

## **Immanuel Kant believed in zombies –**

### **Multiculturalism and Spirituality in the Postcolonial City**

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#### **Introduction**

In his *Critique of Pure Reason* Immanuel Kant revealed his fascination with the ‘living dead’. The Enlightenment giant insisted that, ‘Observations without concepts are blind; concepts without observations are empty.’<sup>1</sup> More than two hundred years later Ulrich Beck expressed a similar interest in zombies, ‘we are living in a society...where our basic sociological concepts are becoming...‘zombie categories’ but social scientists cling onto old concepts long after the life has drained from them.’<sup>2</sup> I have lived, worked and worshipped in the most diverse cities in the United Kingdom for the past thirty years. Over this period cultural and religious diversity have become normative but the term ‘multiculturalism’ has been increasingly appropriated by the political right as a synonym for creeping segregation and a barrier to community cohesion.<sup>3</sup> In spite of the predictions of avowed secularists like Steve Bruce faith has continued to be an important marker of life in many urban communities.<sup>4</sup> Consequently,

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On completing his doctorate he became a Postdoctoral Research Fellow and then a Teaching Fellow at the University of Birmingham (2009-2012) where he developed a major ethnographic project working alongside unemployed young men on a large Birmingham housing estate - a project which led to the creation of the 2012 Bromford Dreams Graffiti Spiritualities Cube. In 2013 he moved to the University of Manchester to take up the position of Lecturer in Religions and Theology and became a Research Fellow in Faith and Peaceful Relations at the Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations at Coventry University in 2015.

His first monograph, *Voices from the Borderland* (2010) provided a critical analysis of British urban theology since its inception in the early the 1970s and is a set text at Universities and Theological Colleges in the UK, the USA and Australia. His second monograph, *A Theology of Community Organizing* (2014) provided the first systematic theological analysis of broad-based community organising. More recently he has co-authored a major report on faith-based approaches to conflict prevention and peacebuilding, which was launched at the United Nations World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul in 2016. His current research focuses on contemporary Christian approaches to poverty in post-financial crash Britain and on Christianity, ‘race’ and racism in the US and the UK.

as a result of the social capital that arises from their deep roots in local communities faith groups have become increasingly visible players in ongoing debates about multiculturalism in the UK.<sup>5</sup>

This chapter will consider the contemporary re-invention of the divisive politics of Empire on the streets of the postcolonial British city and at the despatch box in the House of Commons. The combination of this political discourse with a resurgent Orientalism has given rise to a culture within which difference is increasingly demonised. However I will argue that a critical dialogue with aspects of political theology can pave the way for a life after empire that is characterised by an affirmation of the liberative potential of difference.

## **Melancholia, Migrants and Myopia**

The sociologist Paul Gilroy argues that the UK's response to diversity is characterised by a kind of social schizophrenia. On the one hand Britain portrays itself as a welcoming society that rejoices in its cultural and religious diversity but on the other views Black-Britons as a threat to a nostalgic largely fictional vision of 'British' culture and an unwanted reminder of the days of Empire.<sup>6</sup>

Gilroy suggests that when the nation is envisaged as a ring-fenced 'camp', 'Culture as process is arrested... (and) ...impoverished by the national obligation to recycle the past...in an essentially unmodified mythic form.'<sup>7</sup> Identity, belonging and community are interwoven with an excluding ethnic essentialism, as we have seen in increasingly toxic debates about immigration, the Europe-wide refugee crisis of 2015-16, the dramatic rise in recorded hate-crimes in the aftermath of the UK vote to leave the European Union, the 2016 *Casey Review* into integration commissioned by former British Prime Minister David Cameron and the more recent 2018 *Integrated Communities Green Paper*. On the international stage the rhetoric of Donald Trump about Mexicans and Muslims during the US Presidential campaign

in 2016 played to similar xenophobic insecurity. Just two weeks after his inauguration President Trump signed an executive order temporarily banning citizens from seven majority-Muslim countries (Iraq, Iran, Syria, Somalia, Sudan, Libya, and Yemen) from entering the USA. This and the accompanying order denying federal funding to sanctuary cities, which provide support and hospitality to undocumented migrants, exemplify the demonising of difference, which impoverishes life after empire in the postcolonial city.<sup>8</sup>

The depiction of multiculturalism as the primary cause of alleged residential segregation in British cities and Trump's 'America First' nationalism exemplify the assumptions, which characterised Samuel Huntington's 'clash of civilisations' thesis and its underpinning Orientalism.<sup>9</sup> Particularly pronounced in the artistic and cultural commentary of the colonial area, Orientalist discourse depicted the cultures of the Middle East, the Indian sub-continent and Africa as exotic and alien.<sup>10</sup> The Western depiction of the 'Orient' as alien drew on an essentialised understanding of identity and culture, which pitted Occident and Orient as binary opposites. This unreasonable objectification of the Orient as a singular homogeneous cultural block enabled the forging of a cultural politics within which people of African, Caribbean, South Asian or Middle Eastern heritage were framed as cultural outsiders who disrupted the so-called cultural purity of European societies. Cultural, existential and ontological distinctions were constructed by White Europeans and North Americans on the basis of an exclusively 'Western' epistemology. Whilst, as Ziauddin Sardar notes, 'Orientalism is an artificial construction', it has, as Edward Said suggests, been used as the justification for 'Western' hegemony, within both the colonial and postcolonial eras.<sup>11</sup>

