Black Clergy in the Church of England

“Racism is a gaping wound in the body of Christ. The Rev Mapfumo’s thought provoking work lays bare it’s impact on Black Clergy in the Church of England. Troubling reading it nevertheless deserves to be widely read as a call to action beyond the pious platitudes that too often characterise responses to the lived reality of black people in all walks of life.”

—The Rt Hon the Lord Boateng, CVO DL Chair Archbishops Commission on Racial Justice

“The work is an important and timely study of the Black Clergy in the Anglican tradition, giving insights into their training needs and experiences. Mapfumo carefully documents and paints an accurate and sobering account of clergy who respond to the vocation of ministry, many of whom overcome the odds. A must read especially for those involved in training clergy and lessons that we can all learn from when confronted with challenging circumstances.”

—Revd Dr Carol Tomlin, Visiting Fellow University of Leeds & Senior Research Fellow William Temple Foundation

“The pages of this book are alive with Ericcson’s commitment and passion for racial justice. His analysis seeks to live out that commitment and chart a way forward for the Church and its clergy.”

—Rt. Revd Arun Arora, Bishop of Kirkstall

“This book is a remarkable text that profoundly examines and reflects on the issues of race and racism in the CofE. For academics, this book is an inspiring product of our times as it holds on its shoulders the important task of defining realities of non-Western members in the CofE more autonomously than ever before.”

—Munyaradzi Mawere (PhD) *Professor Extraordinarius of Interdisciplinary Research, School of Interdisciplinary Research & Graduate Studies, University of South Africa, South Africa & *Professor of African Studies at Great Zimbabwe University, Zimbabwe.
Ericcson T. Mapfumo
Black Clergy in the Church of England
Towards a Sense of Belonging
Ericsson T. Mapfumo  
Leeds Beckett University  
Leeds, UK
How do we resist and in fact challenge the colonial appellation of the indigenous Africans in formerly colonised territories in conversations about race and religion? As Dei (2022, p. XV) rightly notes “decolonial and anti-colonial praxis require that we not only challenge the imposition of colonial systems of knowing, but also, uphold indigenous epistemologies as relational and that indigeneity is an international category”. I add here that resisting colonial appellation requires challenging the colonial systems of power. This in itself calls for the formerly colonised to prove their claims on race, culture, religion and most importantly, indigeneity. Indigenous, as I have argued elsewhere, is always marked by land, originality, past, present, future, and absence of colonial imposition.

I deliberately chose to start this foreword with this critical questioning and analysis. This study is not anything to prove that Africans are an equal race to Europeans, both rationally and in capability. We have gone past this stage a long time ago. The point is that the impact of colonialism on African culture, epistemologies, metaphysics and religion has been far-reaching to the extent of brainwashing both some formerly colonised and colonisers. This means that the task before hand for critical African scholars is to continue resisting and challenging the colonial systems of power through generative intellectual conversations that open and accord rightful intellectual space for the formerly colonised.
This is the space this book is yearning to open. The book, whose focus is on race and religion, brings to the fore an expansive gaze on discourses of decoloniality, indigenous philosophies and indigenous epistemic systems. It deploys Critical Race Theory (CRT) as its theoretical framework while employing the techniques of storytelling and counter-storytelling to explore the lived experience of “Black” clergy in the Church of England (CofE) before it remarkably builds a strong case on an under-researched area of race in the CofE. Hitherto, there has been dearth of literature on race and racial practices in the Church of England. Consequently, it has been both frustrating and discouraging for fellow practitioners and all with an interest on race and racism as they have struggled to get hold of foundational texts that tackle head-on such issues. Prior to this publication, students and academics on race relied on works published by Western scholars, most of which were biased and punctuated with Eurocentric tang and tone inclined towards the perpetuation of Western hegemony and dominance. It is sad that African scholars themselves have done little in researching, writing and publishing issues that concern their own being and circumstances, yet as Daniel Gilman, the first president of John Hopkins University pointed out, “books are humanity in print”. Gilman thus aptly notes:

Without books, history is silent, literature dumb, science crippled and speculation at a standstill. Without books, the development of civilisation would have been impossible. They are engineers of change, windows of the world, and lighthouses erected in the sea of time. They are companions, magicians, bankers of treasuries of the mind. Books are humanity in print. (cited in Okai 2000, p. 153)

As such, this book, which adopts the CofE as its case study, is a colossal stride towards the restoration and advancement of knowledge and dignity of the formerly colonised in former colonisers’ territories as it lays bare racial concerns at the heart of African members in the church.

