Racism *en Route*

An African Perspective

Tinyiko Maluleke

Professor Tinyiko Maluleke is a senior research fellow and deputy director of the University of Pretoria Centre for the Advancement of Scholarship. He is a theologian by training. An earlier version of this paper was read at a racism consultation organized by the World Council of Churches and the Japanese Council of Churches in Tokyo, Japan, September 2019.

Abstract

This article argues that in Africa, the nature and advent of racism has to be traced back to the earliest encounters between Africans and Europeans, including the first seven centuries but especially during the slavery and colonial eras. Religion (notably Islam and Christianity), trade, education, culture, and "science" were important incubators and justifiers of racism, in earlier as well as recent times. The paper concludes by proposing some ways in which African theology can stay agile and keep pace with the resilient and adaptive forms of racism in contemporary Africa.

Keywords: racism en route, racism and slavery, racism and colonialism, racism and Christianity, racism and gender, racism and xenophobia

In Accra, Ghana, a group of theologians from across Africa and the African diaspora gathered for a Pan-African theology conference in December 1977. The papers were later published under the title *African Theology en Route*.[1] The idea of the mobility of ideas, in this case African theology, inherent in the title of the book is suggestive. Inspired by this title, I have chosen to think of racism as a mobile set of ideas and practices – racism *en route* – travelling across time, space, and mental frontiers. Racism has been actively *en route* in Africa at least since 1484, when Portuguese explorer Diogo Cão tried and failed to find a route to India around the southern-most tip of Africa.

To invoke the metaphor of mobility is also to suggest that racism survives because it is resilient; and it is resilient because it adapts, adopts, and mutates accordingly. It does not always speak in its own name. It often takes refuge in euphemisms designed to camouflage it as well in the phenomenon Robin DiAngelo calls "white fragility,"[2] namely, the many ways in which white people resist and avoid to speak about white racism and their own implicatedness in it. Such camouflage language, consciously or unconsciously employed to avoid naming racism, includes terms such as diversity, inclusivity, non-racialism, meritocracy, and even gender justice. Nowadays, racism seldom travels alone. It often "fronts" its somewhat "nobler" fellow travellers – tribalism, xenophobia, and ethnocentrism, among others. But racism still lurks just below the surface.

Race in the Africa of Explorers, Navigators, and Conquerors

"Ever since the era of the pharaohs Africa has been coveted for its riches."3 So starts Martin Meredith's 745-page book on *The Fortunes of Africa*. This insight sheds light not only on the

ideologies that informed the earliest interactions between Europe and Africa, but also on the possible link between racism, exploitation, and trade.

Some of the earliest "explorers," "navigators," and "discoverers" of Africa – as they preferred to call themselves – were the Carthaginians. These formed a city-state in Carthage, whose empire was at its height several centuries up to the 3rd century BCE. Their main interest was in trade along the African north and west coasts. Herodotus, known as the world's first historian, recorded some of their encounters with a "race of men who live in a part of Libya beyond the Pillars of Hercules."[4] While travelling "around Egypt in about 450 BCE . . . [Herodotus] was struck by the many indigenous peculiarities of Egypt, everything from its climate to its customs to the workings of the Nile," suggesting in the process that the Egyptians "seem to have reversed the ordinary practices of mankind."[5] When Carthage was later overrun by Rome, it was renamed *Provincia* Africa. In some of his records, Herodotus suggested that the Egyptians do everything in exactly the opposite way that "ordinary mankind" would do things.[6] Nevertheless, Herodotus recorded and captured more key aspects of the extent and nature of African civilizations in antiquity than any other historian.[7]

Next, Alexander the Great, the Ptolemaic dynasty of Macedonia, and later the Romans took control of much of North Africa. In the process, they introduced Christianity as an organized religion in North Africa. In time, Africa was to produce its own Christian martyrs, such as Vibia Perpetua.

In the seventh century, the Arabs entered Africa. Within a century, the cultural and religious landscape of North Africa changed. The Arabs almost rid North and Nubian Africa of all Christianity, replacing it with Islam. But, like the Christian rulers before them, they brought a lasting cultural heritage to North Africa. It was in recognition of the traditional, Islamic, and Western heritages of Africa that Ali Mazrui spoke and wrote of Africa's triple heritage.[8] In what ways has the African traditional heritage succumbed to or colluded with the Arab and the Western heritages to become home to the most pernicious forms of racism in the world?

The Roots of White Racism in Africa: The First Centuries

Imagine racism as a participant-observer in the initial contacts between the people of Carthage and the people of Northern Africa. Imagine racism salivating while watching the Africans and Europeans bartering in gold and diamonds on the shore of the Mediterranean Sea. According to Herodotus, in the daytime the natives were nowhere to be seen. But in the moonlight, the traders would come lay down their goods, and the natives would emerge from the bushes of the mainland to put down stacks of precious stones in exchange. Then they would disappear into the night until the next session. Was it the desire to get more for less that triggered feelings of discrimination and racism? And how long did it take before the invaders discovered that the natives could themselves constitute the most valuable commodity – namely, as slaves?