Carl Jung suggests that myth is an expression of archetypal themes to be found within our collective unconscious.<sup>12</sup> As a result, whilst a myth may fail to reflect social reality it carries the power to shape our understanding and underpin deeply held assumptions or beliefs. Chiara Bottici makes the point clearly, by 'slipping into our unconsciousness political

myths can deeply influence our most fundamental perceptions of the world and thus escape the possibility of critical scrutiny.’<sup>13</sup> When we bear Bottici’s observations in mind it becomes easier to understand how the enduring hold of Orientalism and, in the UK, an accompanying myth of Empire, provided fertile ground for Samuel Huntington’s influential ‘clash of civilisations’ thesis.

Writing just a few years after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, Huntington asserted that in the aftermath of the Cold War the new geo-political struggle would revolve around a so-called ‘clash of civilisations’ rather than political ideologies, ‘Conflict between civilizations will be the latest phase in the evolution of conflict in the modern world.’<sup>14</sup> Huntington’s thesis reified living cultures and was characterised by the assertion that, ‘differences among civilisations are not only real; they are basic’.<sup>15</sup> He went further and argued that the next big geo-political struggle would be between what he referred to as ‘Western civilisation’ and ‘Islamic civilisation’, which he depicted in graphically negative terms - ‘The crescent-shaped Islamic bloc, from the bulge of Africa to central Asia, has bloody borders.’<sup>16</sup> For Huntington diversity threatened national identity rather than enriching it. Whilst his ideas were widely critiqued the narrative woven by Huntington provided the intellectual camouflage for the demonising of difference and upsurge of Islamophobia that has characterised life in the postcolonial city for the last twenty years. Huntington implicitly paved the way for the 1997-2010 Labour Government’s assimilationist community cohesion agenda and foregrounding of so-called ‘British values’, the 2010-2015 Conservative Government’s assertion that multiculturalism has failed and the 2016 British referendum decision to leave the European Union.

Gilroy suggests that this culture of othering reflects a ‘post-imperial melancholia’ – an ambivalent impotence that has resulted from the loss of Empire, which expresses itself in the demonising of the children, grand-children and great grand-children of its colonial past.<sup>17</sup>

Such post-imperial melancholia evidenced itself in the dramatic rise of ‘hate-crimes’ in the aftermath of the UK’s decision to leave the European Union. In a similar vein the ‘No Irish, No Blacks, No Dogs’ signs in boarding house windows that greeted many Black people migrating to the UK in the 1950s and the ‘No More Polish Vermin’ flyers handed out in the aftermath of the EU referendum rest on the unholy alliance between the angst-ridden processes of ‘othering’ and scapegoating.<sup>18</sup>

The objectifying and demonising of Black and Asian Britons rests on a flawed anthropology, which defines human identity in essentialised binary terms and enables the forging of excluding models of nationhood and belonging whereby particular ethnic or religious groups are defined as threatening cultural outsiders. Such a process of ‘othering’ provides the raw material upon which the scapegoating of the so-called outsider depends. The Jewish community, the Irish community, the Black community, the Bangladeshi community and more recently the Muslim community know what it means to be the scapegoat – to be blamed for society’s problems. Robert Beckford argues that the de-humanising and de-valuing of Black people is arguably written into the DNA of Christian history, dating back to the formation of the canonical Gospels.<sup>19</sup> Anthony Reddie and Michael Jagessar highlight the historic nature of the racialized ‘othering’, which underpins Britain’s post-imperial melancholia, suggesting that, ‘The construction of the binary of Blackness and Whiteness is a product of modernity...racialized notions of fixed identity and restricted perspectives on Black human selfhood were the dangerous offspring of the chattel slavery of the Black Atlantic.’<sup>20</sup>

If we are to fashion inclusive urban communities within which plurality and difference are markers of liberative community relations it is vital that we move beyond our addiction to the myth of ‘race’ upon which the zombies feed. Whilst it has proved to be incredibly difficult to ‘kick’ our addiction to ‘race’ only such a shift can enable us to move

towards political and theological narratives and social justice movements, which are capable of engaging in a credible manner with our interwoven plurality. Beckford makes the point well, suggesting that, ‘...this multidimensional approach to experience means that liberation strategies will not all be the same because experience is not singular’.<sup>21</sup> A recognition that, ‘...the experience of poor whites within the inner city is similar but also dissimilar from their Indian, Bangladeshi...Caribbean and West African neighbours’ can begin to put the zombies back in their box.<sup>22</sup>

### **Reinventing the multicultural landscape**

Writing at the beginning of the new millennium Andrew Davey suggested that, ‘You only have to walk down the streets of any major city to encounter the world.’<sup>23</sup> The postcolonial city is neither singular nor static but dynamic and multiple. Leonie Sandercock is therefore right to remind us that we need to cultivate an ‘epistemology of multiplicity’ if we are to understand its complexity.<sup>24</sup> Monocultural cul-de-sacs and ring-fenced conceptions of culture, reassuring though they may be, inhibit the forging of genuinely inclusive patterns of citizenship. It is only when we recognise that ethnic and religious diversity is normative rather than exceptional and that identity is plural and fluid that we will begin to overcome the introverted nationalism and resurgent xenophobia that increasingly dominates politics on both sides of the Atlantic.