With its audacious but intellectually penetrating tone, the book rightly points that the CofE warrants its own sociological study in order to clearly understand how institutional habitus has had an impact on the lived experiences of non-Western (and in fact, African) clergy in England.
Foreword

The novelty of this book lies in its boldness and meticulousness in articulating and exposing the inconsistencies, complexities and lacunas in the CofE. This is more than convincing as the narratives (in the book) on how “Black” clergy survive the onslaughts of racism in the CofE and how their lived experiences attest to the realities of institutional racism which pervades the deficit narratives used to portray them as clergy, are paraded by those individuals who have experienced it all themselves. Be that as it may, I have no doubt that the conscientious penetrating analyses of race and racism in the CofE articulated in this book, will go a long way in challenging the systems of power, open fresh opportunities for generative dialogue, and in promoting a mutually co-existing and racially just society.

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References


This book would not have been a reality without contributions from friends, colleagues and fellow academics of note. As such, I would like to thank all the ‘Black’ clergy who have taken part in this study, and those who have shared their journey with me. I have felt empowered by the various conversations that I have been part of. This has made me realise that when I am seen as an academic, it will be because I have been standing on the shoulders of giants. A fellow African theologian, Anthony Reddie, has been a source of inspiration, as well as Professor Extraordinarius Munyaradzi Mawere, who from a distance has always encouraged me to exploit my potentials and pursue my goals to the full. He has been both a source of inspiration and a mentor par excellence.

I also want to thank the ‘Black’ community in England, who have made me feel that being Black is something to have pride in, and that it is a gift which can be celebrated and offered to the church. This community made me feel at home away from home.

The death of James Hal Cone, in 2018, was a sad moment in my academic career, as I was hoping to meet him face to face and pay my respects. This is because it was his theologising that influenced the direction that my ministry has taken. It was by reading Cone’s book *God of the Oppressed* that initiated an internal conversation within me whilst at theological college. From then on, I decided that I was going to join the struggle and be counted worthy of the suffering of my ancestors, Nehanda Nyasikana,
Acknowledgements

Chaminuka and all the ancestors who fought in the war of liberation in Southern Rhodesia. Their suffering to make sure we are no longer slaves is to be commended.

My supervision team when I was still a PhD student, Dr Alison Wilde and Professor Kevin Hylton who at different times acted as my director of studies, as well as Professor Vini Lander who provided constructive criticism, have supported me by making me believe in myself and have nurtured me as a budding scholar. It was their constructive criticism of my writing and thought processes, especially at the start of my doctoral candidature, which made me improve as a writer and an academic. I also would like to thank Prof Jacqueline Stephenson and Dr. Shona Hunter, who encouraged me to write a book out of my research material. To all members of staff at the Carnegie School of Education who in various ways helped to increase my confidence. Thanks also to all the members of the Critical Race Theory group at the university for offering different perspectives during our discussions on race and its impact in society, specifically in higher education in Britain.

I also thank my countryman, the honourable, his excellence the late Cde. Gabriel Robert Mugabe, life president, my hero, who though perceived as a controversial figure nationally and internationally, not only instilled in me a sense of African pride, but also showed me that intellectual prowess was possible to “despised bodies”. Life experience has taught me that you must love your own before you can love ‘the other’, hence loving a man who fought for justice and is a towering figure in Pan-Africanism can only reflect the love I have for myself, but more importantly for my people. It is out of this love for a people who were taught to hate themselves that I write this thesis.

Although the funding gods did not hear my prayer, I am thankful that the Lord Jesus, the God of Israel, had mercy on me and provided the finances for this study, and hence, as in the African village, it would not be proper for me to fail to acknowledge this.