Strangely, within a few centuries after the Romans and the Christians dominated North Africa, "in parts of Europe black Africans became almost mythological figures. Africa was imagined as a land inhabited by monstrous creatures . . . Yet it might also offer riches and bountiful trade."[9] Whereas in earlier periods, the empires of Greece, Carthage, and Rome had regular contact with African kingdoms and civilizations, by the 15th century, Europeans seemed to know very little about Africa and Africans. Or was this wilful amnesia and manufactured ignorance?

The Portuguese incursions

From about 1415, several Portuguese monarchs engaged in trade with several African kingdoms. By the time Diogo Cão, Bartolomeu Dias, and later Vasco da Gama set off on the historical exploratory journeys that landed them in parts of Africa, Portugal had been trading with African kingdoms, including trade in slaves, for at least 70 years.

The Diogo Cão expedition

In 1484, Portuguese explorer Diogo Cão made an attempt to find a sea route to India and China. Cão did not make it to India, but he managed to interact with Africans *en route*. He "discovered" the Congo River and had a glimpse of the renowned wealth and natural beauty of the continent, which had been the stuff of legend in Portugal for some time. Cão also "discovered" the country we now know as Namibia, whereupon he installed the *padrãos* – a dated stone marked with the Portuguese coat of arms. In this way, Cão and his men claimed the Namib desert and all of Namibia as Portuguese territory. But it was a pyrrhic victory, because "the Portuguese never arrived to take possession or to seek out its elusive inhabitants."[10] However, 400 years later, the murderous envoys of the German Second Reich arrived in Namibia to finish what the Portuguese had started. While they were at it, they also experimented with genocide,[11] almost exterminating the Nama and the Herero – an experiment that was to be tried again and perfected against the Jews 45 years later, during the Second World War.

The Bartolemeu Dias expedition

Three years after the Cão attempt, in the Porto de Lisboa in August 1487, two ferryboats, the *São Cristóvão* and the *São Pantaleão*, set sail for Africa. The voyage was commissioned by King João II of Portugal himself. Like his predecessor, King João harboured a burning ambition for Portugal to be a pioneer in reaching the ends of the world in order to expand Portuguese territory, increase its influence, and maximize its trading opportunities, and in the process establish it as leader among European nations. As with the failed Cão expedition, the aim was to establish a safe and alternative route to connect the Atlantic and the Indian oceans without having to navigate the overcrowded and fiercely contested Mediterranean routes available at the time. Accordingly, the king appointed Bartolemeu Dias, one of the most decorated squires of the royal court, to lead the expedition.

Was racism an invisible member of the voyaging team? Did the mission inspire or necessarily require racism? Could such expansionist ambitions – which included the discovery of "virgin" lands, commercial benefit, wealth creation, and discovery of new markets – be pursued without a need to inferiorize, infantilize, and demonize the peoples who, for at least 70 years, had been bought and sold as slaves?

As King João bid farewell to the captain, Bartolemeu Dias, he must have whispered to him that while pursuing the main mission of the voyage, he should, if time allowed, seek out the country in Africa, which was ruled by a Christian African priest-king, apparently a descendant of the three magi, known as Prester John.[12] Legend had it that Prester John was beseeched by hostile pagan and Muslim nations. Indications are that Prester John never actually existed; he was a figment of the European imagination of Africa. But his country was reputed to be wealthy and beautiful. However, of all the wealth that beckoned in Africa, perhaps slaves were the most valuable in those days.

Although Bartolemeu Dias and his crew did not reach Asia during the 1487 voyage, what they achieved was significant. They managed to sail around the tip of the African continent. They also stopped at São Gorge de Mina, later renamed Elmina Castle, a Portuguese fortress and trading post founded in 1471, situated where the river Benya meets the Atlantic Ocean, in a country later named the Gold Coast. At that time, Elmina Castle had already taken its place in ignominy as a slave-holding castle of note.

The Vasco da Gama expedition

On 8 July 1497, Dom Vasco da Gama left the Porto de Lisboa leading a fleet of three ships, the *São Gabriel*, the *São Raphael*, and the *Berrio*, carrying in excess of 150 passengers.[13] They made stops *en route* on the Kenyan coast (Malindi and Mombasa), in Mossel Bay, and, from 2–29 March 1498, in Mozambique. Though initially friendly, the natives soon became suspicious and hostile, so that in Mozambique where they stayed for almost one month, da Gama and his entourage had to take flight. On 20 May 1498, da Gama's fleet arrived in Kappadu, near Calicut, India. This expedition has been hailed as a trailblazer in maritime navigation.