If we are to wrestle back multiculturalism from political leaders and journalists who present it as a barrier to social cohesion it is important to identify the tools and concepts which can help us to fashion an alternative liberative narrative of meaning. A brief examination of the dynamic nature of contemporary diversity, ongoing of globalisation processes, criss-crossing patterns of migration and the nature of personal and communal

identity can help to provide us with the tools we need to resist the appeal of the zombies, which worried Kant and Beck so much.

Whilst Davey touched upon it and those of us who live in big cities experience it on a daily basis it was the anthropologist Steven Vertovec who first began to theorise what he termed ‘superdiversity’.<sup>25</sup> Just as Davey and Vertovec were pointing to our dynamic diversity New Labour government Ministers were drawing on the assimilationist community cohesion agenda set by Ted Cantele in their articulation of xenophobic and static definitions of ‘Britishness’.<sup>26</sup> Political and academic debate about diversity in the UK has largely framed identity in fixed terms and focused policy and analysis on large settled communities of people of Caribbean and Indian sub-continent heritage. However, as the urban landscape has been transformed it increasingly appears that social policy is framed and research undertaken into a world that is fast disappearing in the rear-view mirror. Vertovec reminds us that even our diversity is diverse. As a result of the confluence of ongoing waves of globalisation and widespread geo-political conflict the twenty-first century has witnessed a movement of people from across the global ‘South’ to the affluent ‘North’ not seen for generations. Vertovec argues that, in this context, established ways of thinking about identity fail to respond to the new questions that contemporary migration raises. He suggests that on this new landscape, ‘...there is much to be gained by a multidimensional perspective on diversity...and by appreciating the coalescence of factors which condition people’s lives.’<sup>27</sup> This new landscape has seen the emergence of plural towns and cities, like Luton and Leicester, where no single ethnic group constitutes a majority of the population.<sup>28</sup> When everybody is part of a minority the identification of so-called ‘British values’ becomes as difficult as catching water in a net. Such an exercise owes more to essentialist understandings of nation and hegemonic assimilationist community cohesion agendas than it does to

progressive configurations of social inclusion characterised by a commitment to the plurality of British identity.

Vertovec focuses his analysis on patterns of migration. Whilst this has become increasingly important since the onset of the Mediterranean refugee crisis beginning in 2015 an exclusive focus on immigration can perpetuate the misconception that Black and Asian-Britons are cultural outsiders. An obsessive interest in ‘the immigrant’ can blind us to the new future that is being framed before our eyes. As a result we fail to see the rapid rise of the community of Britons who self-define as people of dual heritage – not just Olympic gold medal winners like Jessica Ennis or Formula 1 world champions like Lewis Hamilton but 1,200,000 Britons in towns and cities across the UK.

This re-invention of identity has the potential to re-frame life in the postcolonial British city in such a way that difference resources a mutually liberative activism capable of forging inclusive models of social cohesion. The life-giving potential of such a new vision of urban life may still be sapped by the zombies that continue to stalk the streets of the postcolonial city. However a critical conversation with aspects of political theology can help us to forge a model of liberative spirituality that is capable of breathing life into the zombie discourse that surrounds diversity. Such a critical conversation, which can only be hinted at here, is vital as we seek to build inclusive post-imperial communities in our superdiverse twenty-first century cities.

### **Life-giving spiritualities versus lifeless zombies**

The zombie discourse surrounding contemporary multiculturalism, recent British Government social policy, excluding narratives of community cohesion, the ‘clash of civilisations’ thesis and the myth of ‘race’ upon which they all depend are the products of modernity. I suggest that the intellectual tools of modernity cannot cope with the dynamic



and interwoven complexity of the cities of the twenty-first century. In order to forge a new and liberative spirituality we need to move beyond a modernist concern with roots and embrace ways of thinking that focus more on routes – not so much where we are from but how we got here and where we are headed. A critical dialogue with the following theological themes can help us to respond to the zombie discourse surrounding multiculturalism and construct a contextual theologian's tool-kit capable of responding to the challenge.

### **Catholicity**

The scapegoating of Black and Asian-Britons and of the British-Muslim community undermines the central thrust of Christian anthropology, which asserts the interconnected equality of humanity – one people made in the image of the one God. As Kenneth Leech notes, racism and Islamophobia contradict the conviction that all people are, 'made in God's image and shine with the divine light.'<sup>29</sup> In the face of the zombie discourse that pervades ongoing policy responses to ethnic and religious diversity, the ancient Christian doctrine of Catholicity has the potential to resource the development of a new and life-giving post-imperial urban spirituality.