To my two daughters, Sophia and Samantha, thank you for being patient with your dad, who at times had to go to the library to submit a chapter when you wanted to play and have him around.

To my wife who provided a happy home for me to concentrate on my doctoral studies and at the same time continue my work in the parish. As
someone said: “I thank God for creating me Black”. I am Black and proud!! I am convinced that God affirms Blackness and is not at all colour blind, as Reddie would say.

To my mum and siblings and above all my grandmother who believed in me from a young age. In addition, Uncle Milton and family and the Kamwendo Clan, not forgetting Mainini Mavis and late husband Killian Mupingo.

Thank God I am now on the other side, and now my philosophy will be to ‘lift as I climb’, which is reminiscent of a liberation approach in ministry and in life more generally.

God is Great! Amen!
This study on race and religion deploys Critical Race Theory (CRT) as a theoretical framework and employs the techniques of storytelling and counter-storytelling to explore the lived experience of ‘Black’ clergy in the Church of England (CofE). As such, it theorises an under-researched area in the CofE, using a sociological perspective to centralise race as a unit of analysis in the field of religion and theology in particular. The CofE, as a context, warrants its own sociological study in order to understand how institutional habitus has had an impact on the lived experience of Black clergy in England. In spite of policies that seek to address issues of equity and equality for all clergy in the church, Black clergy are featured as a numerically marginal group in the CofE, which also means their metaphysical and cultural ways of knowing and understanding are limitedly appreciated. As an ‘insider researcher’ and activist scholar of African roots, I trace the pedigrees of inequality and the racialisation of Black clergy in the CofE with a view to lobby for a transformative harmonisation and generative dialogue between and amongst clergies across races.

The nuanced and penetrating analysis proffered in this book unravels how coloniality, the conceptualisation of ‘Whiteness’ and white superiority complex have systematically influenced the CofE through its White majority clergy and its racial processes and structures to position ‘Black’ clergy at the bottom of the hierarchical structure of the church. As such,
the narratives of the Black clergy qualitatively paraded herein underscore the contradictions in the CofE and the way in which the spiritual element of the Anglican tradition is central and in fact helpful to the Black clergy as a coping mechanism for injuries inflicted by micro-aggressions.

The novelty of this book lies in its dexterity and audacity exposing of the contradictions, complexities and lacunas in the CofE by narrating how Black clergy survive the onslaughts of racism in the Church and how their lived experiences attest to the realities of institutional racism which pervades the deficit narratives used to portray them as clergy. The study demonstrates how Black clergy painstakingly reflect on their position and identity as racialised individuals within the Church, where they are often considered as the ‘Other’. The study provides an epistemological shift in the theological study of race while affording an opportunity for the CofE to reflect and transformatively move forward its agenda on racial justice and inclusion in a manner that promotes mutual co-existence and generative dialogue.
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<td>CT</td>
<td>Critical Theory</td>
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<td>CofE</td>
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<td>AIC</td>
<td>African Independent Churches</td>
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<td>Committee for Minority Ethnic Anglican Concerns</td>
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<td>BAME</td>
<td>Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people (this includes Chinese and other non-White people in the CofE)</td>
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<td>BMC</td>
<td>Black Majority Church</td>
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1 As the terms below might feature frequently in this chapter, defining them might be fruitful, at this stage.
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Introduction: ‘Black’ Clergy Voices and the Church of England

The ‘lived experience’ of Black clergy in the CofE has been woefully understudied (Isiorho, 2003). The results intended or not? Black ‘voices’ have been ignored, silenced and invalidated (Hiraldo, 2010; Gambrell, 2016; Blackett, 2017; Dixson, 2018). What a loss this is for the CofE. The present work brings Black voices front and center, to understand their unique experiences and thus to understand more fully and completely the CofE.