Within a century, part of the Congo, initially discovered by Diogo Cão, was Christianized, even boasting a baptized Christian chief – Nzinga a Nkuwu.[14] From time to time, the latter would write to his counterpart, João II of Portugal, Christian king to Christian king, complaining about the plundering, kidnapping, and murdering activities of Portuguese settlers in the Congo. The Congolese king even accused the Portuguese of crucifying Christ again through their behaviour. Did the fact that the king was Christian provide him and his people with protection from the brutality of the colonizers? Not a chance. His pleas fell on deaf ears. In the Congo, Christianization coincided and co-existed not only with slavery and plunder, but also with the atrocities of genocidal proportions by the turn of the 20th century.[15]

Colonialism, Christianization, and Racism

The Christianization of Africa cannot be historically untangled from its colonization. Even in the first seven centuries, where the colonial motif was less pronounced, attitudes of European superiority were not completely absent among the Carthaginians, the Greeks, and the Romans. It is therefore not possible to either discuss or understand white racism in Africa outside of both colonialism and Christian mission in Africa. Nor would we be able to understand its stubborn resilience on the African continent without appreciating its embeddedness in religion, trade, colonial economics, culture, and the education system.[16] The most derogatory term long used by white racists against black South Africans, namely *kafir*, is also the Muslim word for non-believer. For the longest time, white settlers in Africa have tended to see themselves as superior either on account of their "civilization" or on account of their religion. But this was hard work, needing to be strenuously justified by means of theories of a hierarchy of human species, a hierarchy of religions, at the bottom of which were African religions, as well as theories of the "white man's burden." Like patriarchy, white racism as a system does not require the physical presence of white racists for it to reign.

The White Man's Burden

Four hundred years after Vasco da Gama established a new sea route that linked Europe to Asia, connecting the Indian and the Atlantic, a 20-something-year-old English poet, Rudyard

Kipling, published his poem "The White Man's Burden: The United States and the Philippine Islands." The poem begins thus:

> Take up the White Man's burden
>
> Send forth the best ye breed
>
> Go bind your sons to exile
>
> To serve your captives' need
>
> To wait in heavy harness,
>
> On fluttered folk and wild
>
> Your new-caught, sullen peoples
>
> Half-devil and half-child.[17]

While this poem was initially intended to encourage American imperialism in the Philippines, it might well be described as a colonialism charter. The poem presents the most explicit rationale and logic for colonialism. Though the logic presented is akin to earlier justifications for slavery, Kipling's "argumentation" is much smoother, much cleverer, and much more devious. The very idea of colonialism and imperialism as a "burden" and a form of "service" was cunning. The poem came at the height of Britain's Imperial era – roughly 1815 to 1914. Behind the deliberately misleading notions of service, allegedly self-imposed exile, heroism is the viciousness of naked racism. The people to be "served" are thankless, lazy, heathen, "wild," "captive," "half-devil," "half-child." They need to be saved from themselves! Even then, say Kiplings, they will accuse the white man, saying, "Why brought he us from bondage, our loved Egyptian night?"

In his deft justification of colonialism and conquest, Kipling captures European racism at its most sophisticated, at its most evangelical. The logic and the thinly veiled arrogance of Kipling was also the logic and the thinly veiled arrogance of the missionary era. Whereas Kipling spoke of the "white man's burden," the missionaries spoke of their moral duty to spread the gospel. The latter also joined the abolitionists in arguing, finally, that black people possessed divine souls and were therefore fit to be called human.

Behind the "good intentions" of Kipling lay a history of centuries of slavery. Even closer to the date of the publication of Kipling's poem was the abolition of slavery in the UK and the Berlin Conference of 1883–84, where colonialism was formalized when the European powers carved up Africa and divided it among themselves. Shortly after Kipling's poem was published, Joseph Conrad published his *Heart of Darkness* in 1902. If Kipling urged on the invaders, conquerors, and missionaries through his idea of the white man's burden, Conrad provided an idea of Africa and of Africans that was so primitive, it made Kipling's poem sound reasonable. Here is how the fictional main character and narrator in the Conrad novel describes Africans seen on the banks of the river Congo:

> We are accustomed to look upon the shackled form of a conquered monster, but there – there you could look at a thing, monstrous and free. It was unearthly, and the men were – No, they were not inhuman. Well, you know, that was the worst of it – this suspicion of their not being

inhuman. It would come slowly to one. They howled, and leaped, and spun, and made horrid faces; but what thrilled you was just the thought of their humanity – like yours – the thought of your remote kinship with this wild and passionate uproar. Ugly.[18]

Meanwhile, in Germany, the founding of colonies and their occupation by German settlers was seen as necessary for the renewal of true German-ness. In terms of this view, German colonies "would become the incubators"[19] of true German-ness, the so-called *Völkisch* spirit. The colonies would help reconnect Germans to land – a true mark of being German. They would also provide raw materials, new export markets, and extra military personnel in time of war, as well as setting some true Germans aside from the corrupting forces of industrialization and modernity. These motivations both for colonialism and for encouraging colonial settlements were probably closer to the truth than Kipling's utterances about the "white man's burden." If the colony was also seen as a bulwark and an incubator against the impurity of modernity and the inconveniences of science, then colonialism was clearly also a desperate search for a pristine world that was slipping away. In part, it was first and foremost about the "rehumanization" of Europeans and the expansion of their sphere of influence. But at what cost and at whose expense? It is in answering those questions that we have to talk about racism.

