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The Black American Church and Homosexuality: A Hermeneutical Analysis

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This work offers a hermeneutical analysis and framework for understanding the emerging acceptance of homosexuality among a few Black American Protestant church leaders and congregants in the age of neoliberal globalization under American hegemony. I argue that the White Christian Western world ended Black history as a distinct form of system and social integration unfolding onto the world by integrating them into the dialectic of their (neo) liberal (Protestant) capitalist means and modes of production. This process, contemporarily, in postindustrial America, has led to the queerification and feminization of the so-called Black American (fictitious) community. As such, the emerging phenomenon of embracing homosexuality as church doctrine is related to black relations to the means and modes of production, which embraces and reinforces the identity politics and diversified consumerism by which the superstructure of the postindustrial economic base of the American service economy is constituted.

Keywords: Black Church, African-Americanization, Racial Identity, Religiosity, Black Diaspora, Spiritualism, phenomenological structuralism

Introduction

Recent works such as *Queering Black Churches* (2023) and *Black Gay British Christian Queer* (2021), build on the theories of intersectionality, postmodernism, and poststructuralism to highlight the need to make open and acceptable the presence of homosexual and queer lifestyles in the so-called Black church by reinterpreting the gospels to embrace and reinforce homosexual lifestyles. Obviously, given the conservative nature of many denominations of the so-called Black churches, this aforementioned position is unacceptable. Yet, the queering movement is gaining traction among a few Black denominations (Pentecostals, Episcopalians, Methodists, etc.) in America and the West in such places like the United Kingdom, for example, from which the latter title, *Black Gay British Christian Queer*, emerges. In this work, using Mocombe's theory of phenomenological structuralism as a heuristic tool and hermeneutical framework for understanding the queering movement in the Black Church, I argue that the queering of Black American churches in general, and the gospels in particular, parallels the queering of the so-called Black American community, which promulgates the idea in the West and globally in the name of identity politics and diversified consumerism, in general, as a result of their relations to the means and modes of production in postindustrial neoliberal America and the West.

There is no Black American identity and community in America, or the West for that matter, outside of their segregation associated with their relations to, and differentiation within, the American Protestant capitalist modes and means of production. Ever since their arrival onto the shores of America, so-called Black identity and practical consciousness, in other words, have been determined by their actions and reactions, i.e., practical consciousnesses, to their interpellation and embourgeoisement by Whites to the social class language games of the Protestant Ethic and the spirit of capitalism. There are no *sui generis* Black American identity and community with its own form of system and social integration that is different from, or diametrically opposes, the Protestant Ethic and the spirit of capitalism of their White counterparts, which would emerge out of that historical relationship. Instead, the so-called Black American community is a fictitious community stemming from structural differentiation and reproduction associated with their practical consciousness within the Protestant Ethic and the spirit of capitalism of their former White Christian slavemasters. And at the end point of this form of system and social integration, neoliberal identity capitalism as highlighted by Francis Fukuyama (1992),