In the summer of 2020, I was one of the members of the Black clergy who attended a Zoom meeting in which the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, responded to questions presented to him by members of the Black clergy, including those holding senior positions. This meeting coincided with the height of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) campaign and the death of George Floyd. This meeting was insightful, as Archbishop Welby challenged Black clergy to organise themselves and be united in their efforts. While this was helpful to members of the Black clergy, it also highlighted the privilege of Whiteness, in that members of the White clergy do not have to worry about having a strategy in order to be heard or to feel that they belong in the CofE. This shows disparity and inequality in terms of the clergy, in that Black clergy have to worry about being
accepted in the CofE in addition to performing the same role as their White counterparts.

Various themes emerged during this meeting, such as the role of members of the Black clergy in leadership positions to mentor other Black clergy members so as to allow them to navigate the system and processes of the CofE. What became apparent to me was how little impact Archbishop Welby had in terms of enacting major changes in the processes and structures of the CofE, since such changes require him to consult with others in positions of authority, who tend to be White clergy. Although Bishops have more control of their area (diocese), which enables them to appoint people without the influence of Archbishop Welby, it is important to highlight that the decentralisation of authority in the CofE adds to the challenge of uncovering institutional and structural racism. This is because the people discriminating against the Black clergy are congregational members, staff employed by the CofE and, more generally, the White community in which Black clergy tend to represent the CofE.

To foreground this argument, comments made recently by the Archbishop in the *Guardian* reflect this, especially when he stated that there was (Fox, 2020; Firma, 2020):

> “the need to revisit the portrayal of Jesus as White”

This might have surprised most of the White clergy, who have been teaching theology, as well as the general community, although to most of the Black clergy, this would affirm their identity and inclusion in the processes and structures of the CofE. When members of the Black clergy continued the meeting via Zoom, to reflect on the questions posed to them by Archbishop Welby, it was encouraging that they were willing to use theological resources to find ways in which to respond. However, what became apparent to me was the way in which they were, at times, apologetic about being in the CofE, feeling that they had to learn how to navigate the system and processes of the CofE to be able to survive. In a way, this spoke of the double consciousness in the mind of members of the Black clergy, in that, on one hand they saw themselves as being Black and marginalised, but at the same time saw themselves as being Christians
who were among other Christians (White clergy), whilst not understanding why they were being racialised and misunderstood. Some rationalised their experience in order to justify their ill-treatment in the CofE.

Policy formulation in the CofE is an area in which Black clergy feel that they have been marginalised and this is based on Author's experience, as well as research in this area. In order to capture the ‘lived experience’ of Black clergy in the CofE, there is a need to privilege their voice in the study of the church. The use of some form of ‘analysis’ of the experience of members of the Black clergy will be helpful in informing practice and in helping them and the researcher to interpret their ontological existence (Reddie, 2013). Most Black, Asian and minority ethnic people find themselves in a climate of privileged ‘Whiteness’, in Britain (Hylton, 2009). Based on gaps in the literature, it is of paramount importance for Black clergy to articulate their experience so that they may develop confidence in their ministry in the church. As a Black subject, I am driven by the need for social justice and equity in education, and it becomes germane to investigate the policy machinery in the CofE, and how it affects members of the Black clergy. Similarly, all members of the clergy need to know how to interpret the realities they face (Lartey, 2013; Mucherera, 2006, 2009).

Perhaps the building of a community which has been started by the killing of George Floyd has shown how Black clergy can work together and support one another as they experience the tropes of racism in the CofE. In addition, it has shown that Black people in general, in White majority churches, continue to suffer from racialised discrimination, and, as the Black Lives Matter movement has revealed, there is need for solidarity with Black people in White churches (Lindsay, 2019). For the current study, at least, and for subsequent studies, this has created a platform which can be drawn upon for further studies. Boutros (2015) highlighted the need for blogging to develop into a discussion of complex issues such as race and racism. It seems to me that the use of online media platforms can provide a ‘space’ for Black clergy to come together and share their lived experience of being members of the clergy in the CofE. In order to critically investigate the lived experiences of the Black clergy in the CofE, the following research questions were set to guide the research process:
Research Questions

The main research question is: What are the lived experiences of Black clergy in the CofE? And, this is followed by the following sub-research questions:

1. What are the barriers to the inclusion of Black clergy in the CofE?
2. In what ways do members of the Black clergy experience racialised practices and processes during and after theological training?
3. How does Critical Race Theory contribute to a critical exploration of the church and the clergy’s experiences?

