declining (LSE, 2018). Despite the growth of BMC churches, many discontented Black millennials are severing ties with Christianity and seeking religious movements supporting their desire to be pro-Black and religious. Social media has seen a growing trend in anti-Christian sentiments from within the Black community, often arguing that Christianity is a slave religion that does not benefit the Black community and remains silent on the societal injustices experienced by Black people. Counter-histories support these anti-Christian sentiments, and alternative spiritual belief systems are considered more authentic and beneficial for the Black community. The arguments tend to be spearheaded by the exposure of Christianity as an ongoing colonial enterprise:

- The historical legacy of slavery as endorsed and instituted by the European Church
- Existential narratives of domination, assimilation, and subjugation in contemporary theology and practice
- The re-packaging of indigenous African religious systems with white face: White Jesus and the biblical texts as racialised counterfeit tools used to oppress people of colour²

² I have presented a list of current online content that evidences the de-churched phenomenon and their arguments, debates and discussions under 'Background Research'

These initial arguments have much broader implications; they speak to the social and political mobilisation of the Black-British community against injustice and expose the theological disconnect between the Black theological academy and the Church.

The Afroasiatic religions I have selected for this study are often negated as reactionary, extremist, racist, and anti-intellectual. Despite this reception, my research considers their teachings in raw form; what I mean by this is I shall be engaging with the teachings as the religious adherents present them without censorship. I believe that this is the best way for the study to analyse them as indicators of the desires and needs of the Black-British Christians on the fringes of the British church body. My instinct here is that Afroasiatic religions are integral to the future of the study of Black religion as they are rich sources of information about the Black diaspora and globalised reality. During their initial waves of influence in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, where slavery, racism, segregation, and racial discrimination were legal institutions, these religions were active among an already essentially religious (confessional and traditional) Black society. In the twenty-first century, these religions, I argue, are still influential in Black communities, which indicates that although there have been political, philosophical, and social advancements in Western society with regards to the Black lived experience undergirded by more humanist and pluralist ventures, they are failing to meet some core desires and needs that must be explored.

The quest toward anti-Black racism, from an academic perspective, should not ignore the basic premises of Afroasiatic religions because they are unfavourable to the progressive trajectory but instead should consider how the social mechanism of the ethnoreligious institution has perhaps led the way and presents a more viable option for decolonisation and Black identity formation.

1.6 Contribution to knowledge

The contributions I hope to make with my research pertain to this study's ethnographic insights. In the first instance, I will be engaging with more recent religious outputs from these Afroasiatic religions, particularly with the religious branches formed in the last twenty years and their online social media

content. Most existing literature on this topic considers these religions historically, relying mainly on key figures such as Malcolm X, Bob Marley, and the Noble Drew Ali. Although this research considers them foundational to the movement, I must engage with the most recent activity to understand this twenty-first-century phenomenon. This line of inquiry will also shed light on how these movements have become well established in Britain and are no longer solely dependent on teaching from across the Atlantic.

Secondly, I have innovated a conceptual framework that brings conservatism to the table as a favourable mechanism for anti-racism. Anti-racism projects are led mainly by progressive, liberal movements such as the Black Lives Matter Movement. My data demonstrates that conservatism viewed conceptually, not as a Western political asset, is a crucial component of Afroasiatic diasporic religious rationale and its appeal to those who want to be Black, Conscious, and religiously submitted to the Bible. I call this framework the preservation-liberation framework. Black Bible-reading religion preserves the authority of scripture, where culture, tradition and history are the foundation for identity formation, yet, seeks to liberate the biblical religion of God's people from colonial Christianity through decolonisation.

The third unique contribution I make to wider knowledge is the programme I designed to facilitate my field research. **BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS AND CHRISTIAN FAITH** is a five-session programme designed to respond to this phenomenon. Guided by the principles and methods of Participatory Action Research and my intuition as an 'insider', each session focused on topics directly linked to the research project. The general parameters of this programme are 'White man's religion', the influence of Afrocentric religions, alternative theological methods such as Black liberation theology and most importantly, a safe space for open discussion, consciousness-raising and solution making.

1.7 Key Research Questions

The questions that have been generated from my personal experience and the perceived experiences of others are:

1. Why are some Black people becoming disillusioned with the Church in Britain?

2. What do Afroasiatic Diasporic Religions offer that the de-churched believe mainstream British churches do not?
3. What is the main strength of the Afroasiatic diasporic religious influence, and how best can we understand their rationale?

This research has been designed to privilege the participants' voices. Despite my intuitions and experiences, this study needs to reflect the participants' thoughts, beliefs, choices, and feelings to develop a critical understanding. Although the research focuses on the presence and influence of Afroasiatic Diasporic Religions, these broad questions will allow the research to consider other factors that may be key to a more meaningful understanding and interpretation of the phenomenon.

The second question speaks to the participant's dissatisfaction regarding their experience in mainstream churches, Black Majority, historical Pentecostal, and the European historical denominations. This question considers the strength of personal/religious conviction (belief), the limitations of the participant's access to information, and their ability to engage with their dissatisfaction critically. Much of the information that contributes to the case against Christianity on the premise of 'White Man's religion' is historical: dates, events, people, and how this information has been distributed. It may be the case that some people's beliefs are based on incorrect information, so whilst the beliefs are still valuable to this research (as that in itself has significance), I must still account for the scope and limitations of their beliefs and perceptions.

The final questions speak to my role as a researcher, firstly to uncover the strength of the influence of Afroasiatic Diasporic Religions on my participants. Using a grounded methodology, I have looked to the data to generate the key concepts and theories that develop the best conceptual framework for the interpretive task and describe the rationale I consider to be at work. As we shall see in the first half of the thesis, Black religion is complex. Birthed within a diaspora in response to enslavement, subjugation, and discrimination, Black religion is both political and religious; it consists of progressive, hybridised, and conservative mechanisms. Nevertheless, despite more liberal and progressive academic trajectories for the study of Black religion, there is still, in the twenty-first century, much to be said about what is seemingly becoming less attractive; the conservative mechanisms at play in Black religion.

1.8 De-churched

The term "de-churched" in this study describes the participants who have left the Church and have sought an alternative Black bible-based religious community and belief system. Caleb Davis (2018) considers more broadly those who leave *consciously* due to conflict, pain, or politics and those who leave *unconsciously*, distracted by work responsibility, family commitments, and falling out of the habit of attending services. He considers attendance and participation in the local Church's life and new meanings of mission that centre around the local engagement between Church and community instead of introducing Christ and the gospel to unbelievers. Thom Schultz (2013) considers the *relational* aspects of the de-churched phenomena, the effect of large church communities, and the inaccessibility of the leadership to be vital components of this unfolding narrative. Brian Harris (2015) briefly considers 'de-churched' theologically; he asks what theological implications of 'de-churched' speak to a church's belief about *salvation*. He likens the de-churched to the prodigal son and the lost sheep, which mirrored the initial theological response to my friend who left the Church. I desired her to eventually come back, won by persuasion and a spiritual encounter. Despite my initial responses, this research takes 'de-churched' further; to begin with, it has no intention to make a case for the mainstream Church as theologically or religiously preferable. 'De-churched' in this study resonates most closely with decolonisation, dismantling an oppressive power and de-colonisation, articulating the difference between colonial Christianity and Afroasiatic Bible religion. Ethnographically, this research considers how people have sought emancipation from a religious system that they consider unempowering, disingenuous, and erroneous—not departing from religious conviction inspired by the Bible and parts of the historic church tradition but instead departing from the European/British institutional Church's colonial Christianity. My penultimate chapter aims to flesh out a definition of the Black, British and de-Churched that is beneficial for collating lessons learned, equipping churches to respond and contribute to the existing conversations on this topic for a deeper and more balanced understanding of this community.

1.9 Thesis outline

The first chapter has two tasks; the first is to clarify my use of 'Afroasiatic Diasporic Religion' inspired by the Afroasiatic category developed in linguistic studies. The Afroasiatic language category is designated by location and the characteristics of the languages present. In this chapter, I apply the 'Family Tree' (Schleicher, 1853, 1874, Bernal, 1987) model to my religious paradigm to define a religious category that is rooted in its geographical claims and its use of the Hebrew/Christian Bible and demonstrate the diversity within the branches of this religious paradigm by discussing the various theological perspectives on Jesus/Messiah and Redemption. The second task discusses the meaning of woke from a Black religious (Afroasiatic) perspective and determines its uses and scope for this study. Finally, this chapter aims to set the scene for the study from a religious perspective. Afroasiatic Diasporic Religion is a crucial concept within this study, and I will refer to their religious perspectives as an equal contributor, alongside the data collected from my participants, towards answering my research questions.

The second chapter is a literature survey; here, I have selected a cross-section of existing literature that goes beyond describing the documentation of these religions but seeks to understand their role within the Black diaspora and contribution to more comprehensive religious and theological discussion. I refer to works generated in the last ten years, except an early twentieth-century work in which the researcher uses methods similar to mine in the American inner-city context of the 1940s. In this chapter, I survey the various approaches that have been made to utilise Afroasiatic Diasporic Religions as a resource for theological formation and ethnographic work and identify the gaps that my research fills. The more significant portion of existing literature is set within the Caribbean and American contexts; my research is for the British context, and my data collection was gathered explicitly in London. I have identified some critical British literature, particularly the work of Robert Beckford, that draws upon themes present in Afroasiatic Diasporic Religions towards politicising Black theology for the British context. Beckford's deconstruction works well to develop a theoretical liberatory paradigm for Black-British Christians, used to develop resources to support churches in socio-political engagement. My study intends to understand the influence of these religions ethnographically and in their raw form – referring

to a plain reading of their beliefs. I hope to limit my focus to the religious desires of the participants, which admittedly overlap with their political consciousness. However, I argue that it is primarily rooted in religiosity that transcends the current Black-British lived experience of discrimination, to which Black Liberation Theology is limited.

In the third chapter, I generate a conceptual framework, a hypothesis that addresses the complex tensions within Afroasiatic Diasporic Religions that I believe are key to understanding the de-churched phenomenon. Whilst trying to maintain a 'religious' focus, I must account for the context from which they emerged, enslavement, segregation, and the social presumption of white supremacy. I envisage the conceptual framework as hermeneutical, which I depend on to understand best the perspectives and premises that undergird the beliefs and interpretive processes of both those Afroasiatic diasporic religious adherents and the de-churched participants of my study. This section defines what I mean by 'religion' for this study and how Afroasiatic religions sit between 'religion' and 'new religious movements'. By drawing together aspects of Ethiopianism, decolonisation and conservatism, I have innovated the *preservation-liberation* framework that respects the Afroasiatic Diasporic Religion's stance on religious authority, conservative reading conventions, ethnocentrism, and its anti-colonial/liberatory nature.

Next, the method/methodology chapter outlines the inner working of my research and analysis. This ethnographic work uses Participatory Action Research, supported by elements of consciousness-raising, to collect my data. I have designed and facilitated a five-session programme called BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS AND CHRISTIAN FAITH (BCCF) which took place in local churches in London (2016-2018). This five-session programme combined a provocative seminar-style talk with an open discussion forum which became my data pool. The sessions were designed to focus on the experiences of the de-churched, those who had been influenced by the claims and religious perspectives of Afroasiatic Diasporic Religions. I have employed grounded theory to steer my data analysis and shape the entire study.

The sixth chapter is an analysis of my findings from the data collection – this follows the structure of the BCCF programme, session by session, *White Man's Religion?, Out of Kemet? The Black Face of*

the Early Church, Black Jesus/Black Theology and State your Case. Here, I begin to form the connections between the ADR teaching, the participant's contributions, and my reflections and role as a participant analysing the data to test my hypothesis and the resulting conceptual framework.

The penultimate chapter discusses my findings with the broader body of existing literature for the Black-British context. Here I hope to demonstrate how the Black, British de-churched phenomenon gives more grounding to existing conversations about Black-British identity in a more balanced way. I will look at the *Afroasiatic Diasporic Religious Voice, De-colonisation, Evangelical Theology of Liberation, and Black Diasporic Religious Identity*. Finally, the final chapter discusses overall findings and concluding remarks, recommendations, and considerations for future research.

In this chapter, I have outlined the aims, method, and shape of this ethnographic study to demonstrate its originality, importance, and place among other studies on Black religions, Black-British Identity, Black Theology, and the Black Christian body in Britain.

This study has been developed from personal experiences that are meaningful, valid, yet undeniably anecdotal, so I have situated them in the broader phenomenon that I believe deserves inquiry. The Black-British de-Churched and Afroasiatic Diasporic Religions in Britain, an understudied phenomenon, has the capacity to fuel future inquiry in Black Religious studies, keeping research dynamic and grounded towards solution making for everyday living.

As I stated earlier, whilst publications are emerging in the United States as a response to the Black de-churched and the influences of ADRs, my research is original because it is an ethnographic study that seeks to critically analyse the phenomenon towards a fuller understanding of the community's hope, desires, and dissatisfaction with mainstream Christian churches in Britain. Because this is a twenty-first-century phenomenon with a British focus, one can expect to see data collected from online teaching on YouTube, where much of the ADR activity takes place, partly because of the COVID 19 Pandemic that has overshadowed the second half of my writing process but also because it is an effective, efficient and economical community building method.

In this introductory chapter, my experiences and recent publications signalled several key themes: Proclaiming the truth and uncovering the lies, being rooted in ethnic-cultural history, establishing freedom from colonial religion, and waking up and being woke to the snares of colonial Christianity. The next chapter will look more deeply at the Afroasiatic Diasporic Religions; I will define what I mean by Woke in this study and why it is an important cultural and theological asset. The next chapter aims to help the reader understand ADR God-talk, their methods and interpretations, which I believe shed light and provide the suitable framing for the Black, British and de-churched phenomenon.

'Rise, ye mighty people, ye-ah

There's work to be done, so let's do little by little

Rise from your sleepless slumber'

(Bob Marley, Wake up and Live, 1979)

2. 'Woke' – The Afroasiatic Diasporic Rationale

2.1 Introduction

In the introductory chapter, I outlined my intention for this study by demonstrating how I have developed a research project from my personal experience. Having been confronted with alternative Black religions that challenged my Christian beliefs and traditions on which my family life had been centred around, I seek to understand the broader influence these alternative Black religions have on the fringes of the Black-British Church. What I mean by the Black-British Church in this study is the combined presence of Black people in churches throughout Britain: Black Majority Churches, Historical Pentecostal Churches and Black people in White majority and European historical institutions, multicultural congregations, and independent and community churches.

Twenty-first-century conversations about the Black-British church have turned their attention to the growing presence of Christian communities from various countries in Africa and their contribution to the changing face of the British church (Aldred, 2019, Chike, 2007). Previously, the Caribbean presence had captured scholars' sociological, political and theological imagination – with the Caribbean migrants came new influences and challenges to British church culture, a theological resistance, most notably captured in the Rastafari religion. Rastafari continues to have widespread influence throughout Britain and has received a more positive reception than other Black religions such as The Nation of Islam. This success is due mainly to the popularisation of Bob Marley and other world-famous Reggae artists who translated the Rastafari belief system and cultures into an accessible format for the masses. Although African churches and the presence of African peoples are having a significant impact on British church life and culture, this study concerns itself with religions that have been birthed in the Caribbean and North America and have in more recent years resurfaced and established new roots in Britain. That being said, this study does not consider this to be a Caribbean diaspora phenomenon but instead, a Black-British concern – second, third and fourth generation British - African and

Caribbean diaspora who have encountered Afroasiatic religions on their quest to develop a bible-based religion that is socially, politically and culturally conscious.

This chapter seeks to clarify the definition and scope of my intended engagement with alternative Black religions. I will begin by defining my use of the term Afroasiatic diasporic religion, followed by what it means to be woke from an Afroasiatic diasporic perspective as a critical concept that drives this study. Then, I will summarise key aspects of these religions, demonstrating how I have conceived them Afroasiatic by outlining key points of convergence and divergence – 'geography', the 'Bible', 'Jesus' and 'redemption'. These are just some basic entry points; later in the study, I will unpack them more deeply to reveal their significant impact on the de-churched and its meaning for mainstream church and society.

Black religion is a vast subject, so it is necessary to set the parameters to convey their manifestation in Britain in the twenty-first century and their influence on the participants of this study. There is a concern about essentialising these communities; Modood says,

One is particularly prone to this when one is producing a systematic summary or ideological justification for those traditions. Hence, rich, complex histories become simplified and collapsed into a teleological process or a unified ideological construct called French culture or European civilisation or the Muslim way of life. (Modood, 1998, p. 381)

Using the umbrella term Afroasiatic, I hope to avoid an unnecessarily essentialist 'systemic summary' and instead allow its inner diversity to be the strength of my argument.

2.2 Afroasiatic

Afroasiatic is a term used in linguistics; the basic premise is to explore Semitic, Egyptian, Berber, Cushitic and Chadic languages historically and comparatively analyse the developments and mechanics. A standard image used to demonstrate 'Afroasiatic' is a tree with branches, which show both connection

and distinction (Hodge, 1971). Following this concept, Martin Bernal, in *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical civilisation* (1987, 1992, 2006), seeks to demonstrate how Western classical civilisation has Afroasiatic roots; he does this through linguistics, archaeology and other forms of historical documentation. He argues that the legacy and influence of African and Semitic peoples have been discarded and decentred by eighteenth and nineteenth-century European scholars, reflecting the influence of "race" as a scientific premise of which non-White peoples are considered subnormal. Bernal explains,

The name "Afroasiatic" comes from the fact that the languages of this family are spoken in both Africa and Asia. The "Afro-" comes before the "-Asiatic" because seven of its eight subfamilies, Chadic, Southern Cushitic, Central Cushitic, East Cushitic, Beja, Berber, and Ancient Egyptian, are or were spoken exclusively in African, and the seventh Semitic is spoken on both continents. (Bernal, 2006)

These works are extensive linguistic investigations, which is beyond the scope of this study. Bernal's method and employment of the terms 'Afroasiatic', 'family tree' and 'branches' are helpful and appropriate for two reasons: First, whilst he makes a case for a root language in Africa, the main work focuses on a broader geographical region (which includes Asia) which more powerfully describes the 'family'. I hope to demonstrate that this can also be conceptualised for my study, as we shall see the religions I have selected place their roots in the Afroasiatic region. Secondly, his research is scientific and critical; his use of empirical data to demonstrate social phenomena is mirrored by Afroasiatic Diasporic Religions, who make cases to correct religious history by using empirical data to demonstrate social and religious crises. Finally, it must be noted that Bernal's work is controversial and received much criticism from scholars who challenged his linguistic proficiency (Lefkowitz, 2014). Despite this controversy, the 'family tree' model and the term 'Afroasiatic' employed for this study are not under threat by any of the more comprehensive criticisms about the mechanisms of his claims. Furthermore, *Black Athena* seems to be a well-respected text within the Black conscious community and serves well to demonstrate their school of thought.

In the same way that Bernal seeks to uncover the Afroasiatic roots of Western civilisation, Afroasiatic Diasporic Religions have similar agendas for Christianity as it has become known through colonialism and empire. This pursuit may indicate why many de-churched peoples remain centred around the Bible (and Qur'an) because they are reclaiming them as Afroasiatic religious texts.

Julian Baldick, in *Black God: The Afroasiatic Roots of the Jewish, Christian and Muslim Religions* (1997), concludes, according to his survey of (indigenous) Afroasiatic religions, that duality or bipolarities are the foundational influences of Afroasiatic religions on Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Although not limiting their modes of thinking, he argues that simple dichotomies such as light and dark and good and evil are at the heart of these modes of religious thinking. From these dualities, more complex modes of meaning are produced or birthed. Of Islam, he says,

What we must consider here is the Afroasiatic bipolarity of the religion itself. This is most evident in the Qur'an, where there are two worlds, this one and the next, and two main races, humans and genies. Further pairs are paradise and hell, believers and unbelievers, East and West, day and night, male and female, past and future, people of the right hand and people of the left, heaven and earth, sun and moon, and piety and wickedness. These pairs are expressed in antithetical verses which for the Muslim constitute the ultimate miracle of unsurpassable eloquence. (Baldick, 1997, p. 169)

Duality can be seen throughout diasporic Afroasiatic religious teaching, beginning with them/us, Black/White, oppressor/oppressed, Babylon/Zion – these dichotomies are seen throughout much of 'Black' talk both academically and socially. Later in the study, I discuss how more progressive concepts such as hybridity have been introduced to counter these simple dichotomies in Black academic discourse. However, I draw attention to Baldick's claim to a sense of continuity that works at the heart of contemporary Hebraic/Afroasiatic religious imagination at this juncture. This sense of continuity is key to what drives diasporic Afroasiatic identification. For example, bible-based Black religion seeks to correct the notion that a Bible religion is a 'White man's religion' and distinguish itself from colonial Christianity – the Roman/European/British Bible-based religious institution. Charting an alternative

trajectory, arguably retrospectively³, diasporic bible-based Afroasiatic religions seek to recover their religious origins, discounting the dominance of the Roman, European,/British epistemologies by reconstructing or rediscovering those sites of continuity.

The final key piece to this Afroasiatic religious concept is the pursuit to prioritise the ethnic identity of the biblical peoples. Kevin Burrell in *Cushites in the Hebrew Bible: Negotiating Ethnic Identity in the Past and Present* (2020) says,

Thus, it is worth emphasising that the Israelite population from the earliest time were an "Afro-Asiatic" people. According to the Hebrew Bible, Israel became "a people" within an Egyptian-Cushite, Asiatic social, cultural, and political nexus. And it may also be worth remembering that *Egypt is Africa*, with all the inherent implications. (Burrell, 2020)

The concept of Afroasiatic, with its connected yet distinct features attached to geography, cultures and movement of communities, is an appropriate way of conceptualising Black religions in the diaspora collectively. This chapter seeks to demonstrate how these religions connect through their use of the Bible, their experiences and their sense of *return*, but are also distinct in their interpretation, organisation and route of *return*. Afroasiatic then, conceptualised, describes genealogically and mythically rooted bible-centred religious traditions located in the Afroasiatic region. This approach conveys the intentional process of decolonising biblical religion and recovering its Afroasiatic origin.

2.3 Woke

Woke is the first step in the decolonising process. The term 'woke' has historically been associated with the African-American community; during the civil rights era, it was a vernacular term that concerned Black people's social and political awareness. Inspired by the activist, theologian, philosopher and

³ One must not forget that the Coptic and Ethiopian churches, remnants of the Eastern strand after the east/west schism are thriving ancient African Christian institutions.

community leader Marcus Garvey, becoming 'woke' calls Black people to be mentally engaged and comprehend White America's tyranny on Black lives. With more recent civil unrest in the diaspora and the birth of the Black Lives Matter movement, woke has become a word that primarily describes left-wing, liberal and progressive ideals and cultures. The evolution of Black anti-racist literature that engages more systematically with socialism, critical race theory and feminist thought can portray the idea that 'woke' is best positioned with the 'left' and progressivism. However, as I plan to unpack in this study, this is not the case – being 'woke' pertains to any danger to Black people, including the progressive ideologies that threaten the value of traditions, cultures, and religious beliefs central to Black identity formation and preservation.

The term 'woke' not only concerns being aware but also waking up from sleep, slumber, or zombification resulting from centuries of oppression and trauma. It concerns waking up and realising a true Black self, which is often done through study, knowledge building internal decolonisation. From a religious perspective, 'woke' extends to the rejection or decolonisation of the religion that has dominated Black life in the diaspora since the enslavement of Africans in the sixteenth century. As we shall see throughout the study, Christianity, which in this context includes Roman Catholicism, is the most common target for religious decolonisation and rejection. Each of the Afroasiatic Diasporic Religions I have selected for this study call believers to be 'woke' to the counterfeit form of Christianity that has held the diaspora's loyalty for centuries or to reject it altogether as the religion of the White man, opting instead for a bible-based religion that is most representative of Afroasiatic peoples. This can be seen in Robert A. Hills' collection (2006) of the Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association papers and press releases (1923-1945). The papers demonstrate the political and religious call to be 'woke' and to organise,

Now it is time for the white priests to tell other whites that the Kingdom of God is near. And lacks must preach to other blacks. A white person-he won't become right again. What's good to an African is his right. Wake up! Wake up!! Wake up!!! Africa is our father's country! It is the most beautiful among all countries, and all its wealth must go back to Africans. (African Word, 1925 p.318)

Marcus Garvey and the UNIA's activity connected mainland Africa with the African diaspora and spoke both to continental and personal 'wokeness',

Wherever there is a Negro sleeping on his social, civil and economic rights, we would wake him up. Wherever there is a dead Negro, dead on his social, civil and economic rights, we should wake him up because we believe in the resurrection and the life. So do you. Then, wake up if you are asleep and come to life if you are dead. (Negro World, 1924 in p.144)

The enactment of waking up and claiming one's rights towards justice can be perceived as a religious process as it is political for many in the diaspora. Undergirded by religious belief, drawing upon the resurrection of Christ, for example, demonstrates how themes and events from the Biblical scripture fuel and influence the notion of being woke. Malcom X (1971) suggested that in the awakening of Black people, there would be a change in the world - a signifier of the end of White dominance,

So I pointed these things out to the white students at the University of Pennsylvania so that they could see themselves that their world is shrinking, that their world is coming to an end. And the thing that is bringing about an end to their world is the awakening of the dark world. As the dark world awakens, the dark world is rising. As the dark world rises and increases, the power of the white world decreases. (Malcom X, 1963)

Malcolm X's reference to the dark world is an example of how Black leaders in the diaspora wanted to change perceptions, teaching Black people to embrace 'darkness' as a positive representation of themselves and not synonymous with evil or dirty. Leonard Percival Howell (1933, 2008), in *The Promised Key*, a significant Rastafari text, says,

All the Churches religious systems of today, claims to represent the Lord God of Israel; but the Pope who is satan the devil, a false organisation is a hypocritical religious system that has three elements, first commercial political and ecclesiastical to keep people in ignorance of their wicked course. (Howell, 1933, p. 7)

In this study, the call to awakening, waking up, and being woke goes beyond just being aware of social and political issues. It is considered a mental and spiritual transformation of individuals, communities,

and nations inspired by religious teachings such as the resurrection of Christ and the redemption of the 'chosen' people. Woke in the Afroasiatic perspective is as religious as political and social. It connects those of the Afroasiatic diaspora to the Afroasiatic region. Being woke leads to organisation and mobilisation, which results in the realisation of justice – both, it seems, an earthly, legal justice and an eternal justification.

2.4 The Root (Origins)

In this section, I will introduce the Afroasiatic Diasporic Religions, using the linguistic imagery of the family tree as a template. These religions are generally considered nineteenth and twentieth-century phenomena, emerging from the experiences of enslavement, subjugation and segregation. Their teachings describe a people discovering their true and original religion. However, this study does not discount their contextualised and arguably constructive nature; as this is an ethnography, it does give preference to the religious teachings which believers consider to be divine and genealogically inherited rather than socially constructed. As the researcher, I take a methodologically agnostic position (Bruce, 2011) for this study so as not to distract the research from its primary task with discussions about its legitimacy and authenticity.

The four religions I draw upon are The Nation of Islam, The Holy Qubtic church, Rastafari and the (Black) Hebrew Israelite communities. Rather than introduce them in a historical format, I will discuss their theological and hermeneutical perspectives to best access their decolonial religious imagination.

The Nation of Islam and the Holy Qubtic Church have a centralised organisation, which means that all the churches and chapters adhere to the same religious teachings aided by additional literature provided by their religious leaders. Although their interpretations are different in both these cases, the Bible is reinterpreted to a more true and original translation with the aid of additional literature. In the case of the Nation of Islam, it is Elijah Muhammed's prophesies, and for the Holy Qubtic church, a publication called *The Original Books of The Bible* is considered the most credible.

On the other hand, Rastafari uses the process of reasoning and ritual to acquire accurate interpretation locally. In this sense, there are core or common teachings, but they are not centralised and subject to a

single leader. The individual's connection with the Most High – the 'I and I' is the location for interpretation. This is important to note throughout this study as then any reference to Rastafari interpretation must not be seen as institutional – it is the influence of the person that results in the belief's prominence. The (Black) Hebrew Israelites (BHI) exist in many different forms; many individuals believe they are of Hebrew ethnic descent, they may practice Christianity or Judaism, the religion of the Israelites as described in the Old Testament or are non-religious. Most notable among the BHI are the 'camps'; various religious Hebrew groups form their centralised organisations, led by an Elder, distinguished by their interpretation of Scripture and levels of assertion and engagement in society.

These religious groups have established roots in Britain and have an online presence in which they deliver their teaching to the masses through social media. YouTube, Facebook and Instagram are examples of online platforms I mainly engage with for their teachings. I believe they are most influential in the twenty-first century through these mediums.

2.4.1 Geography

These religions can be considered Afroasiatic because they each claim religious and genealogical origins in the Afroasiatic region. According to Elijah Muhammad in *Message to the Blackman in America (1973)*, the NOI teach that Black people are the aboriginal (often synonymous with original) supreme beings of the planet. Their (terrestrial) geographic origin is from the once merged continent of Africa and Asia⁴, from within which the African Americans derive from the esteemed tribe of Shabazz. Having established the Nile Valley and the Holy City of Mecca, as it is now known, as sites of significance, the NOI maintain an Afro-Asian-Arab genealogy rather than the East, Central and West African route of its competing movement Rastafari. Nuri Tinaz in *Black Islam in Diaspora: The Case of Nation of Islam (NOI) in Britain* says,

⁴ NOI also teach that before they were established on earth they have extra-terrestrial origin.

For African Americans and Afro-Caribbeans to become Muslim or a member of the NOI is to reclaim their lost religion and identity and to return to their ancestral faith which has been unknown to them over the years as a consequence of slavery, forced conversion and colonisation respectively. (Tinaz, 2006, p. 153)

This teaching about the origin of Black people leads to the belief that Islam is the natural religion of Black people; it ties Black people's spiritual and geographical journey to Islamic sites of origin. Further, the NOI teaches that many enslaved Africans transported to the West were already practising Muslims. The NOI, in turn, teach that they provide a way back to their original way of life and relearn their connection to Allah - synonymous with the God of the Bible- before the physical and psychological trauma of slavery. (Barnett, 2006)

A positive self-image is a central theme within the communal identity of the Nation of Islam, but beyond these aesthetic markers such as wearing suits and white garments, shaven heads and headscarves and a following selective diet, the NOI's internalised identity is 'chosenness' (Barnett, 2006). Having merged biblical and Qur'anic text, both recognised as sacred texts of the aboriginals; the NOI refer to the narrative of the Hebrews in Genesis 15:13-14:

13 And he said unto Abram, know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years; **14** And also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance. (Genesis 15: 13-14, KJV)

Believing this Scripture to be foresight of the transatlantic slave trade and subsequent subjugation, much like the Rastafari, the NOI follow through the narrative with a communal identity of a "chosen people", an "original people", and a "supreme people" from the Afroasiatic region. The NOI were a prominent part of the struggle for freedom during the Jim Crow and civil rights eras; they taught Garvey's Black Nationalism alongside submission to Allah. The Nation of Islam established itself as a religion to better Blacks and reunited Black people with their ethno-religious origins. Tynetta Muhammed says:

(NOI) teach the downtrodden and defenceless Blacks people through a knowledge of God and of themselves and put them on the road to self-independence with a superior culture and higher civilisation than they had previously experienced (Muhammed, T, 1996, www.noi.org)

In an ethnographic study, A. A. Akom explores Black Achievement ideology in the Nation of Islam, which stems from this 'chosenness', Akom can demonstrate that whilst they are undeniably a separatist religion, they cannot be considered entirely oppositional in culture and orientation because their religious teaching demand that personal and communal achievement, such as in education and industry be taken seriously. He studied teenage girls from the NOI community in mainstream education. Akom says, 'In short, rigid morals, self-determination, nontraditional Islam, and Black nationalism are the key elements that constitute what I refer to as the NOI's Black achievement ideology.' (Akom, 2003, p.307). He considers Mattias Gardell's contribution to support his definition as 'a theory about the world- how and why it was created and how human beings relate to and should act in the world' (Gardell, 1996). The Nation of Islam's teaching about geographic origins generates purpose and direction whilst in Babylon (America/Britain), revealed in part by high achievement and excellence.

The Rastafari tradition builds upon Ethiopianism, which I discuss further in *Chapter 4*, and develops a more focused connection to the biblical Israelites. In this case, 'Ethiopian' and 'Israelite' are the same. (Barratt, 1997, p.111) There are two prevailing schools of thought; the first is that the Rastafari are 'reincarnated Israelites', which denotes a spiritual/mythical connection, a "sonship", and "personal divinity" that occurs through a spiritual birth. (Barratt, 1997, p.111). The other school of thought takes a more literal turn and claims a direct genetical link via the tribe of the Falasha's, followers of Menelik I, supposed son of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba (Wimbush, 2012). Using Genesis 25:23 for scriptural reference:

The LORD said to her, Two nations are in your womb,
and two peoples from within you will be separated;
one people will be stronger than the other,
and the older will serve the younger. (King James Version)

Some Rastafari believe that from Isaac, God created two peoples, Caucasians being the descendants of red-skinned and hairy Esau and Black people the descendants of Jacob. Rastafari seems to have literal and mythical origins in tension, both of which they believe affirm them as the true Israelites.

Prophet William Saunders has been recorded as one of the first in the Hebrew Israelite tradition to receive the revelation of African Americans' true origins whilst clearing his field in 1892. In his comparison of the Rastafari movement with (Black) Hebrew Israelites, Michael Barnett suggests that origins are determined by a combination of spiritual characteristics and geography within the various camps of the Hebrew Israelite movements. (Barnett, 2006) Hebrew Israelites claim that they are the people of Canaan, the Hebrews of the Bible from the "Middle East" who were Black-skinned and not people of Africa. Instead, Africa is considered the wilderness the Hebrews found themselves in because of their disobedience and idolatry. This belief is based on their interpretation of Scripture rather than through widely accepted scholarly works "They find all the proof they need in the Bible. Invoking "Divine Geography," or a way of charting the world that is "pleasing to God" (Markowitz, 1996, p.193)

Since their enslavement in Africa, some of the Hebrew Israelite camps teach that the tribes can be identified by location: (1) The Tribe of Judah – Negroes, (2) The Tribe of Benjamin – West Indians, (3) The Tribe of Levi – Haitians, (4) The Tribe of Simeon – Dominicans, (5) The Tribe of Zebulon – Guatemala to Panama, (6) The Tribe of Ephraim – Puerto Ricans, (7) The Tribe of Manasseh – Cubans, (8) The Tribe of Gad – North American Indians (9) The Tribe of Reuben – Seminole Indians (10) The Tribe of Naphtali – Argentina to Chile (11) The Tribe of Asher – Columbia to Uruguay (12) The Tribe of Issachar – Mexicans. (Barnett, 2006)

Although these teachings are prevalent on social media platforms, it is not an essential belief; many (Black) Hebrew Israelites reject this teaching altogether. The Hebrew Israelite religion differs from Pan Africanism and Afrocentric religions because it has severed its African ties (Jackson Jr, 2005). Often found within the BHI teachings are varying degrees of the rejection of Africans and Arabs who sold the Israelites into slavery. Ultimately, the BHI teach that their relocation is a divine judgment resulting from the disobedience of which Africans and Arabs (and later Europeans) were tools to carry out God's punishment; the Gathering of Christ perspective found on their website is an example:

Disclaimer: Before we take the time to reveal this understanding, we would first like to mention that we do not blame anyone for the atrocities that happened to our people. We understand that these things happened to us based on our disobedience (Deut. 32:15-21, Deut. 28:15, Amos 3:1-2) <https://gatheringofchrist.org/twelve-tribes/> [Accessed 2022]

They support this notion through Old Testament scripture, specifically the King James Version, much like the Rastafari, Deuteronomy 28:25,

²⁵ The LORD shall cause thee to be smitten before thine enemies: thou shalt go out one way against them, and flee seven ways before them: and shalt be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth.' (KJV)

It is crucial for (Black) Hebrew Israelites to validate one's Hebrew origins geographically as it is foundational to their identity formation as a nation. What we see with these Afroasiatic Diasporic Religions is more than a neo religious construction; to them, it is the rediscovery of who they are to make sense of their communal divine purpose now that they have become woke from the slumber and trauma of oppression. Ben Ammi is an example of a Hebrew Israelite leader who repatriated to Israel with a Black Hebrew Community; I will speak more about it in the next chapter.

The Holy Qubtic Church looks to 'Tama-Re' (Ancient Africa) as their origin. Kahun Montu Tar (Dr Horace Wright) - High Priest of the Holy Qubtic Church in London, says,

Each race, nation, nationality has their own religion, and within their own religion, it helps and works for them. It helps to bind them; it helps to put umm a sense of morality in them, a code - a conduct that says we will respect and work by and for each other. It works for those who adhere to it. (Gotkush TV, 2019)

The Holy Qubtic Church of the Black Messiah (HQC) seeks to direct 'Nubian-melaninites' (Black people) towards African religious traditions to remedy a diasporic identity crisis. Religious symbols and ideas that are often considered Egyptian, according to The Holy Qubtic Church, are the foundation of African religious knowledge. Much like the Nation of Islam, the Holy Qubtic Church traces its

origins beyond conventional readings of the Genesis account and provides an alternative interpretation. Referring to The Original Books of the Bible – the ancient African biblical account, they teach:

The Ba-Re-Shiyth gives the African account of the garden of A-Ten (Eden) that was recreated, replenished and reconstructed by the High Priest, Seer and Prophet Baba Ankh An Aton. In ancient times it was referred to as A-Mir-Na, and was the place where the spiritual sciences would be taught to those students who had proven themselves worthy.

Within these pages, you will also learn about the African Genesis story, which was really a refilling or replenishing event, that in time became confused as being the beginning of all creation. However, we as Ancient Africans knew that this was only the re-surrection, re-population and re-erection of a sacred city. (<https://www.holyqubticchurch.com/our-scriptures>)

The Garden of Eden or A-Ten then is situated as part of Ancient Egyptian, African history, not as an antediluvian creation myth as is most readily accepted in the mainstream Christianity and for many Rastafari and BHI's. This claim draws the "origins" conversation away from Canaan or Israel, as we see with the BHI's to Kemet (Egypt) but still keeps it in the Afroasiatic region. One of the interesting geographic points from the HQC teachings is how they understand themselves in the broader divine reality – unlike the other religions in which they are central to God or Allah's plan for humanity and are the chosen people of the one true God - the HQT teach that each ethnic group will have a god or gods and a sacred text with teachings that are unique to them and can remedy their ills. Therefore, according to HQT, it is imperative that Black people in the diaspora reconnect with the religious teachings of their ancestors in order for them to function optimally in any society. There is less of an emphasis on repatriation but on local gatherings in whatever part of the world the adherent resides.

These Afroasiatic Diasporic Religious communities have a deep tie between geographical, ethnic, and religious origins. Together, they find an original home in the Afroasiatic region and the Biblical

narrative that produces a sense of purpose, direction, and continuity that resists and negates the intrusion of colonial Christianity.

2.4.2 The Bible

The Afroasiatic Diasporic Religions seek to discover and provide a corrected translation of the biblical scriptures through ritual, historical re-examination, and cross-referencing with other texts such as the Apocrypha and using their lived experience as a hermeneutic.

The Rastafari believe that the Bible tells their story of the Israelites captured and enslaved because of their disobedience and idolatry. Turning to Scripture, the Rastafari interpret that their historical experiences directly correlate to the Biblical account of the Israelites. For example, the Rastafari likens white skin to the affliction of leprosy, as seen in the biblical accounts of Moses and Miriam, where they are struck with leprosy, and their skins, on separate occasions, become white (Murrell, 2012). In the first instance, Rastafari would use this reinterpretation to support the idea that the biblical characters were black (having dark skin), but further to this, some would perpetuate the idea that white skin is a curse or a punishment. In this way, they also turn other theories like the curse of Ham on its head so that whiteness becomes the curse rather than blackness. Many 'Rastafarians believe they were the very Israelites depicted in the Bible' (Murrell, 1998)

The Nation of Islam attempts to sever its links with Christianity but still maintains ties to the Bible or Hebrew Scriptures and acknowledges Jesus as a central religious figure, consistent with mainstream Islam (Curtis, 2009). Elijah Muhammed taught that the Bible, although not holy as the Qur'an is holy, contains truths and prophecies that speak to the 'so-called-negro' experience. He teaches that the Bible has been corrupted and misunderstood to 'blind the black man' (Muhammed, 1973, p.94). Partial severance is a common trend among these Afroasiatic Diasporic Religions; much of their biblical teaching deals suspiciously with the hidden truths that have been made obscure by the reinterpretation and tampering of the European Christian Church. In the case of the NOI, the correct interpretation had been divinely received by the late prophet and leader Elijah Muhammed. He says: 'The Bible means

good if you can rightly understand it. My interpretation of it is given to me from the Lord of the Worlds.'
(Elijah Muhammed, 1973, p. 88)

Muhammad also acknowledges the symbolic integrity of the New Testament insofar as it speaks specifically about Black people and their present state,

The New Testament and Holy Qur-an's teaching of a resurrection of the dead can't mean the people who have died physically and returned to the earth, but rather a mental resurrection of us, the black Nation, who are mentally dead to the knowledge of truth; the truth of self, God and the arch-enemy of God and his people. (Elijah Muhammed, 1973, p. 967)

This interpretation is consistent with the notion of 'woke' that I have presented in this study, a religious awakening that leads to action and redemption. In this way, the Bible act as a mobilising force, a catalyst towards rediscovering truth and strengthening the "Black nation" to realise its divine purpose on earth.

Israel United in Christ (IUIC), a (Black) Hebrew Israelite Camp, believes that the Bible is exclusively for Israel, of which they are descendants. An IUIC elder teaching a brief history of Israel says, 'The bible is only for us and written to us' (IUIC: A brief story of Israel, 2020) [YouTube]. He goes on to verify his assertion by quoting Psalm 147:19 – 20,

'He sheweth his word unto Jacob, his statutes and his judgments unto Israel. He hath not dealt so with any nation: and as for his judgments, they have not known them. Praise ye the LORD.'
(KJV)

It is common among many (Black) Hebrew Israelite groups to teach the exclusivity of the biblical texts; their adherence to the Mosaic Laws most notably marks their nation-building process. The Bible is the major asset in BHI communities; it is the sole reference in their teaching and public preaching. Of all the Afroasiatic religions in this study, the BHI's seem to take the Bible - the King James 1611 translation - most seriously and literally. Apocryphal books are also included in many (Black) Hebrew Israelite biblical canons, referring to them as historical and prophetic in function. The IUIC website describes Biblical teachings as a remedy for the sick,

Blacks and Hispanics must learn the truth that they are the Biblical 12 tribes of the Nation of Israel. Disobedience to God's laws has been the root of all our troubles. Blacks and Hispanics everywhere suffer the same racial, social, economic problems worldwide. Voting has not helped us, Christian churches have failed us. It's time for a change. In these last days, we must give the Bible's medicine to sick people, then and only then will things begin to change. (<https://israelunite.org/> 2020])

Part of the awakening process and returning to this Nation of Israel is to commit wholly to God's laws. There are various interpretations among the camps about what constitutes God's laws across the Old and New Testaments – particularly influenced by one's Christology; some BHI's do not believe Jesus to be God incarnate – however, the common aspiration is obedience. Obedience is what BHI's teach to be the key to emancipation from the judgement of God – slavery, subjugation and oppression over the last four hundred years.

In contrast to the BHI's approach to Scripture, the Holy Qubtic Church provide a version of the Bible they believe to be the original Ancient African biblical texts that predate Christianity and is upon which the present European Christianity has built a foundation. KaHun Anju Sa ra, High Priest of a community in Barbados, says,

You see, for too long, we as a people have been feeding off of the watered-down, bleached-out versions of what is being called the scriptures today. Whether it was the Alexandrian Greek orthodox scriptures, whether it was Constantinian Greco-Roman orthodox Scripture, whether it was the King James anglicised scriptures, we have been feeding off the watered-down bleached-out misinformed, misinterpreted version for so long that we as a people have emulated these scriptures by being out of place being watered down and even bleach ourselves from time to time – amun? (KaHun: Anju Sa Ra, 2016[YouTube])

The Original Books of the Bible are taught as a religious manual that meets the specific needs of African peoples,

As a teaching Church, we teach the words of The Most High with simplicity and understanding, using the proper translations from the original languages. This is done in the hopes that, once one has gained a full comprehension of what the scriptures are actually saying, the knowledge can then be applied to our everyday lives in a practical and effective manner.

<https://www.holyqubticchurch.com/>

Standing alone among the Afroasiatic Diasporic Religions referred to in this study, the HQC is the only religion that does not emphasise eschatological events as a primary focus; for them uncovering the most authentic translation of Scripture is to have a guide for everyday living as opposed to making sense of the Black experience and the return of the Messiah or God's judgement on Babylon.

Here I have demonstrated how the Afroasiatic Diasporic teachings converge on a matter of origin; geography and the Bible. Each religious community roots itself in the Afroasiatic region and the Hebrew Bible. It is on this basis that they consider themselves to be 'woke' and to sever ties with the whitewashed churches and European Christian institutions – the roots of God people have always been in the Afroasiatic region, and therefore the Bible is the history and sacred text of the ancestors of the enslaved Africans, the 'so-called negro', and, in the context of this study (to varying degrees), the Black-British.

2.5 The Branches (religious distinctions)

There are many distinctive teachings, rituals and perspectives between and within the Afroasiatic Diasporic Religions. The aim here is not to present them as a singular religious system but to demonstrate how they fit into the family tree model, with common roots and distinct branches. Throughout the rest of the study, I will refer to more religious Afroasiatic distinctions. However, I would like to highlight the distinct teachings about two central Christian themes, 'Jesus' and 'Redemption' and outline the various perspectives found within the Afroasiatic Diasporic Religions.

2.5.1 Jesus

Although there is no ADR consensus on his divinity, each of the Afroasiatic Diasporic Religions is reverent of the person of Christ/ the Messiah. Among the Hebrew Israelite camps, there are conflicting ideas on the divinity of Christ. For some, he was a major prophet, a Black man from the land of Israel; in this school, they reject the triune nature of God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit). Some consider Christ (Yahawashi) to be God incarnate, but what is generally accepted, however, is his black ethnic appearance. Many camps refer to The Book of Revelation 1:13-16 as evidence;

¹³ And in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle.

¹⁴ His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire;

¹⁵ And his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters.

¹⁶ And he had in his right hand seven stars: and out of his mouth went a sharp twoedged sword: and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength. (KJV)

Here many BHI preachers consider this a description of a black-skinned man with afro-textured hair, and they use this as central to their arguments against White images of Christ. In much of their literature, online content and learning resources, Yahawashi (Jesus) is portrayed as a powerful, muscular, dark-skinned warrior-priest, ultimately rejecting the traditional European's effeminised, meek and gentle appearance rendition of Jesus.

According to Barratt (1997), Barnett (2006), Murrell (1998) and others, Rastafari was specifically birthed from the recognition of Haile Selassie as Messiah, although the death of the Ethiopian emperor brought this fundamental belief into question and has caused division within the community. In 1930 Tafari Makonnen Woldemikael was crowned as emperor of Ethiopia, taking up the formal title of Haile Selassie I, meaning 'power of the Trinity'. Through mainstream media and the eyewitness accounts of travelling Black free men and women, Ethiopianist preachers in Jamaica were able to develop a new

theology, the divinity of Haile Selassie I. Ethiopianists who followed the teaching of Marcus Garvey, believed to be a prophet, were awaiting the Black King and Messiah. Although it has become historically difficult to prove the moment Garvey had proclaimed that a Black Messiah would come out of Ethiopia, it is largely accepted that local preachers, Garveyites and others were awaiting salvation to come to them from across the Atlantic. The new religious movement came to be known most famously as Rastafari, which refers to another name of Haile Selassie, 'Ras' meaning head and 'Tafari' being his birth name. The Rastafari, the followers of Haile Selassie, believe him to be God incarnate and a descendant of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. This idea is linked to biblical Scripture, where Christians and Rastafari believe the text to prophesy the coming of the Messiah from the line of King David, Solomon is David's son. The Rastafari Christ has genealogical and eschatological trajectories that, despite the disappointment of Selassie's death, continue to capture many followers' religious imagination. Howell says,

His Majesty Ras Tafari is the head over all man for he is the Supreme God. His body is the fullness of him that fillet all in all. Now my dear people, let this be our goal, forwards to the King of Kings must be the cry of our social hope... Forward to the King of Kings (Howell, 1933, p. 8)

In the same way that Rastafari have been able to reimagine themselves outside of the dictatorship of colonial powers, they have reimagined God as Black, and many maintain this link through the belief in the divinity of Selassie, the Black/African Messiah. Basing their agency on the biblical scriptures, Rastafari has developed agency for Black people, a non-subservient role in which God has chosen them to realise salvation through adherence to Haile Selassie, coming against twentieth-century Babylon and repatriation back to Ethiopia (Africa) (Sugirthajah, 2006).

The Holy Qubtic Church, on the other hand, teaches an esoteric Christ. According to Reverend Dr AJ Varmah, the Head of the Holy Qubtic church, Jesus was schooled in Africa whilst taking refuge in Egypt. There he learned African history and spirituality and bore the Ka-restian consciousness,

The Living Messiah says that he will come amongst the people, not as an individual but as a what? A consciousness, not a spirit. A personality a consciousness, I stand at the door of your heart, and I knock. That's what the Scripture says, right And what does it say the heart, the heart is the seat of what? Your emotions and your emotions is a direct reflection of your personality. How you respond to something... so this word Christ, somebody was bringing it in, and they knew when they were bringing it, there was already a Ka-rest... (Africans in the Bible, 2010 [YouTube])

The teaching dictates that becoming like Christ is to follow the example of Jesus and grow toward the Ka-rest consciousness from Tama-re (ancient Africa), and it is in this process, that salvation is found. The Holy Qubtic Church website says,

Thus, as your level of awareness grows, you will become more in tune with The Karast (Christ) Consciousness, working to bring salvation to all members of humanity, in varying degrees of genetic potency. So we welcome those of you, who are seeking true faith, to enter the gateway, which leads to atonement and salvation within The Holy Qubtic Church. (<https://www.holyqubticchurch.com/> [accessed December 15 2020])

The theology of atonement takes on a new meaning with this alternative approach; it relies less on the ministry and personhood and death of Christ but that these activities imply an outward expression of the Ka-rest consciousness to be found in those who pursue it. Although a revered religious figure, Jesus in Afroasiatic Diasporic Religion is not necessarily as central as how one might see in Protestant Christianity. This, in part, is due to alternative salvific perspectives: attaining salvation through the law or an elevated consciousness.

2.5.2 Redemption

Redemption is equally contested among Afroasiatic Diasporic Religions. Rastafari, The Nation of Islam and The Black Hebrew Israelites take a more dispensationalist approach to redemption as inextricably

tied to the biblical eschatological texts, anticipating a gathering of God's chosen people. Many (Black) Hebrew Israelite groups teach that the Bible prophesies a time of European dominance before the return of the Messiah and gathering of Israel to the promised land; standard scriptural references used to support these perspectives are,

²⁴And they shall fall by the edge of the sword and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled. (Luke 21:24 KJV)

and

³For all nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth are waxed rich through the abundance of her delicacies.

⁴'And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues. (Revelation 18:3-4 KJV)

Many in the Hebrew Israelite community believe that the four hundred year enslavement prophesied in Genesis is to be reread in terms of the enslavement of Black people, estimating the return of Christ to be 2019. It is contested that four hundred years of bondage in Egypt is incomplete, according to the years and dates provided in the Old Testament, and that Hebrews lived peacefully in the land for some of that time.

Hebrew Israelite leader, Ben Ammi, taught that the anti-God/anti-Christ individual in the book of Daniel 7:23 is spiritually and prophetically the European Nations.

²¹I beheld, and the same horn made war with the saints, and prevailed against them;

²²Until the Ancient of days came, and judgment was given to the saints of the Most High; and the time came that the saints possessed the kingdom.

²³ Thus he said, The fourth beast shall be the fourth kingdom upon earth, which shall be diverse from all kingdoms, and shall devour the whole earth, and shall tread it down, and break it in pieces.' (Daniel 7:23, KJV)

These dispensationalist methods of interpretation are not unlike those that can be found within conservative evangelicalism. Therefore, I will explore this later in the study.

The Nation of Islam's eschatology is primarily focused around the 'mother plane' or 'mothership' in the War of Armageddon, a small mechanical planet armed with bomber planes to destroy Allah's enemies, specifically unbelievers and the White "race". This idea is drawn from Ezekiel's vision of a wheel within a wheel:

¹⁵ Now as I beheld the living creatures, behold one wheel upon the earth by the living creatures, with his four faces.

¹⁶ The appearance of the wheels and their work was like unto the colour of a beryl: and they four had one likeness: and their appearance and work was as it were a wheel in the middle of a wheel.

¹⁷ When they went, they went upon their four sides: and they turned not when they went.

¹⁸ As for their rings, they were so high that they were dreadful; and their rings were full of eyes round about them four.

¹⁹ And when the living creatures went, the wheels went by them: and when the living creatures were lifted up from the earth, the wheels were lifted up.

²⁰ Whithersoever the spirit was to go, they went, thither was their spirit to go; and the wheels were lifted up over against them: for the spirit of the living creature was in the wheels.

²¹ When those went, these went; and when those stood, these stood; and when those were lifted up from the earth, the wheels were lifted up over against them: for the spirit of the living creature was in the wheels. (Ezekiel 1:15-21, KJV)

Elijah Mohammed and Malcolm X presented their correction of the Bible texts within the context of America's social tensions, wars, and politics about racial injustice. Whilst the Nation of Islam would claim the method of truth to be revelatory, Wayne Taylor in *Pre Millennium Tension: Malcolm X and Nation of Islam eschatology* brings this revelation into the broader field of Black eschatology and compares the NOI theology with that of the Black Ethiopianist Christian churches. He posits that Elijah Muhammad builds upon the connection between the experience of the Hebrews in Egypt and the Enslavement of Africans in America by trying to satisfy the failure to reach the promised land past physical emancipation (Taylor, 2005). The War of Armageddon and the Promise Land narrative become subject to the end of the world rather than slavery. The Nation of Islam extends the story beyond slavery and into a cataclysmic physical judgment on America. Taylor suggests that the imagery of the mothership represents Elijah Muhammad's mechanical universe in that the revelation/interpretation surfaced during the era of the 'space race' between America and Russia. (Taylor, 2005, p.57) He says, 'they racialised their eschatology by conflating the white race with biblical devils' (Taylor, 2005, p. 62), supported by the racialisation of God, who is Black. Despite Taylor's constructive interpretation, the plain reading of the teaching speaks of a severe and personal judgement against America.

Before the revival of these formalised ideas from Elijah Mohammed, Wallace Muhammed, his son, reinterpreted the NOI's eschatology which was later rejected for the original vision. Wallace Muhammed's eschatological claims were similar to that of St. Augustine's Millennialism; this interpretation considers the book of revelation as an allegory to which the millennium begins with the birth of Christ and is fulfilled through the church. In this same sense, the Muslim community became the representation of the Black Millennium (Lee, 1996), upon which Wallace Muhammed expounded on the meaning of community instead of the destruction of White people.

In a similar vein to the interpretation of Elijah Mohammed, Rastafari interprets the biblical terminology of Babylon to mean that white supremacy would be consumed and overthrown upon the final return of the Messiah, the redemption, and the rest of the chosen people. The colonial, imperial European empire led by the government and supported by the pope have become the signifiers of Babylon, the wicked and oppressive power mentioned in various places throughout the Bible. Kebede et al. in *Social Movement Endurance: Collective identity and Rastafari* (2000) suggest that cognitive liberation and movement/culture boundaries are critical methodologies found within the development of Rastafari. In this work, the scholars describe cognitive liberation to have two elements firstly, 'system attributions' whereby Rastafari blame the governing systems for their oppression, poverty and lack of opportunity and secondly, 'political efficacy' whereby they have created a means of doing politics that works outside the parameters of mainstream political activities such as voting. Renaming the West as Babylon is evidence of this thinking, 'Babylon constitutes a symbolic delegitimation of those Western historical values and institutions that have exercised control over the masses of the African diaspora' (Edmonds, 1998, in Kebede et al., 2000, p.24) Kebede et al. further suggest that movement and cultural boundaries within Rastafari are signified by wearing dreadlocks and symbolic colours in their clothing (red, green, gold and black). In one way, these choices create an aesthetic identity, and in another way, they signify their politics, dreadlocks being statements against colonial aesthetic conventions and, for some, Rastafari a homage to a scriptural guidance system that is above the law and conventions of the 'white man'.

Some scholars may deem Rastafari escapist and apathetic, but Kebede et al. argue that Rastafari's action-politics is directed with their purpose as free Black men who oppose Babylon and will repatriate Ethiopia. This same notion can be appropriately applied across the Afroasiatic Diasporic Religions.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter has defined two key terms: 'Afroasiatic', a geographic region where Black religions find their religious and ethnic roots. I have identified where their beliefs converge and diverge here, allowing me to apply the linguistic family tree model to the Afroasiatic diasporic religious paradigm. The second term, 'Woke,' from the Afroasiatic diasporic religious perspective, means the awakening of Black individuals and communities to social and political realities, true genealogical origins and a true original religion undergirded by a bible-based religious rationale. These two significant concepts drive this study. I want to understand how Afroasiatic Diasporic Religions and their perceptions of woke influence Black-British Christians on the fringes of the Black-British church. For this purpose, I refer to Rastafari, The Nation of Islam, the (Black) Hebrew Israelites and the Holy Qubtic Church as Afroasiatic Diasporic Religions, which I consider current influential religious movements in twenty-first-century Black Britain.

Following these definitions, I have briefly described the core beliefs that demonstrate their Afroasiatic nature and provide the necessary foundation for this research. By focusing on 'geography', 'the Bible', 'Jesus' and 'redemption', I refer to teachings that are influential and most challenging to mainstream Christian teachings. This descriptive exercise gives voice to the ADR teachings in their 'raw form' to illuminate the ideas that have captured the theological imagination of participants. Although not an exhaustive comparative study, which perhaps would be a future research project, I hope to clarify the religious distinctions whilst highlighting the de-colonising project woven throughout these Bible-based Afroasiatic Diasporic Religions. The following chapter will discuss various interpretive approaches scholars have taken to understand the Afroasiatic diasporic religious phenomenon.

In many ways, the quest for identity is a joint enterprise between the movements; there is heavy overlapping in developing ideas. Existing texts on this topic seem to swing seamlessly between the distinct religious movement and the overarching theme/concept of the Black Hebrew Israelite(ism). Merrill Singer (2000) is an example of one who defines this identification method as symbolic identification formation, where diasporic Afroasiatic religious adherents identify with the historic Hebrew narrative of enslavement, emancipation, and redemption. Jacob S. Dorman suggests that

African Black Israelite religions are a *Bricolage*, fusing various religio-cultural substances that form a new religion (Dorman, 2013).

The next chapter will survey a cross-section of literature that considers the function, nature, and method of understanding Black religions (what I have termed Afroasiatic Diasporic Religion). The complex ethnoreligious claims often considered racialised, or contextualised theological processes make a rich ground for ethnographic research. Without pursuing an authenticating and legitimising process but considering the epistemological components and implications of ADR, I seek to demonstrate how these belief systems have been underestimated in their scope for influence and contribution to the decolonisation or de-colonisation process.

"...and I think one of the things that umm traditional Christianity has done is made us suspicious and mistrustful of our own heritage, so that is the 'other'. This is the established truth, and everything else is to be other, to be wary of whether that's African spirituality, African traditions, or ummm so we're wary of it, so there's no need to have fear, its worthy of the investigation umm you know it's not something your gonna suddenly find yourself stepping into a room full of demons and all sorts!"

(Pastor CAW, The Black Face of the Early Church, 2018)

3. Literature Review

3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I defined my use of 'Afroasiatic' and its perspective on 'woke' – an awareness and awakening to the truth – the true self, the true religion that these religious teachings have been plagiarised, distorted and whitewashed, concealing the truths of their Afroasiatic origin. I summarised points of convergence (geography, the Bible) and divergence (Jesus and redemption) in Afroasiatic diasporic religious teachings to demonstrate how they can be understood as a family tree inspired by the use of the family tree in the field of linguistics.

This chapter is a literature survey in which I consider a cross-section of existing literature that explores the presence, nature and method for understanding Afroasiatic Diasporic Religions. I will identify the gaps in the methodological and interpretive process the existing literature has not satisfied. I begin by examining research that has been conducted in North America in which Afroasiatic religions have an established presence. With a singular exception, I have chosen to focus on literature that has been published in the last ten years; this is not to negate previous works as they will feature throughout the study but to interrogate approaches to the most recent resurgence of Afroasiatic religions and the methods of interrogation that have become more popular in twenty-first-century sociological/theological research.

The second main section considers key texts produced in Britain, particularly engaging the perspectives of trailblazers Robert Beckford, Anthony Reddie and Richard Reddie. These scholars have drawn upon

another major player into the discussion – the evangelical movement, which becomes integral to this study, making sense of how its presence and influence help translate an Afroasiatic diasporic religious hermeneutic. This literature survey will allow me to define the gaps that this thesis will address.

3.2 African American Black religion

3.2.1 Functional Religion

In 1944 Arthur Huff Fauset's influential study *Black Gods of the Metropolis (1944) (2002)* sets out to observe some of the 'practices prevailing among several representative groups of cult worshippers' (Fauset, 1944) to generate a deep and meaningful understanding of how they have been developing their religious concepts as Black religions in America. By visiting the homes and places of worship and conducting interviews, Fauset made observations and attempted to outline and describe the distinct religious features of various Black religious cults: Mt. Sinai Holy Church of America, United House of Prayer for all people, Church of God (Black Jews), Moorish Science Temple of America, and the Father Divine Peace Mission Movement. Ultimately Fauset sought to predict the trajectory of Black religious life in America as it pertained to the social and political needs of the church. The work begins by addressing the controversial intellectual discussion about the "Negro" religious disposition, which asks the question, 'Does contemporary religious practice among Negroes in the United states disclose definite African survivals?' Fauset examines the data for indications of functional expression as against "pure" African survivals, destined to transform specific social needs of the American Negro folk (Fauset, 1944) and concludes that there is little evidence to suggest such an innate *bent*. Fauset centres his research field on the northern metropolitan cities - "Negro city within a city" (Fauset, 1944, Chapter 1)

Fauset suggests that the main attraction to these cults has been 'the desire to get closer to some supernatural power, be it God, the Holy Spirit, or Allah... relief from physical or mental illness, race consciousness or nationalism [and] the compelling personality of the leader' (Fauset, 1944, Chapter VIII)

Many of Fauset's participants were former members of mainstream Christian congregations; Fauset concludes that the attractions to cults need not be considered exclusive to Black cults; orthodox-evangelical churches do not explicitly state their appeals in such terms as these, but it can be argued that there is overlap in their points of appeal. (Fauset, 1944). Fauset also suggests that the appeal to cult life is a response to the movement of Black people from the south, where legal segregation was still at play, to the north, where huge psychological adjustments to desegregated society would have made the transition difficult and unsettling. The cults would have provided the religious framework with which to manage the transition;

Certain religious cults in northern urban communities assist the transplanted southern worshipper, accustomed to the fixed racial mores and caste requirements of the south, to adjust his psychological and emotional reactions to conditions in the North, where all life and living are more fluid and intermingling of the races is inevitable. (Fauset, 1944, Chapter VIII)

Fauset indicates that joining the cult was also seen as an elevation or graduation to something higher than the mainstream church. In these cases, it was not necessarily a rejection of the church but that it only operated at an entry-level and that for many of the participants, they felt that the cults assured that through its religious demands, they would be truly saved. This notion is also supported by the esoteric nature of these cults that distinguished them from one another and mainstream Black church denominations. Fauset acknowledges but to no extreme extent that it is possible to make tangible religious links between African traditional religions and survivalist religious functions found in both mainstream Black Christian communities and the Black cults.

Negros are attracted to the cults for the obvious reason that with few normal outlets of expression for Negroes in America due to the prevailing custom of racial dichotomy the cults offer on the one hand the boon of religion with all its attendant promise of heaven either here or above or both; and on the other hand, they provide for certain Negroes with imagination and other dynamic qualities, in an atmosphere free from embarrassment or apology, a place where they may experiment in activities such as business, politics, social reform, and social expression... (Fauset, 1944, Chapter XI)

Fauset asserts that the cults who have the 'most rigid adherence to the bible' (Fauset, 1944, Chapter XI) also have the least engagement in social, economic and political programs, whereas the cults who set their own rules or take the Bible less seriously are most engaged in the programmes of community betterment. Fauset suggests that the Black Church function is 'likely to witness a transformation from its purely religious function to functions which will accommodate the urgent social needs of the Negro masses under modern stresses of politics and economics.' (Fauset, 1944, Chapter XI)

With the benefit of doing my research nearly a century after it was written, it can be noted that Fauset was correct to an extent; the Black church has had significant moments of transformation where its religious function was extended to significant effect to the betterment of Black lives socially, politically and economically. However, on the topic of Black cults, it can be said that they continue to operate on the fringes of Black religious (Christian) society. Thus, these movements are still 'suggestive evidence of the continuing dynamic character of the American [and British] Negro's religious experience in a milieu which has made the unique unfolding of that experience compulsory and inevitable.' (Fauset, 1944, Chapter XI)

Fauset's ethnographic work discusses twentieth-century Black religion's social and religious function in North American urban contexts. Fauset demonstrates the interconnectedness of Black religion, experience and social progress among the religious communities and predicts a trajectory that sees the Black church as more socially and politically engaged and active, distributing its function in society between this activism and its religious nature. My work seeks to build upon this work, applying a similar fieldwork method with a more intentional and focused research design that reflects the nuance of the twenty-first century British urban context.

Carol White's interdisciplinary approach, in *Back Lives and Sacred Humanity: Toward an African American Religious Naturalism* (2014), reduces African America's religiosity to a set of functions that 'distinguish this humanistic bent as one of the highest aspirations of African American character, namely, its claim on life.' (White, 2014, Chapter 1) Here, she explores through radical humanism or humanism with 'religious sensibilities' (White, 2014, Chapter 2) new meanings of 'human'.

White's method is valid in the sense that Afroasiatic religions search for answers that affirm their humanity; however, as per its nature, humanism centres on the human, whereas much of Black religion, although they centre themselves in the religious narrative, maintain subjectivity to the will, designs and desires of the 'most high', 'supreme being' or God. So, whilst conceptually intriguing and progressive, it deviates drastically from the intentions of the religious groups themselves. It re-writes their legacy and nullifies their influential core contribution to the struggle. White refers to very broad and general conceptual frameworks such as functionalism;

Through the lens of functionalism, I see the religious pattern as affirming blacks' humanity and advocating a fuller, richer life for African Americans as part of an ongoing existential exercise undertaken by humans in every generation. (White, 2014, Chapter 1)

The religious naturalism that Carol Wayne White envisages (which ultimately roots religion and spirituality in the natural world rather than a supernatural world) examines the 'philosophical and humanistic assumptions embedded in contemporary African American religiosity' (White, 2014, preface); moving away from a religious premise, White brings Black religion into the scientific domain. She is charting non-traditional paths that, as a result, and with great intention, seem to move the Black religious framework beyond fundamentalist epistemologies.

As an alternative to theistic models of African American religiosity and spirituality, this study is an unabashed celebration of religious humanism. I am hoping that its perspectives and main argument will inspire a generation of scientifically oriented African Americans in search of a newer, conceptually compelling views of religiosity that address a classic, perennial religious question: what does it mean to be fully human and fully alive? (White, 2014, Preface)

Much in line with progressive scholarship, White is keen to reject what is considered modernism; fixed and absolute truths, for a view that shifts and changes as human thinking changes:

This type of religious valuing, then, becomes one dimension of cultural transformation that evolves as our thinking evolves. More importantly, with this orientation, we are led away from a modernist view that demands an "all or nothing" epistemological framework and toward one

that takes into account our complex historicity and our radical relatedness as sacred humans, and all the possible nuances associated with that phrase. (White, 2014, Chapter 6)

In this sense, God, Yah, Jah or Allah has no real religious significant contribution to one's understanding of sacred humanity and what it means to be human. Instead, White draws upon the intellectual works of iconic thinkers Anna Julia Copper, W.E.B Du Bois and James Baldwin to build her concept. By taking their lead in resisting the exclusive, discriminatory and universal approach to defining humanity, White aims to produce a framework that illuminates the drive and capacity of Black individuals and communities to redefine what it means to be human, using religious imagery to attain dignity and freedom from the epistemological constraints of enlightenment and modernism. This work speaks to the possible futures of Black religions, driving a distance between Black people and millennia of religious narrative. My work resists such a radical approach; this study gives preference to how the Afroasiatic diasporic religious teachings look backwards into their ethnoreligious history to find meaning, affirmation, and direction. White's work represents a trending humanistic 'bent'; however, it does not represent the Afroasiatic diasporic religious modes of thinking present in the twenty-first century, which is imperative for understanding the de-churched phenomenon.

3.2.2 Diasporic Religion

Edward E. Curtis, in *The Call of Bilal: Islam in the African Diaspora (2014)*, brings Islam and slavery into conversation and anchors his focus on the experience of African Muslims or Muslims of African descent. Curtis asserts that the story of Bilal, an African who was enslaved and then elevated to the role of prayer-caller at the genesis of Islam with the Prophet Mohammed, is a symbol of belonging and heritage for African Muslims around the world who continue to experience discrimination based on ethnicity and skin colour. Curtis' work explores the impact of travel and dispersion and diasporic communities rather than religious interpretation and metaphysical perceptions of being diasporic – the Africana Muslim diaspora.

An integral part of his work is to understand how practices of Islam are influenced by the experience and meaning of diaspora (Curtis, 2014). It brings to light both explicit and implicit debates about the

relationship between identification with an African diasporic identity and Islamic practice. It shows that even among Black Muslims who explicitly claim an African Islamic ancestry or origin, some will name certain Islamic traditions as having African influences, while others will not attribute any African influences to their Islamic practice. (Curtis, 2014)

Curtis highlights how some African Muslims establish a religious genealogical connection and claim to Islam through the African Saint Bilal – an African who was close to the Prophet Mohammed. Curtis discusses how the Nation of Islam absorbed Bilal into their identity formation process under WD Mohammed's leadership, broadening and bringing more dimension to how African- American Muslims negotiated diasporic Muslim identity.