A particularly virulent strand of colonial racism came in the form of social Darwinism, hints of which are in Kipling's poem. At the heart of this theory is that without denying the devastating effects of genocide and colonial dispossession on African people and other "inferior races," it was "that perhaps the inner cultural weakness of the native races of Africa, America and Asia made them passive and therefore incapable of withstanding the European assault."[20] In terms of this logic, the Africans were simply too inferior, too unfit, and too feeble to withstand the might of the fittest races of Europe. Their extermination and their dispossession were therefore part of the natural process, and therefore in keeping with Darwin's notion of "the survival of the fittest." In 1903, the German Commissioner for Settlement in Namibia, Dr Paul Rohrbach, an ardent social Darwinist, justified the colonization of Africans in the following terms:

> It is not right either among the nations or among individuals that people who can create nothing should have a claim to preservation. No false philanthropy or race-theory can prove to reasonable people that the preservation of any tribe of nomadic South African Kaffirs . . . is more important for the future of mankind than the expansion of the great European nations, or the white race as a whole.[21]

But what happens when the Africans do not surrender as easily and therefore do not exhibit the assumed weaknesses that should render them unfit to withstand European assault? What happens when they withstand the assault of the supposedly superior power of European powers? Genocide; extermination; massacre is what happened to the "stubborn" Nama and Herero of Namibia, who dared to stand up to German colonialists; and the Germans almost wiped them off the face of the earth.

In similar fashion, King Leopold of Belgium dealt with the Congolese when they dared to stand between him and the riches of the land he called a slice of "*un le magnifique gateau Africain*" – a magnificent African cake.[22]

I wish we could say social Darwinism is a thing of the past. But we cannot be too sure. In November 2009 in Bayreuth, Germany, Nobel Laureate Wole Soyinka delivered a lecture in which he pointed out that "both Islam and Christianity had been guilty not merely of physical

atrocities on African soil, including the enslavement of the indigenes, but of a systematic assault on African spirituality in their contest for religious hegemony."[23] Afterwards, he was confronted by a young white man whose 2009 thinking sounded just like that of Paul Rhorbach in 1903: "Africans, you must admit, are inherently inferior. You must be, or other races would not have enslaved you for centuries. Your enslavers saw you for what you were, so you cannot blame them."[24] If blatant social Darwinism of the Rhorbachian sense is no longer as prevalent with regard to African people as such, remnants of it remain with reference to African cultures, worldviews, languages, and ways of life. The belief in social Darwinism is mostly unspoken and often unconciously held.

The same social Darwinist rationale is often given for the death of many African languages. It is said that they die because they are and cannot be languages of science and technology, and they are too weak to withstand the power of the languages of science and technology. Similarly, it is argued that the reason many indigenous forms of knowledge, ways of living, and worldviews are being made extinct is that they are too primitive, too unscientific, too backward to withstand the postcolonial and post-faith era. Social Darwinism is dead! Long live social Darwinism!

Racism as Colonization of the Mind and the Spirit

> In the colonies the truth stood naked, but the citizens of the mother country preferred it with clothes on . . . The European elite undertook to manufacture a native elite. They picked out promising adolescents; they branded them, as with red-hot iron, with the principles of Western culture; they stuffed their mouths full with high sounding phrases, grand glutinous words that stuck to the teeth. After a short stay in the mother country, they were sent home, white-washed. These walking lies had nothing left to say to their brothers; they only echoed.[25]

Whereas colonization may be accounted for by means of making reference to its physical effects, it was perhaps at its deadliest in its impact on the mind, the psyche, and the spirit of the colonized. To these issues, Frantz Fanon dedicated at least two books published in the early 1960s.[26] Other thinkers such as Steve Biko,[27] Okot p'Bitek,[28] and Ngugi Wa Thiongo[29] also focused on the effects of racism on the African psyche. For Biko, psychological emancipation was necessary if there was ever to be emancipation at all. In his famous *Song of Lawino and Song of Ocol*, Okot p'Bitek created a husband (Ocol) and wife (Lawino) to compare and contrast a white-washed elitist African against an authentic African. The wife is still steeped in notions of African humanity, whereas the husband is part of an educated elite. For his part, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o argues strongly that we cannot rid ourselves of intellectual colonization as long as we prefer and use the language of the colonizers. But the colonization of the mind is deeper and more complex. It is not separate from the brutality of colonialism, but an intricate part of it. Racism is about insult, insulting words and gestures, but it is not only about the insult of words,[30] it is the combination of insult, violence, and dehumanization:

> The order is given to reduce the inhabitants of the annexed country to the level of superior monkeys in order to justify the settler's treatment of them as beasts of burden. Violence in the colonies does not only have for its aims the keeping of these enslaved men at arm's length; it seeks to dehumanize them. Everything will be done to wipe out their traditions, to substitute our language for theirs and to destroy their culture without giving them ours. Sheer physical fatigue will stupefy them. Starved and ill, if they have any spirit left, fear will finish the job.[31]

It was in this sense that Sartre argued that the natives were deliberately and permanently thrusted into a "nervous condition."

For Desmond Tutu and Martin Luther King, the most painful thing about racism is it made the children of God doubt that they were the children of God.[32] In other words, racism has the capacity to create spiritual orphans and God-less children.