‘Race’ and the Church

The advent of Covid-19 has laid bare structural arrangements in society, as has been observed by a number of researchers (Sencan & Kuzi, 2020; Daoust, 2020; Bamfo et al., 2020; Ihekweazu & Agogo, 2020; Marmot et al., 2010, 2020; Public Health England, 2020). It has also shown the magnitude of embedded racism in the British society, given that those who have been impacted the most in the British society have been from ‘Black’, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) groups. This has been exacerbated by the fact that most BAME people work in jobs and frontline roles that expose them to the Covid-19 virus which explains why there has been a high death rate among this group. Surprisingly, the CofE has not voiced any opinion with regard to the way in which Covid-19 has impacted on these groups. However, where they have made remarks about race, it could be argued that their hand was forced and could be seen as a case of interest convergence. Only the murder of George Floyd was enough to provoke a response from the CofE, perhaps due to the fact that it brought to the public’s awareness how the police and major social institutions have, in the past, been the perpetrators of institutionalised forms of racism. It is in light of such revelations as these that scholars like Gillborn (2020) have argued that structural racism exposes inequalities in society as a result of systemic racism, and that, in addition to the physical
health of the victims of such forms of racism, there is the likelihood that people suffer mental distress from experiencing racial discrimination for a long period of time.

Racism can affect the health of individuals (Gee et al., 2019; Bamfo et al., 2020; Marmot et al., 2020; Public Health England, 2020). Part of the perpetuation of this problem can be seen through the work of Beydoun (2020, p. 1481), who argues that “faith in Whiteness” is the belief that “religion remains a potent catalyst in shaping race and racial classification today”. Cases of Black clergy being denied the same opportunities as their White colleagues have become evident in the CofE in recent times. The death of George Floyd might have contributed to the uncovering of racial issues, since it has emboldened some members of the Black clergy to ‘speak out’, and this has helped to further illuminate their lived experience in the CofE. The case of Augustine Tanner-Ihm, a trainee member of the Black clergy in the CofE, who was denied the opportunity to serve in a “White majority congregation” due to being black, has raised concerns about the CofE’s attitudes towards its Black clergy. An email he received, which he posted on Facebook, read (Swerling, 2020):

I am afraid that despite some of your obvious gifts, we do not think it worth pursuing a conversation with you about the curacy position at [omitted]. We are not confident that there is sufficient ‘match’ between you and the particular requirements of that post.

…firstly, the demographic constitution of the parish is monochrome white working class, where you might feel uncomfortable. Second, we feel you would be best suited to a curacy with a more experienced incumbent than the one in [omitted].

In addition, Revd Alywin Pereira, who could not find a job after his in-service training for the clergy, highlighted how he was not supported by the Bishops in his diocese (Firma, 2020; Paveley, 2019). These and other stories of Black clergy, both those mentioned in the current study, and others who have been provoked to share their stories, have revealed the varied, insidious and multifaceted nature of racism in the CofE (Williams, 2020; France-Williams, 2020; Firma, 2020; Paveley, 2019; Isiorho, 2019; Hope et al., 2020; Perera, 2020). Such narratives reinforce
the timeliness of my study. In addition, Frazer-Williams, in his new book, *Ghost Ship*, quoting Gus John, after explaining the context in which John left the CMEAC wrote:

Black and global majority people in the Church, whether as clergy, laity or employees, are still experiencing discrimination and exclusion, benign and sugar-coated or otherwise, at every level of organisation in the church, and yet, their active presence in communion with the church is responsible for its survival and buoyancy in many communities. (France-Williams, 2020, p. 1)

In his own commentary on the account above, Frazer-Williams highlighted how: “…this volley of devastating combination of punches may stun, but will not floor, the White church of England hierarchy” (France-Williams, 2020, p. 1). In this manner, Frazer-Williams began a critical exploration of institutional racism in the CofE, by also giving examples from his own experience before and after becoming an accredited minister in the CofE. This brought into the open issues of institutional racism which are still part and parcel of the CofE. Even its high-profile Archbishop Justin Welby has accepted that the CofE has remained “institutionally racist”, despite decades in which there has been rhetoric focusing on equality and diversity policies (Paveley, 2019; France-Williams, 2020; Isiorho, 2019). This has emphasised and shown the need to explore if a colour-blind ideology is in operation in the CofE, under which issues of racial discrimination have continued unabated due to the varied nature of subtle racism(s) (Isiorho, 2019; Lindsay, 2019; France-Williams, 2020; Williams, 2020; Paveley, 2019).