In this case... the linking of African American Muslim ethnic and religious identity to a close companion of the Prophet Mohammed signalled a shift in Muslims' notions of "thick blackness" – that is the black identities that Muslims themselves constructed. Rather than imagining a primordial and mythological origin for black/Muslims as the "original man" as Elijah Mohammed had done, celebrating Bilal was a way to link black people to the earthly history of the religion of Islam while also carving out a particular ethnic identity inside that larger story. It was a theme that would continue to echo across the black Atlantic over three decades later among some British- and Caribbean-born Muslims in the United Kingdom. (Curtis, 2014, Chapter 6)

Despite the innovation of WD Mohammed, the Revelation of Elijah Muhammad still holds a firm place in Nation of Islam cosmology, so Curtis describes how their Muslim identity goes beyond Africa and sixty-six trillion years into the past. Influenced by the teachings of Elijah Muhammad that describe the original man as rulers of the universe, Curtis outlines how the NOI community are committed to a personal reform from slavish behaviours. He says,

In short, being a real Muslim meant exhibiting those behaviours so often associated in the United States and black America with middle-class respectability and being "civilised". For Members of the Nations of Islam, these protestant-like habits did not signify a capitulation to

the norms and ideas of American Protestantism but instead became evidence of a properly Islamized and mentally resurrected black person. (Curtis, 2014, Chapter 6)

This text embodies a deep sense of return for all Muslims, whether literal or religious. Curtis describes how Caribbean migrants and Black-British Muslims, both born into Muslim families or those converted from Christianity as teens and adults, struggled with the socialising forces in Britain. The NOI present the resistance and critique of European/British imperial and colonial legacies in their religious thought and practice and defines a distinct Muslim practice that would reflect both a Black identity and an Islamic conviction. Black diasporic Muslims in Britain are the minority among Somalis, Arabs and those from south-east Asia, all of whom would have distinct ethnoreligious qualities. The Nation of Islam and their consideration of Bilal then works uniquely as a socialising force for Black-British Muslims.

As an ethnic symbol, Bilal often also has an important political meaning. Whether among black North Africans, African descended South Asians, Afro-Europeans, or African Americans, the figure of Bilal has become a symbol in the struggle for self-determination and political autonomy. (Curtis, 2014, Conclusion)

Curtis points toward a more complex view of Islam beyond simple groupings; African Muslims and Muslims in the African diaspora specifically illuminate a diversity marked by ethnicity, movements and migration, leadership, experiences, and hermeneutics. This approach is helpful because it details the effects that movement has on religious features within the faith; for this study, I want to take it further and consider this movement, travel and migration in light of Afroasiatic interpretation of the sacred texts.

Judith Weisenfeld in *A New World- A-Coming: Black Religion and Racial Identity during the Great Migration*. (2017) examined how some African-Americans functioned within the Western construct of "race" by re-identifying themselves formally during their migration to the northern states of America. Referring to the 'Moorish Americans' or 'Ethiopian Hebrews' Weisenfeld demonstrates a 'religio-racial identity' and says,

I use the term "religio-racial identity" to capture the commitment of members of these groups to understanding individual and collective identity as constituted in the conjunction of religion and race, and I refer to groups organised around this form of understanding of self and people as religio-racial movements. (Weisenfeld, 2017, Introduction)

This study proposes that "race" is an unfortunate term that perpetuates the falsities of "race" as a reality and suggests that ethnicity is perhaps a more appropriate term that, even in this work, conveys more of what the Ethiopian-Hebrews were trying to achieve.⁵ However, Weisenfeld's use of the term demonstrates how some African Americans considered their identity equally religious and racial. This labelling does not demonstrate an original perspective on identity, and some could argue that it mirrors that very thing Black progressivism resists in colonial Christianity. I assert here that Weisenfeld has demonstrated and confirmed how religion is essential for many Black people in maintaining a sense of self beyond being Christianised. In this way, religion, particularly Afro-Hebraic religion, functions as an institution, a carrier of traditions, ideas, and truths:

Even as they promoted different configurations of an intertwined religious and racial sense of individual self and shared history, the group held in common a conviction that only through embrace of a true and divinely ordained identity could people of African descent achieve their collective salvation. (Weisenfeld, 2017, Introduction)

Weisenfeld also considers the notion of ethnoreligious *recovery*:

In contrast to approaches that characterise such claims as fanciful or misguided attempts to escape from a "real" racial identity, this book explores religious means by which people of African descent in the early twentieth-century United States entered into the process of racial construction and produced their own religio-racial meaning.... By restoring what they believed was a true collective identity. (Weisenfeld, 2017, Introduction)

⁵ There is a belief present among ADR believers that Black people and white people are distinct races in the biological sense, particularly with The Nation of Islam and among some Rastafari houses, so I do not suggest that use of the term "race" is redundant but should not be conflated with the idea of ethnic difference.

This approach offers an important distinction for the broader study of Black religion, which is often restricted to the contextualisation of Black religious interpretations that function as coping mechanisms or reject its legitimacy as authentically religious. Weisenfeld, perhaps unnecessarily, distances her work from religious categorisation but instead considers how they illuminate the challenges religious "race making" presents:

Rather than position the groups under consideration in this volume in relation to a presumed normative centre by labelling them "cults" or "sects" is to isolate them from broader cultural and religious influences as new religions, I examine them as windows into religious challenges to conventional racial categories and explore what participation in the movements meant for members. (Weisenfeld, 2017, Introduction)

Weisenfeld designates three significant sections for this work, the first looks at the narrative taught by Black religious leaders that lay the foundation of articulating knowledge of self and racial-religious identity formation. Weisenfeld demonstrates how Ethiopian Hebrew religions' 'path the self-knowledge and understanding of peoplehood that articulated a literal connection to a sacred geography.' (Weisenfeld, 2017) Weisenfeld unpacks the cosmological teachings that would locate Black religious individuals, the Negro, the White man and the rest of the world, be it divine, supreme, raceless or determined by their dis/connection to past experiences. This cosmology would also outline the role of the leadership, prophets, men, gods and messiahs.

The second section examines how these Black religions distinguished and maintained the 'new religio-racial selves.' Performative actions such as dress, food choices, change of names and rituals within their new theological frameworks – returning or being 'restored to their true, original nature.' (Weisenfeld, 2017, Part II). The final significant section details how these groups defined and built their communities, families, location for living, and relationships outside of their communities.

The structure of the study outlines personal and communal transformation that begins with the experience of being Black in twentieth-century America, which is influenced by bible-based religious teaching. Interestingly, many African American migrants sought to officially record this transformation

on paper by changing of name and ethnicity whilst physically journeying to new territories in the twentieth century. Considering Weisenfeld's image of 'windows,' my own ethnographic work can build upon this image and, through direct engagement with participants, better define and commit to the extent to which these Black religions are religious.

Michael T. Miller in *The African Hebrew Israelites of Jerusalem and Ben Ammi's Theology of Marginalization and Reorientation* (2020) touches on a contention that I will explore further in the next chapter. The notion of marginalisation and identity as the 'other', 'poor', 'oppressed', he says,

The marginalised Black Americans, the oppressed lower strata of American society, were the focal point of Ben Ammi's thoughts and the major actors in his narrative. The African American Israelites were always the centre of the narrative – this had been concealed and distorted by the satanic agenda of the Euro-gentiles, but since the Israelites began their movement back to righteousness, the world has adjusted around them. This eschatological reordering, brought about by the revealing of divine truth, has demonstrated where the centre and margins actually lay all along: the AHI were the centrepiece. (Miller, 2020, p. 14)

Miller highlights a common characteristic among these four movements, they see themselves as central to the biblical narrative, which translates as central to contemporary society. Despite being considered marginalised and oppressed, their eschatological viewpoints on future glory and redemption reveal their true identity as chosen people by God. Miller makes an interesting observation on new Black religious movements' relationship with Liberation theology:

The poor are the locus of Gutierrez's theology but only to the extent that they are seen from the outside, and they are liberated from their poverty in order to incorporate them into the mainstream of privilege; to get what the others already have. In fact, one could argue that liberation theology fetishises poverty in order to release the poor from it; once liberated, they are of no further interest. In these respects, it is radically different from Ben Ammi's theology which is faithful to the biblical narrative of a single chosen people around whom the world should and will orient themselves. (Miller, 2020, p. 15)

Black Liberation theologies seek to centralise the Black lived experience as a theological resource through which all people can see God's preference for the poor and oppressed and understand salvation through the self-determination of Black people themselves. This is unlike the centralising of the New Black Religious Movements (or ADRs), which centralise Black people in a way that does not become redundant if Black people are no longer oppressed, marginalised and whose legacy is not limited to resistance and self-determination. Miller argues, quoting James Cone, the father of Black Liberation Theology, "blackness signifies oppression and liberation in any society' (Cone, 1997) that Black liberation theology is not exclusive but situational; hence 'there is no special role for African-Americans' in the ways that can be outlined by Ben Ammi in particular and these other new religious movements in general (Miller, 2020). Miller argues that Ben Ammi's theology did not require the intervention of social reforms because his 'theodicy of deserved punishment' also outlines and foretells the African American's return to righteousness. (Miller, 2020). This interpretation can again be extended to the other movements whose eschatology is framed by literalist-prophetic scripture readings, not by intellectuals and activists who eschewed social reform. Interestingly, these movements are a rich resource for those seeking and shaping social reform, and I aim to discover in this study how the legacy and presence of ADRs are holding an apocalyptic, dispensationalist hermeneutic in tension with the notion of community or social reform.

3.2.3 Identity Formation

Andre E. Key presents in *Towards a Typology of Black Hebrew Religions Through and Practice* (2014) a descriptive typology of Black Hebrew religious thought and practice as understood by its adherents (Key, 2014, p.31). Key argues that Black Judaism should be situated within the broader structures of Black religion, and analysis should avoid the legitimacy and authenticity focused research, suggesting that 'Black Judaism is a religious tradition rather than a social movement' (Key, 2014, p. 37)

He suggests that Black religion more broadly has a functional nature that is responsive to Black lived realities but keeps it within the religious paradigm,

The central tenet of black religion is that racial oppression can be combatted on divine terms with theologically based anthropologies. Black religion operates not as a single religious tradition but rather as a *plurifait*, a collection of religious traditions undergirded by the concern with protecting, defending, and advocating for the full humanity and spirituality of African people. (Key, 2014, p. 37)

Key makes the religious and the socio-political function inseparable and holds them in equal tension but alludes to a sense of continuity and community through the need to affirm the humanity of Black peoples religiously. Here he considers (Black) Hebrew Israelites in more broad terms, not restricted to the 'camps'; he instead defines them under the umbrella of Black religion.

I define Black Judaism as a denomination of the African American spiritual orientation known as Black religion. It is primarily a Bible-based religious tradition that is informed by a belief in redemptive ethnic suffering and Black Messianism, and it that asserts that individuals of African descent in the Western hemisphere are the "true Jews," a claim that rests on a belief that African Americans are the descendants of West African exilic Hebrew Communities. (Key, 2014, p. 39)

This definition prompts conversations about identifying terms 'Black', 'African-American' and 'Black-British'. Chapter 7 will discuss the concerns of ontological blackness and its divergence from ethnocentric values that 'Black Religion' holds in tension. Charles H. Long, in *Structural similarities and dissimilarities in Black and African Theologies*, says, 'blackness refers to a concrete historical and social reality that has produced an African-American religious world view' (Long, 1975, p.21). Key's study highlights the counterclaims found within ADRs, such as Black Hebrews and Jews. They emphasise a rediscovery and return to ancient ancestral religion rather than a productive or generative process. Key posits the overlap between different Black religious movements/denominations and the theological diversity found with the Black Hebrew religion,

Torah-only sects are equally opposed to the Black church as a source for theological content.

The Black Church is rejected as the religion of slavery and for its acceptance of Jesus as the

messiah and/or the son of God. Torah-only sects maintain a strict monotheism that may be attributed to the cultural and theological influence of Black Islam and perhaps Sunni Islam within the African-American community. This demonstrates the necessity in view of Black Hebrew Torah observance as a part of a larger plurifaith in which the boundaries between Black Judaism and Black Islam converge culturally and theologically. (Key, 2014, pp. 58-59)

Key suggests that what makes conceptualising these methods difficult is the existing privilege that Western forms of the Christian tradition have benefited from. In other words, for the most part, the world has to experience Christianity through the gaze and on the foundations of Eurocentric epistemologies, which in turn may influence our response to alternative grassroots, Afro/Black-centric re-readings of scripture and tradition, specifically those birthed through personal and then communal revelation. Walter Isaac in *Locating Afro-Jewish Studies* says,

A Black Jewish Studies for the next generation must first recognise Black Jews as a historical reality. For Israelites who trace their diasporic consciousness through Africa as opposed to Europe, an understanding of the history of African and African diaspora Judaism remains essential.' (Isaac, 2007, p. 532)

My work wants to take the Afroasiatic diasporic religious presence further, beyond a coping mechanism or community affirmation process. I hope to interrogate this sense of 'truth' and 'reality' seeking, a final and absolute notion of truth that I believe can be demonstrated in their approach to study and teaching.

Andrea C. Abrams in *God and Blackness* (2014) focuses on the First Afrikan Presbyterian Church in Atlanta, an American Afrocentric Christian church that essentially combines or fuses Afrocentric notions of blackness with the protestant, more specifically presbyterian Christian religious traditions. At the heart of their teachings is Christ as an African Messiah. The aesthetic outworkings fashion themselves in a combination of traditional gospel hymns, traditional Afrikan dances, terminology from various African languages, and a cross-section of classes. Abrams here focuses on the identity formation of the middle-class members of the congregation, particularly on how their idea of blackness may be somewhat different to those who are less affluent. She frames her analysis conceptually by combining

Du Bois' double consciousness, cultural and ontological blackness, Black and womanist theologies on account of gender politics and Afrocentricity. Abrams says,

'On the one hand, discourses of racial essentialism contribute to a powerful sense of shared identity; on the other hand, heterogeneous constructions of blackness simultaneously contribute to a sense of ambivalence. A core contention of this book is that this tension between essentialism and heterogeneity is not a problem to be solved; rather, it is a fundamental and necessary part of racial identity.' (Abrams, 2014, Introduction)

Abrams identifies that Black identity formation is a space of contradictions and, within this tension, describes the ways in which middle-class members of the church 'determine what authentic blackness is and how it should be practised, how biblical narratives are employed to prove the value and essential nature of blackness, and how middle-class status and womanist theology promote counternarratives of heterogeneity.' (Abrams, 2014, Introduction) By examining how members of the church employ Afrocentricity in their behaviour, changing names, appearance, and the relationships they have to the continent of Africa, Abrams finds that the members had a more true sense of self than the false identity that had been operating pre-Afrocentric conversion. She further demonstrates how the teaching of the Bible contributes to the Afrocentric formation by 'the reading of the Bible as an African text' (Abrams, 2014, Chapter 3). The study describes this Afrocentric re-reading as a critical factor of appeal to those looking for something more than what they experience in mainstream Christianity. This research uses observations and interviews to generate data material that she refers to throughout the text to support and demonstrate the complex identity formation within this unique Afrocentric Christian setting. The conceptual framework that she has innovated allows her to comprehend the participant's contributions as intersectional.

Abrams makes an interesting analysis of the 'anxiety and guilt' (Abrams, 2014) associated with being Black and middle class. She says,

I contend that members of the First Afrikan Church have added another tool to their Black middle-class tool kit – Afrocentrism. I suggest that, for many of the congregants, belonging to

an Afrocentric church is, to some degree, an attempt to assuage the guilt and anxiety by, at times, emphasising Black identity over middle-class status. However, the emphasis is not just on any Black identity but on an authentic Black *African* identity that can hold its own when compared to the Black cultural capital associated with poorer African Americans. (Abrams, 2014, Chapter 4)

This quote demonstrates the contradictory notions of blackness found among the congregation, which is embedded into the framework that Abrams has designed here. Ultimately the most authentic blackness is situated among the poor, and when understood through the lens of the class, the conclusion is that blackness is most found at sites of poverty, which is an ontological perspective, not a cultural or ethnic stance. Afrocentric scholarship often focuses on the greatness of ancient African kingdoms, cultures, and intellectual prowess. Although one could consider that inconsistent notion of blackness, Abrams emphasises the enhanced possibility of assimilation to Euro-American culture due to the participants' education and work environments. This, according to Abrams, is appealing because First African provides the opportunity to 'perform blackness' (Abrams, 2014) - Black or African inspired attitudes, values and 'cultural ways' (Abrams, 2014). Acknowledging the problem of locating 'blackness' most strongly with poor people, who would then be assumed to all think and live the same, Abrams suggests Afrocentricity provides a sense of blackness that is not class-based but is centred on culture.

Abrams concludes that middle-class African Americans are drawn to this Afrocentric congregation because it celebrates their ethnic/racial identity in ways that their European work and church environments celebrate 'neither their phenotype nor ethnicity' (Abrams, 2014). In this environment, not only do congregants celebrate and embrace blackness through an Afrocentric framework, this Afrocentric framework supports community work and the use of resources from within the affluent community to aid improvement in the local poorer Black communities, Abrams says,

Marginalized within the larger community, the Afrocentric community provides a space in which there are shared notions of what it means to be a good Christian, a loyal member of the nation, and a spouse with appropriate family values based on shared notions of blackness and Africanness rather than whiteness and Europeanness. (Abrams, 2014, Conclusion)

Abrams has highlighted some important themes for my study. She confirms the appeal to Black religious peoples of Black culture and Afroasiatic readings of the biblical text, and she interrogates the intersection, class, “race”, gender, and implications of this Afrocentric Christian church space. However, this approach is still distinct from my own in that Abrams's congregation celebrates African histories and cultures and marries them with their Christology and ritual meeting space. However, Afroasiatic Diasporic Religions define themselves as distinct from Christianity. It is not the celebration and honouring ancient biblical cultures that are to be obtained but the uncovering of a true religious identity that is not Christian.

Bruce D. Haynes also seeks to make sense of this distinction in *The Soul of Judaism: Jews of African Descent in America* (2018). Haynes anchors his work in the intention to rebut authoritative literature on the nature of Black Jewish identity in America: *The Black Jews of Harlem: Negro Nationalism and the Dilemmas of Negro Leadership* (1947), by Howard Brotz, *Black Jews in America: A documentary with commentary* (1978) by Graenum Berger and *Black Judaism: Story of an American Movement* (2002) by James Landing. He suggests that the failure of these critical works has been to misunderstanding the internal workings of the religions and the true scope of a Black Jewish/ Hebrew Identity formation in America,

Rather than explore centuries of African-Jewish contact in the New World and the influence of Judaism and Jewish Culture on transatlantic black populations, Berger and others situate African-American collective identity within the confines of the Protestant revival of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. They claim that through a syncretic reinterpretation and allegorical identification with the ancient Israelites of the Christian Bible, blacks constructed new identities as Israelite and "literally became Jews" (Chireau 2000).' (Haynes, 2018, Introduction)

Haynes also conducted interviews to deepen his understanding of Black Jewish Identity and sought to move beyond 'simplistic, naïve and incomplete' existing scholarship about the historical relations between Africans and Jews (Haynes, 2018). He ultimately wants to understand Black Jewish identity formation through the 'intersection and negotiation of race, religions, ethnicity, and culture' (Haynes,

2018); based on the scholarly consensus that Jews have over time become White, his assertion is that Black Jewish identity 'illuminate(s) the fluidity of the relationship between "race" and ethnicity (Haynes, 2018, Introduction)

Haynes' work in totality is broadly documenting and analysing Black Jewish identity in America; a chapter of significant interest to this study is *Back to Black: Hebrews, Israelites and Lost Jews*, in which he focuses his attention on the Black Hebrew, Israelite and Jewish communities that assert they are the ethnic, religious and national continuations of the biblical Hebrews, Jews and Israelites. Haynes successfully demonstrates the diversity among Black Hebrew, Israelites and Jews by deferring to his interview material as the guide to his understanding, essentially undermining the existing literature that postulates hostility and lack of depth. He says,

The voices of Black Hebrews and Israelites provided here illustrate the centrality of the Old Testament in shaping the narratives of black Americans. While the biblical story of the children of Israel and their exodus from Egypt has long served as a metaphor for the experience of black Americans, early Black Hebrew Israelite sects drew upon the Old Testament to construct parallel and counterhegemonic, essentialist narratives on race (blacks are the original Hebrews and rightful heirs to Israel). (Haynes, 2018, Chapter 4)

Among his study of the various types of Black Jews, Haynes tries to find a location for the Black Hebrews through a constructivist lens by suggesting that it could be argued that Black Hebrews have sought to occupy the space abandoned by European Jews, which provided a direct link to an ancient civilisation and elevated blackness to biblical chosenness (Haynes, 2018). Hayne's interpretation negates preference for the religious teachings and insights as presented by the Black Jewish/Hebrew community. It ultimately rejects ethnoreligious continuity and recovery claims, central to the rationale of religious Hebrew Israelites. In this sense, the constructivist lens has been used to demonstrate a homeless and lost community that depends on the rejected leftover space of Europeans. Haynes finally concludes in his historical survey that the presence and assertion of the Black Jewish realities, beliefs and reform have dismantled the European monopoly on Jewish identity formation.

The final American text I present for this survey is Spencer Dew's *The Aliites* (2019). Dew explores the teachings of Noble Drew Ali, Leader of the Moorish Science Temple of America and analyses their religious understanding of citizenship and their drive to both resist and reform the American legal system moving towards realities reflecting their ideals for society. Noble Drew Ali claims that the Moors (which he identifies as Black people) are the original inhabitants of the Americas, even predating the various ethnic groups known as 'Indigenous Americans' and previous American-Indians. With this view, Ali leads a community of people through a legal project to establish citizenship that recognises their historical habitation and presence in America and to be seen no more as the descendants of enslaved Africans.

The Moorish Science Temple of America draws upon various religious concepts and symbols as points of knowledge but focuses on the religious symbols that they believe to be deliberately and secretly woven into the national symbolism of the United States of America as constructed by European Invaders. Moorish, Egyptian, Judeo-Christian, freemason and Islamic themes are at the heart of this religious knowledge system and are used as the framework through which these Moors define their historical presence and religious sense of citizenship. This counternarrative drove Aliites towards survival and self-determination (Dew, 2019). Dew's work is significant because of his focus on the claims to citizenship that are often conceptualised in Black religious/theological God-talk. He also explores the nature and beliefs of the religious community from the perspective of the individuals who are a part of the Moorish Science Temple of America instead of centralising their controversial leader Noble Drew Ali. In this way, Dew hopes to look behind the charismatic figure and draw attention to

The mass of seemingly everyday people who are exceptional in their thoughts and practices, like those Washitaw contributing to the "nation-building" Sunday-night conference call, the Nuwaubian Yamassee posting their ideas in response to memorial videos of the movement's achievement at Tama-Re, or the Moorish American spending the evening crocheting a giant U.S. flag. (Dew, 2019, Introduction)

Dew opted for the term 'religious community' instead of 'cult', which he considered derogatory. The study explores a religious motivation of a Black religious community to realise sacred citizenship in America and is thus embedded in concepts of law and “race”, religion and identity.

Aliites exist in tenuous relation to state power. Citizenship, that status which serves as predication for any political negotiation within the state, does not exist without state recognition. While understanding the sovereignty of the people in a democracy to be real, Aliites also take it to be – like all forms of sovereignty shorts of the ultimate authority of true law – always situational, fleeting and dependent upon recognition by the sovereign state. (Dew, 2019, Chapter 3)

Dew considered the post-colonial efforts of the Aliites and their quest for recognition in that the Aliites sought to work with the existing system rather than radicalise it and dismantle the oppressive European system. The Aliite religious conviction, as Dew describes it, seeks eventual reform towards what satisfied their religious perspectives but designed a strategy that would acquire the type of recognition necessary to then participate in those reforms.

3.3 Black-British Bible Religion

3.3.1 Richard Reddie

Richard Reddie in *Black Muslims in Britain* (2009) asks, 'why are a growing number of young Black people converting to Islam?'. He interviews a cross-section of Black-British converts, previously Christian and churchgoers. Setting this work aside from others that focus on Muslims of African descent or a comparative study between Christianity and Islam, Reddie seeks to understand the key factors underpinning the individual's conversions.

Reddie grounds his research in a thorough historical and cultural analysis of Islam and its British variants: the presence of Islam in Britain, the experiences of Black people in Britain in the twentieth century and the role that Islam has played for Black-British people during decades of discrimination, prejudice and identity formation. He also considers controversial connections to terrorism and radicalisation that frame much of the Western world's perceptions of Islam. Interestingly, connections

are made in this text by the "othering" of Black and Islamic communities and how they come together as a unique religious force that, by their very presence and through religious means, critically engage with the socio-political realities of the 'other' in Black Britain.

The rise of the Black Caribbean diaspora forms the backdrop of Reddie's investigation - the Windrush generation and the Black majority Christian community that established churches as well as a fixed presence in existing Christian denominations throughout Britain. He refers to a similar phenomenon that features in this study, the de-churching minority who would embrace Rastafari; he says,

'The focus on Rastafari is vital because it was the first counter-cultural religious force to capture the affiliations and imaginations of Black youth in Britain. A whole generation of Black youth, including some of my own relatives, became followers of Rastafari in the 1970s and 1980s, having left the Christian Church. There are some clear resemblances between the subversive approach of the Rasta movement in Britain during its heyday and the current counter-cultural positions of Islam' (Reddie, 2009, p. 8)

Reddie highlights the issue of "race" pertaining to Islam and identity. For orthodox Muslims, Islam transcends "race" (Reddie, 2009); however, "race" is a central theological theme for the Nation of Islam and other Black Islamic groups. Acknowledging this tension is helpful for the continued study of Islam as it demonstrates its variety and internal discriminations and theological conflicts – particularly on the topic of identity formation. Within the myriad of Islamic expressions, Reddie briefly identifies those he calls cultural Muslims of the 1960s, those who may change their name, read the Qur'an in English, are devout like those from Black Majority churches and who open their homes to others to discuss religious ideas (Reddie, 2009, p.127). As the Nation of Islam in Britain had yet to be officially instituted, the Black Muslim converts designed their religious ritual framework as intersectional, considering "race" and religion.

Reddie suggests that unlike the "wax and wane" of the influence of the Rasta movement, Black-British conversion to Islam will continue to grow because 'The rise of the Black Muslim presence in Britain is a crystallisation of race and faith' (Reddie, 2009, p.229). Reddie asserts that Black identity formation is

a significant part of the conversion process, the need to be Black and religious but not Christian as most of his participants had once been; '...the Black Muslim movement took root feeding on the spiritual hunger of those with a natural thirst for truth and justice and a craving to make a difference in the lives of their brothers and sisters.' (Reddie, 2009, p. 231)

Reddie confirms the intuition that fuelled this study's inception; many Black people on the fringes of the Black-British church want to be pro-black and remain religious; they seek a religious community and narrative that affirms their blackness and religiously engages in a quest for truth and justice.

3.3.2 Robert Beckford

Black-British theologian and cultural critic Robert Beckford has furthered the development of Black Liberation Theology by contextualising it for the Black-British lived experience. Using the hermeneutical principles developed in both Black Liberation Theology in general and Womanist theology in particular, Beckford explores how various African-Caribbean diasporic cultures are vehicles for liberation and decolonisation and, as a result, are theological resources for church education. Most of the focus is on Caribbean-British cultures both in sacred and secular spaces due to Beckford's Caribbean heritage. He often uses his own experiences as points of departure. What makes this trajectory unique in the broader discourse is the hybridised cultures found in British cities with concentrated populations of people belonging to the African-Caribbean diaspora and the church formations that also reflect this reality. Unlike Northern America, which is said to have heavily segregated church formations, Black people in British churches are distributed among the following church bodies 1) Black historical Pentecostal churches, 2) Black majority independent churches, 3) European historical denominations such as the Church of England, Methodist Church and Baptist churches. This next section of this survey explores how the aforementioned hermeneutical principles have been realised for the Black-British Christian body.

Part of the decolonisation process, which works hand in hand with Black Liberation Theology, is the deconstruction of African-Caribbean cultural assets to reflect theologically on Black lived experiences and bridge the gap between the secular and the sacred dimensions. This ultimately serves to redeem

Black cultural assets that may have been deemed as heathen and sinful. (Beckford, 2011, p. 89) However, one could argue that this academic enterprise does not represent the largely conservative Black Christian body who have traditionally made clear distinctions between 'secular' and 'sacred'. Beckford goes beyond loose cultural references in sermons to help convey spiritual meanings, conflating that distinction altogether. Beckford, in *Jesus Dub: Theology, Music, and Social Change* (2006), draws parallels between the politics of sound within the 'church hall' and the 'dance hall', two key sites, he argues, of Black culture religion, and resistance. Beckford demonstrates how music has been a vehicle for resistance. Beckford combats this 'common sense' notion of complete pacification of the Black Pentecostal tradition by using juxtaposition and deconstruction to explore the elements of resistance interwoven in the alternative cultures birthed by Black Britain. Where Black theology had in recent decades been associated mainly with the United States and South Africa, Beckford has drawn the British-Caribbean nuances into the conversation. Beckford uncovers instances of resistance within the cultural expressions of the Pentecostal African Caribbean diaspora.

An example of this is in *Jesus is Dread: Black Theology and Black Culture in Britain* (1998), where Beckford uses the liberative motifs of Rastafari as a source of reflection. Using Paul Tillich's definition - 'theology is a method for interpreting Christian faith', Beckford posits that Bob Marley, world-renown reggae artist and political activist, was a Black Theologian in his own right. Beckford argues that Marley used his music to interpret Christian Faith according to his culture, context, and struggle. He then makes a case for a Dread Christ:

"A Dread Christ equips Black folk to face and destroy all cultures of oppression – being Dread for the Black church is to engage in the struggle for Black freedom. Furthermore, to say that Christ is Dread is to unveil a Christ of black upliftment, Black empowerment and Black progress. Similarly, a dread Christ tells Black British people that the Jesus of history is with them as they protest, fight, boycott, celebrate and progress. In short, a Dread Christ is a black Christ participating in Black Lives and Black Struggle. In the context of Britain, a Dread Christ is the focus of our socio-political struggle and source of joy in our lives. (Beckford, 1998, p. 151)

Through the deconstruction process⁶, Beckford can intellectually compartmentalise the various characteristics of Rastafari and home in a 'Dread' concept as a theological tool of resistance. Beyond the Black Christ, a Dread Christ has explicitly been contextualised for the Caribbean diaspora who wrestle socially and religiously with the Rastafari tradition. The music is internationally loved, the message of peace, love and liberation respected, but the traditional Black-British church and other Pentecostal/charismatic churches may find it difficult to reconcile their faith with what they consider a Black religious cult. Rastafari was specifically birthed from the recognition of Haile Selassie as Messiah, which is Christologically problematic from a conservative theological perspective. Beckford details his struggle to engage his home congregation in a politicised theology. He says,

For example, elsewhere, I have argued that as a member of the Wesleyan Holiness church, it was not possible to make explicit socio-political issues perplexing the Black community. This was because the reading convention influenced by conservative reading strategies were deployed from the predominantly white American denomination. In sum, the contemporary Black church does not yet have the potential to nurture political theology consistent with D.P.T. (Dread Pentecostal Theology) (Beckford, 2011, p. 214)

Here Beckford identifies conservative reading strategies as a barrier to understanding Black socio-political realities. He also associates these reading strategies with White American denominations, a foreign influence that resists Beckford's political and theological paradigm. As with much of Black Liberation theologies, this endeavour continues to sever ties with a deeply embedded religious tradition that holds sacred a fixed image of Christ. Whilst the Dread concept makes a useful theological tool, it unsettles the layman's connection to Jesus the human/divine Jew and draws Christ into relativised

⁶ Beckford defines his own deconstruction process? As 'Deconstruction for the dubbist aims to redeem by restructuring the narrative, in this case the music track, rather than destroying.' (Beckford, 2008, p. 72).

intellectual paradigms that do not answer the more simple yet foundational questions like 'who *was* Jesus?' and instead posit questions such as 'who do we need Christ to be for us today?'

Another point of tension is syncretism, which is womanist in theological nature; Beckford explores how Caribbean peoples have preserved ancestral religious rituals and appropriated, transformed and embedded them into their Christian religious experience. These examples are championed as anthropological successes and resist the theological barriers by conservative perspectives that prohibit the participation and celebration of non-Christian religious practice. This, of course, can be argued to be overlaid with racist connotations in which 'Christian practice' has been defined by European colonial powers whilst posturing scientific, objective and value-free theological perspectives and will be addressed in more detail in the following chapter. The womanist perspective calls for theologians to form bridges between Christian theological reflection and African Traditional religions. Beckford begins that bridge making with his Dread Pentecostal Theology but takes his readers further into the Myal religion and its compatibility with Christianity. Beckford traces the religious genealogical routes of the native Baptist church in Jamaica to the presence of the Obeah-Myal ritual still active amongst the poorer Black peoples detailing comparisons such as water symbolism. (Beckford, 2011, p. 101) This presents another complexity for the hermeneutical process. Considering some ritual practices as compatible and drawing non-Christian influences into the theological melting pot disturbs the idea of pure, unique or superior religion, an attitude one can argue is asserted by colonial Christianity. Beckford works with this complexity by using evolving cultures as indicators of developing theological imaginations among the Black-British people and sites of resistance and redemption. He says:

I am placing myself within a tradition of appropriation and adaptation, which finds points of connection between two entities to further formulate, make sense of a radically transform the social location. The benefit of this approach is that it affirms critical engagement with culture and rejects the negative dichotomy between church and world so often peddled by sections of African Caribbean Pentecostalism.' (Beckford, 2006, p. 82)

His approach to Bible reading considers the readers' cultural activity as part of the reflective process and dissolves the gap between the church attenders and non-church attenders. In this way, reading scripture focuses on how its truths can be appropriated for today's social and political landscape – here, Christology shares its space with political resistance. Christology is politicised and, much as we have seen with the American development, denies a sole focus on other-worldly realities; Beckford argues that Jesus' ministry or 'his deconstruction provided new opportunities and options for those he encountered, providing physical healing, spiritual salvation and social, economic and political freedom' (Beckford, 2008, Chapter 6).

What has been considered controversial about politicised theology is its work within such a polarised political climate. Many Black theologians are heavily critical of Western conservative political 'philosophy' yet have not made any formal endorsements of alternative parties. As a theological voice, Black Liberation Theology aims to be a prophetic voice against the social sins of the nation and local powers, the critique often rooted in liberal political philosophy. There is a contention here that whilst, statistically, Black and Brown people in Britain essentially vote for the Labour Party (Barton, 2020), and in America largely vote Democrat (White and Laird, 2020) (Igielnik and Budiman, 2020) - one could argue that their theological frameworks and attitude towards social-political conventions are largely conservative (marriage, privacy, family, free market, tradition, small government), so one must ask if perhaps the resistance we see from Black majority churches to embrace Black Liberation Theology is due to the theological and political implications of these hermeneutics?

The following chapter aims to define the foundational principles of conservative theologies to better reflect on their presence in Black theological thought and the evolving principles of global contextual theology. Black Liberation Theologies need a development that is more representative of the Black-British Church body collective mindset to understand better the persistence of New Black Religious Movements and Afroasiatic Diasporic Religions specifically and their influence on those on the margins of the Black church.

3.3.3 Anthony Reddie

Anthony G. Reddie, Black Liberationist and Postcolonial theologian, in *Is God Colour-Blind? Insights*

from Black Theology for Christian Ministry (2009) proposes that Colour-Blindness from the perspective of a White majority society takes the form of protecting White cultural norms. He says: 'Often in white-majority Christian-influenced societies, the emphasis is upon 'integration' and a 'colour-blind' doctrine as a means of handling contentious issues of difference' (Reddie, 2009, p.6). Supplementing this careful management is the subtle advance of English mannerisms and etiquette that makes being culturally different difficult and inconvenient. By protecting the culture of historically white-dominant churches with excuses such as 'we've always done it like this' (Reddie, 2009, p. 7), colour-blindness acts as a polite exclusion barrier at which Black people should leave their colour (and all that comes with it) by the front door. Turning his attention briefly to Black majority churches, Reddie makes a crucial theological link between colour-blindness and a Pauline theology of God as spirit concerning Galatians: 'There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3.28, NRSV)

Reddie says, 'The colour-blind approach of which I speak is one that does not see colour in its hermeneutical or interpretive engagement with the Christian faith.' (Reddie, 2009, Chapter 1) In this way, racial prejudice within churches takes a social/relational stance and colour-blindness a higher theological reality. If the flesh is deemed sinful, in a Euro-orthodox setting as imagined through a White Jesus and a White dove (as a representation of the Holy Spirit) or colourless reality – Blackness becomes symbolic of sinful flesh. Colour-blind and multicultural ideologies in this vein are considered a function that pacifies those resisting racial discrimination, contrary to its efforts to seek equality through eradicating diversity theologically, by suggesting that God does not see colour, is to trivialise diversity and fall back on White ethnocentric norms as the baseline for a 'kingdom culture', which is essentially monoculturalism. Monoculturalism then works as another guise for colonial theology that claims theological authority to prescribe the characteristics and qualities of this culture and how it should work. To say that God does not see colour is to say that God does not see Black people, for it is Black people that are coloured in the mind of this 'diseased' western society. (Jennings, 2010)

Colour-blindness, Reddie argues, in Christianity sets a tone of inequality theologically and to challenge this, Reddie posits that Black Theology offers insights that affirm the Black body. For

example, he refers to Deloris Williams' womanist approach. In *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of womanist God-Talk* (1993), she posits that by forming the relationship between a Black Jesus who was mercilessly murdered with the oppressed or the marginalised, theology can confirm the need to oppose oppressive forces rather than offer Black bodies to the cross through toleration. Black Theology uses the suffering of Black people as its point of departure and becomes the primary authority of the discourse. ADR's deference to the high authority of scripture contends that issues arise from the improper interpretation, not from the divine and correct scriptures - it is not the Word of God that has the issues but the dominant Eurocentric interpretive lens through which Christians have all been socialised.

Reddie and other Black Liberationist theologians implore that theology must begin with and be rooted in the experiences of the poor, marginalised and oppressed, rejecting claims for an objective approach to reading scripture which is considered an achievable and necessary bible study tool for many evangelicals (See example Walton, 2002). As a result, the authority of scripture shares the space with or comes second to lived experience. Therefore, the Bible is used as a resource to explore themes of liberation and resistance for the Christian community but does not serve as an authority on religious faith and practice. Many Black Liberationist and Womanist theologians would seek to reject cases where scripture can be deemed a 'terror text' (Trible, 1984/2022) (such as events, instruction or ambivalence towards the suffering of women, homosexuals, the poor and disabled) and dismantle its theological significance. A fundamental evangelical tenet is the sole authority of the Bible over Christian faith and practice, which I discuss in the next chapter, and one can identify a version of this theological stance within the teaching of Afroasiatic Diasporic Religions.

It is widely agreed that a plain reading approach to scripture still significantly influences Black-British Christians; the context from which interpretations are birthed is significant, and it is key to my thesis to discuss the implications of progressive methods and what is at stake as they work 'against the grain' (Reddie, 2008). Reddie suggests that this ongoing relationship with conservative evangelical hermeneutics affects Black Christians' ability to converse with their everyday needs theologically; he says

Black Christianity in its various guises has been 'infected' by the viral strain of imperial mission Christianity that has exerted a form of cultural dissonance on the neo-colonial mind of the Black Christian subject in the U.K., to such an extent that many are unable to incorporate their own material realities and existential needs alongside that of their faith. What one often sees exemplified in some Black Christians in Britain is a de-contextualised faith, which incorporates at a subterranean level all the traits and hallmarks of a form of self-negation of blackness. (Reddie, 2012, p. 53)

At a glance, one can surmise that what ADR have most in common with the evangelical movement is its approach to scripture and its hermeneutical processes. Although these movements have not engaged in rigorous scholastic processes to systematise their hermeneutical methodology, it is possible to identify fundamental principles, premises and tenets that resonate with an evangelical approach – mainly its submission to the text's authority. The main argument from the Black Liberation critique is that this is simply residue from a colonial theological narrative and conditioning towards dependency on a text of which they can exercise no agency – which, they argue, is prevalent in Pentecostal churches and Bible-based movements on the fringes. Black Liberation Theology asserts a different approach to hermeneutics as surmised by Anthony Reddie - 'Black Theology's belief in the primacy of the Black experience of suffering is such that the seemingly fundamentalist notions that equate the bible direct with God's own self are summarily rejected.' (Reddie, 2019, p. 138)

Twenty-first century "Western" conversations about conservatism are often dominated by racism, capitalism, institutionalism and, at the time of writing this research, President Trump. Given the general advances and influence of postmodern liberal philosophies amongst young people, in academia, legal policies and on social media, the election of Donald J. Trump has been a phenomenon that illuminates the prevailing attitudes and experiences of disenfranchisement among everyday Americans and Britons alike; Black, Brown or White, male and female (or other), rich and poor. Trump's patriotism, nationalism, and capitalism have captured the imaginations and hopes of America's many poor White forgotten citizens, the political conservatives, and the conservatively religious. My study does not feature an exhaustive and deep analysis of Trump's political leadership and effects on the Black-British

Christian community, but a brief consideration reveals the complexity of the conservative position. It is undeniable that despite Trump's controversial statements about women and people of colour, many Black people on both sides of the Atlantic still support his conservative social/political attitudes despite their feelings for him personally.

Anthony Reddie speaks of his own experiences in Britain, working with Black-British Christians, some of whom openly discuss voting for the BNP, a far-right and openly anti-black/anti-foreigner political party on the simple premise that they protect the 'Christian values' of Britain. He says that by failing to engage with other hermeneutical processes that are not literalist and in complete submission to the text as divinely inspired, Black Christians fail to understand the implications that colonial epistemological frameworks have on their worldviews and perceptions of truth. 'When some Black Christians claim to be defending 'Christian Britain', what they are in effect stating in covert ways is a desire to protect normative whiteness.' (Reddie, 2011, p. 10). This reflection reveals a gap in Black-British Theology that is unapologetically conservatively Christian yet critical of the Eurocentric mechanisms in British conservatism in general and conservative evangelicalism specifically.

3.4 Conclusion

This chapter conducted a literature survey that discussed a cross-section of existing works exploring Black diasporic religion's presence and nature. Of particular interest were the methodological approaches to this phenomenon. The first section considered how Black religions operate functionally; how Black religion aided oppressed Black people to make sense of and cope with living in hostile environments. The most basic function was to create links between the diaspora and the African continent. White's humanistic approach demonstrated Black religion's capacity to explore meanings of humanity, looking ahead to less fundamentalist and traditional notions of religion. This functional approach does not reflect the metaphysical and mysterious aspects of religion that undergirds Afroasiatic religious teaching and mainstream Black Christianity in Britain. Whilst scientifically intriguing, the framework does not give preference to the voice of the de-churched or ADR adherents. Though dated, Fauset's ethnographic study conveyed more faithfully the ideas and drives of the Black

de-churched peoples in inner-city America, that Afroasiatic Diasporic Religion leads to an elevation of spiritual and social prominence.

The second section considered how some scholars have tracked the journey of Black peoples as a diaspora and that the journey itself presented an opportunity for personal and communal religious transformation. The presence of ADR speaks to the importance of an ethnoreligious identity, of ancient connections in modern society, such as that to Bilal, which mobilises, politicises and challenges racism within an organised religion. A diasporic perspective also lends itself naturally to the recovery of a religious life lost over time, eroded by the experiences of enslavement, subjugation and Christianisation. From an ADR perspective, this recovery process requires adherents to recenter Black people and the biblical Afroasiatic traditions as significant players and authoritative in interpreting God's divine redemption plan.

The final section considered the inseparable religious and political nature of Afroasiatic Diasporic Religion, of which the political is the most emphasised in the current trends of Black academia. This politicisation puts Black religion at odds with conservative theological premises or acknowledges this presence as a limitation. In light of this survey, the gap I have identified is the necessity for ethnographic research in the Black-British context to explore the nature of Afroasiatic religion's persistent influence at ground level. However, an approach to this phenomenon is yet to be developed that positively embraces its ethnocentric, preservationist and liberatory composition as theologically or intellectually cohesive.

In the next chapter, I suggest that the Afroasiatic Diasporic Religious rationale is best understood through the *preservation-liberation* framework and that this is the strength of their influence on the fringes of the Black-British church uniquely. Whilst this seems contradictory, it speaks to how liberal approaches to scripture are not sufficient solutions for many Black-British people who want to preserve the religious, mysterious nature of the sacred text yet be liberated from the colonial epistemological residue found in mainstream theology, teaching and preaching that rejects their blackness.

"I'm umm extremely excited; I was hoping it was gonna be like this. I didn't think it was; I was hoping. And umm, I left Church two years ago and didn't know - it was something with the word, and I kept on thinking, you know there's so much going out in our community, but the Church is here and doesn't actually have anything to do with us, and umm then I started looking on YouTube, searching, searching, and there was so many things like wow and the more I read, the more I wanted to read, and Participant M lives next door, and we wanted to have these discussions for years and years. Like

ten years now! And like you said, there's been an awakening because our children they're not accepting Christ because we haven't been taught right; we have to make sure that we know Him before we can actually give them Him. So there's so much to learn, from the beginning" (Participant BJ, White Man's Religion?, 2018)

4. The Preservation-Liberation Framework

4.1 Introduction

So far in this study, I have outlined my intention to understand the influence of Afroasiatic Religions, Rastafari, the Nation of Islam, (Black) Hebrew Israelites and the Holy Qubtic Church on those who reside on the fringes of the Black-British Christian body. I identify the de-churched as those who are dissatisfied with mainstream Christianity and seek an alternative religious community that is Bible-based and affirms Black histories and culture. Foundational to this task is the use of the terms 'Afroasiatic' and 'woke', which I defined and demonstrated their viability for my thinking in Chapter 2. In this chapter, I will detail some of the core beliefs from within the various Afroasiatic religions I consider to be integral to the progress of this study. Although not exhaustive, I intend to set the necessary tone, focus and background for my approach.

In the previous chapter, I conducted a literature survey. I examined a cross-section of literature that interrogates and interprets the presence and nature of Black religions, beginning with the American context and then moving to works of key Black-British theologians. The literature review aimed to identify the gaps that this study seeks to fill. Firstly, much of the literature's interpretive methodology negated what Black religious adherents believed; despite provability or controversiality, this research privileges the beliefs of the adherents and de-churched participants to best voice their perspectives. While I must interpret the data, I hope that the interpretation speaks faithfully to the essences I believe to be present. Secondly, I seek to explore the religious epistemological transition process when leaving the mainstream Church and engaging with Afroasiatic Diasporic Religions. Richard Reddie asks similar questions to my own; however, his emphasis is on the impact of Islam on the social and political

negotiations currently active in Britain. My study looks at the religious and theological negotiations between Afroasiatic Diasporic Religions and Christianity. Thirdly, I seek to fill is to make sense of the tension between evangelicalism and Afroasiatic Diasporic Religion. Both Beckford and Reddie conflate evangelical axiomatic/literalist reading conventions with colonialism; however, Chapter two, although introductory, hints at the strength of plain or literalist readings for the ADR in engaging with a decolonial process and simultaneously recovering the meanings of the Biblical text itself as Afroasiatic and thus misappropriated by European colonisers.

This chapter presents my hypothesis in a conceptual framework consisting of themes and concepts that I believe broadly represent Black religious thinking. To begin with, I consider what I mean by *religion and new religious movements* to clarify what I believe to be the nature of Afroasiatic Diasporic Religion. Secondly, I conceptualise *Ethiopianism*, which was/is a religious movement that, in concept form, is most fitting to understand the religious underpinning of Afroasiatic Diasporic Religions, given that it is from Ethiopianism that these religions have emerged. Third I consider decolonisation and its various dimensions (decoloniality and de-colonisation) covered in ADR teachings and activity beyond what we see in Black academic mobilisation. Finally, I consider how conservatism can be conceptualised with a focus on its attitudes towards preserving institutions such as culture, tradition and religious authority in a way that best reflects what I believe to be evidenced in ADR teaching and de-churched thinking.

4.2 Religion

I need to define my meanings of religion and how Afroasiatic Diasporic Religions are to be understood throughout this study. Unlike the humanist or reductionist approaches referred to in the literature review (White, 2014), I consider religion to be organisations of any kind in response to a belief in God and sacred texts formed due to this belief.

In *Defining Religion: a practical response* (2011), Steve Bruce suggests that the definition of religion should begin with what religious people believe religion to be rather than what a social scientist formulates as more suitable for the religious people in question and the ideology that underpins their agenda. Bruce suggests that functional formulations of religion - such as that of Karl Marx and Emile

Durkheim, in which religion serves people functionally to cope with or overcome oppression - do not define religion per se but define a potential function of religion. Regarding these examples, in which the function serves people in socio-political crises, religion would be redundant if their circumstances changed. Instead, with Hinduism, Buddhism and gods in mind, Bruce suggests, 'religion then, consists of beliefs, actions and institutions which assume the existence of supernatural entities with powers of action, or impersonal powers, or processes possessed of moral purpose.' (Bruce, 2011, p.112)

Bruce's contribution to the quest to define religion ultimately resists the relativity that is commonplace in current social science, being wary of fixed definitions. He offers a broad definition that he argues allows for the variety, scaling, and scope of religious life for research. Another approach that tries to consider any supremacy that evokes worship is by Robert Neville, in *Defining Religion: essays in philosophy of religion (2018)*; he is cautious of Europeanising the term "religions" by focusing the definition on ways that distort other cultures (Neville, 2018, p.7). He says,

'Now suppose we define religion as *human engagement of ultimacy expressed in cognitive articulations, existential responses to ultimacy that give ultimate definitions to the individual, and patterns of life and ritual in the face of ultimacy.* (Neville, 2018, p.9) [Italics by Neville]

By considering religion as an engagement with ultimacy (and whatever, whoever finds meaning there) rather than God, Neville generates a concept that is too broad for the aims of this study. The religions I engage with explicitly refer to God, gods, and a divine consciousness articulated through scripture and divine revelation, and so religion in this sense must work within those boundaries, so I rely on Bruce's contribution. Having defined 'religion' as I mean it for this study, I must further define what type of religious category I consider to fit into this ethnographic research. New Religious Movements describe religions that have emerged recently and are recognised and distinct from other historical institutional religions. This is a helpful paradigm to situate Afroasiatic Diasporic Religions because it considers their recent emergence and claims to recovery or continuity with ancient religions distinct from current dominant religious institutions. It also helps to consider their relationship with the wider society. John A. Saliba, in *Perspectives on New Religious Movements (1995)*, says,

The new religions can also be appropriately be called 'movements' in the sense that they reflect important transitions in people's lives. They are small currents in society that may be pointing to greater upheavals and changes in religious life. They cause shifts in the converts' previous religious allegiance and in the behaviour of people affected by the change. (Saliba, 1995, p. 10)

Afroasiatic Diasporic Religions, therefore, can be considered New Religious Movements, adherents who have engaged in a religious transformation that also shapes a new type of engagement with society. J. Gordon Melton, in *Teaching New Religious Movements* (Bromley, 2007), suggests that New Religious Movements should seek to define themselves in a way that is broad enough to encompass the variety of new religions that have developed in recent history. Further to this, the definition should take note of the relationship that it has with older religions and traditions as mentioned before, often the term 'unorthodox' or, in Molten's words, 'strangeness' is a reflection of the 'beliefs and practices perpetuated (or altered) from the older religion in which it is rooted.' (Molten in Bromley, 2007, p. 30). Molten also asserts that a definition should not assume that all cults and religions share the same characteristics; he says:

As our knowledge of new religions has expanded, we have come to realise that no single characteristic or set of characteristics are shared by all new religions (that is, by all the groups that have been called cults) and that any effort to define them by such a set of characteristics admits of too many expectations. (Molten in Bromley, 2007, p. 31)

I have attempted to combat this type of essentialist labelling by considering Afroasiatic Diasporic Religion, an umbrella term within which there is diversity beyond the shared roots.

4.2.1 Globalisation

Considering new directions for the study of New Religious Movements, Liselotte Frisk draws attention to globalisation. Following the suggestion that New Religious Movements have a responsive mechanism, Frisk argues that globalisation creates fertile ground for the rise in religious fundamentalism:

The process of relativisation gives rise to the dual and simultaneous process of search for, on the one hand, particularistic identities, and on the other hand, universalistic identities, a process which could also be expressed religiously. Globalization is thus producing universalism and cosmopolitanism, but also, as a reaction, the assertion of particularistic identities, as opposition to the conception of the world as a series of culturally equal, relativised, entities or ways of life. An example of this resistance or particularism is religious fundamentalism, reacting to the cultural complexity of a globalised world as disturbed and dangerous, taking refuge in renewed and purified traditions (Frisk in Zeller, 2014, p. 274).

Frisk refers to New Religious Movements that seek to form religious identities that are not necessarily ethnic-specific but are marked by spiritual and religiously ideological markers. In this sense, globalisation in the twenty-first century means that people worldwide can join new religious movements if they have access to technology, specifically the internet, and share this new religious identity. This type of connection means that there is also greater scope for people to make the religion adaptable to their natural social and cultural environment instead of geographically specific cults where there is perhaps more of an assimilation process. Here can be seen both the universalistic and particularistic identities develop simultaneously. For example, the Afroasiatic religions I have selected for this study are typically ethnocentric, focusing on reclaiming an ancient ethnoreligious identity; in this way, it is not so easy to uncover the type of universalism that is associated with globalisation. There is little to no sense of accommodation and tolerance of other religions. Whilst some may argue that the principles of Rastafari have been embodied by people all around the world, the commercialised "one love" Rastafarianism – at its core and certainly at the root of Rastafari is a genealogically informed religious perspective that challenges the legitimacy of universalism.

In Afroasiatic Diasporic Religions, mechanisms of globalisation undeniably play a fundamental role, most notably using social media and the internet to transmit teaching to the various camps throughout the Black Atlantic (Frisk in Zeller, 2014, p. 274). In this way, they can generate and nurture an ethnoreligious identity throughout the diaspora. According to their claims, they could be considered transnational by nature due to the intervention of enslavement;

Many new religions could be seen as examples of such transnational cultures. Members are residents of different countries, but have a feeling of commonness, and of sharing of a history and a destiny with other members worldwide. (Frisk in Zeller, 2014, p. 275)

The Black Atlantic is perhaps the best sense to describe the boundaries of its transnational nature. As we shall see in the penultimate chapter, the term Black Atlantic intends to capture the scope of Black diasporan reality and geography and the existing/evolving/hybridised religious, cultural, social and political particularities. While these religions are generally exclusive to Black/African/Asian ethnic groups, they still qualify as transnational.

Catrina Kinnvall, in *Globalisation and Religious Nationalism: Self, Identity, and the Search for Ontological Security* (2004), contends that globalisation creates the best environment in which nationalist religious identity flourishes. She says the destabilising effects of globalisation's lack of certainty 'challenges simple definitions of who we are and where we come from' (Kinnvall, 2004, p. 742)

Globalisation and other facets within postmodernity move away from fixed concepts and labels that have helped create a sense of certainty in building identity - historical, religious and geographic connections that carry unique traditions and cultures. Kinnvall argues that this insecurity created by the ever-growing dominant global culture that undermines socially constructed religious, cultural and geographic boundaries drives communities to what is familiar and grounding (Kinnvall, 2004) – religious nationalism being a prime example of this. Religion and nationalism function to provide security in response to globalisation and insecurity by calling into question and challenging how society contends with reality. Kinnvall reminds the reader of how scholarship talks about religions and their beliefs as a social construction, leaving behind medieval cosmology. Religion and nationalism often work well together in fundamentalist religious expressions because they serve as longstanding institutions, vehicles that carry a people's theological, historical and genealogical identity. Kinnvall says,

The construction and reconstruction of historical symbols, myths, and chosen traumas supply alternative beliefs to everyday insecurity. The more inclusionary such beliefs are, the more exclusionary they tend to be for individuals or groups not included in the definitions of these beliefs. The construction of self and other is therefore almost always a way to define superior and inferior beings. Superior, are those on the inside (of the religion or nation) who represent purity, order, truth, beauty, good, and right (order), while those on the outside are affected by pollution, falsity, ugliness, bad and wrong (chaos)... The inside (the home) can bring order from the chaotic outside. (Kinnvall, 2004, p. 763)

Kinnvall poses thought-provoking questions for this study about Afroasiatic Diasporic Religions as constructionist and reconstructionist religions. The religious teachings seem to consider their beliefs as spiritual revelations, prophecies, and being 'woke' with the responsibility of defining the details and scope of the religion to God, who reveals the truth in the Bible and through Prophets. However, it cannot be denied that these religions were birthed in a time of insecurity, struggle and oppression, that the core messages are responsive to enslavement, subjugation and oppression.

In trying to locate these Afroasiatic religions within the broader religious scholarship, given their relatively recent emergence and most apparent response to the people's historical and current social conditions in (and around) those religious communities- describing them as new religious movements seems most fitting. On the one hand, their religious genealogy is rooted in the Christian-Ethiopianist traditions, yet they claim to have a more ancient and pure form of spirituality and religion that centres around the concepts, prophecies and histories detailed in the Hebrew scriptures and Christian Bible. On the other hand, the constructionist lens itself generates huge questions that would lead this thesis down the path of 'legitimising' and 'authenticating', which I do not intend to entertain. I intend to privilege the voice of the religious teachers and adherents themselves; many, I assert, do not consider their beliefs to be anything less than a transcendent epistemology.

Kinnvall identifies the importance for many religious people to distinguish between identity and beliefs rather than fluidity or intentional pluralism. In Chapter 7, I will discuss how critiques of modernity challenge notions of essentialism and draw conversations about identity towards accepting and existing

pluralistically. What Kinnvall alludes to in this text is the value that many religious people place on essentialist identities,

"The more essentialist such interpretations can become in establishing links with past events, such as the historical significance of a place or a building, the more successful they will be in terms of inclusiveness and exclusiveness – in creating boundaries between self and other. Many such places (churches, temples, mosques, gurdwaras, synagogues) constitute controversial and contested sites and are often the sites of competing narratives and historical "facts." They are parts of the chosen trauma (or chosen glory) that define self and others in historical terms. (Kinnvall, 2004, p. 760)

Being able to make distinctions between Afroasiatic Diasporic Religions and colonial Christianity, for example, is fundamental to their ethnoreligious identity and purpose in the diaspora; the boundaries and exclusive nature of the belief systems are what reveal the criticisms of other competing religious traditions.

4.2.2 Rational Choice Theory

Rational Choice Theory is an economic theory that suggests that human behaviour is influenced by getting maximum benefit for the least cost. To understand the human side of religious behaviour, as one cannot quantify the supernatural aspects of the religion, scholars have applied Rational Choice Theory (RCT) to the sociology of religion. Following a survivalist and constructivist trend, New Religious Movements can be understood in transactional terms. Arguably, one can suggest that because people cannot obtain their ultimate desires, such as immortality, they are drawn toward supernaturalism and notions of transcendence through their human ability.

Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, for example, in *Acts of Faith: Explaining the Rational side of Religion* (2000), argue that institution weakens the prospects of religions, so what can be observed is the emergence of new religions - a cycle in which secularisations (of which globalisation could be considered one aspect) acts as a catalyst. The term 'religious economy' speaks specifically to the competition within the religious framework –

Each firm seeks to occupy and to consolidate a key 'niche.' Thus it is not church-switching [i.e. changes in the relative demand for various 'brands'] that is the central dynamic in religious change. Rather it is the *shifting of religious firms from niche to niche* that has the greatest impact on the overall religious economy with the consequence that the primary religious suppliers change over time (Stark and Finke, 2000, p. 196) [italics by Stark and Finke]

Observing the shift from mainstream churches to these Afroasiatic congregations does provoke questions about religious, social, economic, and political needs. Given that these organisations are not as economically prosperous nor socially or politically influential as the dominant religions from which they have diverged, one must consider the influence of the genealogical and historical claims they make to support their religious functionality. Do we see this play out in the "market" of Black religion and their emphasis on particular aspects of social and religious heritage? Can these merely be versions of Christianity that appeal to niche requirements within the Black community? Is there also a connection between the influence of secular philosophies and postmodernism in Black religious and theological discourse and the persistence and flourishing of these "modernist"/fundamentalist religious groups? What is at stake if we consider these movements solely based on human behaviour – a need to survive, achieve and bank a constructed version of their ultimate desires?

A weakness of Rational Choice Theory is that it does not take into consideration the beliefs of the religious adherents - this is typical of many constructivist responses to a religious phenomenon; subjecting religious belief to rationality equally negates the unique function that religion plays in society; to embrace a mysterious, mystical or metaphysical reality that transcended our versions of rationality. Andrew M. McKinnon (2011) posits that analysing religion through a capitalist lens using terms such as 'religious economy' and 'the market' in the way that religious people may view God considers society as one dimensional, naturally self-serving and without the capacity for diverse human action (McKinnon, 2011, p.542). Whilst RCT flags up some helpful questions for this study, in the broader conversations that seek to define religion, RCT reduces religion to a mechanism for coping, competing and surviving. The merit of this approach perhaps lies in its ability to critique the overlap of

the seeker's quest for a divine purpose and how religions and centres of religion market themselves to appeal to "customers".

4.2.3 Social Problems and Prejudice

David Feltmate, in *Rethinking New Religious Movements beyond a Social Problems Paradigm (2016)*, describes the scope of New Religious Movements quite broadly; he says

Some religious communities will move from one geographic location to another, being historically old, but situationally "new." Others will be variations on ancient themes but be considered different enough by larger and more established religions that they are seen as "new" and significant in their deviance. Still others will be built around novel ideas arising from the mind(s) of charismatic figures, which can lead to the formation of intentional communities, public outreach, or publications. (Feltmate, 2016, p. 83)

The Afroasiatic Diasporic Religions I have selected for this study are grounded by combining these elements, seeing themselves as ancient people who were involuntarily relocated. Afroasiatic Diasporic Religions reject the Christianisation of the enslaved and colonised Hebrew/Africans and set about returning to the "true" religion of the Bible, and they have also been inspired by, centred around or cultivated by a key figure. Feltmate suggests that New Religious Movements are considered new when considering the time and context of their emergence but are not dissimilar, in nature, to the dominant religions from which they diverged, which historically would have come to prominence from much the same conditions as outlined above. Feltmate argues in this text that studies on new religious movements are often given to problematising the religious communities by focusing on negative social aspects associated with them; he says,

"What do Scientology, Rastafari and Neopaganism have in common?" The answer is that people in social mainstreams have treated them as dangerous and problematic groups. The reasons why they are deemed dangerous varies and may not be comparable, but that they are seen as dangerous is all that is required for comparison within our field. Hence, the social

problems paradigm is an underlying organising force in new religious studies. (Feltmate, 2016, p. 84)

Feltmate argues that what is considered successful research are the works that identify why new religions are problematic – such as new norms, violence or deviance; most of these movements have little in common but are brought together because of the problems they create. He demonstrates the prejudice towards new religious movements by evaluating the contents of standard teaching handbooks, identifying themes that continue to 'orient the field: definitions of religion, Satanism scares, sex, violence, and leading people astray. Social problems – especially ones that lead to legal intervention – are dominant frames.' (Feltmate, 2016, p. 88)

Feltmate suggests three ways of moving beyond the social problems paradigm in the classroom when teaching NRMs:

First, we need to stress that new religious movements are a constant feature of history and that understanding new religious movements is part of understanding a basic human quest to find meaning in this world in the company of others. (Feltmate, 2016, p. 93)

Although venturing into a reductionist territory, there is much value in stressing the reality of the ongoing emergence of religions as normative; it humanises the phenomena instead of perpetuating sensationalist cult tropes and speaks to the human preference for a religious institution.

Second, rather than be subject to categories that support the social problems paradigms like 'suicide cult' or 'sex cults',

We want to ask who determines significance when creating comparative categories... (and to) diffuse the power of categorisation from the hands of those who have created analytically restrictive comparative categories and create stronger grounds for comparison based on better empirical evidence. (Feltmate, 2016, p. 94)

This is a decolonial pursuit; by resisting the conventional categorisation processes that demonise new religions, studies on new religious phenomena can engage with a more integral critical analysis and ethnographic study.

Third, we have to acknowledge the sources of power that give significance to the social problems paradigm and find ways to challenge them. Money, political and legal power, and a sense of moral superiority all contribute to the importance vested in the social problems paradigm. (Feltmate, 2016, p. 94)

The social problems paradigm is appropriate for this study as Afroasiatic Diasporic Religions have been largely perceived as problematic and socially unsettling. Admittedly, among the diverse groups, leaders and teachings, there are undoubtedly notions of Black supremacy and racial discrimination against non-Afroasiatic diasporic peoples. Whilst I contend that these notions should be challenged and condemned, a biased categorisation system often overlooks its own complicity in racial discrimination and notions of superiority. It negates NRMs more common everyday beliefs and practices that do not concede to racist ideologies.

Using the term New Religious Movement to describe Afroasiatic Diasporic Religions in the twenty-first century acknowledges their recent emergence and relationship to larger religious institutions – Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. Yet, despite the term 'new', the focus is less on the age of existence and more on its stage of development. Rational Choice Theory engages with the realities of globalisation and the global market. High levels of accessibility, though the internet allows people to engage with religions that speak to their needs; it allows one to consider the religion's attractive features that compete with longstanding, mainstream, religious institutions.

4.3 Ethiopianism

From a historical perspective, Afroasiatic Diasporic Religions have roots in Ethiopianism, a Black religious framework that brought together a literalist, institutional, genealogical, historical, liberative understanding of scripture during the legal enslavement of African peoples in the Caribbeans and the

Americas. (Jalata, 2009, Price, 2003, 2014, Quiri, 2011, Shepperson, 1953, Shilliam, 2016) Although multifaceted in its function as a social and political movement, this Black religious framework was the roots of a Black Christian theology and Afroasitaic Diasporic Religion. As early as the eighteenth century, Prince Hall, abolitionist and founder of Black freemasonry (Johnson, 2011), became known for his liberatory interpretation of Psalm 68:31, 'Princes shall come out of Egypt; Ethiopian shall soon stretch out her hands unto God' (KJV). His prophetic interpretation of this verse became foundational for many Ethiopianists who sought the emancipation of enslaved, segregated and oppressed Black peoples and believed God had appointed Black people as the key to the successful emancipation of Africa (Kay, 2011).

Rastafari is an example of one of the religious trajectories built upon Ethiopianism; many Ethiopianists became followers of Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie (born Ras Tafari Makonnen 1892), believing him to be God incarnate and a descendant of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. It was believed to be the fulfilment of scripture that describes the Messiah as a descendant of King David, such as Jeremiah 23:5-6:

⁵Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth.

⁶In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is his name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS. (KJV)

An Ethiopianist approach to scripture draws upon a genetic and ethnic link between King David of the Old Testament, Jesus Christ of Nazareth, and Haile Selassie, Emperor of Ethiopia. This situated Africans within the biblical narrative literally, liberating Christ from the triumphant hands of the coloniser and returning Him to His people. Charles Price would argue that this was a natural development of Ethiopianism; he says, 'Ethiopianists combined race, scripture, historical experience, religiosity, and social criticism in ways that made enduring and compelling ideas of a Black Messiah or Christ possible.' (Price, 2014, p. 419) Ethiopianism developed a critique of the mainstream European Church and provided alternative interpretations that I argue were deeper than a creative emancipatory

framework but demonstrated the importance of ethnic genealogy, biblical historicity, and religious institution.

ADR's religious teachings challenge mainstream Christian interpretations; the alternative interpretations appear corrective rather than functioning purely to resist and critique colonial Christianity. Saliba says;

Cults or new religions are diverse and complex organisations whose significance cannot be gauged without reference to the sociocultural and religious situation of the second half of the twentieth century. (Saliba, 1995, p. 8)

Whilst Ethiopianism extends beyond Saliba's time constraints, Ethiopianist Black Religious Movements undeniably grew in prominence due to subjugations and Christianisation by European colonisers and missionaries. Ethiopianists believe that revelation spoke of the destruction of the systems that oppressed them and worked towards a vision that saw Africans unified and returning to their place of origin. As a result, Ethiopia became a symbolic home of the disenfranchised, a central idiom whereby Black people could find affirmation and claim a legitimate ancient history and powerful ancestry. (MacLeod, 2014)

Ethiopianism formed a more solid cluster of ideas in the nineteenth century among preachers and intellectuals such as Henry Highland Garnet, Martin Delaney, Edward Blyden and Alexander Crummell. In 1829, Robert Alexander Young published a pamphlet called *The Ethiopian Manifesto*, in which he called for a theocratic body politic; social and political order that promotes and works towards the welfare of Ethiopians (Black people) in America. The manifesto reflected the bible-mindedness many Black people in the West were believed to have upheld; Young spoke of the imminent freedom from slavery that would be achieved by the 'power of words and the divine will of God.' (Hayes, 2000, p. 105) Those who subscribed to the ideology saw Ethiopia as either a place to return to or a place to invest in; their theology worked as resistance against oppressive White forces and turned their focus back to Africa. By grounding their roots in Ethiopia mythically, believers could develop and maintain a morally rooted sense of Black identity and Black redemption (Price, 2009, p. 32).

As a concept, Ethiopianism resists White religious hegemony and employs an ethnoreligious hermeneutic. It is a crucial player in this conceptual framework as it clearly describes the religious ideas present in the teachings of the Afroasiatic Diasporic Religions. Price confirms this,

Wherever Ethiopianism has taken root, three main factors animate it: White hegemony, especially over liberty, knowledge, and religion: a desire for varying degrees of autonomy in economic and political affairs; and a sense of injustice and moral wrong related to Blacks enduring White injustices, especially slavery and apartheid. (Price, 2003, p. 35)

Ethiopianism is widely recognised for the influence it has had on Black religion and political activism. Price credits the development of Afroasiatic Diasporic Religions to Ethiopianism

In Ethiopianism, we find precursors to beliefs and practices associated with Black nationalism proper. This does not mean that Ethiopianism caused the practices; rather, it points to a genre of Black efforts in disparate places and times to grapple with their complicated relationships with White-dominated societies. (Price, 2003, p. 37)

Price extends the influence beyond religious ideas - Black emancipatory movements are indebted to the Ethiopianist model and underpinning principles. In the decades that followed the legal emancipation of enslaved Africans, Black Nationalism maintained prominence - however, as diasporic relationships with the white-dominated societies continue to be complex and unstable in the twenty-first century, Black Nationalism is not at the fore of public racial justice conversation. The protest is to belong to white-dominated societies as equals instead of being compensated through a repatriation process or land and regions exclusively for the use and governance of Black peoples within the white-dominated societies. So, whilst Ethiopiaism may be considered outdated, its earliest form is the prototype for the framework I am developing to convey my hypothesis.

4.4 Decolonisation

Frantz Fanon (1925-1961), a Caribbean psychiatrist, spoke much of decolonisation regarding nationhood and the emancipation of occupied states. However, often his work was produced in ways that translate to more abstract sites of occupation such as religious epistemology and, thus, a valuable frame for decolonisation in this study. In *The Wretched of The Earth* (1961), he speaks of decolonisation on national terms, which marries well with the nationalist stance present in Afroasiatic religions.

National Liberation, national renaissance, the restoration of nationhood to the people, commonwealth: whatever may be the headings used or the new formulas introduced, decolonisation is always a violent phenomenon... decolonisation is quite simply the replacing of a certain "species" of men by another "species" of men. (Fanon, 1961, p. 35)

I have repeatedly emphasised the notion of recovery and return; however, Fanon's decolonisation also considers the inevitable changes during both the colonisation and decolonisation processes. Whilst recovery and return are ideals; the conceptual framework must account for how the diasporic journey has brought about change and activity towards emancipation, negotiated in contemporary contexts and not the context in which the Bible was written and in which the pre-colonial Afroasiatic communities existed.