Since the Patristic period in Christian history the doctrine of Catholicity has largely been used as a metaphor for the diverse unity of the Church: dispersed across the globe but united around a common faith. The articulation of Catholicity has often focused on orthodox belief as defined by the Nicene Creed in order to identify people as doctrinal 'insiders' and 'outsiders'. In spite of this word of caution I suggest that a re-imagined Catholicity has the potential to resource the development of inclusive and dialogical spiritualities in the postcolonial city, which can begin to drain the life from the zombie discourse which surrounds multiculturalism.

The work of Robert Schreiter provides an important resource for those seeking to re-

imagine Catholicity in a globalised world. Schreiter begins by suggesting that the fluid and dynamic nature of contemporary society challenges un-examined discourses about identity, thereby changing the way we view other people and ourselves.<sup>30</sup> Consequently a re-framed dialogical understanding of Catholicity needs to revolve around what Chris Baker has called an, ‘...open-ended and fluid Christology’, which has the flexibility to resource ‘blurred encounters’ in the superdiverse postcolonial city.<sup>31</sup> For Schreiter such a step is critical, ‘For it is in the experience of moving from one place to another...of negotiating multiple identities...that insight into where God is at work in a globalized culture will be found.’<sup>32</sup>

In recent years politicians and commentators on the left as well as the right have depicted ever-increasing ethnic and religious diversity as a symptom of social disintegration. Like Gilroy, Modood and Meer I suggest that such a perspective reflects an *a priori* value judgement about multiculturalism rather than an evidence-based observation.<sup>33</sup> It is possible, and I would argue, vital, to take another view, which frames plurality, movement and dynamic identity as the raw material for liberative and inclusive models of social cohesion. The work of the linguist and postcolonial critic Homi Bhabha can help us in this task.<sup>34</sup> Bhabha speaks of a third space of social discourse – a liminal borderland that is characterised by fluidity, dialogue and the ‘blurred encounters’ to which Baker refers. As essentialist conceptions of identity rub up against increasingly fluid superdiversity new opportunities for dialogue emerge. Third space conversations between perceived cultural strangers become the crucible within which new relationships can be forged and new discourses of diversity explored.

A re-framed doctrine of Catholicity, when allied with Schreiter’s reflections on movement and multiplicity and the dialogical possibilities of third space discourse, can begin to subvert the demonising of difference which underpins our cleaving to multicultural zombies. A new Catholicity has the potential to provide a narrative, which can undermine the

lingering support for Huntington's 'clash of civilisations' thesis and strengthen those who are struggling, 'against those forces in society that, using the signifier of race...make difference a warrant for discrimination and oppression.'<sup>35</sup> However such a new Catholicity can only fulfil its liberative potential if it is informed by a new conception of the 'common good' within which the marginalized 'stranger' is prioritized.

### **The Stranger and the Common Good**

One of the best known phrases in the Bible is Jesus' commandment in Mark 12:31 to 'love your neighbor as you love yourself.' However it is the far more common Biblical injunction to 'welcome the stranger' that can more effectively subvert a political and public discourse that demonizes the difference that the 'stranger' represents. In 'post-Brexit' Britain and Trump's America where hate-crimes abound, refugee children are left in 'the jungle' bordering Calais and bans on migrants and refugees specifically target people who are Muslim and overwhelmingly non-White welcoming the 'stranger' represents a prophetic critique of those in power.<sup>36</sup> We are challenged to think again about notions of the 'common good' and to respond to the question that the Teacher of the Law asks Jesus in Luke 10: 'Who is my neighbor?'

The writer of the letter to the Hebrews (13:2) wrote two millennia ago but the challenge of these words echoes down the centuries - 'Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.'<sup>37</sup> As I have shown above, a toxic narrative surrounding migration, the depiction of multiculturalism as a failed social experiment that fosters segregation and an incipient 'clash of civilisations' culture permeate contemporary British politics. Repeated more than forty times in the Pentateuch alone, the command to love or welcome the stranger is allied with a commitment to solidarity with the oppressed (Deuteronomy 10:18-19). Its adoption may be costly but this

counter-cultural ethic can resource the development of a spirituality which prioritizes the demonised stranger and subverts the hegemonic hold of the demonising of difference in the postcolonial city.

Luke Bretherton reminds us that a commitment to welcoming the stranger should not be presented as the ‘politically correct’ behaviour of progressive Christians. Rather it is a key foundation of Christ-centred spirituality. In his parable about the Day of Judgement in Matthew 25:31-46 Jesus makes it plain that those who welcome the stranger have welcomed him. As Bretherton notes, ‘hospitality towards strangers constitutes part of the church’s witness to the Christ-event.’<sup>38</sup> However, as welcome as a commitment to hospitality towards the stranger is in the fractured postcolonial city a word of caution should be raised. When cultural ‘insiders’ welcome cultural ‘outsiders’ there is a danger that exclusionary social relations may be reinforced and binary configurations of ‘guest’ and ‘host’ bolstered. If such pitfalls are to be avoided then it is vital that the ‘welcoming of the stranger’ is permeated by an ethic of mutuality. As Bretherton reminds us ‘welcoming the stranger’ must revolve around, ‘a process of decentring and re-orientation to God and neighbour.’<sup>39</sup>

A commitment to ‘welcoming the stranger’ raises significant hermeneutical questions that must not be side-stepped. Making sense of what we experience and giving it meaning is not a value-free process. We can choose to privilege the meanings that ‘insider’ power elites attribute to life in the postcolonial city or to listen most closely to marginalised ‘outsiders’. Interpreting social reality is never a neutral exercise but is shaped by our experience, our place in society and the values upon which we base our lives. What we see depends on where we are. Consequently the Black accountant in a large Church in Birmingham who was told she couldn’t be the church treasurer because she couldn’t be trusted with the collection and the White Church Steward who said this to her recall and give meaning to their encounter in radically different ways. Similarly the White members of a church in London who refused to

receive the Body of Christ from the hand of the Church Steward remember the incident in a dramatically different way to the Black Steward who was handing out the bread.