Institutional and Structural Racism in Africa

Again and again we have observed that in Africa, racism has never relied entirely on individuals for its sustenance and its longevity. Although racism had individual champions – such as social Darwinist Paul Rohrbach in Namibia, King Leopold in the "Belgian Congo," Adolf Hitler in Germany, Hendrik Verwoerd in South Africa – racism survives not through individuals but by creating structures that will ensure its continuation and by embedding itself in key structures of society.[33] The "greatest achievements" of "racism champions of note" was their ability to create sustainable structures in which racism will be hosted. In doing this, care was taken to ensure that the instruments and structures of control, governance, and racial stereotype reproduction were not only created but constantly oiled, serviced, and primed to devour blacks and Africans. In this manner, for its sustenance racism needs neither "individual racist champions" nor the presence of slave masters, colonialists, or white people. Five key structures in the sustenance and reproduction of racism are government policies, the education system, the labour system, economic systems, and religious systems.

Once racism is institutionalized in law and in policy, the individual racists can be dispensed with; the system will work just fine to maintain and reproduce itself. Some of the most infamous forms of institutionalized racism were and are the apartheid system in South Africa and the Jim Crow system in the US.

An even more deadly form of institutionalization of racism occurs when racism is deftly inserted into popular culture, for example, in literature (especially children's literature), film, folklore, language, and the public media through the peddling, repetition, and normalization of racial stereotypes.

Racism and Gender in Africa

Colonial and slavery racism was also laced with misogyny and disdain for women, especially African/native women. Because colonialists and missionaries alike brought chauvinism and sexual discrimination with them, it followed that African women received the shorter end of the stick. The stories of Saartjie Baartman[34] (taken from Cape Town to Europe for display as a living human exhibit in various European centres) and Eva Krotoa (who worked in the house of the original Dutch settler Jan van Riebeck), the first indigenous convert to Reformed Christianity, are illustrative. Krotoa died, apparently an alcoholic, on Robben Island.

The combination of gender and race was manifested both in the nature of colonial racism itself and also in the framing of the resistance against it. In a way, most racisms are a battle of men over women, often with women as "sites" of the battles.

So effective was white racist masculinity in South Africa that there was a time when the most famous white South African woman was a female comedy character, Evita Bezuidenhout, created and performed by a white male actor, Pieter-Dirk Uys.[35] Admittedly, more

progressive white people and a few black people knew about Nadine Gordimer, the South African Nobel Literature Laureate, and Helen Suzman, the liberal politician who stood as a lone voice against the racist policies of her white countrymen. But none reached the levels of fame of the fictional Evita Bezuidenhout. This was perhaps because Evita Bezuidenhout was such a proper, typical, and obedient white female, serving the apartheid government as ambassador to their self-made Bantustan homelands for black people.

And yet, like the white masculinity of oppression, aspects of the black masculinity[36] of liberation also perpetrated exclusionary violence against women, mimicking both the violence and the tactics of white supremacists[37] – even though their objectives were supposedly direct opposites. According to Daniel Magaziner,[38] the reclamation of black manhood was "perhaps the most basic element of Black Consciousness efforts to recast black identity." Steve Biko himself wrote:

> But the type of black man we have today has lost his manhood . . . Deep inside his anger mounts at the accumulating insult, but he vents it in the wrong direction – on his fellow man in the township, on the property of black people . . . In the privacy of his toilet, his face twists in silent condemnation of white society but brightens up in sheepish obedience as he comes out hurrying in response to his master's impatient call . . . All in all, the black man has become a shell, a shadow of man, completely defeated, drowning in his own misery, a slave, an ox bearing the yoke of oppression with sheepish timidity.[39]

Nelson Mandela seems to have been steeped in a similar mentality. Upon handing him over to his step-parent following the death of his father, his mother said to Mandela,[40] "*uqinisufokotho kwedini*," which Mandela loosely translates into "man up, my boy," but could also be translated to mean "toughen up the soft spot between your infant skull bones, young man."

On the day of his circumcision graduation, Mandela had listened to a rousing keynote speech about manhood delivered by a local chief (Meligqili, the son of Dalindyebo). Among other things, Mandela recalled the chief saying:

> There sit our sons . . . young, healthy and handsome, the flower of the Xhosa tribe, the pride of our nation. We have just circumcised them in a ritual that promises them manhood, but I am here to tell you that it is an empty, illusory promise that can never be fulfilled for we Xhosas and all black South Africans are conquered people.[41]

Mandela later maintained that listening to that speech was the closest he came to a Damascus road experience. Similarly, while preparing for what has become his famous statement in the dock of the defendant at the Rivonia Trial in June 1964, Mandela jotted down five points by hand, the fifth of which read, "If I must die, let me declare for all to know that I will meet my fate like a man."[42] Clearly, the idea of lost manhood, which could be reclaimed only by standing up to the white man and by the attainment of political freedom, became a kind of aspirational masculinity of struggle, and perhaps the very objective of the struggle. The African man had to regain his manhood. For this to happen, Biko suggested the following remedy:

> The first step therefore is to make the Black man come to himself; to pump back life into his empty shell; to infuse him with pride and dignity, to remind him of his complicity in the crime of allowing himself to be misused and therefore letting evil reign supreme in the country of his birth . . . This is the definition of "Black Consciousness".[43]

The problem is that these notions of manhood were gleaned from conservative notions of African masculinities and designed as antidotes for toxic white male masculinities[44] of *kragdadigheid* (overbearing power). Such a situation of two sets of toxic masculinities, one bent on domination and the other committed to resistance, was bound to produce, nurture, and perpetuate various forms of gender insensitivity and violence. Again and again, when xenophobia is invoked against Africans, at home and abroad, women are portrayed as "booty" and a "prize" in a war between men. Not so long ago, the leader of the Partij voor de Vrijheid in the Netherlands, Geert Wilders, was reported to have spoken of "Moroccan scum," whose male members are sheer "testosterone bombs" needing to be incarcerated in some (refugee) asylums.[45] Similar sentiments have been shared by Frauke Petry, the former leader of the Alternative für Deutschland party, and Marine Le Pen, the leader of the National Rally party in France.[46]

One of the repeated claims of South African Afro-xenophobes and xenophobes all over the world is not only that foreign nationals take jobs, but also that "they take our women"[47 –] asserting a bizarre entitlement to all women, as a possession of men.