Whilst this study explores the issue of racism in the CofE, it has been evident that the CofE is a microcosm of British society, given that, in one of the White Majority Churches, known as Hope City Church, its founding leaders have resigned over the issue of racism (Beever, 2020). Again, this reinforces the institutional nature of racism in white majority congregations, as well as foregrounding the fact that race and racism remain issues that need to be addressed in England (Hope et al., 2020). As a member of the Black clergy in the Church of England (CofE), I have personally experienced racialised interactions with White clergy and
congregations, as my being Black has been interpreted as me being inferior (Isiorho, 2019; Lindsay, 2019; Fox, 2020). This ‘lived reality’ has enabled me to reflect and question whether/how I am welcome and seen as part of the institutional church. Others have felt it necessary to instigate the ‘I, too, am CofE’ campaign which has revealed the ongoing marginalisation of Black clergy in God’s church (Henry, n.d.). The campaign has revealed that:

Despite the advances made, combined with almost 30 years of promoting the participation of ME Anglicans in the church, this stubborn underrepresentation persists in all areas. Nevertheless, CMEAC [Committee for Minority Ethnic Anglican Concerns] cannot of itself make the necessary changes. While initiatives such as ‘Turning Up The Volume’ (TUTV) and the work of Vocational Strategy Group have provided a framework to progress some of these issues, what is also required is a systemic commitment that involves all areas of Anglican organisational life-policies, procedures and culture, which addresses behaviours, attitudes and perceptions that perpetuate unconscious bias. (Henry, n.d., p. 1)

My experience of unequal treatment, as White brethren see me as ‘the other’, has made me question my presence in the Church. In a church that believes in the celebration of God’s diversity, the *not-me* metaphor resonates with my experience in the CofE. This has been the catalyst for me to ‘read and write’ this book, to make sense of my experience. Looking further afield, the ‘I, too, am Oxford’ campaign (Haidrani, 2014) has revealed the same struggles that Black individuals face in other sectors, including higher education. The context of this campaign seems to resonate with the experience of members of the Black clergy in the CofE. To illustrate this more fully, Haidrani (2014) posited that:

Higher education institutions are widely celebrated as places to encourage academic achievements, yet campaigns like this expose the struggles of students of colour who face prejudice and discrimination merely on their appearance. (Haidrani, 2014)
The quotation above illustrates how racialised individuals are differentially treated in institutions of higher learning (Banks, 1993; Bhopal, 2008; Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Bhopal et al., 2016), and this has also been noticed in theological colleges that are owned by the CofE (Henry, n.d.). I argue that the lack of recognition of the talents of Black individuals, including Black clergy in the CofE, is a cause for concern, which necessitates a study like this one, to interrogate the lived experiences of Black clergy in the CofE. Black clergy in the Church of England (CofE) continuing to express their dissatisfaction with the status quo led to the formation of the Committee for Minority Ethnic Anglican Concerns (CMEAC). However, in spite of the church being aware of the existence of Black clergy, statistical evidence (see Fig. 1.1) Full time clergy in the CofE suggests that inequalities in terms of progression and promotion between Black clergy and their White counterparts continue unhindered. While statistical data indicate the presence of inequalities, they do not bring to the fore the issues at play; hence, this study also seeks to shed light on how issues of equality and diversity in the church are experienced by Black clergy (Bourdieu, 1986; Bell, 1992; Blackie, 2014; Arellano & Vue, 2019).