Decolonisation never takes place unnoticed, for it influences individuals and modifies them fundamentally... It brings a natural rhythm into existence, introduced by new men, and with it a new language and new humanity, decolonisation is the veritable creation of new men (Fanon, 1961, p.36)

Fanon talks about decolonisation as an inevitably violent struggle between the coloniser and the colonised, a process that dismantles the systems that colonisers have put in place to organise their new property profitably. Fanon's text is focused on the political struggle of colonised nations, but as is evident in the masses of literature inspired by this seminal work, Fanon's decolonisation treatise can be applied to various aspects of social life, including religion.

Efforts to decolonise theology are concerned with the colonial values and premises that have underpinned the interpretation of scriptures and the organisational structures of the European organised Church, of which Black people or the 'other' have little *power, participation, and presence*. Fanon says,

In the colonial context, the settler only ends his work of breaking in the native when the latter admits loudly and intelligibly the supremacy of the white man's values. In the period of decolonisation, the colonised masses mock at these very values, insult them, and vomit them up. (Fanon, 1961, p.44)

ADR's controversial teaching displays the type of rejection and distaste that Fanon alludes to here, demonstrating how intentional they are about the decolonisation process and the distinct separation that ADR religions make, such as the 'White Man's Religion', is evidence of this raw and wavering rejection.

Decolonisation, in more academic spheres, is concerned with dismantling the power of White Supremacy, White hegemony, patriarchy and other names modes of oppression by designing ways in which the power can be equally disseminated among those who are considered the victims and the oppressed under the powers of colonialism and neo-colonialism. Robert Beckford, in *Documentary as Exorcism: Resisting the Bewitchment of Colonial Christianity* (2014), presents a compelling argument for 'exorcism' in the Gospel of Mark (include the specific biblical verses for clarity) to be seen as an anti-colonial sentiment,

As part of the emancipatory framework, these postcolonial readings of Jesus' exorcisms define the meaning of cast out. To cast out is to remove an occupying or harassing malevolent spiritual force from the physical body and also social world. (Beckford, 2014, p,70)

In this text, Beckford's focus is on the bewitchment of Black-British Pentecostalism, defining witchcraft as a structural evil which is ultimately understood as colonial Christianity, but this can also be translated for Black religion as it has been outlined for this study Bible-based religions that have been birthed from within the Black Christian religious experience. While holding a high view of scripture, Afroasiatic Diasporic Religions question its current form and versions produced by European

scholarship. ADR falls out of favour with current decolonial trends in mainstream theology in its exclusive nature; decolonisation is typically such that all peoples are welcome to participate in God-talk. Bo Sanders and Randy Woodley in *Decolonising Evangelicalism* say,

Applying critical theory (such as decolonisation) has an amazing capacity to level the playing field and expose what have been historical privileges and examined advantages. Each school of thought and tradition comes to the arena and puts its best foot forward. It explains its priorities, its goals, its big question and major concern, each one gets to frame its project with its own categories, vocabulary and concepts. This way, no one has a home-field advantage (to use a sports analogy). Then the examination begins. The question then becomes, what is your relationship to the powers and authorities? (Sanders and Woodley, 2020, Chapter 2)

However, the ADR nuance of "chosenness" or "original people" suggests a de-colonisation of removing the captors and regaining control over one's cultural assets. This exclusive quest presents questions about ADR's epistemological challenge - much of what we see in academic decolonisation discourse makes assumptions about what qualifies as 'colonial' or 'neo' that Afroasiatic Diasporic Religions and their maintained influence on the fringes seem to contest. For example, justice through the decolonisation process is not realised through sharing power equally among communities but by regaining power as those chosen by God, or, as noted by Fanon earlier, 'replaces one "species" of men by another' (Fanon, 1961, p.35). Lewis Gordon, an Africana philosopher, in *Freedom, Justice and Decolonisation* (2021), summarises colonialism to be considered as

That which aims at the conquest of all reality, colonialism becomes a system whose goals is not only conquest but also the offering of the domination of life and the assertion of itself as ontological and the primacy of ontology. Thus knowledge is, as nearly all decolonial theorists have argued, implicated here in the form of epistemic colonization. (Gordon, 2021, Chapter 3)

Gordon and Jane Anna Gordon, in *Not only the Master's tools* (2006), in response to Audre Lorde's sentiment "The Master's tools will never dismantle the master's house", talk about the method of dismantling. They posit that a more beneficial approach is not to focus efforts on dismantling but instead

on creating new spaces, in the same way, that oppressed people built houses of their own; 'It is our view that the proper response is to follow their lead, transcending rather than dismantling Western ideas through building our own houses of thought.' (Gordon & Gordon, 2006, Introduction). This captures, in part, the ADR project but with nuance – ADR decolonisation essentially comprises rebuilding their homes and reclaiming their tools. The example image of building one's own house, study, philosophy or religion resonates with how Lewis, reflecting on Fanon's ideas, also interrogates theorists' struggles when engaging with morality and ethics related to power and authority. Morals must depend on a set of rules, and it presents the conundrum of having to submit to the set of rules, set, for example, by a European epistemology, to realise new or improved ethical norms. Lewis says,

Reflection radicalises the problem. If they attempt to establish an ethical relationship, they must do so by the rules (morals) of a society premised in their exclusion. Thus, if they attempt to enter the ethical sphere of that society, the already excluded people treat the excluded ones as *violating the ethical space by virtue of doing the same to the avowedly moral rules*. Fanon's name for this was controversial. He called it "violence". (Gordon, 2021, Chapter 3)

Lewis says that morality creates the inclusion-exclusion paradigm by its very nature. Therefore, Black people participating in the European colonial moral space are considered violent because they are the 'excluded' operating (or appearing, as he puts it) in the space of the 'included'. The presence of ADRs presents the same said difficulties because one could argue that they purport a strictly religious, moral epistemology for Black people. Nevertheless, it appears to have similar structures to that we see in European colonial epistemological structures. It has already been noted that the resulting critique is often that these religions are colonially minded after centuries of subjugation to modernist, conservative reading conventions. However, because ADR religions are on a recovery project rather than a progressive or academically radical one, considering a 'strict moral code' as colonial (as it pertains to European colonialism) is an error. I will return to this point in the penultimate chapter. The nuance of "chosenness" provides the internal or exclusive remedy – much to the dissatisfaction of progressive decolonial theorists.

De-colonisation then, so far as it concerns Afroasiatic Diasporic Religions, is not that type considered in progressive postcolonial scholarship; space of inclusion – sharing power and resources with intentions to embrace the contributions of various epistemologies. Instead, it is akin to what Fanon describes, a violent recovery of epistemological and national assets (the Bible and bible-religion) from European colonial powers. In this sense, colonial Christianity is replaced with Afroasiatic Diasporic Religion as more authentic, authoritative, and appropriate for Black peoples.

4.5 Conservatism

In the literature review, I discussed how notions of conservatism were present in Black religion, primarily intended to be a criticism of Black Christian reading conventions and, more broadly, nationalist and patriotic stances. Conservatism, in many ways, has become synonymous with colonialism. Whilst considering its historical implications, there are grounds for conceptualising conservatism that speak so to anti-radicalisation, a preference for institution and religious authority.

Conservatism as intellectual discourse or an ideology is largely contested; a simple singular definition has yet to be produced because it is most simply understood for what it is not rather than what it is. Its very nature rejects abstract theories and ideologies and so cannot be sufficiently discussed accordingly. This being said, Samuel P. Huntington, in *Conservatism as an Ideology* (1957), persisted in using an ideological framework to demonstrate the nature of conservatism in a way that makes it helpful to discuss alongside the ideologies it opposes. While acknowledging its historicity, Huntington suggests that conservatism stands alone as situational and autonomous in its mechanisms.

Often termed 'reactionary', historical conservatism was formally birthed as a response to the French Revolution in the eighteenth century, which succeeded in overthrowing France's aristocratic rule and attempted to implement a liberal democratic system. It demonstrated the deep-seated frustration of the everyday person, both rich and poor, who did not have access to political power and influence due to the institution of feudalism. The writings of Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), were a key catalyst for further defining conservative attitudes that have varied perspectives and ambitions, as with all intellectual thought. Whilst there is no space nor need to herald Burke as the

authority on conservatism, the context from which his opinions have developed is significant to understanding conservatism's mechanisms. Daniel O'Neill, in *Edmund Burke and the Conservative Logic of Empire* (2016), summarises Burke's ideas in a few sentences, that whilst in itself the interpretation of Burke's ideas is not supremely authoritative, they do provide critical points for this defining process and a strong trajectory that can be traced to conservative views of the twenty-first century, he says,

Burke adhered to a view of history as a civilising process that stressed the fundamental importance of the landed aristocracy and organised religion for human progress and development. Conversely, he rejected as philosophically absurd and politically disastrous basic liberal notions such as natural human equality and declaration of universal individual rights, he consistently lampooned any notion of political and social equality between sexes or between the higher and lower orders. (O'Neill, 2016, p. 169)

O'Neill firstly highlights Burke's view of society as an evolutionary process toward good which is undergirded by the dependence on institutions such as the Church and aristocracy to aid this 'civilising process'. Secondly, he illuminates its aversion to abstract ideologies that aim to solve the inevitable inequalities among citizens in the country entirely. Conservatism is known for its 'slow reform' approach to society and politics in that, as mentioned before, it takes a historical view that society becomes better and more civilised over time and not through revolution - but through evolution. So, whilst, for Burke, society must make changes and require improvement, these improvements can and should be made through the mechanisms of tradition, institution, and religion. Society, in this view, has been described as a social contract liberal politics sought to dismantle by applying abstract theories to complex human lives; Burke posited,

Society is indeed a contract... [But as] the ends of such a partnership cannot be obtained in many generations, it becomes a partnership not only between those who are living, but between those who are living and those who are dead and those who are to be born. Changing the state as often as there are floating fancies... no one generation could link with the other. Men would be a little better than flies of summer. (Burke, 1776)

Burke is alluding to the need for tradition and continuity, that tradition grounds humanity and provides a mechanism through which society can learn from mistakes and maintain what has proved to be successful. Huntington picks up on this idea; he says 'the essence of conservatism is the rationalisation of existing institutions in terms of history, God, nature and man.' (Huntington, 1957, p. 457). He means that aside from Burke's response to the French Revolution, conservatism in its own right functions as a resisting force to the dismantling of existing institutions in any society. According to Huntington and others, conservatism is not about protecting aristocracy or the Church in particular but preserving and valuing any long-serving institutions as vehicles of wisdom and experience. This situational perspective of conservatism concludes then that conservatism is usually only active when the need arises when there is an ideological resistance against the existing institution, but what can also be seen through Burke's response to the French Revolution are some principles that complement yet go beyond a simple love for institution. The following is a summary of conservative principles concerning societal progress:

- (1) Man is basically a religious animal, and religion is the foundation of civil society. A divine sanction infuses the legitimate, existing social order.
- (2) Society is the natural, organic product of slow historical growth. Existing institutions embody the wisdom of previous generations. Right is a function of time "prescription," in the works of Burke, "is the most solid of all titles...".
- (3) Man is a creature of instinct and emotion as well as reason. Prudence, prejudice, experience, and habit are better guides than reason, logic, abstractions, and metaphysics. Truth exists not in universal propositions but in concrete experiences.
- (4) The community is superior to the individual. The rights of men derive from their duties. Evil is rooted in human nature, not in any particular social institution.
- (5) Except in an ultimate moral sense, men are unequal. Social organisation is complex and always includes a variety of classes, orders and groups. Differentiation, hierarchy, and leadership are the inevitable characteristics of any civil society.

- (6) A presumption exists "in favour of any settled scheme of government against any untried project..." Man's hopes are high, but his vision is short. Efforts to remedy existing evils usually result in even greater ones. (Burke paraphrased in Huntington, 1957, p. 456)

Working within these premises, conservatism can then be said to be a response and resistance to any ideology that seeks to usurp these premises. So, it is not the case then that conservatism is the opposite of liberalism. There are examples, particularly with fiscal conservatism, of overlap, but it is against anarchy, radicalisation and revolution –in brief, against the complete disregard for the existing institution of the society. Nor is it the case that conservatism is always pro-monarchy or aristocracy; applied to North American society, conservatism is pro-constitutionalism as they have never had a monarchy. However, it is the case for British conservatism, whose foundation institutions are the monarchy and the Church.

In *Conservatism: Dream and Reality* (2017), Nisbet considers the constant struggle between tradition and new ideas and innovative philosophies toward a perfect society. Conservatism does not seek perfect but is committed to tradition,

Given our normal predilection for the more exciting Enlightenment mentality of the Voltaire's, Diderot's and d'Holbach's, it is easy to miss, in the histories, this counter-force to the high rationalism and individualism of the Enlightenment. But it is there all the same, a product at one and the same time of the *Church* and its still considerable numbers of philosophers and theologians committed to orthodoxy instead of ideas of natural religion and natural ethics which had sprung out of the natural law movement of the seventeenth century. The more that *philosophies* declared the enlightenment of their doctrines of natural rights, the more the philosophers and historians in the universities – all religiously oriented, of course – appealed to the traditions which had sustained Europe for more than a thousand years. (Nisbet, 2017, p. 20)

Afroasiatic religions could also be considered as gatekeepers of the religious orthodoxy, deferring to an ancient and traditional ethnoreligious institution; the preference for identity formation being generated through a genealogical, traditional or mythological historical gaze is typically conservative,

Basic to conservative politics is its view of the role of history, 'History' reduced to its essentials is no more than experience, and it is from conservative trust in experience over abstract, and deductive thought in matters of human relationships that its trust in history is founded. (Nisbet, 2017, P. 38)

Kieron O'Hara, in *Conservatism, Epistemology and Value* (2016), explains how conservatism supports a variety of social models,

In a relatively egalitarian society without a hierarchical structure, a conservative position would defend *against* hierarchy and inequality. Even in a hierarchical and unequal society, a conservative's line might be that social stability will be promoted by ensuring that power or resources were shared a little more widely. (O'Hara, 2016, p. 425)

The point here is that conservatism defends historical institutions, an act of preservation - and is situational, so it allows for differences of opinions, systems and governmental structures by geography:

An ideologue who focuses on a particular end detects its absence in existing society (which is so complex that no end will be entrenched enough to satisfy its adherents). This then becomes a key aim of the ideologue's policy, because of his one-dimensional yardsticks of what constitutes a successful society. On the other hand, the conservative eschews the idea of society having ends at all, and so – though he may well be critical of existing society – he can also appreciate its positive aspects without contradiction. (O'Hara, 2016, p.431)

Conservatism, considered conceptually, is the balancing feature of this conceptual framework that best supports the ADR preference for tradition, religious authority and institution, as outlined in Chapter two. The progressive intellectual contribution to the current extreme polarisation of the British political landscape has been identity, representation, recognition, and rights. With organisations such as the Black Lives Matter movement at the helm of Black progressivism in social spheres, people of colour

are challenging the existing democratic political system that, they argue, is founded upon White supremacy, patriarchy and exploitative capitalism (including the enslavement of African and indigenous peoples). As its leading contender in many ways, conservatism has become synonymous with racism, White supremacy, imperialism, colonialism, and intolerance. Defining the principles of conservatism conceptually is essential to this study because I argue that it describes the political/social attitudes of many, if not most, Black-British Christians and those who can be described as de-churched. Not that they are racists and complicit in their oppression, but that Black history, ancient African and Caribbean cultures (proverbs and morals), family traditions, religion, and continuity are essential features that govern and protect Black life.

4.6 The Preservation- Liberation Framework

In this chapter, I have innovated a conceptual framework that I believe will best capture the concepts that will emerge from data and interpret the inner workings of Afroasiatic Diasporic Religions from a religious perspective. Often literature emphasises the ADR as socio-political responses to the Black lived reality; however, without negating those aspects, this study considers the religious and theological natures as indicators of their appeal to the de-churched. I intend not to separate them from their socio-political function but to provide the balance I perceive religion to be underestimated and underemphasised as core to the decolonial inspiration of these Black religious groups.

I began by considering its religious nature, specifying the genuine relationship to and belief in a divine God and Holy Scriptures instead of an abstract sense of 'ultimacy' (Neville, 2018, p. 9) that serves as a coping mechanism. Further, I categorised Afroasiatic Diasporic Religions as New Religious Movements, acknowledging their recent emergence in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and their relation to more established religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) and claims to recover more ancient religions. New Religious Movements are considered indicators of shifts in society, and so it also faithfully captures their relationship with the wider society without shifting the focus away from their religious nature.

I then considered Ethiopianism a historical religious foundation that gave rise to these Afroasiatic Diasporic Religions. Merging faith, politics and genealogy, Ethiopianism was a successful framework that oppressed Black peoples could make sense of Black consciousness and their Christian faith. My framework seeks to encapsulate critical concepts developed and tested since the era of Ethiopianism and perhaps broaden its reach and scope beyond the symbol of Ethiopia. At the same time, I want to make more direct genealogical assertions for far as culture, religious and ethnic continuity about the Afroasiatic region, which perhaps serves the various religions within ADR a bit more integrally. I hope that the more mechanical terms I rely on, preservation and *liberation* are a more explicit reminder of how the framing works and thus how it can be applied beyond the ADRs and the de-churched.

Another critical concept in this framework is de-colonisation, which I have defined by reflecting on Fanon's decolonial lens, considering decolonisation on national terms as well as how it applies to other epistemological sites of colonial occupation I felt worked well with religions many consider as Black, nationalist religions. I did not delve into Black nationalism in this chapter to maintain a religious focus; however, in the penultimate chapter, I return to the role of Black nationalism in the ADR and how they contribute to Black, British and de-churched identity formation.

The final concept that I believe brings the conceptual framework into balance is the underpinning influence of conservatism. Conceptualised, conservatism is understood to speak to the preference of institution, history and religious authority, which I argue are central features of Afroasiatic Diasporic Religions. Conservatism anchors Afroasiatic Diasporic Religions in historic traditional, cultural and religious realities that resist the inevitable relativist and pluralist pursuits found within progressive ideologies. In this way, ADRs can create legacies for Black people and remain anchored in ancient ethnoreligious communities that are safe spaces for identity formation in the diaspora and globalised world. Together these concepts form the *preservation-liberation* framework, a concept I have created to hold in tension the intuition to preserve a traditional, genealogical, and religiously conservative institution yet liberate it from White supremacy.

"... and can I just say something, one more thing! I've been pondering on this, I've been pondering on slavery times, they never gave us good clothes, they never gave us good food, they never gave us good housing, they never allowed them to marry, they never allowed them to keep their children, and they just about made them be human – but they gave them religion. So all of everything else... but we need to look at the religion as well because I came to Church and what I've studied in the book and of what was preached, in churches in slavery times, there was essences of it in the modern-day. So what I'm saying – that's why I had to invite Eleasah, we have to look at it just because it was happening. Because that means that everything else they gave us was bad except the one thing, you know? And I really think deeply about that. So we have to interrogate it. (Participant M, White Man's Religion?, 2018)

5. Method and Methodology

5.1 Introduction

In the first half of this thesis, I have built a case for the importance and originality of this study. I have introduced how I have come to bring together select Black religions as Afroasiatic Diasporic Religions, detailing an Afroasiatic perspective of 'woke' that has established itself in Britain and, I suggest, maintained an influence on the fringes of the Black Church for decades. I have explored existing literature that engages with the presence and nature of ADR in North America and Britain and conclude that what is missing is an ethnographic study that engages the de-churched directly to understand best what has caused them to leave mainstream churches, and explore the strength of ADR appeal, in the British context. I then gather my ideas conceptually to define what I perceive to be the concepts that undergird the Afroasiatic diasporic religious nature and appeal to the de-churched. I have innovated a *preservation-liberation* framework that holds in tension both conservatism and liberation conceptually. This framework is my working hypothesis that I will test against the qualitative data. I will now outline my methods for conducting my research, analysing the data, and testing my hypothesis.

These are the research questions that drive my analysis:

1. Why are some Black people becoming disillusioned with the Church in Britain?

2. What do Afroasiatic Diasporic Religions offer that the de-churched believe mainstream British churches do not?
3. What is the main strength of Afroasiatic diasporic religious influence, and how best can we understand their rationale?

My initial ideas centred around their rejection of a 'White man's religion', an unapologetic pro-Black stance, and the ability to marry a highly conservative religiosity with liberative social and political perspectives.

The literature review demonstrated that scholars, in recent years, have struggled to accommodate Afrocentric Diasporic Religions as their religious adherents teach them because of their ethnocentric and conservative natures that drive their core teachings. While being able to mine these religions for liberative themes, there is much to be said for how these ADR teachings actively contribute to Black identity formation in twenty-first century Britain, meeting the need to be pro-Black, religiously centred around conservative Bible reading and living.

With particular consideration to the more recent publications outlined in the introduction (Mason, 2018, 2021, Bantu, 2020, McCaulley, 2020), it seems imperative that while the Church has begun to equip itself to answer the questions and challenges from the ADR apologetically, that ethnographic work is being done to make sense of the phenomena as it pertains to wider society and church's role within it. Black religion, as discussed in this study, are those religions that have been birthed out of oppressed communities – the re-reading and de-colonial religious project is inextricably linked with the people of colour's experiences of oppression in society. Insofar as it discusses the findings with the broader socio-political British context, an ethnographic approach also helps reflect the role of religion in society in the twenty-first century rooted in empirical data, which is valuable for further research and developing solutions relevant to today's religious, social, political climate. Nevertheless, despite the popularity of humanism, pluralism, and atheism – conservative religious expression still has a place in today's British society – particularly within Black communities.

5.2 Researcher's Background, Belief and Biases

It is crucial to reiterate my interest and background because this research has been inspired by my lived experience and evolving journey as a confessional Christian. I was born into a religious, Christian family that can be best described as combining Evangelical, word of faith, and Pentecostal traditions, so in every sense, we have always held a high view of Scripture as authoritative, yet it has only been in recent years that I have engaged with the academic nature of these views. My passion for this project is fuelled by my love for, respect, and religious submission to biblical Scripture, but I have managed this potential bias by taking a methodologically agnostic approach. Bruce suggests that methodological agnosticism in sociological studies is a valuable way of answering our questions; he says,

If we wish to explain why people act as they do, the explanation will take the form of identifying which of their beliefs (not ours) were brought into play in interpreting their perceptions (not ours) of the circumstances in which they acted or reacted. (Bruce, 2011, p.109)

This marries well with my intention to privilege their beliefs as religious instead of a coping mechanism which I discussed in the conceptual framework chapter.

There are interpretation issues when the religion is not the researcher's own, and this should always be taken into account as an inevitable limitation in the analysis. This research aims not to legitimise or authenticate truth claims of the various religious teachings but to analyse what ADR adherents believe and how those beliefs influence the fringes of the Black-British Church. Although there may be similarities to how these Afroasiatic religions and I approach Scripture, there are numerous grounds upon which I reject their religious views. My rejection (or embrace) of these Afroasiatic Diasporic Religious teachings is of no consequence to this study.

The second note to be made on biases and backgrounds is that the data analysis benefits from insider knowledge in which I can produce 'thick descriptions'. Firstly, I have collected my data in local neighbourhoods where the participants are a combination of people I know and do not know; this has allowed me to have an insider privilege. Secondly, the programme that I used to collect my data was designed in response to my journey as a Christian, having come into contact with these ADRs and their

challenges to my core religious beliefs. As we shall see in the next chapter, each session is centred around a particular topic with suggested foci, which reflect how I understood the phenomena at the time. In summary, I am as much a participant as I am the researcher in this project, and I have sought methodological ways that enable this research not to be overcome by my own bias.

Below is an example of how I started the group discussions of each session; due to the close link between my research and my experiences, it was important that, as a researcher/participant, I am transparent about my background and desires with each group.

Elesah: okay, let's bring it back together. So what I did last week is start off with something so that people don't feel shy. You don't have to say something, but this is the point where we come together and share, and I always try to make it clear that when we do these sessions, there is no one authority of knowledge. I try to share what I've found, where I have specialities, which I do have some, I try to input them, but the discussion part is the part that matters because whether we know the beginning from the end or the ultimate truth – it's what we do with the information. If we're Christians, how does it impact our Christianity and if not, why are we no longer Christians, and what does your religion or your faith or your belief system look like? So I'll just start, as I told you last week, I'm a Christian; I don't currently attend church because I find it a little bit difficult – just on the silence against things like the oppression of Black people in Britain and just on the fact that the education in terms of the intellectual side I find quite weak and I find it quite frustrating. Sometimes I find it a little bit hard to know my place in the Church. And in terms of just visiting Sunday to Sunday, sitting down and singing and all of that a little bit difficult. I've been in Church all my life a little bit of a Ned Flanders kid, and I think for me this topic I find interesting because I'm interested in history and the preservation of culture. Sometimes I struggle with the fact that culture does evolve and things change; I love things to just be preserved. And I find this interesting, and I find talking about this topic with people very interesting because for me I find it very crucial that people start to think for themselves and start to question things and even if they come across this information – the fact that they have gone so far deep to study it. I mean, I come across people that have been like

'what about this', and I have had to read the Metu Neter and all these different types of things, and I've had to read these books to understand where they're coming from and what their belief systems look like, and I think there's such merit in really digging deep to try and find truth and I mean for me like ultimately I would love everyone to know Jesus and stuff like that but what does that even mean? That's why I do this; what does it mean to know Jesus? We've been sold it one way, but it might look like another? Okay? If people are finding different lines of truth, how does it impact what I believe? Because we can sing, we can pray those things don't take school, but knowing a bit more about where your Bible came from, knowing if Jesus really walked the earth or not, we'll be doing a little bit more of that, we have a few more sessions, three more, those are really important to because often we practice what we've been taught, the way we pray, we've learned it, the things we say, the songs that we sing, the way that we change are all reflections of what people teach us, even sometimes when people say – well I had a dream, I know some Christians who never say that because it's not practised in their Church, it doesn't come to them instinctually but sometimes in our Christianity I've found that a lot of people practice things they think are spiritual, but they're actually just learned. And what we do is provide a space to see well what more is out there and what has actually informed that learning. And it's not to take away the spiritual nature of God and all that aspect of religion but to acknowledge the intellectual aspect of our faith that is at play whether we like it or not. What our pastor teaches us was written by a theologian that specialises in this, that took someone's side in this – can you see the pattern? And so, for me, I might present this, even though I might not agree with it. I don't present it in a mocking way; I present it because it's really important that people take this journey to question. To ask questions. Jesus constantly asked his disciples questions, and just even left them with it like – 'let me know when you're ready' he constantly challenged them, so we have to have that same attitude about ourselves as well. Does anyone have anything they'd like to say in response to that, in addition, or share a part of their journey where they're at? Don't be shy! (Researcher, Out of Kemet, 2018)

The point of re-introducing myself in this way was to ensure continual transparency about myself as both researcher and participant. Sharing my story, ideas, and desires helps others understand my contribution to the process and how limited my perspectives are, therefore creating an opening for other participants to influence the process through their stories and sharing.

5.3 Research Design

5.3.1 Ethnographic Research

This study is a qualitative ethnographic study. I seek to understand a community of people through observation by being present among them. The community I have identified as de-churched are not a fixed nor organised community but is comprised of individuals who share similar social and religious experiences and desires or are interested in the de-churched phenomenon; these qualifiers identify this community;

- They have left their church community and joined an Afroasiatic Diasporic Religion
- They can be considered on the fringes of their church community and asking questions connected to the beliefs and challenges presented by Afroasiatic Diasporic Religions
- They are experiencing disillusionment with their faith and understanding of Christianity on account of the legacy of African enslavement, colonialism, and neo-colonialism

As we shall see in the next chapter, the participants this study engages with also comprise active confessional Christians interested in the notion of 'woke,' Black consciousness, and the decolonisation of Christianity.

This qualitative ethnographic research aims to make sense of a broader social phenomenon through a focused investigation. There are three main points I want to emphasise here about my ethnographic research; the first is contextual. Martyn Hammersley calls these 'social microcosms'; he says, 'the value of ethnographic work often depends on showing that the particular events described instantiating something of general significance about the social world' (Hammersley, 1992, p. 17). I hypothesise that this social microcosm – the de-churched - speaks to a progressive shift in society that we see

demonstrated clearly in critical discourses and the louder political voices that perhaps do not necessarily speak for the majority of those in society and that severance from modernity destabilises a community's ability to maintain a meaningful identity.

Secondly, this critical research is responsive to the oppressive conditions in which the religions were birthed and the general sense of complaint and dissatisfaction of the de-churched rooted in racial discrimination and White hegemony. Furthermore, this research seeks to raise awareness of injustice and address inequality on an epistemological level that has not considered ADR equal conversation partners in twenty-first-century Western theology. Although, as mentioned before, Afroasiatic Diasporic Religions are often referenced as sites of resistance, it seems their advancement in decolonising mainstream Christianity is understated and underestimated by both conservative and liberal theologians. In this sense, this critical ethnography does not observe through a single lens such as womanism, socialism, or conservatism, if one would permit that it is considered critical, but seeks to convey the criticisms that emerge from the data and apply them more broadly to all positions that have excluded ADR. Hammersley notes this complex issue; he says,

It is not obvious that there is only one source of oppression. This threatens the coherence of the critical model, unless there are reasonable grounds for believing that a single form of theory-guided practice can lead to the simultaneous abolition of all sources of oppression. Without that assumption, it seems likely that from the point of view of different critical theorists, or even that of a single one, many people may be simultaneously both oppressor and oppressed. (Hammersley, 1992, p. 103)

My intuition is that this social microcosm reflects more broadly an underestimated and undervalued community, the ADR and the de-churched, who are more advanced in the decolonisation project than academia has been in praxis.

In *Key Concepts in Ethnography* (2008), Karen O'Reilly says that critical ethnographic research 'interpret[s] the data, using image and metaphors that show them in a new way, to reveal the hidden depths of exploitations, power, and disadvantage' (O'Reilly, 2008, p. 54). Critical ethnography seeks

change. This study presents itself as a contribution to the decolonisation of the British Church. It also challenges the progressive relativisation and humanist undertones of post-modern Black religious scholarship (considered most critical) that cannot facilitate the presence of Afroasiatic Diasporic Religions as they present themselves but instead must repackage or dismiss their validity. Consistent with critical scholarship, this research looks for change from the bottom up.

The final emphasis is contact. Campbell and Lassiter (2015) outline the necessity for ethnography to have direct contact with the research subject; it is distinct from other forms of data collection because its very integrity is based on the insights that are gained through direct interaction,

Doing and writing ethnography itself rests on an analogous idea, that direct participation and genuine engagement in the day to day lives of others can provide unique insights into how various and diverse ideas and activities generate meaning. (Campbell and Lassiter, 2015)

Foundational to this study is the original data derived from contact with the de-churched community. This qualitative and detailed data is the evidence upon which my hypothesis depends to justify the preservation-liberation framework and the present mind of the twenty-first century Black, British de-churched. This unique data set provides the necessary insights into which various fields of study and praxis can benefit from the knowledge and ideas of those on the margins.

5.3.2 Participatory Action Research

I have chosen to combine my ethnographic research with Participatory Action Research (PAR) because of its democratic and critical approach to data collection and solution production. In 'The Entanglements of Ethnography and Participatory Action Research (PAR) in Educational Research in North America' (2019), Margret Eisenhart considers how although seemingly compatible and often conflated, the roots of these methodologies present weighty tensions that the researcher must consider seriously when bringing the two together. The issues of concern for this study are the power relationships and the development of the research plan. This section outlines the methods I have employed to gather the data; the aim here is to demonstrate how I have consistently privileged the participants' voices and religions as key actors in creating solutions. Here I describe how I have combined elements from participatory

action research and consciousness-raising methods and insider knowledge to design a programme that I felt would best generate the data needed to bring understanding while creating an educational, ethical and empowering space for the participants.

Participatory Action Research is when the researcher enters a community space and works with the community to solve an issue through research and dialogue. This process requires democratic, safe spaces where all the participants can flourish and feel heard. In this space, everyone should feel equal, empowered, and valued within the group. What is unique about this approach is that it allows the participants to dictate the research direction and decide what outcome they would like to work toward.

According to Peter Reason and Hilary Bradbury, action research is:

A participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes, grounded in a participatory worldview which we believe is emerging at this historical moment. It seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally, the flourishing of individual persons and their communities. (Bradbury and Reason, 2001, p. 1)

Below is an example of how I encourage others to see themselves as equal contributors to the solution making process. I begin by demonstrating my thought processes about the topic and challenging them to contribute their questions and ideas:

Eleasah: Okay, so usually we form a circle, so there is no kind of me saying everything, so a circle of life! And um basically, the discussion element of this session becomes the most important part because what I try to do in these sessions is eliminate this idea that the person at the front gets to know all and say all okay? So the initial point, the initial part that I do --- (some disruptions of talking) the initial point is just to provoke you, so I provide some information and provoke you, you're welcome to challenge me on it and what we wanna do is start to hear some of your ideas, its been about four weeks for most of us now okay so I'm hoping that you're starting to form some ideas or more questions and those questions can be

geared at one another they don't necessarily need to be at me okay. Um, but mainly because this is the last session, it is considering this thing called Christianity in light of our struggle as Black people or people of colour in Britain, okay. Is Christianity enough? Okay, theologically, practically, what do we experience of Church now? Okay, is it actually a viable vehicle for justice, and this is why I save Black theology for last, because a lot of people, a lot of Christians, don't get to hear about it. It doesn't make it to Church, okay, but there are people out there really trying to make sense of God and his interaction with our struggle, so I thought you'd probably feel a bit cheated if I didn't have this conversation and let you know that this is out there. But also, just based on what you know, what you understand of life, it boils down to this can you be Black, can you be Christian, and where does it go from here. With what you've learned with some of your ideas, um as they've been stretched, as they've been grown over the last few – what are the new challenges that have arisen, for me particularly starting this journey a few years ago it's about how does my faith actually become practical and socially and politically useful.

Someone says: YES!

Elesah: okay, it's not enough for me to pray and fast and cast out demons; I'm very good at that, okay, but when it comes to being a political voice for people who struggle in real life, people that actually don't have food, people that get wrongly imprisoned all those kind of things okay, all the – I don't know if they're called bills in this country but all the new laws and bye-laws that gets passed, is my faith actually contributing to the betterment of peoples lives, the same way I believe that Jesus' did when he land okay. So I'm just starting off to say that it's always been my biggest struggle; even though I teach it's like 'how am I walking it day to day?' part of it is is me teaching it okay; that's part of my contribution, but when I wake up what does my faith look like, is it enough to say I'm gonna pray for you sister, okay that's because I decided to remain a Christian but is it good enough, is it worth it? Okay, is it useful? Okay, so over to you guys! (Researcher, *Black Jesus, Black Theology* 2018)

PAR creates a safe space that aims to be inclusive of multiple voices, in the case of this study, religious and political voices concerning identity - 'The respect action researcher's have for the complexity of local situations and for the knowledge people gain in the process of everyday life makes it impossible for us to ignore what the 'people' think and want' (Brydon-Miller, 2015, p. 25).

Relationships are essential in PAR; the researcher facilitates the sessions and engages directly with the participants rather than observing from the sidelines. This method benefits from the researcher's reflections, who can describe atmospheres, tensions, and moments of group consciousness that might not be so easy to decipher or conjure with one-on-one interviews, written testimonies, and quantitative data. Participation Action Research takes seriously the issues affecting the community they are working with. Brydon-Miller et al. suggest that '[a] key value shared by action researchers, then, is this abiding respect for people's knowledge and for their ability to understand and address the issues confronting them and their communities' (Brydon-Miller, 2015, p.14).

Ultimately, PAR seeks to let the participants speak for themselves and empower them to move toward a solution for their circumstances; the following excerpt is an example of how I invited people to participate and led by sharing some of my interests in the research as it pertained to my personal life:

Eleasah: So this part is really kind of a time to respond to some of the things that I've said, but you don't have to because, again, as I said, it's just to provoke. But really this is just a time to share your experiences, introduce yourselves, why you came, how you're feeling about Christianity, if you're not in Christianity, where are you, what are the truths of that space okay and um and to just to really begin the discussion about how we're working out this Black Consciousness and this Christian faith. I assume that most have come here because they're concerned about Black Consciousness and about Black lives or have questions about Christianity, and so it's just really to begin that conversation. The more that we learn in all these sessions, obviously the richer and the deeper the discussion will become, but I really hope that you take the first part as just a good prompting, okay, so my name is Eleasah umm I am currently not a member or attending any church, and I have not done for five years. I love God, um and I believe that Jesus is the son of God but, I also believe that there are big flaws in the

education, my personal education – understanding God, how I've seen God understood God umm and umm I'm tryna think what I have questions about.... I've just got some- obviously my main thing and my research is based on how do we move forward as a Christian but even just as a Black community because religion is just there, it's a big part of our community whether you're saved or not, or whether you're a Christian or not um and so what does, my interest is in how is religion gonna play a part in you know the emancipation of Black people basically. Um, so yeah, I don't know if anyone wants to begin, initial responses, thoughts, questions?

(Researcher, White Man's Religion?, 2018)

5.3.3 Consciousness Raising

To support the Participatory Action Research, I employed a method from feminist consciousness-raising groups from the 1960s which focused on slowing the pace of the conversation and allowing participants the time to talk, think, process, and complete their contribution:

Each participant would be encouraged to take as much 'free space' as she needed to talk, and interruption was discouraged. Less vocal members would be encouraged to participate in-depth (Shreve 1989, 21). Reger argues that such free spaces were intentionally 'infused with feminised emotion cultures fostering emotional expressiveness and caring, nurturing and personal relationships' (2004, 212). They provided a safety net and vantage point outside everyday life (Firth and Robinson, 2016, p. 352)

This slower pace of re-processing and sharing interpreted experiences allowed people to tell their stories and share in consideration of what had happened during the session, something they may have learned, or an idea that has piqued their interest. In this way also, I was empowered to politely request that people who had spoken before or made a habit of interrupting others give others room to allow others to speak and complete their contribution. Interestingly, this became a significant part of the analysis because many of the participants felt that during their church experiences, their voices were not valued, their questions were left unanswered, and their unconventional contributions were dismissed. Having

discussed this issue in a more general way with the group helped create that sense of sharing even when it came to allowing people to express an idea or experience fully.

Another significant aspect of consciousness-raising that has contributed to the research and programme is the format of the group sessions. Focusing on a particular theme each week rather than an utterly unstructured discussion allowed for the participants to think and speak deeply on the topics, 'The group format typically consisted of a round of personal experiences and reflections on the week's theme, followed by an integrative session in which the group sought to combine their accounts into a structural picture.' (Firth and Robinson, 2016, pp. 346-7)

Consciousness-raising was a communal activity requiring the group to bring together their individual experiences and consider this qualitative data as critical signifiers. This type of formatting aids in analysing and developing a strategy that works for both the sessions and my data analysis.

By combining these approaches, I designed a five-session programme that focused on the religious teachings and challenges within the Afroasiatic Diasporic Religions. These programmes were designed to have safe, transparent, listening conversations and consider solutions for decolonising the mainstream Church.

5.4. Population, Sites and Sampling

5.4.1 Population

The research aims to understand the influence of ADR on the Black-British Christian body and those I have come to define as the de-churched. The design of my sampling technique has two stages; the first is what is described as *criterion sampling*, and this applies to how I selected my population for the research. M. Patton, in *Qualitative evaluation and research methods*, says,

The logic of criterion sampling is to review and study all cases that meet some predetermined criterion of importance. This approach is common in quality assurance... This point of criterion sampling is to be sure to understand cases are likely to be information-rich because they may

reveal major system weaknesses that become targets of opportunity for program or system improvement. (Patton, 1990, pp. 176-177)

The target population, therefore, are Black people who have (1) left mainstream churches and have joined an ADR, (2) those who are still attending mainstream church but have questions and concerns that position them on the margins of the Black-British church body, (3) and those who are still committed to mainstream Christianity but have an interest in decolonising the mainstream church and engaging with ADR teachings apologetically. To best understand the issue of disillusion of the de-churched and the influence and strength of ADR, this study seeks to hear from those at the centre of the phenomenon, rather than from observers and scholars—engaging directly with the de-churched presents the best possible chance for developing a robust, relevant and rich understanding. (Guest, Namey, and Mitchel, 2013, p. 43)

Being de-churched and engaging with ADR is not a new phenomenon, but I am interested in its twenty-first-century resurgence in Britain. With this in mind, there was no need to discriminate on class, gender, or age, for I hope to understand how the ADR maintains an influence throughout Black Britain.

The PAR sessions were advertised much like an event that described the issues, subjects, and participants suitable for contribution, ensuring that the data gathering process was focused on the research topic and a population who have a particular interest primarily because the participants have volunteered based on the questions, parameters or criteria I detailed. For example, I advertised BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS AND CHRISTIAN FAITH (BCCF) as a public event; this five-session programme would take place in a particular church venue and open to those who were interested in taking part in my doctoral research – answering the question – why are Black people leaving the church and supported by a more provocative question – "Is Christianity a White Man's Religion?"

I designed flyers for the publicised events using social media platforms Whatsapp, Facebook and Instagram, and various email networks. Admittedly, having such an open invitation may result in the participants not seeing through the entire programme or only having attendees for the first session but based on my insider knowledge and intuition of this phenomenon, I felt that applying as little pressure

as possible was perhaps the best way securing the interest of those who were already sceptical of church-based engagement.

I provided my contact details on the event invitations for those who may want to ask questions or better understand what they were attending and the requirements for participation.

Included in the data sample is a programme that I had run by invitation (the participants in full knowledge of my doctoral research) whereby an individual wanted to have the BCCF sessions run in her local community. This individual had attended the programme at another site and other events I participated in around London. In this case, the individual did their own marketing, which I added to my own promotion of the ongoing research. I feel that it is important to add this set of data to the sample pool because it identifies a particular group of people seeking to engage in this topic and in need of a facilitator to help them create a solution and generate knowledge.

5.4.2 Multi-site/Multi Visit

The data collection process I had designed for this study required me to visit multiple sites on repeated occasions in London. Using my personal network of Baptist churches, I contacted various ministers about hosting the programme at their church buildings. The sample is based on three sites around London, which I visited five times weekly. Although I will discuss these sites comparatively in the next chapter, providing a deeper dimension to the sample and key contributors, the decision to gather data from multiple sites was less about the geography and shifting demographic and more about having a substantial data and sample pool. This resonates with George E. Marcus in *Ethnography in/of the World System: The Emergence of Multi-sited Ethnography* (1995) when considering some of the potential issues of the developing methodology. He says,

Although multi-sited ethnography is an exercise in mapping terrain, its goal is not a holistic representation, an ethnographic portrayal of the world system as a totality. Rather, it claims that any ethnography of a cultural formation in the world system is also an ethnography of the system, and therefore cannot be understood only in terms of the conventional single-site mise-

en-scene of ethnographic research, assuming indeed it is the cultural formation, produced in several different locales, rather than the conditions of a particular set of subjects that is the object of the study. (Marcus, 1995, p. 99)

As my study is concerned with a religious formation in London, a large geographic site, having multiple sites in different areas of London (Central, South and East London, respectively) allows me to interrogate the religious phenomena and to also make it accessible for participants around London to participate and for the ethnographic research to demonstrate its presence in multiple locations.

5.4.3 Sampling

The second stage of my sampling design refers to the data samples that feature in my findings; this is based on *theory-based sampling* or, more specifically, concept-based sampling. Following the conceptual framework outlined in the previous chapter (that serves as my hypothesis), the data I have selected for analysis is based on the conceptual construct of interest I previously outlined – the preservation-liberation framework. This framework consists of various theories and concepts that I believe work in tension to understand the de-churched phenomenon best related to Black-British Christians. Patton says,

However, to sample social science phenomena that represent the theoretical construct of interest, one must define the construct to be sampled, such as person-environmental interactions or instances of social deviance, identity crisis, creativity, or power interactions in an organization. (Patton, 1990, p. 177)

In this sense, the samples are selected to test my hypothesis; however, because I have already determined the criteria for the population based on the issue of the de-churched and 'White Man's Religions', a significant amount of the data has been used in the findings. This ensures that my sample is information-rich and substantial enough to support an in-depth critical analysis.

5.5 Procedure

5.5.1 Group Discussion: equipping the group to engage in dialogue

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), Paulo Freire introduces a critical pedagogy to the academic platform. A revolutionary work from Brazil (considered part of the 'third world') challenged how education existed, perceived love, and liberated the oppressed. Freire's dialogue as a form of transformation education is a vital tool for defining a pedagogical method for the BCCF programme, as it destabilises all preconceived notions of 'teaching well'. Freire describes dialogue as a human phenomenon in which *true words* are the goal (action + reflection). The true word informs a work that informs a praxis that transforms the world (Freire, 1970, p. 68). Words that are not true, either lacking action or reflection, are merely verbalisms and are considered non-transformative.

Further thoughts on this were presented in *What is the Dialogical Method of Teaching?* by Freire and Ira Shor (1987), where Freire posits, 'dialogue is the moment where humans meet to reflect on their reality as they make and remake it' (Freire and Shor, 1987, p. 13). Dialogue, in this context, is more than just a conversation; it is a meaningful and transformative experience in the process of getting to the conversation, which is undergirded by the thought, language, aspirations and conditions of the student (Freire and Shor, 1987, p. 11).

Freire's theory on dialogue speaks directly to small group dynamics. In a series of instructions, he establishes a code of conduct to achieve dialogue in the transformative sense. There is no room for domination, one over the other, within dialogue; it is a safe space in which the word is the right of everyone (Freire, 1970, p. 69). Establishing these rights in dialogue gives everyone the right to be considered a human with agency; there is no room for a division of class or "race". Freire was mainly concerned with the evil of capitalism and was committed to educating the illiterate communities, contributing to the development of their countries throughout his career.

Dialogue demands critical thinking, which demands understanding one's reality and the part one plays in that reality. This type of learning establishes equality among the group. In contrast, the banking method in which the teacher fills the receptacles (students) with static narrative (facts) denies the

students the opportunity to truly engage with the narrative and experience the life behind the facts and how it relates to their reality. The banking method does not require critical thinking and minimises students' opportunity to understand their reality and create new realities. The banking method of education does not require the type of student participation then ensures holistic growth. In rejecting the banking method of transference and domination, the dialogical method affirms everyone's right to speak, in that it does not work without the contribution of sincere others to find true words that have action, that have been reflected upon, and that create new realities and ways that people can name the world and not be subject to being named (Freire, 1970 p. 69). The liberation within Freire's dialogue is present in the fact that people have the freedom to speak for themselves, to name their reality and to have that naming valued; 'those who have been denied the primordial right to speak their word must reclaim this right and prevent the continuation of this dehumanising aggression' (Freire, 1970, p. 69).

The quote below is an example of a participant offering correction, critiquing my use of the term 'intellectual' in the introductory talk and offering a deeper framing of 'intellectual' going forward in the discussion:

Participant EO: thank you, it's really interesting. A couple of things that you said, one of them is about, you want to explore the intellectual side um, and I think for me just be careful how we say that because I think that sometimes people can feel like their knowledge is not important. And I think even as an intellectual, you can learn from people's everyday information and every experience. And in one instance they are intellectual in how they've grown in the Church um so I think if we say it's an intellectual thing, it kind of distances people when they hear that word people feel like they need to know so much, but actually this is all about increasing our knowledge. I've done some work; I don't want to talk about it, there's just so much to take on board, and you can feel like the information is so much that we need to break it down. Yes, it's about learning and understanding and um, at all levels, we have our own intellect, and we are our own intellectuals type of things, so yeah.

Eleasah: yeah yeah, I one hundred per cent agree with that; intellectual probably isn't the right word; we had a brother last week, one of my boys came down, and he said, 'but all this

knowledge for what? How much can we possibly contain within our lives?' you know its limitless at the end of the day, so in a sense, this journey for ultimate intellectual power is a little bit vain; we will die not knowing things, and intellect obviously does include other aspects, we have emotional intelligence, so you're one hundred per cent right, so perhaps intellectual isn't the right word but more just to highlight that aside from what we might consider as ritual, deeper knowledge is probably the best word, the reading aspect, the artefacts, the archaeological aspects of our Christianity, so definitely thank you for that a really good point.

(Out of Kemet 2018)

One of the crucial moments within the dialogical teaching method is the space for the teacher to learn and re-learn what they already know. It is not just the liberation of the student that is the goal, but for the teacher, every time a topic is taught to build upon the reality of what they know, the experience is '...shaped by the subject matter and training of the teacher, who is simultaneously a classroom teacher, a politician and artist' (Freire, 1987, p.11). In this way, the achievement of learning is not with the accumulation of knowledge and facts but by making sense of the information according to one's lived experience and transforming those realities.

Freire's work is set within a framework of humanism, the pursuit of betterment as a human, experiencing and fulfilling human potential. Freire concludes that true dialogue cannot occur without these five virtues:

- (1) Love – 'If I do not love the world – If I do not love life – If I do not love people – I cannot enter dialogue.'
- (2) Humility – 'Dialogue, as the encounter of those addressed to the common task of learning and acting, is broken if the parties (or one of them) lack humility.'
- (3) Faith – 'Faith in people is an *a priori* requirement for dialogue; "the dialogue man" believes in others even before he meets them face to face.'
- (4) Hope – 'Hope is rooted in men's incompleteness, from which they move out in constant search – a search which can be carried out only in communion with others.'

- (5) Critical thinking – 'thinking which perceives reality as process, as transformation rather than as a static entity.'

(Freire, 1970, p. 71)

The Dialogical teaching method of Freire speaks directly to the nature of group dynamics within a small group setting, which I feel to be necessary for this programme. Dialogue provides a vehicle in which the like-minded and those who share similar experiences and interests can make sense of their reality and transform it into something better or more appropriate. In my study, dialogue can help those connected by a commitment to and hope for justice for Black people to name and rename their realities. This type of transformative communication requires a vision, an established goal for learning and action, which creates a sense of value for the group and its members. Applying the dialogical teaching method to the programme can create a sacred space for those within the learning space; however, its humanist bent does not resonate with the religious emphasis I envisage for this study.

During the group discussion, I began by sharing my own story of someone on a personal journey of understanding my faith in relation to my identity and some of the broader issues of miseducation and whitewashing of scriptures that I believe have shaped my understanding of God. It is crucial to clarify that in the session space, we all become teachers and students and that although there is initial educational input, it is still limited to operating as a tool to provoke ideas and questions and is open to criticism and further exploration by the participants. Below is an example of how I open up the discussion with some opening thoughts and prompts about how our religion and belief engage with our lived experiences:

Eleasah: Okay, well, I'll get started so it doesn't get too awkward; hey my name's Eleasah, and what we do in this section is a combination of reflecting on the information that I've put out there, and the information is really just meant to act like a stimulus, there's no way for me to teach on the whole thing it's just not possible. I just have my limitations – I'm still learning number one, but number two is about time. But the second aspect of this conversation is just to open up the floor about Black consciousness and Christian faith. We might not all be Christians here, so it is definitely an open floor where you can share whatever you believe, but it's just

interesting to talk about why we believe what we believe or how we're wrestling with this issue or actually not wrestling with this issue of Black consciousness. I meet many Black people who are like, 'what are you talking about, and why is this important?' And um in some ways you might consider well actually God loves everybody, he loves me so leave it as that I'm cool, but when we think about in our first session we looked at some of the statistics in this country, statistically, in this country, Black people are systematically oppressed, it's proven. Six times more likely to be stopped and searched, six times more likely to be incarcerated or sectioned, employment is low, or asset is low in comparison to other groups and obviously in comparison to European people here in this country. We looked at these statistics because part of this is to look at what is Christianity and what does Christianity have to say about the predicament of Black people in this country. It's not just to say, 'Oh, we're oppressed and we're just gonna pray about it' what does God actually think about it? What do we then think and do about it?

And that's a bit more of a Black theology – how is God speaking specifically into our context and situation that we are now in? And the idea is that we're in this position not because we asked to be. Okay, we're not in this country – well, our grandparents are in this country because they flew here, but we're not on this side of the planet because we wanted to be, essentially my ancestors did not say 'yeah definitely put me on that boat'. Okay, um and so because of that tension of domination, of colonialism and for so long not being counted as human and now we have kind of this new era of still not being seen as equal and fighting for equality, just talk about what does Christianity have to say, or what are some of the failings of the Church so far—just having a well-rounded discussion. So I'll open it out with a question first, just to get people rolling, but if you have other information you want to share, 'I read a book, or this is where I'm at or what I'm thinking this is the space to do it. And if you obviously want to refer back to something that I covered in the session today, that is cool. But the question I'm just gonna ask, and it's a bit personal so no force, you can just listen okay, but what is the relationship between your identity as a Black person and your religion? You might not be a Christian, so this is saying religion; if anyone would like to share about that – is there a

connection, what is the relationship between you as a person where you come from, your culture, your skin colour and the religion, your belief system? (The Black Face of the Early Church, 2018)

The group discussions should be considered a planned discussion (O'Reilly, 2009) or focus groups in that I had methodically organised the gathering of the participants and each section had a topical focus. The initial seminar section of the event, as mentioned before, was designed to provoke and stimulate ideas, questions, rebuttals and responses for the group discussion, the main focus. In the programme's pilot, I had anticipated attendance of eight and was overwhelmed with a response of over one hundred people. However, as I moved into the ethnographic data collection, where the sessions were topic led, each session averaged twenty people per session. This seemed to work well because whilst more dominant characters would often lead with their contributions, having such diverse responses among those considered more dominant seemed to give those considered 'quiet or reticent' (O'Reilly, 2008) more confidence to contribute.

My interpersonal skills are a personal strength, so I could use those skills confidently to ensure that all participants would have the opportunity to be heard. However, it was often the case that I would have to discern when to ask a more enthusiastic or dominant character to 'wind up their comment' in order to allow room for another contributor because, more often than not, the dominant character would spark an interesting idea or opinion that would bring out those who had not yet spoken.

Eleasah: Can I stop you there? Because you can speak for an hour, this brother has had his hand up for a while, and after that, I want to touch on this "Black people as gods" issue, taking into consideration other ideas outside of what we spoke about in Scripture - very interesting views. Um, when people are saying, but we are gods, how do you compute all of that? You might think of some of our Kemite friends or humanists who may be less supernatural but see humans as the ultimate answer to everything – how do you wrestle with that? (State your Case, 2016)

In *Nobodies to Somebodies: A Practical Theology for Education and Liberation* (2003), Anthony

Reddie details and discusses the process of developing a church and child-friendly education programme that used Black Theology, Womanist Theology, and Transformative Education as its frameworks. Reddie sought to develop materials that reflected the everyday life of the Black-British reality by devising activities, games and role-plays that feature African/Caribbean foods, music, and colloquialisms. While acknowledging that Afrocentricity is problematic in its essentialism and romanticism of 'blackness' and Africa, he concludes that at the centre of Afrocentricity is the crucial resource of Black culture; it 'offers a critically important tool and framework for the task of developing an appropriate model or example for the Christian education of Black youth in Britain' (Reddie, 2003, p. 36). Reddie asserts that by infusing Christian education with Black culture, the young people can be affirmed in their hybrid reality. He concludes that Black music is an essential tool to make this positive affirmation work as it is a key expression of Black-British culture and tells a more truthful story of the Black experience in Britain. By creating a space where both Black cultures and Christian education are at play, Reddie aims to create a safe space of affirmation and positive identification;

These young people required specific, intentional education processes for their emotional and psychological wellbeing... they needed additional education and theological interventions that would assure them it was acceptable to be 'Black' and more starkly 'non-white' (Reddie, 2003, p. 145).

What is apparent is Reddie's intention to develop a programme that encourages emotional and psychological well-being through the affirmation of Blackness and the relationship between God and Black people as made in his image. Inspired by James Cone's systematisation of Black theology and through the support of a Black Theology group during his research, Reddie used Black theology as one of the major frameworks for the programme. The programme works as a praxis for liberation as it emerges from the margins (Reddie, 2003, p.7) and seeks to establish justice for the oppressed, the overlooked Black youth within mainline British Churches. Part of the liberative process was in giving the young people an opportunity 'to see aspects of their cultural and familial world reflected as the norm,' countering the British institutional stigma of 'other' (Reddie, 2003, p. 145). In the following quote, I am discussing with the participant the cultural and religious influences that impacted our

religious upbringing. Initially, I thought we had a common feature but learned that 'Zionist' means different things to us,

Eleasah: and could you, what you mentioned about that kind of Zionist aspect, is that kind of like – was there a pro-Israel, is that what you meant?

Participant CL: Nah nah nah, it's more of an umm what can I say just more about African, that side of it, yeah African. So people coming from the outside – I guess it's wherever people came from, in Jamaica, to be honest, rural Jamaica to be honest with you. Um, so yeah, you got the Zionist movement, not so much the Israel side, African sort of mix in there.

Eleasah: I was only asking just to make the clarification because I grew up in more of a signs and wonders church, so we had stuff from Israel all over the house. It was all kind of like 'yes the people of Israel drawing back to Israel, so in some sense, the Church obviously supported the state of Israel, which is obviously a political thing but, they consider it a spiritual thing, do you know what I mean? So I just wanted to make that clarification because I'm not familiar with your Church. Because again, that was a cultural input, and I was with Black people do you know what I mean. And we're playing – even our music sounded Israeli do you know what I mean, or what we thought would be Israel, it's reconstructed, what we believed, because obviously now what we're learning, that the Hebrew community may have been a bit more like African communities that what we see of people in the country now, whoever they may be. So I just wanted to make that clarification because sometimes, even just thinking about the little influences helps us to understand the type of faith/religion wherever we are, even if we're atheists, umm the influences that have an impact on how we express ourselves, even the languages that we use. When I grew up, we didn't have much Black music in the house, but I can sing a couple songs in Hebrew, do you know what I mean. So that kind of influence – it plays a part... anybody else? (The Black Face of the Early Church, 2018)

Reddie draws upon the reflections of Freire and Shor concerning the learning process and transformative education. This notion of defining truth through a mutual explorative relationship

between the student and teacher is argued by Reddie to improve the student's ability to develop agency and understand history, particularly Black history, of which the delivery and interpretation are often policed. Reddie uses dialogue to draw upon the benefits of transformative education within his programme; he found that the young people become literal and figurative actors within the teaching and learning process. Moving beyond Freire, Reddie details how he uses the ideas of Grant Shockley to devise group activities that encourage the young people to define their world' instead of being named by it' (Reddie, 2003, p.87). For Christian education to be effective, it must wrestle with God's response to the present Black reality. Black Theology's answer to this humanist theory is that 'God sided with the oppressed in his manifestation as an oppressed Jew' (Cone, 1969). For Freire's theory to be truly transformative in religious spaces, it must meet with a framework that affirms the Black experience and develops action for liberation shaped by a religious perspective; the preservation-liberation framework meets this requirement.

5.5.2 Secondary research

I supported my data collection and research process through desk-based research. I consulted each religion and their various sub-community online content regarding teaching. Teaching content uploaded to YouTube allowed me to engage with these religions the same way my research participants had. In a globalised and internet-centred society, online religious teaching is becoming normative. The global spread of the COVID-19 virus caused a lot of religious groups to close their buildings and produce online services and other remote support services for their followers. Although not a central theme for this research, this type of interaction is a valuable feature of this twenty-first-century research. Several scholars (Campbell, 2007; Downey, 2014; Ganiel, 2021; Hadden and Cowen eds., 2000; Iqbal, 2016; Mattis, Palmer, and Hope, 2019; McClure, 2017; Seabright and Raiber, 2020) have concluded that the utilization of the internet by both mainstream religions and new religious movements have increased, however, the exposure to alternative information via social media, blogs and teachings in other religious establishments has undermined the authority of 'home religious spaces' – particularly among Millennials where there is a recorded decline of religiosity.

5.6 Data Processing

5.6.1 Grounded Theory, Postfoundationalism, and Participatory Action Research

For this study, I have employed grounded theory methodology, in which I have developed my theory from the data I collected in my field research as both participant and researcher. As mentioned before, as an insider, I must manage my intuitions so as not to warp the data with my presuppositions. Strauss and Corbin state that 'theory evolves during the actual research, and it does this through continuous interplay between analysis and data collection' (Corbin and Strauss, 1994, p. 273). This is evident in the various methodical approaches I developed throughout the research process to best understand this phenomenon, which I shall discuss in the final chapter.

Teram, Schachter, and Stalker (2005) suggest that grounded theory integrates well with participatory action research. Their research deals with highly sensitive and personal topics, but the consideration of power and relationship aptly applies to my research. Of their integrated methodology, they say,

The integration of both approaches, started with a traditional grounded theory, which led into PAR, was guided by (as) the need to produce knowledge that is relevant to and acceptable by the professional community and (b) a consideration of the power differential between survivors and professionals. (Teram, Schachter and Stalker, 2005, p. 1131)

Grounded theory develops my knowledge-generating fieldwork (PAR) into a transferable theory applied to other contexts. Hammersley suggests that 'Grounded theorising seeks both to represent concrete situations in their complexity *and* to produce abstract theory' (Hammersley, 1992, p. 21).

Grounded theory methodology requires a coding process that supports the integrity of my data analysis - induction, deduction, and verification (Hammersley, 1992). I began by considering broad themes in the transcribed audio data such as 'racism,' 'White supremacy,' 'Black power,' 'origins,' 'mis-education,' 'transparency,' 'knowledge,' and 'true religion', and comparing them with my conceptual framework, intuitions and religious teaching from the Afroasiatic religions. This was a cyclical process, with each cycle refining my interpretation into something that was not only original but shed new light on the phenomena of Afroasiatic Diasporic religion and Black-British identity formation.

Generating my theory from the data allowed my interpretation to be sensitive to the political and social events shaping my thoughts and the de-churched, such as the Black Lives Matter Movement, the presidency of Trump, Brexit, and the Windrush scandal. Corbin and Strauss support this,

One of the methodology's central features is that practitioners can respond to and change with the times - in other words, as conditions that affect behaviors change, they can be handled analytically, whether the conditions are in the forms of idea, ideologies, technologies, or new uses of space... when we carefully and specifically build conditions into our theories we eschew claims to idealistic versions of knowledge, leaving the way open for further development of our theories. (Corbin and Strauss, 1994, p. 276).

Building conditions into this research have been a consistent occurrence in this research process. A key example is the notion of citizenship, which had initially been considered more broadly as communal social models to describe the social features of Black religion. However, as events around Brexit and the Windrush scandal developed, I was drawn to consider more precisely what Afroasiatic Diasporic Religions contribute to the concept of being Black and British. This trajectory became a significant feature of my findings, this tension of acceptance and citizenship in Britain, yet this appeal to Afroasiatic origins.

Martyn Hammersley in *What's Wrong with Ethnography?* (1992) questions this idea of theory emerging from the data asking 'on what basis can an ethnographer decide which theory is emerging?' (p. 71) Having come to a now satisfying answer, he suggests that 'we are often left with an appeal to intuition'. The case for this research is that I have designed a conceptual framework that best conceptualises the diversity of concepts that describe what is emerging most prominently in the data. As mentioned in the previous chapter, conservatism (conceptualised) focuses on the preference for institution tradition and religious authority, which, although very broad, works well to theoretically describe participants who demonstrate a preference for a type of institution, a sense of tradition or religious authority. `

Postfoundational rationale considers context, interpreted experience and traditions that inform religious values to be credible sources of knowledge. It moves beyond a foundational approach that relies on a

self-valid knowledge source, the Bible, to produce absolute truths. Foundationalism is problematic because the transmission of those "truths" is clothed in human language (which evolves). A postcolonial theory (which I come to in the penultimate chapter) posits that Eurocentric powers have monopolised interpretations of these truths. Foucault suggests that what one knows reflects who has the power (Foucault, 1991). Chapter 2 highlighted how the Afroasiatic Diasporic Religions used this sense of power by returning, correcting, and discovery - to recover knowledge and tell their divine history. So there is an engaging, contested space that postfoundationalism can accommodate, the decolonial process of dismantling Eurocentric epistemologies, often associated with foundationalism, and the foundationalist perspective of Scripture evidenced in the data pool (the group discussions) and among the ADR.

Postfoundationalism, as it pertains to theology, is a useful theoretical tool that aids the analysis; although not the key processing tool, it helps me to manage the tensions I had described in earlier chapters about the academic view of a constructivist religious phenomenon and the raw beliefs of the religious adherents themselves. Both Participatory Action Research and Postfoundational practical theology prioritise the local contextual experience over the grand narratives and louder voices on specific issues. In this sense, they are the ideal tool for spaces where personal identity and communal politics are inextricably linked.

Afroasiatic Diasporic Religions such as Rastafari, the Nation of Islam, Hebrew Israelites and the Holy Qubtic Church movement all hold individual/communal – religio/socio-political identities in their appropriate tension. The programme was designed to facilitate those tensions by welcoming individuals into a space where their interpreted experiences and stories become the tools for more comprehensive social action. In challenging one's idea of Black identity, religious identity and Black religious identity, I hoped to uncover the basic building blocks for ADR identity formation in the British context.

Participatory Action Research challenges participants' epistemologies, making it a complementary method to postfoundationalist practical theology. It provides the opportunity to re-evaluate how one knows and understands their world and the social issue that focuses on the research experience. In

addition, the participants can create new realities and contexts by consciously exploring alternative knowledge methods, specifically knowledge grounded in their experiences.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the Afroasiatic Diasporic Religions I have selected for this study can be understood conceptually in a preservation-liberation framework. This means that I have demonstrated religious interests in preserving a sense of authoritative truth forms, ethnocentric traditions and other social/religious institutions as a basis for identity formation. At the same time, I have also demonstrated from the socio-political perspective that these religions were birthed in response to dominant Western Christianity in the context of suffering and oppression,

Postfoundational theology... fully acknowledges the role of context, the epistemically crucial role of interpreted experience, and the role of tradition in shaping religious values. Theological reflection in post foundationalism also points creatively beyond the confines of the local community or culture toward a plausible form of cross-contextual and interdisciplinary conversation (Park, 2010, p. 2).

Postfoundational rationale also resists the groundlessness that non-foundationalist rationale champions. A non-foundationalist approach asserts that knowledge and meaning have no fixed value and are entirely relative to the individual experience. (Park, 2010) This approach does not fit well with ADR because they are rooted in holy texts that serve as a source of truth and knowledge. Post-foundationalism acknowledges the limitations of these extremes and sits in-between the two, working with both the fixed and fluid. This way, one can understand the discourses that influence one's theology. This process is complemented by interdisciplinary dialogue; by engaging with decolonisation or conservatism, one's theological reflection becomes enriched and allows people of different beliefs to find common grounds. Ultimately a postfoundationalist reflection ensures a re-evaluation of epistemology, and this is central to the reflective process,

As we have seen above, the creative fusion of hermeneutics and epistemology in postfoundational critical theological reflection occurs through the processes of interpreted experience, use of rationality and transversal reason and interdisciplinary conversation. All of

these elements of postfoundationalism are critical to a practical theological process (Park, 2010, p. 3).

Healy captures the need for a conceptual framework:

The transition to postfoundationalist is marked by a loss of faith in these erstwhile certainties, with significant consequences for how we construe the epistemological project. Thus, sustained challenges to traditionalist foundationalist presuppositions have resulted in a loss of faith not only in indubitable foundations, but also in atemporal truths, superordinate legislative standpoints and infallible algorithmic procedures for adjudicating knowledge claims (Healy, 2007, p. 135).

This research requires respect for foundationalist thinking because it will be represented in the data; the research is not about legitimating specific beliefs or authenticating identity formation processes but seeks to understand the motivating factors behind the phenomenon, and post-foundationalism is a supportive theoretical tool for the preservation-liberation conceptual framework and the grounded theory process.

In the last session of the programme run at Brixton Baptist Church, I gave an overview of how New religious movements such as the Nation of Islam or Rastafari teach and promote a Black Christ. One of the participants became interested in religion's self-validated sense of knowing, and he began his contribution with (paraphrase) *'who makes this stuff up? How can Elijah Muhammad know that the earth and the moon were once joined together trillions of years before Adam?'* (Participant PH); other Christian members challenged the participant on what he believes in (how would he describe his belief system). He responds by saying (paraphrased) *'I believe in myself, I believe sometimes I am right, sometimes I am wrong... and I believe in energy – science backs it! Energy has been around as far back as we know; everything is held or bound together by energy....'* I used this opportunity to build a bridge between the rationale of believing in science and faith by bringing up the notion of miracles, explicitly a miracle performed by Elijah in 2 Kings 6. In this account, Elijah throws a piece of wood out into the water to retrieve an axe head that had sunk to the bottom. This story could be viewed in one of two

ways, an act of God (a miracle) or a matter of science and energy (theories of), but as observers of biblical accounts and scientific theories, what we have to work with at ground level is the language to convey the eventualities - human transmission. If one believes in ultimate truths, miracles by faith and scientific theories could be divided by language and power. However, on the level of experience, context and tradition, the dissimilarities lessen; not only is the adherence to the understanding a matter of the "faith", but principles guide the practice of miracles and science. Thus, this concept of energy becomes less of a divide among the scientific and the foundationalist Christian but a matter of language, metaphor and transversality.

5.7 Quality Assurance

The quality, dependability and transferability of qualitative research have been contested based on the population size, sample size, data gathering methods, and data processing methods. However, qualitative data can be shown to be credible, reliable and transferable if the researcher has taken measures to engage with the participants with ethical considerations, record the data, be transparent about the data analysis process, and they can show how the findings are consistent with existing theories in the academic community. Guba and Lincoln, academic authorities of quality assurance in qualitative research in *Naturalistic Inquiry* (1989), say,

The implementations of the credibility criterion – the naturalist's substitute for the conventionalist's internal validity – becomes a twofold task: first to carry out the inquiry in such a way that the probability that the findings will be found to be credible is enhanced and, second, to demonstrate the credibility of the findings by having them approved by the constructors of the multiple realities being studied (Guba and Lincoln, 1989, p. 296).

Although a dated source, qualitative research and, more specifically, Participatory Action Research and grounded theory have been under academic scrutiny about how best to judge the study's credibility; in the first instance, as a researcher who is participating in the study with the participants, the study is not

afforded what would have been considered valuable objectivity. However, as attitudes have changed towards the reality of true objectivity, the first task is to relay the data with transparency so the reader can identify to what extent the researcher/participant has influenced the outcomes or affected the dynamics of the group discussion space. The second task, then, is to present the data, findings and emerging theory so that the reader can see and understand how the researcher formed the links between the data and the theory.

5.7.1 Ethics and Credibility

Concerning ethics, the research does not feature any individual or private discussions but details only what has been said publicly among the other participants. Equally, I have not recorded nor detailed any exceptionally sensitive or private information, nor do I allude to anything of this nature in my research. Therefore, the main concern for this research regarding ethics is anonymity and consent; I have detailed the processes that protect the participants and myself below.

Attached in the appendix is a letter from the university that confirms the ethical process of my research. Upon submitting my proposal and ethics form, an administrative oversight meant I had not been given conventional ethical approval before starting fieldwork. I subsequently submitted evidence of my data gathering process that satisfied the postgraduate board of my ethical conduct and good practice.

O'Reilly suggests that ethnographic researchers 'have the responsibility to do with the material we collected what was expected of us by the participants' (O'Reilly, 2009, p. 61). This research was carried out overtly; all the participants knew that I was a researcher and had designed the programme to serve the community and gather data for formal doctoral research.

In the first instance, I would advertise the events publicly via social media, using Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp to broadcast the event flyer, providing details, the purpose (for research), and what to expect. In any case, I would receive emails and private messages asking for more information, to which I would respond in full detail about my intentions, the research concept and how the sessions will be run. I needed to clarify that the session was part-seminar and part-open discussion and that the participants would be encouraged to contribute knowledge, ideas, and questions.

