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Black is the Most Disrespected Color in Religion

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ABSTRACT

Discrete identities such as race, religion, gender role, and sexual orientation have been socio-historically utilized to identify and segregate ethnic communities within America because of fallacious notions concerning sin and, consequently, have become weaponized because of current-day culture war issues regarding the role of faith within the public square. Discerning the imbricate societal Carrefour that exists between racism, race, religion, gender expression, and sexual orientation becomes especially portentous when one examines in what furtive ways non-traditional gender identities have now become vilified by some conservative pundits: a civic knife to publicly cut and marginalize and exclude those who do not fit traditional expectations. The study uses a qualitative research methodology to conduct the study. The data was collected from 10 online articles base on thier relevance to the topic. Therefore, the present study seeks to critically interrogate through religious studies weltanschauung the abstruse and intersectional nature of how fraudulent notions of sin, race, gender, and sexual orientation operationally function within religion to oppress both Black heterosexuals and homosexuals.

INTRODUCTION

Bifurcation Alongside Race

Oppression

(Huggins, 2018; Ramadan *et al.*, 2023; Waters, 2021) Neither the complex oppression that LGBT people of color face [every day] nor its effects are hypothetical or academic. They are very real ... substantial efforts must be made to challenge the oppression of LGBT people of color (van der Meide, 2001).

Discrete social identifiers such as race, gender expression, and sexual orientation, when coupled with religion (e.g., Christianity, Judaism, and Islām), have a dismaying tendency to both label, define and segregate ethnic communities within America and, because of this, have also become politically weaponized by Christian evangelicals in the current-day because of culture war issues regarding the role of faith within America; illuminating the powerful societal relations of power regnant within the United States as it appertains to race, religion, gender expression, and sexual orientation (Balan, 2010; Hanson *et al.*, 2021; Huddy, 2015; Shabani, 2014). The post-racial rise of white nationalism coupled with sinful acts of physical violence directed against minorities (e.g., Blacks, Asians, etc.) convincingly illuminate how the bouts of ethnic fury currently occurring within public, semi-public, and private American spaces (e.g., Charlottesville, VA, Buffalo NY, Colorado Springs CO, New York NY, etc.) are not coincidental but, rather, a stark religious-historical consequence of the many crisscrossing ways by which some conservative Christian evangelicals have promulgated whiteness as a national religious-cultural inheritance (Collins, 2020; Yacovone, 2023). Such a problematic socio-historical legacy by which to conserve a homogenous religio-racial identity and societal structure that promotes a white-

gendered “construction of American life and, ironically, its [associated] democratic institutions and values” (Ramadan *et al.*, 2023).

At this point, it should be noted that the use of the theological term sin and its many familial derivations are deployed in an expansive religious studies manner, style, and context to explicitly refer to any “act not in accord with reason informed by the Divine law” that is committed against God/the Divine within Christian, Jewish and Islāmic sacred writings (Hebrew translation: חַטָּאָה -- chata’ah, Arabic translation: خطيئة -- *ḵaṭīʿa*) (Encyclopedia, 2023). Unbeknownst to quite a few non-LGBTQIA+ scholars within the Academy, many university community centers (e.g., University of Delaware, California State University, St. Lawrence University, etc.) housing homosexual people—Queer premises where one would normally expect to see inclusive, tolerant and compassionate expressions of human solidarity, kind-heartedness and acceptance—have a dismaying tendency to marginalize and exclude African Americans from their midst because of race (Messinger, 2009; Noble & Renn, 2021). Curiously, quite a few American university community centers (i.e., “safe spaces”) within the present-day higher education environs have become racialized and, more importantly, the non-Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) individuals inside them are woefully oblivious to their bigoted disposition towards Black folk (Jeffries, 2015).

The [Rainbow] flag is a crumb ... It doesn’t change my material conditions. It doesn’t make me less targeted in the workplace. It does not make me feel safer in the Gayborhood. It’s a [racist] symbol. For other people, it was like the end of action. We did it. We have arrived. No more racism exists, which we know is a lie. The truth is the Rainbow has never been enough for Black and Brown

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[Queer] people ... The Rainbow [flag] was never really our symbol. The Black and Brown stripes were a way to say 'NO' ... From my vantage point, it was a critique of the Rainbow flag. This is a visual critique of the problem of white supremacy and racism in LGBTQ spaces [my emphasis](Williams, 2020).

