

The Escape of the Black Self

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Abstract

This article explores the question whether blacks can escape their blackness. This is motivated by assertions that blacks have tried to become white and as a result have ultimately adopted self-destructive behaviour against themselves. The Biblical text of Exodus 2:11–25 will be used as a key argument to propagate the view that blackness cannot be escaped and should not be regarded as something to escape. The article argues that blackness is natural and above all, beautiful and good. The current xenophobic attacks and bleaching of black skin will also be exposed and interrogated as fundamental problems and possible motivation for blacks wanting to escape the black Self.

Keywords: black; self; escape; self-hate; xenophobic

Introduction

Song of Songs 1:5: “I am black, but comely, O ye daughters of Jerusalem as the tents of Kedar, as the curtains of Solomon.”

Blackness has been created or shaped as a problem by white people, and as a result, some black people believe this and have started hating their blackness. The likes of Mshoza and Khanyi Mbau¹ have shown that they hate their blackness; which has resulted in their efforts in trying to escape the black self and succumbing to lies that white is more beautiful than black. Murapa (1969, 7) exposes that “these lies include, 1) that black man was (is) not civilised, 2) that black man was (is) a savage, 3) that black

1 South African celebrities, kwaito singers and actresses who spoke openly about their practice of skin bleaching, <https://www.channel24.co.za/The-Juice/News/celebrities-get-lighter-20170829>.



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man was (is) lazy.” All these lies, of course, directed their authors to the devastating conclusion that the black man is inferior. The recreation of blackness has been distorted into being ugly and bad, thereby stigmatising this beautiful colour—resulting in self-hate. Blacks thought that economic emancipation and social status would solve this problem, but Mooney (2007) exposes that “if you have money and have fame, but you do not have any confidence in your blackness, then it is all for nothing.” Blackness has always been the abhorrent thing to whites and disgruntled blacks. White ideology and the oppression of black people have caused them to declare themselves as ugly and a beast of some sort; it has left blacks feeling inferior. Thus originated a declaration of black identity as something that is not good and beautiful and it is for this reason that we see blacks in transit, trying to escape their blackness.

Many blacks are today suffering from identity syndrome; this is well argued by Amos Wilson, when he articulates the explanation of the historical importance of identity:

History is what creates a shared identity in a people. It is based on that shared identity that they act collectively. To take away a people’s history, to degrade their history is to degrade their sense of shared identity to remove the basis upon which they must behave collectively and reach their goal collectively. That’s why the history is rewritten. (Wilson 1993, 39)

This is seen from the actions of a few black celebrities, who have skin bleached themselves. The likes of Michael Jackson, Mshoza, and Khanyi Mbau—to mention but a few—have recreated themselves against what God made them to be. Blacks are intending to become white, while forgetting what is said in Genesis (1:31) that “God saw all he had made, and it was very good. And that there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day.” This included black creation, argues Boesak (1984, 16), “the affirmation of our blackness, the affirmation of our creation as black. Black is beautiful.” In contrast with this, some disgruntled blacks have disappointed God as they have tried, of course without success, to become like their master (who declared them ugly and inferior); who has dehumanised their blackness.

The intention of this article is to counter the disgruntled blacks who are on an impossible mission to want to escape the black self; to remind them that blackness is natural and above all beautiful and good. Therefore, blacks do not need to be told that we are beautiful but it comes naturally. When one tries to escape the self, it is self-destructive behaviour tantamount to suicide.

What is the Present to be Investigated?

Blacks have been dislocated and misplaced by colonialism and apartheid. As a result, the individual quest for personal fulfilment (self-actualisation) has become increasingly accepted by general society as a legitimate and important aspect of life (Baumeister 1987, 163). This article tries to answer the question of Franz Fanon: “What does the black man want?” (Fanon 1970, XI). This question hits the core of the problem we are

trying to investigate; because only by knowing what the black man wants, can we identify the problem. What blacks “want” is a better life, a life of dignity and respect; which some think is located in whiteness. The problem to be investigated has everything to do with the attempt by blacks to escape blackness; since they believe their colour predisposes them to be at the receiving end of negative prejudice.