All the audio-recorded data collected for which I received verbal and written permission has been transcribed and stored privately and securely onto a hard drive to which only I have access. For anonymity and sensitivity purposes, I have given all the participants pseudonyms in the transcriptions that I produced independently. I have also decided to keep the names of the church venues anonymous, as some participants may be linked to those locations.

The data collection process spanned over two years, of which I spent a considerable amount of time in the field engaging with the de-churched community in various capacities. As mentioned before, I can be considered an insider on the fringes of the church and de-churched community, so the phenomenon itself is not unfamiliar to my lived experience. In this sense, I have achieved two main instances of credibility: 'The researchers extended time in the field improves the respondents' trust and provides a greater understanding of the participants' (Anney, 2014, p. 276).

I met each group I worked with weekly for five weeks, three hours each week, and kept regular contact online in social media forums. Given that this phenomenon primarily consists of online interaction, I was able to keep up with participants and others regularly through online discussions or through observing the latest trending topics, insights and influencers. Having this constantly updated background knowledge helped deepen my understanding of the phenomenon.

5.7.2 Peer Debrief

During the research process, I took several opportunities to test my ideas publicly among peers and the de-churched. Barber and Walczak, in *Peer Debriefing* (2009) say,

Since the researcher is often the collector as well as interpreter of data, biases, and sensitizing concepts can easily find their way into the work (Charmaz, 2003). A peer debriefer can provide a valuable "second opinion" on the meaning of the data, proposed categories, and the emerging theory. In this sense, the peer debriefer has the challenging task of serving as both conscience and critic for the researcher's work' (Barber and Walczak, 2009, p. 6).

In academic spheres, I had the opportunity to present papers, deliver progress reports, and receive feedback and ideas from those in my professional network and my supervisors. I also attended and

participated in various church events that responded to the de-church phenomenon, which allowed me to present my developing ideas to the broader de-churched and Black Christian community.

I participated in a postgraduate seminar group that specialised in Black scholarship, theology, religion, and critical theory, which acted as a safe space to receive feedback and interrogate the progress of my work. In addition, I have attached a list of activities that I have participated in during the time of this research process.

5.7.3 Code-Recode strategy

The data I collected was initially coded manually. After a cooling down period, I returned to the data and used the NVIVO software to recode the data and test my initial outcomes (Chilisa and Preece, 2005, p.171). I have provided the outcomes of this coding process in the appendix. The next chapter will discuss in more depth how I arrived at my codes and the subsequent theory

5.7.4 Transferability

For this study, I have provided 'thick descriptions', extensive quotations from the raw data transcriptions and detailed insight into the group session proceedings (the seminar section and the open discussion) to aid in its transferability. Although I am providing insights into a uniquely designed setting, the BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS AND CHRISTIAN FAITH events, the detail provided in the 'findings' chapter should act as a blueprint for another researcher 'to replicate the study with similar conditions in another setting' (Anney, 2014, p. 278).

5.8 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined both the method and methodology of this research project. It felt that engaging with people who qualify as de-churched was the best way of generating up-to-date and original data. Participatory Action Research helps researchers methodically collect data within local communities in a holistic, measured, yet adaptable way and is complimentary to a grounded theory approach.

I have detailed the research design and the data analysis process that I have used to address my research questions and selected some material from the transcriptions to evidence my efforts to conduct a methodically robust, ethical, credible and trustworthy study.

The next chapter will relay my data findings and serve as an extension of this chapter, where I can elaborate on my method/methodology using the data and thick description.

The Faith factor

'White Man's Religion?' had ended, and after a quick debrief with the minister who had allowed me access to his building for the event, I stepped out onto the front steps of the building. It was still sunny and warm. I was exhausted. My husband was standing on the steps with a friend engaged in discussion with the 'Hotep' brothers. What only could be described as a reasoning session was happening, my husband had his phone out looking through scriptures, and one of the other brothers was reading from the Metu Neter. They were standing close together, and there seemed to be mutual respect among the men; although the dividing line was evident on a matter of belief, they all seemed keen to find, establish and teach the truth. It was interesting to visualise this restrained passion. As I approached the gathering, one of the brothers, wearing jeans, a fitted t-shirt, snapback (hat), a carving of Africa on a chain, was explaining more about what they believe,

'All these hieroglyphs are metaphors that guided our ancestors on right ways of living.. where man and women were equal, where they traded and were educated.. that's what we want – to get back to, a time of peace and order.'

His reference to this egalitarian model struck me. During the event, there was minimal talk about gender roles, gender discrimination –the conversation was so heavily focused on 'race' and 'truth' and 'slavery' that I had yet to consider other social and relational aspects of the alternative Afroasiatic religions that perhaps underpin their decolonisation process. It felt like this comment was directed at me as I approached. Perhaps my role as the facilitator indicated that I did not have traditional conservative complementarian values. I decided to remain quiet and listen.

I did not want to disturb the conversation that was in full swing. The conversation quickly moved on to the topic of the Bible and Jesus. One of the brothers was making his case against the legitimacy of the Bible as a plagiarised repackaging of ancient Kemetic religion. He was referring to the teachings in the book in his hand; he seemed so excited to be holding a tool of liberation and so keen to see other brothers and sisters be set free.

Hotep Brother: 'I mean I don't have a problem with Jesus as a man - if he existed, what he had to say, what he did for people was cool, I get the principles. But he was not God, and we cannot rely on the Bible.

Husband: but your ideas are just beliefs, I believe in the Bible, and you believe in the hieroglyphs. You can't read them; you depend on a translation... at the end of the day, what it boils down to is faith. (Researcher's reflection, 2016)

6. Black Consciousness and Christian Faith – The Findings

6.1 Introduction

So far, I have set the foundations for my research project; I have introduced the de-churched phenomenon in Black-British Churches, the Afroasiatic Diasporic Religions, a conceptual framework that serves as a hypothesis for the methodology behind the research process. As stated before, This ethnographic study seeks to answer three questions about the de-churched phenomenon:

1. Why are some Black people becoming disillusioned with the Church in Britain?
2. What do Afroasiatic Diasporic Religions offer that the de-churched believe mainstream British churches do not?
3. What is the main strength of Afroasiatic Diasporic religious influence, and how best can we understand their rationale?

To answer these questions, I designed a five-session programme called BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS AND CHRISTIAN FAITH (BCCF) to serve as a group discussion space where I could facilitate Participatory Action Research. As a facilitator of the group discussions, my role requires me to create safe spaces for the de-churched and Christian community, where I equip them with knowledge and skills to enter into a solution-making process. In this chapter, I will be analysing the data collected from both the Black Consciousness and Christian Faith settings and a sample of current online religious

teachings pertaining to each session's subject. This is the evidence with which I will test the preservation-liberation framework that I have submitted as a hypothesis. The preservation-liberation framework suggests that the de-churched are looking for a religious space that has Ethiopianist characteristics (such as merging the political, religious, genealogical and historical knowledge spheres to achieve liberation), is concerned about de-colonising the Bible religion and maintains conservative positions on the authority of scripture, notions of truth, preservation of history, tradition and social conventions.

I will be using grounded theory to analyse my data; I intend to generate a new theory from the data that will best describe the themes, concerns, and responses found within my data. This microcosm, a small pool of qualitative data, provides fresh insights into the de-churched phenomenon of which anyone could apply the theory to other contexts. Given that I have already preconceived a conceptual framework as a hypothesis, this study can be considered inductive and deductive. I will begin with an inductive analysis with no initial codes as a reference point; the codes developed manually have been retested after a cooling down period has been retested or recoded through the NVIVO programme. The second round of codes is then set against my initial hypothesis. I can then evaluate and develop a final theory, amending my hypothetical conceptual framework.

The format of this chapter follows the format of the BCCF programme, as mentioned in the previous chapter. To demonstrate credibility, dependability and transparency, I have provided a thick description so that other researchers can test my coding process and hypothesis and see the details of my research procedure should they want to reproduce the study or transfer the theory into another context. As a result, this chapter features extensive quotes from the transcribed audio data in chronological order; this allows the reader to see the flow of the conversation, how the participants influence and interact with one another and how themes/methods are connected and applied by the participants.

The outline of this chapter begins with a description of the data sample, which includes details about the sites and participants. I then move through each session, defined by a theme, providing details about

my contribution as facilitator (the seminar), Afroasiatic Diasporic Religious perspectives on the theme and the participant's perspectives. Next, I summarise each session with the emerging themes, codes and categories. Finally, I complete the chapter with a final evaluation of the preservation-liberation framework in light of the data analysis.

6.2 Research sites

This study was a multi-site study; I facilitated the BCCF programme in Churches in Central London, East London and South London. I ran the same programme at these sites, so I have selected different sessions where the transcriptions presented the most information-rich data. There were occasions when the sessions were poorly attended, or the audio device failed; therefore, what is presented is information-rich and supported by transcriptions and not only my memory and field notes.

The Central London site was in an accessible historic church, which meant that participants were not local to the area. The participants mainly comprised men and women in the 20-40 years age range. On average, the attendance was 20 participants per session, with high attainment of repeat participants. Although I encouraged people to sign up for all five-session, this open event naturally lends itself to being poorly attended as the weeks go on. However, the events maintained consistent numbers. In this cohort, the participants were male dominant, and we were seated in a semi-circle format that accommodated the seminar and the group discussion. The main characteristic of this group, among the others, I would describe as confrontational. I felt that this group were more likely than the others to call out another group and challenge each other's ideas, so the diversity in the group comes out more strongly in the data. The main speakers in this group were males.

The East London site was unique in that I was asked to facilitate the programme by someone in the local community, so they advertised and gathered people in their local networks, friends, family and associates. Although I also advertised this programme publicly, most of the attendants connected to the host. The demographic of this group was mostly female, with the age range between 35 and 65 years. Fifteen people on average attended each session, the numbers rising towards the end of the programme.

At this site, I stood at the front of the church sanctuary with the participants sitting in rows and then, for the group discussions, the chairs were rearranged into a complete circle. This was the host's design. This group were most concerned about improving the mainstream church rather than abandoning it.

The South London site was based in a local, historic Black church. This run of programmes was attended on average by twenty-five persons, the largest attendance being in the first few sessions. The gender demographic was a balanced age range comprised of two distinct groups, 20-40 years and 60+ years. I had arranged with the minister to host the sessions; usually, participants from outside the church would attend, but in this case, the elderly members of the congregation came out to attend the sessions. This brought a unique intergenerational dynamic and a feeling of being monitored. The Pastor also took an active role in the group discussions during these sessions. The particular characteristic of this group, among others, is that they were predominantly Christian or those on the fringes, keen to understand and build bridges between themselves and the de-churched. Although the de-churched attended the session, it felt like the Christians had taken a respectful yet defensive position. In one of the sessions, we had the entire session in the sanctuary; I stood at the front, and the participants sat in the pews. In the second session presented, we moved into a smaller, more relaxed room for group discussions.

All of the sites/Churches provided refreshments at every session.

6.3 White Man's Religion?

6.3.1 The Researcher's contribution

The first session of my programme, 'White Man's Religion?', is an introductory session that serves as an ice breaker for the group; as mentioned in the methodology section, it begins with a short provocative lecture in which I aim to outline the issues that have led to my research. The 'White Man's Religion?' session posits a vital question – whose religion is Christianity, and how is that qualified? The complaint that has brought my participants together is that the Christianity of the Bible is different to the Christianity they have experienced going to Church in Britain. While this may have been influenced by anti-Christian groups, Pan-Africanist literature, and other transmissions within the wider Black

conscious community, many participants have come bearing their own stories of rejection, confusion, and disturbance.

Firstly, I highlight key arguments against Christianity and offer some apologetic-type responses that seek more to provoke a response from the group and help them develop questions for the open floor discussion that follows. Each session is shaped to help the group feel like they are coming together with a common struggle – White supremacy; so that even if people have different perspectives, one hopes there is a general attitude of working together to solve the given issue. One of the challenges that Afroasiatic Diasporic Religions bring to the Black, British and de-churched is to question what they believe Christianity to be and what factors have shaped one's understanding of the religion or religious organisation.

In this session, we explore what is meant by 'White Man's Religion' by focusing on three central claims:

- The Bible endorses slavery and therefore endorses the enslavement of Africans in the transatlantic slave trade;
- The Europeans created the Bible to control and subdue people of colour;
- The image of a White Jesus is representative of the White supremacy that underlines the Christian faith;

In the first session, the group addressed the issue of 'White Man's Religion', the notion that White people created Christianity to dominate and control people of colour. Central to this discussion is the role of the Bible within Christianity, often with questions about its validity, historicity, authenticity, and inclusivity/exclusivity. In many participants' experiences, the Bible had been sold to them as the unchanging, infallible 'Word of God', a perfect combination of true historical events and prophetic mysteries of things to come. For those who had left Christianity, it has become a common idea that the Bible was unreliable, contradictory, and the word of men and not God. This shift in theological perspectives seems to be linked to their disillusionment with Christianity, considering how the legacy of slavery within Christendom has shaped or distorted their perspective of Black identities. To challenge the group's understanding of the scripture, I reintroduce 'how we got the Bible' by merging a variety of

perspectives: textual criticism, history of the manuscripts, theo-politics surrounding the translations, the mystery of the prophetic (foresight) scriptures and geography (Africa's influence). Although the input is foundational, the aim is to present the participants to other perspectives on the Bible as a sacred text, who perhaps previously had more one-dimensional views of the document, such as 'a living word', 'erroneous', or 'a conspiracy'. With the added layer of the various English translations and the conflicting theologies that surface, the participants can appreciate the complexity surrounding Christianity's sacred texts that do not necessarily begin with the mystery of God but with the human transmission of scriptures.

The very nature of the programme is to challenge the whitewashed, spoon-feeding nature of mainstream church pedagogy and cannot afford to replicate those models with Black face. However, as a researcher who has only ever been exposed to evangelical Christian teachings, this was a challenge I had been aware of from the beginning and in designing the programme, I have had to relieve myself of the responsibility of having all the answers – which was typical of the teaching styles I had been exposed to. The participants often came with questions relating to historical eventualities or anti-Christian claims, and the postfoundationalist approach allowed my responses not to be confined to an apologetics type format.

During the programme's pilot, adherents of the Atonist/Qubtic religion had initiated a conversation about gender equality after the first session called 'White Man's religion'. This was a unique contribution among the other religious voices in the room, which were largely Hebraic (Rastafari, Nation of Islam, Hebrew Israelite) and are generally considered male-led movements often critiqued for their patriarchal models. This conversation created a necessary opportunity to explore gender equality in Christianity, where women can ask themselves about how they see themselves in this broader discussion of Black religious identity, having had some history with mainstream Christianity. I followed up with this challenge in a session on slavery in the Bible, particularly the model of slavery in the Old Testament. I set aside a moment for reflection; firstly, to reflect on how we understand slavery in the Old Testament to the enslavement of Africans in the sixteenth century, and secondly on the treatment of women in the Old Testament, in particular, where a man can sell his daughter into slavery without opportunity for

freedom after seven years as the males would have. In this instance, I felt the most transparent form of education was to avoid defending the issue and allow the challenge to provoke questions and discussion.

My hope with this pedagogical approach is to break down religious feelings of hostility and highlight the shared spaces and grounds for building understanding. The de-churched and Afroasiatic Diasporic Religions seem to share the desire to see God through Black eyes, to see their ancestors (literal or religious) as key actors in the development of religious understanding and the rejection of a Colonial Christianity that has omitted their participation.

6.3.2 The ADR Perspective

The ADR perspective on ‘White Man’s Religion?’ is perhaps the key question or concept that ties these religions together in terms of beliefs. However, their approaches are nuanced; they distinguish their religion from colonial Christianity (European mainstream Christianity and Roman Catholicism). The consensus is that the Bible religion is the relationship between God and his chosen nations. For example, Leo Muhammad from the NOI in London considers how the prominent images of Christianity have been the reason for the de-churched phenomenon; he says:

... because when you're discussing religions, believe it or not – I'm not talking about the fake stuff – but when you're talking about religions, you're discussing the very essence of the human being. That's why it's so important. See it's not an accident that when Donald Trump is going to become the president of the so-called [he makes quotation signs with hands] most powerful nation on the planet, he has to go and put his hand on a book and swear allegiance to a God and to a people and a country. It's not an accident that in 1952 when Victoria or Elizabeth was taken to the throne, she had to swear on that Bible. Today the people of God are sometimes the most devoid of God because those who have hijacked religion have so misrepresented religion that the people of God don't want anything to do with religion. (Leo Muhammad – The Hijacking of Religion, The Nation of Islam Study Group, (2020) [Youtube] 01:19 – 02:33)

Muhammad here talks about how Christianity is so deeply entrenched in Western governance or in Babylon, the lands where Black people have and continue to suffer. He is alluding to the religious commitment that the country's leaders are making to assuring the success and dominance of their people. However, given that the NOI and the other Afroasiatic Diasporic Religions have determined the descendants of the enslaved as those who are the chosen people of God – this conflict of truths causes Christianity to be a hostile opponent – a different religion and for the de-churched defamation of religion that leads some people to question religion altogether. In Muhammad's teaching, he suggests that religion is part of a human's essence, not an external system but an internal one, and he ties this internal system to nationhood, hence the Nation of Islam, in which corruption of this essential connection between religion and nation leads Black people to be lost and estranged to their natural state and the original man and gods.

Reverend AJ Varmah, head of the Holy Qubtic Church, insists that Black people reclaim the Bible religion as African religious heritage:

So we must reclaim our religious heritage by African standards, by African eyes, African ears, African tongue, African ideals and structure. The reason the religion is so important to reclaim – to remove the Africa out of Judaism – reclaim it back, all of the African components found in Judaism reclaim it back, all of the African components found in Judaism, we've gotta take it back. All of the African components that's been sprinkled and bleached within Christianity, we have to take it back. (Reclaiming our Religious Heritage, Got Kush TV, (2020) [YouTube] 0.213 – 02.45)

According to the HQC, as discussed in chapter two, the Bible is the religious text of Ancient Africans - the Ta Ma Reans, and communities or nations have taken the text and reappropriated it for their ethnic groups. The call to reclaim and recover the truths that have been distorted and reappropriated in order for Black people to flourish is the religious teachings that bring freedom. Again this perspective is linked closely to nationhood and genealogy, the religion not being for all people but an exclusive

community – designed for and by a particular ethnic group. ‘White Man’s Religion’ is a fitting term for this type of conversation because, according to ADR, distinctions of religions and whom they belong to are foundational to liberation. Mainstream Christianity claims that Christ died for all and the Bible and, therefore, theologically are an inclusive religious framework; however, the experience of Black people: through enslavement, segregation and ongoing discrimination within Christian institutions, according to the ADR, says that Christianity is indeed a ‘White Man’s Religion’.

The Israel United in Christ BHI Camp in London challenges the Christian idea that God’s people are anyone who believes, and instead, through their interpretation, God’s people, the true Israelites, are the only people God refers to as his own. This is an excerpt from some street preaching that took place in London:

Reader: Psalm 147:19 *He sheweth his word unto Jacob,*

Preacher: He sheweth his word unto Jacob, Jacob is the progenitor of the Nation of Israel, come on

Reader: *his statutes and his judgments unto Israel.*

Preacher: His statues and his judgements unto whom?

Reader: Unto Israel

Preacher: Unto Israel, the so-called Blacks and Hispanics come on

Reader: *He hath not dealt so with any nation*

Preacher: Uh-oh- who has not what?

Reader: He hath not dealt so with any nation

Preacher: The Heavenly Father is only dealing with the Israelites, so you can understand

Reader: and as for his judgments, they have not known them.

Preacher: and as for his judgements, they have not known them -meaning his judgements are for the children of Israel for breaking his commandments. That's why we went into slavery; that's what we're here to teach you. Come on. (The Israelites: cutting the Christian lies, IUIC London, (2018) [YouTube 01.27-02.00])

The final example of ADR perspectives on 'White Man's Religion?' is a more dated script from a Marcus Garvey speech; Marcus Garvey is still a considerable influence among the Rastafari community. In this speech, his approach to making distinctions is through an Ethiopianist lens, so unlike like the other ADRs who suggest more concrete genealogical/historical connections – Garvey does not necessarily make a firm connection between Hebrews and Black people,

If the White man has the idea of a White God, let him worship his God as he desires. If the yellow man's God is of his race, let him worship his God as he sees fit. We, as Negroes, have found a new ideal. Whilst our God has no color, yet it is human to see everything through one's own spectacles, and since the White people have seen their God through White spectacles, we have only now started out (late though it be) to see our God through our own spectacles. The God of Isaac and the God of Jacob let Him exist for the race that believes in the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. We Negroes believe in the God of Ethiopia, the everlasting God—God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost, the One God of all ages. That is the God in whom we believe, but we shall worship Him through the spectacles of Ethiopia. (Garvey in Garvey, 2009, p. 29)

Here Garvey is concerned about the appropriate lens through which Black people see and understand the God of the Bible. An obvious precursor to formal Black Liberation Theology, in some sense, there is relativity in this approach that is not shared among the other ADR religions, yet they share the determination to define religion that is unique to those who are descendants of enslaved African peoples.

6.3.3 The Participant's Perspective

6.3.3.1 Slavery

The participants demonstrated that their frustration lay in the unanswered questions about slavery in the Bible and its relationship or resonance with the enslavement of their ancestors. As an exception among all the participants, Participant N, an Ethiopian Jew shares her story,

I'd like to um if nobody minds, my name is [REDACTED] I am a Danite, so my family originate from Ethiopian background we're Jewish that believe in Yeshua, and we call him Yeshua because that is his original name. And uh, over the year mixing with Christianity and Judaism, the two somehow um excludes you from either being a Jew or being a Christian, you can't be both in the eyes of the normal accepted genres. So umm, one being of African descent and being Jewish – not acceptable because most people think Jews are all White. And being a Christian and uh being you still holding on to the Old Testament system of worship um you're seen as a freak or legalistic so the experience of a practising believer as I call myself its um not been easy because it's just finding another person like yourself that would accept you because not being acceptable I stay on my own a lot of the time. (Participant N, 2018, White Man's Religion)

Participant N did not share the frustrations expressed among the rest of the group, because the community from which she originates, she claims, lived in continuity with biblical social institutions. Although Participant N benefitted from knowledge and connection to non-colonial/colonised ancestral roots and geographical origins, she struggled to accept and find acceptance in churches she had been attending. Participant seemed to see herself as distinct from the Jews and Christians she has engaged within Britain. While it is clear that she is proud of her ethnicity and religion, she has concluded that it was not validated in the churches and synagogues that she attended because she is an African Jew or a Christian who upholds the laws outlined in the Hebrew Scriptures.

Participant N becomes the centre of inquiry in this open discussion, contributing a perspective that the other participants could not. Returning to the topic of slavery, Participant N again created a distinction between the slavery of the Bible and the enslavement of African people in the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries,

Participant N: well, some of the things you mentioned, like slavery, we actually still practice in Judaism. The first and second (tither), I was explaining to the lady you have seven years if you fall on hard time so after seven years – so the slavery that was of African is completely different from the biblical slavery where you did have rights, and they would have to give you a bill of rights if you were umm treated badly or you know your time comes to an end and your master didn't want to let you go that you would go to court for that.

Participant/Host M: Is this practised? Still practised now.. wow!

Participant N: yes yes we still practice this, we have a second tithe, and as you know the story of Ruth and Naomi, Ruth was a beneficiary of the second tithe because she was allowed to glean the edges of the field, and that land is still there, Boaz's field is still there in Bethlehem. So you know it's something that lots of Christians don't realise it's it never came to an end, the New Testament is not the beginning of something that wasn't there before. It's there before, and they call it the New Testament because of the additional books, so it's one continuation. So I'm one of those believers that, like the disciples, was the beginning they were Jews that believe in Jesus, I'm a Jew that believes in Jesus. (White Man's Religion?, 2018)

Participant N drew the group into a historical experience many may not have ever been privy to in an everyday Christian gathering simply by detailing how she has witnessed and lived the continuity of historical biblical social institutions.

What I do in this session is demonstrate this as a time-related phenomenon in the history of Christianity by showing where it sits on a timeline. The point here is to encourage the participants to consider what they believed about Christianity before the Roman/European colonial era and what Christianity could look like in the era of 'woke' – if colonial Christianity could be reduced to a 'phase'. Participant N, an Ethiopian Messianic Jew, says,

'This is a different agenda, and it's monetarily based, and it's brainwashing based and because, for instance, when I started to look at Christianity, I couldn't understand why they had all these different names. There was never a Mary in Hebrew; there was never nobody called Mary, even

to this day, you can't find nobody call Mary. (everyone laughs) I am never going to find Joseph and Matthew; you're not gonna find it – it's Matthias, Johanan (people say ohhh ok ok) you know the way how they tweak things to Europeanise it – but it's not biblical. It's not biblical, this – what ya'll understand to be Christianity is not Christianity because Jesus is a Jew. He's a Jew. (Participant N, 2018, White Man's Religion?)

What Participant N is describing here are distinct religions with the same name, one religion rooted in power and capitalism and the other considered to be a continuation of a Hebrew religion defined by God through their prophets. Interestingly, her contribution is that Christianity is not true Christianity unless Jesus is a Jew and that the names of other biblical Characters must be known in their original form. For Participant N, ethnicity is an integral part of how she understands Christianity as a religion – it is the religion of Hebrew people, not of European people, and by colonising Christianity, it has become a distinct religious entity.

Part of the group's desire that became known throughout the session was to make sense of the African diasporic identity crisis through scripture. Participant P says:

'Deuteronomy 28: 27 it says, and you shall become strangers... and a byword among all nations where the Lord will drive you. So when you're saying I'm ting I'm that and were looking and were searching down the ages, through everything that we've gone through as a nation of people, we're not Africans we're not West-Indians were not this that and the other we belong to God. But because God knew that we were going to be disobedient to him, he told us what we would become, a proverb, a by word of our disobedience to him.' (Participant P, 2018, White Man's Religion?)

Someone says: so what do we do then?

Participant P: we need to be obedient.

Eleasah: so, can you explain a bit more about how you understand what you mean about this disobedience. I'm making assumptions, but I want you to explain it

Participant P: I think, because of what we've gone through, you said quite plainly that as a nation of people we've gone through so much and lack is like a resistance to everything that we've encountered through the ages, but if we are to search for ourselves in this manual, which I believe is our manual (the Bible) for life because if we're believers, we take this to Church, we read through it we get inspired by it but what our problem is sitting in this circle is that the establishments that we've been connected to in the past have not adhered to this, so we've been taught one thing, but when we're looking for it in the manual, we can't find it. So that's where the confusion comes from. Do you understand what I mean?" (Participant P, White Man's Religion?, 2018)

Much in line with Hebrew Israelite teachings, Participant P believes that the enslavement of Africans was a direct result of disobedience from God. Although some scholars may consider this to be a product of mental oppression, poor theology, internalised hatred or a problematic view of God, what can be seen here is the decentralising of the European players. Through this perspective, the European slavers were no longer powerful players in their own narrative but merely a tool in the unfolding divine narrative of the Hebrew people.

Participant P attends to the conversation theologically; she interprets Deuteronomy 28 – the warning from God to Israel, as the answer and reason for the dislocation of 'Black' peoples in a fashion consistent with (Black) Hebrew Israelite teachings. The interpretation follows that because of Israel's disobedience towards God, God allowed his chosen nation to be overcome, enslaved and scattered. Participant P also makes a nationalist distinction in that *we* are not Africans nor West-Indians, but a *nation of people*; this distinction reflects the (Black) Hebrew Israelites (BHI) notion that *we* (descendants of those enslaved Africans in the sixteenth century) have a unique identity that transcends is yet linked to geographical location. This interpretation means that even though the Israelites have been dislocated, they can still function as a nation defined by religious laws, cultures, and ethnic specificity. Unlike other Afrocentric or Black religious movements, the BHI does not centre their narrative on Africa but on Israel, and it is here that we have seen the selective and exclusive nature of nationalism and ethnocentrism come into play. The BHI belief system is only concerned

with Israelite heritage, not all Black people or peoples of colour; it does not adhere to Pan-African ideals in which unity, solidarity and empowerment include all Black peoples. I will discuss this more in the next chapter.

6.3.3.2 Routes

Participant NM: it's only one thing out of everything, what you call yourself Black? (indicating Eleasah)

Eleasah: oh wow!

Host M: can I just say something? Because Black is superimposed on us

Participant NM: there's no country called Black

Host M: Yeah, I know and can I just say something, after this because on my quest and on my journey of doing all this academic study as I said I've been introduced to Professor [REDACTED] work and I met Eleasah – I also met another academic by the name of Dr [REDACTED] and she speaks about that very thing about Black. Okay, but it's so deep, yeah, and so ingrained in our society the way we call ourselves Black, and she wants to do away with this word called Black

Participant NM: Absolutely!

Host M: but we're not ready for it yet

Participant NM: yeah

Host M: but it's a process... Eleasah is talking about the theological grounds, what the Bible says, the historical context, but what do we do with it? How do we move forward, how we - I perceive myself, how do I look at the word Black etc.. and that's gonna be the next session after, so don't think that after this we're just gonna be left like wa gwan?!

Everyone laughs – someone enquires about the sessions being filmed in case you cannot make them all.

Host M: there will be more, hopefully you know – we'll see we'll see

Participant NM: so there's no answer for that one today?

Host M: what one?

Eleasah: well, I can answer from my perspective. So for me personally, um, I just always brought up saying we're Black, so it's a traditional cultural thing umm, but after more thought equally, there's no country called Africa, and I've got no idea

Participant NM: Africa...

Eleasah: yeah, it's a continent, but I don't know where I come from?

Participant NM: you don't?:

Eleasah: not in Africa

Participant NM: ohhhh

Eleasah: I come from Jamaica, and I know that my mum is Irish – but also I mean why I call myself Black is a little bit academic as well, and people have done a lot of work on what Black means, and there's lots of ways to view it (a few participants say "yesss"), and for me, I'm really drawn to whilst I don't know where I come from, Black symbolises people that have survived a massive trauma, and I'm proud of that. That's my history. I have survived; my ancestors have survived that particular trauma. We went in Africans and came out actually something very different, because of the trauma, because of the new things that we had to do to survive, um in many ways, not surviving, kind of a little bit broken, um in that sense, and Black is also very contextual. It's a resisting force against this terror of white supremacy, and so for me, it's not necessarily that Black is a genetic thing. It's actually more of a political statement to say that I'm here I survived, my ancestors survived, I dunno where we came from originally, but we're here init, and for me, Black ties that into and is the shadow behind that is Africa, but I just don't know where. So it's a bit more of a political-ideological thing mainly because I don't

know where I come from if that makes sense – as opposed to Black as a genetic thing, because maybe? I should go around saying I'm Jamaican and Irish or something.

Participant N: yes see, we're called Black after we're called coloureds, its everything but your identity and the place where you came from, where you stem from and many mean West-Indians, funny name, (everyone laughs) yes West-Indians and you look like that I can't work it out? But you know when you say coloured, and then it went to Black, West-Indian, all these different titles that is nothing of us. Nothing that I can see in this room anyway. (White Man's Religion?, 2018)

This segment indicates that one's identity is deeply connected to one's geographical origins for this participant. I had already identified that I am British-born, so her question is directed at how I identify myself as a part of the African diaspora. This nationalist stance is reflective of the ongoing discussion about how the diaspora identifies themselves; as we have seen with nationalism, there is a call to stand in solidarity as a unit of Black peoples who share common suffering; on the other, there is the challenge to divide by ethnicity to nullify racial categorisation.

Being the one at whom the question was directed meant that I needed to use my contribution to inspire other group members to engage whilst being completely transparent about my position in keeping with the Participatory Action Research methodology. I hoped that I could demonstrate enough understanding of ontological blackness and the complexity of being of dual heritage whilst also demonstrating the limitations that many in the diaspora face, the inability to identify physical/geographical roots in Africa. My answer reveals my need to belong; I identify myself as Jamaican with an Irish mother – at the time of writing this thesis, I have never visited Jamaica, but I visit my family in Ireland each year. In this setting, there was a prioritisation of ethnic connection consistent in all parts of my life – although I am most estranged from my African-Caribbean heritage geographically, I have built a political and ontological identity. Although I have had frequent access to Northern Ireland, a country I love, I still do not feel as Irish as I do Jamaican. Although this was not picked up on in the session, it is reflected in Participant N's desire to see Black people identify with a nation (or continent) they may never have been to. For this participant (and others, as we shall see), it seems that connecting to Africa

geographically is part of the solution or the foundation to solution making regarding the wider issue of white supremacy and Christianity.

6.3.3.3 Reclaiming and participation

Participant AU: well, for me personally, the reason why I'm here is my son actually just told me about it this afternoon; what's been bugging me actually, I was privileged to be born into a Christian family, Christian school and everything, I'm still a Christian, but I'm very eclectic. I can go to Roman Catholic church, I can go to Pentecostal, but fundamentally I'm from the Anglican church. And I've always I tell my children this, and they don't believe me. I don't see a White Jesus because I always have that verse in the Bible that says that he made me in his own image. And surely if he made me in his own image, he must be representing me. And my children, very good children, they grew up in the church, went to church, Mondays Fridays, and when they got older, I said to them, you know what, you don't have to go to church if you want, you've come to a point now where you decide where you want to go. And now I kind of regret it, they didn't go and now they've started questioning that you know the story in the Bible is not true, Jesus is not White, you know things that happened in Egypt, they just put it somewhere else, and I say to them you know, surely if that is the case you need to reclaim it. We need to reclaim it. There's no point in running away from it because you can stand outside, criticise and everything, but you've got to be part of it. In most of the Pentecostal churches, they have youth week; you have to be part of it to make an impact. Unless you don't want to practice Christianity anymore, anyone can say this is wrong, and that is wrong, but how do we prove true knowledge, true history and say to our children, you know this is your religion, reclaim it. Because I think this is what is wrong with our race is that we complain and expect other people to fix it (Participant AU, White Man's Religion?, 2018)

Participant AU was an older Nigerian lady who attended with her adult son; both were quite vocal throughout the East London programme. She has suggested that their lack of attendance to church in

their late teen years is partly the cause of their dissatisfaction and challenging questions. Although for herself she has no trouble with theologically identifying with God through Genesis 1:26 (being made in the image of God), she encourages her children to participate in the correction process, should their claims about a stolen religion be accurate. At the same time, she feels that the problem lies with Black people ('our race'), the sense of dependency on others to bring correction.

6.3.3.4 Summary

The introductory seminar asked the question – is Christianity a 'White Man's Religion?' with a focus on how the participants have understood the role and credibility of the Bible. The theme of slavery was used to ground the discussion on the history of Black people with the history of the Hebrews, given that the ADR religions interpret scriptures in a way that conflates the two experiences. The data shows that 'White Man's Religion?' prompts the need to make distinctions between European Christianity and the religion of the Bible. To make these distinctions, both the de-churched and ADR communities seek to 'recover' and 'reclaim' ancient Afroasiatic religion grounded in ethnicity and 'nationhood'. In this sense, colonial Christianity is a stolen religion – the national and spiritual property of communities in the Afroasiatic region. The key solutions presented in this session were *knowing the truth, obedience to God as described in the scriptures*, and *participation* in correcting and challenging the false religion.

'White Man's Religion?' is the question at the beginning of the de-churched journey – it seems it points people to consider one's ethnic, religious and historical origins as a site for answers and direction for identity formation in the present.

6.4 Out of Kemet?

6.4.1 The Researcher's Contribution

The second session unpacks mythologists' claims that the Jesus account in the New Testament is a repackaged revision of ancient Egyptian mythology – specifically the Horus myth. By comparing the accounts and reviewing the arguments for and against this claim, I also suggest why this claim matters

on account of Black identity. Where does the truth of our religion originate? I then consider other possible instances of interactions between the Hebraic faith and the Ancient Egyptian religious systems:

- Akhenaten introduced monotheism to Ancient Egypt and the possibility of him being Moses
- Abram and Sarai's extended stay and interaction with Pharaoh
- Joseph's appointment as governor in Egypt

The second session, 'Out of Kemet?', explores the anti-Christian idea that the account of Christ is a repackaged version of the ancient Egyptian Horus myth. Although my findings concluded that arguments lacked the cohesive material to support these claims, and even the basic paralleling of accounts did not fulfil the claims of the mythologists, there was, in fact, value in this type of work and the development of thought as seen within the neo-Kemetic movement. To move this forward in a way that captured the competing voices on this topic, I drew upon the account of Akhenaten, a Pharaoh in ancient Egypt who established monotheism during his reign. I chose this eventuality because it can help to illuminate some shared spaces among differing world views, firstly that of time and space, the interaction of Old Testament Hebrews with Egyptians – in Africa. Secondly, the possibilities of the exchange/interaction of religious beliefs, monotheism or the development of the Ma'at and the ten commandments (thinking more specifically of Abraham, Joseph and Moses, who had all spent considerable time among Egyptian Leaders in Egypt) and thirdly religious practice such as circumcision.

6.4.2 The ADR Perspective

I will begin by unpacking the challenge of 'wokeness' by referring to the lyrics of a rap song performed by a Black-British Gospel Rapper turned Kemet-inspired personality, Jahaziel. After years of ministry and Christian celebrity status, his rejection of Christianity seemed to be a ground-shaking moment for many Black Christians who were also challenged to rethink their religious commitment 'to the White man's religion'. Although he politely declined an interview, he did permit me to use his lyrics as a reference point for my research. I intend to frame this chapter with a tangible experience that produces the questions necessary for getting to grips with the data. The remainder and majority of the chapter are dedicated to discussing the data.

Part of the decolonising project of the Afrocentric movements has been to investigate the integrity of the scriptures. Afro-Kemetic teachings, such as those taught by the Holy Qubtic Church based in London, suggest the Bible to be a plagiarised work of more ancient Kemetic (Egyptian) religious writings. As a result, adherent to this belief dismisses the credibility of the Bible as used by Orthodox Christians as a deliberate dismissing of a whitewashing of ancient Black religious sophistication and the reappropriation of esoteric spiritual truths. Jahaziel uses the imagery of war as a way of describing his de-churching experience and struggles for *true, correct and authoritative* epistemological foundations:

If my mind is a weapon, I'm strapped with the tool

Ankh as my jewel, tanked full of fuel

Sack full of balls

So I ain't going backward at all

True history the facts on the wall

It's a wrap when I talk, power on my tongue

Solar power that I brung, most powerfulest one

Amen Get power from the sun like pow pow pow power from a gun

This man won't bow and never run

Have to stand proud cah my mum never raised no coward as a son

Ready for the war, many these days say they need change, so I got a penny for your thoughts

I'm reclaiming symbols stolen from then retold to us by free masons

Why would I need a book that keeps changing when I've got the hieroglyphs that predates them? (Jahaziel, 2016, Amen Ra)

Unlike the type of decolonisation that I have discussed earlier, which seeks, in part, to redistribute power through contextualisation, the emphasis here is to return – or realise that the religious power lies with the spiritual truths found in Egypt – not the European interpretation of plagiarised documents. Although diverse in doctrine and interpretation, each of the representative religions is a preservation of the life, ministry, death, and return of Christ. Afroasiatic religions also redistribute the power among themselves as people; the idea of being 'woke' or a personal transformation is integral to the de-colonising process. Jahaziel describes this as stepping out from the oppressive system of lies to take a personal journey of discovery (study);

But they don't want to see the Black rising, they wanna see the Blacks fighting, back biting

*I was in the Church the baptising when I went back to Black writings, they said I'm
backsliding*

They wanna see me in the back hiding – bad timing my bruddah I'm back rhyming

Fire pon dem deceiving lies I and I bun till its legalised

And I am done accepting this Jesus guy while my ancestors get demonised

Nah, my visions been redefined, escape religion that means to bind

Try try know they ain't telling you the truth

Man have to go back to Kemet for the proof

(Jahaziel, 2016, Amen Ra)

The Atonist teachings are distinct from the other representative religions in that they do not consider the biblical scriptures as sacred or authoritative documents. However, they may draw parallels between the religious documentation to support the claim that the Bible embellishes certain Kemetic teachings. They reject subjectivity to the God of the Bible and instead see the religious teachings as a guide towards realising inner divinity as part of the universe (pantheism).

Instead of looking to the sky start looking inside cause that divine energy is you

You, your superhuman with power to produce a human

And ain't no one even came from a damn man's rib

Any man that lives came through the womb-an

There's no other creator than the great mother nature

As above so it is below – learn that Metu Neter

(Jahaziel, 2016, Amen Ra)

6.4.3 The Participant's Perspective

6.4.3.1 The Credibility of the Bible

When I ask certain questions, the Church is like “oh you're not meant to ask those questions”, and I think that's where the Church fails cause Jesus always answered questions, even whether people were tryna trap him or not and I think that as a church we shouldn't be embarrassed to say we don't know. Because there's some things that the Church just doesn't know, the Bible just doesn't say, the Bible doesn't say how old Adam and Eve were, the Bible doesn't say how many female siblings they had and how did Cain get a wife, the Bible just doesn't say a thing, and I think we try and make excuses and do what have you and it causes frustration in people, Black people for the sake of this discussion and they leave the faith. (Participant A, 2017, Out of Kemet)

Participant A highlights an institutional dialectical inconsistency with Scripture, he rightly asserted on various occasions in the New Testament that Jesus answered the questions of his followers and opposers, and so to be subject to a tradition that is subject to the authority of Scripture should mean that embracing Jesus' methods for teaching should be present among his believers. As explained earlier in the chapter, the issue lies with the churches' selectivity. Because the topic of ethnicity and “race” is topical in the political landscape, it can be rejected alongside the identity politics and liberal political philosophies that offend a core theological “colour-blindness”. Many apologetic programmes have excelled and invested in debating mainstream science and alternative religions. However, they have

only recently come to attend, in hostility, to the in-house issue of "race" and the alternative apologetic arguments provided by these Afroasiatic Diasporic Religions that have come from under the Evangelical influence.

Participant A goes on to reflect on the actual teachings,

People who advocate ancient Egyptian way of life... the Bible stole from it ... is that when you compare the core of the teachings, the two different teachings and you say way of life and the Christian way of life they're like completely different. When you find a lot of West African or ancient Egyptian, it may be centred around some sort of ancestral worship or being a god yourself ... and the Christian doctrine is completely opposite, saying not to do those things, so when I personally, when I come across comparisons like that, that's when I say no - it becomes chalk and cheese, but I can sympathise when people say that you know how Christ has been presented to them from Sunday school, from pastors, what have you, has been very kind of sort of European focused to make them feel like they're not accepted whereas with Egyptian way of life because you know they're historically Black they're more... into that. (Participant A, 2017, Out of Kemet)

Here, Participant A distinguishes between Christianity and the Atonist/Qubtic religion as religiously incompatible through the reading of Scripture. Although they do not work from the same theological premise, they agree that making the distinction is essential for pursuing what is true, correct, and authoritative.

6.4.3.2 Misinformation

Participant EO: and also I find um that the African journey in the Bible, I try to make that connection and uhh from the _____ that I did, I did a tour of the British Museum and it's the separation of Egypt from Africa and its like no, Egypt is in Africa you know, and they were Black kings who were proved within Egypt, and I want myself to explore the Bible journey as its told, and in a truthful way, because there's a lot more in the Bible umm regarding Africa itself and the whole continent not just Egypt separately because we shouldn't speak of Egypt

separately to Africa, it's a country within Africa you know as with some of the other northern and southern African countries. So just to put that as well, oh were talking about Egypt were walking about Africa, so I think that's really important as Black people that we- you know we're the first man - Black people come across, and the more that we deepen our knowledge and understand you know hopefully we become less afraid just to say that openly you know because its - you know the evidence - the cannons etc. But you know that is that - that's important, we should feel safe and just, you know, be happy to explore that in our history and the critical role that we play in Christianity. (Participant EO, Out of Kemet, 2018)

Participant EO is thinking about the correlation between realising Egypt as an African Nation and the presence of Black people in the Bible or the Bible as Black history. Here she contends that deeper knowledge and understanding of history provide the confidence to explore Black people's role in Christianity. This knowledge, it seems, is serviced by evidence, archaeological evidence currently hidden from mainstream education, hidden in plain sight (British Museum). Participant EO's desire for this type of research to be a safe and happy experience causes one to think about a possible enjoyable side to the de-colonisation process. Often, the participants refer to the struggle to find and know and establish the truth, yet introducing an attitude of enjoyment perhaps emphasises the enjoyable learning factor that builds confidence rather than a combative experience.

Participant DA is a Black conservative Christian who no longer attends church, his issues with the churches were relational. After years of working for the Black Majority church in various positions, this participant was sacked and asked to leave the Church when he confronted the leadership on matters of doctrine. Despite his de-churched experience being different from the rest of the group, he attended because of his passion for seeing Black people seek salvation in Jesus Christ. Participant DA was sympathetic to the issues that arise in response to the dominant European image. Interestingly, while he can understand how this can contribute to religious disillusionment, he considers the alternative Afroasiatic/conscious claims to be 'stories'. Again, another distinction is being made, here it is between what is true and what is not true, and he seeks for this truth in the Bible,

From my experience, I feel like a lot of the reason why discussions like this or the reason why people have searched for these stories in the first place is because of the whitewashing in Christianity to start with, and people don't feel that they're included as Black people in Christianity. So every time we've been removed from the narrative and cause like I grew up in catholic church so I grew up White Jesus all over my home and that's what I saw Jesus to be just because that's what I was told I didn't know any better but umm I can see where somebody growing up with an issue of that and not seeing themselves fitting into the story of Christianity that they would maybe more entertain some of these stories what's out there. And me I've looked into what's out there, I don't shy away from them, and I like to I'm more concerned with the truth even as Christians were taught that even by Paul that we should be noble in that sense that we should seek the truth in all things and I think that it's just helped me to actually see the truth and where we as African are actually in the scripture which has actually strengthened my faith and what I believe more so that pushing me away because I've never in my life and studied the Bible yet and seen the whiteness in the Bible. The more I've studied the Bible, the less White it seems to be; there's just no White narrative no matter where if you actually study it, there's no White narrative, there's no White narrative um so it's something that's probably pushed me to feel more inclusive of the scriptures as a Black person so I think that it's a good thing to not shy away or be afraid of it because it can work out in your favour as a Black people. (Participant DA, Out of Kemet, 2018)

Participant DA observes that people's dissatisfaction with mainstream Christianity results from Black people's lack of presence in Christian teaching, Bible reading, and Christian resources for personal use – such as the images our family members have at home of biblical scenes. This whitewashing and the resulting rejection of the religion suggests that the de-churched religious peoples seek to be central to a divine narrative as a corrective and are an essential and foundational requirement for commitment.

During the seminar section of the session, I explore different ways of contending with the image of Christ. Much of the Black, conscious social media and documentary material I came across when gathering my initial ideas together rejected the image of a White Christ on account of it being a

deliberate act to whitewash Black history, replacing the Christian Messiah with the image of European royalty and variations of a desirable European aesthetics. Distinct from the Black liberationist and postcolonial critique that perhaps focus more on contemporary social representation and a theological rejection of people of colour, the conscious community in general and Afroasiatic Diasporic Religions, in particular, seem most concerned about correcting the ethnic representation as a matter of historical fact. By seeking to correct these details and clarifying the truth about Jesus' ethnicity, it seems that Black people will distinguish between the religion of the 'White man' and the religious history of Black Afroasiatic peoples.

Although not sympathetic to Afroasiatic religions as ideal alternative bible-based religions for Black people, Participant DA supports reading the scriptures as an ethnic narrative. In this way, he asserts that his faith and ability to connect to the Scripture have strengthened because he can see 'we as Africans' in Scripture. Further, Participant DA encourages those who have questions about whom the Bible is talking about and talking to – to pursue their inquiry. Despite referring to various attempts from within the conscious community on social media to discredit the Bible in both amateur and intellectual endeavours, in these sessions, the Bible as a source of truth, be it historical or religious, has not been an offence but a given to those who made a vocal contribution. This supports my hypothesis that the success of the ADR on the fringes of the Black-British Christian body is their commitment to hold the Bible in high authority – even if they feel that specific versions of the Bible are questionable. This contribution was followed up by another Black conservative Christian who, referring to his understanding of Scripture, offers a rebuttal to the (Black) Hebrew Israelite's claim to exclusivity,

My Bible tells me that God the father is not Black, He's not White, He's not Jewish, He's not whatever – God is spirit, and the Bible also says that God shows no favouritism, so it's too long to get into, but there's a reason why the Jews were chosen first it was because of Abraham's obedience um but moving aside from that when we come to Christ now because of the promise that God made to Abraham, you know Jesus would have had to come through that lineage to come onto the earth. (Participant A, Out of Kemet, 2018)

Whilst acknowledging the ethnic aspect of the sacred writings, Participant A draws attention to Abraham's obedience as written in the book of Genesis as the key reason God promised salvation through his lineage. He pushes back on any notion of ethnic supremacy whilst accepting that an ethnic group privileged an election or chosenness. Going further, participant A rejects racialising Jesus, another distinction being made between ethnicity and “race”; although accepting Jesus was a Jew, participant A goes on to describe his understanding of what the gospel is,

'...when you racialise Jesus to say Jesus was Black or Jesus was White, you're indirectly kind of saying, well Jesus is for White people, but he's not for Black people, or Jesus is for Black people but has not for White people. So it's like, it's like you kind of segment Jesus to say that Jesus was only for a certain set of people, and this is where the twisting of the scriptures can come in... he was about calling the children of God home no matter what walk of life you've come from. So that's why he says go into all nations and basically spread the gospel so that people can come in. So that's why I say it's extremely dangerous to racialise Jesus because you're saying that Jesus favours one set of people over the other and that's not the case.'

(Participant A, 2018, Out of Kemet)

Participant A is suggesting that the racialisation of Jesus leads to an exclusive gospel that he believes is not supported by New Testament scripture. Despite Jesus not being White and perhaps having darker skin than often portrayed, Participant A suggests that the offer of redemption is not exclusive to the community from which Jesus was born but to all humanity. This perspective, I argue, is shared by many Black Christians in Britain and stands distinct from Afroasiatic diasporic ethnoreligious exclusivity and the strategic essentialism present in Black Liberation Theology that relies on the Blackness of Christ to keep central the experience of Black people as a form of resistance to colonial Christianity and prophetic social criticism.

6.4.3.3 Purpose of knowledge

This section features a conversation about the purpose of knowledge; it seems that the consensus in the group is that knowledge comprises information and facts. In the previous chapter, I discussed how

knowledge also includes information beyond empirical evidence based on experiences from a PAR and postfoundationalist perspective. The data does present knowledge of this kind, but, as with all the sessions across the sites – information about Black history, theology and religion is presented as verifiable factual evidence. This may be a result of the tone of the seminar, which sought to present empirical research as well as more contextual and reflective modes of knowing; however it seems that it is vital among the de-churched that knowledge based on facts and evidence is a significant part of the solution for liberation. Participant WF, a Christian, challenges this idea:

Yeah, it's just a thought that I wanted to add to that umm; it's almost like what people want to do is acquire knowledge, but what we gonna do with all that knowledge? And wisdom comes from a place of taking the word and doing the word; that's the whole purpose of the Bible. Now when you go out and try to ___ understanding, not, for instance, a lot of people um, they won't actually go and do something unless they understand it and, if we look at what we mentioned last week (White Man's Religion? session) there's only so much knowledge you can obtain, it's limitless but why do we want to obtain it all? To do what? Does that make sense? And the whole purpose of the Bible is to do the work. So if you're not actually using it, what's the point of having the word, so you've got people are Christians, don't go to church, reading the word but not doing anything with. So I kind of get the angle of this whole topic, but what's the point? What's the point of acquiring all this knowledge and not doing anything with it? (Participant WF, Out of Kemet, 2018)

Participant WF's perspective of the de-churched is that they are more concerned with knowing information than putting it into practice; he also seems to extend this notion to the point of these sessions. It seems he cannot quite grasp how attaining 'all this knowledge' about Black history, early church history, and ancient African religious traditions are translated into action or practical application. He contrasts the demands of being 'woke' (gaining knowledge and insight for understanding the world around you) with what he understands about the Bible and its direction – to read, understand and act. Participant MI responds to these questions and draws upon people's experiences to clarify why knowledge is a priority;

Yeah, I agree with most of what you said; we had a brief discussion last week saying that, um, the idea of infinite knowledge, especially without action, is largely a Western ideal, in terms of wanting to conquer everything and to know everything, all of that so but I think umm I don't think everyone wants all the knowledge before they go out in action, my favourite Bible verse is faith without works is dead which you can do... but I think it's the fact that a lot of the time the church rejects the questions or does not want to own up to answering is the off-putting part for some, it's not the fact that questions are being asked, but it's the kind of response that people sometimes get to the asked questions that then leaves that disparity and anger. And yes, as you said, faith should not be based upon what you know, we should do anyway umm there was something else I was gonna say umm yeah I don't think – I think sometimes people want to understand more, but that can be mistaken as them not wanting to do and at the same time but yeah I can't remember the other thing. (Participant MI, Out of Kemet, 2018)

What participant MI seems to be drawing out here is the experience of rejection, dismissal and a form of educational negligence on the part of the church leadership. This sentiment is in line with other participants' feelings of disappointment when they have brought questions to their church leaders and have not had the type of engagement they had hoped for, which would first be to recognise the questions as valid and important.

Participant AD: the thing that you two brought up is faith which is the key... You know I hear a lot of Black people say, wake up, don't you know that our ancestors were astrologers and kings and queens and the thing is I knew that because it kept getting repeated to me every other day, but me knowing that and knowing that yes we were the ones in Egypt, and I'm saying this for the sake of argument, we were the ones in Egypt hence X-Y-Z, it doesn't change anything, there's no awakening just like okay, that's another area that I can add to my profession as a historian. Do you get what I mean? ... I'm saying that to say that that understanding or that knowledge or what they know of the ancient Egyptians or what have you, whatever you're teaching next, it's only just historical information. And I suppose the only difference is it may have been circumvented by European history-telling, so when you see, you know, Prince of

Egypt at Disney or Gods of Egypt, they're all whitewashed. I think that's where the problem comes in. And to this day, I can only remember like Michael Jackson 'Remember the time' where there was a Black Pharaoh, that's the only Black representation that sticks in my mind, but I'm just saying that to say back to their point (Participant WF/Participant MI) that you know you have to have faith and actually believe that God will actually bless you with wisdom and the other side of it as well is that you have to seek Gods word in scriptures.

Participant KN: yeah, I kind of agree with what he is saying because I recently went to a Coptic church because my dad's married to a Coptic woman. (mummers and clarification of what Coptic was) Yeah, it was like an old, it's an Egyptian church but it kind of predates the Egyptian gods and what, it was quite strange because the similarities between Christianity and the Coptic believer were so apparent and they believe in Jesus, they believe in the disciples, and I was like wow okay it's a bit I was a bit shocked. But like you're saying, at the ends of the day, what comes down to it is your faith and your personal, intimate relationship with Christ. So we can attain all of this information and have all of this information for what? It's great to have knowledge and to grow, but knowledge is not wisdom; you can just ask the father, we can just ask Jesus, give me wisdom, and he'll give us wisdom, so for me, it was like a bit eye-opener that it does where it is for me, Black, White Asian. Jesus is Lord for me personally, and yeah.

Participant DA: I was just gonna say something quickly, pretty much around the whole thing of what's been said maybe from a little bit of a different angle and maybe from my personal experience and what I've seen. I grew up in my church; I've been a Christian since 2008 (he meant 1998), and umm, so loads of us grew up as Christians together as teenagers but what I've found is that we must have a balance so even with the knowledge and faith you must have balance. Cause some people are all on the knowledge and some people are all on the faith, and a lot of people that are leaving church which is the basis of why Eleasah created this programme is because people are leaving the faith and they had no knowledge of actual where their Christianity came from. So when they're presented with these arguments, they crumble as Christians. Because they don't know how to, they don't know any apologetics; they don't know

how to argue, anything- a meme can throw off their Christianity because it's like woah. They don't actually know the origins of their actual religion, and that's why, as Christians that are we balance the faith/emotional aspect with the intellect and knowledge because, in the scriptures, Paul commended the Bereans for doing exactly that and too many Christians are going around thinking it's not important to know the basics of Christianity. Because when you're tested and the devil comes to test you, saying I have faith in God, but if something's presented to you and you don't know how to actually prove and actually contend for the faith, how do you contend when someone comes to you with information that you do not have an answer to? And that's why as Christians, I believe personally as much as we believe in God and we have faith in Jesus Christ as a twelve-year-old, as Eleasah said, was in the temple debating with grown men. This is our example as Christians; we're supposed to be constantly learning and understanding God. Do you know what I'm saying and to me personally, faith is not enough – the Bible says faith without works is dead, I think that just having an airy-fairy faith with God is just not enough, and I think it's very, it can put you in a very dangerous position as a Christian if you just base your Christianity on 'I just believe' because to be honest, the Bible also says the truth sets us free, and even as a Christian I had to relearn so much of what I believe because my faith was based upon what I was taught. And what I was taught in many instances was incorrect. So I was living a way, and I was bound, and certain things even as a Christian I had to be freed from when I actually studied myself and said God that's not what you meant about that, and now I know what you mean I've applied and lived my life a certain way. And that's actually made me as a Christian more free, I think like it's very important that we don't just have this mindset of well, I just believe it, because everything that we believe is what we've been taught, and if we've not been taught correct then we have belief in something that's wrong. So we do have to make a better effort to see the truth as well in our own lives. (Out of Kemet, 2018)

This extensive excerpt from the data is a conversation between the Christian participants in the group, and it shows how the discussion has been an opportunity to re-evaluate how faith and knowledge

interact with one another. Whilst the participants seem to be siding with one another on the topic of faith, there are many instances where they correct one another, showing the diverse perspectives and positions on the de-churched phenomenon. For example, participants WF, AD and KN seemed less inclined to engage with the liberatory elements of knowledge building in favour of faith, whilst participants MI and DA made a practical connection between how knowledge shapes faith by building it up or tearing it down. Participant DA reflects Christologically on the role of knowledge and Jesus' ministry to his people. My sense here is that knowledge, be it based on facts or experience, has a way of holding others to account, whereas faith and what results from faith is too personal and transcendent without demonstrating the theological building blocks for its application. In this excerpt, those who referred to faith did not connect it with a particular liberatory practice every day, whereas those who interlinked faith with knowledge could anchor in on potential sites for liberation, such as teaching in a church setting.

6.4.3.4 Summary

In the session 'Out of Kemet?' the participants seemed drawn to the conundrum of knowledge and faith; how do they interact? Are they so separate - is one better than the other for salvation or liberation? The Christian participants particularly dominated this session; much of their contributions were observations of the de-churched and what they believed to be the reasons for their 'exodus' from mainstream Christianity. It was largely agreed that the 'rejection' experienced by many de-churched was the catalyst for the desire for a religious space that was attentive, integral and inclusive of Black people. On the other hand, there was a division in the process of gaining knowledge or building faith; on the one hand, some of the Christian participants lay the responsibility on the church to teach, advise and guide, whereas others looked to their personal faith-based relationship with God, asking him directly for answers and guidance.

6.5 The Black face of the Early Church

6.5.1 The Researcher's Contribution

This session looks at the contribution of African theologians, bishops and thinkers in early church history that directly impacted foundational theologies of the mainstream Western churches today. In each session, I put up timelines and maps that help to put our conversations into a historical and geographical perspective. For example, when talking about the “Council of Nicea” conspiracy, which many de-churched and ADR claim is the time that Roman Christians devised the repackaged biblical text and declared Jesus as divine, I can demonstrate other historical events that may support or challenge these ideas such as the evidence of Biblical canons that predate 325AD as well as what some of the leading theologians understood as the earliest Christological doctrines. Equipping the participants with this background knowledge, I felt levelled the playing field for those in the room, all then able to interrogate some foundational information.

I pay particular attention to Tertullian and Origen as examples of African Church fathers who significantly influence mainstream Christian theology today. I presented them, in contrast, to demonstrate the variety of theological ideas during the early history of the church and the fundamental implications and application of their ideas so that I can help the participants connect with their own theological ideas and those of early African Christians. Tertullian coined the term 'Trinity' to reflect the triune nature of God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit, whereas Origen is known to have introduced gnostic ideas into his Christian doctrine; his approach to allegory and deeper meanings in the text, I felt would resonate most with those de-churched who considered Christianity, a descendant of an earlier African religious tradition – such as the claims of the Nation of Islam and the Holy Qubtic Church.

This session aimed to consider how one's identity is connected to one's religion or religious identity and, further to this, the power of knowing one's religious history. In earlier parts of the study, we have seen that ADR are keen to demonstrate the continuity of their religion with ancient religions that had been destroyed and forgotten through the enslavement experience.

6.5.2 The ADR Perspective

ADRs are also concerned with correcting the perception of the origin of their religions; most scholarships attribute their beginnings as fairly recent, a product of religious resistance in the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Although they attribute their resurgence to these eras, these religions teach that they have awoken to their true religious origins, ancient religions revived through revelation to prophets and elders. Leo Muhammad teaches about Islam that predated the Prophet Muhammad of mainstream Islam:

But beloved Islam is a pure system of freedom, justice and equality which didn't begin 1400 years ago; it didn't come with Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon you, that was the latest revelation to the Arabs. But prior to that, Islam was the system that governed the universe it's called peace and Black people that's our very nature from the beginning that's why at the time of the Prophet in the Arabian Peninsula, when he began teaching an Ethiopian Black man by the name of Bilal who was being enslaved by Arabs he heard about this Arab in the Arabian Peninsula teaching this what they said was a new religion but to Bilal, the man was teaching the old-time religion Bilal already knew the religion. It was Bilal who climbed up onto the Kaaba, that house built by Abraham and Ishmael from a longer time before it was Bilal who climbed up on the top of it and said for the first time "Allahu Akbar" Prophet Muhammad didn't teach him how to do that when the Prophet saw Bilal doing that the probably said wow that's a call, but Bilal already knew that call he already knew the name of Allah it, wasn't new to us as a people. (Leo Muhammad, The Beginning, 10:18 -12:23)

These teachings aim to correct the perception of Islam beginning in 610AD through the prophet Muhammad, but that it has always been the religion of the original man of which the Arabs have received access to this revelation. Muhammad considers how Bilal, an Ethiopian slave and adherent to the 'old-time religion', recognised his own religious teachings taught in other nations. As discussed in the literature review, Curtis E. Edwards (2014) concurs that Bilal is a crucial African Islamic figure because his prominence affirms Black and African Muslims in what is considered an 'Arab' religion.

There is a sense of continuity tracked through Bilal; he is a connecting figure between Ancient Islam, mainstream Islam, and the Nation of Islam as we know it today.

Ka Hun: Anku Sa Ra of the HQC in Barbados, in his online teaching programme ‘Know your Scriptural Roots’, considers the etymology of the term ‘Bible’ in an effort to demonstrate the origins of the biblical text,

And then as you to see the word ‘biblio’, when we look at the word ‘biblio’ we’re forming the element meaning book so you do see the word book here and what is called the Bible while sometimes sometimes Bible from the Greek ‘biblion’ on paper scroll as we just saw also the ordinary word for a book as a division of a larger work, originally a diminutive- diminutive of ‘biblos’ which means what Egyptian papyrus this is perhaps from this is, no they- no they trying to play games now now they’re trying to figure out how we gonna tweak our way out of this because it’s telling you that the word Bible done from ‘biblos’ which is Egyptian papyrus so the original books in the Bible come from Egyptian progress and we that dare I say this is not only Egyptian papyrus but the African Ta Ma Rean papyrus, Amun? (Know your Scriptural roots, 2017, 07:19-08:11)

Ka Hun: Anku Sa Ra is sharing a common suspicion among the ADR about the hidden origins of the Biblical texts, that what is printed for mainstream use and has been in use for many centuries is, in fact, ancient African teachings, by way of Egypt. The etymological approach, if done rigorously, is helpful for mapping and tracking continuity through languages. For the ADR, the study of origins is a significant underpinning of their arguments against mainstream Christianity; knowing the origins of one’s religions seems to also be the preferred site for identifying one’s cultural, philosophical and social particularities.

6.5.3 The Participants' Perspective

6.5.3.1 Identity and Faith

This group discussion began with some questions, *'is there a connection? What is the relationship between you as a person where you come from, your culture, your skin colour and the religion, your belief system?'* (Researcher, The Black Face of the Early Church 2018). An elderly Jamaican woman was the first respondent,

Participant MO: When I was called as a young girl of sixteen in Jamaica, you know I just have that urge; I always want to be a Christian first. I like the tings of God and the Church, you know, and to learn more about God, and with that I find it help me to be a kind person a loving person I'm not very contentious I like to make peace you know. I need to be at peace with it, yeah... I've had a long marriage and um I looked after my husband very well, and in his last days of sickness, he said to me that probably the sickness would have killed him a long time had it not been for my help you know. And these make me feel good.'

Pastor CAW: so for you, being a mum, being a wife, that's where your identity, that was important to you in terms of your faith. Did your racial identity play a part in your faith as well, or was that never something you considered because it was just 'I'm a mum, I'm gonna be a good mum, I'm gonna be a good wife umm and a good woman'?

Participant MO: No, I never let these tings bother me because I hear when people talk about when they come to this country and to get anywhere to live and all these tings. By time I come here in 1962, ya know, Black people have their own houses so I could get a room to rent and never have much problem with people who don't want to sit beside me on buses and at work. Well, to get jobs, sometimes they don't wanna give it to you because you're Black, you see that. But I never let it go, I always went to my little evening classes learn something, I'm always want to better myself, I never look at nobody who you know, want to keep me down, they do say horrible things to me and things, but I'm always persevering doing things you know. Be doing things. (The Black Face of The Early Church, 2018)

Participant MO speaks of how her faith influenced her life, despite experiencing some discrimination. For her, the connection between her ethnicity and her religion was not important, simply her love for God and the safety and flourishing of her family. Whilst she does not seem to have much interest in the topic of racial discrimination, she does engage in self-determination – striving for individual success, and for her, that meant studying, being a good wife and mother, her duty to her family and to God. These are the type of conservative attitudes that one can find encouraged among ADR teachings about marriage, raising a family or building a nation.

6.5.3.2 Historic Afroasiatic Legacy

These excerpts consider how the historical legacy of Black and African peoples and their presence in leadership is important for dispelling mythical beliefs about the inferiority of Black and African peoples, the places from which they come, and the contribution they can make to global conversations.

I think identity is very important, and how people see themselves. So umm, for me, it's been a - it's a little bit of an interesting one, I think, and my identity as a man. As an African definitely influences the way I interact with my faith. Um, I'm a Christian um I think some of the challenges I've had umm is I think the fact that that kind of patricha- or neo-colonial relationship that still happens; where it's like I feel that as the Black community a lot of the times our- what we do is not recognised in the broader sense unless there's a someone out of our community world- if that makes sense- so it's not like we're not seen as being able to rule ourselves. So when I say that there's a lot of churches that are predominantly Black, but they'll still be led by a White minister, and I don't think – there's nothing necessarily wrong with having a White minister but just the idea of somebody who's Black being able to - to sort of lead. I think that's a big thing, so I think I'm quite passionate about my African descent and for me feel very very passionate about what happens on that continent, because um hearing stories for my grandfather, he talks about, he even when they were there Black people couldn't even achieve the highest grades. It was just like you could because you were Black. You just couldn't and even looking at like a lot of the theology, looking at today's society, like well known Black preachers, I'm not of the nature of too charismatic, so there doesn't seem to be much. I looked

up something, for example, um African I think it was Bible school or something like that, and I found that in Kenya and I found that it was still led by someone of European descent and Uganda - still by European descent, and it's like why do we need that....there's that element. It's an interesting one for me because, for me, it's more a 'on this earth' thing, does that make sense, and interacting that will people other Christians who are not Black. I think my concern is that as a body - as a Christian body, there seems to be a disconnect within that, understanding that as a Black person, I can worship God in a certain way which may not be the same as what you do, but it equally, it's not – there's an element of it done in an African way it might be voodoo evolved, do you know what I mean? Whereas the White way is the righteous way, and for the Bible, for me, the Bible didn't come from your culture anyway. The Hebrew culture wasn't the same as modern-day Western culture. So kind of coming across that and also helping for me, the reason why I'm here is – I don't personally, there's some little gaps in my knowledge, that doesn't influence my salvation if that makes sense personally, but there are some friends who it does. And helping find where some of their challenges are and filling those gaps, discussing it with my fellow brothers and sisters, I can better understand where they're coming from. (Participant KA, The Black Face of the Early Church, 2018)

Participant KA shares his concerns about the lack of Black leadership in Black churches and theological education. He considers the epistemological effect that White leadership has on the confidence and flourishing of Black people in Christian spaces. Participant KA speaks of the disconnect between the context in which Christianity was birthed and modern Christianity in the West and considers how a contextualised Christianity, teamed with better education to ‘fill those knowledge gaps, that reflects his ethnicity, location, cultures and languages is the site for flourishing and the lack thereof is a source for dissatisfaction with Christianity among his peers.

I think one of the things we've got to understand is the power of religion, I think we see it as just a church ting, but it's almost something that's in the atmosphere, in our perception in our culture and its Christianity is deeply bound up with the notion of hierarchy, a racial hierarchy, it's almost just assumed as we don't often recognise it but its deeply embedded in our past

consciousness and not just in Black subconsciousness but in White subconsciousness as well that this – at the top of the racial ladder sits a White God. And actually, to deconstruct that, to get that out of your head, is liberating; it's absolutely liberating. It gives us permission to challenge the very way our social order has been constructed. It has been constructed with this underlying assumption. And every now and again, it rears its ugly head. How many people seen the Black panther movie? So I was having a conversation with someone, we're talking about it, and I was saying that one of the things it does – this projection of Wakanda, although it's this afro-futurist view, this technologically advanced society that actually is reaching back into history into this idea that actually there were these great historic African kingdoms. It's not something that just sci-fi it's actually rooted in history. And the person I was talking to was like 'oh what African- name an African kingdom' like they didn't exist, and I was really shocked, a White friend of mine , who I knew quite well but this dismissal of any notion that there was these great historical African histories that they've been written out of. So peoples view of African and Blackness is you know receiving aid you know...' (Participant/Host CAW, The Black Face of the Early Church, 2018)

Participant/Host CA is a pastor at one of the church venues I used for the programme; already familiar with Black theological literature, he used his knowledge and perspective to build further on the ideas about religion, hierarchy and liberation that had been introduced in the seminar part of the session. Participant/Host CA, in the first instance, recognised that Christianity as the group had come to know it was complicit in racial discrimination, dispelling any expectation of being defensive. Participant/Host CA successfully put aside any notion of religious authority that is often expected when the pastor is present. This supported the atmosphere of exploration, solution-finding and knowledge building/sharing that I had outlined as essential for all of the sessions. Here he describes the process of deconstruction, particularly deconstructing the racial hierarchy, ultimately an intellectual activity that scholars such as Beckford often use to introduce liberatory action. Here Participant/Host CA suggests that one be freed from its power by deconstructing the social constructs that endorse and maintain a racial hierarchy. He builds on this by demonstrating that underneath these social constructs of

whiteness, white superiority, and racial hierarchy are, in many cases, the hidden historical legacies of African power and social development that have been hidden or forgotten. Again is this dichotomy of truth and lie, real and fake, what is portrayed and proven to be true once again rooted in the historical and genealogical accounts of African or Afroasiatic peoples. Participant/Host CA brings to the fore the importance of knowing the truth to aid the deconstruction of constructed lies; so, beyond identifying the racist undertones of colonial Christianity and European religious milestones, what has been understood over the various sessions is that these constructions must be dispelled with historical or scriptural facts as well as alternative cultural perspectives.