As we seek to defeat the zombies in the postcolonial city the reflections expressed a generation ago by some of the earliest Latin American liberation theologians can come to our aid. God is depicted as being in solidarity with the poor. As Elsa Tamez summarises, ‘God identifies himself with the poor to such an extent that the rights of the poor become the rights of God himself.’<sup>40</sup> This intimate relationship between God and the poor moves us beyond an assertion of God’s preferential option for the poor to the realisation that the experience of poverty is a place of hermeneutical privilege. The upside-down kingdom, which Jesus articulates is one that resonates most fully with the left out and the left behind, those who are blessed in Jesus’ beatitudes in Matthew 5 and Luke 6. In the face of the physical, psychological and existential damage that racism and Islamophobia continues to do to those whom the included and the powerful frame as cultural outsiders I have argued elsewhere that it is necessary to forge a ‘hermeneutics of the demonised’, which subverts insider/outsider divides, ‘clash of civilisations’ essentialism and hegemonic binary framings of guest and host.<sup>41</sup> A hermeneutics of the demonised outsider demands that we re-think power relations and our understanding of truth, centre and margins. Furthermore when life in Brexit Britain is viewed through the eyes of the excluded our perception of what constitutes the ‘common good’ is subverted. When we gaze on the ‘common good’ from outside and below, dominant perceptions about multiculturalism are disrupted, making it possible to begin to re-imagine a new and liberative theology of the common good that is written by the socially excluded.

### **The solidarity of Jesus the ‘cultural other’**

Within a Christian context a re-imagined and enlarged vision of Catholicity and the forging of a counter-hegemonic hermeneutics of the demonised outsider rely upon a model of

Christology, which subverts the historic doctrinal dominance of the White Christ. Reddie argues that it is only when we peel away the layers of Eurocentric Christology and embrace the ‘otherness’ of Jesus the marginalised Palestinian Jew that we will be able to begin constructing a liberative theological narrative capable of resourcing new patterns of faith-based activism, which can challenge the demonising of difference.<sup>42</sup> Whilst he wrote almost a decade before the European refugee crisis, the UK vote to leave the European Union and the so-called ‘Muslim ban’ by Donald Trump in the USA, Reddie’s words retain a powerful contemporary resonance, ‘Welcoming the stranger can be a means of grace...In their very presence we may even see the benevolent presence of the Divine.’<sup>43</sup> Laurie Green also challenges us to recover a liberative Christology of otherness. Jesus, he suggests, ‘throws open his Kingdom to those...considered unclean and of no account, and sets them at the very centre...Jesus does not simply offer them dispassionate justice but aggressively positive discrimination.’<sup>44</sup>

In the face of the demonizing of difference in the postcolonial city and the persistent Orientalism of the ‘clash of civilisations’ thesis in all its populist guises the articulation of a Christology of liberative difference when aligned with a re-framed Catholicity and the fashioning of a hermeneutics of the demonised can begin to undermine the hegemonic hold of an ethic of oppressive difference. Such a Christology, if it is to be culturally credible, needs to avoid the temptation to re-hash or mimic other, earlier liberative Christologies. Consequently, whilst it is of paramount importance to draw inspiration from figures like Beckford whose articulation of a subversive and emancipatory ‘Dread Christ’ resonates with historical and contemporary Black experience it is of critical importance that we draw organically on our own experience of life in the superdiverse but fragmented postcolonial city in order to identify contemporary ontological symbols that have the capacity to articulate a new and culturally resonant Christology of liberation.<sup>45</sup>

With this in mind, as I have argued elsewhere, it is essential that attempts to fashion a Christology of liberative difference in the postcolonial city foreground a critical examination of White identity and normative Whiteness. To date little attempt has been made by White British theologians to begin such an exploration with the exception of Kenneth Leech who suggests that the articulation of a credible Christology of liberative difference must begin with a critique of the, ‘edifice of whiteness’ and its alignment with a ‘history of domination.’<sup>46</sup> If this exploration is to be coherent and persuasive it is essential that White experience in the postcolonial city is not essentialised. Leech, Reddie and Beckford are right to describe Whiteness as a ‘location associated with economic privilege.’<sup>47</sup> However the economic social exclusion of sections of the White community, often on impoverished outer city estates, and the resulting existential alienation from mainstream society must not be air-brushed out of the picture because neglecting this experience and this voice will only leave a vacuum, which the far-right will fill with enthusiasm.