More broadly, in White majority churches (WMC), including the CofE, various scholars have indicated that Black people (including Black clergy) have often been excluded from the decision-making process and (Beckford, 2000; Reddie, 2002, 2009, 2012; Lindsay, 2019). Chike (2010), an Anglican clergyman, emphasised the fact that it is disheartening for Black clergy, who feel powerless to work in an ‘alien’ culture, where their own perspectives are disregarded (Isiorho, 2003; Fenwick, 2016; Manala, 2016). If one’s culture is disregarded, a sense of belonging

![Fig. 1.1](source: Research and Statistics, 2020)
cannot be fostered, but can result in low self-esteem. Mitchell and Thomas (1994) highlighted the importance of culture, and how low self-esteem is linked to not taking seriously one’s culture and identity. Jennings (2020) described a language of “fragments”, an incomplete understanding of the world, which exists until we understand ourselves and bring our own identity, culture and voice to the fore. Mitchell and Thomas (1994) alluded to this:

Another source of low self-esteem among African Americans is the notion that our culture is inferior. Even well-meaning writers allege that we were ‘stripped’ of all culture during the horrors of the Middle Passages, crossing the Atlantic. (Mitchell & Thomas, 1994, p. 113)

Reddie (2012) and Beckford (2000) noted how Black individuals in a White majority church such as the CofE were usually unappreciated, which has resulted in a proliferation of Black majority churches. In the CofE, the way in which Black individuals have been treated led to the formation of CMEAC, with an agenda to ‘privilege’ the Black voice (Kuhrt, 2001; Gordon-Carter, 2003). One problem is that CMEAC in England as elsewhere in the Global North continues to be led by White clergy, which has made it difficult for Black clergy to have ownership. The assertion of Audre Lorde (1971, as cited by Hylton, 2009, p. 34) that “…the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house” can help to identify some of the problems inherent in the systems and structures of the church. Since its inception, 30 years ago, CMEAC has challenged the institutional church to review its policy formulation around the issue of diversity and inclusion. Using a CRT framework will help uncover the complexities of ‘race’ and racial dynamics in the CofE. The work of Hylton (2018) does show that CRT can be used to enter a new field and to explore issues of equality and diversity with some level of success. This is fully explored in Chaps. 5 and 6.

From its formation, the CofE has been a White-dominated institution, and it continues to take time for those who are Black to fully participate in the structures and policies of the church.

The Church of England statistics on the ethnicity of the clergy illustrates the lack of diversity within this key group of personnel. Although
the figures show an increase in the number of Black clergy from 3.1% in 2012 to 3.8% in 2019 (Research & Statistics, 2020), this does not reflect the BAME population in England, which is closer to 15% (Office for National Statistics, 2022). When one compares the number of Black people in British society, according to the national census of 2011, it is evident that BAME people are underrepresented in the CofE. The proportion of BAME people in England has continued to increase, due to increased migration from the Global South. The statistics indicate that the CofE is not representative of society in terms of ethnic diversity (Isiorho, 2019; Clarke et al., 2020; France-Williams, 2020; Williams, 2020; Fox, 2020; Paveley, 2019). This raises the issue that appears in the work of France-Williams (2020) and Lindsay (2019), who posited that, in White majority churches (which includes the CofE), Black people, including members of the Black clergy, have been marginalised and their experience has not been acknowledged.

The next section provides details of how the racialisation of Black clergy continues in the CofE, and how this necessitates a study such as the current one, which seeks to give voice to the narratives of the Black clergy.

Racial Tensions in the CofE

Within the CofE, a committee was established in 1986 to address racial tensions, called the Committee for Minority Ethnic Anglican Concerns (CMEAC). One of its foremost members was Gus John, who was a consultant to this committee. But in late 2019, due to racial tension, he abruptly resigned from the very committee designed to address racial tension.

He accused the Archbishop of Canterbury of taking sides and not being concerned with Black issues, especially about Afro-Caribbean deportations (Islamic Human Rights Commission, 2019), regardless of the fact that these people were instrumental in building the United Kingdom, through their labour (Beckford, 2000). This shows the currency and potency of this study, as it is relevant to the current discourses in the church. It should be noted, however, that Professor Gus John, not