6.5.3.3 Roots and Culture

The participants also engaged in a discussion about the importance and practicalities of being connected to home countries in the Caribbean or Africa. Participant D shares his story of being sent “home” for schooling,

I was eight. I got sent back home, so I went to live in the Caribbean. So seeing the difference between me and other friends growing up in Dominica at my age, being that for me I had all the Black stuff, the latter part of primary school, all my high school I learned all about the Caribbean, I learned Black history, I learned everything. I didn't learn about Shakespeare and Queen Elizabeth, I never heard them things, so my perspective to a lot of people my age is a lot different. When I see younger Black people now, I find the struggle for identity is kinda similar to the Americans, in the sense that Americans obviously came from Africa at some time but as the generations go by they're losing the history, they're losing knowing where they come from. There's so many people that - they've never been back to their country in Africa, never been to the Caribbean. Don't know anything about Jamaica, St. Lucia wherever they're from, Nigeria. Don't know the language, don't know how to cook the food, they just lose all their culture, and their kids are gonna be worse off because they're not going to their countries on holiday, they're going to Spain and all these kind of places. (Participant D, The Black Face of the Early Church, 2018)

Participant D suggests that the identity crisis he perceives in the Black-British community is attributed to the loss of connection to ethnic cultures. He is less concerned with ancient cultures but with more recent ancestry, which provides a sense of grounding in his contribution. Being that the majority of the Caribbean presence in Britain has been a reality within the last seven decades, Participant D seems to believe that a connection to those back home - through visiting home, maintaining the traditional language and engaging with other aspects of the culture - provides that knowledge of self often referred to in ADRs. Participant D alludes to a difference between himself and his other British peers because he was sent to school in the Caribbean when his grandmother was returning for her retirement. As they unfold, what becomes interesting in these sessions is that extraordinarily little is considered about belonging to Britain or becoming British. It seems that the privilege is to be most connected to ancestral roots, culturally, genealogically, historically and religiously.

Off of that point, I'm in my early thirties, so I'm not second-generation. I'd say I'm probably third-generation um as the original question that you posed how much of our race is involved in our religion, for me personally my own journey um I grew up in church, and so to answer that question church has always been a part of life as a youngster really. My parents are from Jamaica both my parents came over when they were young, their other siblings were born here, but they were born in Jamaica, so they grew up with their grandparents, so that thing of just going to church and church being a part of life was just normal for me. Um, both my parents and a lot in that generation sort of left the church. My dad was a Rastafarian for a little while; I don't know how serious it might have just been the music, but the books was in my house, so I got to read about Marcus Garvey from a young age even as a Christian. So me personally, I grown into an apostolic faith, so there's a lot of Zionist kind of mixes in there, so for me personally it's just an extension of community, it was only when I went to school I realised that people did church differently so in terms of for me personally yes it was always for me part of who I am but interestingly as well and why I think what you're doing is really is as a Black person, you start to learn about slavery or just the history because it's written down, I was drawn to read about Rastafarianism and its only because when I read it, I was into the music

and everything, it was the doctrine that didn't make sense to me.' (Participant C, The Black Face of the Early Church, 2018)

Participant C is a Christian from a Black majority apostolic church who describes his church experience as consistent with his cultural and ethnic heritage. As a result, he has not suffered a process of disillusionment but is concerned about the ways in which Black cultures are preserved and shape the Christian expression of his community. Alongside his main job and family life, Participant C has a reggae/Gospel sound system business that performs at events in and around London; he has found a way to express Christianity through his ethnic and cultural identity consistent with his own church experience. Participant C also highlights that whilst Rastafari has been influential, he is not sympathetic to their doctrine or teachings and so finds benefit from it as a cultural asset and acknowledges it as a vehicle for transmitting Afroasiatic diasporic religious ideas.

6.5.3.4 Crossing Over

In this session, Participant HB shares with the group her family's 'de-churching',

Participant HB: it was more when you brought up the whole Israelite thing; I was brought up in Church, we two (indicating her sister) grew up in Church together, but from the age of nineteen, it was probably when my family started coming out of Church, questioning the Bible, our thoughts were everywhere, and we took a step back instead of going into it more, and then discussing it an finding out –

Eleasah: with your parents?

Participant HB: well with my whole family, yeah, my brothers and sisters that was it every Sunday go to Church, that was the routine like so we all just took a step back kind of just wondering about ourselves like 'okay we don't go church anymore' it was weird on a Sunday, to wake up and like – lie down. So yeah, now my mum, in like the last year she gone to this Israelite thing

Eleasah: Hebrew Israelites?

Participant HB: yeah, sorry, I'm not sure what you really call it because I dunno; there's some things with me because I've not... I dunno, it just hasn't – I dunno something with me. I'm not kind of at peace with it or something like it. It's cause it's too. I don't even how to describe it because it's that kind of -

Pastor CAW: mmm, it's different, isn't it?

Participant HB: yeah, it's different

Pastor CAW: and I think one of the things that umm traditional Christianity has done is made us suspicious and mistrustful of our own heritage, so that is the 'other'. This is the established truth, and everything else is to be other, to be wary of whether that's African spirituality, African traditions, or ummm so we're wary of it, so there's no need to have fear, its worthy of the investigation umm you know it's not something your gonna suddenly find yourself stepping into a room full of demons and all sorts

Participant HB: yeah, a lot of its Black culture, so I'm open, completely open with it- it's just a lot of the things that they practice. I asked my mum the other day about women wearing trousers, I was like mum 'if I wear trousers am I going to hell' she's like 'yes' you know things like that, and I'm just like its one of those tin head moments you're just like 'what?' so I don't know what cross of information and the practices what they're doing, because all through the culture, if you bring it back to Black culture and find out history, I'm all for it I wanna know what they know but when they started crossing that with it and making it part of something that's when I have to be 'what is this all about?'

Participant HB: it's the crossing out of everyone else is what I don't fathom because I grew up multicultural, I've got a mixture of friends from all everywhere, and I like that, and I like knowing about people's different backgrounds. And I'm not gonna cast them out just because you don't follow a certain law or because God said you're not one of the chosen people, but we're still here living on this earth altogether, and I'm still gonna love like God said 'you need

to love everyone,' so I'm going to love everyone, so that's when I don't understand why you, why they felt that no one else is...

Eleasah: and that's what the intellectual space is for because essentially they're mirroring everything they say that they hate about slavery and the White man

Participant HB: yeah, it's like they're doing the same thing back, so where is the growth? (The Black Face of the Early Church, 2018)

Participant HB is an example of the searching de-churched, looking for a religious space rooted in Black history and culture; her concerns lie with the specific teachings that appear exclusive and legalistic. Participant/Host CAW suggests that part of people's struggle with new religions is the epistemological grip that Western Christianity has over biblical teaching, interpretation and practice, causing Black people to be suspicious of African spiritualities, but participant HB seems more concerned about the implication of the teaching on those around her outside of the 'chosen people'. She considers God's message of love at odds with some of the Hebrew Israelite teachings and is therefore on the fence about fully committing to the BHI with her mother. This is a good example of how transitional being de-churched is; although having stopped attending church services and practising rituals as one had done before, the core teachings that a de-churched person may have grown up with will be present whilst they consider new religious ideals and interpretations. The transitional space is where the de-churched form distinctions between 'White man's religion' and ADR, or between the "real" and the "fake" religion.

6.5.3.5 Summary

The main focus of this discussion was the overlap of historical, ethnic and religious identity. For most of the group, having a religion that is reflective of their culture, heritage and historical legacy is seen as ideal. Equally, the religious teachings of the ADR presented as problematic, whilst the participants were sympathetic to the de-churched phenomenon, they referred mainly to the failings of the mainstream church to be inclusive of Black cultures and contexts that would break the oppressive hegemony of Christian expression globally.

6.6 Black Jesus, Black theology

6.6.1 The Researcher's Contribution

The fourth session was designed to introduce the fundamental concepts of Black Liberation Theology. Here I explore how Black theologians have attempted to reconcile their Christian identity with the black lived experience and the relationship between Black realities and God's sovereignty. I use Jesus as the main focus of the session, allowing me to explore the ADR perspective on the Messiah of the New Testament.

It felt important to introduce Black Liberation Theology into the conversation because I realised that it had the potential to form bridges between the mainstream church and ADR for dialogical purposes. Although I would argue that ADR has more in common with conservative Christianity than it does with progressive Black liberationist scholarship, the growth of ADR and BLT have similar roots and refer to the same key historical Black figures. This, I hoped, would lead the group to think about solutions moving forward. It is my observation that BLT has struggled to manifest practically in Black-British Christian spaces, so I presented some questions for the participants to consider and the PAR experience has the potential the generate new ideas and breakthroughs:

- What is your initial response to this overview?
- How does this interact with other ideas about a BLACK JESUS?
- Is Black Jesus necessary for revelation?
- Does a Theological Black Jesus work?
- How could Black theology be put into practice?

6.6.2 The ADR Perspective

In the next chapter, I will discuss further the interaction of Afroasiatic Diasporic Religions, Black Liberation Theology and the de-churched. I have already covered, in chapter two, the varying perspectives on Black Jesus and Liberation.

6.6.3 The Participant's Perspective

6.6.3.1 Purpose of the Church

This group seemed to be the most vocal about their issues with attending mainstream church and weekly teaching and practices. Participant PA, in reflection of the seminar content, suggests that no matter the approach to identifying Christ, Christ should be reflected in the pastoral care of the congregation:

Participant PA: I think the biggest issue for me is, um, there's no question about my Blackness and Christ relating to Christ; there's no questions about that. I don't; I'm not schizophrenic in my faith. However, my issue is having been in church for nearly twenty years or so.. and um, everything I've learned on my journey up until now for me as in the way it's been taught in church is based on a lie. It's based on deception. And I say that because it doesn't match up with what's in the word, I don't – not my faith, it's not about my faith, it's not about how I see myself and how I would pray and how I would encourage and all of those things – it's not about that issue. My issue is when I sit in church, and I listen to the sermons, and I watch whats going on in church life, there's two Jesus'

Participant M: yeah yeah yeah it's not matching up

Participant PA: it's not matching up the word, and the church there's a void in between, so that's been my issue. The whole Black consciousness thing and the journey of that, I've been – no secretly, but I've not been as vocal about it; this journey's been going on for me since 2006. The questioning, the research, the how does this White Jesus relate to me, and he doesn't because it's an image of something or someone perception of who that person should be. But if God has come for everyone, there should be Chinese Black Jesus, Chinese Jesus, and European Jesus. There should be an African Jesus. Do you know what I mean? But that for me has not been coming across in a positive way, so my questions are has been that. How does church

justify that, how does church- how do you justify taking my tithe money and you do not present a programme that feeds the people, not just feeds the people but pays a few bills here and there? Do you understand what I'm saying to ya? You got red tape – I know people that need shoes for their children, and when they go through the admin side of things, there's so much red tape they're made to feel so embarrassed about I they don't ask. It's alright for you to take my tithe money but what about the person who needs £20 for their oyster do you understand – my dilemma is you I give you my tithe money or do I give my sister or my brother that £20. And I say id give you that £20. Do you understand what I'm saying to ya, so those sort of things in the journey is becoming increasingly distressing for me and the change, yeah I do challenge leaders, all the time, I'm their face... that bishops, elders and I'm constantly told "oh you can't say that" and I say "well you show me where I can't say it if it's in the word" yeah it's a real ting, so I think there should be more of this.' (Black Jesus, Black Theology, 2018)

Participant PA does not necessarily seem concerned with Jesus' fixed ethnic representation, but a contextualised Jesus would serve people best. The core of her concern is primarily about meeting the congregation's needs financially and the accessibility to leadership. She refers to the 'two Jesuses,' which is less about what Christ looks like but about his ministry as seen in the Bible versus her experiences at church and the failure to replicate Christ's activity. She views the BCCF programme as a subversion of regular church services, where Black people can get to the 'real ting'.

Participant DH: can I just say, I know I've just come in on your fourth thing

Eleasah: Nah, it's okay, you're welcome!

Participant DH: I'm [REDACTED] best friend, so I've been on this journey with her. And my experience is a bit, she invited me to church on numerous occasions and as I say to her, - she knows, I believe in God. I believe 100% but the church environment it scares me and whether from the experience, going back to this lady, you know I grew up in the West-Indies, and for me, I grew up in a catholic environment, so it was everything was White Jesus, and that's what was instilled in me as well as like she was I was in a middle-class family, and it was Black,

White, Brown you know so it, and in the at church, I never felt complete there, and as soon as I came back to England with my mum she was like 'oh you got to go back to church', and I was like nope! Not going to church. "Oh, but you grew up in a catholic environment" nope! Hated it, hated it – walking into that ting with all those tings stuck up on the wall, hated it. Numerous occasions, I've been invited to Black churches – hate them. Can't think of anything worse, but my faith is still there. I still believe in God. I'm with my friend 24/7; she's preaching to me whatever, you know I know it's in there, but that environment absolutely scares me because, I dunno I kind of look from the outside in, what I see I don't actually like. I don't like the whole kind of because you got two, two um two differences, because you got some churches where you've got the Holy Spirit and whatever which I find terrifying and then you've got the other thing where you've got this man or woman stands there, and their dripping in gold or whatever else and you know I don't get it because to me that's not Christianity, and to me, that's not what I wanna stand there – I wanna sit in a session like this and talk amongst like-minded people, and walk out of here and think 'oh I feel whole now' it's not about you know what I mean, going, clapping and singing for me that's not Christianity, that's my personal opinion. So for me, things like this and as well as that I'm learning about my culture and my Blackness, so I'm feeling whole on numerous levels. I'm walking out of here feeling a bit more Black conscious and a bit more Christian, and I'm – do you know what I mean, so to me this and when I think we talk about our youngsters, If I was to sort of turn and say to my 22-year-old son now, "oh come let's go to church" he'd be like "what!?" as opposed to me saying "and come and have- sit down in this session" do you know what I mean. I think this would be more inviting for him, it wouldn't be so much like you know. I think sessions like this will work, and it will take time like everything else because the minute to put Black in front of anything, they think, "oh here we go, they come with their army", so we don't necessarily have to put a label on it but for me obviously on the fourth week, (everyone laughs) you know sorry, but I think things like this can work and when people are kind of talking and expressing I think that works better than the whole kind of "oh join us" and giving tithes, you know I don't get all that. So for me, this is a nicer environment.'

(Black Jesus, Black Theology, 2018)

Participant DH's de-churched experience is anchored in previous church experiences that she has found traumatic. Having had unsettling and confusing church experiences, this participant recognises BCCF as a safe space for learning and sharing with like-minded people holistically without the pressures of tithing or performing. To Participant DH, a safe Christian space is more like Rastafari reasoning, a religious discussion that merges faith with culture and social concerns, facilitates intergenerational connections and subverts mainstream commercial/traditional forms of religious gatherings.

Host M: because that is true, we need to have an agenda. Has anyone got anything, any ideas?

Participant NY: we need to start with young people, basically. We need to encourage our young people to, not necessarily, to come to church because they don't wanna come to church. We need to find another way of encouraging them.

Host M: do you think this will? This different kind of interpretation, way of looking at the Bible, do you think this will draw them in?

Participant NY: it could if we could get them here in the first place because when the church –

Elesah: but what is this luring and drawing? What are we talking about? What are we trying to bring people into? Because for me, I put these on because people are very confused about what this is in terms of church or Christianity or their Christian experiences. They're a bit kind of unravelling, so I don't; that's why I don't do altar calls and "let's pray together" cause that running before we're even standing. A lot of us are on the floor thinking, what's going on? So that's why I said it's actually more about the changing of our mind, is there new reflections or new thoughts or new questions because that's really the start. We can invite them to church, but they're going to have questions. I mean, what are our ideas? We've been learning for the last few weeks and considering and reflecting and learning from each other, which has been really good, but what does it mean. And what does Christianity mean for Black people? Is it viable

Host M: what do we say to them when we come?

Elesah: what do we say for ourselves, though? (Black Jesus, Black Theology, 2018)

When considering a practical agenda, the group considers the various approaches they have learned on the programme. They seem quite keen to replicate the BCCF programme, a safe space for people to talk and share and learn, but it soon came to light that the group had such unformed religious ideas as a result of their de-churched experience that sustaining meetings like this would require further formational work, or a structure to guide the discussions towards action, productivity or a new Christian expression.

Participant UL: I think um, well, I'm joining in the last session as well, but I'm it scares me how the gap between the elder and the younger generation is just getting bigger and bigger and bigger and bigger, and I feel like church does have a lot to do with that. Because will I've grown up in church as well and I see poverty in church, and I don't understand why um you give your money and stuff and that every week and tithes and whatever they say its to help run the building and all of that and then you're struggling to even get to church the next week. And then your child looks at you and or even says to granny, 'granny; you're dragging me church every Sunday – you need help, how is the help not coming from the church that you've been coming to for twenty years? I don't get it ', and then you're like, 'No, but church is good you will get blessings'

Host M: mmm, and they're not seeing

Participant UL: they don't see it. The younger generation don't see it, so what am I encouraging my child to do? To come and sit and join with me, and we just be like this (clapping unenthusiastically)

Host M: because it's this blessing me for singing

Participant UL: do you know what I mean? I don't, I don't you know – what are we gonna encourage them for. And then when they get angry, and stuff and we say 'well you can't do it like this, and they say 'but you've been doing this for so long, for so long, for so long and you're nowhere' so then what are we gonna tell the youngers then? (Black Jesus, Black Theology, 2018)

Another strong theme in this discussion was 'generation', the passing on of religious teachings or experiences between grandparents and parents to their children. The consensus in the group was that the younger generation had observed the disservice of the church towards their grandparents and rejected the church space as fraudulent or escapist and unable to engage with the needs of the family directly.

6.6.3.2 Summary

Introducing Black Liberation Theology to the group and the programme initiated a focused conversation about Christianity, the Church and finance or resources. In particular, the participants seemed to feel angry about the church's inability to meet the needs of the poor in the congregation despite teaching about Jesus' ministry, which heavily engaged with the poor. This group was not concerned so much with Christ's appearance as with some of the other groups but that the Jesus of the Bible was the 'Jesus' that they would encounter through the church's ministry to the local community. These concerns lead the participants to value the safe, relaxed, inclusive, open discussion made available through the BCCF programme. The hope for the participants was to replicate the set-up with the view to engaging the younger generation in a Christianity that spoke directly to their social and cultural needs.

6.7 State Your Case

6.7.1 The Participants' Perspective

Although the sessions I designed were built as a response to criticism of the validation of the scriptures themselves, it was often the case that participants would use Biblical scriptures as a form of evidence and support for their argument. During the earlier development of the programme, I facilitated a one-off event called 'State your Case', which invited anybody interested in Black consciousness and Christian faith to take the stage and deliver an argument that would be then open for dialogue. There were two reasons for this approach firstly, regarding my research, I wanted to make sure that the hypothesis I was developing was being built on the relevant topics. Secondly, in line with the ethos of

Participatory Action Research, I wanted to demonstrate its capacity to allow others to take the lead in the sessions and determine the topics and themes to be explored. Despite the positive levels of interest I received when advertising the sessions, only one person signed up to 'State his Case', a Black Christian male in his late thirties, who took an apologetic, evangelical approach to dismantle some of the arguments the conscious community/ADRs had made against Christianity.

The impact of the colonial constructs and criticisms from the Black Conscious community about Black people who are a part of what they consider to be the 'White Man's religion' generated an interesting response. In particular, Participant DS's sense of self and confidence in choosing his religious affiliation is based on his belief that historically, people belonging to the continent of Africa have been considered knowledgeable and builders of great empires; he says

I find that insulting when I hear that coz it tells me two things; it tells me one thing that people believe that Black people were that weak to let someone make you feel something, and at the same time, make you keep going on believing. We find it hard to now get someone to believe something, let alone when someone is forcing you to do something, while they're beating you, killing your family – all this stuff. And it's manipulation. It's manipulation of the scriptures that they use to justify what they were doing but to manipulate something you had to know something in the first place. So I know that if we go back before slavery, in Africa, back back back, I don't know if anyone has been to the Pan-African centre here in London, and uh if you go you will learn, there is so much that you will find out about Black people that it's amazing. Even one of the richest to this day, the kings, one of the richest people ever to live is a Black man. And um I say all this to say, there's so much greatness there, and to feel that someone's kind of made you believe something I find insulting were not the only enlightened species, all of the sudden we're enlightened because it's 2016 and all of the sudden we realise actually 'no it was all a lie'. (Participant DS, State Your Case, 2016)

Participant DS rejects the notion that Black people had been subjugated to the point that they lacked the strength and clarity to become genuine Christians willingly. Although he acknowledges the torture that enslaved Africans endured as part of their colonial Christianising, he still believes that genuine

conversion to Christianity is rooted in connections that the enslaved Africans may have had with the biblical religions before enslavement. Participant DS also brings to the fore an interesting point about what is taken for Black people to become intellectually capable of discerning and resisting the power of colonial Christianity. As evidenced in the literature review, Ethiopianism demonstrates only a part of enslaved people's resistance and intellectual capacity. However, he speaks more to this idea of 'woke' in the twenty-first century, suggesting that this generation possesses the qualities to chart a trajectory of dismantling Christianity as a religion of racism. I parallel this conversation with those in the Black Conscious community and their online rebuttals of the modernist-postmodernist or conservative-progressive dichotomy. Other participants who had several points on which they disagreed with Participant DS (including his approach and demonstration of historical evidence) also rooted their argument in the narrative of the biblical text. This is an example of a deep connection with the biblical text – that despite suspicion of the Christian religion, there is still a rooting phenomenon between the participants and the Bible, which is religious, ethnic and mythical. Although many of the participants demonstrate an interest in Afrocentric ideals, many of which give keen attention to Egypt or traditional West African belief systems, the Bible is still a significant backdrop to the story and unfolding history of Black people.

You know when you think about Jesus, you see a White man on a cross with a beard and long hair and that's gonna affect the way the way that you view Jesus, it's gonna affect the way that you view Christianity. You know, I remember witnessing at some point some guys say to me, "Nah that's a White man's religion... I don't do that", and it's - again, it's really the person who holds the bigger stick is the one who sets the rules. Yeah, there were loads of Black Christians way before White Christians, but when you think about it like, for example, I'm rambling, but if you think about it, you got Hollywood, you got Nollywood. Hollywood, yeah, they got the explosions, they got the marketing, they got so much millions, and they can't tell you about all the movies that's taking place. And then you've got Nollywood, nobody really knows about it unless you watch it, and I think that the people that have the most money control the image. They control the way that you look at things. That's why I think certain people can suggest that

Christianity is a White man's religion because the people that hold the biggest stick are the ones that are often gonna have the biggest say about it. (Participant RU, State your case, 2016)

6.7.1.1 Biblical Genealogy

Participant NA.: ... you can make intelligent guesses as to what Jesus would have looked like let's be honest if you're gonna look at the book umm.. I mean, in the biblical story when he was born, you know Mary and Joseph took a trip to Egypt to hide from the King, whatever his name was, now how you gonna hide a White baby? In an environment where people are darker than dark, you know what I'm tryna say? It's not gonna work, so – if you read, if you read the Bible, you can make intelligent guesses as to what his skin tone would have been, you know what I'm saying. And the be honest, the construct of race is not important to the average African. You might not value it; you might think it's nonsense, but other people put a lot of significance to it. And that's another thing as well, we always look at these issues from an African mindset where we know 'Chancellor Williams said' the reason why we got into all this mess, this slavery is because of that mindset of embracing everything by being inclusive, always loving.'

Participant M: and not embracing ourselves – do you say, Chancellor Williams?

Participant NA: Chancellor Williams yeah yeah yeah – you understand? So it's not -

Participant M: read his book, read his book

Participant NA: the African psyche does not see race; it's alien to us, you understand? But to other people, it's important so that the biggest distinction I would make anyway. (State your case, 2016)

Participant NA outlines a process of thinking that requires several significant assumptions; the first is that Egyptians were dark-skinned African peoples. This is important among the de-churched, and it is one of the key arguments that fuel the religious movement's momentum – reclaiming what was stolen. Black academics, celebrities, and activists have long resisted the whitewashing and European claim

over Egypt that has been evident in the retelling of history through educational materials, movies, and literature. As a result, Egypt has left a significant impression on the world because of its perceived magnificence as a well-developed, social, religious, and intellectual leader in the ancient world. Unlike those who may identify with the Kemetic Science movement, Participant NA does not align his genetic/mythic origins with the ancient Egyptians but acknowledges the Hebrews' common ancestry, likeness, and geography with the Egyptians. Following this assumption, Participant N suggests one can positively identify that Jesus, his mother and his father were dark-skinned people who would have been able to blend with the local Egyptians whom God sent them to hide from King Herod. This assumption illuminates the ethnic aspect of the biblical account, where perhaps emphasis may have been put on persecution in the early years of Jesus' life, obedience to God or a supernatural visitation from an Angel. Participant N asserts that the mission's success lies with their ethnicity – the ability to blend in. The final assumption that is significant here is that you can make intelligent guesses if you read the Bible. This is significant because although Participant N was a very vocal, dominant voice in the group, he accepted that the information was there for anyone who reads the text. Participant N reads the accounts of Jesus historically (and literally) and, in doing so, has established the physical appearance and ethnicity of its central character, the nation to which he belongs and the surrounding nations and uses this hermeneutic to rebut opposing European/colonial claims and re-readings of the text.

6.7.1.2 The Black Presence in the Bible

Participant DS: and it's Jewish a culture thing; if you look at Jewish culture, the whole long hair wouldn't have been long hair because they don't do long hair – it's short hair. Like if you understand, looked into it now, like looked into some of the stuff then of what Jewish culture was like, there's a lot of imagery that you can know that it straight away kinda tears it down, they wouldn't have had long hair, even what the Bible says about long hair, it's not – its for a woman to have, not a guy to have – so you gotta bring it back to the Bible

Participant NA: look, sorry to interrupt, but the Jews of today are not the Jews of the Bible

Participant M: Tell them!

Participant NA: you understand? But again, we get it confused because walking down Golders Green or Stamford hill that's a representation of the Jewish people in-

Participant DS: I don't think people think that though

Participant NA: No, they do they do

Participant M: Oh, they do

Participant NA: that's a fact (State your case 2016)

This controversial topic (considered antisemitic), “the identity of the real Jews”, reveals the extent to which some de-churched Black people believe there is an agenda to remove Black people from the Biblical narrative – to have them replaced by another group altogether. Participant MI follows this line of thinking by broadening the scope of the claim; he suggests that the Bible is absent of 'racial designation' because of the 'sameness' between *peoples* in the entire Afroasiatic region:

Participant MI: I wanted to say something um, something you said (indicating participant NA) you said um we didn't have this racial designation and especially in our history a lot at that time, the people, so let me just bring up some names, the Moors, the Hamidians, the Carthaginians, the Tamagaru, the Copts, those are the ancient Egyptians, the Hebrews, the Babylonians the Sumerians, the Phoenicians, the Ethiopians, the Cushites- these were all Black people. So naturally, there's that notion of sameness, so the thing that stands out distinctive amongst the groups is their culture, their language or their dressing, something to that effect, so what happens is when you read the Bible, you don't see a lot of physical descriptions of these people except maybe what somebody was wearing or what they were holding, something to that effect, that would have been the distinctive marker of the religion or culture – not what they looked like because everyone at that time, prior to the Cyprian, Greek, Turkish, roman, Asiatic, basically all those people in the middle east or northeast Africa and the rest of the continent were all Black so that notion of sameness. So there was never need of me saying 'oh a Sumerian is Black, or this person is Black'. So the point is that there was no need of that description in the Bible, you know what I'm saying? But if you read history books, you will find that. But

because obviously with the Bible, the issue is because those descriptions aren't there and they're not solid, tactile you know written down, it leaves space for other people to put their own images, do you see what I'm saying? It leaves room, like for example; I debate a lot of Arabs and Europeans when they try to debate me about the Moors, cause when it comes to the Moors, there are pictures, primary sources of the Moors, where they lived, how they looked at that time, during the Islamic Era and before, so my point is – there was written accounts of what they looked like – their skin, their nose, their hair.

Participant NA: *Shakespeare*

Participant M: not just Shakespeare, the French, the Italians, the Greeks did it, the Romans did it so many people actually described them, even the Arabs did, so my point is there's no real case to argue with that one but with the Bible because there were so many people that looked the same because they were Black, there was no actual physical description of a lot of these people of what the Hebrews looked like, of what the Egyptians looks like, of what this group or that group looked like so that have left a wide birth for these people to appropriate it and whitewash it and so again because we're looking at this object of race which is a European concept, it is really a European concept, but it wasn't that Black people were oblivious to race we were very proud of our Blackness, it's just that we didn't- it wasn't the be-all and end-all of our existence, so that's what I wanted to say about that. (State your Case, 2016)

These participants were particularly dominant in this session, which I consider to be mainly due to their ability to articulate well-formed arguments based on personal study, beyond the questions or reflections of experiences from the others. Although all of these contributions are complimentary in the PAR space, these particular participants did not shy away from controversial matters that seem to get to the core of many of the participant's concerns. The question in retrospect here is: if Black people are, in fact, the people in the Bible or the Chosen people of God, who are those the world accepts as Jews? This study is not interested in answering this question but considering the full extent to which the participants have drawn their conclusions and situated their suspicions. This type of reasoning is reminiscent of Fanon's

‘violence’ that asserting a decolonised truth is never free from injury to another, controversies and deep contentions.

6.7.1.3 Ye are gods

Participant M: You (indicating Participant DS) said something about gods, I wanted to deal with that, when the Bible says 'ye are gods' um you've actually taken it out of context because there's a bit at the end after it that, that says 'you will die – you're doomed to die.'

Participant DS: What was that?... I never said that?

Participant M: No, I'm saying that you missed out a bit

Participant DS: What in Genesis?

Participant M: Yes, in Genesis, it's in the old testament and in the new testament because Jesus repeats it. But my point I'm making is when we say we are gods, it is not for us - it's not to shock out and equate us with the Most High.... It is to say we are god in the person of the flesh; that's what it means

Participant NA: Yes, a reflection

Participant M: Okay, let me give you an example, Genesis chapter 2, God says be fruitful, multiply, replenish, subdue, take dominion. That's what God does, the Most High, and God gave that mandate to us in flesh and blood to do the same thing on this domain that we call earth. To follow suit as he does in heaven, that's the mandate – okay God kills at will, so do humans, God creates, so do we – whether it's another human being, whether it's a business, whether it's a nation or an empire, we create. Do we replenish? So when something, when we run out of cakes we can go to the shop and buy some more, so what it's saying is to serve in the capacity of the Most High the way God does, the only difference is we have to work for it, the only difference is, and the by the way when he says gods they spell it with a small 'g', so you have to remember, that's the point, when someone says ye are gods it's not necessarily that it's false, but it's a matter of context it's not a matter of 'I can think of a thing' because God spoke

everything into existence – we don't, we can speak an ideas and say 'I'm gonna start a clothing line' I've spoken that into existence but it hasn't manifested, I have to make it manifest. I have to learn how to sew, I have to learn how to market, I've got to get my website, hook up the paypal, get my products, get people to come buy my stuff, you know, that's how I start a clothing line, do you understand. I've spoken into existence like God would, but the only difference is God manifests when he speaks, I would actually have to work. So when the Bible says 'ye are gods', especially for Black people who've been told they're not even human the last 500 years, that's not only truthful that's something we need to know, feel and hear and to have, so we know if 'ye are gods' children of the Most High, we can beat white supremacy, we can beat institutionalised racism, we can beat police brutality, we can resurrect Black Wall Street like we had in Tulsa Oklahoma and rosewood. Okay and, this notion of is there a Black superiority, I would say no, it doesn't exist now, and it didn't exist then (Researcher: Okay... making attempts to round him up!) again Black people just happen to be more topical, it not like we had any notion of being better than another human being, if anything if you read the Greeks, the Greeks themselves would say 'you these Black people are better than us' so if anyone had a superiority complex of us it was the other people of the world. We need to read JD Rogers, Dr Joseph Ben Yachunnan, Dr John Henry-Clarke, Chancellor Williams, you need to read Dr Ivan Van Sertima, you need to read.. Pricilla Duncan Houston.' (State your Case, 2016)

Here, the participants challenge one another's interpretation of scripture, which is unique among all the participant groups. These participants took up the challenge of apologetics with intentionality rather than discussing their experiences. Here I witnessed a more rigorous teaching/learning experience. In this excerpt, we see how the participants are contending *'Imago dei'*, being made in the image of God, and to what extent Black people or God's people can be considered 'gods'. The de-churched position in this group leans more towards what we see among the ADR, and scholars who teach self-determination – that to be like God or to be god, is the blueprint and impetus for realising emancipation, for success, for victory over the oppressors.

Ummm, I do wanna make a different point about gods, but I do hope that helped. It's just a thing about Black people as God's – I think ultimately we are all gods, I really think that not even in the sense of as you say (indicating Participant M) 'making things manifest' even right here and now we all have our own ideas about everything you know. Anyone can look in the Bible and say, "cool, I think it says this, I think this means this or this means that", one of the things I learned when I left church is that we all have our own religions. You know I went to a certain church, and I assumed that we all agreed on the same things, but we didn't you know, some people believed 'ahh this person is definitely gonna go to hell because he did this', and some would say 'no he's not gonna go to hell, only god knows' but I really feel like we all have our own understandings of what we believe to be right and wrong. And so in my intimation, we're all gods, that's my understanding. (Participant RU, State your case, 2016)

Participant RU takes a more pluralist approach to this concept, 'ye are gods,' that the goal is not arriving at the definitive meaning of the text but the meaning that most resonates with the individual. Participant RU is unique in this perspective among the participants who have demonstrated concerns for a single truth. Pluralism does appear among the ADR, among the NOI and Rastafari in particular, in that they acknowledge the overlap or continuity of beliefs and histories of other religions. Yet, this pluralism seems to serve the purpose of knowing the ultimate truth, of which other religions have a glimpse. Participant DS, the Christian, comes back to defend the Christian perspective. He suggests that the need to be 'gods' is a response to being oppressed and dehumanised,

I guess this is the problem; we've got so many manuscripts for the Bible alone, more than actually your historian books, more than can back up anything else, but we'd rather read from people that said something to us and we take that on board. I just wanna throw that out there as well, we say, 'ahh, I read a book by this person or that person' and it just like but you won't kind of take the Bible for the word? And I guess as you said (indicating Participant RU) about the gods thing like the problem is the Bible it says 'that's not -we're not gods', and for me seeing what the Bible says and seeing what the devils done is made us believe in any kind of way, shape or form that we are gods or we can be like God. That's was the scripture that I was

(reading) when Eve was being tempted, and he said, 'ye can be like God both knowing good and evil' that was the scripture and the reason why I say that's a dangerous place to be. And even as I say that people shake their heads because people feel like no, in ourselves we wanna be superior, we wanna feel like we can do all these different things, but we kinda forget and then stop looking at God and the Bible as an authority and the one with the truth. So yeah, that's my response to couple things that you all were saying. (Participant DS, session, date)

6.7.1.4 Summary

This session had the most apologetic tone of all the other data-gathering sessions. The single volunteer contributor set out to defend Christianity against the claims of the ADR and Black consciousness community, particularly that Christianity was solely created for the control and manipulation of Black people. Participant DS attempted to strike a balance between evangelical apologetics and a *woke* Christianity that considers the Afroasiatic roots of Christianity. The main themes of this discussion were around the Black presence in the bible, the Image of Christ, and what it means to be 'gods'. The majority of the participants anchored their contributions in scripture; however, what was more evident in this session than others was the reference to Black literature on Christianity, Black identity, and the Black community's development.

There should be an overall summary of this chapter, leading the reader to the next chapter.

Participant NM: It's only one thing out of everything, what you call yourself black?

Eleasah: oh wow!

Host M: can I just say something? Because Black is superimposed on us

Participant NM: there's no country called Black.'

(White Man's Religion?, 2018)

7. Black, British and De-Churched – the preservation-liberation framework in action

7.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will first return to the research questions and summarise my findings and how my hypothesis stands against the results from the data. Here I will suggest some clarifications for the final theory. I will then situate my theory within existing scholarship, discussing how it interacts with previous theories and contributions from Black scholars. This study is concerned with religion, faith, Black-British identity, and how the de-churched phenomenon speaks to this religious, theological, social, and political landscape.

I will begin with the question – *Why not Black Liberation Theology?* which discusses how the de-churched voice is distinct from Black Liberation and Womanist theologies. I will then consider the possibility of an Evangelical Theology of Liberation and how *truth* and *right reading*, perceived conservatively, bridge gaps between the de-churched and the Evangelical tradition. Next, I discuss *Black Diasporic Religious Identity* and the challenging perspectives of the de-churched on identity formation in an inclusive and globalised social reality.

Afroasiatic Diasporic Religions in the Black-British community have long presented fundamental challenges for the mainstream Christian church. Black leaders have long accused the church of their complicity in the enslavement and transportation of African peoples, centuries of subjugation and the ongoing struggle for equality in the twenty-first century (Anthony Reddie's *Theologising Brexit: a*

liberationist and postcolonial critique (2019) is an example of literature that demonstrates how the legacy of the churches complicity remains a present issue for Black and Brown British people today). Historically, the Black church has championed petitions about the ongoing reality of oppression, particularly in America (Calhoun-Brown, 2000), but Afroasiatic Diasporic Religions do not consider these petitions sufficient. Instead, they seek to oppose Christianity all together as heretical and incapable of justice, on the premise that Western mainstream Christianity was birthed from injustice. European bible-religion, according to ADRs, is not the true religion from the Afroasiatic region but a stolen religio-cultural asset repackaged to fuel White domination in the world.

The de-churched, as previously defined, are those who are on the fringes of the Black-British Christian body or who have left the mainstream church, influenced by the teachings and challenges from the ADRs. The de-churched are in transition, on a journey to discover true Bible religion that engages with their ethnic and cultural identity and provides direction for navigating life as an Afroasiatic diasporan in Britain.

There is a tension between Black intellectualism in Britain and Afroasiatic Diasporic Religions in their 'raw form' because the general ambition is to belong to Britain as British people and citizens, being treated equally and acknowledged for their contribution and suffering cannot easily be reconciled. Afroasiatic Diasporic Religions do not necessarily seek this type of citizenship and acceptance, and their teachings and contributions to scholarship have been considered problematic and non-progressive. To assert Black religion as political agency, Black Liberation theology mines ADR as a resource to develop themes and models of liberation but equally struggle and resist the divine, ethnocentric, nationalist teachings in their raw form. Reddie demonstrates his own resistance,

The use of the term 'Black' in the UK context has invariably been used in a plural sense to connote identities and subjectivities that have transcended the seemingly ethnocentric boundaries that want to police such discourses around Afrocentric or Black nationalistic thought.... Using the term Black is to identify oneself as a socially constructed 'other; when juxtaposed against Eurocentric discourses that dominate the normative gaze and trajectory of what it means to be authentically British (Reddie & Jagessar, 2007, Chapter 9).

Despite the trend towards social constructivism as a sufficient frame for identity formation in academia and the now well-formed bridges between Black academia and the Black community (due to a high engagement with higher education and social media platforms), in every session that I facilitated there was a recurring theme that was generated by the participants, which I argue has been inspired by ADR teachings on identity, they ask 'where do we come from?' and believe the answer to be of divine origin. The constructivist position is an outsider position, but this ethnographic study is concerned with the participants' perceptions. I do not believe the evidence demonstrates that ADR adherents nor the de-churched participant consider themselves to have the power to construct identity but discover it through divine means.

Tariq Modood, in *Anti-Essentialism, Multiculturalism and the 'Recognition' of Religious Groups* (1998), considers the power of essentialist ethnoreligious identities for minority diaspora groups in Britain,

The identities formed in such processes are fluid and susceptible to change with the political climate, but to think of them as weak is to overlook the pride with which they may be asserted, the intensity with which they may be debated and their capacity to generate community activism and political campaigns. In any case, what is described here as cultural-practices based identities and associational identities are not mutually exclusive. They depict ideal types which are usually found, as in this survey, in a mixed form. Moreover, a reactive pride identity can generate new cultural practices or revive old ones. For some Caribbean people, a Black identity has come to mean a reclaiming of the African-Caribbean cultural heritage and has thus stimulated among some younger people an interest in Patois-Creole languages, which was not there amongst the migrants. A similar Muslim assertiveness, sometimes a political identity, sometimes a religious revival, sometimes both, is evident in Britain and elsewhere, especially amongst some of the young (Modood, 1998, p. 386).

In resisting modernity's fixed identifications, postmodern academics put religious, historical institutions, tradition, and ancestral culture at risk of being insignificant vehicles for knowledge.

The challenge from the Afroasiatic Diasporic Religions I have selected for this study lies in rediscovering the *true, correct and authoritative* interpretation of Scripture and the function of the Bible. Although the religions have doctrinal diversity, what allows them to be placed under a unifying umbrella is their relationship to the Scriptures, a shared historical experience, and a hermeneutical premise that I have conceptualised as *preservation-liberation*. The foundation of the hermeneutical premise can be summarised as a belief that the Bible is the written history, legacy and redemption story of Black people, more specifically those enslaved and transported from the African continent by European imperial powers in the sixteenth century. Therefore, the biblical scriptures detail the traditions, instructions, stories, the divine revelation and a redemption guide to coming out of the oppression of the Europeans and becoming 'woke' to their true identity, purpose and destiny as designed by the God of the Bible.

In the previous chapter, I presented my findings, the thoughts, feelings, ideas, beliefs and experiences of the de-churched in light of the claims of the Afroasiatic Diasporic Religion that I argue has a significant influence on the fringes of the Black-British Christian body. The chapter aimed to present a significant sample of the data, supplemented with further examples of ADR religious teachings and the degree to which they have influenced my participants. The analytical process identified the drives of the de-churched by discovering the themes, categories and codes that could be developed into a theory for application in other contexts. In chapter 3, I presented a hypothesis, a conceptual framework that suggests that the de-churched can be best understood within the frame of four theoretical concepts, *Religion, Ethiopianism, Decolonisation and Conservatism*. The preservation-liberation framework describes how these concepts work together, illuminating how both the ADR and de-church hold conservative and progressive methodologies in equal tension. Despite quite polarised representation among Christian scholarship, conservative "colourblind" theologies or progressive theologies with a humanist bent, I have argued that the de-churched are those who have fallen in the gaps and seek a religion that is unapologetically pro-Black (or Afroasiatic) and pursues liberation through the submission to the Biblical texts.

7.2 Returning to the Research Questions

At the beginning of this thesis/work, I set out to answer three questions:

1. Why are some Black people becoming disillusioned with the Church in Britain?
2. What do Afroasiatic Diasporic Religions offer that the de-churched believe mainstream British churches do not?
3. What is the main strength of Afroasiatic diasporic religious influence, and how best can we understand their rationale?

The data suggest that the de-churched phenomenon is fuelled by the concept 'White Man's Religion' and the negativity the participants have experienced in Christian spaces when presenting their concerns and questions to Church leadership. Several participants recalled instances where they brought questions about the credibility of the Bible, interpretation of Scripture, slavery and the Bible (and the resulting loss of ancestral identity) or, more broadly, about racism and discrimination and were dismissed and ignored. The resulting experiences are not feeling like they belong in the church, frustration, confusion and distrust, which also led them to consider a conspiracy against Black people, as taught by the Afroasiatic Diasporic Religions. Some participants suggested that this dismissal covers hidden truths that reveal Black people as the true chosen people of God or demonstrates the churches' reluctance to acknowledge the Afroasiatic origins of Christianity and the Bible. Further to these ideas, some of the participants felt that the mainstream church was unsupportive and neglectful of the congregation's needs, contrary to the demands of Scripture. The disconnect between weekly teachings and the de-churched's Bible reading and the history of ancient and modern Christianity is central to the de-churched's frustrations. The de-churched then are no longer satisfied with the role of the mainstream church for Black people and seek alternative spaces where the teaching makes them feel included, answers their questions and gives them a sense of communal religious identity.

The ADR approach to liberation and decolonisation is identified by their prioritisation of 'knowledge building' and recovery of lost identities. In chapter 2, I demonstrated the various approaches among the ADR to fill the gaps that the mainstream churches seem to negate. Regarding 'knowledge', the ADR take an apologetic stance (studying history, archaeology, and etymology, for example) combined with

the revelatory teachings of their leaders. They distinguish between their religion and the 'White Man's religion' through these mediums. They make sense of the Black identity crisis that has led to the de-churched phenomenon and broader social ills in the Black community; they also encourage regular study and define what *true religion* is in the face of colonial Christianity. Making distinctions was a prominent feature in the data; the de-churched are concerned about knowing what is *correct and true*. This focus on knowledge building fuels their identity formation; Black people can learn of and be proud of their rediscovered ethnoreligious heritage, ancestral legacies and the cultures that have survived or developed through the experiences of subjugation.

The ADR presents many controversial ideas such as Black supremacy, nationalism and separatism; the ADR religious teachings carve out an exclusive religious epistemology that, whilst may be considered problematic in a twenty-first-century pluralistic world, seem to be the strength of their influence among the de-churched. Firstly, when one reflects on the religious teachings alongside the data collected, the ADR presents the religious continuity that the de-churched seek. Biblical religious identity is based on ethnicity and nationhood – the descendants of 'God chosen people' or the 'original man'. Establishing these connections and sites of continuity through mythical/genealogical interpretations of Scripture seems to help validate what would regularly be rejected as racist. What assists in the buy-in is the accessible nature of the reading; ADR adherents do not need a formal education to read the text plainly and in light of their leader's revelation. Once they have been convinced of the appropriate cannon, translation and "lens", the de-churched can pursue individual study to build their own knowledge.

The Afroasiatic Diasporic Religious paradigm can provide methodological solutions to past hurts and future hopes. Firstly they centre the Black experiences using Scripture which explains and offsets the feelings of rejection the de-churched experienced in mainstream Christianity. Secondly, by pursuing what is *true, correct and authoritative* (rather than reading and applying contextually in a postcolonial sense), the de-churched can participate in rediscovering lost ancestral identity and religious origins, reclaiming the Bible religion. The participants often alluded to the internal transformation that occurs when one deepens their knowledge; for some of the de-churched and many in the ADR, this pursuit

reveals the Black man as 'god', a super status or superiority over others and chosen and designated by "The Most High".

As far as the questions are related to the British context, the data did not provide enough evidence to suggest a British nuance. I had anticipated more conversation about contemporary social and political affairs; while I could have steered the group in that direction, this approach seemed too heavy-handed to comply with the requirements of PAR. Nevertheless, the evidence shows this phenomenon is happening in Britain and can be considered a British phenomenon with roots in America and the Caribbean. In the remainder of this chapter, I hope to rectify this lack of British nuance in the data by engaging with the existing Black-British Scholarship and the challenges when considering the *preservation-liberation* theory in action.

7.3 Preservation-Liberation

The Preservation-Liberation theory (PLT) conceptualises the tensions present in Afroasiatic and de-churched identity formation; I initially used existing concepts to identify roots for the theory, *Religion, Ethiopianism, Decolonisation and Conservatism*; however, a more basic definition helps the theory to be translated into other contexts. Preservation-Liberation theory suggests that an underdog community seeks liberation from the dominant community's hegemony by preserving ancestral religion, culture, tradition and histories and providing the basis for exclusive identity formation. For this study, we can first consider the internal workings of ADR reading conventions; a high view of Scripture, plain reading, and spiritual revelation that uncovers the route to liberation: recovering and reclaiming the Afroasiatic Diasporic Religion, emancipation from white hegemony as the dominant epistemological baseline in mainstream Christianity, from political and social oppression through the (eventual) formation of an exclusive nation.

The PLT must be understood as a response to oppression; it does not describe the mechanics of an ancient religion but the rediscovery of an ancient religion after a period of involuntary disconnect. This was defined in the conceptual framework when considering the nature of New Religious Movements; I emphasise it here to clarify its foundational role in PLT.

Finally, PLT should be recognised through the participants' voices, not the observers'. The theory describes the needs, wants, intentions, desires, and ambitions discovered in the raw data rather than constructivist observations that can undermine the participants' voices.

7.4 Afroasiatic Diasporic Religious Voices (Why not Black Liberation Theology)

Afroasiatic religious adherents seek a religion that is integral to its Afroasiatic roots. White Jesus for Afroasiatic Diasporic Religions is not simply a matter of contextual representation but direct dismissal and cover-up and colonising of the true biblical religions. ADR's concerns with uncovering historical *truth* are embedded deeply in their religious imagination.

Postcolonial and Black Liberationist theologians such as Carter (2008) and Jennings (2010) would agree with Afroasiatic Diasporic Religions that the European Church's terror and violence towards Black people are rooted in Christianity being Europeanised. Thus, in the era where science and theology were formally racialised, these knowledge bases have come to despise, undermine, and reject the Black body. Black Liberation Theology asserts the need for the Black Christ, a Messiah that sides with the poor and the subjugated. Drawing upon the life and ministry of Christ as described in the Bible, BLT recognises that Christ was born into a colony, committed his ministry to meet the needs of those on the margins of society, and then unjustly imprisoned and executed. Black Liberation Theology posits that God sides with those who suffer in much the same way throughout history – specifically Black people under the subjugation of White supremacy.

To know God is to know God's work of liberation [o]n behalf of the oppressed. God's revelation means liberation, an emancipation from death-dealing political, economic, and social structures of society. This is the essence of biblical revelation (Cone, 1970, p. 48).

James Cone, often referred to as the father of Black Theology, equates justice for the oppressed with the revelation of God, typically the scope of a Black liberationist approach. Reddie, building on the work of Cone, asserts that Black Theology's focus is on developing resources that reflect, respond to and document Black experiences:

Essentially, Black Theology is not concerned with protecting assumed truths or with providing a spiritualised understanding of history and human experience. Rather, its central concern is the need to provide the necessary resources for fruitful and flourishing living for all people, but particularly for Black people of African descent (Reddie 2012, p. 27).

What this highlights is that Black theology does not have an emphasis on the conversion element of Christianity as can be conventionally understood as the intentional effort to convince people to submit to Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour but instead to use the Biblical texts to develop a methodology for social and political justice both in the Church and in wider society. The blackness of Christ then is a central theme that espouses this Black political theology, but it is not a blackness that is linked to ethnicity. Instead, it is a reflection of the choice, deeds and affiliations of Christ as reported in the scriptures. Christ was born amongst, worked amongst, and sided with the poor, and this is translated in contemporary society as siding with the oppressed and, more specifically, contextually, Black people.

A tradition of Black Bible scholars is dedicated to uncovering the Black presence in the Bible, clarifying that Hebrews were not White and Jesus (Yeshua) was a person of colour (McCray, 1989, Burton 2007, Wright and Birchett, 1995, Adamo, 2001). However, this is not the crux of the Black Liberation theological method - it does not sufficiently respond to the claims of the ADRs that Christianity is a 'White man's religion' and that Christ himself is a European deity or fabrication of white supremacist colluders. Ultimately Black Liberation Theology aims to take an ontological approach to the blackness of Christ, which Anthony Pinn argues recreates the very issue that Black Theology claims to combat:

Viewing these issues from the context of overtly religious thought, it is reasonable to say that Black religious studies participate in their ideological game by demonstrating the uniqueness of Black religion in opposition to White religious expression. Ontological blackness denotes a provincial or 'clan-ness' understanding of Black collective life, one that is synonymous with Black genius and its orthodox activities and attitudes. (Pinn, 2004, p. 44)

Arguably ontological blackness provides a safe space for Black religio-cultural assets to be documented, evaluated, and analysed, having been understood as products of experience, context, and continuity.

These processes are essential as they allow Black religious scholars to handle these assets with care, connection, and conviction rather than hostility. However, an ontological approach is not sufficient for the de-churched who demand evidence-based answers to validate the foundational claims of the faith. Black Liberation Theologies commit themselves to theologising and politicising blackness as death, struggle, life, and hope. For example, for Cone, Black Theology was a direct combatant against America's White Jesus. Cone describes the mascot of whiteness (White Jesus) as a stumbling block for Black people,

If Jesus Christ is white and not black, he is an oppressor, and we must kill him. The appearance of Black Theology means that the black community is now ready to do something about white Jesus, so that he cannot get in the way of our revolution. (Cone, 1986, p. 111)

Carter, a third wave Black theologian, considers the Jewishness of Christ that steers away from what Pinn alludes to as a simplistic Black vs White competition; he mirrors some of Cone's ideas in *Race: a theological account* (2008), where he explores the origins of a "race" or racialised imagination. Carter's work suggests that modern theology was the root of racialised imagination which contributed to or is responsible for the assertion of White supremacy and Black inferiority. Carter suggests that whilst there is much to celebrate about Cone's contribution to Black Liberation Theology, he has repackaged and re-centred the essence of whiteness by creating a 'blackness'. By relying on the 'strength' and 'courage' framework given by Paul Tillich, Carter says 'Cone 'does not challenge the way in which I-ness as a structure of identity-in-self-possession – that is, as construed in zero-sum terms- repeats the problem, albeit dialogically' (Carter, 2008, p. 191). The issue of Black Jesus in Black Theology is an epistemological one; how one knows and names Christ, and oneself has remained subject to Eurocentric methods of naming and claiming in theological education in the West and beyond. Carter roots the theological exploration of Jesus Christ in a tangible and genetic ethnicity and, as a result, steers the conversation towards the quest for a historical Jesus. He also critiques the whiteness of colonial Christianity and the Blackness of Black Liberation Theology that has, it can be argued, become a stumbling block in the landing of Black Liberation Theology in the Black church body. Carter contends

that reconnecting Jesus with his historical people is a valid form of decolonisation needed within the discourse.

But in modernity, as looked at from the underside, this ditch is the ditch of coloniality, which itself is the ditching of racial imagination built upon the severance of Jesus from the covenantal people of Israel and thus Christianity from its roots in the reality of YHWH's historical transcendence toward the world through YHWH's covenant with his people (Carter, 2008, p. 192).

In this way, Carter has demonstrated that Black Theology has the potential to build bridges between Hebraic-Afroasiatic religions and cultures, grounding the theory in a resourcefully rich tension of past and present identities. This is different from glorifying the gentile conversion, which Carter (2008) suggests is central to our Western theological imagination. By drawing the group away from dominant Christian imaginings and criticisms (particularly with slavery) momentarily, the potential to sever Christianity from Christendom's white supremacist campaigns offered alternative ways of understanding Christianity as a religious tradition rooted in ethnic identity and geography.

Womanist Theologian Dianne Steward says,

Even in instances where theologians may not be interested in examining slave religion, preferring instead to limit the scope of their research to studies of Christian religiosity among the enslaved, African diaspora studies research and competency in the African religious heritage will facilitate more carefully nuanced interpretations of Christianity in the lives of enslaved African. (Stewart, 2014, p. 80)

A Black Liberationist approach speaks to the contextual nature of Afroasiatic religions sharing historical, social and religious experiences. BLT systematically and theologically seeks to liberate Black people and Christianity from white hegemonic religion by reimagining the person of Christ as a Black messiah through experience, but ADR demands that Christ be identified as Black through the scriptures. Progressive approaches to the decolonisation process question the Bible's credibility and the integrity of the human (male) authorship. Renita Weems, a postcolonial and womanist theologian, calls into question a Christian believer's dedication to texts that can be considered violent towards them; she says:

The interests of real flesh-and-blood black women are privileged over theory and over the interests of ancient texts, even 'sacred' ancient texts... the Bible cannot go unchallenged in so far as the role it has played in legitimating the dehumanisation of people of African ancestry in particular. It cannot be understood as some universal, transcendent, timeless force to which word readers – in the name of being pious and faithful followers- must meekly submit. It must be understood as a politically and socially drenched text invested in ordering relations between people, legitimating some viewpoints and delegitimising other viewpoints. (Weems in Sugirtharajah ed., 2016, Chapter 1)

It seems Weems illuminates an interesting contention of understanding, centred around the role of the Bible and the enslavement of 'African ancestry' in particular. An in-depth study of slavery in the biblical context reveals that the systems of slavery are not parallel to that of the enslavement of Africans in the European transatlantic slave trade. While slavery is an undesirable position, Weems's assertion does not consider the social function of slavery in Hebrew society as a means of getting people out of poverty – which can be argued is redemptive and not dehumanising. There are undeniably controversial issues of gender inequality for female slaves (particularly women who are sold by their fathers and cannot opt to be freed after seven years but are instead enslaved for life) and the undeniable exploitation of enslaved people by individual persons that deserve critical engagement, however, it is an unsatisfactory conclusion that the Bible is responsible for the enslavement of Africans in the sixteen century. Weems here highlights the chasm between the faith-based religions (assumed as erroneous) and the politicised theology that I argue the ADR aims to fill. Weems goes on to demonstrate the challenges of protestant/reformed perspectives on approaches to Scripture for the Black woman; she says,

To see African American protestant women's devotions to the stories of the Bible as a continuing example of a naïve attachment to the principle of *sola scriptura* or as a slavish belief in these texts as the divinely revealed word of God. In all matters religious, the sole authority is to traffic in partial truths and the overly determined about a far more complex and subtle aspect of gender, reading and culture. (Weems, 2016, Chapter 1)

Here Weems surmises her challenge for traditional lay people reading conventions and Western theological doctrine, the biblical text, literalist readings. Weems suggests that submission to its religious authority is an incomplete and unjust approach and asserts theological violence towards marginalised peoples that manifest in socio-political systems of dominance. Clarence J. Martin, in *Womanist Interpretations of the New Testament: the quest for holistic and inclusive translation and interpretation* (2015), draws our attention to the more technical aspects of interpretation and translation. Here Martin confronts "texts of terror" (coined by Phyllis Trible, 1984) such as the use of and subject of slavery in the New Testament. This womanist theological hermeneutic does not set about redeeming these "terror texts" but instead highlights them as problematic and, in many cases, seeks to relieve them of religious authority. The hermeneutic requires that the readers humanise the authors of the texts and 'amplify the voices of *all* persons who are marginalised in the text' (Martin, 1990. p. 53), so we can consider how they may have been complicit in oppression revealed in their religious writings. Holding past and present religious thought in tension, Martin says,

A womanist critical biblical hermeneutics, then, must not only critique the tendencies of the biblical writers and traditional processes themselves, but must also analyse contemporary scholarly and popular interpretations and appropriations of those traditions, and the underlying theoretical models. But that is not the end of the story. A womanist biblical hermeneutic must clarify whether the *doulos* texts, potential "texts of terror" for Black people, can in any way portend new possibilities for our understanding of what actually constitutes the radicality of the good news of the Gospel (Martin, 1990, p. 60)

By highlighting the context in which the authors of the biblical texts lived, focusing on "texts of terror", the marginalised womanist hermeneutical traditions, experiences and contributions assert its capability to recognise and resist its present-day manifestations. The womanist framework is so entrenched in *experience* that it applies its varied hermeneutical principles to the day to day experiences of Black women in the Church and the wider society. This allows womanist theologians to use their religious and theological critique for socio-political purposes; the Bible becomes a critical anthropological resource (after much dismantling) towards understanding the strategies of people in power and the

suffering, strength and resistance of the oppressed. This approach to Scripture (or culmination of various approaches in conversation) seeks to relieve Christianity from its authoritative religious text and emphasise theologically rooting its moral perspectives in knowledge generated through the experiences of the oppressed.

The preservation-liberation framework works contrary to the mechanisms described within Black Liberationist and Womanist methods. With a particular focus on the approach to Scripture, the Afroasiatic Diasporic Religious voice, and arguably the voice of the de-churched, whilst suspicious of specific translations, do not reduce the authority of the sacred text to a mere cultural resource. Instead, what we have seen in this study, is a reverential attitude and dependency on the Bible to uncover the true religion of God's chosen people. A constructivist view would argue that ADR brings their experience to their Bible reading, but the ADR argues that the Bible makes sense of their experiences because it is prophetic (foreseeing) and a product of their ancestor's experience with the Most High (God).

Black liberationist objectives are not pitched for the de-churched as presented in the data; it does not provide an apologetic for Black Bible-religion but instead mines Black Bible-religion for thematic sites of liberation, where possible.

7.5 An Evangelical Theology of Liberation (truth and interpretation)

Throughout the study, I have alluded to the sites of convergence, methodologically and theologically speaking, between the ADR and conservative evangelicalism. In this section, I want to unpack this claim. In the introduction, I highlighted the emergence of Black Urban Apologists, ministers, teachers, pastors and influencers from Evangelical Christian spaces that tackle the claims of the de-churched, defending core protestant Christian claims whilst equally challenging racism and silence within their denominations. Finally, I suggest that the Black Urban Evangelical space is best equipped to re-engage the de-churched, yet by considering the historical emergence of evangelicalism, I also identify parallels between this religious movement and the ADR.

Evangelicalism emerged in Britain and New England the eighteenth century and was part of protestant resistance, like conservatism, against the liberal theological developments in church and society. It also resisted the domination of Roman Catholicism and its emphasis on the tradition of the Church as authoritative on matters of faith and practice. Hindmarsh says,

The rising evangelical movement was distinguished first and foremost by its appeal to men and women to be true and earnest Christians rather than nominal believers. "Evangelical" was not thus a label used to distinguish something as "not Catholic" and "not liberal" (Hindmarsh, 2018, p. 9).

Evangelicalism served as a criticism of the institutional Church and a revival of Christianity's divine or supernatural aspects that had become unpopular in the wake of the Enlightenment era and its empirical method for generating knowledge. The spirit of evangelicalism maintained that divine revelation did not discriminate and instead suggested all types of peoples were eligible for a personal spiritual experience and could engage with the divine revelation.

David W. Bennington in *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A modern history from the 1730s to the 1980s* (2005) suggests that it was a movement that ushered evangelicalism out of the grips of the Enlightenment and most notable in the works of Edward Irving, who was sympathetic to spiritual manifestations looking beyond scholastic methods for knowing the 'truths of revelations' (Bebbington, 2005, Chapter 3). Here Bebbington suggests that evangelicalism is 'far more than a static creed', particularly by focusing on influential leaders within the movement; one can see that the internal differences and divisions produce a living dynamic that is responsive to the changing societies. Nevertheless, evangelicalism is generally known by the following principles:

- (1) Conversionism – a call to personal repentance and moral transformation
- (2) Activism – a commitment to doing that which springs from the moral radicalism rooted in a sense of personal responsibility
- (3) Biblicism – the Bible as the supreme authority of faith and practice

- (4) Crucicentrism – a stress on substitutionary atonement; the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross which enable the believer to access redemption
(Bebbington, 2005)

So, whilst there may be ideological and scientific influences, they must work towards and be subject to these tenets. Furthermore, any ideology that is subversive to the authority of Scripture is a hostile influence. Carl Raschke, in *The Next Reformation: why evangelicals must embrace postmodernity* (2004), says

For reformers, Scripture is authoritative because it mediates God's magnificent reality to each one of us as a person on our own terms. Calvin described this process as the work of the Holy Spirit. Scriptural authority ensures that each one of us hears God as God, not through the filter of our own wants and expectations. (Raschke, 2004, p. 117)

What Raschke illuminates here is that whilst evangelicalism is insistent on believers being subject to the authority of Scripture, the interpretive process must allow for the intervention of the Holy Spirit for a divine revelation. Evangelicalism seeks to understand the Bible as the Word of God, a divine message and historical account rather than a resource subject to one's needs, philosophical expectations, political affiliation, and lived experience. Evangelicalism also emphasises a personal conversion and redemption experience; combined with activism, it is hoped that society would experience the influence of Evangelical biblical morality and the power of the gospel of Jesus. We see this emphasis in a report made by the Evangelical Alliance Commission on Unity and Truth (ACUTE), which released the following statement,

An evangelical Christian is a Christian who lives under the authority of Scripture in all matters of belief and practice and who experience a personal relationship with Christ founded in repentance and faith. Such a person will accept the fundamental doctrines affirmed by the ancient creeds and regard the history of the evangelical tradition as their history. (ACTUTE, 2001, p. 14)

What can also be derived from this statement is the call to personal assimilation to the Evangelical history and tradition; an evangelical must participate in the ongoing commitment to the foundational tenets that have been preserved throughout the movement's history. Evangelicalism is a trans-denominational movement, found within various protestant traditions (Stanley, 2013, p.11). This has meant that throughout its evolution, interpretation of Scripture and perspectives on final authority have led to differences of judgement, most notably between Calvinism and Arminianism but has also made room for more liberal approaches to the tenets. Evangelicalism as a theological framework allows for difference within the boundaries of the tenets. Allister McGrath, in *Evangelicalism and the fire of Christianity*, says,

thus, it has been asserted that Evangelicalism is as much about devotional ethos as it is a theological system... Christian Orthodoxy, as set out in the ecumenical creeds, with a particular emphasis upon the need for the personal assimilation and appropriation of faith. (McGrath, 1993, p. 52-3 in ACUTE 2001)

The devotional ethos of the Evangelical movement is in its commitment and submission to scriptural authority and the divine revelation of the Holy Spirit as working together towards a personal transformation. Although the ADR does not share central theological tenets, they have parallel emergence stories. Both religious movements come from under a dominant European church seeking the true origins of the faith. In the case of the Evangelicals, they were concerned about maintaining continuity with the early Christian church, rediscovering the spirituality of Christianity as described in scriptures and severing ties with a dogmatic European religious tradition that seemed at odds with the gospel of Jesus. The evangelicals sought liberation, justice for the poor, inclusion of the other and religious space submitted to the authority of Scripture and not the pope.

7.5.1 Conservative Evangelicalism

Conservative evangelicalism, then, is the combination of an evangelical theological perspective and the social and political attitudes of conservatism. A particular twentieth-century development of conservative evangelicalism is seen in the fundamentalist movement, which embraced a distinction and

distanced itself from the influence of liberalism in the Evangelical movement. Despite its varied influences, evangelicalism is distinguished by its submission to biblical scriptures, as is canonised, as the sole authority of religious faith and practice. Thus, many evangelical people have sought to apply these religious distinctive to public policy.

Christian Fundamentalism is commonly referred to as a religious development taking place in the late nineteenth into the early twentieth century, although it has been argued that fundamentalism, in its essence, can be seen throughout all known religious history (Baurmann, 2008, p. 46). Characterised by its dependency on certainty, religious fundamentalism and, in particular, Protestant fundamentalist Christianity asserts *absolute truth* as a reality as a response to theological liberalism and cultural modernism and now postmodernism. Fundamentalism requires believers to read the biblical texts as historically accurate, and the inerrant 'God breathed' word of God. The five fundamental beliefs that undergird a fundamentalist epistemology were systematised in a collection of 90 essays written between 1910 and 1915 called *The Fundamentals: a testimony to the truth* in which the Bible Institute of Los Angeles committed to exploring five key foundational beliefs 1) Biblical inspiration and infallibility of scripture 2) the virgin birth of Jesus 3) Christ's death as atonement for sin 4) Bodily resurrection of Jesus 5) Historical reality of Jesus' miracles (Torrey, 2015). In this literature, conservative Christian thinkers engaged in an analysis of its tenets in the face of modern theological developments, an example of the approach demonstrates how they preserve a religious nature of biblical scholarship. Canon Dyson Hague says,

In the first place, the critics who were the leaders, the men who have given name and force to the whole movement, have been men who have based their theories largely upon their own subjective conclusions. They have based their conclusion largely upon the very dubious basis of the author's style and supposed literary qualification. Everybody knows that style is a very unsafe basis for the determination of a literary product. The greater the writer the more versatile his power of expression; and anybody can understand that the Bible is the last book in the world to be studied as a mere classic by mere human scholarship without any regard to the spirit of sympathy and reverence on the part of the student. The Bible, as have been said, has no

revelation to make to unbiblical minds. It does not even follow that because a man is a philological expert, he is able to understand the integrity or credibility of a passage of Holy Scripture any more than the beauty and spirit of it.

The qualification for the perception of Biblical truth is neither philosophic nor philological knowledge, but spiritual insight. The primary qualification of the musician is that he be musical; of the artist, that he has the spirit of art. So, the merely technical and mechanical and scientific mind is disqualified for the recognition of the spiritual and infinite. Any thoughtful man must honestly admit that the Bible is to be treated as unique in literature, and therefore, that the ordinary rules of critical interpretation must fail to interpret it aright. (Hague in Torrey, 2015, p. 3)

This substantial quote encapsulates a fundamentalist attitude towards scholarship, liberalism and Christianity – biblical scholarship, according to Hague, can only be done successfully on the premise that the scholar is led by the Holy Spirit as well as being a competent intellectual. Thus, for a fundamentalist, the interpretive process is exclusive. Through a fundamentalist lens, many conservative Protestant Christians shaped a way of understanding and living in the world. So beyond the five keys tenets, other themes come strongly to the fore as a means to combat the liberalising of theology, such as personal morality (vs a social gospel), sexual and reproductive normativity (vs the affirmation and/or inclusion of LGBTQI+ and pro-choice narratives) and male-lead churches/homes (vs female inclusion in church leadership roles, feminism and fluid family construction). Because of its unwillingness to bend to new ways of constructing knowledge (in the wake of the popularisation of social sciences), fundamentalism is often associated with anti-intellectualism. Knowledge and understanding of one's reality come from divine revelation, Holy Scriptures and rationality (Baurmann, 2008, p. 46). In his analysis of fundamentalism and intellectualism, Martin E. Marty says,

Yet perhaps even more important for the development of fundamentalism was the revivalists' tendencies to promote and reinforce a particular type of intellectual emphasis that is a tendency to think in terms of simple dichotomies. The universe was divided between the realm of God

and the realm of Satan; the supernatural was sharply separated from the natural; righteousness could have nothing to do with sin. (Martey, 2011, p. 48)

Whilst people may contend that fundamentalists are anti-intellectual, a better description is that they are selectively intellectual for their spiritual and theological requirements for true Christian scholarship. For example, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, America saw a rise in conservative Christian theological seminaries to demonstrate their religious-intellectual engagement and their value in developing leaders and teachers who are 'biblically sound.' Conservative evangelicalism and fundamentalism reject intellectually creative ways of approaching Scripture because it is concerned with the spiritual salvific nature of the Holy Texts and views it as a work and tool of God to guide people towards redemption, right living and righteous judgement. In line with Burke's ideas of reality, conservative evangelicalism sees Christianity (religion) as the authority on moral order and not radical, revolutionary intellectualism.

Despite its emergence as resistance to dominance, with a promise for democracy and equality, the evangelical body has been critiqued for its resistance to and consideration of the contextual factors that have been a part of its own historical theological formation.