### **The Moral Arc of the Universe...**

In the current climate it can often feel as if the demonizing of difference has public and political discourse in a death-grip. Such is the hegemonic hold of images of the threatening stranger and the appropriation of multiculturalism by the political class as a synonym for so-called segregation in the postcolonial city that those of us who are determined to articulate an alternative vision of liberative difference can burn-out or become completely disillusioned. And yet, I want to persist in arguing that there are reasons to be optimistic, even in the face of the rise of right-wing populism on both sides of the Atlantic.

Writing from a prison cell in Mussolini’s Italy the Marxist theorist Antonio Gramsci spoke about what he called the ‘cultural war of position’ - an ongoing struggle between reactionary and progressive visions of society. Whilst the battle may be long Gramsci insisted

that once a seemingly counter-cultural idea gains enough momentum to persuade large sections of a population the social contract that preserves the status quo can be overcome and a new world brought to birth.<sup>48</sup> We are currently engaged in such a ‘cultural war of position’. On one side are the dominant voices within society – government, establishment intellectuals and large sections of the media – those using all the weapons at their disposal to continue to assert the spectre of marauding refugees and migrants posing apocalyptic threats to social cohesion. On the other side are the activists and academics, social movements, community organisers, painters and poets who challenge the hegemony of oppressive difference and assert another, inclusive and egalitarian vision of a society strengthened by its dynamic diversity.

Whilst, as Martin Luther King Jr. reminds us, ‘the arc of the moral universe bends towards justice’ the victory of justice is far from pre-determined.<sup>49</sup> If we are to rescue the discourse about multiculturalism in the postcolonial city from the zombie categories that freeze it in time it is vital that a credible and persuasive new narrative is articulated, which uses all of the means at our disposal. As Manuel Castells notes, ‘Whoever wins the battle for people’s minds will rule, because mighty rigid apparatuses will not be a match in any reasonable timespan for minds mobilised around the power of flexible alternative networks.’<sup>50</sup> If the mobilizing of minds around a new discourse of diversity which posits difference as a source of potential liberation rather than as a problem seeking a solution is to be effective it is essential that we overcome the bunker mentality that can inhibit activists and academics. A diverse network of reflective practitioners and activist academics is needed if we are to defeat the zombies, which Kant found so frightening. Schreier’s work on what he terms ‘local theology’ can help us in this task. In his exploration of the emergence of contextual theology in the dying days of Empire Schreier speaks of theology as a creative partnership between activists and academics. Such an enterprise has the capacity to



democratize academy-bound theology and the potential to weave new narratives of meaning that can resource the work of those struggling for social justice.<sup>51</sup>

Wrestling multiculturalism back from the political right, rescuing it from the outmoded zombie categories that no longer reflect the dynamic diversity of the contemporary city and fashioning a counter-hegemonic discourse of liberative difference relies on victory in the ‘cultural war of position’ to which Gramsci referred. Three interlinked steps on what is likely to be a long journey are necessary if a convincing new discourse of diversity is to take root.

First, it is imperative that the weaving of a new narrative of liberative difference is democratic, inclusive and dialogical. As Schreiter notes contextual theologies belong first and foremost to the communities that give them birth, rather than the academy or the Church – ‘to allow the professional theologian to dominate...seems to introduce a new hegemony over already oppressed communities.’<sup>52</sup> If we are to supplant the dominance of a culture that demonizes difference our conversations must cross often closely guarded ethnic and religious boundaries. Therefore a culturally credible theology of liberative difference in the contemporary postcolonial city must be inherently cross-cultural and inter-faith, as I have argued elsewhere in relation to faith-based community organizing in the UK and the USA.<sup>53</sup> Furthermore such a new narrative needs to be characterized by imagination, as ready to listen to the wisdom of the poet and the painter, the song-writer and the story-teller as it is to politicians, professors and preachers.<sup>54</sup>

Second, the myth of academic neutrality must be firmly debunked. Stephen Pattison reminds us that, ‘Since all theology is human discourse, and all human discourse is conditioned by the socio-political nature of reality, all theology must be regarded as biased.’<sup>55</sup> In spite of the protests of those whose vision of the world was shaped by a post-Enlightenment assertion of objectivity there is no neutral research, for neutrality is, in

essence, a passive acceptance of the status quo. What then is the job of the intellectual in struggles for liberation in the postcolonial city? In his *Prison Notebooks* Gramsci explores the role of the intellectual, suggesting that historically they have acted as, ‘the dominant group’s ‘deputies’ exercising the subaltern functions of social hegemony.’<sup>56</sup> Writing out of his involvement in the US Civil Rights Movement Cornel West argues that the role of the intellectual is to ‘create a vision of the world that puts into the limelight the social misery that is usually hidden or concealed by the dominant viewpoints of a society.’<sup>57</sup> Similarly, Edward Said argues that the academic needs to play a clear and public role in struggles for liberation because, ‘The purpose of the intellectual’s activity is to advance human freedom.’<sup>58</sup> For the pioneer of Latin American liberation theology Gustavo Gutiérrez, ‘the theologian is to be an ‘organic intellectual,’ a thinker with organic links to the popular liberation undertaking, and with the Christian communities that live their faith by taking this historical task upon themselves as their own.’<sup>59</sup> If incipient Orientalism, cleaving to the reductive ‘clash of civilizations’ thesis and the consigning of multiculturalism to history are to be defeated ideas matter and that means that academics have a decision to make – Do they remain bystanders or engage as active partners in the struggle against xenophobia, not just in academic journals but in places of worship, community centres and on the street? Do they write about the struggle from a safe distance or, as engaged organic intellectuals, do they feel the ‘elemental passions of the people’ as Gramsci puts it?<sup>60</sup>