Discerning the imbricate societal Carrefour that exists between race, religion, gender roles, racism, and sexual orientation becomes especially portentous when one examines in what furtive ways non-traditional gender identities have now become vilified by Christian evangelical pundits: a knife to publicly cut marginalize and exclude those members who do not neatly fit into traditional gender roles through legislation (i.e., Common Good Constitutionalism) favoring white privilege within American society (OCHR, 2022; Ramadan *et al.*, 2023; Vermeule, 2020, 2022). The current-day LGBTQIA+ demographic environment within America is such that approximately 40% of all homosexual folk within the physical boundaries of the United States are people of color (i.e., approximately 1.2 million Black and Brown Queer adults), many of whom express feelings of dissatisfaction, unhappiness, and marginalization within their respective LGBTQIA+ communities because of racism within the church, mosque or synagogue (2023; Singh & Durso, 2017).

Whiteness rests upon a foundational premise: the definition of whites as the norm or standard for humans [my emphasis], and people of color [are seen] as a deviation from that norm. White people do not acknowledge whiteness, and the white reference point is assumed to be universal and is imposed on everyone. (Ramadan *et al.*, 2023).

The abundant carrefours that exist between race (Blackness), sexual orientation, gender roles, sin, and religion all functionally operate in a recondit manner to marginalize, oppress, and alienate the African American community from others and, by so doing, prevent solidarity of purpose against social injustice (Abrams, 2014; Ramadan *et al.*, 2023). My paper seeks to critically interrogate through a religious studies weltanschauung the abstruse character and intersectional nature of how fallacious tropes concerning sin, race, sexual orientation, gender roles, and religion (Judaism, Islām, and Christianity) operationally function to oppress both heterosexual, homosexual Black folk within contemporaneous society. "Blacks and Hispanics played outsized roles during many of the earliest milestones of the Gay Rights Movement ... they are always on the front line ... they are the ones who are being who they are, no matter what. They are catching all the homophobia, all the transphobias that are being directed at Queer folks [because of race]" (James, 2019).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Hierarchical Relationship

Religio-Cultural Dissonance

We create a hierarchy of identity in our various circles,

and in some cases ... if you're a [Black] Queer person, you have to leave your sexual orientation or gender identity at the door if you want to focus on your race or vice versa; we need to create an environment where you don't have to choose [race, gender or sexuality] ... We need, as a society, to recognize [Black] identity and not assign value on certain identities and devalue others. (Ramadan *et al.*, 2023).

The unusual confluence of race, gender, sexuality, and morality within Abrahamic religions in America illuminates the asymmetrical power relations, heteronormative notions of gender and sexual identity expressed by Judaism, Islām and Christianity towards the Black and Queer community within the United States; a problematic current-day state of remarkable racism cruelly played out within the present-day masjid, synagogue and church within the physical borders of our nation because of bigotry, intolerance and homophobia towards those who are not born straight, white and heterosexual (Ramadan *et al.*, 2023).

We have not loved you as God loves you, which is profoundly wrong [my emphasis]. We affirm, publicly and unequivocally, that LGBTQI+ people are welcome and valued: we are all children of God. The occasions on which you have received a hostile and homophobic response in our [Christian] churches are shameful, and for this, we repent ... An apology only goes so far when so many LGBTQ+ Christians have faced hostility and discrimination for who they are (Ramadan *et al.*, 2023).

It is a modern-day American diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) irony that religious piety, "traditional" familial values, and a professed love of one's neighbor glaringly coexist alongside a discordant reality arising from racism, bigotry, homophobia, and prejudice; a present-day religio-cultural dissonance fueled by religious extremism, orthodox notions of gender, sexual identity and a rigid moral disposition towards any form of perceived sin (Ramadan *et al.*, 2023; Thoreson, 2018). The homophobia and racism present within Judaism, Islām and Christianity within the United States and elsewhere reveal the deleterious presence of a profound racist mentalité at work concerning ethnicity, sexual orientation, and gender expression, a divisive spiritual milieu that corroborates how Foucauldian "relations of power influence the types of identities constituted, and these identities generally operate to maintain existing [lopsided] power relations" within contemporaneous society (Briscoe, 2005; Foucault, 1980; Foucault, 2012).

