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Black Liberation Theology and the Programme to Combat Racism

Introduction

Black liberation theology addresses the question as to how one can claim to have knowledge of God. James Cone provides an answer by politicizing revelation as a process emanating out of suffering and injustice: ‘God comes to those who have been enslaved and abused and declares total identification with their situation, disclosing to them the rightness of their emancipation on their own terms.’¹ For the children of Legba, the experience of the oppressed becomes God’s experience, hence knowing God is to participate in liberation and thenceforth to determine, phenomenologically, that ‘we must become black with God!’² With regards to the Christian tradition, Black theology displaces the white supremacist interpretation of the Bible story; exodus, enslavement, revelation and, above all, redemption, become the prophetic cornerstone of Black liberation.³ This theological position was mobilized in the 1960s in order to testify to the righteousness of the Black Power struggle, thereby contributing to a broader global re-politicization of Christianity. But although the coining of the term is more recent, I would situate Black liberation theology within the traditions emanating from the ‘invisible institutions’ of the plantation. As a contemporary articulation of the long-practised sciences of Legba, Black liberation theology seeks the uncolonized spiritual hinterlands wherein dehumanized sufferers can find their agents of sanctification and redemption.

Moana Jackson, a notable Māori lawyer, defines one of the key effects of colonialism as ‘creating a suspension of disbelief which requires that those from whom power is to be taken have to suspend their own faith, their own worth, their own value and sense of goodness.’⁴ Jackson is articulating the wound that colonial science inflicts upon what we have discussed as ‘deep relation’. In this chapter we shall follow Black Power as it articulates on a deeper plane as soul power, that is, as liberation of souls from dehumanization at the hands of colonial science. For the children of Legba, the statement that God is Black is made precisely to address Jackson’s points as to the effect of colonialism, especially, the dehumanization of enslaved peoples through the automatic testimony provided by their skin colour.⁵ This dehumanization effectively outlawed any attempt to *whakapapa* oneself and community back to the seedbed of creation. The greatest colonial crime of dehumanization, then, was de-sanctification, i.e. to segregate all the way down.

In 1968 the World Council of Churches (WCC) assembled at Uppsala in order to respond to church involvement in the anti-racist and anti-colonial struggles that had spread around the globe. Martin Luther King Jr was to be the opening speaker. His assassination just two months prior underlined the urgency of the meeting, the agenda of which was set out by James Baldwin’s passionate speech entitled ‘White Racism or World Community’. The assembly affirmed that racism was a ‘Christian heresy’. And in the following year the WCC set up its Programme to Combat Racism (PCR) through which ‘new relationships’ – practical as well as theological – could be created between the churches and those peoples suffering under racial and colonial discrimination.⁶ Among such situations, declared the WCC Central Committee in 1969, were ‘those of the aborigines in Australia, the Māori in New Zealand, the black majorities of southern Africa, the Indians, Afro-Americans, the coloured immigrants and students in the UK and continental Europe.’⁷

In the early 1970s, some theologians believed that Black liberation could be mobilized to decolonize Christianity in Aotearoa NZ, and that

becoming Black with God might help to liberate Māori and Pākehā souls. The WCC's Programme to Combat Racism was their vehicle. In what follows we will witness another contentious grounding with Blackness, but this time through the theology of liberation. Here, the children of Arcadian Hermes will also have a part to play.

Pākehā privilege and the Church

In 1968 Don Borrie, the Pākehā theologian that Taura Eruera would later write to, travelled to the United States to undertake a post-graduate degree with Preston Williams, the Martin Luther King Jr Professor at Boston University.⁸ During his studies King Jr was assassinated and Borrie witnessed the shift in popular sentiments towards Black Power. Borrie became part of a crisis team organized by the Presbyterian Church and assigned to the inter-racial council based in St Louis. There, he met Chuck Cohen, a Black Baptist minister who worked closely with children from the ghettos under the dictates of his Black liberation theology. For these subversive activities Cohen was at one point chained to his hospital bed, while Borrie – white, middle class and a foreigner – could walk around with entire freedom.