Black identity and community has also finally ended serving as a simulacrum of the latter with its individual identity politics and diversified consumerism over a group solidarity (metanarrative) manifesting as a universal form of system and social integration in the annals of history, which diametrically opposes the Protestant Ethic and the spirit of capitalism. Instead, they present their fictitious community as an *other* agent of the Protestant Ethic and the spirit of capitalism in black face forming solidarity with other Blacks on account of their phenotype, which the rentier oligarchs of America and the West promote via their medium of communicative discourse, globally, for the purpose of both system and social integration amongst so-called Black folks around the world. Hence, this work offers a hermeneutical analysis and framework regarding the Black American's relations to the means and modes of production as the determining factor for the acceptance of homosexuality among a few Black American Protestant church leaders and congregants in the age of neoliberal globalization. I argue that the White Christian Western world ended Black history as a distinct form of system and social integration unfolding unto the world by integrating them into the dialectic of their (neo) liberal (Protestant) capitalist means and modes of production. This process, contemporarily, in postindustrial America, has led to the queerification and feminization of the so-called Black American (fictitious) community through ideological apparatuses (the church, education, workplace, etc.) and medium of communicative discourse (TV, the media, etc.), which attempts to promote their worldview throughout the diaspora via identity politics or what Mocombe calls the African-Americanization of the black diaspora on account of racial (phenotype) identification, solidarity, and diversified consumerism. As such, the emerging phenomenon of embracing and reinforcing homosexuality as church doctrine is related to Black relations to the means and modes of production, which embraces and reinforces the identity politics, glorification of the self and sexuality, and diversified consumerism upon which the postindustrial economic base and superstructure of the American service economy is constituted. The Black American queered Church, with its reinterpretation of gospel to emphasize God's love for everyone, regardless of their sins, serves as an ideological apparatus to interpellate and socialize (embourgeois) Black American social actors to the postindustrial economic base, hence their emerging embrace of homosexuality as an acceptable form of life in contemporary neoliberal postindustrial capitalist America with its emphasis on glorification of the self, sexuality, and diversified consumerism—while simultaneously, serving as the bearers of ideological and linguistic domination throughout the so-called Black diaspora given their overrepresentation in the entertainment and athletic spaces, which rentier oligarchs disseminate throughout the world through their ideological apparatuses and medium of communicative discourse (TV, media, advertisement, promotion of luxury goods, etc.).

Background of the Problem

The so-called Black church in America, the dominant ideological apparatus used to interpellate and socialize Black folks to slavery and subsequently (bourgeois) American life, is caught between two interpretative lenses in the academic literature: 1) a revolutionary institution of liberation, 2) or a conservative and reactionary ideological apparatus (Lincoln and Mamiya, 1990; Karenga, 1993; Tomlin, 2019; Mocombe, 2024). On the one hand, you have scholars who, using Du Boisian double consciousness as an epistemological critical mode of inquiry, see the Black American church as a *sui generis* Black (native) institution, constituted by its Africanism, preaching style, and songs, that became a dialectical revolutionary force of solace and freedom for Blacks, especially those in the United States of America, against slavery, segregation, discrimination, etc. (Lincoln and Mamiya, 1990; Tomlin, 2019). By this logic researchers explore how Black American lived-experiences emerged from the teachings of Christianity, which was synthesized with their Africanisms (revealed by their preaching styles and songs), as promulgated by revolutionary leaders such Denmark Vesey, Nat Turner, Gabriel Prosser, Martin Luther King Jr., etc., to dialectically and negative dialectically convict White Christian America for not living up to their ideas, ideals, and values given their treatment of Black Folks. In this sense, the so-called Black church was a revolutionary ideological apparatus that both provided solace and the urge for freedom against American slavery, segregation, second-class citizenship, etc. This, obviously, is an absurd position to take as it negates or minimizes the fact that the Christianity, initially, introduced by Whites to Blacks was intended to interpellate and socialize them to the social structure of slavery and American (Protestant capitalist) life. Moreover, the postmodern and post-structural methodology of lived-experiences implored by many researchers of this position attempts to extrapolate the reaction of the few Blacks who became literate and were able to read the bible on their own and dialectically turned it against the White Christian enslavers to the lived-experiences of members of the general community is also problematic.

That is, they extrapolate from the exception to the norm as though somehow the majority of the so-called Black community adopted the teachings of the few against the teachings of the White enslavers to constitute the Black church as a social structural revolutionary tour de force that recursively organized and reproduced revolutionary Black agents against an ideological apparatus of domination as intended by the slavemasters that reproduced their oppression for over two hundred fifty years (Reed, 1997; Mocombe, 2008).