7.5.2 Sola Scriptura

Sola Scriptura was a key element the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century. It 'denotes the conviction that scripture is the one and only criterion for Christian faith and living, and beliefs and practices are true and truthfully Christian if and only if they correspond to the witness of the whole of scripture' (Wisse in Burger, 2018, p. 20). However, this is not the stance of all Protestants – variations have developed over time, such as *Prima Scriptura*, the Methodist and Anglican approach, which says it is the primary authority but is complemented by experience, reason and tradition as secondary authorities. Martin Luther, John Calvin and others, in their liberatory actions against the centralised religious authority of the Roman Catholic church, created an added layer of complexity to the hermeneutical process when bringing the power of interpretation to all people led by the Holy Spirit (in-line the protestant notion of Priesthood of all believers). Unlike the Roman Catholic authority, who

policed truth claims and biblical interpretation, the reformers all could participate in the interpretation process of the Holy Scriptures – the sole authority on salvation and spiritual life so long as it was in the form of literalist or plain Bible reading. This requirement led to various competing interpretations, denominational factions and no closer to establishing universal truths for all believers even under the premise that Scripture interprets itself (*sacra scriptura sui ipsius interpres*). On the other hand, this theological requirement also demonstrates a sense of democracy that, in theory, welcomes the contribution and participation of all believers. Brad S. Gregory, in *The unintended Reformation: how a religious reformation secularised society* (2012), suggests a historical view interprets commitment to *sola scriptura* as anarchistic he says,

From the very outset of the Reformation, the shared commitment to *sola scriptura* entailed a hermeneutical heterogeneity that proved doctrinally contentious, socially divisive, and sometimes (in the German Peasants' War, the Anabaptist Kingdom of Munster, and the English Revolution) politically subversive. (Gregory, 2012, p. 92)

Sympathisers of *sola scriptura* such as Hague argue that their religious perspective cannot be sufficiently interpreted using humanist, philosophical methods and perspectives. Historically, this has resulted in a deliberate disengagement with the progressive theological discourses and hermeneutical processes, which reflects the conservative aversion to radical philosophical trajectories. Interestingly, Gregory's analysis is that adherence to *sola scriptura* is described as uncharacteristic of conservatism – radical. However, Keith A. Mathison, in *The Shape of Sola Scriptura*, argues that this corrective hermeneutical measure is a part of a historical tradition that leads back to the early Church fathers and a small selection of creeds that were a result of early church councils. He suggests that in the Church's formative years, '[t]radition was simply the body of doctrine committed to the church by Christ and His Apostles whether through written or oral revelation' (Mathison, 2001, p. 275). Hence, despite the internal conflicts, the Reformation and its subsequent position on Scripture can be seen as a *liberation* specifically from the Roman tradition and power - not the type of radical that seeks to create an entirely new system having dismantled the old.

As a hermeneutical premise in evangelicalism, *Sola Scriptura* focuses on where to place religious authority rather than be occupied as a primary mission to establish fixed doctrine and religious truths. The ACUTE reports detail that the evangelical theological approach seeks answers to issues from within Scripture,

the concept of 'evangelical theology' thus refers to method as much as conclusions, a method which is governed by the question: 'what do the scriptures say?' Such an emphasis helps evangelicals to live within a diversity of opinion on a range of theological issues which are not perceived as threatening the fundamentals of Christian faith, since they can justify widely differing views on baptism, for example, as equally motivated by a concern to be faithful to the teaching of Scripture. (ACUTE, 2001, p.12)

Wissee argues that an objective approach to Scripture, or in the case of *sola scriptura*, which is subject to divine revelation, is dishonest about the part that the interpreter plays in its interpretation and the humanity of the authors of the scriptures. The contention that many scholars have with plain readings and a commitment to *sola scriptura* is that those who interpret and teach accordingly are relieved from the duty of qualifying their interpretation. The in-house factions themselves act as a process of testing and judging interpretations but, in theory, do not welcome outsiders' contributions. In this sense, then, fundamentalist, literalist interpreters who adhere to *sola scripture* monopolise a power over interpretation that is hard to engage with and challenge. Despite the challenges of its internal workings and relational tensions with those who do not adhere to *sola scriptura*, what it does accomplish is a sense of religiosity, which some may consider medieval, and others traditional in the apostolic sense – but this preservation of religiosity the revelation of the Word and Spirit is what is more difficult to see in modern and postmodern theological methods. Douglas A. Oss in *Canon as Context: The Function of Sensus Plenior in Evangelical Hermeneutics* says,

Evangelicals must reject the concept that the needs of the modern man determine the meaning of the text and thus also its application. At the same time it must be acknowledged that we are "trapped" within our historical situation and there is no escape. So in one sense, sharing in the meaning of a text by way of application cannot avoid historical conditioning. Yet in the fusion

of the biblical and modern "horizons," it is modern horizon that must be subject to refinement, not the horizon of the text. Authority resides in the text not with the interpreter. (Oss, 1988, p. 119)

While the interpretation process undergirded by *sola scriptura* is imperfect because the interpreters are imperfect, it is the premise that is valuable to the religious reading – the text is the sole authority on matters of Christian faith despite the condition of the interpreter.

7.5.3 Sensus Plenior

Another hermeneutical premise found within conservative evangelicalism is *sensus plenior* which has been complimentary to the development of systematic theology. Oss asserts that *sensus plenior* is necessary for 'proper hermeneutical methodology' beyond the limits of 'a rigid grammatical-historical exegesis' (Oss, 1988, p. 106), his definition being,

Sensus Plenior, here defined, refers to the recognition of the canon of Scripture as a single and unified literary work. Because it is one book, no part of the book can be properly understood apart from the whole. Therefore, reflection on the whole of Scripture becomes a vital and central aspect in the hermeneutical process. And one's understanding of a passage will be deeper and clearer as the result of being seen in the light of the whole. This may include levels of meaning that were not part of the conscious intention of the human author, but which are included in the expressed meaning of the publicly accessible text and which are part of the canonical text. (Oss, 1988, p. 106)

This premise is also complimentary to *sola scriptura* because fuller meanings of the text, including prophetic meanings⁷, can be uncovered by searching the scriptures, not dependent on outside sources. *Sensus plenior* functions to confirm an initial interpretation of a passage by seeing how it holds up alongside the rest of the biblical texts, which function as a divine and integrated message.

The foundational premise for *sensus plenior*, according to Oss, are as follows:

⁷ Here I'm talking specifically about foresight as opposed to the socially critical

- 1) God is the author of Scripture and he himself is the ultimate epistemological context for understanding the meaning of Scripture
- 2) Only the Bible in its canonical form is the normative and authoritative source of theological data
- 3) The nature of progressive revelation is such that the meaning of the Scriptures became deeper and clearer as the literary corpus of the canon increased.
- 4) The canon has an organic unit that is demonstrated in its harmony of doctrine, perspective, and faith. (Oss, 1988, pp. 111-112)

Sensus plenior is not primarily concerned about the presupposition and participation of the human author because it considers the scriptures to be of divine authorship. One, in this case, must assume that under the sovereignty of God, the scriptures confirm and affirm one another, and with the support of the necessary scholarship, one can uncover the more profound meaning beyond its face value. It requires a belief that God has orchestrated every aspect of the coming together of the canon, from inspiration to in-text interpretation and its historical canonisation. Raymond E. Brown, in *The Sensus Plenior of Sacred Scripture*, defines it as such:

The *Sensus Plenior* is that additional, deeper meaning, intended by God but not clearly intended by the human author, which is seen to exist in the words of a biblical text (or group of texts, or even a whole book) when they are studied in the light of further revelation or development in the understanding of revelation. (Brown, 2008, p. 92)

The premise of *sensus plenior* is important in conservative evangelicalism because it functions as a tool to identify Messianic prophecies throughout the Old Testament. Evangelicalism centres itself around the life ministry, death and resurrection of Christ – particularly in the substitutionary atonement of which they would claim Old Testament scriptures foretell. Statements such as "The new is in the old concealed; the old is in the new revealed." by fourth-century African theologian St. Augustine of Hippo is generally accepted by Evangelical teachers such as R.C. Sproul to confirm that this line of theological enquiry was part of early Christian thinking and interpretation and thus a trustworthy line of hermeneutical enquiry (Sproul, 2005, www.ligonier.org). However, *sensus plenior* has also been a point

of contention in the developments of evangelical hermeneutics, which had been dominated by the grammatical-historical method (what the author meant in consideration of his historical context). Whilst scholars who adhered to this method were keen to identify the single meaning of the text, *sensus plenior* creates the space for 'fuller' or 'deeper' meanings to the text. This undermines the role of the Scripture's historical context, and the author yet energises the hermeneutical process with a mysterious spiritual dimension that can also be seen in the *sola scriptura* concept with its necessary engagement with the Holy Spirit. However, Oss argues that *sensus plenior* need not undermine the single meaning if one re-evaluates the narrow scientific approach. He says,

Therefore, while maintaining the view that meaning in texts does have parameters beyond which the exegete cannot go, it is also necessary to postulate that meaning in texts is multi-dimensional. The "single meaning" in a text refers to its unity of meaning, with all of its dimensions being connected to the results of grammatical-historical exegesis. (Oss, 1988, p. 115)

Oss suggests that the grammatical-historical method can work well with the *sensus plenior* premise as the deeper meanings would bring depth to the initial exegetical interpretation and not contradict its meaning.

I have taken this detour to highlight some connecting points between the desires of the de-churched and the methods of the ADR. The de-churched phenomenon can help one see the phenomenon of evangelicalism as a de-churching moment, not pulling away from belief in God, Christ or the Bible but from the domination of the institutional church. The preservation-liberation framing translates well for the Evangelical context on several counts; the first is the rediscovering of the authority of Scripture as foundational to Bible religion, second is a severance from the colonial church (although many argue it is not a complete severance, I am speaking of its early intentions), third, internal diversity that is framed by central tenets and internal gatekeepers (much like we see within the ADR frame, diverse perspectives and internal debates are a form of gatekeeping), fourth, the preservation of ancient, early church creeds, and fifth, a commitment to activism.

These premises cannot exist cohesively with the Black Liberation Theology because it must then rework its response to 'terror texts', and the foundations of the hermeneutical premise are fuelled by the Black lived experience. A theological application of postcolonialism concerns itself with the implications and legacies of colonialism among the 'other', in the British context, the Black and brown peoples who are descendants of the enslaved and colonised. R.S. Sugirthajah, in *Voices from the Margin: Interpreting the Bible in the third world* (2006), says,

Postcolonialism, at its simplest, can be seen in two ways. One is historical, marking the dismantling of the empire and its attendant instruments of power, and the other is an intellectual project which searches for "alternative sources, alternative readings, alternative presentations of evidence". (Sugirthajah, 2006)

Applying this approach to biblical hermeneutic means that it is most necessary to engage with the historical context in which conservative evangelicalism was birthed and interrogate the movement as a theological arm of the European colonial empire. Furthermore, postcolonial biblicism subverts the authority of this protestant movement with alternative hermeneutical methods that illuminate dominant powers at work within the interpretation and the text itself. Conservative evangelicalism comes under interrogation not simply because it was birthed during the time of the European global dominance but because, for one, European conservatism seeks to protect and preserve European tradition and institutions (which included the aristocracy and the Church) and two, evangelicalism resists the influence of contemporary philosophical frameworks (often non-European) in their hermeneutical processes – liberatory or not. From a postcolonial point of view, what has meant is that experiences of the marginalised, oppressed, and enslaved have been ignored at best and intentionally terrorised at worst due to these social, religious, and political positions. As evangelicalism progressed and has come to the fore of Western Christianity, it is considered complicit in dominating the third world and its diasporas. Although many argue the principles of evangelicalism are complementary to the participation of all believers, including the non-Europeans, its hermeneutical principles in practice have not been perceived as inclusive of alternative readings and perspectives. Although its most conservative dimension claims to read literally and spiritually the Word of God and interpret universal meanings, it is slow to

acknowledge the interpreter's preconceptions as contextual. Sanders and Woodley, in *Decolonising Evangelicalism*, say,

Western Christianity's preoccupation with its own extrinsically categorical worldview within a systemic binary leaves little for other possibilities. Postcolonial theologies, then, should recognise and repudiate the histories of oppression that disregarded the rights of the others and often failed to recognise the ubiquitous theologically influenced systems that uphold colonialism's theological grip. (Sanders and Woodley, 2020, Chapter 1)

Reddie suggests that ongoing participation with conservative inspired church traditions has affected their ability to flourish holistically,

The malaise that afflicts Black Christians in Britain can be described as "Religio-cultural-theological-dissonance". In using this term, I am pointing to a historic phenomenon where Black Christians have imbibed the blandishments of imperial mission Christianity to such an extent that the operative basis of their Christian faith proceeds as a form of negated Blackness or even anti-blackness. (Reddie, 2012, p. 64)

The de-churched phenomenon perhaps shed light on an alternative interpretation of the Black church's commitment to conservative religiosity. Seen through the preservation-liberation lens and the examples of the ADR, perhaps conservative evangelicalism is appealing to Black churches because it is both liberative and preservationist at its core. Although one cannot negate the colourblind theology that seems rife in conservative evangelicalism, the five points of convergence with the ADR and de-churched phenomenon suggest the possibility for an Evangelical Theology of Black Liberation.

7.6 Black Diasporic Identity formation

7.6.1 Nationalism and Double Consciousness

Nationalism generates important questions for ethnic communities seeking to articulate their feelings and actions politically. The context of this study is Black-British de-churched peoples who seek a Black

religious framework in which they can flourish culturally, religiously, and politically. Nationalism has served the purposes of both left and right-wing social politics. Those on the right-wing nationalism seek to preserve historical/traditional national traits and interests, whilst left-wing nationalism seeks to revolutionise the traditional meanings of "nation" and the systems in place to uphold those historical traditions. In this light then, of nationalism, several vital questions arise: what is a nation? Is a nation to be defined by common philosophies, ethnicity, culture, religion, or origin? Particularly concerning minority communities who may be a part of a state voluntarily or involuntarily; are cultures, religions, and customs at stake if one were to become nationalist about the state they dwell in? Is one's ability to successfully integrate and reap the benefits of their geographic nationality affected if they have nationalist affections for another nation or state?

Black Nationalism in the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries is marked distinctly by its attempts to define Black racial identity in consideration of their position as minority or underdog groups within European states and colonies. As descendants of enslaved Africans who were displaced and involuntarily relocated to Britain, the Americas, and the Caribbean, many attempts have been made to develop and promote a non-assimilationist identity marked by culture, origins, experience and struggle. In its most practical form, this has led to the independence of African and Caribbean countries from the ruling of European colonial powers. However, before this began to occur, Black philosophers, thinkers, and activists had begun to think ontologically about Black identity and nationhood. Part of the development of these ideas was the task of defining Black identity; for example, in *The Souls of Black Folk*, WEB Du Bois (1903) asserted the concept of 'double consciousness, the conflict of two souls, begins with his personal experience of being African and being American, 'looking at oneself through the eyes of others, or measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity' (Du Bois, 1994, p. 8). This description speaks to the process of those in the African diaspora-making sense of a new reality, a liminal reality away from one's ancestral home and yet not accepted by one's new hosts.

This description speaks to the individual experience of the African diaspora in the West, making sense of a new reality, a liminal reality away from one's ancestral home and yet not accepted by one's new

hosts. Double consciousness has become a tool for exploring the Black reality in the West and the Black community's distorted connection to ancestral histories and cultures. Paul Gilroy furthers this discourse by using the postcolonial concept of 'hybridity', a new perspective on identity which dismantles a purity/autonomous narrative because all are involved in a diverse society (Gilroy, 1993). In this way, double consciousness becomes wider than America and the African American reality and the essentialisation of Blackness with Afrocentric perspectives. Moreover, it serves as a tool that had aided Black Theology in moving beyond a patriarchal aversion to neocolonial capitalism and general systemic violence. Together with feminist/womanist theologies, as mentioned previously, complex concepts of identity are being formed by the unique experiences of being who you are, where you are, and considering where you have come from and your place in society. The concept of hybridity in Black Theology acknowledges and works with varying input points and compliments the method of self-differentiation, where colour and gender are not enough to create a complete Black identity.

Du Bois' framework allowed Black thinkers to develop an ontological blackness that was a new and separate identity from their ancestors' purely cultural and ethnic identities in Africa. The tension that double consciousness highlights from a political standpoint in later movements centred on measuring success and the type of action towards a Black nationalist reality. On the one hand, some Black people wanted equality (America, Britain, Caribbean) to be considered an "American" or "British" – which may also be termed assimilation. On the other hand, Black organisations were lobbying, protesting for, and actioning various levels of autonomy which may also be termed 'self-determination'. Marcus Garvey is the prime example of a Black Nationalist who sought to empower Black people by developing a Black economy rooted in and serving both Africa and the diaspora. Garvey, among others, carved a route for the descendants of enslaved Africans to engage with or return to the continent, illuminating the potential for continuing the journey voluntarily as a diaspora by reconstructing African nationhood or nationality.

The (Black) Hebrew Israelites reject an ontological view of blackness and instead seek to mobilise a nation of people united by their ethnicity and religious heritage. "Building a nation, not a religion" is a key sentiment demonstrating an intentional separation from the West's Christendom and Judaism.

Ontological blackness defines the African diaspora according to their experiences of oppression and strategies for survival and overcoming. However, the BHI perspective refuses to be defined by those experiences and denotes them as a judgement outlined by the Hebrew God according to their prophetic/historical reading of Deuteronomy 28. The slavery experience for the (Black) Hebrew Israelites is a result of idolatry and disobedience, and neither assimilation nor localised self-determination is considered a method for emancipation. The BHI refuse the governmental authority of the countries where they dwell but instead considers true repentance and a mental/spiritual awakening (realising one's true identity as an Israelite) the only necessary task.

'The politics of 'race' in Britain is fired by conceptions of national belonging and homogeneity which not only blur the distinction between 'race' and nation but rely on that very ambiguity for their effect' (Gilroy, 1991, p. 45). Gilroy counters a nationalistic strategy of resistance by developing a transoceanic perspective through which we can view iconic Black thinkers such as Du Bois, Black intellectuals who were deeply embedded in European society, cultures and environments and, as a result, were heavily influenced by European philosophy. A key argument in this text is that the Black diaspora is an archetype of cosmopolitanism, a body of peoples that cannot be reduced to a single nation, culture and history - whilst connected by the experience of enslavement and subjugation, there is a wealth of new cultures, histories and movements that are a result of resistance, unwavering strength and self-determination.

Gilroy's call to a new cosmopolitanism in *Against Race: Imagining Political culture beyond the colour line* (2000) dissolves ethnic and culture-driven nationhood, which is argued to be a separatist enterprise and explores the possibilities of post-racial realities in space, place and political communities. He hypothesises that cosmopolitanism allows all peoples to thrive as equals and be freed from modernist conceptualisation of culture and geo/historical origins. Gilroy's work dreams of future societies and envisages cosmopolitan cultures rather than ethnically routed/rooted ones to move our socialisation beyond "race" talk and view one another as citizens of the earth rather than nation-states. He supports this argument by surveying historical moments in which racial sciences, cultures and ethnicity have been sources of selective superiority and oppression, demonstrating how European cultures have been

nationalised and politicised, acting as measuring rods of civilisation and worth. This criticism is not only aimed at White European institutions but at the Afrocentric (and ADR) communities who retaliate with corrective campaigns claiming Africa to be the originating cradle of many scientific discoveries and have been robbed of their prestige, he says,

It makes the conspiracies that covered up the theft into a principal issue. This counternarrative of progress is accompanied by a degree of temporal disturbance. It says in effect: "we were head of you on the ascending escalator of civilisation until you displaced us by illegitimate means." These depressing cycles contribute to the climate in which authoritarian and antiliberal passions can take command of the political imaginations. (Gilroy, 2000, p. 340)

Afroasiatic Diasporic Religions at the core do not intend to civilise or improve civilisations outside of their own; as these religions locate themselves explicitly as a 'lost tribe', they are focused on awakening the lost than improving the social and political conditions of the host nation. In this sense, their beliefs confirm Gilroy's criticism, believing themselves to be rediscovering cultures and religious traditions that predate modernity and would go so far as they argue that the West were civilised by learned African peoples.

Western scholarship, including some Black scholarship, is limited to its philosophical 'dispensations' and fails to sufficiently take serious ADR so long as it is understood only within European philosophical thought. Particularly for Gilroy, this perhaps is due to the lack of attention to Black Religion.

No less than their predecessor Martin Delany, today's Black intellectuals have persistently succumbed to the lure of those romantic conceptions of "race," "people," and "nation" which place themselves, rather than the people they supposedly represent, in charge of the strategies for nation building, state formation, and racial uplift. This point underscores the fact that the status of nationalists and the precise weight we should attach to the conspicuous differences of language, culture, and identity which divide the Black of the diaspora from one another, let alone from Africa, are unresolved within the political culture that promises to bring the disparate peoples of the Black Atlantic together one day. (Gilroy, 1993, p. 34)

Nationalism can be described as the attitudes, feelings, and actions of those who care passionately about the nation they belong to and protect that nationality's integrity. Ernest Gellner describes it as a 'political principle, which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent.' (Gellner, 1983) Nevertheless, it also considers the nationalist notions of minority communities within larger nation-states. This consideration reflects the movement of groups (voluntary and involuntary) who have ties to their previous dwelling or a historical place of origin. These minority groups may not seek to have complete political control of the state in which they live but strive for recognition, equality, and certain levels of autonomy within the wider state. In this general sense, the nation means the body of people, and the state is the governmental and geographical parameters of the region.

Gilroy's futuristic gaze compels him to desire Black scholarship to enter the broader arena of academia as members of this cosmopolitan reality, not to focus on what has been lost or stolen but to use the tools, experiences and lessons learned on the historical journey from Africa to the Black Atlantic and the substance of these Pan-Africanist claims to contribute to scientific enterprise, the evolution of ethics and cosmopolitan politics. He said, 'It is my hope that, not Europe and North Atlantic but the postcolonial world in general, and South Africa in particular, will in due course generate an alternative sense of what our networked world might be and become, a new cosmopolitanism centred on the global south' (Gilroy, 2006. p. 289).

According to the ADR, as they understand it to be outlined in Scripture, personal identity is not dependent on the experience nor acceptance of the dominant culture, host country, and native peoples outlined in the Black ontological project. Instead, a large part of the identifying process is to ground Black people's humanity in ethnic origins, geographic locations, clans, family lineage and religious heritage. This is most notable in the strong separatist nationalism that works within the host country until redemption is realised or the community repatriates. It is not to say that people who are a part of these religions do not participate in society but that their teachings suggest that their religious framework/narrative should have more authority over their choices and modes of operation and ambition for Black people than the ideals, morals and values of the country in which they live. This approach has a significant appeal to the de-churched, the sense of ownership and participation in an

ethnoreligious community that teaches 'chosenness' disregards any sense of unworthiness one may experience on account of being Black or "other."

7.6.2 Ethnocentricity

Ethnocentricity describes how people view, perceive, and judge the world according to the values, morals, practices, and standards of their ethnic community. The conversation about ethnocentrism often overlaps with nationalism and carries negative links to racism, prejudice, and hostility and is generally regarded as an undesirable phenomenon (Buzmic, 2015). In much of the earlier literature focused on the ethnocentric nature of 'tribes', 'clans' and 'native peoples', these orientalist ventures failed to see that all people and nations, including (to great success) European peoples, are ethnocentric and can only view the practices, beliefs and morals of others in contrast to their own. The study of ethnocentrism itself is cloaked in universalist ideals and ethnic superiority that is disturbed by asserting ethnocentric traits in others.

Ethnocentrism is conceived as an ideological system pertaining to groups and group relation. A distinction is made between *ingroups* (those groups with which the individual identifies himself) and *outgroups* (with which he does not have a sense of belonging and regarded as antithetical to the ingroups). Outgroups are the objects of negative opinions and hostile attitudes; ingroups are the objects of positive opinions and uncritically supportive attitudes; and it is considered that the outgroups should be socially subordinate to ingroups (Adorno et al. 1950, p 104).

In an interview on Speakers' Corner, Leo Muhammad was asked if he believed in an 'ethnostate and if so, is it feasible [YouTube video] 'Leo Muhammad: Speakers Corner: Do we believe in an 'ethno state'?

Yes we do, in the sense that we believe in the humanity of all people, we believe that human beings should be able to live together regardless of creed, or class or colour; however, the problem is this, black people have been crushed to the ground and destroyed as a human reality where white people, yellow people, brown people have their own landmasses and their own nation-states that they can take ownership of, mostly black people fund in the Western

hemisphere, we have been disenfranchised from having our own. So, in this reality, we have to create an ethnostate, wherein that reality, we finally have something that we can call our own. But the idea is not to do that to the detriment of somebody else. We believe that white people should be entitled to have their own, Chinese people should be entitled to have their own, brown should be entitled to have their own, and we should be entitled to have our own. (Muhammad, 2018, 0.30secs)

Afroasiatic religions are typically ethnocentric; we have seen in the data how they refer to identities anchored in geography, genealogy, ancient cultures and traditions, languages and religions. Although academic literature acknowledges African origins, roots, and connections, unlike Garvey's aspirations of literal and cultural repatriation, diaspora talk is focused on whom Black people have become and struggle to be in European nation-states. Contrary to this ongoing notion, though seemingly less popular in academic circles, the Afrocentric and pan Africanist trajectories peaked during the civil rights era and persisted among the ADR and the de-churched. These schools of thought centre their attentions on the ethnic particularities of African peoples (religion, culture, politics, and philosophy) and use these particularities to inform, empower and guide the diaspora to resist white supremacy and preserve the historical/geographical connection between the diaspora and their continent of origin.

The ADR's relationship to older religions is significant; they seek to reject the colonial and Eurocentric Christian religion and assert a corrective— an ethnocentric religion. Unlike the hermeneutical processes of postcolonial and Black liberationist methodologies, Afroasiatic religions in Black Britain do not seek to relativise nor contextualise biblical interpretations and dismantle the ethnocentric approach. Instead, the claims are to *correct* false and erroneous interpretations and *preserve* the ethnoreligious narrative that returns Africans, Asians, Hebrews and their descendants - Black people in the West, to the centre of the biblical narrative.

7.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have summarised the findings of my research and presented the theory I believe emerges from the data – *preservation-liberation* for this study describes both the desire and activity of

liberating Bible religion from the grips of colonial Christianity through the preservation of the rediscovered Afroasiatic Bible religious traditions, cultures and reverence of Scripture. Further to this, I have defined the mechanisms of the theory that help realise its transferability for other contexts.

The main task of this chapter was to discuss the implications of the preservation-liberation framework, through the ideas and ideals of Afroasiatic Diasporic Religions and the de-churched, in broader academic conversations about Black-British faith and identity. I considered how the ADR voice is distinct, methodologically, from Black Liberation Theology and how the emergence of evangelicalism and its perspective of the Bible parallels that of the de-churched. This presented some exciting prospects - an Evangelical Theology of Liberation, the beginning of which I have seen recently develop among the Black Urban Apologists in the United States. Finally, I challenged Black Atlantic conversations about identity formation that fail to realise the significance of ethnoreligious positions on the Black-British collective mind for the pursuit of justice and overcoming.

The Pilot – a misfire

As I entered the central London church building for a trial pilot session of the programme, the pastor found me quickly, looking both excited and anxious. It seems that this advertised event has attracted more attention than we had anticipated.

Pastor: I think we're going to get quite a lot of people today

Me: Yes, I was expecting eight or ten people, but nearly one hundred have responded to the online marketing. Even if they do not all come, I think we may need to use the bigger space.

Today's event was a unique church-hosted public event that set out to discuss 'White man's religion?' as it pertained to the challenges presented by alternative black (Afroasiatic) religions. It was a sunny day, perfect for sitting outside, socialising and preparing for the coming working week yet it seemed that the event I would be hosting today had not only attracted local young people but attendees from around the UK. What had meant to be a small trial had taken a life of its own. Today I would be making a public case for attending to the anti-Christian claims of the black conscious community, the silence on racism in churches and possibilities for the most suitable responses to claims against the integrity, authenticity and legitimacy of the mainstream Church. There was great sense of expectancy as people started to pour in through the doors, people were looking nervous and serious, and as the facilitator, I was having mixed feelings about my role. I felt like I was representing the Church, compelled to make a case for the legitimacy of Christianity and to anticipate and rebut in an apologetic style, any arguments that were to be made. On the other hand, I too had my own questions and concerns about the Christianity that I had come to know; my own engagement with anti-Christian challenges of identity, history and theology situated me as a participant of this meeting, keen to engage with the leaders who had come to share insight and response. Initially, I had seen my role as a bridge between the Church and the black conscious community - I was religiously committed to the Church, yet sympathetic and in agreement with the claims from the conscious community I had come across on social media.

There was a silent moment before the meeting when the 'Hotep' brothers walked in; up until this point, I had assumed that the majority of the attendees were Christians who had come with questions and ideas about how to defend Christianity. A particular member of this group is what had caused the sudden hush among the attendees, previous to his conversion to Atonism he was a famous UK Gospel rap artist. Their presence at the meeting seems to have brought a combative element to the meeting. I had prepared a space for small group discussion, and I had not any preparation for managing a discussion on such a large scale and potentially confrontational experience. I had completely underestimated the appeal of this programme.

I sensed high expectations in the room, an expectation of answers to problems beyond the scope of this pilot session. What I had not anticipated was the dissatisfaction with the panel I had selected for this session. I had gathered other local ministers to function as a response to the questions and concerns that would arise in the group. One of the participants raised her hand to say 'I must say I'm really disappointed with the panel you have chosen tonight' there was a resounding 'mmm' of support for this comment. 'It all just seems so one-sided; you didn't get other people from other perspective to have their say and you know, debate the topics.'

I responded by reminding the participant of what I had advertised and outlined at the beginning of the session that she, along with the other attendees, were key contributors to the process. However, my response did not seem to satisfy her disappointment. Perhaps because it was in a church, or because of the huge number the participants expected all the activity to happen from the front?

(Researcher's Reflection, 2016)

8. Conclusion

8.1 Introduction

This chapter concludes my study with some reflective thoughts about the research process and outcomes. Following a summary of the thesis, I will consider the untrodden paths of this writing process and the potential for future research based on what has been discovered.

8.2 Summary of Thesis

8.2.1 'Woke' – the Afroasiatic Rationale

This chapter introduced the Black religions I intended to engage within this study, specifically to introduce them as Afroasiatic Diasporic Religions. This is the beginning of a much needed comparative analysis of these religions in Britain as they chart new territories in a globalised, internet-dependent twenty-first century. I was very aware of the limits to which I could perform this task, but my aim here was to demonstrate how they could be visualised as a community of religions without deferring to a gross essentialist umbrella. The term Black religion I found to be too broad; Afroasiatic, on the other hand, also spoke to the ongoing struggle to have countries such as Egypt be considered Africa. Afroasiatic makes a case for genealogical ties confirmed in the biblical text if read as a historical document, and I hoped to capture these connections.

Rastafari and the Nation of Islam have had significant academic attention, unlike the (Black) Hebrew Israelites and even less so the Holy Qubtic church. So as not to overpower this chapter with literature on the former, I chose to take a descriptive approach that focused on the religious teaching and what these indicate about the de-churched. I chose to focus the topics to what I perceive to be of most relevant to this study. Focusing on 'Geography', 'Bible', 'Jesus' and 'Redemption', I covered the necessary grounds that help to distinguish these religions from mainstream and or colonial Christianity, yet at the same time, I have been able to identify some interesting links which were further expounded upon in the data. These religions could not be considered evangelical, but they share similar emergence narratives and methodological approaches for doing theology.

This chapter also set out to define 'woke' from an Afroasiatic perspective; I assert in this chapter that through a high view and intense study of scripture, be it corrected or reinterpreted, 'woke' is fuelled by the biblical imagination. The call of *return* inspired Afroasiatic religious adherents to awaken out of a zombified slumber and return to the original religion and the original identity – not as the oppressed and subjugated and 'other', but as 'chosen' and 'supreme'. Conversion to these religions has meant for many of its followers to shed the identification of the 'other', which is central to postcolonial and liberationist methodological legitimacy. This generated further questions about the compatibility of these progressive streams of thought and how they can be considered conceptually compatible going forward.

8.2.2 Literature Review

The literature review has been written retrospectively; after various attempts at this chapter in the initial stages of the research project, it became clear that, consistent with the grounded theory requirements, I could not find my literary focus until I could identify the theory emerging from the data. Initially, I aimed to discuss the efforts of existing Black Christian theology to reconcile Black consciousness with Christianity, looking at African theology, Black Liberation theology and Black Urban apologetics. However, it felt too broad and repetitive regarding existing dissertations. During my research, new works on the topic were beginning to emerge. Black ministers were giving the de-churched and Black mystery cult topic more attention via social media but still did not present an obvious way for me to demonstrate how the focus was of my work was filling a gap. The gap became apparent through wrestling with the data as both participant and interpreter; the Afroasiatic diasporic religious rationale was conceptually a middle road between Black conservative evangelicalism and Black liberative theologies. It was not uncommon to hear that Black people think and pray "right" and vote "left", but it was less common to consider that the strength and persistence of Afroasiatic Diasporic Religions were found in the mutual engagement of conservative and liberative paradigms.

The literature review then aimed to demonstrate that trending progressive methodological approaches negate the genuine beliefs and approaches of the Afroasiatic religious adherents. For example, the fieldwork of Fauset, Dew, and Reddie demonstrated that ethnographic work is essential for

understanding de-churched phenomena. The literature review generated the themes and ideas that confirmed the theory I confirmed to be coming out from the data, and its negations highlighted where this study could fill a gap. Finally, the wider conversation about Black-British identity formation and Black-British Theology required an updated, twenty-first-century ethnographic investigation of Afroasiatic Diasporic Religions in the British context and their influence on the Black, British and de-churched.

8.2.3 Conceptual Framework

During the initial stages of my research, I thought Ethiopianism would be a sufficient conceptual underpinning for my thesis; Price's summary of its thematic makeup presents a good case for its sufficiency,

Several themes that influence the different strains of Ethiopianism include the following: 1) Ethiopia is the symbolic home of all Black people and the root of cultural and historical legacies, especially for Christians; 2) this connection gives Blacks a direct claim to Jewry and ancient civilizations and history; 3) Ethiopia is a place to which Blacks should return and/or should develop through financial and political investment;* 4) God will intercede on behalf of Blacks against Whites and their allies; 5) those nations involved in slavery will be destroyed by God; and 6) Blacks are a noble race brought low by white oppression. (Price, 2003, p. 37 [asterix* is author's own])

According to this summary, Ethiopianism makes for a complete foundation for ADR as it emerged in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. However, there have been many key social and political events since their emergence, requiring additional conceptual tools for defining the ADR rationale.

The preservation-liberation framework that I innovated for this study sought to capture the religious rationale of ADR and my participants' voices. I was keen to get to the root of the appeal and desire to become de-churched yet remain religiously committed to the biblical text. The preservation-liberation framework I felt also must respond sufficiently to the socio-political nature of Afroasiatic religions, even if I intend to privilege their religious teachings as indicators. Fanon's work on decolonisation

helped create a framing that better reflected the ADR's intentions to recover power from their oppressors rather than see power being redistributed equally. Conservatism then acts as the mechanism that perceives how ADR celebrate and generates legacy. The preference for preserving Afroasiatic institutions means that identity formation for Black diasporic people is anchored in ancestral history, culture, religion and geography – which they seek to recover. This resonates with Afrocentric approaches; however, the scope of my considerations was grounded in Afroasiatic Diasporic Bible religion rather than the broad category of 'Africa'. It was beyond the capacity of this research project to discuss the intersectional implications of including conservatism in my conceptual framework. The data did not produce much insight to gender, sexuality, and class; however, while developing the framework, I was conscious of the value of intersectional consideration that perhaps requires revisiting. Although there is extensive literature about Christianity or religion and gender, class and sexuality, ADR's rationale on these matters deserves more attention and investigation. My feelings are that Afroasiatic religions, through the preservation-liberation framework, can uniquely contribute to the wider discourse that reflects majority attitudes in the Black-British community.

8.2.4 Methodology

This chapter sought to outline the methodological approach for this ethnographic study. Participatory Action Research allows the researcher to facilitate 'safe solution making spaces', which I think is at the core of the success of this study so far as I was able to develop a research design that the participants responded well to. PAR also facilitated and managed my insider knowledge by considering me as both researcher and participant and, therefore, appropriately bracketing my personal experiences and a stimulus for the study not integral to the analysis.

8.3 Further reflections from the background research process

When I began the background reading for my literature review at the beginning of the research process, I decided I wanted to interrogate what had already been accomplished theologically to address the issue of colonial Christianity. In time, I realised that this was too broad for a literature review, but I am

returning to some of the approaches that captured my interest because they lay the ground for my ideas about future research.

8.3.1 African Theology

I had dedicated a section to African theological methodologies as they wrestled with the prevailing missionary Christianity and the quest to Africanise their Christianity. In the initial stages of Africanisation, African theologians explored the possibilities of Christian themes in the pre-Christianized 'primal' faiths of Africa, a synthesis of Christianity with African Tradition Religion. An example of this is in *Toward an African Theology* (Pobee, 1979), and his consideration of Jesus as the 'great and greatest ancestor' which claims to connect existing religious beliefs with biblical concepts and births an African Christology (Gifford, 2008, p. 21). Kwame Bediako in *Jesus and the Gospel of Africa: history and experience* (2004) explored the function of ancestral worship within the Akan Clan of Ghana. Here he suggested that, as a method of inculturation, one could reimagine Jesus as the great and greatest ancestor, forming a link between the traditional religious views of the people and the message of the Gospel. Bediako argued that, on the surface, this concept lacked a true understanding of ancestral worship and its link to the identity of the living clan members. The ancestors were significant because they could be named; they were deceased clan members who had lived exemplary lives, whereas Jesus himself is a Jew with no direct genealogical connection. In this way, introducing Jesus as an ancestor could create an identity crisis in which Africans may become conflicted between Western Christianity and the particularisms of their African identity. (Bediako, 2004) To develop the idea further, Bediako focuses on the universality of Jesus, in which all tribes and clans can see themselves in the bigger picture, the wider story (Bediako, 2004, p. 24). In this fashion, he explores the theological concepts of God's incarnation within human flesh rather than Jewish flesh; he also looks at all of humanity being made in the image of God and the inheritance of Abraham being based on faith rather than genealogy. In these ways, Bediako has attempted to extend the story of the scripture over the people of the Akan and create a model that can be transferred into any cultural context. In this work, he makes connections between the function of the ancestors and the works of Christ primarily through themes of sacrifice, mediation and power in/through death. He says,

Since ancestral function as traditionally understood is now shown to have no basis in fact, the way is open for appreciating more fully how Jesus Christ is the only real and true ancestor and source of life for all mankind, fulfilling and transcending the benefits believed to be bestowed by lineage ancestors (Bediako, 2004, p. 31)

Although theologically intriguing, the Jesus as ancestor model was difficult to conceptualise for investigating the de-church in the diaspora who may not have understood the religious function of ancestral veneration, particularly those disconnected from their African heritage. 'Ancestors are essentially clan or lineage ancestors. So, they have to do with community and society in which their progeny relate to one another and not with systems of religion as such' (Pobee, 1979, p. 46).

African theologians in these earlier writings struggled to generate a genealogical connection between Jesus and indigenous African peoples, an essential requirement for ancestral veneration. They explored the potential of universalising Christ as an ancestor, which seems to become not much more than helpful imagery. Another challenge with this African Christology was its capacity to hold traditional African religion and an Africanised Christianity in tension. Bediako's ideas were critiqued for taking preference for the African Religious Traditions over the Gospel of Christ as written in the biblical texts; Watson Omulokoli (1986) asserts:

"For us in Africa our battles in this sphere would be in vain if we reject European Christianity for being non-Christian only to replace it with an African Christianity which is so overlaid with our own cultural matter that it fails to meet the tests of Christianity when it is subjected to close scrutiny. To wind up with the type of end product that is African at the expense of being Christian would be self-defeating as all the endeavours of our exercise would boomerang in our very faces' (Omulokoli, 1986, p. 34)

What underlies this contention is further explained by Kevin Howard in which he highlights the ongoing battle between the negative stereotypes of African Traditional Religion as heathen by Christian colonial institutions and the oversight of African blemishes such as human sacrifices (Howard, 2013) or more contemporary visible issues like female genital mutilation. Whilst Bediako acknowledges this battle,

Howard suggests that Bediako seems set on justifying and accommodating practices such as ancestral worship at the expense of a biblical perspective on such activities.

One of the most damning things we can accurately say about Bediako's theology and methodology is that they diminish the importance of Christ's first coming, namely his death and resurrection. In the face of such a statement, he surely would have protested and stressed how valuable Christ was, but Bediako's need to hold on to his identity, his ancestors at all costs could be too high a price to pay (Howard, 2013, pp. 23-24)

This critique applies to African theology in that inculturation has repeatedly become a means of championing a comparative method; theologians begin with a particular religious/cultural expression and compare it to a biblical principle to validate the practice. Critics of African theology point out that this type of 'proof texting' is limited and does not produce transformative theologies but instead prioritises African culture above the call to salvation. On the other hand, Afroasiatic Diasporic Religions in the diaspora look to the traditional Afroasiatic religions as the true, original, and correct religious paradigm for Black peoples. We see this in the diverse Christologies. The gospel is not necessary the life, ministry, death and resurrection of the Messiah but in the recovery of ancient and return to original religion and the correction of the sacred biblical texts.

Further to this, the de-church participants showed little interest in challenging the message and validity of the Gospel as presented in mainstream Christianity but were concerned with being able to access it in its true and original Afroasiatic, non-colonial form. This renders processes of inculturation from the perspective of African theology redundant from this study. With specific regard to the comparative method for Afroasiatic religion and Black-British identity formation, it leaves 'outsiders' in a conundrum of distance. The inculturation of African Traditional Religions relates only to those from within the community and culture and remains a purely theoretical hobby for those outside the community.

African theology also presented some promising methodological possibilities for gathering my data; I was interested in the individual/communal tension that I sense in Black identity formation. Living in

Britain, I felt that Black people always had an unspoken connection and sense of "us", typical of all types of communities, yet perhaps supported by evangelical conversionism, was a definite sense of individualism and personal responsibility. The tension between the individual and the communal identity is well represented in the ethical dimension of African moral theology. Benezet Bujo argues that within the African context, there is no individual without community, so whilst there is a possibility for individual self-determination, it is always (or should always be) towards the betterment of the community. Bujo uses the example of the Holy Spirit, who works through one person to benefit the entire Church, as an example of how individual self-determination presents itself as service to the wider community and not for individual gain (Odozor, 2008, p. 200). This discussion is compared to the Western philosophy of individual moral autonomy and the Roman Catholic doctrine of natural law. Bujo is critical of the way natural law, according to Aquinas, has been considered universally absolute without consideration of historical and cultural context (Bujo, 1990); the Roman Catholic appropriation of natural law (a universal moral code) reflects Western perspectives and philosophies and does not necessarily translate in an African context. Bujo suggested that a *palaver* is a traditional forum whereby individuals gather as a community to share their experiences and reflect on the history of their clan/tribe and the wisdom of their ancestors. This process lays the foundation for making ethical choices and shapes the collective identity of individuals, which is informed by their connection to one another and the history of their people. The palaver process diverts away from a static moral law and seems to look at reason and morality as an unfolding revelation. A discernment process leads to the formulation of communal norms within African culture. This process is open to development and improvement, unlike the laws of nature, and challenges the notion that African religions and cultures are static as they can often be perceived (Bujo, 1990). This is similar to how Black Theology enables Christians to reread the Bible from a perspective of justice and liberation within the context of suffering and oppression that changes in form over time.

A non-essentialist stance exposes the false dichotomy presented in moral law between universalism (synonymous with Western ways) and African philosophies. This sense of a 'natural divine law' active in all men is dismantled. Sayyid says:

The relationship between the universal and the West is central to maintaining the claim of one cultural formation to be the only legitimate form of power/knowledge... The battle between universalism and what are often described as particular claims of cultural authenticity, can be seen as a conflict about genealogies: about how to narrate the future of the world. The Western discourse is a product of several projects which narrate the world in terms of continuity of the West. The limits of Europe emerge when groups of people begin to articulate their position by rejecting Europe's claims that the world is its patent. (Sayyid, 1998, p. 385)

This decolonising method shared commonalities with Rastafari reasoning. To an extent, my awareness of the process informed how I designed the open discussions; however, I realised that its aversion to natural law would clash with the inherent bent towards natural law in ADR teachings. Although widely considered contextualised religious movements, they do not consider their own beliefs in this way and consider their perspectives universal.

On the relational aspect of my fieldwork, I considered self-differentiation, which accommodates the tension between the individual and community to exist but aims to promote the uniqueness, value and humanity of individuals in order that people (African women in this case) are not silenced in the collective voice. The use of individual stories to inform and reflect is perhaps the most accessible tool utilised within African theological discourse as the theory is a bridge between Western and African traditional philosophies of which many in the diaspora are caught.

By engaging in the work of self-differentiation, the changes that happen within will naturally have an impact on the system as a whole. Change the individual, change the system (Nyengele, 2004, p.182)

African theology largely draws upon the historic African communal institution; however, Nyengele suggests there is a danger that the needs and experiences of the individual will become lost among the theological discourses that focus on more general topics of Africa and Black particularities such as “race”, class, gender, tribe, rituals and languages. African feminist theology responds to this gap by telling individual stories yet affirms the communal approach toward liberation. Nyengele affirms the

tension between the individual and the community by critically discussing African feminist theology and family systems theory. African feminist theology, she argues, seeks to promote the individuality of women through self-differentiation by constructing inclusive anthropology that asserts the uniqueness, value and humanity of both men and women (Nyengele, 2004, p.175). Here, women's and men's individuality and community (relationality) are not in opposition but inform and support each other. What is valuable in this approach is that it creates a space for telling individual women's stories, in which women's voices are heard and their humanity is affirmed. Although this study looks explicitly at affirming relationality in the family structure and the local community, relationality is posited as an inclusive approach to humanity, the practice of love and justice between people that could be transferred to other contexts. This approach brings new contemporary issues to the fore whilst allowing a community or family to look back at historical issues with new eyes. This approach complements the palaver and feminist consciousness-raising process that I applied to my data collection by utilizing the tension between individual and communal experiences to address ethical issues. This is a valuable tool for the future of Black religious talk. Storytelling is a robust and fruitful resource for exploring the cultures and philosophies of everyday people. It does not break down the I/We philosophy but affirms and gives space for the voices that have been silenced. Both Bujo and Nyengele's methods connected with my intention to explore the relational aspect of the phenomena, the interaction between my participants and their pastors and families, specifically the breakdown in the relationship that contributed to becoming de-churched. This perhaps will be a future study.

Although I was unable to engage with African theology conceptually for this work, I feel it was necessary to document my encounter with these ideas because I believe they have much to contribute to the future of the study of Afroasiatic Diasporic Religion. Firstly, African theology can help broaden the conversation; being rooted in the Afroasiatic region but coming from different experiential localities, inculturation presents the exciting potential to investigate Afroasiatic religion and culture in a globalized and internet-based context. Secondly, African theological methodology, I believe, has great transferability for ethnographic research in Britain, specifically how it can contribute to relationships and solution finding for the Black-British church body in their various organisations.

8.3.2 Conservatism vs Liberalism

In the background of my research is the ever-growing polarisation between those on the "Left" and those on the "Right" this research process illuminates that it is, in fact, unlikely that the majority of people are wholly committed to either side, but these political and philosophical dichotomies undergird much of the unrest around social movements such as Black Lives Matters and the challenge it brings to the churches in Britain. Inspired by its basic concept and successful commitment to activism, which undeniable has brought racial discourse and social justice to the fore of society, what is lacking is a deeper consideration at the congregational level of its political and theological implications.

During the research process, I had begun to consider the issue of 'wealth' and 'power' as posited by Black liberationist theologians. I struggled to create a firm link between their Marxist position and what I perceived in the Black community to be, as Kehinde Andrews (2018) considered 'soft nationalism', and an economy within an economy that was essentially capitalist. Black Liberation Theology is often critiqued by the Christian "right" for taking a Marxist position that challenges the structures of power in the form of classes in society and lends itself to a socialist stance. The main argument is that Black theology situates Black identity in victimhood and draws upon Karl Marx's use of oppressed/oppressor to analyse social realities for Black people, White people inherently deemed as 'rich' oppressors and Black people as the poor and oppressed. Within this framework, Black theologians have developed a criticism of white supremacy and neo-colonialism across the Black Atlantic. Cone engages this conversation with a critique of capitalist powers, these powerful institutions that continue to hold Black communities in poverty and on Marxist thought, he says:

The Christian faith does not possess in its nature the means for analysing the structure of capitalism. Marxism as a tool of social analysis can disclose the gap between appearance and reality, and thereby help Christians to see things as they really are. (Cone, 1984)

Cone suggested that one can use Marxism as a tool, regardless of its atheist roots, to aid the theological quest of demonstrating the injustices perpetrated by the White ruling powers over the poor Black

oppressed. In *For My People* (1984), Cone calls for Christ of the third world to redefine Marxism to serve their purpose – to shed light on the evils of those in power. In *The Future of Liberation theology: an argument and manifesto* (2017), Ivan Petrella criticises the way liberation theologies have poorly conceptualised capitalism. Petrella contends that by reasserting and rearticulating the core themes of their theology, they have maintained a critique of capitalism that is fast becoming redundant. Whilst it has and can be argued that capitalism has been used to support colonisation and slavery, Petrella calls for a revision of this objection according to the realities of today, and that liberation theologians must consider the opportunities that capitalism affords all peoples to develop new historical projects. Here, the new task is to re-theorise capitalism and rework it into socialism so that Liberation theologies can finally contribute practically to the development, empowerment and enrichment of poor peoples. Although Petrella speaks primarily about liberations theologies in impoverished countries (in Latin America), the sentiment can also apply to Black Liberation Theology which is developed from impoverished communities within an economically developed country.

Petrella's contribution brings this conversation back to the relevance of Black Theology in this current dialogue about the social development of the Black community. Whilst activists may argue that statistically, Black people are the underdogs in Western society, it could also be argued that more than ever, we are seeing a fast-growing Black professional and middle class developing, Black millionaires, internationally renowned celebrities, not to mention prominent politicians and that the nature of capitalism supports all this. While one observes a significant rise in individual success and prosperity within the Black Atlantic community, Black Theology is concerned with collective success and liberation. Cornel West challenges Black Theologians to consider the nature and notion of the liberation they seek for Black peoples and go beyond 'getting theirs' he says, 'if this is the social vision of Black theologians, they should drop the meretricious and flamboyant term "liberation" and adopt the more accurate and sober word "inclusion"' (West, 1979, p. 879). In *Black Theology and Marxist Thought* (1979), West draws our attention to the systems and processes developed by Marxist thinkers to ensure participatory democracy. These models claim to ensure liberation from a capitalist system that provides prosperity for the few and instead intend to redistribute wealth equally. West asserts that this is in line

with the spirit of Black Liberation Theology, that it is not enough to want to succeed in the existing systems but to introduce a new radical system that redistributes power.

Considering Cone and West's dialogue with Marxism this way, fiscal wealth seems to have become a distasteful concept in Black Liberation Theology. It is often affiliated with the wealth of neo-colonial powers, the government, large corporations and old families that have benefitted from the enslavement of Africans. This attitude towards personal wealth and capitalist methods for betterment is contrary to the attitudes of many within the Black conscious community, the de-churched and among the ADRs who want to utilize capitalism to become wealthy by competing, creating successful businesses and who want to develop a thriving Black economy within the larger Western economy – without the need for 'big government' intervention. Black Theology's concept of liberation is still embedded in the action of resisting, uncovering and surviving and, in my opinion, struggles to translate into day-to-day action for flourishing and economic empowerment. Although West claims that Black Theology does not elaborate on the ideal society, it is certainly opposed to American mainstream ideals considered 'conservative'.

This is but one example of the 'right' and 'left' tensions referred to earlier. I believe I have captured others in my data chapter, primarily theological and methodological approaches to scripture conceptualized for contemporary meanings of conservative and or liberal or progressive. Afroasiatic religions have much to contribute to this discussion theologically, especially using the preservation-liberation framework. Afroasiatic religions are neither radical nor submissive to existing British systems. However, because of their high view of scripture, their ideals find connection points in both pools - I believe this has inspired their communities to build businesses, contribute to community development and seek self-sufficiency.

I contend that progressive or liberal theological premises underestimate the power of plain reading and authoritative truth assumptions within Black ethnoreligious movements towards the solution-finding process, anti-racism and community empowerment. Unless they propose a humanist overhaul of Black

Christianity, which I suspect is the desired end goal for many, Black theologians should continue to positively regard the ethnoreligious connection to bible-based religions that birthed much of its resistance efforts during legal subjugation. Losing connection with the cultures, traditions, interpretations, and religious verve that underpinned these resistances for cosmopolitanism and wholly new British identities threatens the ethnoreligious institutions that have strengthened oppressed peoples to survive and build in hostile environments.

8.3.3 Black Urban Apologetics

Considering what has been achieved with this thesis, my first recommendation for future research is a more exhaustive comparative analysis of twenty-first-century Afroasiatic religions in Britain. I feel that there is still room for further documentation and investigation of these religions that would serve the Black-British studies as it pertains to religion, culture, theology, identity, politics and sociology. I have demonstrated that these Afroasiatic Diasporic Religions operate on the sidelines but can generate interest in academic studies and particularly change the shape and culture of more White, male-dominated departments such as biblical studies and apologetics.

The field of apologetics within Christian theology is concerned with answering questions about and claims against the faith using evidence, logic and reason. Typical topics include creationism vs evolution, the reality of God, life after death, human experiences and the validity of scripture. It is philosophically situated in modernist perspectives that value empirical evidence, absolute truths, and high regard for the Biblical scriptures. Apologetics is very popular in conservative, evangelical and reformed denominations of Christianity who, generally speaking, position scripture and Christ as the revelation of God's authority on all matters. During my research, it has been encouraging to see the growing fields of urban apologetics in North America - the arm of apologetics that speaks to the experiences, questions, and needs of Black and Brown urban communities. Christopher Brooks, in *Urban Apologetics*, defines this task as equipping Christians and ministers with the foundational tools for engaging in Urban Apologetics; he says,

The greatest of these tools are wise and well-framed biblical answers to the questions Urban America is asking of the faith. These issues range from matters of poverty, public policy and personal suffering to those of social justice and sexual identity. (Brooks 2003. p. 17)

Brooks calls for the role of the apologist to be well resourced with sound theological teaching and support from the local Church and individual who is spiritually, socially and intellectually gifted to respond to the difficult questions and hostile claims made against the Christian Faith. Black Urban Apologetics is based on the same foundation as (Western) apologetics but speaks particularly to the context of black urban peoples and Black religions often termed mystery cults such as the Nation of Islam, (Black) Hebrew Israelites, Five-Percenters, Kemetic scientists and the wider Black conscious community.

In its early stages of development, Black Urban Apologists (pastors and teachers) have the task of internal reflection, working through some of the attributes it has inherited from the wider evangelical/conservative apologetic movement. Typically, apologetics has been male-dominated, heavy debate spaces undergirded by 'colourblind', conservative Christian interpretation of scripture. BUA has employed a more relatable discussion method (rather than debate), has sought to engage women's expertise in theology and religion and is more self-critical of the wider Church, the Black Church, and the Black religious movement in urban communities. BUA has achieved in a decade what Black theology has failed to do in over half a century; bridge the gap between academia, the Church and the streets, and I hypothesise that it is developing a postcolonial conservative space that meets the spiritual, social, and intellectual needs of the Black-British and de-churched.

Lisa Fields, for example, has made a considerable contribution to Black Urban Apologetics in America by developing the JUDE 3 PROJECT, which creates content to help Black Christians defend their faith through apologetics, aiming the conversations at historical, political, and social issues that affect the African American community. This is particularly exceptional because of the lack of Black and/or female apologists in the wider world of apologetics. She acts as a facilitator and develops a discussion-based style, opposing the confrontational debate style that dominated apologetics. Lisa also takes her work beyond the Urban community. In an interview with Christianity Today, she says,

Black people in the inner city *need apologetics, but black people in the suburbs do*. We offer apologetics for black people across socioeconomic statuses. So that is where I would say Jude 3 is a bit broader. While I want to connect to the black person on the corner, I also want to connect with black people on the Hill in DC who have brunch every Saturday. (Christianity Today, 2018)

Through online courses, day conferences, speaking engagements, and social media, Lisa Fields has contributed to forming the network of Black Christian intellectuals, ministers, and teachers. Field's YouTube channel covers key issues and questions to engage the defectors, equip Christians, and inspire all to study further. Although apologetics is historically found in theologically (and often socially) conservative spaces, Fields expands her network beyond this tradition and dialogues with progressive thinkers to provide a transparent discussion of Black God-talk in the twenty-first century.

Dr Eric Mason, Pastor of Epiphany Church and author of *Woke Church: an urgent call for Christians in America to confront racism and injustice* (2018), realises his apologetic enterprise through the pulpit. Mason acknowledges the need for robust theological education in the general discipleship of churchgoers and shapes his sermons with components of biblical studies, theological reflection, and his congregation's lived experiences in Black America. Mason asserts,

We need textbooks that reflect truth concerning biblical history. The Images used should display the richness and diversity of our faith. Practical theology classes need to be developed that focus on the needs in Black, poor, and middle-class spheres. We must help people to understand how the Bible addresses key questions concerning dignity, Identity and significance. (Mason, 2018, p. 149)

Mason is among a throng of ministers who speak out against the whitewashing of Christian education, colour-blind and racist attitudes towards colleagues and contextualised theological discussions. Beyond articulate rebuttals, Mason's ministry is an example of how these theologically conservative yet socially

conscious churches are engaging in social justice activities, from feeding programmes and career advice to advocating for change in public education policies.

Brother Berean is a YouTube personality who regularly uploads discussions and commentaries about Black consciousness and Christian Faith. As a Pentecostal Christian who grew up in an urban context and has been through his own experience of religious exploration into the mystery cults, Berean's mission is to engage in intellectual debate with claims against the validity of Christianity. This resource is informal and conversational and is aimed at the street level conversations often missed by the church and intellectual efforts. In this way, Berean has utilised social media to engage with other YouTube personalities that are heavily influential within the Black conscious community and debate with some leading critics. Berean is a clear example of how Black Urban Apologetics has developed in-house criticism on several levels, firstly within the wider apologetics world (often on issues of racism and dominant interpretations), secondly within the Black Church and academic spheres (often on issues of doctrine and liberal interpretations), and last within the Black religious community (often on issues of pseudo-scholarship and integrity).

These are but a few examples of many people who transform how Black people engage with their Black, Bible-based religious traditions. I believe that forming bridges between the academy, the Church, and Afroasiatic Diasporic religions (as they present themselves) would be a huge step towards having true power, participation, and presence in the unfolding of our Black religious and theological study. I am keen to contribute to defining a critical Black diasporic theological space that engages the various methods I have outlined in this section: African Theologies, Black Urban Apologetics, Black Liberation Theologies and the Afroasiatic Diasporic Religions as a more full and systematic response to the de-churched phenomenon.

8.4 Final Remarks: Lessons for the Church

While this study has focused on the underlying drives of the de-churched and the ADR rationale, I have not given much attention to some undeniably racist and supremacist attitudes and ideals among the body

of ADR teachings. Nevertheless, I felt that it was essential to highlight the underpinning drives of these communities to voice their critical capacity to engage with decolonisation. From a Christian perspective, one must ask, what does this study mean for Christianity? Are we to accept the de-churched phenomenon as for the best? Is an attempt to 'win them back for the Lord', in fact, a colonial mechanism of control and assertion of undue power? Am I suggesting that ADR is the solution for Christianity's true decolonisation?

I first remind the reader that this study has undertaken ethnographic research to understand a particular community's inner mind in response to these questions. I have not sought to authenticate nor validate their positions. Good research, however, should develop learning outcomes for interested parties and so for the Church; I consider these lessons derived from my exploration:

- The de-churched have described the Church as an *unsafe space* for asking questions about Black identity concerning faith and Christian/Church history. This study has presented a possible approach to transforming the learning space in a Christian setting.
- The de-churched seek to be heard and acknowledged, and guided on their journey to reconcile faith and identity among a community of like-minded people.
- The de-churched are seeking a community that rejects the 'White Man's Religion', rediscovering the true religion and teachings of the Bible and severing ties with colonial Christianity.

Decolonisation applied to Christianity and theology helps respond to these issues. Although many sceptics consider complete decolonisation as an unattainable and unrealistic goal, few people would argue that there is no room for improvement when considering the equality and visibility of Black and Brown peoples in established institutions such as the organised Church.

Power – Decolonisation calls for the dismantling or reform of historic colonial structures and institutions to share power among all participants from all communities.

Presence – Decolonisation calls for the recognition of the presence of the 'other': non-White peoples that have made significant contributions to the shaping of society in the case of British

contexts. It also considers ways in which the presence of the 'other' critiques the existing power structures.

Participation – Decolonisation demands a seat at the table for the 'other' to shape their experiences in society in a meaningful way. This would be an equal contribution that accepts contextualised and nuanced presuppositions, knowledge forms and outcomes.⁸

The strength of ADR's appeal to the fringes of the Black-British Christian body seems to be rooted in how they establish connections with their ancestors as Chosen people of God. This, of course, is exclusive, but it also serves as a corrective. ADR suggests that Christianity or Bible religion has been birthed from within the Afroasiatic region, among people of colour, cultures, traditions, and languages integral to interpreting scripture. Churches that do not maintain this exclusive view of 'choseness' based on ethnicity and nation can still employ some of this emphasis in Christian teaching to correct the whitewashed epistemologies that currently maintain a colourblind stance.

I suggest three G's, that emerge from my research (first published in 2021 in a collection on *Intercultural Preaching* edited by Anthony G. Reddie, Seidel Boanerges and Pamela Searle)

1. **Get geographic** -

Getting geographic refers to the use of maps and detailing of locations. The focus here is on the perspective of the maps and using them to familiarise our listeners with the Afroasiatic world of the Bible – rather than just the 'Bible lands'. By attaching significance to the landscape and trying to understand the relationships between people groups – hearers of the word can in some way draw parallels in their own lives and discover points of application - in every account, the intervention of God was necessary. Further to this, we can use maps to correct the gaze of the listeners helping them to see that many of the biblical accounts took place on the continent of Africa and that when

⁸ This is a definition I have formalised in the last year of study. Emerging from this research, I have used this body of text in two research projects. 1) Visions of Colour, an anti-racism resource I am developing for the Baptist Union of Great Britain, 2) Childrens Christian resources and racism, a report developed for the council for World Missions.

one reads the Bible, on many occasions, they are reading the religious history of Egyptians, Ethiopians, Canaanites, Nubians, Tunisians and Sudanese.

2. Get genealogical

My second suggestion is to use the genealogies in the Bible. While they can seem like the most tedious part of Scripture, particularly in the case of Yeshua the Messiah, His documented genealogy shows us how God uses people, ethnicity, and lineage to realise His plan for redemption. Redemption is not found in the lofty ideas of present-day prophets and teachers but in the incarnation of Christ, the person – both human and divine. These genealogies together allow people a way to see how Christ, our central figure for redemption, is linked to all people - both mysteriously and physically.

3. Go global

We must allow the voices of non-White peoples to tell the story of redemption through their own ethnic and cultural perspectives. This creates a sense of democracy, distributing responsibility among other qualified and spiritually gifted brothers and sisters by eliminating the one-sided preaching shaped by the Eurocentric gaze. In this way, the diversity within a multicultural congregation has room to thrive and flourish rather than fall back to the (dis)comfort of the dominant culture.

By getting geographic, genealogical, and global, churches can begin to overcome the theological conundrums in twenty-first-century society. By embracing an ethnic-centred reading of scripture, preachers can *preserve the* religious integrity and authority of scripture yet *liberate* our perspectives from the lie of colour-blindness and the dominance of colonial power structures.

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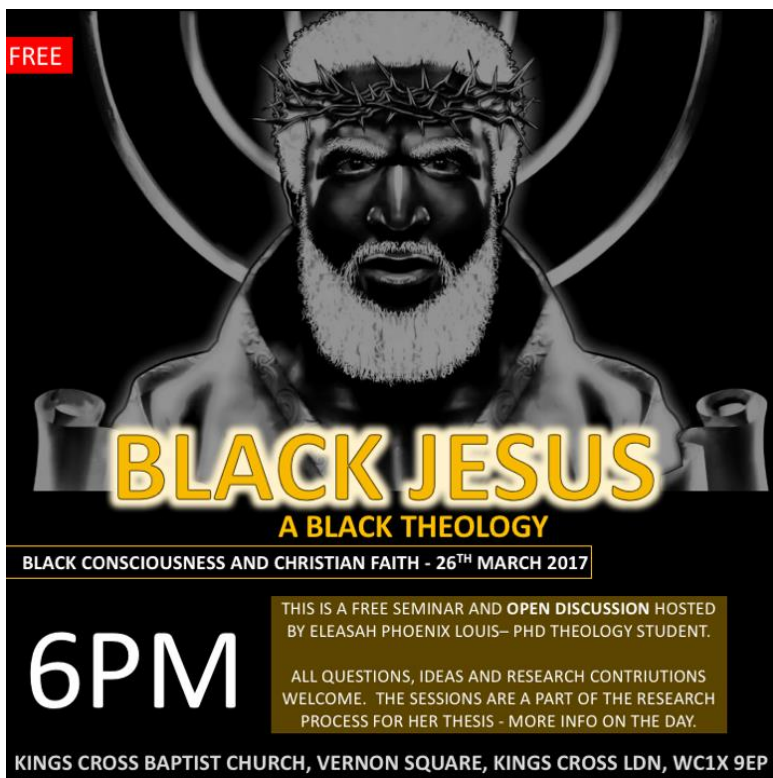
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Appendix A

5. Flyers



JOIN US FOR AN INTENSE DISCUSSION
AND THE OPPORTUNITY TO SHARE YOUR
IDEAS!
ALL ARE WELCOME.


**BLACK
CONSCIOUSNESS
AND CHRISTIAN
FAITH PT.2**

IS CHRISTIANITY MERELY RE-TELLING
AND OLDER STORY FROM ANCIENT
EGYPT?
HAS IT BEEN REPACKAGED AND SOLD
TO US AS SOMETHING NEW?
WHAT WOULD IT MEAN FOR US IF IT
WERE TRUE.. OR IF IT WAS FOUND TO
BE A FALSE CLAIM?

LECTURE. Q&A AND GROUP DISCUSSION - STATE YOUR CASE!

SUNDAY 8TH MAY 2016 - 6PM

OUT OF KEMET?

KINGS CROSS BAPTIST CHURCH // WC1X 9EP 

WHITE
SUPREMACY
CONSPIRACY
THEORY
BLACK POWER
CHURCH
TRADITION
DOCTRINE
AFROCENTRICITY

**STATE
YOUR
CASE**

6PM

SUN 6TH NOV 2016

KINGS CROSS BAPTIST CHURCH, LONDON, WC1X 9EP

We welcome you to STATE YOUR CASE at our next BCCF event. As we move into the next phase we want to round up the last with dialogue, ideas and questions led by YOU. Contact us to apply for a short slot to present your case: ephoenixlouis@gmail.com

 **BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS AND CHRISTIAN FAITH**

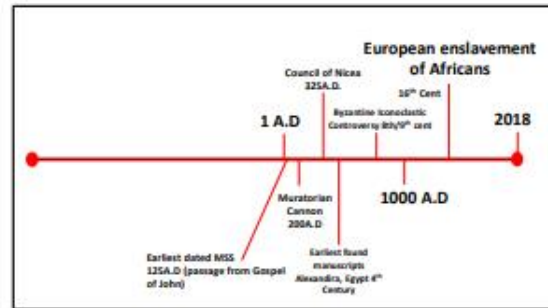
6. Session Presentations

6.1 White Man's Religion?

**BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS
AND CHRISTIAN FAITH**

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[@BCCF_UK // BCCFBLOG.WORDPRESS.COM](https://www.bccfblog.wordpress.com)

1



2

**STATISTICALLY BLACK PEOPLE
IN THE UK ARE OPPRESSED BY
SYSTEMATIC RACISM**

The slide features a silhouette of a person on the left and six raised fist icons arranged in a 2x3 grid on the right, symbolizing resistance and oppression.

3

ENSLAVEMENT COLONIALISM WHITE SUPREMACY

- The European colonial/imperial power was a church/state affair
- Africans were enslaved in the name of civilization/Christ
- White Jesus is still a dominant image

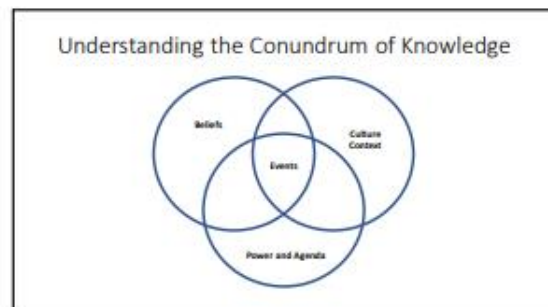
OPPRESSION CHRISTIANIZING BIBLE MEDDLING

4

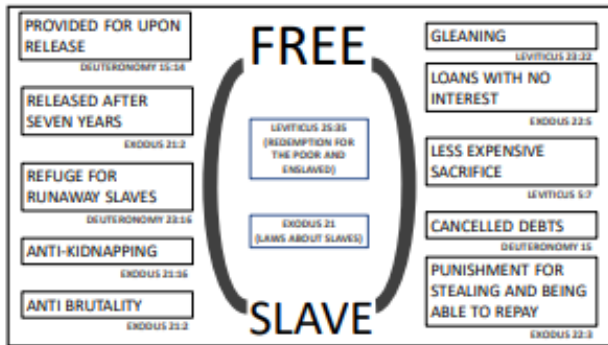
'A religious pragmatism folded into economic opportunity, uniting church and profit'.
 -Robert Beckford, *Discomfiting as asceticism: revisiting the development of Colonial Christianity*

'Taking the term colonial Christianity to mean the specific religion transmitted to enslaved and free Africans in the United States of America between 17th and 20th centuries.'
 -Michael Tlotson, *A critical history of the contemporary black church* (2010).

5



6



7

LET'S NOT BEAT AROUND THE BUSH....

- YES - THE SLAVE OWNERS WERE PERMITTED TO PHYSICALLY DISCIPLINE THEIR SLAVES
- YES - LEVITICUS 25:45 SAYS THAT SLAVE OWNERS COULD TREAT FOREIGN SLAVES AS THEIR PROPERTY, PASSING THEM ON AS AN INHERITANCE
- YES - A MAN COULD SELL HIS DAUGHTER AS A SLAVE, ACCORDING TO EXODUS 21 IN THIS INSTANCE SHE WOULD NOT BE FREED AFTER 7 YEARS AS THE MEN WERE...

8

Which Image of Christ?

Beliefs
Iconoclasm – YAY or NAY?
Byzantine Iconoclastic Controversy 8th and 9th Century (AD)

Culture
Representative of the people?

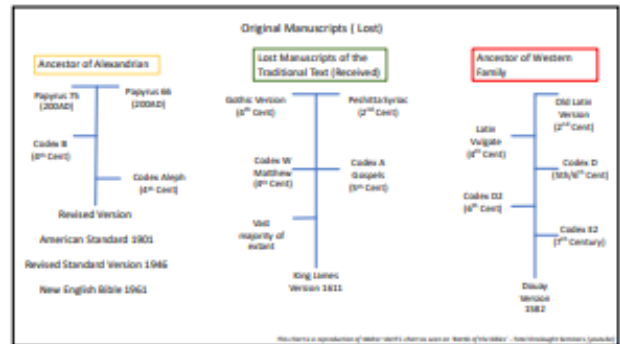
Agenda
European severed roots (KANT) - RACE: A Theological Account, J. Kameron Carter
Black power come back – Black Jesus?