Blackness has been identified with poverty, exploitation, exclusion, unemployment, backwardness and being uncivilised. It is within this context that blacks want to escape blackness in an effort to escape the hard realities that blacks have to face daily. Blacks want to escape themselves because “to be a poor man is hard, but to be a poor race in a land of dollars is the very bottom of hardships” (Du Bois 1903, 6). Blackness is thus seen as entrapment. It also aligns with the myth that blacks are incapable of liberating themselves; they are ugly, lazy, and so forth. In the books that children read, whites are always “good” (good symbols are white), blacks are evil or seen as savages in movies. The questions that arise then are similar to a question by Du Bois (1903, 3): “Why did God make me an outcast and a stranger in my own house?” Sometimes, and to others, in their attempt to discover the meaning of blackness, the suicide of the black self becomes an alternative. As a result, dating across race becomes an option of escape because blacks want their children to have light skin and good hair.

History of Oppression

The most obvious layer of oppression is that of a history of imperialism, colonialism, forced labour and apartheid. Colonialists created racism as a way of oppressing the colonised; the race construct was created on the myth of the inferior “Other”. The primitive black man was regarded as someone whom the white man could tame, pacify and put to work for his own good. The historical reality is that the black man is confronted by a history of oppression, exclusion, and harassment. Dolamo (2014, 215) argues that “the arrival of white people in South Africa has resulted in black people being subjected, inter alia, to historical injustice, cultural domination and religious vilification.” It is within this history that black reality is depicted as negative. This history has caused the black middle class and the rich to distance themselves from the poor (blacks) in a bid to dissociate themselves from black oppression and suffering or other negative stereotypes that are associated with impoverished blacks.

More so, blacks have become the scapegoat for many vices, while living in the shacks of our country. Blacks are depicted as murderers, wife beaters, rapists, hijackers, and so forth. This is our historical reality that expresses the connection between racism, classism and sexism. It is this history that blacks want to escape from. The escaping black by default becomes an unconscious black.

Blackness as Black Consciousness Discourse

It is not a secret that whites have sponsored or nurtured black self-hate and self-sabotage. It is within this context that blacks must consciously and sub-consciously

realise that what they were taught was not for their liberation, but was essentially in the best interest of whites. Therefore, blacks are faced with a programme to remove the shackles of mental enslavement. Biko (1978, 92) exposes the relationship between blackness and consciousness when he argues that:

... black consciousness is an attitude of mind and a way of life, the most positive call to emanate from the blacks' world for a long time. Its essence is the realisation by the black man of the need to rally with his brothers around the cause of their oppression, the blackness of their skin and to operate as a group to rid themselves of the black shackles that bind them to perpetual servitude. It is based on self-examination which has ultimately led them to believe that by trying to run away from themselves and emulate the white man, they are insulting the intelligence of whoever created them black.

It is a fact that blackness was consciously recreated as something inferior and ugly, something which is not to be regarded as part of God's creation. The "Black Consciousness" discourse gives a black person affirmation of his/her blackness as a creation of God. Thus, being black has nothing to do with resigning to whiteness or resigning from blackness—an attempt to be white.