Such experiences provoked in Borrie a need to address the white privilege that he enjoyed. It was clear to him that to depend upon reform directed by whites was simply an act of deferral. And yet it was just as clear to him that it was delusional, as a white churchman, to mimic the activities of Black liberation theologians. What ethical and political relationship to Black liberation could and should a white clergyman cultivate? This was the question that Borrie pondered as he flew back to Aotearoa NZ via the South Pacific islands. Arriving home, it was clear to Borrie that, there, white racism manifested specifically as Pākehā (European settler) privilege. Borrie would have to force his church to address head on its complicity in colonial injustice and to disassemble the Pākehā domination of leadership and agenda setting.

In April 1970, Boudewijn Sjollema, the first director of the PCR, wrote to the National Council of Churches in New Zealand concerning the possibility of a team visit to the region.⁹ Borrie, now General Secretary of the New Zealand Student Christian Movement, seized the moment. Replying to Sjollema, Borrie warned of the tendency for Pākehā to refuse to admit the existence of any problem; he also underlined the importance of including Māori representatives in any future planning.¹⁰ Later in the year Borrie wrote again to Sjollema, noting the rapid rise in race consciousness among Māori and Pasifika activist youth as well as the new confrontations that were brewing over sporting relations with South Africa.¹¹ Borrie warned that Aotearoa NZ might have to go through the same polarizations evident in the United States before reaching more equitable arrangements. To address these issues Borrie informed Sjollema that the New Zealand Student Christian Movement was planning a conference on 'Power, Justice and Community' and that an American in attendance might be very valuable. Geneva sent the new General Secretary of the PCR, Rev Charles Spivey Jr.

Spivey arrived in Geneva from New York City where he had directed the 'Crisis in the Nation' programme of the US National Council of Churches. The Crisis was a response from Black church leaders to the lack of political engagement by white church structures with the uprisings that had peppered the urban landscape of the USA, starting with Watts in 1965.¹² Like his father, Spivey was an African Methodist Episcopal (AME) minister and a keen advocate of social justice.¹³ The AME had emerged out of the Free African Society, a mutual aid organization begun in 1787 to promote the self-determination of free Black peoples in and around Philadelphia. Richard Allen, one of the founders of the Society, resolved to put an end to the racial segregation practised in the Methodist churches by forming an independent church that would also carry on the aims of the Society.¹⁴ The AME was perhaps the first body in North America, outside of the 'invisible institutions' of the plantations, to publically promote what would eventually be known as Black liberation theology.

Spivey touched down in Aotearoa NZ in late November 1971 and during his visit met a diverse array of people: conservative, moderate and radical white laity, government officials (especially the minister of Māori affairs), civil society organizations such as the Race Relations Commission and various anti-racist sports groups, key Māori figures including MP Whetu Tirikatene-Sullivan (a member of the Rātana faith), the Māori Women's Welfare League, and the Māori Queen – Te Atairangikaahu. Spivey also grounded with Māori student and faculty groups, and with Māori and Pasifika radicals including Ngā Tamatoa, the Māori Organization on Human Rights (MOOHR) and the Polynesian Panthers.¹⁵ Tigilau Ness, a Polynesian Panther, remembers himself and Hana Te Hemara from Ngā Tamatoa attending one workshop with Spivey that involved role-playing activities designed to sharpen participants' understandings of the 'White Male Club'.¹⁶ Spivey also undertook two television interviews for mainstream audiences. He acknowledged the 'increasing ferment' within Māori youth groups, and was disappointed with the National Council of Churches' prevailing lacklustre attitude to discrimination against Māori.