Racism and Xenophobia in Africa

> The . . . history of the past four to five hundred years indicates that there have been massive movements of people across boundaries and continents. People have travelled voluntarily or involuntarily as fortune seekers, slaves, religious agents, refugees, outcasts, students etc. Those who travel and those who do not travel have interacted under different power relations. Some travellers and guests are powerful wherever they travel, while other travellers are continually disadvantaged.[48]

At the beginning of 2018, US President Donald Trump described Haiti, El Salvador, and various African countries as sh*thole countries. It seems that from the time he was campaigning for presidency, Trump has been trying to shock the world into a kind of moral numbness.[49] But such xenophobic sentiments are not only perpetrated against Africans from outside. Sometimes Africans perpetrate xenophobia against one another.

On Wednesday, 21 August 2019, I participated in a discussion panel focused on migration, policing, and South Africa's future politics at the University of Witwatersrand (WITS) in Johannesburg, South Africa.[50] The WITS seminar was a response to, among other things, an incident on 1 August 2019, in which foreign nationals who allegedly trade in counterfeit goods in and around Johannesburg were raided by the South African police. However, on that day the evening news showed a video clip in which a police van was seen fleeing, pelted by stones by a large group of protesters, alleged to be foreign nationals. That incident seemed to trigger an alarming surge in the use of xenophobic language by ordinary people, political leaders, government officials, trade unionists, and highly placed police officers. In many of the statements issued, including on social media platforms, foreign nationals were portrayed as violent, lawless, seeking to undermine the authority of the state, committing crimes against the state, and seeking to co-govern South Africa. On August 1, the premier (governor) of Gauteng Province, David Makhura, posted the following statement on Twitter:

> Some foreign nationals who sell counterfeit goods and occupy buildings illegally in the Joburg CBD attacked our police with bottles and petrol bombs. This despicable crime against our state will never be tolerated. #OkaeMolao will respond in full force to defend rule of law
> 12:06 PM - 1 Aug 2019

Since this statement was made within hours of the incident, it is unlikely that the leader of the richest and most populous province in South Africa had fact-checked and verified that indeed only foreign nationals had been involved in what he described as a "despicable crime against our state." Unfortunately, the "certitude" with which the premier publicly made the accusation and the "clarity" with which he delineated the perpetrators more or less ensured his statement would be incendiary. Nor was he the only senior leader or government official to issue such statements at this time.

A few days later, yet another wave of what the South African media has dubbed "xenophobic attacks" broke out. These cyclical episodes, which go back to the first decade of South African democracy but became most notable in 2008,[51] include the looting of shops owned by African foreign nationals, physical violence, the burning of buildings, and killings. Xenophobic attacks also provide excellent cover for other criminal activities, such as robbery, bribery, and rape – so that even the label "xenophobic attacks" feels rather inadequate. In the recent xenophobic attacks, although shops and stalls owned by African foreign nationals were torched and looted, 10 out of 12 victims were found to be South African.

Is (South African) xenophobia the most potent example of how racism has mutated in our contemporary world? Or is it merely a manifestation of African self-hate? It is probably a little bit of both. In a thought-provoking book,[52] Cameroonian–South African anthropologist Francis Nyamnjoh[53] suggests that we must look for the colonialist – such as Cecil John Rhodes – embedded in the African psyche if we are to understand the phenomenon of African xenophobia. Referring to the student-led #RhodesMustFall movement, Nyamnjoh suggests that it is the Rhodes "in-here" who needs to fall, not the Rhodes "out-there." However, Nyamnjoh's proposed solution, namely a sense of conviviality among Africans, is hardly adequate. Africans are not suffering because of a lack of conviviality, but rather because they live in contexts where conviviality is forced upon them.

More than two decades ago, Kwame Appiah[54] of Ghana argued that Africans are more diverse and more "divided" than many narratives of African unity let on. While unity is a good objective, it should neither be assumed nor artificially asserted. Not even victimization by colonialism is sufficient glue to unite Africans. Appiah argues that Africans experienced different forms of colonialism to differing extents, and calls for a more positive basis for African unity. His sentiments seem to be borne out every time xenophobia and xenophobic violence break out between Africans and other Africans anywhere on the continent, including South Africa.