The Attempt to Become White

In many instances, blacks have attempted to become white. In his article entitled "*Skin Bleaching, Self-Hate, and Black Identity in Jamaica*," Christopher A.D. Charles exposes the shame that some blacks have tried to become white. Charles (2003, 711) states that "some Jamaicans have been using skin-bleaching creams to become brown or less black." As a South African poet, Mzwakhe Mbuli once uttered: "*aga sis bayasinyanyisa bo*" (literally meaning: they are disgusting us). This happened even in our country (South Africa) as one of our own, Nomasonto Mnisi "AKA" "Mshoza" (a black female singer in South Africa), bleached herself attempting to become white. This has become the biggest problem in our lifetime, as "Yellow Bones" (black women with light skin) are glorified more than dark-skinned women. According to Brown-Glaude (2007, 37), skin bleaching is often perceived as one way in which individuals can alter their racial identities. Many are perpetually in transit; escaping their blackness and the self. Self-hate or low self-esteem is often posited as the explanation for the bleaching phenomenon (Charles 2003, 712).

However, if we take a closer look at this whole matter of the black escaping the black self, it is a traumatising experience for the enslaved African. The African was brainwashed through several systems and processes to hate the self by the elevation of Dutch and British values as being superior to African values. This has been one of the main reasons why blacks are attempting their utmost—without success—to become white. No matter how hard blacks try, they cannot seem to avoid getting harassed. They are being told, in so many words, that the problem is blackness. But the truth is, blacks have been trying to escape blackness for years. They have taken notes, worked hard and gained access to some of the best schools and jobs available. They have pulled up their

pants and tied their ties, become students and professors and everything else that whiteness claimed would make them respectable human beings; yet the lie remains.

Attempts to become white expose the hate of blackness by blacks; and hate of blackness leads to the self-hate. There is the hypothesis that skin bleaching is caused by low self-esteem, and thus it is a negative emotional disorder. Fennel argues this about emotional disorder:

When experience is negative, these conclusions are also negative. Some core beliefs are descriptions of how things appear in the eyes of the person, for instance “I am no good”; “people cannot be trusted”; and “life is a struggle.” These may be experienced as statements of fact, rather than opinions formed on the basis of experience. Other beliefs (dysfunctional assumptions) are more guidelines for living, standards of performance or rules and regulations that allow the person to operate in the world, given the perceived truth of the core beliefs (e.g. “I must always do everything to the highest possible standard, no matter what the cost”). All may be well until the person encounters an event or series of events (precipitating factors or critical incidents) in which he or she is unable to meet the requirements of the dysfunctional assumptions (e.g. the perfectionist fails at a crucial task). This leads to activation of the belief system, giving rise to negative, distorted automatic thoughts. These are thoughts which pop into the mind rather than being a product of reasoned reflection. They are negative in emotional tone and contain biases or exaggerations (e.g. over-generalisation from specific incidents or jumping to conclusions). Negative automatic thoughts directly influence mood, body state and behaviour. The perfectionist who has failed may feel anxious and depressed, experience physical signs of stress and begin working even harder. Unfortunately, changes in mood and body state and attempts to right the situation may feed back into continuing negative thoughts (maintaining factors). So the perfectionist’s low mood makes him or her more likely to think negatively, while attempts to work even harder result in increasing fatigue and strain which may confirm the sense of failure. (Fennel 1998, 296–297)

No one can deny that blacks have had these feelings and this has caused some of them to believe the negativity of blackness. The self-hate or rejection results in feeling unworthy and of low self-esteem. We must equally highlight that in Africa, low self-esteem was enforced and learned. Low self-esteem is learned, following inaccurate information that blacks are in some way not enough, that our feelings are wrong, or that we do not deserve respect. These are false beliefs that many people grow up with. They may not have been told these things directly, but have inferred it from the behaviour and attitudes of whites, family, friends and events. Often these beliefs get handed down from one generation to another. Changing them is not easy, and it is difficult to do on your own, because it is hard to see others, let alone yourself, through a lens that is different from than the one we grew up with.

One may not be conscious of these beliefs about oneself. The nineteenth-century neurologist, Jean-Martin Charcot, the father of hypnosis, wrote that if there were a conflict between the will and the unconscious, the unconscious would always prevail.

This explains what drives our behaviour and why we may often fail to carry out our best intentions or act upon what we know is right.