The peculiar power dynamics responsible for the American vilification of Blacks within America and elsewhere have their religious studies origin within The Curse of Ham—Genesis 9:20- 27 of the Book of Genesis (Goldenberg, 2003). The Hamitic curse underscores how a bigoted Eurocentric exegesis of the Bible is responsible for the human trafficking of Africans that occurred during the Transatlantic Slave Trade because it "led to the mistaken belief that the word 'Ham' meant dark, Black or heat [my emphasis]" and, more importantly, also reveals how

the human interpretation of Scripture as it appertains itself towards [perceived] sin is never static nor bereft of personal bias (Lee, 2003).

Transatlantic Slave Trade

Vilification of Blacks

Due to the Transatlantic Slave Trade, Christianity is currently the predominant Abrahamic religious tradition within the African American community (75%), Islām is second (1%), and Judaism is a distant third (<1%); an increasing number (23%) of Blacks (any individual of African descent/heritage) in the United States are now choosing to self-identify as not belonging to any religious tradition whatsoever (JEFF DIAMANT, 2022). Having now said this, Black Muslims within modern-day American society currently comprise roughly half (51%) of all Muslim Americans and their families have been in the United States of America for at least three consecutive generations and, more importantly, contextually represent the fastest-growing Abrahamic faith tradition both in the African American community and the rest of the surrounding world (Center, 2018).

Ironically, Judaism for quite a few Jewish African American families similarly goes back to the early days of the Transatlantic Slave Trade when enslaved Blacks adopted the religion of their white owners, a small percentage of whom were of the Jewish faith tradition (BLOCK/JTA *et al.*, 2021). As meaningfully observed by noted Jewish-American scholar Rabbi Bertram Korn in his own race relations research concerning Judaism in the United States, the early days of our nation's history corroborate how "any Jew who could afford to own slaves and needed their services would do so" (Werner, 2022). A plausible social justice argument may be posited that the slave trade of Black bodies into the United States put into motion the false racial narrative that the darker epidermal appearance of Africans was indicative of iniquity and, having now said this, also forged the problematic American myth (Hamitic curse) of a sinful accursed people bereft of God's salvation (Schipper, 2020).

Intriguingly, social justice issues within Judaism, Christianity, and Islām are viewed quite dissimilarly within America because of ethnicity, a religion-social outlook and perspective that is sinfully bifurcated alongside the presence of melanin, and one's attitude towards perceived iniquity (America, 2021).

A religious-historical survey of Abrahamic religious traditions within the context of the African American community illumines a startling modern-day race-relations oriented reality and important religio-historical truth: Islām, like Christianity, and to a much smaller degree Judaism, took root in African American community as a Black faith tradition because of the sin of human trafficking and, to add insult to moral injury, was morally justified because of the Curse of Ham (Austin, 2012; Shaukat, 2020).

Human trafficking (Transatlantic Slave Trade) lies at

the root of the modern-day societal disparagement of Black people within present-day American society and, more to the point, is also arguably the origin point of racism, bigotry, and intolerance both within the Christian evangelical community and the LGBTQIA+ (Queer) community itself (Ochab *et al.*, 2019). A plausible religious, cultural argument may be posited that Islām, Christianity, and Judaism are indigenous to the African American populace because of the mortal sin of human trafficking and, because of this salient fact, all three Abrahamic religious traditions within the context of the Black Queer community are as old as the United States itself (Ochab *et al.*, 2019).

An objective religio-historical examination of the discursive ways human trafficking of Africans triggered the onset of racism within the American homosexual community necessitates that additional scholarly attention be focused upon the sociocultural milieu and socioreligious mentalité needed for bigotry, intolerance, prejudice, and sin to peculiarly coexist alongside Christianity, Judaism, and Islām.

One devastating legacy of the Transatlantic Slave Trade was racism [my emphasis]. Historically, it was used to justify the enslavement of Africans. And today, it has led to people of African descent being relegated to the poorest and most marginalized sectors of [human] society (Guterres, 2020).

METHODOLOGY

The study uses a qualitative research approach to conduct the study. A thorough analysis of 10 studies from the existing literature and articles has allowed the researcher to conduct a nuanced analysis of the topic at hand. The data was selected based on its relevance to the topic. Qualitative analysis allows the researcher to make interpretations from the data and explore the key understanding of the topic (Mohajan, 2018).