Racism and the Church in Africa

Except for contexts involving Islam, Christianity was either involved or implicated in some of Africa's deadliest episodes of racism – since the 15th century, if not earlier. The enslavement of Africans by European colonial powers was justified on both religious and economic grounds. Religious justification ranged from Africans being cursed to be hewers of wood and drawers of water, to various religious versions of "the white man's burden," to slavery being a way to salvation and therefore ordained by God, to various theological versions of social Darwinism. Perhaps the most blatant creation and defense of racism was in apartheid South Africa. This is not to say that this was absent in the Congo, Namibia, and the former Rhodesia. But the South African system lasted longest and provided so blatant a

"Christian" justification that it led to the World Council of Churches establishing its Programme to Combat Racism, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches declaring apartheid a heresy, and the United Nations stating that it was a crime against humanity. By their very existence, segregated churches blessed apartheid and perpetuated it. In this way, the *missio Dei* was distorted into something that Europeans do to or for Africans, something men do to or for women, and the Bible was converted into a tool of subjugation and not liberation.

Apartheid racism was not merely about social engineering and dogma. Its real effect can be seen in the long-term impoverishment of people, long-term death toll, and its many debilitating direct and indirect legacies – which stubbornly refuse to go away even today.

Could we include the growth of abusive right-wing Christianity[55] on the African continent among new forms of racism? To the extent that some of these churches seem to espouse theologies of humiliation based on the exploitation of the money and faith of the poor, these are practising a form of spiritual racism that targets the poorest of the poor.[56]

African Theology *en Route* vs Racism *en Route*: The Theological Agenda Ahead

Having started this article by making reference to African theology *en route*, it seems to me that African theology must remain *en route* if it is to keep pace with historical, mutating, resistant, stubborn, and institutionalizing racism, with its amazing longevity.

For African theology and all theology to remain *en route* God-wards, African theology and all theology must, first, "put on its travelling shoes,"[57] and in that way reclaim its sense of social justice and moral outrage. Only an agile theology can keep track with the mutations of racism and its various manifestation from place to place and time to time. Since racism does not always look the way it used to and since it does not always speak in its own name, Black and African theologies have to be discerning and wide awake.

Second, speaking as a Black theologian, we must seek to build on the ground covered by African theologians of the first seven centuries,[58] and up to and including the pioneer African theologians of the colonial and postcolonial era.

Third, we must dig deeper and further than the theologies of the 20th century, for while the devastating effects of racism may have been most manifest in this century, its roots are older. We need to go back to the early church. The first seven centuries are a particularly important resource for Africa (see Kwame Bediako and John Mbiti).

Fourth, as part of our going back to the drawing boards, we have to return to the great host of all religions that came into Africa from the outside, namely African religion. For Black and African theologians, African religions have become an important dialogue partner, now more than ever before. We must do more than try to help historical Christendom pull itself up by its own bootstraps in Africa, because it cannot.[59]

Fifth, the so-called 4IR (fourth industrial revolution) is going to raise, once again, questions of what it means to be human at a time when human beings, especially the males, are tempted to bestow divinity upon themselves. The problem is no longer merely the economic racism

between rich and poor, men and women, citizens and non-citizens, but the nihilistic and dangerous racism of humanity against the rest of creation.

Sixth, now is the time to confront the structures and the systems, and the policies (and/or the individual champions of racism) that hide and perpetuate racism, sexism, and xenophobia. It is possible to assume that there is an unspoken but deadly theological logic to racism – which we need to confront.

Seventh, racism is not merely an economic or chauvinistic system, it is also a spiritual system founded on the alleged divine parentage of white people and the rendering of black people as God's step children. At its deepest, racism is a theological heresy.

Notes

[1] Kofi Appiah-Kubi and Sergio Torres, eds, African Theology en Route (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1979)

[2] Robin DiAngelo, White Fragility (Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 2018).

[3] Martin Meredith, The Fortunes of Africa: A 5000-Year History of Wealth, Greed and Endeavour (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 2014).

[4] Ibid., 26.

[5] Ibid., 31.

[6] Ibid

[7] John Koskey Chang'ach, "The Contributions of Herodotus to African History," Global Journal of Human Social Sciences 14:5 (2014), 58–64.

[8] Ali Mazrui, The Africans: A Triple Heritage (New York: Little Brown,1986).

[9] David Olusoga and Casper W. Erichsen, The Kaiser's Holocaust: Germany's Forgotten Genocide (London: Faber and Faber, 2010).

[10] Ibid., 17.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Meredith, Fortunes of Africa, 87–88.

[13] David Northrup, "Vasco da Gama and Africa: An Era of Mutual Discovery, 1497–1800," Journal of World History 9:2 (1998), 189–211.

[14] Meredith, Fortunes of Africa, 101.

[15] Adam Hochschild, King Leopold's Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror and Heroism in Colonial Africa (London: Pan, 2012).

[16] Tinyiko Maluleke, "Africa's Opium Is the Religion of Others," Mail and Guardian, 2 April 2015, https://mg.co.za/ article/2015-04-01-africas-opium-is-the-religion-of-others.

[17] Rudyard Kipling, "Modern History Sourcebook: Rudyard Kipling, The White Man's Burden, 1899," Fordham University, https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/mod/Kipling.asp

[18] Joseph Conrad, Heart of Darkness (London: Penguin, 2007), 44.

[19] Olusoga and Erichsen, Kaiser's Holocaust, 88.