People have many fears and anxieties based upon false ideas about themselves and others. For example, many think that making a mistake is unacceptable and shameful. They become anxious about taking risks, trying something new, or expressing their opinion, because they are afraid of failure or looking foolish. Most do not realise that they unconsciously believe that they are unlovable, unlikable, flawed or somehow inadequate. Even if they are aware of these false beliefs, they are convinced of their truth. As a result, they are anxious about revealing who they are, and they try to please or impress whites so that they will be loved and not rejected.

On the other side of the coin, self-esteem is needed by blacks. Self-esteem is a personal experience and the overall feeling of being positive and negative towards the self. A person who has low self-esteem does not think that he/she is a person of worth. This is what is happening to our black-skinned people, who attempt to become what they are not; to be white. To build self-esteem and overcome low self-esteem is to change how we feel emotionally about ourselves. To change our emotion requires changing two different core beliefs about the self-image. The first core belief is obvious; it is the belief that we are not good enough. It may have a more specific association to how we look, how smart we are, or a lack of sexual confidence. The second core belief to change is the image of success that we feel we should have. Changing this belief is contrary to logic, but it is a must if we are to overcome insecurity and raise our self-esteem. Mays and Nicholson's (1933 [1971], 289) argue this about religion and self-esteem:

The opportunity found in the Negro church to be recognised, and to be "somebody," has stimulated the pride and preserved the self-respect of many Negroes who would have been entirely beaten by life, and possibly completely submerged. Everyone wants to receive recognition and feel that he [sic] is appreciated. The Negro Church has supplied this need. A truck driver of average or more than ordinary qualities becomes the chairman of the deacon board. A hotel man of some ability is the superintendent of the Sunday church school of a rather important church. A woman who would be hardly noticed, socially or otherwise, becomes a leading woman in the missionary society.

Therefore, religion plays a critical role in building consciousness and self-esteem and to minimise the element of self-hate.

Hate of Blackness

Self-hate, as indicated above, leads to low self-esteem to such an extent that we even have the braveness of identifying ourselves as white. This point is argued by the Relative Deprivation Theory (Porter and Washington 1979, 57), which is a theory attesting that "rapid socioeconomic change has led to rising expectations and a shift in reference groups. Blacks have begun to compare themselves with whites; as a result, they feel relatively deprived of prestige, power, and material goods." Hating blackness means

that black people can no longer identify with themselves and their history. This is argued emphatically by Poussaint (1966, 419), who states that “when slavery was abolished, the negro had been stripped of his culture and left with his heritage, an oppressed black man in hostile white men’s world.” However, it must be clear that even if blacks can hate their blackness; it will never leave nor depart their bodies. Even if blacks try to bleach their blackness, what remains is still that the dark skin will be black. Not only have blacks been taught that blackness is evil and that black is no good, they have in addition been brainwashed that only whiteness is good, right and beautiful. Malcolm 1962, in his speech “*Who Taught you to Hate Yourself?*” delivered in Los Angeles on 5 May 1962, challenges blacks by asking them:

Who taught you to hate the color of your skin? Who taught you to hate the texture of your hair? Who taught you to hate the color of your skin, to such extent that you bleach to get like the white man? Who taught you to hate the shape of your nose and the shape of your lip? Who taught you to hate yourself, from the top of your head to the soles of your feet? Who taught you to hate your own kind? Who taught you to hate the race that you belong to—so much so that you don’t want to be around each other? (Malcolm X 1962, 1)

Malcolm 1962 helped to attack and challenge the negative stereotyping of blackness, equipping them with the tools to build their perception on affirming their blackness. However, even after such initiative, some blacks continue to hate their black skin as they bleach themselves and try to change their kinky hair by styling it to look like “white” hair. Indeed, one can ask the question: Who taught you (blacks) to hate yourself, to hate the colour of your skin, your hair and the nose you have? Even worse, as attested by Poussaint (1966, 420), “there are still cliques of light-skinned Negroes in our communities who reject their darker brothers.” Evidence of this are the several recent attacks on foreign nationals of African descent and of a darker skin, being attacked by some black South Africans. The attacks were labelled as xenophobic, however, the authors contend that they were rather Afro-phobic because these attacks represent the hatred and fear of African foreigners, but not white settlers. Instead, all whites are seen as legal citizens and those from outside are welcomed as tourists. In the fundamental sense, with the term “Afro-phobia”, we mean negativity by an African against his/her fellow African.