Data was collected from secondary sources including articles from online databases. 11 articles were chosen on the basis of different perception of the color black. The data collected focused on the treatment of black color in different areas.

Blackness As an Antipode to Queerness

Erasure

What happens to the Black Queer experience when Black is increasingly used as an antipode to Queer when Black bodies are [sinfully] erased from Queer scholarly discourse, activism, and neighborhoods. In contrast, [white] Queer bodies are welcomed as a sign of progress and safety? For whom does this whiteness signify safety? (Kiesling, 2017).

It is fair to say that the present-day American congregational membership comprising the three Abrahamic faith traditions (Christianity, Islām, and Judaism) view social justice concerns, iniquity, and Black liberation (e.g., Black Lives Matter movement) in a dissimilar manner that is predicated alongside race; a religio-racial deviation that is

notable for its ethnic deviation (Buchanan *et al.*, 2020; Mansoor, 2020; Ransby, 2018). For example, the Black community within Christianity, Islām, and Judaism is historically viewed as both unwelcome and undesirable by their non-BME (white) peers. This salient ethnological truth has resulted in grievous psychological harm being inflicted upon many Jewish, Muslim, and Christian Black heterosexuals and homosexuals (Ramadan *et al.*, 2023; Vidino & Meleagrou-Hitchens, 2022).

I don't think I ever was really honest with myself about how painful it is to see someone that looks like me [a Black Jew] not be treated well. I think that I tried to separate myself as much as I could from the violence and the terror of being Black in America as a coping mechanism to protect myself [from racism]. But when George Floyd was murdered, there was no opportunity for me not to see anymore... Today, I can finally embrace all the various parts of myself, including my Jewish identity, my gay identity, and my Black identity [my emphasis] (Abay, 2022).

Within the Christian religious tradition, the Christian evangelical church, Catholic church “as well as many Protestant churches condemn homosexuality unambiguously” and, by so doing, have made same-sex attraction a moral sin which has resulted in the Queer community also feeling generally unwelcome within the pews (Gross, 2008). Unsurprisingly, Judaism follows suit and also regards “sexual relations between men as forbidden by the Torah. (Lev. 18:22). Such acts are condemned in the strongest possible terms, as abhorrent [my emphasis].

The only other sexual sin within Judaism that is similarly described is the iniquity of remarrying a woman you had divorced after she had been married to another man. (Deut. 24:4). Lastly, Islām considers homosexuality a deleterious moral deviation from humankind's true nature and, consequently, is considered quite iniquitous (Sūrah al-ʿAʿrāf, 80-81) (Peumans, 2016). A plausible religious studies argument may be tendered that “as with Christianity and Judaism, Islām's sacred texts have [also] been used to oppress LGBTQ people across the centuries” and, with this now having been said, conventional Abrahamic notions concerning homosexuality as a moral sin has also fostered religious persecution of Queers by Christian, Jewish and Muslim zealots that sadly continues unabated in the modern-day (Ramadan *et al.*, 2023).

Traditional Abrahamic religious frameworks will always posit homosexuality as a grievous moral sin and, consequently, it is my argument that conventional Christian Jewish and rules and regulations regarding homosexuality are now woefully inadequate to keep abreast of the modern-day evolution and growth of non-normative gender expressions, gender roles, gender fluidity and varieties of gender structures currently present within contemporaneous society (Sigusch, 2004). As astutely observed by Black legal scholar Bernard Freeman, the current-day human rights abuses, violations, and concerns currently perpetrated against Blacks and

Queers illuminate the existence of a powerful tautness existing between traditional and progressive conceptions of religious identity, sexual expression, gender roles, and societal structure pushing itself up and against traditional and progressive notions of sin, race, and religious morality (Mohamed, 2021; Pettigrew, 2020).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Racism is Still with Us

Instantiating whiteness

No one was white before they came to America. It took [many] generations and a vast amount of coercion before this became a white country (Baldwin, 2023).

Sociologists discerning the recondite role of race, religion, and racism within American society convincingly lay bare the disingenuous protestations concerning the trope of non-BME.

Americans claiming to be colorblind (2023). For example, sociologist Hadi Khoshnevis persuasively argues how politically correct objections in favor of colorblindness artfully attempt to obnubilate the factual modern-day reality that quite a few Americans of non-European (white) descent—irrespective of their gender/sexual expression— have intentionally embraced an inferior white (i.e., “white but not the right kind of white” and “honorary white”) mentalité as depicted in Figure 1 in their racialized desire to mellifluently ingratiate themselves into an American (Eurocentric) society hostile to Blackness (Khoshnevis, 2019).