From this latter critic, you have scholars, on the other hand, who view the Black church as an emerging (conservative) slave institution (ideological apparatus of domination) that interpellated and indoctrinated Blacks to accept their status as slaves and second-class citizenship waiting on the lord for liberation or heaven (Karenga, 1993; Reed, 1997; Mocombe, 2008, 2024). In this latter instance, the focus is on how the institution was established as an ideological apparatus of control to curtail the agency of the so-called Black community and socialize them to slavery and the Protestant Ethic and the spirit of capitalism. Hence, the Black church was an institution of death. This latter position is also problematic as it highlights social structural norms and rules and denies agency, which the former position overemphasize, to the so-called Black community in recursively organizing and reproducing their being-in-the-world, i.e., practical consciousness (Mocombe, 2008).

In this work, using Mocombe's (2019) structurationist theory of phenomenological structuralism, I argue that the Black church whether in America or elsewhere has been a conservative and reactionary ideological apparatus for interpellation, socialization, and embourgeoisement of Blacks to the means and modes of production equated with the nature of reality as such. This is made more evident, contemporarily, as many Blacks, in America in particular, have embraced the queering of the Black American Protestant churches for the purpose of system and social integration to the postindustrial neoliberal identity capitalism of America, which is equated with the nature of reality as such.

Theory and Method

Mocombeian phenomenological structuralism posits that societal and agential constitution are a result of power relations, interpellation, and socialization or embourgeoisement via five systems, i.e., mode of production, language, ideology, ideological apparatuses, and communicative discourse, which are reified as one of two types of social structure (the Protestant Ethic and the spirit of capitalism or the Vodou Ethic and the spirit of communism), or what Mocombe (2019, 2021a, 2021b) calls a "social class language game," by persons, power elites, who control the means and modes of production in a material resource framework. Once interpellated and embourgeoisied by these five systems, which are reified as a social structure and society (social class language game), social actors, for their ontological security, recursively organize, reproduce, and are differentiated by the rules of conduct of the social structure, which are sanctioned by the power elites who control the means and modes of production, language, ideology, ideological apparatuses, and (medium of) communicative discourse in a material resource framework. Hence, societal and agential constitution are both a duality and dualism: a dualism given the reification of the social structure (social class language games) via the five systems; and a duality given the internalization of the rules, norms, ideas, and ideals of the five systems (via language, ideology, ideological apparatuses, and medium of communicative discourse tied to the means and modes of production), which become the agential initiatives or praxes of social actors differentiated by the rules of conduct that are sanctioned based on the economic mode of production. Difference, or alternative social praxis, in Mocombe's structuration theory, phenomenological structuralism, is not structural differentiation as articulated by traditional structurationists such as Bourdieu, Sahlins, Habermas, and Giddens; instead, it is a result of actions arising from the deferment of meaning and ego-centered communication given the interaction of two other structuring structures (physiological drives of the body and brain; and phenomenal properties of subatomic particles that constitute the human subject) vis-à-vis the mental stance of the ego during the interpellation and socialization or embourgeoisement of social actors throughout their life span or cycle in the dominant social class language game or social structure, which produces alternative praxis that is exercised at the expense of the threat these practices may pose to the ontological security of social actors in the social structure or society, which, as previously mentioned, is of two types (the Protestant Ethic and the spirit of capitalism or the Vodou Ethic and the spirit of communism).

This difference, however, becomes structural difference or differentiation in the structurationist sense once it is (dialectically, negative dialectically, and antidialectically) interpellated in the language, ideology, ideological apparatuses, and communicative discourse of those who own the means and modes of production in a material resource framework in order to control and direct the alternative praxis towards structural functionalism and equilibrium. Hence, True difference, *différance*, is practice associated with one of the two forms of system and social integration operating in, and against, its opposite counterpart for social change. For in the latter sense, the social praxis of the social actor is permanently differentiated, marginalized, and incommensurable within the praxes of the alternative social class language game it is operating within.