Maluleke’s (2010, 372) observation is important in this regard when he exposes that “even in more recent times, Africa has been viewed negatively. Afro-phobia is a term that has been used to describe sceptical to negative attitudes towards Africa. Unlike the earlier and uncouth notions associated with that of a “dark continent,” Afro-phobia tends to employ a more diplomatic language. Afro-phobia must also be understood as a hate of the black-self and as an attempt to escape the self. This is a disappointment, as black people are supposed to pronounce, like King in one of his pioneering books, entitled “*Fire in my Bones*,” that “I am black and I reject all racist myths to explain my blackness” (King 1983, IX). Denying and losing identity is one of the most deadly and dangerous things that could happen to blacks. Hating our blackness is the result of losing

this beautiful identity called blackness, something that is natural and was created by God; given to us as good and beautiful. Paradoxically, some blacks tend to distrust and hate each other more than their oppressor. Fanon (1991, 3) in one of his books, "*Black Skin White Mask*," shows that the black man has always wanted to escape his/her colour of being black. Black people happen to hate themselves because their skin colour is associated with evil, negativity and inferiority; this is what pushed the black people to hate the black self.

A practical example which illustrates familiarity with the above reference is Michael Jackson, as originating from an extreme hating of his blackness. However, one can at the same time ask the question: If someone engages in skin bleaching, can he/she truly identify him/herself as black? The answer is "yes". The very same person, before he/she becomes light or bleaches him/herself, was black and their children will never be white. One can never escape the self.

The Self as not Escapable

According to Brown-Glaude (2007, 35), it is a common understanding among scholars that race is not a biological fact but the product of a social and historical process. However, this article argues that race is also a biological reality and that the Bible seems to be agreeing with this viewpoint. The story of Moses is the key to unpacking our argument. When reading the narrative from Exodus 2:11–13 we are informed that:

¹¹ Moses grew up. One day, he went out to where his own people were. He watched them while they were hard at work. He saw an Egyptian hitting a Hebrew man. The man was one of Moses' own people. ¹² Moses looked around and didn't see anyone. So he killed the Egyptian. Then he hid his body in the sand. ¹³ The next day Moses went out again. He saw two Hebrew men fighting. He asked the one who had started the fight a question. He said, "Why are you hitting another Hebrew man?"

The reaction of Moses seems to have been spontaneous and conscious. The question is, why? Was it because he was conscious that he was a Hebrew or was it because even if he did not know, he sub-consciously knew he was a Hebrew? It appears that, irrespective of the answer, he had what is called "knowledge in the blood," as argued by Jonathan Jansen. Jansen (2009) extends the term "knowledge in the blood" to refer to the habitual knowledge embedded in students' minds and hearts through intergenerational transmission. In our attempt to prove that one cannot escape the self—as black theology would have said—we turned to the Bible to find stories of communities, personalities and events that we can relate with and liberate ourselves with. The story of Moses, the Hebrew, as depicted in Exodus 2:11–19, will be used to expose that one cannot escape the self. Let us read and reread carefully the text (of which the first part has already been quoted above):

¹¹ Moses grew up. One day, he went out to where his own people were. He watched them while they were hard at work. He saw an Egyptian hitting a Hebrew man. The man

was one of Moses' own people. ¹² Moses looked around and didn't see anyone. So he killed the Egyptian. Then he hid his body in the sand. ¹³ The next day Moses went out again. He saw two Hebrew men fighting. He asked the one who had started the fight a question. He said, "Why are you hitting another Hebrew man?"