[20] Ibid., 110

[21] Ibid., 112.

[22] Meredith, Fortunes of Africa.

[23] Wole Soyinka, Of Africa (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012).

[24] Ibid., xii.

[25] Jean-Paul Sartre, "Introduction," in Frantz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth (London: Penguin, 1961), 7.

[26] Ibid.

[27] See Steve Biko, I Write What I Like (London: Heinemann, 1987).

[28] See Okot p'Bitek, Song of Lawino and Song of Ocol (London: Heinemann, 1984).

[29] See Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Decolonising the Mind (London: Currey, 1993); Moving the Centre: The Struggle for Cultural Freedoms (London: Currey, 2008).

[30] Tinyiko Maluleke, "Racism Is So Much More Than Words," Mail and Guardian, 15 January 2016, https://mg.co.za/ article/2016-01-14-racism-is-so-much-more-than-words.

[31] Sartre, "Introduction," 13.

[32] Desmond Tutu, Crying in the Wilderness (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1982).

[33] Tinyiko Maluleke, "Institutional Racism Is the Enemy," Sunday Independent, 21 March, 2016, https://www.iol. co.za/sundayindependent/institutional-racism-is-enemy-2000199.

[34] Rachel Holmes, The Hotentot Venus: The Life and Death of Saartjie Baartman. Born 1789 – Buried 2002 (London: Bloomsbury, 2007).

[35] Pieter-Dirk Uys, The Echo of a Noise: A Memoir of Then and Now (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 2018).

[36] Ian M. Macqueen, Black Consciousness and Progressive Movements under Apartheid (Pietermaritzburg: UKZN, 2018), 14.

[37] Redi Tlhabi, Khwezi: The Remarkable Story of Fezekile Ntsukela Kuzwayo (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 2017), 41–65.

[38] Daniel R. Magaziner, "Pieces of a (Wo)man: Feminism, Gender and Adulthood in Black Consciousness," Journal of Southern African Studies 37:1 (2011), 45–61.

[39] Biko, I Write What I Like, 28–29.

[40] Nelson Mandela, Long Walk to Freedom (London: Little Brown, 1993), 20.

[41] Ibid., 34.

[42] Nelson Mandela, Conversations with Myself (London: Pan Macmillan, 2010), 122.

[43] Biko, I Write What I Like, 29.

[44] Jacklyn Cock, Women and War in South Africa (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1993).

[45] Tinyiko Maluleke, "Vulgarity Becoming the Status Quo in the Age of Trump," Sunday Independent, 19 March 2017, https://www.iol.co.za/news/opinion/vulgarity-becoming-the-status-quo-in-the-age-of-trump-8256826.

[46] Ibid.

[47] Pumla Dineo Gqola, "Brutal Inheritances: Echoes, Negrophobia and Masculinist Violence," in Go Home or Die Here: Violence, Xenophobia and the Reinvention of Difference in South Africa, ed. Shireen Hassim, Tawana Kupe, and Eric Worby (Johannesburg: WITS University Press, 2008).

[48] Musa Dube, "Batswakwa: Which Traveller Are You? (John 1:1-18)," Journal of Theology for Southern Africa 108 (2000), 79–89.

[49] Tinyiko Maluleke, "The No 1 Strategy: Shock Them Till They Are Numb," Comment and Analysis, 5–11 June 2015. https://www.academia.edu/29689307/No_1s_Strategy-_Shock_Them_Till_Theyre_Numb_-_Opinion_Piece. pdf.

[50] Convened by Lauren Landau (WITS University), the members of the panel included journalist Jan Bornman (New Frame Media), Jean-Pierre Misago (WITS), Gareth Newham (Institute for Security Studies), Julia Honberger (WITS), and Koketso Moeti (Amandla.mobi); see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TcV4pQ89GKs.

[51] Hassim, Kupe, and Worby, eds, Go Home or Die Here.

[52] See Tinyiko Maluleke, "Look at the Kwerekwere in the Mirror," Mail and Guardian, 10 June 2016, https://mg.co.za /article/2016-06-09-look-at-the-kwerekwere-in-the-mirror.

[53] Francis Nyamnjoh, #RhodesMustFall: Nibbling at Resilient Colonialism in South Africa (Bamenda: Langa Research and Publishing, 2016).

[54] Kwame Appiah, In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture (New York: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992).

[55] Tinyiko Maluleke, "The Prophet Syndrome: Let Them Eat Grass," Mail and Guardian, 24 October 2014, https://mg.co.za/article/2014-10-23-the-prophet-syndrome-let-them-eat-grass.

[56] Tinyiko Maluleke, "Preying on the Poor in the Name of Praying," IOL, Sunday Independent, 16 August 2016, https://www.iol.co.za/sundayindependent/preying-on-the-poor-in-name-of-praying-1900442.

[57] Maya Angelou, All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes (New York: Random House, 1986).

[58] Kwame Bediako, Theology and Identity: The Impact of Culture upon Christian Thought in the Second Century and in Modern Africa (Regnum: London, 1992).

[59] Tinyiko Maluleke, "Of Africanised Bees and Africanised Churches: Ten Theses on African Christianity," Missionalia: Southern African Journal of Mission Studies 38:3 (2010), 369–79.