From this perspective, there is no Black American identity and community, for their practical consciousnesses are not constituted as an alternative, and permanently incommensurable, social class language game to that of the Protestant Ethic and the spirit of capitalism as in the case of the Africans of Haiti who, uncompromisingly, reproduced their Vodou Ethic and the spirit of communism in the mountains and provinces of the country following the Haitian Revolution; instead, they (Black America) are a structurally differentiated group, created by Whites and their relations to the means and modes of production, whose practical consciousness emerges from their segregation based on, and embrace, and reinforcement, of, the structurally differentiated othering terms and behaviors incorporated in the social class language game of their former White slavemasters. In which case, their integrative push for equality of opportunity, recognition, and distribution into the Protestant Ethic and the spirit of capitalism of the White West as part and parcel of the *modus operandi* of the Black American civil rights movement has brought about the end of anything resembling a Black American (metanarrative) history from their original position upon which they encountered White agents of the Protestant Ethic as we find amongst the African Haitians who sought to reproduce the Vodou Ethic and the spirit of communism in the mountains and provinces of the island.

Discussion

In other words, the majority of Black American identity/practical consciousness, like their White American counterparts, has been determined by their relations to, and differentiation within, the modes and means of production of the Protestant Ethic and the spirit of capitalism under White oligarchical domination, language, communicative discourse, ideology, and their ideological apparatuses. Segregation and the embrace, and reinforcement, of the “other” terms and practices of blackness (improvisation, different concept of time, and rhythm grounded in their Afrocentrism or double consciousness), emerging from structural differentiation, highlighted by Whites for Black identity-in-differential to Whiteness, is the sole basis for this talk about a so-called Black American identity and community, which is a fictitious community as it does not offer an alternative form of system and social integration that is distinct from the systemicity of the Protestant Ethic and the spirit of capitalism. Instead, it is a product of Black relations to the means and modes of postindustrial production, and their ideological apparatuses, such as the so-called Black church, which, contemporarily, has decentered so-called Blackness from the patriarchal nuclear family and the pathologies of the Black underclass (created from their relations to the industrial and agricultural mode of production, respectively) to embrace and reinforce queerness as it is a means in neoliberal postindustrial America to generate surplus-value from emerging queered and feminized serial identities and communities under the guise of identity politics and diversified consumerism. Hence, in this latter sense, afropessimists are correct to point out that so-called Blackness is instrumentalized for intersectional agendas in postindustrial America, given that the latter is presented by Whites as the nature of reality as such. There is no so-called Black American community with political subjectivity attempting to manifest itself against the end point of White Western Christian (Protestant) neoliberal identity capitalism and history. The end of Black American history began in agricultural slavery when so-called Black folks, dialectically, utilized the language, ideologies, ideological apparatuses, and communicative discourse of the White Western Christian world to convict them of not identifying with their values, ideals, ideas, as revealed by the practical consciousness of the Black (Protestant) bourgeoisie, for the purpose of system and social integration. At which point so-called Black folks, under industrial capitalism, in America in particular and the West in general, became a people without history adopting the discriminatory terms of their former White slave masters to constitute an “other” identity-in-differential to Whiteness, which they reified, used, and discriminated against for the purpose of postulating a so-called Black (bourgeois) history seeking equality of opportunity, recognition, and distribution with Whites against their discriminatory effects due to the othering terms represented by the Black urban underclass and the rural poor, which they (the Black bourgeoisie) also discriminated against.

Their end goal became highlighting the first Black to participate in the Protestant neoliberal identity capitalism of the White Christian West by recursively organizing and reproducing the practical consciousness of the society as an “other,” and against the other practices of their so-called community, as opposed to offering an alternative form of system and social integration. Contemporarily, under post-industrial neoliberal capitalism, however, they (the Black bourgeoisie) embrace, as opposed to warring against them as was done in previous modes of production, the othering terms and practices by which they were discriminated against for the purposes of individualism (glorification of the self), diversified consumerism, and equality of opportunity, recognition, and distribution.