In general, Spivey argued that racism in Aotearoa NZ was engaged with mostly within the domain of international sports. And he noted that his attempts to bring up the notion of domestic institutional racism were dismissed as American ignorance of the exceptionalism of New Zealand society.¹⁷ Journalists who followed Spivey's engagements reported that 'he is striking few sympathetic chords when he hints that white racism could exist in New Zealand'.¹⁸ Pathologizing Black Power as bloodthirsty race revenge, the mainstream press asked Spivey if he supported the 'violent' strategies of the Black Panthers. Spivey replied that 'violence arises in situations where people have no other alternatives'.¹⁹ In response, the congregation of Karori, a predominantly white suburb of Wellington, demanded that the Bishop of Wellington dissociate the church from the PCR.²⁰ Indeed, many of these reactions from Pākehā were generated by concerns that the WCC was endorsing violence as a necessary means for liberation in the various anti-colonial struggles that raged at the turn of the decade.²¹ Perceptively, Miss

Althea Campbell, a Pākehā missionary resident in Kenya, suggested that the Pākehā outcry was in fact to do with racial concerns over the safety of white settlers in the context of liberation struggles. Where was the general outcry when black and brown people were killing themselves, Campbell asked?²²

Alternatively, Spivey gained far more support from Māori and Pasifika activists with which he enjoyed fruitful groundings. Witness, for example, a letter from Tom Poata of the Māori Organization on Human Rights to Spivey sent after his visit: 'your forthright comments on white racism during your visit here were very heartening to many Māori'. Poata also noted that Spivey's critical comments on land ownership were especially well received.²³ Spivey seems to have shared useful strategies with activists during his groundings with them. When asked by media what their role might be in the event of a race riot, one Ngā Tamatoa member commented on the creation of urban cadres: 'it's something that Algerian [sic] Frantz Fanon and American Dr Charles Spivey are both good on.'²⁴ Spivey even attempted to connect Māori and Pasifika to global liberation networks and on at least one occasion funded Māori participation in international symposia on Third World women's struggles.²⁵ Subsequent to Spivey's visit, some small funding was initiated by the PCR to support Ngā Tamatoa and the Polynesian Panthers.

Borrie was keen for Spivey to return for a longer visit in order to 'make more extensive and deeper contacts with Māori and Pacific Island people'.²⁶ Yet Spivey's visit had troubled the church waters and a vigorous debate began over the utility and ethics of Black liberation theology especially when applied to Māori/Pākehā relationships in Aotearoa NZ. In this way, the same issues that were being debated regarding the public-political use of Black Power also found their way into church politics. At the time of Spivey's visit, A. Gnanasunderam, a theologian from Sri Lanka, was the secretary for the Church and Society Commission of the National Council of Churches. Gnanasunderam orchestrated a debate on precisely these issues between himself, Spivey, Borrie and Paul Reeves, the Māori Bishop of Waipou (and future

Governor-General of New Zealand). The issues manifested by Spivey's groundings continued in these letters. And through them we can draw out some key contentions concerning the suitability of Black liberation theology as a salve to Pākehā privilege and a catalyst for *mana motuhake* (self determination).

Gnanasunderam seems to have accepted the popular 'exceptionalist' narrative of Aotearoa NZ race relations that activists such as Ngā Tamatoa were busy trying to dismantle. For example, he explained to Sjollesma on the eve of Spivey's visit that 'the Māori are in a different position to that of the Indians in America and the Aborigines in Australia. In spite of the subtle form of white racism present, most of the Māori today would be offended if they are referred to as a "racially oppressed" people.'²⁷ Gnanasunderam suggested that the hostile response of many Pākehā to Spivey was because of the specifically American sensibility through which the latter had communicated the politics of race.²⁸ To this assessment Spivey replied that Gnanasunderam was being far too generous, and that the 'lack of understanding' was, in fact, a manifestation of the 'real racism' that lay 'just under the surface'.²⁹ Additionally, Spivey defended Borrie's programme of confronting Pākehā with their own white privilege using the methods garnered from his American sojourn while acknowledging that there could be no 'ready made approach to New Zealand racism coming from outside'.³⁰ (In fact at this point Spivey was sending readings on methodology and research to Syd Jackson of Ngā Tamatoa with the precaution that these materials were 'US centric'.³¹) Nevertheless, the key point Spivey wished to impress upon Gnanasunderam was that even in the absence of slavery one had to still account for the 'white superiority/black inferiority' attitude that prevailed in Aotearoa NZ.³²