Third, drawing on the work of Paulo Freire, I want to suggest that dialogue, discourse and education need to be seen as essential tools in the struggle to forge a spirituality that can breathe life again into an ailing multiculturalism. In his classic work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* Freire argues that contextualized and dialogical education can enable people to become conscious of the nature and cause of their oppression.<sup>61</sup> This ‘building of a critical awareness’ has a vital role to play if we are to supplant the demonizing of difference with an

ethic of liberative difference as we strive to build a life after Empire.<sup>62</sup>

As I write the dominant voices in Brexit-Britain and Trump's America appear to be drowning out those who see diversity as strength rather than a 'clear and present danger' to social cohesion. The future feels bleak; perhaps the zombies have gained the upper hand. And yet there are reasons to be optimistic. Amidst the clamour of siren voices loudly asserting the death of multiculturalism the quiet whispers of hope can still be heard that give the lie to the 'othering' of contemporary Orientalism, the ahistorical essentialism of the 'clash of the civilisations' and the demonizing of difference. Here are just a few reasons to be hopeful as we try to re-imagine life in the postcolonial city. These stories from early 2017 offer us glimpses of an emerging prophetic critique of xenophobia. In the UK faith leaders held Prime Minister Theresa May to account for her abandonment of Syrian child refugees. In the US Imam Mohammed Magid challenged the Islamophobia of President Trump at his inter-faith inauguration service at Washington National Cathedral. In Canada hundreds of Jews formed a ring of peace around a mosque in Toronto in the aftermath of the White supremacist attack on a mosque in Quebec. In the US more than 400 churches publicly committed themselves ready to become places of sanctuary for undocumented migrants and over 100 evangelical Christian leaders took out a full page advertisement condemning Donald Trump's so-called 'Muslim ban'.<sup>63</sup>

This reclaiming of the prophetic tradition of speaking truth to power offers us some cause for hope. However such activism needs to be allied to a renewed commitment to liberative contextual theological reflection because it is only when we bring progressive social action into a critical dialogue with liberative reflection that it will be possible to win the 'cultural war of position'. One small example of such liberative contextual theological reflection is found in the recent emergence of the cross-cultural and inter-faith 'Faith and Peaceful Relations Forum' in Coventry, which has begun to fashion a dialogical learning

community of practitioners, politicians and academics committed to using the resources of faith to build inclusive social cohesion in the ‘city of peace and reconciliation.’<sup>64</sup> The battle to defeat the zombies that so worried Kant will be a long one but it can be won.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter I have drawn upon the British experience of resurgent racism in the postcolonial city in order to highlight the pervasive nature of contemporary Orientalism, the ‘clash of civilizations’ thesis and the scapegoating of people and communities presented as cultural outsiders. The hegemonic grip of this narrative is such that dominant discourses of diversity remain locked into backward-looking debates about identity in a city that is being re-invented before our eyes. This zombie discourse has enabled people with power to assert the so-called death of multiculturalism almost unchallenged.

The intensity of this exclusionary discourse is such that beginning of the Trump Presidency in the USA and the dawning of Brexit-Britain mark a moment of decision – this is a *Kairos* moment. Will communities of faith move beyond a welcome resurgence in activism to radically re-imagine life after Empire in the postcolonial city? Such a task demands a new theology of liberation that brings the demonizing of difference into a critical dialogue with a re-framed vision of Catholicity, a hermeneutics of the demonized, an openness to encountering God in the stranger, an ethic of liberative difference and a vision of Christ the Palestinian outsider. The challenge before us is an enormous one. However there are signs of a new consciousness tentatively emerging and bridges being built from the stones previously used to erect walls. The time has come to put Immanuel Kant out of his misery and defeat the walking dead once and for all. The future of life on the streets of our postcolonial cities depends on us winning the war.