Conclusion

In other words, in the agricultural, and the beginning of the industrial, age, between 1880-1960, paralleling White family structures, married households traditional nuclear families raising children, dominated the so-called Black American family structure, unfolding in the annals of human history, which the so-called Black church as an ideological apparatus highlighted and promoted against the promiscuity, queerness, single female headed households, etc., i.e., the so-called Africanisms associated with the black urban underclass and rural communities, which were imageries and circumstances of the agricultural mode of production (1619-1880s). Post the 1960s, and the advent of deindustrialization, criminalization, mass incarceration, and post-industrialization of American inner-cities, the out-of-wedlock birth rate began emerging as the dominant Black family structural form, which was 25% among Black people (Moynihan, 1965). Post the Moynihan report, which examined the link between Black poverty and family structure, that number rose to 70% as of 2018. The result in postindustrial American capitalism where identity politics and the glorification of the self and its standpoints are commodified by finance capital for capital accumulation by the White power elites, rentier oligarchs, the celebration of single-female headed households and same-sex couple family structures would emerge, via the ideologies of identity politics and diversified consumerism, as the dominant family forms in Black America post the 1960s. Given the criminalization, mass incarceration of Black males, and their absence in the homes as a result of legislation associated with the processes of deindustrialization, postindustrial inner-cities would be dominated by Black single-female headed households, and gay male and female family structures (the latter one can surmise emerging from homosexual behaviors, which occurred in prison and post-incarceration amongst Black males; and the rise of lesbianism due to the lack of men in the communities). Amidst the 70% single-female headed households, as of 2010, 32.9% of children in the US were raised by same-sex Black male couples compared to 6.2% raised by white male same-sex couples; 46.7% were raised by Black female same-sex couples compared to 23.1% for White female same-sex couples; and as of 2015, 24% of all Black men married outside of their race compared with 12% of Black female newlyweds, which is on the rise (Movement Advancement Project, Family Equality Council and Center for American Progress, 2012). Hence, Blackness, due to its social relations and differentiations within industrialization and post-industrialization, lacked any subjectivity as posited by afropessimists; instead, it (their practical consciousnesses that emerged from their social relations and differentiations vis-à-vis the industrial and post-industrial modes of production) was instrumentalized for post-structural neoliberal identity politics and intersectional jargon, becoming a model community of, and for, the latter (intersectional) by negative dialectically convicting Western society for its (individual and institutional) continual discriminatory effects against the serial, reified, and commodified identities utilized by finance capital for capital accumulation. This latter position represents the theorization of critical race theory, which highlights the continual effects of institutional racism, sexism, transgenderism, etc., on preventing (intersectional) Black folks from achieving equality of opportunity, recognition, and distribution with their White counterparts. The response of White Western (Protestant) Christian capitalists who have declared that (neo) liberal democracy as embodied by the American nation-state is the end-point of human history, is to reconcile the contradictions of the continual effects of their discriminatory practices against serial identities through identity politics and representations of the other as a Protestant capitalist neoliberal other, i.e., professional queer agents of the Protestant Ethic seeking to constitute queer nuclear families, the same for transgenders, blacks, etc., within their language, modes of production, ideologies, ideological apparatuses, and (medium of) communicative discourses. Hence, the promulgation of queerness in the Black American churches by agents of the so-called Black American community, who's queerness has been allowed, where under industrial capitalism it was discriminated against, to manifest for the purpose of diversified consumerism and identity politics in postindustrial neoliberal America.

The emerging ideology and support of this process of queerification and feminization in the Black church, highlighted in the content of the books in the introductory sentence of this work, is to emphasize the love of God for everyone over his disdain for, and rebuke of, their individual sins and practices. No longer, as it was under agricultural and industrial capitalism, is the message, “come as you are, repent, and transform your life from sin;” instead, the emphasis is, “come as you are and stay as you are for God made you and loves you just the way you are!”

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