¹⁴ The man said, "Who made you ruler and judge over us? Are you thinking of killing me as you killed the Egyptian?" Then Moses was afraid and thought, "What I did must have become known."

¹⁵ When Pharaoh heard of this, he tried to kill Moses, but Moses fled from Pharaoh and went to live in Midian, where he sat down by a well. ¹⁶ Now a priest of Midian had seven daughters, and they came to draw water and fill the troughs to water their father's flock. ¹⁷ Some shepherds came along and drove them away, but Moses got up and came to their rescue and watered their flock.

¹⁸ When the girls returned to Reuel, their father, he asked them, "Why have you returned so early today?"

¹⁹ They answered, "An Egyptian rescued us from the shepherds. He even drew water for us and watered the flock."

The story is told in a way that it seems Moses knew he was a Hebrew. It is the argument of the article that it depicts Moses as an Egyptian, yet the author of Exodus in verse 11 exposes Moses as having knowledge that he was a Hebrew. The author makes a distinction between a Hebrew and an Egyptian to a point that Moses killed an Egyptian and even asked why Hebrews were fighting against one another. Based on this, there is a clear assumption that Moses knew about his Hebrew-ness. Even though he grew up in the Palace of Pharaoh and enjoyed all the benefits as an Egyptian, he remained a Hebrew at heart. But the question is, how did he know that he was a Hebrew? There are several possibilities; we have opted to expose the physical difference between a Hebrew and an Egyptian—after all, physique never lies.

The Appearance of an Egyptian?

This sub-section will argue that there was a difference of appearance between Egyptians and Hebrews that should have informed Moses that he looked like the Hebrews. It is not a secret that Egyptians have black skin colour and Diop (1989, 15) attests that "Egyptians had only one term to designate themselves: KMT, which literally means 'the Blacks'. This is the strongest term existing in the Pharaonic tongue to indicate blackness." He further added that: "The term is a collective noun which thus described the whole people of Pharaonic Egypt as a Black people." For further evidence, Diop (1989) focused on both the monuments and how the ancient Egyptians represented themselves in their art. It is a historical fact that Anglo-Saxon-Celtic Semitic ancestors were fair skinned. De Luca and Tiradritti (1999) in *The Treasures of the Egyptian Museum (al-Mathaf al-Miṣrī al-Qāhira - Tiradritti)*, asks: "What colour were the ancient Egyptians?" Being on the continent, Egypt has always been an African

civilisation though it straddles two regions, Africa and the Middle East. It is fairly clear that the cultural roots of ancient Egypt lie in Africa and not in Asia. The Egyptians are better classified using evidence of their physical appearance, language, material cultures and historical records.

Skulls have been measured and compared, and DNA tests and results have exposed that they are more similar to those found in Northern Sudan and less similar to those found in Palestine and Turkey. Diop (1989) concludes that most of the skeletons and skulls of the ancient Egyptians clearly indicate that they were Negroid people with features very similar to those of modern black Nubians and other people of the upper Nile and East Africa. This article argues and acknowledges that it seems there is some genetic continuity from pre-dynastic time through the Middle Kingdom, after which there was considerable infiltration into the Nile valley from outside populations.

What did the Hebrew look like?