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## Endnotes

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- <sup>2</sup> John Slater and George Ritzer, 'Interview with Ulrich Beck' in *Journal of Consumer Culture* 2001 1:2; 261–277.
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- <sup>4</sup> Steve Bruce. *God is Dead: Secularization in the West*. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 3.
- <sup>5</sup> Graham Ward and Michael Hoelzl *The New Visibility of Religion: Studies in Religion and Cultural Hermeneutics* (London: Continuum, 2008).
- <sup>6</sup> Paul Gilroy, *After Empire: Melancholia or Convivial Culture?* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2004), 109.
- <sup>7</sup> Paul Gilroy, *Against Race*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 84.
- <sup>8</sup> Web sites <http://www.npr.org/2017/01/31/512439121/trumps-executive-order-on-immigration-annotated>; <https://www.theatlantic.com/news/archive/2017/01/trump-immigration-order-muslims/514844/#exec%20order>; [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/volokh-conspiracy/wp/2017/01/26/constitutional-problems-with-trumps-executive-order-on-sanctuary-cities/?utm\\_term=.6475c26b6a69](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/volokh-conspiracy/wp/2017/01/26/constitutional-problems-with-trumps-executive-order-on-sanctuary-cities/?utm_term=.6475c26b6a69) and <http://www.npr.org/2017/01/31/512439121/trumps-executive-order-on-immigration-annotated> all accessed 2 February 2017.
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- <sup>10</sup> Anne Salmond. 'Self and Other in Contemporary Anthropology' in Richard Fardon (Ed.) *Counterworks: Managing the Diversity of Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 1995) 23-48.
- <sup>11</sup> Ziauddin Sardar. *Orientalism* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1999), vii and Edward Said. *Orientalism* (London: Penguin Books, 2003 edition), xxii
- <sup>12</sup> Carl Jung, *Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), 3ff
- <sup>13</sup> Chiara Bottici. 'Towards a Philosophy of Political Myth' in *IRIS – European Journal of Philosophy and Public Debate*, III April 2011, Firenze University Press, 41.
- <sup>14</sup> Huntington, op. cit., 22.
- <sup>15</sup> Ibid, 25.
- <sup>16</sup> Ibid, 35.
- <sup>17</sup> Gilroy, 2004, op. cit., 120.
- <sup>18</sup> Web site <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-cambridgeshire-36633388> accessed 2 February 2017.
- <sup>19</sup> Robert Beckford, *Dread and Pentecostal: A Political Theology for the Black Church in Britain*. (London: SPCK, 2000), 68-79.
- <sup>20</sup> Michael N. Jagessar and Anthony G. Reddie, ed. *Black Theology in Britain: A Reader*. (London: Equinox, 2007), 10.
- <sup>21</sup> Beckford, *Dread and Pentecostal*, 150-151.
- <sup>22</sup> Robert Beckford, *God and the Gangs*, (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2004), 21.
- <sup>23</sup> Andrew Davey, *Urban Christianity and Global Order* (London: SPCK, 2001), 4.
- <sup>24</sup> Leonie Sandercock, *Towards Cosmopolis*. (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 1998), 76.
- <sup>25</sup> Steven Vertovec, 'Super-diversity and its implications', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 30:6 (2007): 1024-1054.
- <sup>26</sup> Ted Cantle, *Community Cohesion: A Report of the Independent Review Team*. (London: Home Office, 2001).
- <sup>27</sup> Vertovec, op. cit. 1026.
- <sup>28</sup> Web site <http://www.manchester.ac.uk/discover/news/first-plural-towns-and-city-outside-london-revealed> accessed 2 February 2017.
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- <sup>30</sup> Robert Schreiter, *New Catholicity: Between the Global and the Local*. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 15.
- <sup>31</sup> Christopher Richard Baker, *The Hybrid Church in the City: Third Space Thinking*. (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 146.
- <sup>32</sup> Schreiter, op. cit. 59.
- <sup>33</sup> Gilroy, 2004, op. cit., 29 and Nasar Meer & Tariq Modood (2014) 'Cosmopolitanism and integrationism: is British multiculturalism a 'Zombie category'? *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power*, 21:6, 658-674, 660-661.
- <sup>34</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994).
- <sup>35</sup> Schreiter, op. cit. 95
- <sup>36</sup> Web sites <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-37640982>; [https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/feb/08/dubs-scheme-lone-child-refugees-uk-closed-down?CMP=share\\_btn\\_tw](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/feb/08/dubs-scheme-lone-child-refugees-uk-closed-down?CMP=share_btn_tw) and <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/donald-trump-refugee-ban-executive-order-muslim-majority-countries-syrians-un-united-nations-a7550576.html> all accessed 10 February 2017.
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- <sup>39</sup> Ibid, 360
- <sup>40</sup> Elsa Tamez, *Bible of the Oppressed* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1982), 73. See also Gustavo Gutiérrez, *The Power of the Poor in History* (London: SCM Press, 1983), 131–43.
- <sup>41</sup> Chris Shannahan. *Voices from the Borderland* (London: Equinox, 2010), 225 and 227.
- <sup>42</sup> Anthony G. Reddie, *Working Against the Grain: Re-imagining Black Theology in the 21st Century*. (London: Equinox, 2008), 148.
- <sup>43</sup> Ibid, 156.
- <sup>44</sup> Laurie Green, *Urban Ministry and the Kingdom of God*. (London: SPCK, 2003), 85.
- <sup>45</sup> Robert Beckford, *Jesus is Dread* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1998).

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- <sup>47</sup> Beckford, 2004, op. cit. *God and the Gangs*, 76.
- <sup>48</sup> Anne F. Showstack, *Antonio Gramsci: An Introduction to his Thought* (London: Pluto Press, 1970), 129–204.
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- <sup>51</sup> Robert Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1985). 1–21.
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- <sup>55</sup> Stephen Pattison, *Pastoral Care and Liberation Theology*. (London: SPCK, 1997), 34.
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