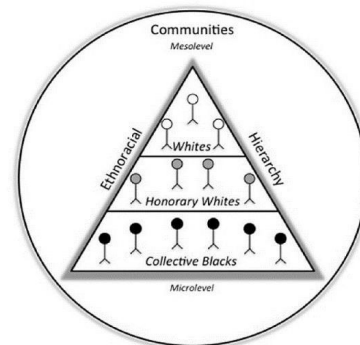


Figure 1: Ethnoracial Hierarchy Model (Sewell, 2019)

Speaking Truth to Power if we are to be morally cognizant of the moral implications and carrefours regarding race, racism, sexual orientation, gender role, and sin, we must then match our words with our deeds and not exclusively rely upon BME scholars to do this hard work (Jackson *et al.*, 2021).

In [Western] society and on college campuses, whiteness has staked a claim as the default race for Queerness. This has manifested in Queer and trans people of color feeling like outsiders who must resist hegemonic whiteness at personal and institutional levels (Havey, 2021).

Ironically, the colorblindness trope adopted by many non-BME (white) Queer individuals is a subtle form of racism that has become sinfully absorbed within the

Queer social imaginary; quite a few white homosexuals now erroneously assert they cannot be racist because he/she/they are gay (Havey, 2021). Such illusory and false thoughts impede, or in some cases, deny and invalidate Black Queer students lived experiences, agency, and their complicated racial heritage; an act of white privilege that racially renders the BME homosexual community invisible and, more importantly, implicitly characterizes all homosexuals as being white (Noble & Renn, 2021; Ramadan *et al.*, 2023).

Often, nonwhite Queer and transpeople do not feel included [in America] — or necessarily even safe — within the larger LGBTQ+ community ... Historically, white people have been the ones to decide where or how people of color fit into their [Queer] world (Ramadan *et al.*, 2023).

The authentic lived experiences of Blacks in America corroborate how the prejudicial Foucauldian power relations, systemic racial bias, and structural inequality endemic to the United States disempower anyone who is not born white, straight, Christian, and male (Howell & Richter-Montpetit, 2019). The socio-historical implications ascribed to the Transatlantic Slave Trade contextually illuminate the peculiar presence of an enigmatic interlocking system of white supremacy, racism, sin, and homosexual prejudice within America, a diabolical form of institutional and systemic racism deployed to dominate, oppress, and marginalize all non-conventional Black expressions of gender identity and sexual expression (Elk, 2021). It is a somber modern-day reality that draws much-needed moral attention to the persistent sinful nature of the systemic racism affecting all people of BME descent within America (Black, 2017). As a nation, we must collectively recognize that any form of “oppression is the systematic devaluing, undermining, marginalizing, and disadvantaging of certain social identity groups in contrast to a privileged norm. Oppression exists when some people are denied value (such as access to resources, opportunities, and networks; legal protections and rights; inclusion and acceptance, etc.) based on their social [identity] group memberships. The key to understanding oppression is recognizing that it is based on membership in socially constructed subordinate [social] identity categories” (Ferber & Samuels, 2008). The religious-cultural challenge facing modern-day society is to compassionately recognize all forms of gender roles and sexual orientation that may or may not necessarily fit traditional systems “of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing those conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic” because, to do otherwise, creates a prejudicial world devoid of human love, charity and goodwill (Hochstrasser, 2020).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the investigation into the phenomenon

of black being perceived as the most disrespected color in religion has revealed complex and interwoven dynamics that span across cultural, social, historical, philosophical, and psychological realms. The abstract notion of sin, intertwined with racial, gender, and sexual identities, has historically been manipulated to perpetuate systemic oppression within religious contexts. This manipulation, fueled by fallacious beliefs and exacerbated by contemporary culture war issues, has marginalized and excluded individuals who deviate from traditional expectations, particularly non-traditional gender identities and individuals within the Black community. Through the lens of religious studies, this study has critically interrogated the operationalization of fraudulent notions of sin, race, gender, and sexual orientation within religion, highlighting their role in perpetuating oppression against both Black heterosexuals and homosexuals.

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