Fishberg (1902, 89) argues that to identify or to classify a person, the colour of the skin, hair and eyes is a very important racial trait. Whether pigmentation is a fixed trait—that is, a racial characteristic transmitted by heredity—or is influenced to any extent by climate, altitude, nutrition, and social condition, is a question on which anthropologists do not agree. Fishberg (1902) continues that “in our study of the anthropology of the Jews this is of importance. It should be clarified that the colour of hair and the eyes can be altered due to the varying external conditions, irrespective of heredity; we may have a ready explanation of the high percentage of blond hair and blue eyes among the Jews.” Thus our conclusion is that Moses was aware that he was a Hebrew, but then Fishberg (1902) mentions that ancient Hebrews were characterised as having dark hair. Fishberg (1902) argues that Jacobs quotes a Mishnic Rabbi, R. Ishmael, who says: “The sons of Israel are like boxwood, neither black nor white but between the two”—i. e., of an olive colour.” The Talmud appears to use the term black (*shachar*) as synonymous with both hair and youth (Fishberg 1902, 89). The Hebrews were the Semites, the dominant ethnic group in Mesopotamia and much of Syro-Palestine. According to Mathews (1988, 3), physically the Semites in the ancient Near East had black hair and were short in stature. The difference with them was their hair and eyes, as it can be shown that the colour of hair and eyes may be altered under varying external conditions, irrespective of heredity. The racial element was exposed when there was a denial by Moses’ siblings to marry a black-skinned woman. The book of Numbers 12:1: “Moses’ sister and brother, Miriam and Aaron spoke out against him because he married an Ethiopian woman. Their behaviour angered Yah.”

Blackness as a Biological Fact

Frantz Fanon (1991, 109) demonstrated the prominence of bodies in racialisation processes and experiences. In *Black Skin, White Masks* he coined the term “epidermalisation” to describe how a colonialist construction of blackness was inscribed onto his body “like a dye” and “fixed” him as the Other in relation to whites. By

mapping blackness and bodies, race becomes factual since bodies are often viewed as reliable indicators of one's realised being. The body is often an initial signifier of one's racial belonging (Brown-Glaude 2007, 35). To show that blackness is in the blood, Fanon (1991) proved that the "dye" that was inscribed within him, to show to that blackness, remains in the blood. Even if we bleach our skin, as Charles (2003) alludes in his paper that some non-white people use skin-bleaching creams and home products to lighten their skin, it won't change the fact that blackness remains in the blood.

In an article in the Jamaica Observer, entitled "*Blacks Gone White: Bleaching Exposed under the Sun*", teen writer Zakiya McKenzie (2005) argues that people's bodies and physical structures are suited for the climate from where they originate. African bodies are built differently. Our skin is dark; this is our natural protection from the blazing sun that we would encounter in Africa. Our hair is naturally "natty"; this is to keep it from our bodies, which would only generate unnecessary heat. This concludes that blackness is in the blood, because even if we can escape our blackness or bleach it, we will still remain black—it is in the blood.

According to Brown-Glaude (2007, 48), by mapping blackness onto the bodies that we are born with, the body serves as a way of reifying and essentialising it. Blackness is understood in the discourse as natural pigmentation that one is either born with, or given it by God. Associating blackness with melanin that protects the skin from the sun helps reify it in the public imagination. Imagining blackness in this way makes it appear fixed and immutable. When the body is transformed or modified, however, this concept of blackness is destabilised, and efforts are made to re-centre it. Public responses to skin bleaching reveal that modern articulations of blackness or modern blackness in Jamaica do not allow for difference *among* blacks.

Conclusion

Peter Tosh famously said: "If you're a black man, you're an African." Blacks have tried to escape their blackness on many occasions; some have already escaped their blackness and are swallowed in the white man's world. We know throughout history blacks have been in the world of the white man and have been taught to hate her/himself, and that her/his body or skin is nothing but a problem. By this Charles (2003) means that a person's identity is unconsciously influenced by the mental activities of significant others. Moreover, identity is from the survival of the self (Charles 2003, 713). In summary, the ideology of escaping blackness leads to losing the identity of the black-self, and according to McPherson and Shelby (2004, 174), quoting Appiah, "our social identities can themselves be a major obstacle to our pursuit of an ethically successful life." When one has lost one's own identity, it means that it is now an obstacle of being what we are supposed to be, instead of what we are told to be.

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