SYMBOLISM, REVELATION OR IDOLOTRY?

A CONTEXTUAL CHRIST?

CAUGHT IN A CYCLE?

9



10

Materials used

- Papyrus, a perishable material made from the papyrus plant located in Egypt and Syria
- Parchment (animal skin)
- Vellum (calf skin)

Textual Criticism
Involves a systematic way of discerning the MSS most like the original

There are around 24,000 early NT manuscripts, 3000 of which are Greek Text, the rest being early translations, lectionaries and quotations from church fathers

11

Author	Written	Earliest Copies	Time Span	# of copies
Caesar	100-44 B.C.	A.D. 900	1,000 yrs.	10
Plato (<i>Tetralogies</i>)	427-347 B.C.	A.D. 900	1,200 yrs.	7
Thucydides	460-400 B.C.	A.D. 900	1,300 yrs.	8
Sophocles	496-406 B.C.	A.D. 1,000	1,400 yrs.	100
Catullus	54 B.C.	A.D. 1,650	1,600 yrs.	3
Euripides	480-406 B.C.	A.D. 1,100	1,500 yrs.	9
Aristotle	384-322 B.C.	A.D. 1,100	1,400 yrs.	5
THE SECOND RUNNER UP.....				
Homer (<i>Iliad</i>)	750-700 B.C.	200 B.C.	500 yrs.	643
AND THE WINNER IS.....				
God (<i>The N.T.</i>)	A.D. 40-100	A.D. 125	25 yrs.	24,000+

12

Matthew 6:13 King James Version (KJV)
 13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: **For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.**

Matthew 18:11 King James Version (KJV)
 11 For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost.

Mark 2:17 King James Version (KJV)
 17 When Jesus heard it, he saith unto them, They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: **I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.**

13

Origen

- 185-254, Alexandria - Egypt, Africa
- His interests were in exegetical writings
- Directed the production of the 'Hexapla' a work for word comparison of scriptures between Hebrew, the Septuagint and other local Greek translations
- Embraced and was influenced by philosophy
- Interpreted the scriptures literally and allegorically: the literal sense, the moral application and the spiritual sense
- His commentaries looked for a hidden spiritual truth rather than historical significance- although valuable
- Taught in Alexandria after Clement of Alexandria
- Learned Hebrew in order to read the Old Testament in its original form
- Themes included Christ, the Holy Spirit, Creation, the soul, free will and salvation

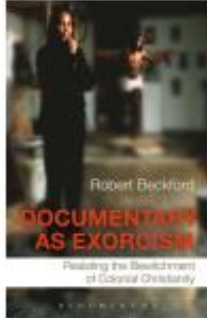
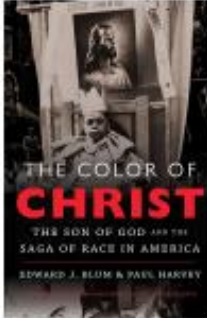


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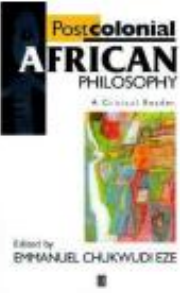
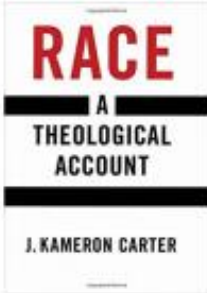
The Identity Crisis

- In-House: The culture upgrade
- In-House: Colour-Blind Theologies
- In-House: The missing histories-
Transparancey

15

16

17

6.2 Out of Kemet?

BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS AND CHRISTIAN FAITH

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1

SESSION 1

Setting the context: White Man's Religion?

- 1) Slavery in the Bible
- 2) White Jesus
- 3) Bible Conspiracy

Why is the conversation important?
 What does it have to do with Black identity?
 Can you be black, conscious and Christian?



2

OUT OF KEMET?

- The race battle for Egypt – Who were the inhabitants of one of the most mysterious, powerful and intellectual known nations in history?
- A religious point of origin of people of Africa decent – the “cradle of civilization” come against the idea of Africans being “less than” and barbaric
- Reinstating Kemet/Egypt as Africa/African is a matter of justice and the exposing of European hijacking

3

Charles Gabriel Seligman – Races of Africa

“Apart from relatively late semitic influence... the civilizations of the Hamites, its history is the record of these people and of their interaction with the two other African stocks, the Negro and the Bushmen, whether this influence was exerted by highly civilised Egyptians or by such wider pastoralists as are represented at the present day by the Beja and Somali... The incoming Hamites were pastoral ‘Europeans’ – arriving wave after wave – better armed as well as quicker witted than the dark agricultural negro’s”

- page 96

4

Black Genesis

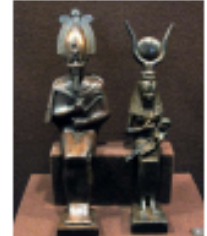
“In spite of many clues that have been in place in the past few decades, which strongly favour a Black African origin for the pharaohs, many scholars and especially Egyptologists have either ignored them, confused them, or, worst of all, derided or scorned those who entertained them.”

- pg1

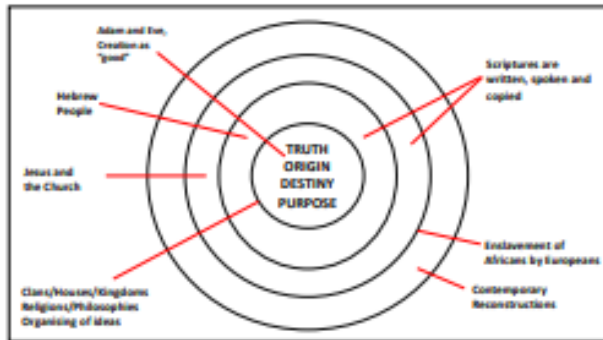
5

Jesus Account Stolen from Egyptian Myth?

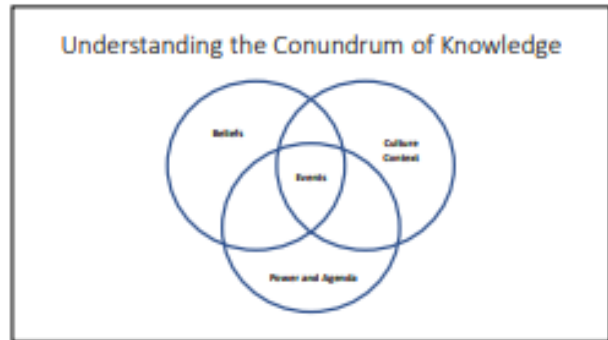
1. Christianity was created to control and subdue the masses – it has repackaged an ancient Egyptian myth and clothed it in white supremacy
2. Christianity dons itself as the ultimate truth, that is superior and against occult practices
3. Christianity severs its roots from Africa by not admitting that is has stolen from its ancient mythical belief systems



6



7



8

Key Biblical Figures and Early Interactions

Abram and Sarai in Egypt - Genesis 12
Joseph in Egypt – from Genesis 37
Moses a Hebrew/Egyptian? – from Exodus 2

All had an interaction with people in Power
All had an interaction with God: plague, dreams, judgement

All stayed in the land for a while

9

DIM MUROCK (Mythicist) – CHRIST IN EGYPT

1. Horus Birth announced by a star in the east and attended by three wise men
2. He was of royal line and his mother was the Virgin Isis-Mary
3. At the age of 12 he was a teacher in the temple and at age 30 he was baptised
4. Horus performed miracles, exorcised demons and raised Osiris from the dead
5. The Egyptian god has 12 disciples
6. The god walked on water
7. Horus was crucified by two thieves
8. Horus/Osiris was also the way the truth and the life / Messiah
9. Horus' personal epithet was "Iusa", the "ever becoming son" of One, while Osiris was the KRST
10. Horus battled with the "evil one" Set/Seth
11. Horus was to reign for one thousand years

10

Some Opposing Responses

1. There is no evidence of this in any of the Horus stories – he was born in a swamp
2. Isis was not a virgin according to the Horus account. There is no evidence of Meri/Mary being part of her name.
3. There is no evidence that Horus taught in a temple nor do the texts seem to try account for those years in such a way
4. Horus may have performed miracles as a god but there is no evidence for walking on water, exorcising demons nor raising the dead.
5. This was concluded by a 20th century poet and amateur Egyptologist Gerald Massey based on an image of "the twelve who reap harvest" although Horus was an out in the image. There is no account of Horus having 12 disciples.
6. There is no account for Horus' crucifixion. In some accounts he doesn't die, in others he merges with the sun god and a parallel account he was cut into the water in pieces and later retrieved by crocodiles.
7. The word KRST in Egyptian means "burial" it was not a title... the other titles are nowhere to be found in the Egyptian texts although he was called other names such as "chief of power", "Master of heaven" etc...

11

Back to textual criticism and the editorial process.

Struggles for many years could not be decided. The discovery of the Rosetta stone was the breakthrough Egyptologists had been waiting for.

However we must consider the complexities and limitations of the decoding process considering that the Rosetta stone is partial and (partly) blank. Decoding is CHALLENGING.

The Book of the Dead (Book of Coming Forth by Day) is not one book. They are spells and illustrations that were buried with individual mummies, that was to help them in the after life.

There various sources for the Osiris myth such as the Pyramid texts and the Demotic Kamesareum Papyrus (Lemmonian papyrus).

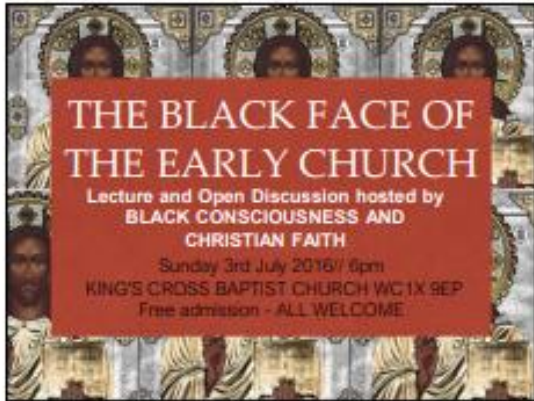
Cracking down on the best sources in this case are difficult!

A lot of what we know on this topic is the repeated thus resulting associations of scholars (who are in general) or of mythicists who were not specialists.

Apologists tend to overlook the claims asserted by the mythicists.

12

6.3 The Black Face of the Early Church



1



2

- Our aim is to organise and facilitate progressive conversation between **BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS** and **CHRISTIAN FAITH**
- As christians we aim to respond to important (and difficult) questions concerning black histories, religion, spirituality, and ideologies through discussion and research
 - Can you be black, conscious and christian?
 - Is christianity a white mans religion?
 - Is christianity a force for liberation
 - Brainwashed
 - History and facts according to who?
- We are based in London, UK and welcome anyone and everyone

3

Lectures
 Group discussions
 Panel discussions
 Research
 Book recommendations

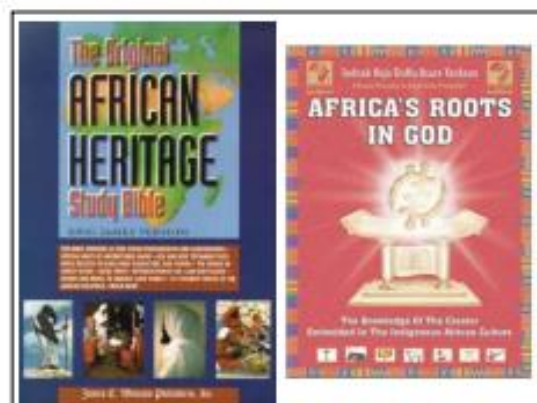
4

Overview

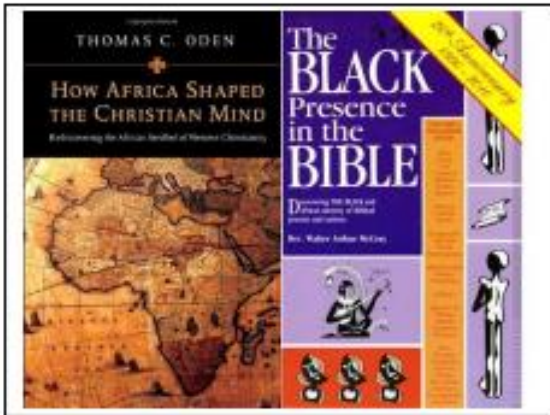
- Timeline
- Desert mothers and fathers
- African concepts and western theology



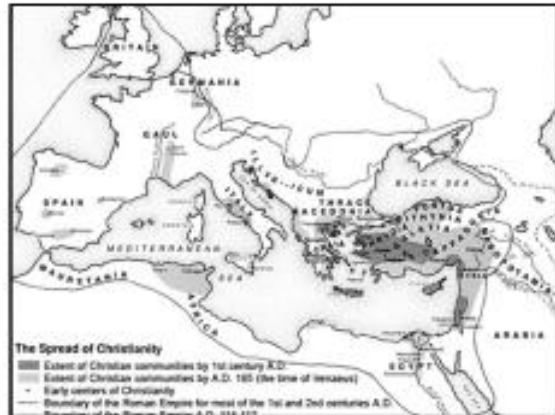
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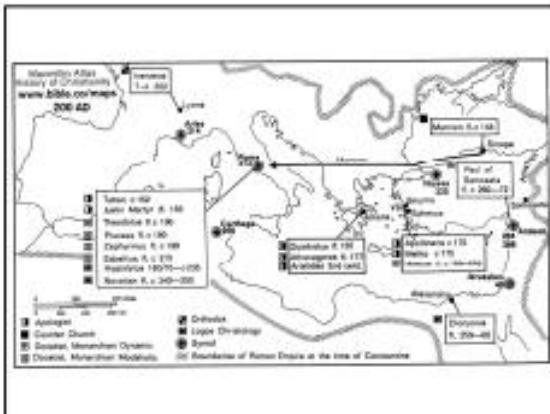
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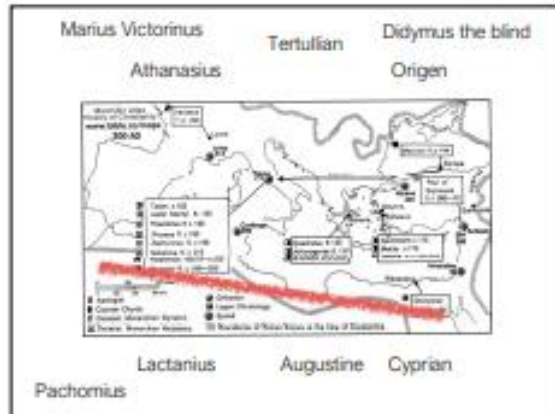
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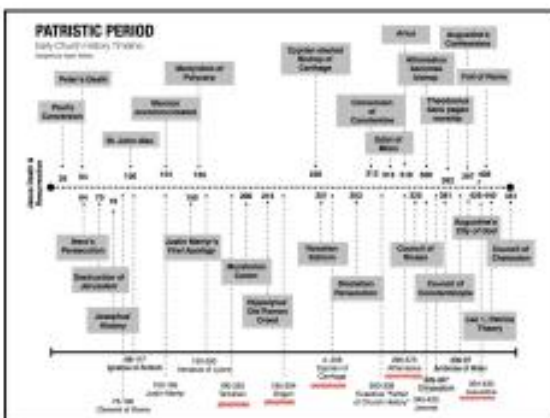
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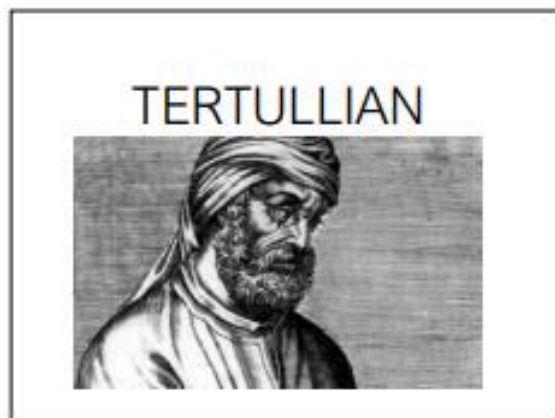
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10



11



12

Tertullian - Quintus Septimius Florens Tertullianus (160-220AD) from Carthage
 Known as the father of Latin Christianity or founder of western theology
 Oldest extant writer to use the word Trinity, his formula for the Trinity later used
 Thought to be a lawyer and proved but the evidence is sparse and mainly an interpretation of his writings
 Later he separated from the universal church (catholic) to become
 Topics: Apologetics
 Political human rights
 Gnosticism
 Paganism
 His teachings:
 His soul is not pre-existing nor subject to re-embodiment (transmigration of the soul into body of another) or resurrection, it is a new creation, proceeding equally from the parents - TRINITY/COSMISM
 The soul suffers, in bondage to Satan, his seeds of good and when awakened calls upon God
 All unconscious victims: angels to women, fear of demons, the mourning on death, fertility (being soul and genital), judgement of God
 Trinity - single substance, words of God, principle of divine reason and creative order) doctrine, 3 persons, 1 substance. His teaching on the Trinity invites a subordination of the son to the father but in the later (and) form of Arianism the church rejected as heretical (W. La Scola - Tertullian: The new catholic encyclopedia Thompson Gale, 2003, vol 13 pg 837)

13

ORIGEN



14

Origen: Origen Adamantius
 Born in Alexandria
 Lived a life of asceticism (severe self-discipline)
 His interests were on exegesis
 Textual critic
 Directed the production of the Hexapla - a word for word comparison of the Greek Septuagint with original Hebrew and other Greek translations
 Embraced and influenced by philosophy
 Interpreted the scriptures both literally and allegorically
 Brief summaries of the meaning of difficult texts
 Homilies (speeches/preaching)
 Book/commentaries (his commentaries sought a hidden spiritual truth rather than a historical significance although it still played a part in his work.)
 Origen taught in Alexandria is recognized in the teaching of the gospels in terms which could be understood by people familiar with the highest form of Greek culture. Establishing the intelligible/philosophical elements of the faith.
 He learned Hebrew to read the Old Testament in original language
 His theory of three levels of meaning: the literal sense, the moral application to the soul, the allegorical/spiritual sense

15

His teachings:

- Pre existence of the soul. God created many souls who were initially devoted to contemplation and love. Those commitments wanes. Those whose love diminished most became demons, then human souls, then angels. The one who remained perfect in love became one with God - Jesus
- The condition the souls were born into was dependant on what the pre-existent souls did
- His conception of God the father as apophatic - so perfect and incomprehensible, he used a negative theology (what God is not rather than what he is)
- The material world was created following our falling as a transitional reality in which we can re-ascend to a purer reality

16

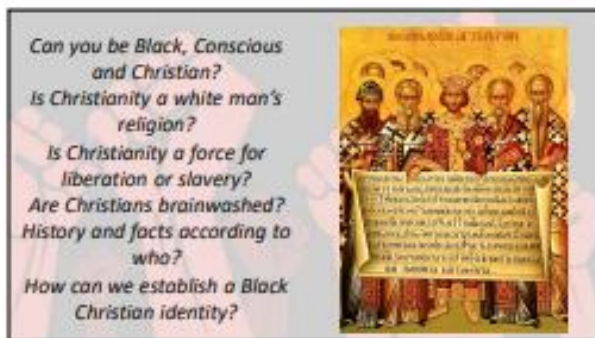
6.4 Black Jesus Black Theology



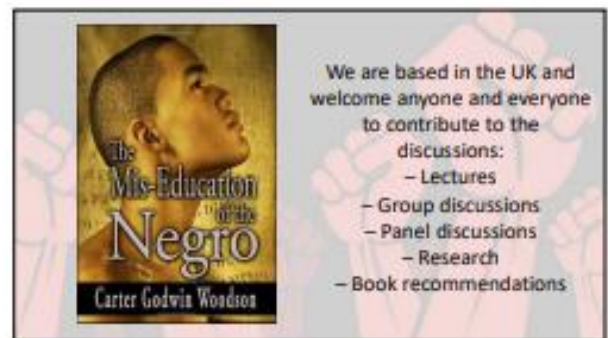
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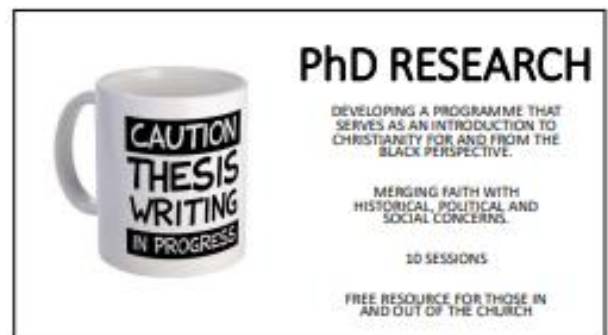
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4



5



6

ETHICS

- People being heard
- Reclaiming our critical voice and right to speak for ourselves
- Making theology and everyday practice for all types of people: making sense of our personal experiences and how they relate to God
- Respect yet critique ideas and interpretations
- Take a journey from discovery to recovery
- Establishing justice through education

7

RULES

1. Speak truthfully and only on behalf of yourself
2. Back up your statements with scripture, experience or an academic resource
3. Show respect and patience for one another

8

Tools

- Academic resources – historical records, artefacts, architecture, books that make cases for new ideas based on extensive credible research
- Scripture – for those who are Christians we believe the Bible is the word of God so how does it speak to our situation and how do we make sense of the bible as a historical/spiritual document(s)
- Alternative spiritual ideas – where is the idea from (source)? What does it mean?
- Experiences – our day to day interactions with the world: people, politics, environment, life and death

9

WHAT IS BLACK THEOLOGY?

10

Roots....

- Social Gospel of the 1800's and 1900's was an activist interpretation of the gospel – a call to 'mirror Jesus activity on behalf of the despise'
- The Black churches recognised need for a theology that gives attention to racism and the oppression of Black people in America.
- 'Being a Christian was commitment to the welfare of those who struggle'
- During the civil rights era black power and Christianity were beginning to form an articulated relationship
- Liberation theologies arose simultaneously in various contexts, liberation theology of Latin America, feminist liberation theology and black theology

11

KEY FIGURES IN BLACK LIBERATIONIST THOUGHT


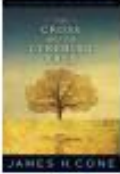
- NAT TURNER
- MARCUS GARVEY
- HOWARD THURMAN
- MARTIN LUTHER KING JR
- ALBERT CLEAGE



12

JAMES HAL CONE

Chair, Anglican Bridge
Distinguished Professor of
Systematic Theology at [Lutheran
Theological Institute in the City of
New York](#)

(1989) (2011)

13

It is involvement in the struggle with the oppressed against oppressive contracts which has led to the assertion made by James Cone that 'God is Black'. He explains:

Because Blacks have come to know themselves as Black, and because that blackness is the cause of their own love of themselves and hatred of whiteness, the blackness of God is the key to our knowledge of God. The blackness of God, and everything implied by it in a racist society, is the heart of the Black theology doctrine of God. There is no place in Black theology for a colorless God in a society where human beings suffer precisely because of color. The Black theologian must reject any conception of God which stifles Black self-determination by picturing God as a God of all peoples. Either God is identified with the oppressed to the point that their experience becomes God's experience, or God is a God of racism.²⁶

James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1984), p. 11.

PARADIGMS FOR A BLACK THEOLOGY IN BRITAIN
Edwidge Lee 2016-17

14

'BLACK THEOLOGY IS UNDERSTOOD AS THE DELIBERATE ATTEMPT TO CONNECT THE REALITY AND SUBSTANCE OF BEING BLACK AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF IDEAS SURROUNDING BLACKNESS WITH ONES SACRED TALK OF GOD AND GOD'S RELIIONSHIP WITH THE MASS OF SUFFERING HUMANITY WHO MIGHT BE DESCRIBED AS BEING BLACK PEOPLE'

B.S. BLEDDE - IN GOD OUR COLOR-BLIND?



Addressing to Professor Edwidge Lee in the
Department of Philosophy, Practical and
Systemic Theology at the University of South
Africa.

15

Defining Black Theology in Britain

When speaking of Black theology in Britain, I am referring to the specific well-stated concept of reimagining the meaning of God as revealed in Jesus the Christ, in light of ancestral Black experience in Britain. This approach to engaging with the Christian tradition is not unlike Black theology in differing senses such as the U.S., the Caribbean or South Africa, where one's point of departure is the emotional and ontological reality of Blackness and the Black experience, in dialogue with "Holy Scripture."

Black theology in Britain, like all theologies of liberation, is generated by the necessity of *either/or* rather than *and/both*. In using this statement, what I mean to suggest is that one's starting point in talking about God is generated by the necessity to find a basis for acting in response to the material or spiritual and vicissitudes of life, which impinge upon one's daily experience in the attempt to be a human being. The need to respond to the realities of life as it is lived in postcolonial Britain is one that has challenged many Black British Christians to seek in God a means of making sense of situations that seem inherently *untenable*.²⁷

Adapted from *The Whiteness of Black Theology in Britain: Ideology, Method and Epistemology in Construction*
Anthony G. Bledde, 2016

16




Professor of Theology and Culture in the African Diaspora
School: School of Humanities

Redemptive forgiveness is God's gift, redemptive vengeance, guided by the power of the Kingdom of God to challenge the principalities and powers of this world, offers a powerful antidote. By focusing on saving ourselves and designing an environment for change and seeking out ways in which we can actively transform the situation, redemptive vengeance preaches justice and encourages Black people not to give up on our quest for reparation in the past or present. As a consequence redemptive vengeance is an important rebuff to the forces of racialized oppression. Redemptive vengeance, while being primarily concerned with the person in sphere of Black life, is not individual but communal and social. This is, it is concerned with empowering Black men and women to seek out and destroy the forces of oppression, whether motivated by racism or sexism or classism.

- God of the Nations redemptive sign, pg113 (2022)

17

JESUS AS BLACK

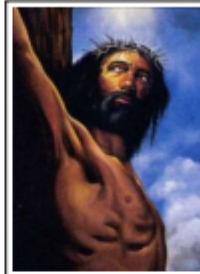


18

"In healing the human condition Christ emptied himself (kenosis) to take the form of the slave, and one is led to conclude that the site of God's wealth is Jesus' poor and enslaved flesh. Having taken on the form of poverty and the form of a slave, God in Christ is the impoverished slave. As such, God enters in to the hurts of those who suffer so that from inside those hurts, being fully identified with them to the point of communicating his divinity through them, he heals them. It is the poor slave, one might say, who is the closest to God and so reveals God.

Maximus the Confessor ICE cited in Jonathan Tjau, "The New Black Theology: Retrieving ancient sources to challenge racism," Christian Century 129, 2012 pg 25. ATLA Religion Database with ATLASearch
<http://search.atla.com> (accessed August 2014)

19



Black theology draws historical and theological parallels between Jesus' experience and the black experience.

Jesus was born into a Roman colony

Jesus' ministry was focused on helping the oppressed, healing the sick

Jesus was murdered – an innocent victim of injustice. Tortured. Humiliated

Jesus resurrection signifies hope, victory and overcoming death

20

IT IS IN THE CONNECTION BETWEEN THE BIRTH, LIFE, MINISTRY, DEATH AND RESSURECTION OF CHRIST AND THE CURRENT BLACK REALITY AS OPPRESSED PEOPLES THAT JESUS IS THEOLOGICALLY BLACK.

THIS BLACKNESS CREATES A DIVINE CONNECTION BETWEEN GOD AS HIS PEOPLE AND CHALLENGES WHITE AUTHORITY OVER INTERPRETATION, RELIGIO-SOCIAL NORMS AND MEANINGS OF JUSTICE.

BLACK THEOLOGICAL GOD-TALK IS POLITICAL.

21

SCRIPTURE

Luke 4:18

18 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free,

22

SCRIPTURE

Isaiah 42:1
The servant, a light to the nations

42 Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my spirit upon him; he will ring forth justice to the nations.

23

SCRIPTURE

Exodus 6: 5-7 (RSV)


'I have heard the groaning of the people of Israel whom the Egyptians hold in bondage and I have remembered my covenant. Say therefore to the people Israel, I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from their bondage, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment, and I will take you for my people, and I will be your God...'

24

SCRIPTURE

PHILIPPIANS 2:6 (NRSV)

⁶who, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
as something to be exploited,
⁷but emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
being born in human likeness.
And being found in human form,
⁸he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of
death—
even death on a cross.



25

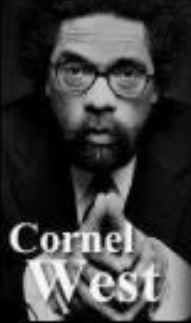
CRITICISMS

Anthony Evans – the black experience must be seen as real but not revelatory, important but not inspired. (Biblical theology and the black experience- 1977)

Tom Skinner – it assumes that the black experience is absolutely moral and absolutely just, there must be a moral frame through which the black experience can be judged. (if Christ is the answer, what are the questions-1975)


J. Deotis Roberts – Black theology must speak of reconciliation, between black men, between black men and white men as equals (Liberation and reconciliation: A black theology - 1971)

26



Cornel West

Don't be afraid to say "revolution," because we want a transfer of power from the oligarchs to ordinary citizens, beginning with the poor children of all colors and the orphans and the widows and the elderly and the working folk.



27

Jesus, a brown skinned Palestinian Jew, called us to preach good news to the poor, the broken, and the bruised, and all those who are made to feel unaccepted.
- William Barber II



28

WHAT ABOUT THE SISTA'S??



“Black Women have been forgotten in Theology”

Janetene Grant
Culverly Professor of Systematic Theology
at the Schreiner Historical Theological
Center in Atlanta

29

What is Black Theology?

A theology of liberation with 'blackness as the primary mode of God's presence' (Cone - Black Theology & Black Power)

That is one who sides with those who have right' (Book of the Nations, Beal/Beal)

Realizes that Black people are made in the image of God and are equally significant.

'Blackness... is Black Power' (Cone - Black Theology & Black Power)

God is Black - An earthly experience parallels that of the Black experience of oppression and equator

A challenge to the notion that Christianity is a white man's religion which uncovering the grey white theology (whiteness), institutionalized in all 2,100 year Black churches and congregations.

30

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- What is your initial response to this overview?
- How does this interact with other ideas about a BLACK JESUS?
- Is black Jesus necessary for revelation?
- Does a Theological Black Jesus work?
- How could black theology be practiced?

7. BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS AND CHRISTIAN FAITH Schedule (Data collection)

8.

9.

King Cross Baptist Church (2016/17)

November 6th 2016 – [State your case](#)

March 26th 2017 – Black Jesus, Black Theology

All Nations Baptist Church (2017)

March 3rd 2017 – Black God: Black Jesus and Black people

March 10th 2017 – Slavery legacy and empire

March 17th 2017 – African Consciousness vs Christianity

March 24th – 2017 – Black Presence in the Bible

Brixton Baptist Church (2018)

February 11th 2018 – What is BCCF?

February 18th 2018 – White Man's Religion

February 25th 2018 – [Out of Kemet?](#)

March 4th 2018 – [Black Face of the Early Church](#)

March 18th 2018 – Black Jesus Black Theology

East London Salvation Army

March 16th 2018 – [White Man's Religion](#)

May 2018 – Out of Kemet

May 2018 – Black Face of the Early Church

June 2nd 2018 – [Black Jesus, Black Theology](#)

10. Amen Ra Lyrics by Jahaziel

Amen Ra- Jahaziel

Jah! Know God when you see me

Dedicated to the Sun, that's the S-U-N

Known to walk on water, die and rise again

Sustainer of human life, yeah

The most powerful thing you'll ever see with your two eyes

Hail up the sun

Hail up nature

Hail up Amen

Hail up the ancestors who taught us nature

Using the Neter get me

Yeah yeah, aight, listen

If my mind is a weapon, I'm strapped with the tool

Ankh as my jewel, tanked full of fuel

Sack full of balls

So I ain't going backward at all

True history the facts on the wall

It's a wrap when I talk, power on my tongue

Solar power that I brung, most powerfulest one

Amen, get power from the sun like pow pow pow power from a gun

This man won't bow and never run

Have to stand proud cah my mum never raised no coward as a son

Ready for the war, many these days say they need change, so I got a penny for your thoughts

I'm reclaiming symbols stolen from then retold to us by freemasons

Why would I need a book that keeps changing when I've got the hieroglyphs that predates them

But they don't want to see the black rising; they wanna see the blacks fighting, backbiting

I was in the church the baptising when I went back to black writings, they said I'm backsliding

They wanna see me in the back hiding – bad timing, my bruddah I'm back rhyming

Fire pon dem deceiving lies I and I bun till it's legalised

And I am done accepting this Jesus guy while my ancestors get demonised

Nah, my visions been redefined, escape religion that means to bind

Try try know they ain't telling you the truth

Man have to go back to Kemet for the proof

Instead of looking to the sky, start looking inside cause that divine energy is you

You, your superhuman with power to produce a human

And ain't no one even came from a damn man's rib

Any man that lives came through the womb-an

There's no other creator than the great mother nature

As above, so it is below – learn that metu neter

Ra!

Amen Ra

Amen Ra

Amen Ra

Hail up the sun

That's Amen Ra

Amen Ra

Amen Ra

Amen Ra

Hail up the sun

And the church said...

Kemetic truths I hold them in my heart

Lies from the Jews I be blowing them apart

So why would I hold on to Moses commands when I know they were stole from Ma'at

Go check the artefacts, hieroglyphs; we scripted an art with facts

It shows who the Africans were versus who the savages were

Who the dons in the palaces were, verse the one who were sat in the dirt

Who the one with the power on the earth, who the ones who the sun will devour and burn

Who the hunters and gatherers were and who the cannibals were

Who the ones with the phalluses were and who the one who prefer fucking animals were

Mandem must learn they won't return our property, left church it's time to burn their philosophy

Why we earning equality? we ain't equal, please accept my words of apology

for any bars that I dropped in the past that said I wouldn't cock it and blast

things change

They shot Dr martin; if cops wanna start, I ain't just gonna march

For liberation, I'm not gonna ask

Won't turn the other cheek unless I'm washing my arse

See, the problem ain't that the yout dem are strapped and ain't afraid to go blasting

But the problem is mainly the fact that they aiming them at the wrong fucking target

Time for straight aiming across here

Life sign carry my ankh there's no cross here

Before we were kind to the man

Now I'm drawing the line in the sand, don't cross here

Yeah, I got white mates, not a white hater

But I'm black like the print on the newspaper

Black to my soul black like holes in the universe that gave birth to this globe

I swear I'm a king; melanin means more than superior skin

Shout out to the Dogon who showed dons when the sun comes back it's a Sirius ting yeah

Ra!

Amen Ra

Amen Ra

Amen Ra

Hail up the sun

That's Amen Ra

Amen Ra

Amen Ra

Amen Ra

Hail up the sun

Appendix B

4. Transcriptions

4.1 White Man's Religion

Transcription

White Man's Religion (East London)

16/05/2018

Eleasah: alright cool, so in this part of the session, what time is it? Let's keep an eye on the time... (murmur). Oh right, cool, so we got a bit of time. So this part is really kind of a time to respond to some of the things that I've said, but you don't have to because, again, as I said, it's just to provoke. But really this is just a time to share your experiences, introduce yourselves, why you came, how you're feeling about Christianity, if you're not in Christianity where are you, what are the truths of that space okay and um and to just to really begin the discussion about how we're working out this Black Consciousness and this Christian faith. I assume that most have come here because they're concerned about Black Consciousness and about Black lives or have questions about Christianity, and so it's just really to begin that conversation. The more that we learn in all these sessions, obviously the richer and the deeper the discussion will become but I really hope that you take the first part as just a good prompting, okay, so my name is Eleasah umm I am currently not a member or attending any church, and I have done for five years. I love God, um and I believe that Jesus is the son of God but, I also believe that there are big flaws in the education, my personal education – understanding God, how I've seen God understood God umm and umm I'm tryna think what I have questions about... I've just got some- obviously my main thing and my research is based on how do we move forward as a Christian but even just as a black community because religion is just there, it's a big part of our community whether you're saved or not,

or whether you're a Christian or not um and so what does, my interest is in how is religion gonna play a part in you know the emancipation of black people basically. Um, so yeah, I don't know if anyone wants to begin, initial responses, thoughts, questions?

Participant NM: I'd like to um if nobody minds, my name is Naomi I am a Danite, so my family originate from Ethiopian background we're Jewish that believe in Yeshua, and we call him Yeshua because that is his original name. And Uh, over the year mixing with Christianity and Judaism, the two somehow um excludes you from either being a Jew or being a Christian, you can be both in the eyes of the normal accepted genres. So umm, one being of African descent and being Jewish – not acceptable because most people think Jews are all white. And being a Christian and uh being you still holding on to the old testament system of worship um you're seen as a freak or legalistic so the experience of a practising believer as I call myself it's um not been easy because it's just finding another person like yourself that would accept you because not being acceptable I stay on my own a lot of the time.

Host M: Do you find that this is a kind of, there's acceptance or some of the things you want-

Participant NM: well, some of the things you mentioned, like slavery, we actually still practice in Judaism. The first and second (tither), I was explaining to the lady you have seven years if you fall on a hard time so after seven years – so the slavery that was of African is completely different from the biblical slavery where you did have rights, and they would have to give you a bill of rights if you were umm treated badly or you know your time comes to an end and your master didn't want to let you go that you would go to court for that.

Host M: Is this practice still practised now.. wow!

Participant NM: yes yes we still practice this, we have a second tithe, and as you know the story of Ruth and Naiomi, Ruth was a beneficiary of the second tithe because she was allowed to glean the edges of the field, and that land is still there, Boaz's field is still there in Bethlehem. So you know it's something that lots of Christians don't realise it's it never came to an end, the New Testament is not the beginning of something that wasn't there before. It's there before, and they call it the New Testament because of

the additional books, so it's one continuation. So I'm one of those believers that, like the disciples were the beginning, they were Jews that believe in Jesus. I'm a Jew that believes in Jesus.

Host M: that's brought to life what Eleasah has been saying

Participant NM: yeah, definitely definitely

Participant KE: you know I thought you said that it was different from the biblical version of slavery days

Participant NM: yeah, the slavery in the Bible, the slave had rights

Participant KE: yeah, so the African slavery that you're practising now they don't have rights?

Participant NM: no, the slavery that was enforced upon the Africans by the Europeans

Participant KE: you're talking about – right, right

Participant NM: yeah, that type of slavery is nowhere in the scriptures; it's nowhere in Judaism

Participant KE: got it got it

Participant NM: it was never practised like that; this is a different agenda, and it's monetarily based, and it's brainwashing based and because, for instance, when I started to look at Christianity, I couldn't understand why they had all these different names. There was never a Mary in Hebrew; there was never nobody called Mary. Even to this day, you can't find nobody call, Mary. (everyone laughs) I am never going to find Joseph and Matthew; you're not gonna find it – it's Matthais, Johanan (other participants say "ohhh okay okay"), you know the way how they tweak things to Europeanise it – but it's not biblical. It's not biblical, this – what ya'll understand to be Christianity is not Christianity because Jesus is a Jew. He's a Jew.

Participant LI: I'd just like to say because your name is Eleasah from Eleasah to [REDACTED] Umm being here, I came a little like "another black power thing yada yada" (unimpressed tone). I'll be honest what I heard. I thought, umm hmmm.... I got a little friend who's fourteen and a half bless him, and unfortunately if I'd have known what this is, he'd a loved it – we were talking about this the other day,

and some for my upbringing I have raised Seven Day Adventist, so if you know any Seven Day Adventist you now what's that's about I'll say no more. And you come out of that, and I thank God for my mum, she has a relationship with God, and I have like you said I'm not doing anything, love God not in a church, because religion hinders my relationship, so I don't do religion, I don't do church, and it's very hard to explain it to people, and I think being here as well – this is going to open, I don't think can of worms, but it's going to open more doors. Some time ago, myself and joy, we got into common law, and when we started that, it was like 'oh my god', and that is what this is starting to feel like. What we thought was fine, this is like the matrix of religion – so there we have it, I'm looking forward to coming.

Participant BJ: I'm umm extremely excited; I was hoping it was gonna be like this. I didn't think it was; I was hoping. And umm, I left church two years ago and didn't know it was something with the word, and I kept on thinking, you know there's so much going out in our community, but the church is here and doesn't actually have anything to do with us, and umm then I started looking on youtube, searching, searching, and there was so many things like wow and the more I read, the more I wanted to read, and ████████ lives next door, and we want (we have been?) to have these discussions for years and years. Like ten years now! And like you said, there's been an awakening because our children they're not accepting Christ because we haven't been taught right; we have to make sure that we know him before we can actually give them him. So there's so much to learn, from the beginning

Host M: So I'm Marcia and organised, invited Eleasah to come here today, and I think for me where I was on this journey like I gave up work to look after the children and so it was like over ten years of studying, so I looked after children and studies at the same time. So umm it was when I studied the masters in psychology of religion that I realised that a lot of what was preached in the church was prosperity gospel and that really.. sent me in a bit of - threw a spanner in the works and I began to search and search and search. And that's when I found and the book that Eleasah is talking about (documentary of exorcism: resisting the bewitchment of colonial Christianity) that is such a prophetic book, where it's talking to the people and saying this is what we need to do, the church needs to stop being silent about this, it needs to stop being silent. So what I did was I was going to this church and this big church, and

I went to the pastor and gave him everything I knew because I did this PhD proposal, to get funding with [REDACTED], so this was like proper, proper... and up till now he still hasn't called me. I've seen other pastors about this – not interested. Yet professor Beckford says we need the silence to be broken, but nobody wants to break it; it was interested you know the pastor, the vicar that I got saved in was an Anglican, he was a white vicar, and there was hardly anybody black that went to the church so he couldn't really help me either and he would if it was a black majority church, so basically that why I've had to arrange this event because I met Eleasah doing this PhD so what I'm saying is Eleasah said that she wanted to be the go-between the academics and us laypeople you know and luckily, so glad I met her because if I didn't meet here, she wouldn't be here. So it's all worked out, so you know that's how she's in today and hopefully

Participant BJ: it's the beginning

Host M: Yes!

Participant NM: it's only one thing out of everything, what you call yourself black? (indicating Eleasah)

Eleasah: oh wow!

Host M: can I just say something? Because Black is superimposed on us

Participant NM: there's no country called Black

Host M: Yeah, I know and can I just say something, after this because on my quest and on my journey of doing all this academic study as I said I've been introduced to Professor Beckford's work and I met Eleasah – I also met another academic by the name of Dr Gloria Gordon, and she speaks about that very thing about Black. Okay, but it's so deep, yeah, and so ingrained in our society the way we call ourselves black, and she wants to do away with this word called Black

Participant NM: Absolutely!

Host M: but we're not ready for it yet

Participant NM: yeah

Host M: but it's a process... Dr Gloria Gordon, after this session of five, I want to invite her to come, and she will blow your mind. She will blow your mind, Dr Gloria Gordon, and it's all touching on all these issues. Eleasah is talking about the theological grounds, what the Bible says, the historical context, but what do we do with it? How do we move forward, how we - I perceive myself, how do I look at the word Black etc.. and that's gonna be the next session after, so don't think that after this we're just gonna be left like wa gwan?!

Everyone laughs – someone enquires about the sessions being filmed in case you cannot make them all.

Host M: there will be more, hopefully you know – we'll see we'll see

Participant NM: so there's no answer for that one today?

Host M: what one?

Eleasah: well, I can answer from my perspective. So for me personally, um, I just always brought up saying we're black, so it's a traditional cultural thing umm, but after more thought equally, there's no country called Africa, and I've got no idea

Participant NM: Africa...

Eleasah: yeah, it's a continent, but I don't know where I come from?

Participant NM: you don't?:

Eleasah: not in Africa

Participant NM: ohhhh

Eleasah: I come from Jamaica, and I know that my mum is Irish – but also I mean why I call myself black is a little bit academic as well, and people have done a lot of work on what black means, and there's lots of ways to view it (a few participants say "yessss"), and for me, I'm really drawn to whilst I don't know where I come from, black symbolises people that have survived a massive trauma, and I'm proud of that. That's my history. I have survived; my ancestors have survived that particular trauma.

We went in Africans and came out actually something very different, because of the trauma, because of the new things that we had to do to survive, um in many ways, not surviving, kind of a little bit broken, um in that sense, and Black is also very contextual. It's a resisting force against this terror of white supremacy, and so for me, it's not necessarily that Black is a genetic thing. It's actually more of a political statement to say that I'm here I survived, my ancestors survived, I dunno where we came from originally, but we're here init, and for me, black ties that into and is the shadow behind that is Africa, but I just don't know where. So it's a bit more of a political-ideological thing mainly because I don't know where I come from if that makes sense – as opposed to Black as a genetic thing, because may I should go around saying I'm Jamaican and Irish or something.

(Murmur of various people)

Participant NM: yes see, we're called black after we're called coloureds, it's everything ut your identity and the place where you came from, where you stem from and many man west Indians, funny name, (everyone laughs) yes west Indians and you look like that I can't work it out? But you know when you say coloured, and then it went to Black, West Indian, all these different titles that is nothing of us. Nothing that I can see in this room anyway

Participant JO: Can I just reply to that?

Participant NM: Yeah

Participant JO: Deuteronomy 28: 27 says, and you shall become strangers...a and a byword among all nations where the Lord will drive you. So when you're saying "I'm ting", "I'm that" and were looking and were searching down the ages, through everything that we've gone through as a nation of people, we're not Africans, we're not west Indians were not this that and the other - we belong to God. But because God knew that we were going to be disobedient to him, he told us what we would become, a proverb, a byword of our disobedience to him

Someone says: so what do we do then?

Participant JO: we need to be obedient.

Eleasah: so, can you explain a bit more about how you understand what you mean about this disobedience. I'm making assumptions, but I want you to explain it

Participant JO: I think, because of what we've gone through, you said quite plainly that as a nation of people we've gone through so much and lack is like resistance to everything that we've encountered through the ages, but if we are to search for ourselves in this manual, which I believe is our manual (the Bible) for life because if we're believers, we take this to church, we read through it, we get inspired by it but what our problem is sitting in this circle is that the establishments that we've been connected to in the past have not adhered to this, so we've been taught one thing ut when we're looking for it in the manual, we can't find it. So that's where the confusion comes from. Do you understand what I mean?

Host M: and that's why we need to have these because we can't go to mainstream church; they don't want to get us out of this tangle, so that's why we have to use Christ and get ourselves out.

Participant JO: they don't even serve Christ, they're not serving Christ, they've got nothing to do with Christ

(murmurs) someone says: who's they?

Participant JO: I'm talking about the churches

Host M: Eleasah said it's a different type of Christianity; there's the colonial type of Christianity and then -

Participant JO: that's what I'm talking about colonial Christianity

Host M: so basically what we're gonna do, we all know that one, so we're just gonna look at something else, so that's what it's about, so then we can say boom we need to do this and need to that. At this stage, we're just like wa gwan? Boy, mi thought it was dis, and it's dis okay, right!

Participant LI: what comes to my mind following on from what Participant JO said, I'm personally hoping that when we leave here, we'll get a greater understanding because the word says the spirit leads

us into some truth, most truth? All truth! And sometimes we got to dare I say it we've got to leave the black the white the in-betweeners because our spirit which is the real us blah blah blah will start to connect. And then I think when we start to walk that way, we will become, I don't want to say enlightened, but we will become enlightened and can help somebody else. So I was talking to my little fourteen and a half-year-old friends, and he's saying when they go to school, they've got this thing of Black and this and that, and it was hurting my head. It pained me to hear how we are killing each other with our words. And young people, I thought we've been through all that we have been through to come to this stage where I'm not even talking about the physical killing, I'm talking about the killing with words, whos black? Whos this? I'm like, are you serious? In the schools? What's going on? That's where we've come, so I'm praying that when we leave here, we'll do our best to be pioneers wherever we are. To start sharing the message seriously, because some good must come out of this.

Participant SB: umm, I listened to your topic; I myself a salvationist, so this building is part of me, and I become a salvationist because I collapsed one day on the street and a pensioner picked me up, and she cared enough to call the ambulance, and I was taken to hospital. And the reason I came back and joined them, an old Jamaican lady who I knew here, I said the only person who I knew who had come and escort me through the casualty. It was as a matter of respect that I decided to come back, and I studied the history of the salvation, which was bought for the purpose of the homeless, right there in Whitechapel road, William Booth, and I thought well this Windrush thing, our black people are now retired. Came up in the fifties/sixties, and every one of them that was ready to get down on that boat would have been seventeen/eight. I look young, but I'm seventy. I was one of the Windrush kids that came here from the island of Barbados - had to be literate and numerate, and they brainwash the Bajans. NHS, the buses and the post office and all of them had to have qualifications, yes? The Jamaicans being the larger island send out a little less poorer ones, without the qualifications and thanks to them, Jamaicans, when we stopped the war, they came on the streets. The Bajans with the Christian inheritance says, we're praying for you, Maureen, but we can't come out. And I went into the NHS and were given their grading according to agenda for change, and agenda for change meant the system, we've got news for you – you've gone in the sixties to do your job, now your retiring clear off! And they had to find a

way to do it, so they upgrade us, and I was upgraded to a nurse specialist, and I did not comply to _____ my own black people. I went to the press, and I told them the unfair practices, and I was set up. My husband rest his soul was a Guyanese, he got Indian in him, he said "Maureen they're gonna go for you", and believe you me they upgraded a few of us. And we're in our posh uniforms, nurse officers, nurse specialists, and they made me up, and I did not conform to the system. I went around trying to recruit some of my comrades to become a socialist because the socialist workers, you see them out there with their papers, they don't talk about colour, they talk about class. They preach the aristocracy in this country, and that is why I believe the Queen is living so long because the amount of praise we send up in the name of Jesus for her, it's accumulated in count - she must live long! So and I'm getting called to give talks on the Windrush - I'm gonna watch the time because I'm a person, I understand your protocol. I'm being called now to give talks on the Windrush, and I give it to them, and I often refer them to Dianne Abbott, she's summerise beautifully, and she's now on the hit list, whether you want to know it or not. So when you say you're praying, that Bible is a beautiful little book, but it's only a storybook. I got to bible study with the Baptists, I respect the Baptist because Martin Luther he said I had a dream and the night before he died a white man from _____ shot him, I do me 60's music, Bo Marley says get up stand up, he didn't live long, Mandela came to this town, he gave his blessings to all of us – did he live long? Wake up! This is a good organisation, we need to get out there and recruit some young people and if you have to use the word lack, use it! The time will come when we will say reformation; we need to embrace a few more people from Black. Because if you're Black, you have to stand back, Asian, they're now calling islamophobia, the Asians are now getting their ass whipped, they want to know us. They didn't want to know us. The Chinese are alright, you come and buy your Chinese restaurant food, any of them come to you? The Indian man got his shop all over the road; islamophobia is now hitting him on the technology, everybody with a computer. They don't want labour anymore, we have to come together, and I don't want to hear any rubbish about- I love that Bible but don't get into spasms of it (?), smoke your ganja, embrace the rastas, because red bush ganja there were all straight. I rest my case.

Eleasah: Thank you, anyone, new? I'm conscious of time because it's been hired, so anyone, please

Participant DD: I just wanna say I'm here to support [REDACTED] because we've been together through thick and thin; she been there at the birth of my son, history, there's just history between us. I just know that she's passionate about this, and I said I'd support her. I'm currently not in church myself, because of church politics, but umm we're starting a group, it's not church, but there's a lot of people that have been hurt by Christendom, where you for whatever reason, they're recognising that church is not where they really wanna be, but they do believe in Christ, Yeshua Messiach. Um, a lot of people have been wounded, and there's a shall I call it a project, that we have going at the moment called R.E.S.C.U.E., which is Restoring Emotional Souls Convelece Ultimately via Everything, that's more for those who are mourning in Zion, they've been wounded by church, and we're hoping to establish that very soon. We've found that people are just not doing church anymore, they've not found in church what they're expecting, and that's the refuge, and that's accepting Yeshua, so that's what we're about to do, and I'm here to support [REDACTED] on this quest.

Participant SB: you got my support as well darling, you've got it

Participant EM: I'm Emma; I'm here to support [REDACTED] as well; we've had some interesting debates

Host M: you've come here because you wanna know what she's saying!

Participant EM: yeah, I do, I got to church, and I love my church, I love my God. And a lot of this, I was brought up to believe in black Jesus, I'm struggling to think of any black person even if they're you, that you ask them if Jesus was white they would tell you he was black. Regardless of what they see, but I get the impact of it being around. No, in my church, there's not a picture of black Jesus, and my church is black, white, Indian, whatever – we don't address colour. And sometimes I get there's an issue that black people need to address, totally, and I do feel that I'm very proud to be Black, call myself Black because of what we've been through, and I know what we need to go through. That we are gonna need to associate ourselves and come together to do something but this is why I came because I wanna know the link between church and this black consciousness, so I get - obviously - I might be in a bubble, I probably am in a bubble umm and I remember when I used to g seven day Adventist – when I was made

to go Seven Day Adventist, and I remember what you oh 'woe is me thing', but I don't- haven't seen it for years, well I've been going to my church for twelve years –

Someone says: which church?

Participant EM: I got to Emmanuel community church, and um, for me, it's the relationship with God; it's not the fact that I got to church that I call myself a Christian. It's what I do every day, I love everybody, I have to love my neighbour whether your white, black, Chinese whatever, but there is something going on in our mind and I think there's just in shackles in our mind and wherever that comes from we need to address that. Because somewhere along the lines, we think of ourselves as not – yeah! Not worthy, below or whatever, and that's what needs to be addressed.

Participant IE: and also there's systems out there keeping us in chains

Host M: and can I just say something, one more thing! I've been pondering on this, I've been pondering on slavery times, they never gave us good clothes, they never gave us good food, they never gave us good housing, they never allowed them to marry, they never allowed them to keep their children, and they just about made them be human – but they gave them religion. So all of everything else... but we need to look at the religion as well because I came to church and what I've studied in the book and of what was preached, in churches in slavery times, there was essences of it in the modern-day. So what I'm saying – that's why I had to invite Eleasah, we have to look at it just because it was happening. Because that means that everything else they gave us was bad except the one thing, you know? And I really think deeply about that. So we have to interrogate it

Participant IE: but they haven't given us anything good, so we have to think, well what have they done here?

Host M: yeah

Participant IE: why have we got the gospel now? Their interpretation?

Host M: it doesn't mean that it's not good; it just means that we need to look at it

Participant AU: well, for me personally, the reason why I'm here is my son actually just told me about it this afternoon; what's been bugging me actually, I was privileged to be born into a Christian family, Christian school and everything, I'm still a Christian, but I'm very eclectic. I can go to Roman Catholic church, I can go to Pentecostal, but fundamentally I'm from the Anglican church. And I've always I tell my children this, and they don't believe me. I don't see a white Jesus because I always have that verse in the Bible that says that he made me in his own image. And surely if he made me in his own image, he must be representing me. And my children, very good children, they grew up in the church, went to church, Mondays Fridays, and when they got older, I said to them you know what you don't have to go to church if you want, you've come to a point now where you decide where you want to go. And now I kind of regret it, they didn't go and now they've started questioning that you know the story in the Bible is not true, Jesus is not white, you know things that happened in Egypt they just put it somewhere else, and I say to them you know, surely if that is the case you need to reclaim it. We need to reclaim it. There's no point in running away from it because you can stand outside, criticise and everything, but you've got to be part of it. In most of the Pentecostal churches, they have youth week; you have to be part of it to make an impact. Unless you don't want to practice Christianity anymore, anyone can say this is wrong, and that is wrong, but how do we prove true knowledge, true history and say to our children, you know this is your religion, reclaim it. Because I think this is what is wrong with our race is that we complain and expect other people to fix it

Host M: Yeah, but how do we claim it? This is part of it

Participant AU: exactly

Host M: This is the first time apart from academia; this is the first time I went to church. Oh no, I'm lying because I came with you (indicating Eleasah) to City gates, and it went over the youths like whooooo! Because they were young, and so what I'm saying is this is the start of that because where you gonna start, you have to start from somewhere

Participant AU: of course, because you have to have the knowledge

Host M: yes, and this is the start of that; it comes from a good source

Eleasah: okay, any final comments, not from [REDACTED] before we round up

Participant JU: umm, so I'm Julia. I heard about this from a friend, so I'm Nigerian and um, I kind of grew up - I was born here, and then I went to school in Nigeria for a bit and so because of that, my experience of church has been so weird. I've been to so many different churches, um I think I was born a Roman Catholic, and I think the churches I've been to in this country and in Nigeria has just made me so afraid of Christianity and just did not make any sense to me. And um as well as that just being a part of my generation, I think that we're a lot more studious than some people like to give us credit for like we want to understand the history we want to well for me anyway I want to learn, I want to study, and I find it very frustrating sometimes when I go to church and um there's no context given, there's no explanation of context given. And even um and I went to, there was another event, black Christian and confused – something like that?

Eleasah: Oh yeah

Participant JU: I saw that on bun/Babylon it's a group chat on Facebook, and I was so excited about it because it was the first time I've ever heard of like you know this topic being discussed, I was so excited, but then umm I like to consider myself to be a very very new Christian so despite myself growing up in the church, to be honest, I was just there like I was not actually a true follower of Christ. So just starting this journey towards the end of last year, so when I went to that event, I was very, very disappointed - for me, I was just a new Christian, and I still had there were still so many doubts and my decision to be Christian was just based on faith, and I still don't know what's going, a lot of things don't make sense to me. I can't reconcile my blackness with the Bible, but I'm just gonna trust and follow this process, so when I went there, there was no – everything was spoken from a Christian perspective. I was like, no, you need to explain; I don't feel like I'm being educated. People are just talking, umm, and there were a lot of things being said, but okay, who told you that and how did we get to this, so I guess the point of what I'm tryna say is that I really appreciate today.

4.2 Out of Kemet?

Eleasah Phoenix Louis

Transcription – Out of Kemet

(Brixton)

18/02/18

Eleasah: okay, let's bring it back together. So what I did last week is start off with something so that people don't feel shy. You don't have to say something, but this is the point where we come together and share, and I always try to make it clear that when we do these sessions, there is no one authority of knowledge. I try to share what I've found, where I have specialities which I do have some I try to input them, but the discussion part is the part that matters because whether we know the beginning from the end or the ultimate truth – it's what we do with the information. If we're Christians, how does it impact our Christianity and if it's not, why are we no longer Christians, and what does your religion or your faith or your belief system look like? So I'll just start, as I told you last week, I'm a Christian; I don't currently attend church because I find it a little bit difficult – just on the silence against things like the oppression of black people in Britain and just on the fact that the education in terms of the intellectual side I find quite weak and I find it quite frustrating. Sometimes I find it a little bit hard to know my place in the church. And in terms of just visiting Sunday to Sunday, sitting down and singing and all of that a little bit difficult. I've been in church all my life a little bit of a Ned Flanders kid, and I think for me this topic I find interesting because I'm interested in history and the preservation of culture. Sometimes I struggle with the fact that culture does evolve and things change; I love things to just be preserved. And I find this interesting, and I find talking about this topic with people very interesting because for me I find it very crucial that people start to think for themselves and start to question things and even if they come across this information – the fact that they have gone so far deep to study it... I mean, I come across people that have been like 'what about this', and I have had to read the Metu Neter and all these different types of things, and I've

had to read these books to understand where they're coming from and what their belief systems look like, and I think there's such merit in really digging deep to try and find truth and I mean for me like ultimately I would love everyone to know Jesus and stuff like that but what does that even mean? That's why I do this; what does it mean to know Jesus? We've been sold it one way, but it might look like another? Okay? If people are finding different lines of truth, how does it impact what I believe? Because we can sing, we can pray those things don't take school, but knowing a bit more about where your Bible came from, knowing if Jesus really walked the earth or not, we'll be doing a little bit more of that, we have a few more sessions, three more, those are really important to because often we practice what we've been taught, the way we pray, we've learned it, the things we say, the songs that we sing, the way that we change are all reflections of what people teach us, even sometimes when people say – well I had a dream, I know some Christians who never say that because it's not practised in their church, it doesn't come to them instinctually but sometimes in our Christianity I've found that a lot of people practice things they think are spiritual, but they're actually just learned. And what we do is provide a space to see well what more is out there and what has actually informed that learning. And it's not to take away the spiritual nature of God and all that aspect of religion but to acknowledge the intellectual aspect of our faith that is at play whether we like it or not. What our pastor teaches us was written by a theologian that specialises in this, that took someone's side in this – can you see the pattern? And so, for me, I might present this, even though I might not agree with it. I don't present it in a mocking way; I present it because it's really important that people take this journey to questions. To ask questions. Jesus constantly asked his disciples questions, and just even left them with it like – 'let me know when you're ready' he constantly challenged them, so we have to have that same attitude about ourselves as well. Does anyone have anything they'd like to say in response to that, in addition, or share a part of their journey where they're at? Don't be shy!

Participant EO: thank you, it's really interesting. A couple of things that you said one of them I about, you want to explore the intellectual side um, and I think for me just be careful how we say that because I think that sometimes people can feel like their knowledge is not important. And I

think even as an intellectual you can learn from you know peoples everyday information and every experience. And in one instance they are intellectual in how they've grown in the church um so I think if we say it's an intellectual thing, it kind of distances people when they hear that word people feel like they need to know so much but actually this is all about increasing our knowledge. I've done some work; I don't want to talk about it, there's just so much to take on board, and you can feel like the information is so much that we need to break it down. Yes, it's about learning and understanding and um, at all levels, we have our own intellect, and we are our own intellectuals type of things, so yeah.

Eleasah: yeah yeah, I one hundred per cent agree with that; intellectual probably isn't the right word; we had a brother last week, one of my boys came down, and he said, 'but all this knowledge for what? How much can we possibly contain within our lives?' you know it's limitless at the end of the day, so in a sense, this journey for ultimate intellectual power is a little bit vain; we will die not knowing things, and intellect obviously does include other aspects, we have emotional intelligence, so you're one hundred per cent right, so perhaps intellectual isn't the right word but more just to highlight that aside from what we might consider as ritual, deeper knowledge is probably the best word, the reading aspect, the artefacts, the archaeological aspects of our Christianity, so definitely thank you for that a really good point.

Participant EO: and also I find um that the African journey in the Bible, I try to make that connection and uhh from the _____ that I did, I did a tour of the British Museum and it's the separation of Egypt from African and it's like no, Egypt is in Africa you know, and they were black kings who were proved within Egypt, and I want myself to explore the bible journey as it's told, and in a truthful way, because there's a lot more in the Bible umm regarding Africa itself and the whole continent not just Egypt separately because we should speak of Egypt separately to Africa, it's a country within Africa you know as with some of the other northern and southern African countries. So just to put that as well, oh were talking about Egypt were walking about Africa, so I think that's really important as black people that we- you know we're the first man___ black people come across, and the more that we deepen our knowledge and understand you know hopefully we become less afraid

just to say that openly you know because it's _____ you know the evidence the cannons etc. But you know that is that that's important, we should feel safe and just, you know, be happy to explore that in our history and the critical role that we play in Christianity.

Elesah: umm one hundred percent, I mean earlier in the presentations I talked a little bit about this race battle for Egypt do you know what I mean, who was originally there, the book I showed you guys was Black Genesis and what they do is um they work backwards, so they look at what the earliest understanding of religion or in the earliest phases and they work backwards. And what they found is evidence of _____ nomads, I guess almost like shepherds that wandered the desert and studied the stars. So they'd move around, this dark-skinned African community would move around, and they traced these people to be the ancestors of the [Haros that transmitted the knowledge. It wasn't a knowledge that I mean many people argue that the pyramids were there before the pharaohs, so it wasn't a knowledge that came in the biggest or height of Egypt, it was a knowledge- the knowledge of the stars, why the pyramids are aligned a certain way and all of that kind of stuff that have come from these African people that have been able to do a lot of scientific work, and again that's why I pointed out the difference- because there is a difference between the specialist and just the people, observers of information umm but the evidence is there but I guess my question to you guys is, does it matter? Because how do we read our Bible again? What influences the way that we read our Bible, we've been brought up in a country that gives out textbooks, and we see Egypt as European people, and we read it in the Bible, we have images going through our mind, but we come to this story of Joseph and the brothers walk into Egypt, see the prime minister, and they're so in just awe and scared, why can't they see that's their brother if they're so different? If they believe white people come from Canaan over into Egypt? There were similar people again around and outside Egypt who were dark-skinned. The evidence. I mean, the strong arguments are definitely there, so for me I'm just really interested to know how much it matters to you or if it doesn't matter at all, even to hear that aspect would be really good, um but it's really important that we're able to verbalise and talk out some of our thoughts and ideas kind of as we're on this journey, so I don't want this to be a case of me just telling you stuff, and then you guys go yeah that's kind

of cool umm but yeah what do you guys think? How important is it that Egypt was full of black people or that Jesus and Horus were the same or were not the same.. repackaged? How important are these arguments and these ideas in your religious walk, whether you're Christian or not?

Participant DA: From my experience, I feel like a lot of the reason why discussions like this or the reason why people have searched for these stories in the first place is because of the whitewashing in Christianity to start with, and people don't feel that they're included as black people in Christianity. So every time we've been removed from the narrative and cause like I grew up in catholic church so I grew up white Jesus all over my home and that's what I saw Jesus to be just because that's what I was told I didn't know any better but umm I can see where somebody growing up with an issue of that and not seeing themselves fitting into the story of Christianity that they would maybe more entertain some of these stories what's out there. And me I've looked into what's out there, I don't shy away from them, and I like to I'm more concerned with the truth even as Christians were taught that even by paul that we should be noble in that sense that we should seek the truth in all things and I think that it's just helped me to actually see the truth and where we as African are actually in the scripture which has actually strengthened my faith and what I believe more so that pushing me away because I've never in my life and studied the Bible yet and seen the whiteness in the Bible. The more I've studied the Bible, the less white it seems to be, there's just no white narrative no matter where if you actually study it, there's no white narrative, there's no white narrative um so it's something that's probably pushed me to feel more inclusive of the scriptures as a black person so I think that it's a good thing to not shy away or be afraid of it because it can work out in your favour as a black people.

Participant AD: I think going back off of what Participant DA was saying umm kind of a bit similar to my self, well not in terms of what I believe because I believe in Jesus Christ but the way how Christianity is you could say marketed by white Europeans is like a is very eurocentric um to me any text book in church, or you got to your grandma's house that's Christian it's like a white Jesus and stuff like that umm and that age I never really racialised Jesus, I think Jesus is massively over racialised but I see the problems in Jesus being depicted in that way and I think that it's part of the

reason why in Exodus 24 where God talks about not making any kind of graven image, where you start to worship the image rather than God himself, when you see images of like a white Jesus that image originates from the Italian renaissance painters that depicted Jesus, like if you do it by the book and say okay were talking about a man who was born in the ancient middle east a expert that specialised on the time period would say your typical middle eastern person wouldn't look like that type of appearance so going by that fair play_____ it's not historically accurate – we don't know what Jesus looked like course but it's not historically accurate if you were to place it there. And going back to ummm based off of what Participant DA saying, I think with Egyptians and ancient Egyptians way of life, the mysticisms that we still don't know about fully I think because we know that they were black, you know Egypt was in North Africa that there I think black people can find more affiliation to say well hey I originate in Africa I'm from Africa as well I'm black and I can relate more to that and that we were kings and stuff like that than I can to a white Jesus that has been passed or such and such has pushed on me. And when I ask certain questions, the church is like, oh you're not meant to ask those questions, and I think that's where the church fails cause Jesus always answered questions, even whether people were tryna trap him or not, and I think that as a church we shouldn't be embarrassed to say we don't know. Because there's some things that the church just doesn't know, the Bible just doesn't say, the Bible doesn't say how old Adam and Eve were, the Bible doesn't say how many female siblings they had and how did Cain get a wife, the Bible just doesn't say a thing, and I think we try and make excuses and do what have you and it causes frustration in people, black people for the sake of this discussion and they leave the faith. Well, I mean just to wrap it up because what I've kind of noticed, not noticed but what I the conclusion that I come to of people who advocate ancient Egyptian way of life, and the Bible stole from it and stuff like that is that when you compare the core of the teachings, the two different teachings and you say way of life and the Christian way of life they're like completely different. When you find a lot of West African or ancient Egyptian, it may be centred around some sort of ancestral worship or being a god yourself, and stuff like and the Christian doctrine is completely opposite, saying not to do those things, so when I personally, when I come across comparisons like that, that's when I say no it becomes chalk and cheese but I can sympathise when people say that

you know how Christ has been presented tot hem from Sunday school, from pastors what have you has been very kind of sort of European focused to make them feel like they're not accepted whereas with Egyptian way of life because you know they're historically black they're more inclusive into that

Eleasah: and tell me what you mean by Jesus being over racialised; that's interesting. I only say that because I came into the church to talk to the church about what we'd been doing, and one of the older mothers said, will what's the point God black and white what does it even mean like why are we even talking about that? And it was an interesting point, God being God was he black was he white what does it matter so much? So you saying "God's been over racialised" it's almost along the same stream.

Participant AD: if I go from the top, with God the Father. My Bible tells me that God the father is not black, he's not white, he's not Jewish, he's not whatever. God is spirit, and the Bible also says that God shows no favouritism, so it's too long to get into, but there's a reason why the Jews were chosen first -it was because of Abrahams obedience. Um, but moving aside from that, when we come to Christ now because of the promise that God made to Abraham, you know Jesus would have had to come through that lineage to come onto the earth. Now a lot of the discussions myself and probably Participant DA has seen on Facebook, that you know Jesus was black and Jesus wasn't a white and all that type of stuff, and the Bible doesn't say any of that the Bible says Jesus was a Jew and so we just, if we're just going by the Greek translation in the KJV the Bible doesn't say that Jesus was black or Jesus was white it just says Jesus was a jew simple, from the house of David. If you want to argue how dark or how fair his skin tone was, that's a completely different argument, and then you have to go back to what were the typical middle eastern Jew living in whatever you seen look like? That's a separate argument, but when you racialise Jesus, to say Jesus was black or Jesus was white, you're indirectly kind of saying, well Jesus is for white people, but he's not for black people, or Jesus is for black people, but he's not for white people. So it's like, it's like you kind of segment Jesus to say that Jesus was only for a certain set of people, and this is where the twisting of the scriptures can come in, which is too long to get into. But Jesus says already look I've

come for the lost sheep of Israel, which is the Jews, but there's other sheep which, i.e. other nations which I need to bring into the fold as well, so I'm saying that to say that the reason why Jesus may seem like he was for one set of people first, is because they couldn't turn around and say well you went to other nations first that's why we didn't believe you, so to kind of, so just to conclude in other words really there was a certain order in which things had to take place ut the bottom line is si that Jesus wasn't about favouring race, he was about calling the children of God home no matter what walk of life you've come from. So that's why He says go into all nations and basically spread the gospel so that people can come in. So that's why I say it's extremely dangerous to racialise Jesus because you're saying that Jesus favours one set of people over the other, and that's not the case.

Eleasah: has anyone else got anything they want to contribute?

