

# Naming the contemporary and historic legacies of slavery

We are seeing a global, national and local resurgence of racism and xenophobia. This is the fruit of Empire then and now.

## Contemporary manifestations

**Economic injustice** remains the deepest, longest lasting legacy of slavery. It is clear that the former colonial powers enjoy economic privilege because of their colonial past and because the current economic system still perpetuates their advantage. This means that Black led nations particularly operate under the impoverishment of the colonial and post-colonial era.

Thus, economic injustice affects African people but also African descendent people within other nations. The UN has made 2015-2024 The International Decade for People of African Descent. This is part of the summary for why:

*Whether as descendants of the victims of the transatlantic slave trade or as more recent migrants, they constitute some of the poorest and most marginalized groups. Studies and findings by international and national bodies demonstrate that people of African descent still have limited access to quality education, health services, housing and social security.*

<https://www.un.org/en/events/africandescentdecade/background.shtml>

CWM's NIFEA work is also beginning to advocate reparation as a crucial piece for creating a just economic system

**Persisting Racism and Afrophobia.** Enslavement was rooted in the denial of the humanity of African and African descendent people, and a limited admission of humanity to the other 'races'. But race is itself a complete fabrication, a construction of White empire, which would permit the enslavement of an entire portion of the human family and further privileging the power and interests of the White colonial powers.

Racism is a deep flaw in human society, and it is on the rise in many of our contexts. Many politicians are building power by stoking xenophobia. Nevertheless, **Afrophobia** is a global phenomenon. Black people meet discrimination beyond the White dominant contexts of Europe and North America, it is a clear social force in Asia, the Pacific and beyond.

This racism was enforced and taught by white colonial and missionary masters. Many of our contexts still operate their race politics on the basis of the colonial constructions of race, which in Singapore, for example, would be: Chinese, Malay, Indian Other.

**Colourism** is also a feature of this. Skin bleaching is a global phenomenon, as if there is something desirable about fairness of skin. This is impacting women and men, children and young people especially.

**White Privilege.** The corollary of racism in all its forms is the privileging of certain dominant groups and norms, especially White groups. This is the cultural and

political side of the persisting economic privilege White-led nations enjoy. This is a complex force, which white people often do not recognize. It is something white people unconsciously enjoy even as they reject racism. It is also something White communities seem to be defending as we see in decisions like Brexit.

**Colonising mission and faith.** Some have argued that the White supremacy of Empire became the basis for claiming in mission that the White religion, Christianity, is also supreme. This has now become hard wired into global Christianity, so that one cannot read Matt 28 without imagining the Church entering, occupying, colonising and saving all lands and peoples, with its exclusive version of faith and identity.

**Criminalisation of 'blackness' and disaffection amongst children and youth.** The racist nature of our global economies and our national economies, spreads into others systems, especially education and the legal system, and has a particular impact on youth and children. This is most pronounced in White dominant cultures. According to 2019 figures, more than 50% of those in young offender institutions in England and Wales are from minority ethnic communities. 29% of young black males are unemployed in London. Is this because black people are criminal and lazy, as the racist tropes teach? Or is it because UK systems and society are racist and deliver unequally for its population?

**Deficits** in the achievement, prosperity and presence of African and African descendent people are rooted not just in the systems and attitudes which created enslavement, but in the mind-sets which decided that owners of the enslaved, rather than the enslaved should be compensated.

**Climate change** is the defining moment for our generation, it affects all people of the globe. But, it has distinct race dimensions. We can see that the impact of climate change falls heaviest on 'non-white' nations globally, and often black communities within nations. White economies have created and driven climate change through the Capitalism of the post enslavement era, and Capitalism has its roots in the colonial enslavement era. Racism also contributes to the valuing or not of those who work against climate change, meaning the media ignores 'non-white' climate activists and making the environmental movements seem almost exclusively White.

**Complicit churches** The Legacies work shows that churches were largely silent in the face of the injustice of enslavement. In the contemporary era, churches have continued to leave the racist operation of economy, power and politics largely unquestioned, and in the post immigration eras of Europe and North America churches have become segregated by race. All our churches are agreed racism is wrong, and don't want to be racist, but we have not done enough to be actively anti-racist. This is itself a legacy of slavery.

## **The historic roots as we see them in the work and life of CWM and its predecessor the London Missionary Society**

Racism is a colonial legacy, but also a legacy of White Western mission which developed theologies to 'baptize' the racist anthropology constructed by European

nations. This was aimed as much at the White home populations as it was at the indigenous people White Christianity and its White Jesus was 'saving' but in fact demonizing and occupying.

The roots of CWM lie in the establishment of the London Missionary Society in 1795, twelve years before the abolition of the Slave Trade in the British Empire in 1807 and thirty eight years before emancipation in 1833. We have found in the archives of the LMS that there is both evidence of individual and systemic complicity in the economy and theology of racism, colonization and White supremacy.

### **Direct personal and official legacies**

LMS had two treasurers who appear in the Legacies of Slavery database. William Hankey and Sir Culling Eardley Smith who, between them, received 'compensation' for the emancipation of enslaved people. They receive close to GBP2 million by 2019 standards. LMS was amongst their credentials as fine upstanding members of society. Eardly Smith even presented anti-slavery petitions as part of his image as a religious reformer. Hankey, officially resigned after defending slavery at his appearance before the Parliamentary sub-committee, but in fact he remained a Director until his death some 25 years after and his personal bank remained the LMS bank beyond his death. This means that the organization allowed its officers to profit from enslavement, as well as in fact benefit directly from its profits, when, for example, the Colonial Missionary Society received direct assets from the Hankey family from the sale of the Arcadia plantation.

### **Systemic indebtedness**

LMS was rooted in the chapel life of the emerging middle class and the new capitalist enterprise of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. This enterprise was deeply indebted in the slave trade, either directly in terms of particular products like coffee, sugar, tobacco and cotton, but also in terms of the capital they drew upon to sponsor their business or how their goods sustained elements of the slave trade. The emerging metal industries of the English Midlands made chains and shackles, Welsh wool was spun to make clothes for enslaved people to wear. A UK Theological College still has records of the names of the enslaved people in their 'possession'. It is clear that Selena, Countess of Huntingdon, whose chapels also supported the work of LMS, received some of her wealth through slave ownership. The assets Sir Culling Eardly Smith came through mortgages he offered on the strength of his plantation ownership.

### **'Christianity, commerce and civilisation'**

David Livingstone's famous prescription for ending enslavement in East Africa, ironically points to how deeply LMS was placed in the White British colonial project and its enslaving practices. We can see in the LMS transport policy, the parading of black people as spectacles on deputation visits, the resources LMS produced for children and adults that we were convincing Black and White people of the superior calling and nature of White people and the inferior and sub-human nature of Black people. Most damning of all, when the LMS were offered an opportunity to speak out against enslavement and speak up for the people their mission had successfully converted in Guyana, this was what we said:

*Not a word must escape you in public or in private, which might render the slaves displeased with their masters or dissatisfied with their station. You are not sent to relieve them from their servile condition, but to afford them the consolation of religion ...*

Instructions to Missionary Smith, 1816

**As we come to issues like the Legacies of Slavery, people can say 'it's not our fault, we weren't alive then', but, we are alive now, so it is our responsibility to tackle this sinful injustice today**