Participant WF: yeah, it's just a thought that I wanted to add to that umm; it's almost like what people want to do is acquire knowledge, but what we gonna do with all that knowledge? And wisdom comes from a place of taking the word and doing the word; that's the whole purpose of the Bible. Now when you go out and try to ____ understanding, not, for instance, a lot of people um, they won't actually go and do something unless they understand it and, if we look at what we mentioned last week (needs clarification) there's only so much knowledge you can obtain, it's limitless but why do we want to obtain it all? To do what? Does that make sense? And the whole purpose of the Bible is to do the work. So if you're not actually using it, what's the point of having the word, so you've got people are Christians, don't go to church, reading the word but not doing anything with. So I kind of get the angle of this whole topic, but what's the point? What's the point of acquiring all this knowledge and not doing anything with it? Which is probably one of the questions I have _____ I also had a conversation with umm Felix? It's quite interesting____ he's a minister in this area, the question that I had was, let's just say someone was brand new or doesn't believe anything in Christ um would it be best now for a person to go to a theologian to learn about Christ or someone with real experience? And walk in faith and speak the things that's actually happened to them. My question was that, well, my thing was I would actually like to be with the person who has experience. I want to live up to what it's actually telling you to

do. Does that make sense? So at the end of the day, we're all hoping to go to heaven, and what's God gonna call us to do? He's gonna call us to confess what we've done in the time that we've spent on this earth, on this planet. So when we go what we gonna do, we're gonna confess what we've done, if we haven't done anything, of course, there's only one place we'll go so my thing was, all this knowledge, what we actually doing with it? What's the purpose of it, to know and to do what? So we're gonna be right enough to learn the word from someone in theology or someone whos a man of God whos experienced that's walked in that ___ has that testimony, like a strong testimony that's based on 'this is what happened to me, this is what I believe'. I mean that's, for me personally and my journey _____ um my thing is what I'm tryna say is, it's all part of the experience, you want that experience of Christ____ - you want to experience Christ, that's the whole point of Christ being available to us so we can have access to him umm... as long as we do his word. So all of this acquiring knowledge, it's similar to how going to church acquiring knowledge and not doing anything with it when we leave church, that's where the devil will come in and try to play with our minds, and we start to question ourselves 'is God really this? Is God really that?' and from one question comes two questions, and we find ourselves out of church. And we justify so many reasons why we're outside of church, but we never go back to the one source, the first source of what actually happened that first moment in question. So just to come back to the first thing that I said, yeah, why all this knowledge that we feel we need to acquire when actually the whole purpose of faith and how we find it is believing in the unseen? So we're meant to be able to do something, and God's going to reveal it to us after, that's the whole trust_____ when you look at how we live out the things that God has actually done for us, it's powerful and hence the reason faith is here today that's the whole point. So the knowledge is really vital but why? That's my angle...

Participant MI: yeah, I agree with most of what you said; we had a brief discussion last week saying that, um, the idea of infinite knowledge, especially without action, is largely a western ideal, in terms of wanting to conquer everything and to know everything, all of that so but I think umm I don't think everyone wants all the knowledge before they go out in action, my favourite bible verse

is faith without works is dead which you can do _____ but I think it's the fact that a lot of the time the church rejects the questions or does not want to own up to answering is the off-putting part for some, it's not the fact that questions are being asked, but it's the kind of response that people sometimes get to the asked questions that then leaves that disparity and anger. And yes, as you said, faith should not be based upon what you know, we should do anyway umm there was something else I was gonna say umm yeah I don't think – I think sometimes people want to understand more, but that can be mistaken as them not wanting to do and at the same time but yeah I can't remember the other thing.

Participant AD: the thing that you two brought up is faith which is the key, you know anyone can ask God for money, houses that type of stuff, and it's gonna be different to every individual person some people need it some people want it, some peoples like you know God is like if I give this to you, you cant handle it, so I'm gonna hold it back from you, stuff like that but one thing that God won't forbid, God won't forbid, won't prevent anyone from having is wisdom the Bible says that God says to Solomon ask for whatever you want and I will grant it to you and umm and Solomon asked for wisdom and because of that God is like you can have the kitchen sink as well and I'm saying that to say that if anyone wants wisdom from God, no one can know everything in all eternity but if anyone wants wisdom and understanding from God, God will give it to them in abundance. But the catch is that you have to believe that God exists and that God will answer that request for wisdom, so there's always a catch. The relationship between God and mankind is contractual 'if you do this, I'll do that if you confess your sin, I'll exempt your from the judgement of that you would have otherwise faced' and so with these people that for whatever reasons have you know rejected umm Christ, they're seeking wisdom from other areas and like the brother is saying it can only take you up until a certain point. You now I hear a lot of black people say, wake up, don't you know that our ancestors were astrologers and kings and queens and the thing is I knew that because it kept getting repeated to me ever other day but me knowing that and knowing that yes we were the ones in Egypt, and I'm saying this for the sake of argument, we were the ones in Egypt hence X-Y-Z, it doesn't change anything, there's no awakening just like okay, that's another area that I can add to

my profession as an historian. Do you get what I mean? And a lot of us, or a lot of them, they would say they we're woke and what have you but their just glorified stories because having the information doesn't do anything. Someone handing you a whole roll of spreadsheets at work that's just numbers and zeros, you can't make heads or tails out of it without interpretation, so I'm saying that to say that that understanding or that knowledge or what they know of the ancient Egyptians or what have you, whatever you're teaching next, it's only just historical information. And I suppose the only difference is it may have been circumvented by European history-telling, so when you see you know Prince of Egypt at Disney or Gods of Egypt, they're all whitewashed. I think that's where the problem comes in. and to this day, I can only remember like Michael Jackson 'Remember the time' where there was Black pharaoh, that's the only black representation that sticks in my mind, but I'm just saying that to say back to their point (Participant WF/Participant Mi) that you know you have to have faith and actually believe that God will actually bless you with wisdom and the other side of it as well is that you have to seek Gods word in scriptures. Because if you say, well, I believe a bit of this, and I believe a bit of that, that's where people can get really confused. So I think there's basically, to wrap up, there's having information as the brother said, and then there's having the right kind of information that can actually benefit you. Does that make sense? So me knowing that ancient Egyptians are black can be like, well okay yeah, then I can come as a pharaoh for world history day then I'm historically accurate because blacks were once Egyptians, ancient Egyptians, but in terms of actual benefit to my life, it doesn't hold any value in that sense. So I think we need to actually prioritise what information can actually benefit us and what information like -

Participant KN: yeah, I kind of agree with what he is saying because I recently went to a Coptic church because my dad's married to a Coptic woman. (mummers and clarification of what Coptic was) Yeah, it was like an old, it's an Egyptian church but it kind of predates the Egyptian gods and what, it was quite strange because the similarities between Christianity and the Coptic believer were so apparent and they believe in Jesus, they believe in the disciples, and I was like wow okay it's a bit I was a bit shocked. But like you're saying, at the ends of the day, what comes down to it is your faith and your personal, intimate relationship with Christ. So we can attain all of this information

and have all of this information for what? It's great to have knowledge and to grow, but knowledge is not wisdom; you can just ask the father, we can just ask Jesus, give me wisdom, and he'll give us wisdom, so for me, it was like a bit eye-opener that it does where it is for me, black, white Asian. Jesus is Lord for me personally, and yeah...

Participant DA: I was just gonna say something quickly, pretty much around the whole thing of what's been said maybe from a little bit of a different angle and maybe from my personal experience and what I've seen. I grew up in my church; I've been a Christian since 2008 (he means 1998), and umm, so loads of us grew up as Christians together as teenagers but what I've found is that we must have a balance so even with the knowledge and faith you must have balance. Cause some people are all on the knowledge and some people are all on the faith, and a lot of people that are leaving church which is the basis of why Eleasah created this programme is because people are leaving the faith and they had no knowledge of actual where their Christianity came from. So when they're presented with these arguments, they crumble as Christians. Because they don't know how to, they don't know any apologetics, they don't know how to argue, anything- a meme can throw off their Christianity because it's like woah. They don't actually know the origins of their actual religion, and that's why, as Christians that are we balance the faith/emotional aspect with the intellect and knowledge because in the scriptures, Paul commended the Bereans for doing exactly that and too many Christians are going around thinking it's not important to know the basics of Christianity. Because when you're tested and the devil comes to test you, saying I have faith in God, but if somethings presented to you and you don't know how to actually prove and actually contend for the faith, how do you contend when someone comes to you with information that you do not have an answer to? And that's why as Christians, I believe personally as much as we believe in God and we have faith in Jesus Christ as a twelve-year-old, as Eleasah said, was in the temple debating with grown men. This is our example as Christians; we're supposed to be constantly learning and understanding God. Do you know what I'm saying and to me personally, faith is not enough – the Bible says faith without works is dead, I think that just having an airy-fairy faith with God is just not enough, and I think it's very, it can put you in a very dangerous position as a Christian if you

just base your Christianity on 'I just believe' because to be honest, the Bible also says the truth sets us free, and even as a Christian I had to relearn so much of what I believe because my faith was based upon what I was taught. And what I was taught in many instances was incorrect. So I was living a way, and I was bound, and certain things even as a Christian I had to be freed from when I actually studied myself and said God that's not what you meant about that, and now I know you mean I've applied and live my life a certain way. And that's actually made me as a Christian more free, I think like it's very important that we don't just have this mindset of well, I just believe it, because everything that we believe is what we've been taught, and if we've not been taught correct then we have belief in something that's wrong. So we do have to make a better effort to see the truth as well in our own lives.

Closing words by me.

1.3 The Black Face of the Early Church

Eleasah Phoenix Louis

Transcribing – Black Face of the Early Church

Brixton Baptist Church

04/03/2018

Eleasah: Okay, well, I'll get started so it doesn't get too awkward, hey my name's Eleasah, and what we do in this section is a combination of reflecting on the information that I've put out there, and the information is really just meant to act like a stimulus, there's no way for me to teach on the whole thing it's just not possible. I just have my limitations – I'm still learning number one, but number two is about time. But the second aspect of this conversation is just to open up the floor about black consciousness and Christian faith. We might not all be Christians here, so it is definitely an open floor where you can share whatever you believe, but it's just interesting to talk about why

we believe what we believe or how we're wrestling with this issue or actually not wrestling with this issue of black consciousness. I meet many black people who are like, 'what are you talking about, and why is this important?' And um in some ways you might consider well actually God loves everybody, he loves me so leave it as that I'm cool, but when we think about in our first session we looked at some of the statistics in this country, statistically, in this country, black people are systematically oppressed, it's proven. Six times more likely to be stopped and searched, six times more likely to be incarcerated or sectioned, employment is low, or asset is low in comparison to other groups and obviously in comparison to European people here in this country. We looked at these statistics because part of this is to look at what is Christianity and what does Christianity have to say about the predicament of black people in this country. It's not just to say, 'Oh, we're oppressed and we're just gonna pray about it' what does God actually think about it? What do we then think and do about it?

And that's a bit more of a black theology – how is God speaking specifically into our context and situation that we are now in? And the idea is that we're in this position not because we asked to be. Okay, we're not in this country – well, our grandparents are in this country because they flew here, but we're not on this side of the planet because we wanted to be, essentially my ancestors did not say 'yeah definitely put me on that boat'. Okay, um and so because of that tension of domination, of colonialism and for so long not being counted as human and now we have kind of this new era of still not being seen as equal and fighting for equality, just talk about what does Christianity have to say, or what are some of the failings of the Church so far. Just having a well-rounded discussion. So I'll open it out with a question first, just to get people rolling, but if you have other information you want to share, 'I read a book, or this is where I'm at or what I'm thinking this is the space to do it. And if you obviously want to refer back to something that I covered in the session today, that is cool. But the question I'm just gonna ask, and it's a bit personal, so no force, you can just listen okay, but what is the relationship between your identity as a black person and your religion? You might not be a Christian so this is saying religion; if anyone would like to share about that – is there

a connection, what is the relationship between you as a person where you come from, your culture, your skin colour and the religion, your belief system?

Participant MO: When I was called as a young girl of sixteen in Jamaica, you know I just have that urge; I always want to be a Christian first. I like the tings of God and the Church, you know, and to learn more about God, and with that I find it help me to be a kind person a loving person I'm not very contentious I like to make peace you know. I need to be at peace with it, yeah... I've had a long marriage and um I looked after my husband very well, and in his last days of sickness, he said to me that probably the sickness would have killed him a long time had it not been for my help you know. And these make me feel good

Eleasah: and you link that directly to you

Participant MO: Faith. I love God. I can't see myself being horrible or anything like that. I know my prayers answered when I pray. I see my children they been in tested in other religion, not in my religion but connected to God and the last session one of them was that was asking question, that they went to classes about the various things... but as for my belief as a mother and wife, I dedicated my life to look after them, sent them to school. And one day, I remember my son said, like some parents, they (never) go to school and tell off teachers, you and I said, but then you wouldn't get where you are today, they would put a block on you. You know, I'm not that type of person; I never see my mother doing that, so I had a good upbringing, so I just bring it into my family – teach them to have love and not to be going out there and making trouble. My son, when he got his job (laughs), and he learned his trade, he even did some little work in the Church here with the gas and you know things like that, and with my friends and ting. I said he mustn't charge them big price you know, and it does benefit my family. You must just teach them the right way and just love God and just feel that the spirit of God is in me, you know.

Eleasah: Thank you

Participant MO: from a young person I just love God, my place of work all my life, never no policeman coming to my door, my children never get in trouble, neither do I, neither do my husband we just live clean lives, thank God. Amen

Participant MO: Thank you very much

Pastor CAW: so for you, being a mum, being a wife, that's where your identity, that was important to you in terms of your faith. Did your racial identity play a part in your faith as well, or was that never something you considered because it was just 'I'm a mum, I'm gonna be a good mum, I'm gonna be a good wife umm and a good woman'?

Participant MO: umm, that's right

Pastor CAW:the racial part of who I am is umm secondary or even insignificant, I didn't even think of myself as a black woman I am just, I am a mum and wife, a good parent and a good person, do you ever think about your racial identity?

Participant MO: No, I never let these tings bother me because I hear when people talk about when they come to this county and to get anywhere to live and all these tings. By time I come here in 1962, ya know, Black people have their own houses so I could get a room to rent and never have much problem with people who don't want to sit beside me on buses and at work. Well, to get jobs, sometimes they don't wanna give it to you because you're black, you see that. But I never let it go, I always went to my little evening classes learn something, I'm always want to better myself, I never look at nobody who you know, want to keep me down, they do say horrible things to me and things, but I'm always persevering doing things you know. Be doing things.

Pastor CAW: It's just because you would be described as the first generation. Does the second generation growing up in the country have a different perspective, where perhaps the racial experience in this country starts to become part of your identity? Part of your political identity, because you're seeing experiences perhaps that you parents awareness of issue suddenly racial identity starts to become more important, um in a way perhaps to your _____ her (indicating Participant MO) priority is survival, home to live, family to raise, husband to take care of that's my

priority, suddenly next generation different priorities are emerging, race starts to become more of an important issue. Is that something that starts to emerge second generation?

Eleasah: or third?

Participant KA: I don't want to speak for everybody, but I think, generally speaking, that would be the case. I think identity is very important, and how people see themselves. So umm, for me, it's been a - it's a little bit of an interesting one, I think, and my identity as a man. As an African definitely influences the way I interact with my faith. Um, I'm a Christian um I think some of the challenges I've had umm is I think the fact that that kind of patricha- or neo-colonial relationship that still happens; where it's like I feel that as the black community a lot of the times our- what we do is not recognised in the broader sense unless there's a someone out of our community world- if that makes sense- so it's not like we're not seen as being able to rule ourselves. So when I say that there's a lot of churches that are predominantly black, but they'll still be led by a white minister, and I don't think – there's nothing necessarily wrong with having a white minister but just the idea of somebody who's black being able to - to sort of lead. I think that's a big thing, so I think I'm quite passionate about my African descent and for me feel very very passionate about what happens on that continent, because um hearing stories for my grandfather, he talks about, he even when they were there black people couldn't even achieve the highest grades. It was just like you could because you were black. You just couldn't and even looking at like a lot of the theology, looking at today's society, like well known black preachers, I'm not of the nature of too charismatic, so there doesn't seem to be much. I looked up something, for example, um African I think it was bible school or something like that, and I found that in Kenya and I found that it was still lead by someone of European descent and Uganda - still by European descent, and it's like why do we need that ___ there's that element. It's an interesting one for me because, for me, it's more a 'on this earth' thing, does that make sense, and interacting that will people other Christians who are not black. I think my concern is that as a body - as a Christian body, there seems to be a disconnect within that, understanding that as a black person, I can worship God in a certain way which may not be the same as what you do, but it equally, it's not – there's an element of it done in an African way it

might be voodoo evolved, do you know what I mean? Whereas the white way is the righteous way, and for the Bible, for me, the Bible didn't come from your culture anyway. The Hebrew culture wasn't the same as modern-day western culture. So kind of coming across that and also helping for me, the reason why I'm here is – I don't personally, there's some little gaps in my knowledge, that doesn't influence my salvation if that makes sense personally, but there are some friends who it does. And helping find where some of their challenges are and filling those gaps, discussing it with my fellow brothers and sisters, I can better understand where they're coming from. I can tell you, um, I think that when I met Eleasah, she made a good point that when she was younger, she saw a lot of people coming away from the faith because they watched a youtube video or something, and it's just like, they're willing to push the Bible which is very big, but then when you're coming across other pieces of literature you should mean to scrutinise them equally in amount and sometimes that not the case and how do we get people to see actually that kind of disconnect? I think it's really important for me and my brothers and sisters to benefit, um it can -identity can be a challenge, but I think for God I mentioned he sees us as individuals and we need to find where there's, where we don't find a connect with God, being about to get over that a little bit, get over that in terms of understanding why that it is, because for some people just to kind of finish on this point, as a man if you don't have a father in your life, the idea of God the father is not something that you're used because your father is not in your life, so the idea of God being a good father is unusual.

Eleasah: anyone else

Participant CL: Off of that point, I'm in my early thirties, so I'm not second-generation. I'd say I'm probably third generation. Um, as to the original question that you posed- how much of our race is involved in our religion- for me personally, my own journey um I grew up in church, and so to answer that question, church has always been a part of life as a youngster really. My parents are from Jamaica, both my parents came over when they were young, their other siblings were born here, but they were born in Jamaica, so they grew up with their grandparents, so that thing of just

going to church and church being apart of life was just normal for me. Um, both my parents and a lot in that generation sort of left the Church, my dad was a Rastafarian for little while, I don't know how serious - it might have just been the music, but the books was in my house, so I got to read about Marcus from a young age even as a Christian. So me personally, I've grown into an apostolic faith, so there's a lot of Zionist kind of mixes in there, so for me personally, it's just an extension of community. It was only when I went to school I realised that people did Church differently - so in terms of for me personally, yes it was always for me part of who I am but interestingly as well and why I think what you're doing is really is as a black person, you start to learn about slavery or just the history because it's written down, I was drawn to read about Rastafarianism, and it's only because when I read it, I was into the music and everything, it was the doctrine that didn't make sense to me. But I think to answer your question when you think about white Jesus, he wasn't in my house but going into a church or a school and looking at the other side of it I have to say as a black person, it can pose a challenge. So for me personally, I've been fortunate that Church was what you did. Whether your parents went to Church or not, they sent you to church, I was part of that. My parents then got saved after but I think for me actually taken the time to read and ask questions like the brother was saying, I don't think it's a bad thing, um as the brother was saying me personally faith has to be the starting point and being able to ask questions about history I don't think is a wrong thing doing that. I think probably in my own personal experience, thinking back now, um, maybe there wasn't enough of a space to do that. And I see – what I think is different back then, I'm in my thirties now but growing up there was no questions, cool, there's a lot of youngsters now are not being forced to go to church, and there's an access to information now, it's a different challenge there, for me it was no questions asked, and so you had that foundation put in you and then later on obviously you start to ask questions. So for me, it was part of my upbringing; it was for all my friends. Whether your parents went to church or not, you all went to Sunday school and heard bible stories, whatever type of denomination. I was fortunate in my own home and my own Church; we were allowed to be expressive. I got very involved in music and it sort of helped me to stay through my teen years, so for me growing up personally, yes, it was just part of my culture; going to Church was part of it, yeah.

Eleasah: and could you, what you mentioned about that kind of Zionist aspect, is that kind of like – was there a pro-Israel, is that what you meant?

Participant CL: Nah nah nah, it's more of an umm what can I say just more about African, that side of it, yeah African. So people coming from the outside – I guess it's wherever people came from, in Jamaica, to be honest, rural Jamaica to be honest with you. Um, so yeah, you got the Zionist movement not so much the Israel side, African sort of mix in there.

Eleasah: I was only asking just to make the clarification because I grew up in more of a signs and wonders church, so we had stuff from Israel all over the house. It was all kind of like 'yes the people of Israel drawing back to Israel' so in some sense the Church obviously supported the state of Israel, which is obviously a political thing but, they consider it a spiritual thing, do you know what I mean? So I just wanted to make that clarification because I'm not familiar with your Church. Because again, that was a cultural input and I was with black people do you know what I mean. And we're playing – even our music sounded Israeli do you know what I mean, or what we thought would be Israel, it's reconstructed, what we believed, because obviously now what we're learning, that the Hebrew community may have been a bit more like African communities that what we see of people in the country now, whoever they may be. So I just wanted to make that clarification because sometimes, even just thinking about the little influences helps us to understand the type of faith/religion wherever we are, even if we're atheists, umm the influences that have an impact on how we express ourselves, even the languages that we use. When I grew up, we didn't have much black music in the house, but I can sing a couple songs in Hebrew, do you know what I mean. So that kind of influence - it plays a part .. anybody else?

Participant: Thank you, Thank you – just thinking about is there, has there or has there never been, doesn't have to be, we're not trying to control the ideas but just to explore this relationship because it's centred around this issue of the divide in the black community, kind of anti-Christ and pro-Christ – obviously it's more complex because there are other religions but specifically here today umm

Pastor CAW: I think one of the things we've got to understand is the power of religion. I think we see it as just a church thing, but it's almost something that's in the atmosphere, in our perception in our culture, and its Christianity is deeply bound up with the notion of hierarchy, a racial hierarchy, it's almost just assumed as we don't often recognise it but it's deeply embedded in our past consciousness and not just in black subconsciousness but in white subconsciousness as well that this – at the top of the racial ladder sits a white God. And actually, to deconstruct that, to get that out of your head, is liberating. It's absolutely liberating; it gives us permission to challenge the very way our social order has been constructed it has been constructed with this underlying assumption. And every now and again, it rears its ugly head. How many people have seen the black panther movie? So I was having a conversation with someone, we're talking about it, and I was saying that one of the things it does – this projection of Wakanda, although it's this afro-futurist view, this technologically advanced society that actually is reaching back into history into the idea that actually there were these great historic African kingdoms. It's not something that's just sci-fi; it's actually rooted in history. And the person I was talking to was like 'oh what African- name an African kingdom' like they didn't exist, and I was really shocked, a white friend of mine, who I knew quite well but this dismissal of any notion that there was these great historical African histories that they've been written out of. So peoples view of African and blackness is you know, receiving aid you know –

Participant LM: also because when we was, when I was going school, I wasn't taught that

Pastor Caw: you weren't taught?

Participant LM: nothing about that

Pastor CAW: oh no, no, no

Participant LM: that's probably why he didn't; everything we were taught was white, nothing black was taught in school (Participant in 40+years) so, when I got older, knowing more black history, it

was like 'really, they do that? that really happen?' it all white history, so I can understand why he said that to you

Pastor CAW: but this was a younger person. I was surprised at the way it was dismissed; it was like it couldn't be that, rather than 'oh really tell me some more' it was like 'That can't have happened, Africa is this poor.....' so

Participant DA: I was gonna say, my point is similar; touching on what you both said, my story is that I'm third generation as well, but when I was eight, I got sent back home, so I went to live in the Caribbean. So seeing the difference between me and other friends growing up in Dominica at my age, being that for me I had all the black stuff, the latter part of primary school, all my high school I learned all about the Caribbean, I learned black history, I learned everything. I didn't learn about Shakespeare and Queen Elizabeth. I never heard them things, so my perspective to a lot of people my age is a lot different. When I see younger black people now, I find the struggle for identity is kinda similar to the Americans, in the sense that Americans obviously came from Africa at some time, but as the generations go by, they're losing the history, they're losing knowing where they come from. There's so many people that they've never been back to their country in Africa, never been to the Caribbean. Don't know anything about Jamaica, St. Lucia, wherever they're from, Nigeria. Don't know the language, don't know how to cook the food, they just lose all their culture and their kids are gonna be worse of because they're not going to their countries on holiday, they're going to Spain and all these kind of places

Participant LM: it's cheaper! (everyone laughs)

Eleasah: well yeah!

Participant DA: flying everywhere but never been to your own country. You don't even know your own family, and what's gonna happen is the links are gonna break. So once their family has died, they're gonna have no link to go back. Now if you wanna go back, you have to go to hotel, you come like a tourist-

Pastor CAW: yeah

Participant DA: and the chances of you going now are just getting less and less, and you're just gonna be completely disconnected, when I came back, I came back when I was sixteen, so I was there for 8 years, a lot of the things I see my friends have gone through, iv e just never had that. I've never had a problem of who am I as a black man kinda thing I find that a lot of my friends and that are just searching for this connection to my cultural identity-

Participant LM: because we're not taught that in school

Participant DA: - language, I can talk patois I'm from Dominica, do you know what I'm saying I can speak it, I can go back there, and I know everywhere – I'm Dominican. And there's a lot of Dominicans – there's a lot of Dominicans that you say 'oh where are your parents from?' 'I don't know' they don't even know the village their parents are from, so like it's just becoming more and more of a disconnect. And if that disconnect keeps – for us we're going back, we wanna raise our kids there, I think that that's important, even if we just take our kids there and teach them our culture and our language, so they know I'm from Nigeria or whatever, yeah I think that that's important, keep the connection with your country your culture.

Eleasah: and it's interesting because you keep saying it's not taught in our schools, it wasn't taught in my school either the first thing I got taught about black history is people dancing around a fire or being a slave. But also the Church, it's like a hidden history, I mean I've only been talking for 40 minutes, do you know what I mean about two people, that two out of so many that have contributed to what we believe and, I speak to so many people and they're like 'what? I've never heard of it.'

Participant LM: I must agree, with the religion, not black religion, that's not really taught in schools, but we know like Hindu all that that's being taught, jews Catholics but not blacks. Because as I said, when I went to school, black religion is not taught in school, so we don't know nothing about the Baptist Church or anything like that – Church of God, which is a shame, it's not only the Catholic Church, it's not only the Church of England you know.

Eleasah: And other African traditional religions that are not Christian as well

Pastor CAW: Yes Coptic

Eleasah: because we have a whole, in theology, we have like a whole field called African theology where they kind of tackle through ancient traditional – African traditional religions and Christianity. So we got books about Jesus being an ancestor, trying to make those connections, and we still argue about if that's good, or that's biblical or whatever but actually just discussing what was, with that is now and how can there be a more authentic black or African Christianity. Those things exist out there but we'd never know going to Church. It took me to join theology masters and PhD (programmes) to find this out. Do you know what I mean like what is that? I've been to black Churches all my life, black schools all my life, as in we were the majority seventy percent, black women. All independent, strong, we're all that ethos, but our culture and our black religions are like a hidden history, and it's that lack of transparency that seems to be causing the divide, so it's not even in schools. It's the power that umm religion and Christianity just seems to embody; it's actually very complicit in that gap. It's basically essentially intentional, it could be argued. Intentional – and it's kind of why we're here today, to kind of unpack that, explore it and challenge it essentially and do something a bit different. Anything else- we're gonna wrap up soon, maybe just the last few comments it's getting late. Anything like a question, or something they wanna share?

Participant HB: it was more when you brought up the whole Israelite thing; I was brought up in Church, we two (indicating her sister) grew up in Church together, but from the age of nineteen, it was probably when my family started coming out of Church, questioning the Bible, our thoughts were everywhere, and we took a step back instead of going into it more, and then discussing it an finding out –

Eleasah: with your parents?

Participant HB: well with my whole family, yeah, my brothers and sisters that was it every Sunday go to Church, that was the routine like so we all just took a step back kind of just wondering about

ourselves like 'okay we don't go church anymore' it was weird on a Sunday, to wake up and like – lie down. So yeah, now my mum, in like the last year she gone to this Israelite thing

Eleasah: Hebrew Israelites?

Participant HB: yeah, sorry, I'm not sure what you really call it because I dunno; there's some things with me because I've not... I dunno, it just hasn't – I dunno something with me. I'm not kind of at peace with it or something like it. It's cause it's too. I don't even how to describe it because its that kind of -

Pastor CAW: mmm, it's different, isn't it?

Participant HB: yeah, it's different

Pastor CAW: and I think one of the things that umm traditional Christianity has done is made us suspicious and mistrustful of our own heritage, so that is the 'other'. This is the established truth, and everything else is to be other, to be wary of whether that's African spirituality, African traditions or ummm so we're wary of it, so there's no need to have fear, its worthy of the investigation umm you know it's not something your gonna suddenly find yourself stepping into a room full of demons and allsorts

Participant HB: yeah, a lot of its black culture, so I'm open, completely open with it- it's just a lot of the things that they practice. I asked my mum the other day about women wearing trousers, I was like mum 'if I wear trousers am I going to hell' she's like 'yes' you know things like that, and I'm just like its one of those tin(?) head moments you're just like 'what?' so I don't know what cross of information and the practices what they're doing, because all through the culture, if you bring it back to black culture and find out history, I'm all for it I wanna know what they know but when they started crossing that with it and making it part of something that's when I have to be 'what is this all about?'

Eleasah: and this is where the learning journey is really important because I mean, with the black Hebrew Israelite community, there's lots of different camps. Some of them believe Jesus is the son of God, some of them don't – this is just for clarifications. So we can't make blanket statements; it's not that easy, but they're very much rooted in the law, which's where wearing trousers go to hell comes from. As protestant Christians and in this Baptist Church were not rooted in the law in that sense, so if we wear trousers, it's not hell that we're bound for. It's our lack of faith in Christ that's what saves us and pleases God. But their efforts to recapture what they believe is the true "Hebrewness", the black presence in the Bible and black agency, our purpose and destiny is very admirable, but obviously, there's lots of overlap in terms of, like I said, being bound by the law, for example, I would say as a protestant 'being bound' okay, but they wouldn't call it that – so again language, context, culture, power, agenda, is important. But the suspicion thing is really powerful because actually we've got a lot that we could learn from them, but also there are some things that personally are not cool like white people cannot be saved and selected geography. Okay, so the lost tribes of Israel all ended up in the Caribbean and the Americas because actually, the fulfilment of Abrahams prophesy –slave ships and Deuteronomy as well I shouldn't forget – slaves ships, that was the um judgement, and those were the Israelites. So the whole of Africa doesn't count, the people that were left behind don't seem to count, and those are the things that we have to tackle – maybe for their benefit if you believe they're really wrong or not. And it is a difficult one because we have these reconstructionist groups that are, that want religion, that want the Hebrew God, and in many cases want Jesus, but they want to be black.

Participant HB: it's the crossing out of everyone else is what I don't fathom because I grew up multicultural, I've got a mixture of friends from all everywhere, and I like that, and I like knowing about people's different backgrounds. And I'm not gonna cast them out just because you don't follow a certain law or because God said you're not one of the chosen people, but we're still here living on this earth altogether, and I'm still gonna love like God said 'you need to love everyone, so I'm going to love everyone, so that's when I don't understand why you, why they felt that no one else is...

Eleasah: and that's what the intellectual space is for because essentially they're mirroring everything they say that they hate about slavery and the white man

Participant HB: yeah, it's like they're doing the same thing back, so where is the growth? Where is the

Participant DA: I just want to add something to that, if you look at the history of the Hebrew Israelites in America, you know you had that thing about belief, power, agenda... theirs comes from the power agenda because their Reversed which is still racism so for them it's a thing. That's why a lot – there are different sects that are milder than others. Some do believe white people are going to hell, some believe some are not, some believe Africans are not gonna get saved because they're not included because just because you're black doesn't mean you're a Hebrew, basically. Hebrews are from the twelve tribes, and they were sent into Egypt as slaves then ended up from Africa to the Caribbean, but there were people in Africa already who they consider not their people, some say. But the whole thing is why they did it is the power agenda, which was 'we're gonna be on top' so they saw themselves and took the Hebrews to be them but by default, they had to accept everything else that came with it because the prophecies are very specific and if they accept those prophecies they have to be bound under the law to practice that. So that's why they have to adopt the law and carry on the various religious practices that they have like the trousers and all these different things.. so on and so forth. They kind of bind themselves under the law as it goes hand in hand to take that position, as God's children or God's only children should I say. So it's a difficult situation, but from my experience, I used to debate with a lot of them, before... years ago, before it was really here, it was online, YouTube _____ it's really coming up that time, so that's what I found that the power/agenda is what it is, they flip the rules, not to bring the unity but to make us to be the top of the others... you have to be careful

Pastor CAW: yeah

Eleasah: it's worth exploring. We shouldn't be scared to learn and explore; like you said, you won't get attacked in the night. You'll be fine. (Participant HB laughs) Do you know what I mean, and

again – but it is! This is also what we've embodied 'if we learn too much,' somebody said, 'don't go to theological school or you'll leave the church!' and for me, my connection with God is definitely different but definitely stronger.

Participant HB: I think your faith will still remain the same, isn't it?

Eleasah: BUT we've been scared for centuries, don't read it's not for you, if you do this if you do that – power agenda. We've been on the bottom for so long, all of that plays a part in our suspicions in our fears and really, for I mean education is just paramount at this point to uhh to make the change. Is there any final points anyone wants to make? It's been really good actually... any kind of.. or it could....

1.4 Black Jesus, Black Theology

Eleasah Phoenix Louis

Transcribing Black Jesus/Black Theology

20/06/2018

Eleasah: Okay, so usually we form a circle, so there is no kind of me saying everything, so a circle of life! And um basically, the discussion element of this session becomes the most important part

because what I try to do in these sessions is eliminate this idea that the person at the front gets to know all and say all okay? So the initial point, the initial part that I do --- (some disruptions of talking) the initial point is just to provoke you, so I provide some information and provoke you, you're welcome to challenge me on it and what we wanna do is start to hear some of your ideas, its been about four weeks for most of us now okay so I'm hoping that you're starting to form some ideas or more questions and those questions can be geared at one another they don't necessarily need to be at me okay. Um, but mainly because this is the last session, it is considering this thing called Christianity in light of our struggle as black people or people of colour in Britain, okay. Is Christianity enough? Okay, theologically, practically, what do we experience of church now? Okay, is it actually a viable vehicle for justice, and this is why I save black theology for last, because a lot of people, a lot of Christians, don't get to hear about it. It doesn't make it to church, okay, but there are people out there really trying to make sense of God and his interaction with our struggle, so I thought you'd probably feel a bit cheating if I didn't have this conversation and let you know that this is out there. But also, just based on what you know, what you understand of life, it boils down to this can you be black, can you be Christian, and where does it go from here. With what you've learned with some of your ideas, um as they've been stretched, as they've been grown over the last few – what are the new challenges that have arisen, for me particularly starting this journey a few years ago it's about how does my faith actually become practical and socially and politically useful.

Someone says: YES!

Eleasah: okay, it's not enough for me to pray and fast and cast out demons; I'm very good at that, okay, but when it comes to being a political voice for people who struggle in real life, people that actually don't have food, people that get wrongly imprisoned all those kind of things okay, all the – I don't know if they're called bills in this country but all the new laws and by-laws that gets passed, is my faith actually contributing to the betterment of peoples lives, the same way I believe that Jesus' did when he land okay. So I'm just started off to say that it's always been my biggest struggle; even though I teach it's like 'how am I walking it day to day?' part of it is me teaching it okay; that's

part of my contribution, but when I wake up what does my faith look like, is it enough to say I'm gonna pray for you sister, okay that's because I decided to remain a Christian but is it good enough, is it worth it? Okay, is it useful? Okay, so over to you guys!

Participant PA: I think the biggest issue for me is, um, there's no question about my blackness and Christ relating to Christ; there's no questions about that. I don't, I'm not schizophrenic in my faith. However, my issue is having been in church for nearly twenty years or, say late.. and um, everything I've learned on my journey up until now for me as in the way it's been taught in church is based on a lie. It's based on deception. And I say that because it doesn't match up with what's in the word, I don't – not my faith, it's not about my faith, it's not about how I see myself and how I would pray and how I would encourage and all of those things – it's not about that issue. My issue is when I sit in church, and I listen to the sermons, and I watch what's going on in church life, there's two Jesus'

Participant M: yeah yeah yeah it's not matching up

Participant PA: it's not matching up the word, and the church there's a void in between, so that's been my issue. The whole black consciousness thing and the journey of that, I've been – no secretly, but I've not been as vocal about it; this journey's been going on for me since 2006. The questioning, the research, the how does this white Jesus relate to me, and he doesn't because it's an image of something or someone perception of who that person should be. But if God has come for everyone, there should be Chinese black Jesus, Chinese Jesus, and European Jesus. There should be an African Jesus. Do you know what I mean? But that for me has not been coming across in a positive way, so my questions are has been that. How does church justify that, how does church- how do you justify taking my tithe money and you do not present a programme that feeds the people, not just feeds the people but pays a few bills here and there? Do you understand what I'm saying to ya? You got red tap – I know people that need shoes for their children, and when they go through the admin side of things, there's so much red tape they're made to feel so embarrassed about I they don't ask. It's alright for you to take my tithe money but what about the person who needs £20 for their oyster do you understand – my dilemma is you I give you my tithe money or do I give my sister or my brother that £20. And I say id give you that £20. Do you understand what I'm saying to ya, so those sort of

things in the journey is becoming increasingly distressing for me and the change, yeah I do challenge leaders, all the time, I'm their face... that bishops, elders and I'm constantly told "oh you can't say that" and I say "well you show me where I can't say it if it's in the word" yeah it's a real ting, so I think there should be more of this

Host M: but the good thing is you're in church, you go church, do you?

Participant PA: yeah, I go church at the moment, but even if I wasn't in church, I never met Jesus in church – that's my ting I never met God in church, I met God when I was like on holiday if the truth be known, in Negril saying "what about me? If you're real, you need to show me that you're real". That was the conversation I was having at the time, and yeah, it's real, and he spoke to me, so yeah, it's not about church for me – this is church. Not just the building, the fact we're congregating together, anywhere that we're discussing the justice of our fellow man is church for me. So yeah, I do go to church, how long for – that's the question, or the organisation, being part of the organisations, how long for I don't know. That's me.

Participant SB: it's interesting, but I haven't been with you lot for you said four weeks? I haven't - haven't been with you lot for that because Wednesday is my socialist night. I'm socialist, and um, church for me is inherent because I'm from Barbados, which they call little England, and the lifestyle is very like here, we have a class structure you're either top middle or bottom right? So I was educated in the middle-class structure and, umm came here as a nurse in the sixties; I had to be literate and numerate to be here. My father couldn't read or write, but he wanted his daughter to come here where the streets were paved with gold to be a nurse. I class myself as a professional bum wiper. Yes, it's okay. I can handle it, yes I qualified as a nurse, and I stayed as a nurse; it paid my way in life. I produce one child. I choose not to have any more because of the economic climate and because of the differences and the difficulties I've been through. I nurse started off away in Hertfordshire, and I think I was the only black face in the ward, and then the white ladies and see me and were scared, but that didn't frighten me because that experience is what I experience In Barbados. There is a part of Barbados where it is predominantly white, that white aristocracy that owns the plantation along the seaside. I walked along there one day with my eldest sister, who was

a servant, and the white lady was calling me. I was scared shit. I never got close to a white person, so I was frightened. She only wanted to give me a sweet. I came here to England, I did my nursing, and I was on night duty; they said, "get your blasted hand off me. I'm scared of you". It didn't frighten me; I stuck to it. But let's move on because of time is of the – I did my nursing and became a trouble maker because when we start to do this thing called agenda for change, I will give you a little experience of why nurses scared me, we came here in the late sixties so around this time we'd all e retiring, its called agenda for change and agenda for change meant in the British system, we've got news for you, we bought you here to do a job, t clean up this country after the war. But now that you're ready for retirement and what they did, they upgraded some of us and made us very posh. I became a nurse specialist, a lot of us got high positions called nurse officers. It got to our heads, and the system was to use us to get rid f our own and lack people got promotion nearing their retirement. Agenda for change that what it meant; however, I was looking for promotion, and they call it agenda for change. They got an Irish girl in my department. They have her three grades higher than me. She said, 'Maureen would you be kind enough to show me the work' I said, 'no, I'm sorry, you are now my boss. I will refuse' my manager at the time was black okay – I got suspended -

Participant OM: can I ask you something politely, please?

Participant SB: go on

Participant OM: Because it's the last session

Participant SB: last session

Participant M: yeah

Participant SB: that's a shame. That I didn't come early and give you this story. (everyone laughs!)

I got suspended

Participant PA: if you could relate this to Christianity, that would actually be helpful

Participant SB: yes?

Participant PA: if you could link it with Christianity and what we've been discussion

Participant SB: okay, I will come back. This has a lot of Christianity – I'll round this up. When I got suspended for failing to meet a reasonable request, my black audience said to me they were praying for me, and it was the white socialist comrades that came outside that hospital, it's fallen now, with banners, white socialist banners

Host M: oh, and black ones just prayed?? Okay

Participant SB: 'reinstate her now', and I got my job back. So if you all are looking towards moving forward, you need to have an agenda that are going to encourage the young followers like my daughter because we are now the elderly. The care of the elderly, and there's no room for us because the system said the Windrush is there - get out

Host M: That's true

Participant SB: so we have to look out for this religious thing because were using the word 'black' quote/unquote, so be very positive. I'm ready to stand up as an older pensioner and fight with you

Host M: so would anybody like to add to that?

Host M: because that is true, we need to have an agenda. Has anyone got anything, any ideas?

Participant NY: we need to start with young people, basically. We need to encourage our young people to, not necessarily, to come to church because they don't wanna come to church. We need to find another way of encouraging them.

Host M: do you think this will? This different kind of interpretation, way of looking at the Bible, do you think this will draw them in?

Participant NY: it could if we could get them here in the first place because when the church –

Eleasah: but what is this luring and drawing? What are we talking about? What are we trying to bring people into? Because for me, I put these on because people are very confused about what this is in terms of church or Christianity or their Christian experiences. They're a bit kind of unravelling, so I don't; that's why I don't do altar calls and "let's pray together" cause that running before we're even standing. A lot of us are on the floor thinking, what's going on? So that's why I said it's actually more about the changing of our mind, is there new reflections or new thoughts or new questions because that's really the start. We can invite them to church, but they're going to have questions. I mean, what are our ideas? We've been learning for the last few weeks and considering and reflecting and learning from each other, which has been really good, but what does it mean. And what does Christianity mean for black people? Is it viable

Participant M: what do we say to them when we come

Eleasah: what do we say for ourselves, though?

Participant DH: can I just say, I know I've just come in on your fourth thing

Eleasah: Nah, it's okay. You're welcome!

Participant DH: I'm [REDACTED] best friend, so I've been on this journey with her. And my experience is a bit, she invited me to church on numerous occasions and as I say to her, - she knows, I believe in God. I believe one hundred percent, but the church environment it scares me and whether from the experience, going back to this lady, you know I grew up in the west indies, and for me, I grew up in a catholic environment, so it was everything was white Jesus, and that's what was instilled in me as well as like she was I was in a middle-class family, and it was black, white, brown you know so it, and in the at church, I never felt complete there, and as soon as I came back to England with my mum she was like 'oh you got to go ack to church', and I was like nope! Not going to church. "Oh, but you grew up in a catholic environment" nope! Hated it hated it – walking into that ting with all those tings stuck up on the wall, hated it. Numerous occasions, I've been invited to black churches – hate them. Can't think of anything worse, but my faith is still there. I still believe in God. I'm with my friend twenty-four-seven; she's preaching to me whatever, you know I know it's in

there, but that environment absolutely scares me because, I dunno I kind of look from the outside in, what I see I don't actually like. I don't like the whole kind of because you got two, two um two differences, because you got some churches where you've got the holy spirit and whatever which I find terrifying and then you've got the other thing where you've got this man or woman stands there, and their dripping in gold or whatever else and you know I don't get it because to me that's not Christianity, and to me, that's not what I wanna stand there – I wanna sit in a session like this and talk amongst like-minded people, and walk out of here and think 'oh I feel whole now' it's not about you know what I mean, going, clapping and singing for me that's not Christianity, that's my personal opinion. So for me, things like this and as well as that I'm learning about my culture and my blackness, so I'm feeling whole on numerous levels. I'm walking out of here feeling a bit more black conscious and a bit more Christian, and I'm – do you know what I mean, so to me this and when I think we talk about our youngsters, If I was to sort of turn and say to my twenty-two-year-old son now, "oh come let's go to church" he'd be like "what!?" as opposed to me saying "and come and have- sit down in this session" do you know what I mean. I think this would be more inviting for him, it wouldn't be so much like you know. I think sessions like this will work, and it will take time like everything else because the minute to put black in front of anything, they think, "oh here we go, they come with their army", so we don't necessarily have to put a label on it but for me obviously on the fourth week, (everyone laughs) you know sorry, but I think things like this can work and when people are kind of talking and expressing I think that works better than the whole kind of "oh join us" and giving tithes, you know I don't get all that. So for me, this is a nicer environment.

Participant UL: I think um, well I'm joining in the last session as well, but I'm it scares me how the gap between the elder and the younger generation is just getting bigger and bigger and bigger and bigger, and I feel like church does have a lot to do with that. Because will I've grown up in church as well and I see poverty in church and I don't understand why um you give your money and stuff and that every week and tithes and whatever they say its to help run the building and all of that and then you're struggling to even get to church the next week. And then your child looks at you and or

even says to granny, 'granny, you're dragging me church every Sunday – you need help, how is the help not coming to the church that you've been coming to for twenty years? I don't get it ', and then you're like, 'No, but church is good you will get blessings'

Host M: mmm, and they're not seeing

Participant UL: they don't see it. The younger generation don't see it, so what am I encouraging my child to do? To come and sit and join with me, and we just be like this (clapping unenthusiastically)

Host M: because it's this blessing me for singing

Participant UL: do you know what I mean? I don't, I don't you know – what are we gonna encourage them for. And then when they get angry, and stuff and we say 'well you can't do it like this, and they say 'but you've been doing this for so long, for so long, for so long and you're nowhere' so then what are we gonna tell the youngers then?

1.5 State your Case

Eleasah Phoenix Louis

Transcription

State your Case – Central London

06/11/2016

Participant DS: I find that insulting when I hear that coz it tells me two things; it tells me one thing that people believe that black people were that weak to let someone make you feel something ad feel something, so umm and at the same time make you keep going on believing. We find it hard to now to get someone to believe something, let alone when someone is forcing you to do something, while they're beating you, killing your family – all this stuff. And it's manipulation, its manipulation of the scriptures that they use to justify what they were doing but to manipulate something, you had to know something in the first place. So I know that if we go back before slavery, in Africa, back back back, I don't know if anyone has been to the Pan-African centre here in London, and uh if you go you will learn, there is so much that you will find out about black people that it's amazing. The kings, even one of the richest to this day, one of the richest people ever to live, is a black man. And um I say all this to say, there's so much greatness there, and to feel that someone's kind of made you believe something I find insulting were not the only enlightened species, all of the sudden we're enlightened because it's 2016 and all of the sudden we realise actually 'no it was all a lie', our ancestors and stuff held on actually got them through a lot of hard times and um, and um as they didn't educate black people after a while um I understand that it's easy to feel like okay they didn't want us to know too much so they can kind of mask what they know. Them masking what they know is nothing again to do with what the bible says. This, all this stuff for me, is like me looking at black people and seeing how they are getting it twisted, and it can bring up arguments that are not actually there. Because biblically.....the Bible does not support it at all. In fact, I want to find something to read to you; I guess in slavery terms the biblical slavery was nothing like what we saw happening in the slavery in the United States. Um, the master automatically owned the estate, and they owned the babies that were coming out; they owned them as property. Um, biblical slavery was different because it would be more of like, he would be in my house working um, so the world slavery then is the not the same word as we see slavery today. It's more of an employment, your employed to work in my house, and you're a part of the house, and I look after you as if you're part of my friends and family in my house. Um, it was never a forced, beaten – there was none of that, there was none of that, it was if you were a part of someone's household, you were a

part of the household. To be part of someone's household – I wouldn't invite everyone to my house, because some people – I don't know you, but if you're working and if you're staying, in America for instance or wherever they colonised -

Participant RU: It was predicated on the idea that I knew Jesus was white with long blonde hair a beard. And it only comes down to one thing, you know we're – when kids grow up – there was a story, I can't really go into all of the specifics, but they got these teenagers to come up with these stories ummm they wrote some stories based on what they think might happen, say in a relationship, they get to a certain point in a relationship-what will happen. And the boys wrote one thing and the girls wrote another thing. And the girls heard the stories of the boys, and they were like 'that's not gonna happen, what do you think? That's not gonna happen, and that's because the boys were watching things we won't talk about, but they were watching certain things, and that coloured the way that they viewed reality, and I think if you think about it – a lot of people, you know when you think about Jesus, you see a white man on a cross with a beard and long hair and that's gonna affect the way the way that you view Jesus, it's gonna affect the way that you view Christianity. You know, I remember witnessing at some point some guys say to me, "nah that's a white man's religion... I don't do that", and it's - again, it's really the person who holds the bigger stick is the one who sets the rules. Yeah, there were loads of black Christians way before white Christians, but when you think about it like, for example, I'm rambling, but if you think about it, you got Hollywood, you got Nollywood. Hollywood, yeah, they got the explosions, they got the marketing, they got so much millions, and they can't tell you about all the movies that's taking place. And then you've got Nollywood, nobody really knows about it unless you watch it, and I think that the people that have the most money control the image. They control the way that you look at things. That's why I think certain people can suggest that Christianity is a white man's religion because that people that hold the biggest stick are the ones that are often gonna have the biggest say about it.

Participant DA: Can I add something to that?

Participant GL: Oh -

Participant DA: you gonna respond to that?

Participant GL: Well, I was just gonna say previously the reason why I mention it, the guy mentioned imagery a lot, and he said his only idea um in his mind he sees um a white Jesus. And then when he sees a black Jesus, you know there may be some artworks that are like that, it's more controversial (participants mmm in agreement), it seems controversial, and he says 'why is that? Why is it that in most museums, it's all white porcelain skin Christian, umm no, Christian figures? and he said that because of that mental image, It's changed the way we approach the faith. Umm, I'm sure it's true to a lot of people, and as you said, it's true to you because you said that now you view heaven where there's mainly white people

Participant RU: no, I mean in a sense that when I was a kid when I was growing up when I was in church – when I was in church, I almost assumed, even in my head, even when I'm praying and closing my eyes I assume it's the white Jesus I'm talking to not the black Jesus. And it's true to a certain degree when you suggest or saw imagery of a different version of Jesus - it could be any other Jesus, but to you, it would either seem controversial, which is sort of like 'ohh that really interesting artistic view', but in your head, it was always there as white Jesus, as if to say that's the default so.. yeah

Participant NA: The question here has to be worded, so we can make these kinds of critical analyses and come to intelligent conclusions (he physically indicates towards Participant RU). My point is if I were to go Ghana and tell a typical Ghanian that that's Jesus on the right yeah (image of black Jesus), he would look at me as if I were insane. That's a fact, yeah, and that's what we have to deal with, so the whole, we're getting two things mixed up as well. The white Jesus was used for a purpose; yeah, it was deliberately used to manipulate, like you said earlier (pointing to Participant DS). Sorry, what's your name again?

Participant DS: [REDACTED]

Participant NA: Sorry yeah... it was used as a tool to do whatever they done- to capture them so.. but like you said (indicating Participant DS), the Bible doesn't you know you can make intelligent guesses as to what Jesus would have looked like let's be honest if you're gonna look at the book umm. I mean,

in the biblical story when he was born, you know Mary and Joseph took a trip to Egypt to hide from the King, whatever his name was, now how you gonna hide a white baby? In an environment where people are darker than dark, you know what I'm tryna say? It's not gonna work, so – if you read, if you read the Bible, you can make intelligent guesses as to what his skin tone would have been, you know what I'm saying. And the be honest, the construct of race is not important to the average African; what Africans are concerned with is... _____ people. You might not value it, you might think it's nonsense, but other people put a lot of significance to it. And that's another thing as well, we always look at these issues from an African mindset where we know 'chancellor Williams said' the reason why we got into all this mess, this slavery is because of that mindset of embracing everything by being inclusive, always loving

Participant M: and not embracing ourselves – do you say, Chancellor Williams?

Participant NA: Chancellor Williams yeah yeah yeah – you understand? So it's not -

Participant M: read his book, read his book

Participant NA: the African psyche does not see race; it's alien to us, you understand? But to other people, it's important so that the biggest distinction I would make anyway

Participant DS: and it's Jewish a culture thing; if you look at Jewish culture, the whole long hair wouldn't have been long hair because they don't do long hair – it's short hair. Like if you understand, looked into it now, like looked into some of the stuff then of what Jewish culture was like, there's a lot of imagery that you can know that it straight away kinda tears it down, they wouldn't have had long hair, even what the Bible says about long hair, it's not – its for a woman to have not a guy to have – so you gotta bring it back to the Bible

Participant NA: look, sorry to interrupt, but the Jews of today are not the Jews of the Bible

Participant M: Tell them!

Participant NA: you understand? But again, we get it confused because walking down Golders Green or Stamford Hill that's a representation of the Jewish people in

Participant DS: I don't think people think that though

Participant NA: No, they do they do

Participant M: Oh, they do

Participant NA: that's a fact

Eleasah: alright, [REDACTED] – Guys, let's stick with the hands up thing, so we don't have people dominate

Participant RM: umm, I suppose listening to the conversation around the depiction of Christ in art and ____ I did um many moons ago I did a Christian art course. The purpose of those artworks were to be hung in a cathedral and large spaces where people would have come to worship – most of whom would have become illiterate and they would not, they would not have had the benefit of education, and so in order to um in order to depict what it was they were hearing, these pieces of artwork were commissioned, so you connect the ear with the sight as a way of embedding what you're hearing in terms of knowledge. So a lot of the imagery that could e of people in the Bible of mary and so forth would have been a reflection of the people who were painting those images at that time, and they were prolific because most people couldn't read you were reading – if you could read it would have been Latin or greek – it would have been those classic languages, and most people didn't, the concept of white majority reading is fairly new in this larger history of the western world. So you know when you go into these um art galleries and museums, and you see these large pictures, and none –its true don't see black people, and if you do see black people, they're in a little corner here or some kind of joker in the background, and I just want to reiterate it's a reflection of what it was used for the time being. Sometimes it was taken out of that context and cut and pasted and used for something else, but that is the original purpose for those pieces of art. And in and of themselves they might be beautiful, but they were, they were a colour television, and there you have it.

Participant GT: I think the issue is the images of white Jesus have been normalised within our society, and if we go into any Catholic church, this is the image that we see. I teach two hours of RE and were doing it on heaven and hell, and we're talking about angels; one of the kids said, 'but miss, why are all

the angels white?' and I stopped, and it was like 'Oh, why are all the angels white?' because the imagery that we see of angels in mainstream media, in catholic churches they're all white. So this child believes that her, as an um a black child, couldn't become an angel because she was black. And when we started to talk about Jesus, okay, and someone said 'but miss Jesus was white and has got blonde hair' we had to break it down, where was Jesus from, what do you think he might have been like if he was from this place in the world, but our problem is unless we are educated like we all are here, and we understand that um actually this is a false image, and we've done our research to be able to have those articulate discussions, but I think that the issue is that primarily we need to challenge this within our institutions and educate children on actually who Jesus is and identity and who he is in terms of our relationship with him and help them to understand that Jesus is relevant to all of us because unless we have these discussions outside of forums like this and we're educating our children, and we are debating with people who hold this view. Because my nan will tell me Jesus looks like this if you go into my grandmother's house or any of her friends this is Jesus, and there's no way that anybody else can say anything different and as a child growing up, this is what I believed. I grew up in a catholic church. I saw Jesus like this (indicating the White Jesus image), and I believed for a long time that this is what Jesus looked like. I, too, like the child in my class, believed that angels were white and that Jesus was white and that represented purity, and we need to challenge these perceptions within our children and let them know that actually black is beautiful and that although there is this image of Jesus – it's false and that all our identities are in Christ and you don't have to look like these in order to reflect Christ.

Participant M: I wanted to say something um, something you said (indicating Participant NA) you said um we didn't have this racial designation and especially in our history a lot at that time, the people, so let me just bring up some names, the Moors, the Hamidians(?), the Cathegenians the Tamagaru (?) the Copts, those are the ancient Egyptians, the Hebrews the Babylonians the Sumerians, the Phoenicians, the Ethiopians the Cushites- these were all black people. So naturally, there's that notion of sameness, so the thing that stands out distinctive amongst the groups is their culture, their language or their dressing, something to that effect so what happens is when you read the Bible you don't see a lot of physical descriptions of these people except maybe what somebody was wearing or what they were

holding, something to that effect, that would have been the distinctive marker of the religion or culture – not what they looked like because everyone at that time, prior to the Cyprian, greek, Turkish, roman, Asiatic, basically all those people in the middle east or northeast Africa and the rest of the continent were all black so that notion of sameness. So there was never need of me saying 'oh, a Sumerian is black or this person is black'. So the point is that there was no need of that description in the Bible, you know what I'm saying? But if you read history books, you will find that. But because obviously with the Bible, the issue is because those descriptions aren't there and they're not solid, tactile you know written down, it leaves space for other people to put their own images, do you see what I'm saying? It leaves room, like for example; I debate a lot of Arabs and Europeans when they try to debate me about the Moors, cause when it comes to the Moors, there are pictures, primary sources of the moors, where they lived, how they looked at that time, during the Islamic era and before, so my point is – there was written accounts of what they looked like – their skin, their nose, their hair

Participant NA: Shakespeare

Participant M: not just Shakespeare, the French, the Italians, the Greeks did it, the Romans did it so many people actually described them, even the Arabs did so my point is there's no real case to argue with that one but with the Bible because there were so many people that looked the same because they were black, there was no actual physical description of a lot of these people of what the Hebrews looked like of what the Egyptians looks like, of what this group or that group looked like so that have left a wide birth for these people to appropriate it and whitewashed, and so again because we're looking at this object of race which is a European concept, it is really a European concept, but it wasn't that black people were oblivious to race we were very proud of our blackness it's just that we didn't- it wasn't the be-all and end-all of our existence, so that's what I wanted to say about that. You (indicating Participant DS) said something about gods, I wanted to deal with that, when the Bible says 'ye are gods' um you've actually taken it out of context because there's a bit at the end after it that, that says 'you will die – you're doomed to die.'

Participant DS: What was that?... I never said that?

Participant M: No, I'm saying that you missed out a bit

Participant DS: What in Genesis?

Participant M: Yes, in Genesis, it's in the old testament and in the new testament because Jesus repeats it. But my point I'm making is when we say we are gods, it is not for us it's not to ____ (shock out?) and equate us with the Most High.... It is to say we are god in the person of the flesh; that's what it means

Participant NA: Yes, a reflection

Participant M: Okay, let me give you an example, Genesis chapter 2, God says be fruitful, multiply, replenish, subdue, take dominion. That's what God does, the Most High, and God gave that mandate to us in flesh and blood to do the same thing on this domain that we call earth. To follow suit as he does in heaven, that's the mandate – okay God kills at will, so do humans, God creates, so do we – whether it's another human being, whether it's a business, whether it's a nation or an empire, we create. Do we replenish? So when something, when we run out of cakes we can go to the shop and buy some more, so what it's saying is to serve in the capacity of the Most High the way God does, the only difference is we have to work for it, the only difference is, and the by the way when he says gods they spell it with a small 'g', so you have to remember, that's the point, when someone says ye are gods it's not necessarily that it's false, but it's a matter of context it's not a matter of 'I can think of a thing' because God spoke everything into existence – we don't, we can speak an ideas and say 'I'm gonna start a clothing line' I've spoken that into existence but it hasn't manifested, I have to make it manifest. I have to learn how to sew, I have to learn how to market, I've got to get my website, hook up the pay pal, get my products, get people to come buy my stuff, you know, that's how I start a clothing line, do you understand. I've spoke into existence like God would, but the only difference is God manifests when he speaks, I would actually have to work. So when the Bible says 'ye are gods' especially for black people who've been told they're not even human the last 500 years, that's not only truthful that's something we need to know, feel and hear and to have, so we know if 'ye are gods' children of the Most High, we can beat white supremacy, we can beat institutionalised racism, we can beat police brutality, we and resurrect black

wall street, like we had in Tulsa Oklahoma and rosewood. Okay and, this notion of is there a black superiority, I would say no, it doesn't exist now, and it didn't exist then (me: Okay... making attempts to round him up!) again black people just happen to be more topical, it not like we had any notion of being better than another human being, if anything if you read the greeks, the greeks themselves would say 'you these black people are better than us' so if anyone had a superiority complex of us it was the other people of the world. We need to read JD Rogers, Dr Josph Ben Yachunnan, Dr John Henry-Clarke, Chancellor Williams (edit: see above), you need to read Dr Ivan Van Sertima, you need to read.. Pricilla Duncan Houston.

Eleasah: Can I stop you there? Because you can speak for an hour, this brother has had his hand up for a while, and after that, I want to touch on this black people as gods issue, taking into consideration other ideas outside of what we spoke about in scripture - very interesting views. Um, when people are saying, but we are gods, how do you compute all of that? You might think of some of our Kemite friends or humanists who may be less supernatural but see humans as the ultimate answer to everything – how do you wrestle with that?

Participant PI: Okay Ummm, just on the like all the different groups of people, under the umbrella of blackness – there was one instance in the Bible that I do recall um Moses had a wife Zipporah and umm there's just the one instance of this distinctive description of like, well definitely skin tone where Moses sister Miriam actually starts like parring her off for being darker. As far as I know, that's the only instance, based on what you've been saying (indicating Participant M), where there's been some sort of description of skin tone, but apart from that either way, clearly, God wasn't having it because later on, I can't remember where it is...

Participant M: she got leprosy...

Participant PI: Yeah, and given this history that has now been established that has now- yeah, there were black African Christians before we had Europeans even coming to the fold, like coming to the body of Christ like that is quite established, like Ethiopians, like Egyptians who know their history, who know basic things – they will just shut down that statement of 'white man's religion'. But if that is reality,

if that is the case, then how's it so, well you can say openly, that it's the devils plan to hinder people from coming to salvation but still like in historical terms, then why do we in the west, something as the transatlantic slave trade, why does it seem like so many of us are so oblivious to those stats – that someone's just come out with 'oh -white man's religion' they've just come up on the imagery of Jesus and so on... why is that still such an issue?

Participant M: I wanna answer that and say that most people have failed us and educated us

Participant LK: The greatest force in our darkness is fear and what I wanna ask and open person in terms of how do we, if not completely tear it apart, how do we fight against and be successful because that is what is continuing the lack of knowledge and you know the quest for the truth, that is what stops most people – fear. So how do we defeat it?

Several participants: defeat what? Sorry I didn't actually hear that

Participant LK: so yeah, I was saying, umm, fear is sort of our biggest opposition in our quest for truth umm obviously not for all of us but umm in terms of the world population. Most people sort of stop their journey in finding the truth when they have the fear of something they've been taught, or there could be different reasons. My main point is how do we overcome or tear apart this fear and be successful in revealing of truth globally?

Participant RU: when you say globally, do you mean umm in terms of like, fighting and combatting the fear to be seen as off, to be seen as weird, to be seen as wrong? Is that kind of what you're saying? Because you're saying how do we do it globally?

Participant LK: okay, why I say globally is because all around the world in different ways and in different things people have been misled from the truth so umm I'm talking about finding this truth it's mainly fear a lot of the times certainly that people draw the line, they don't want to go any further, or I'll stop at this subject here, so I'm asking how do we defeat that?

Participant RU: I think for me – me and my brother both left the church when we were about twenty-one years old um, my brother in his own way I guess is still tryna find his own truth that works for him. And I said to myself, you know what? I've had enough – it doesn't make any sense to me (?). ... And I think the interesting thing between both of our journeys is that he thought it was so important to find out what the truth was; he doesn't care about what makes him scared he was going for it at full pelt. And I think fear for me is human, its human to be scared – I act as well um and one of the things we tell young people when they say 'ahh I'm really nervous about this show' is nerves are good because it triggers you to go 'I really care about this, I really want to make this the best thing that I can make it, so I think that fear is, can be, a negative thing but I think at the same time if you know that you wanna find truth it doesn't matter what its gonna get you, or, where you want to fight for what you believe in then you just beat that door down and get through. Ummm, I do wanna make a different point about gods, but I do hope that helped. It's just a thing about black people as God's – I think ultimately we are all gods, I really think that not even in the sense of as you say (indicating Participant M) 'making things manifest' even right here and now we all have our own ideas about everything you know. Anyone can look in the Bible and say, "cool, I think it says this, I think this means this or this means that", one of the things I learned when I left church is that we all have our own religions. You know I went to a certain church, and I assumed that we all agreed on the same things, but we didn't you know, some people believed 'ahh this person is definitely gonna go to hell because he did this', and some would say 'no he's not gonna go to hell, only god knows' but I really feel like we all have our own understandings of what we believe to be right and wrong. And so in my intimation, we're all gods, that's my understanding.

Participant DS: I guess this is the problem; we've got so many manuscripts for the Bible alone, more than actually your historian books, more than can back up anything else, but we'd rather read from people that said something to us and we take that on board. I just wanna throw that out there as well, we say, 'ahh, I read a book by this person or that person' and it just like but you won't kind of take the Bible for the word? And I guess as you said (indicating Participant RU) about the gods thing like the problem is the Bible it says 'that's not -we're not gods', and for me seeing what the Bible says and seeing

what the devils done is made us believe in any kind of way, shape or form that we are gods or we can be like God. That's was the scripture that I was... when eve was being tempted, and he said, 'ye can be like God both knowing good and evil' that was the scripture and the reason why I say that's a dangerous place to be. And even as I say that people shake their heads because people feel like no, in ourselves we wanna be superior, we wanna feel like we can do all these different things, but we kinda forget and then stop looking at God and the Bible as an authority and the one with the truth. So yeah, that's my response to couple things that you all were saying.

Eleasah: okay, [REDACTED] and sorry, what's your name, brother?

Participant M: [REDACTED]

Participant NA: I think he explained it very well (indicating Participant M), so we're kind of going round and round in circles. People that say they're gods, they don't mean literally they are gods, according to my understanding, so I think we need to get that clear. Secondly, the Bible says that God made man in his own image, or plural, 'let us make man, let US make man' that's another subject, in our own image umm so most Christians would say they're talking in the spirit, the spirit of God is within us, and that's theological... we can argue about that all day but the point is, in the Bible, like my brother said over there (indicating Participant M) it said 'ye are gods' and whatever is said afterwards, the point is – its there. They use a small to infer that we're not thee God.

5. Coding – Word Frequency Table

Word	Length	Count	Weighted Percentage (%)	Similar Words
black	5	890	2.24	black, black', 'black, 'black', blackness, blackness', 'blackness, 'blackness', blacks, blacks', 'blacks, darkness, 'darkness', negro, negro', negroes, negros, 'negros, shame
people	6	538	1.37	masses, people, people', peoples
church	6	494	1.27	church, church', 'church, churchd, churchd', churches, churching

think	5	719	1.15	believe, believe', believed, believer, believers, believes, believing, conceived, consider, considered, considering, considers, guess, guesses, imagination, imaginations, imagined, imagining, intellect, intelligence, intelligent, intend, intended, intending, intends, meaning, meanings, means, reason, reasonable, reasoning, reasons, recall, remember, 'remember, remembering, suppose, supposed, think, thinking, thought, thoughts
christian	9	366	0.94	christendom, christian, 'christian, christianised, christianity, christians, christians'
religion	8	394	0.86	faith, faith', faithful, religion, religion', 'religion', religions, religions', religiosity
jesus	5	334	0.73	christ, christ', jesus, jesus', 'jesus, 'jesus', redeem, savior
things	6	298	0.71	matter, matters, thing, thing', things
bible	5	302	0.66	bible, bible', 'bible', books, scriptural, scripture, scriptures, worded, words
white	5	251	0.63	caucasians, clean, purely, purity, white, white', 'white, whiteness, whites
actually	8	341	0.62	actual, actually, exist, existed, existence, existing, exists, literal, literally, literate, realisation, realise, realised, realising, really, 'really
religions	9	263	0.62	devout, religious, 'religious, 'religious', religiously, sacred, 'sacred', spiritual, spirituality, spiritually
going	5	532	0.61	become, becomes, becoming, belong, belonging, break, departing, department, departure, extended, extends, failed, failing, failings, fails, fitted, fitting, function, functional, functionalism, functioned, functions, getting, going, leading, leads, leave, leaves, leaving, lived, lively, lives, living, moved, moving, offer, offers, operate, operated, operates, operating, operation, passed, release, released, releases, running, sound, sounded, spell, start, started, starting, starts, survival, survivals, survive, survived, surviving, travel, travelling, turned, turning, work', worked, working, workings, works
person	6	223	0.53	enactment, individual, individuals, person, person', personal, personality, personally, posed, somebody, someone, souls
african	7	198	0.51	african, 'african, africanness, africans

5.1 Coding summary Table

Why are some black people becoming disillusioned with the Church in Britain		What do Afroasiatic religions offer that the de-churched believe mainstream British churches do not?		What is the main strength of Afroasiatic religious influence, and how best can we understand their rationale?	
White Man's Religion	Negative Experiences	Knowledge	Identity	Religion	Solution
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Covering up the truth behind Christianity's origins - lack of black leadership and deference to European epistemologies and authority in church educational institutions - Truth hidden in plain sight - Lost Identity - Slavery and Oppression - Disconnect between ancient and modern Christianity - Whites have control over how we see Christianity/Jesus 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The need to belong - Asking questions and getting no answers - Confronting leadership about teachings/poor outcome - Don't feel included as black people - Experiencing rejection and dismissal - The teaching is not matching the Bible - Church finances and resources – feeling unsupported and neglected 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Making distinctions between religion and peoples - Make sense of the identity crisis - Study leads to liberation - Historical evidence proving black prominence - Real and fake religion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Proud of religious/ethnic heritage and tradition - Known by our ethnicity. - Historical African Legacy - Preserving black cultural identity such as music 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Continuity - A religious identity based on ethnicity and nationhood - Apologetic - Biblical genealogy – who were the people in the Bible and what did they look like - Plain reading provides the answers - Like minded people - Bible is historical backdrop for Afroasiatic peoples 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Centering the black experience in scripture - Revoering lost identity - Participate and reclaim the religion - Looking for what is true, correct and authoritative - Deeper knowledge provide confidence - Looking at history to find answers - Connected to ancestral roots not Britain - Ye are gods - superstatus
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Discovery Should be enjoyable - It's a Christian duty to seek truth - The Bible is a source of truth - What is the point of all this knowledge? - Faith vs Knowledge? - Contextual Christianity meets filling the knowledge gaps - Safe space to talk, BCCF set up is preferable to regular church - Jesus reflected in churches service to local community 					