In order to facilitate this dialogue further, Spivey sent Borrie, Gnanasunderam and Reeves a copy of Robert Terry's writings on white racism. Terry, at the time, was the director of the Detroit Industrial Mission. Influenced by the current crises, Terry sought to channel discussions held by the Mission into a critique of the structural racial division between white managers and black workers. Facing Black Power,

Terry asked the white managers: 'what does it mean to be white today?' Much of his answer referenced the constant deferral of white privilege, that is, the privilege not to have to think in terms of – or talk about – racial identity.³³ Alternatively, Terry encouraged whites to 'explore new meanings and anti-racist ways to be white while still recognizing that whiteness accrues unearned benefits to whites in a white racist society'.³⁴ Standing against racism and social injustice therefore required 'aggressive action to redistribute power, create open resources and institutions, and affirm cultural pluralism'.³⁵ Rather than feeling guilty about their institutional privileges, 'new whites' would need to cultivate a positive sense of self and direct that energy to tackle the core of the problem.

Gnanasunderam agreed with Terry's fundamental point that 'old' white consciousness was the basic problem to be overcome. Nevertheless, Gnanasunderam still worried that this admission might encourage binary thinking and violent confrontation, both of which he seems to have uncritically identified with Black Power. 'It is not possible', confessed Gnanasunderam to Spivey, 'for me as a coloured person to accept it entirely as a white problem': non-whites would have to take some responsibility too.³⁶ Reeves, the Māori Bishop of Waipou, concurred with Gnanasunderam, protesting that Terry 'literally says things in terms of black and white'.³⁷ Reeves drew upon another well-worn trope of New Zealand exceptionality to contest this framework, namely, that colonial conflict was being resolved peacefully and progressively in the bedroom with the production of a sizeable 'mixed-race' population.³⁸ In response, and pre-empting some of the contentions that would soon be raised by the Black Women's Movement, Spivey argued that Reeves' position ignored the uneven grounds of inter-mixing. Which cultural complex, Spivey asked, was actually defining 'the standards of success, achievement, cultural, ethical and moral values, beauty etc?'³⁹ Was there an unspoken aspiration towards whiteness in the trope deployed by Reeves? In the US, reflected Spivey, the Black Power movement had rejected this aspiration to 'pass' in white society: 'in a sense, those who pass are dead, dead to anything Black';⁴⁰ and to anything Māori?

These discussions demonstrate that the provenance of Black Power was interrogated just as much in the Church among theologians as it was in the street among activists. But in many respects, the theological stakes were higher than the political in so far as identification with Blackness sought to re-sanctify a people who had been forcibly segregated from God. To become Black with God: there lay the energy store for soul power and the compass for Black Liberation. No wonder, then, that contentious questions as to the provenance of Black Power emerged in theology as much as they had in the protest politics of Ngā Tamatoa. Did Black liberation theology require the consumption of African-American soul without any cultivation of indigenous *wairua* (soul)? Would Black liberation theology reproduce precisely the ‘suspension of disbelief’ in one’s indigenous spirituality that Moana Jackson attributes to colonialism? And if this was the case, would the pursuit of a ‘new white’ (American) identity by Pākehā churchmen simply be reproducing the same problem? In short, how might specifically *Aotearoa* liberation theologies be cultivated?

Aotearoa liberation theologies

Reeves’ core concern with Black liberation theology was less its provocation that to know God is to participate in the Black struggle and more the under-examined methods of acting upon this theological shift, especially in pursuit of *mana motuhake*. Reeves suggested that Borrie’s impetuosity in leading the groundings with Spivey instead of working with a Māori partner was a sign of his own complicity in the ‘Pākehā veto’.⁴¹ Borrie, for his part, acknowledged these criticisms.⁴² Indeed Reeves was well aware of the continuing paternalism of the Pākehā-run church, and even defended Spivey’s employment by the WCC against the ‘liberal white opinion’ of the National Council of Churches.⁴³ In this respect, Reeves was a true son of Māui: he sought rearrangement of the Church on Māori terms and in Māori spaces.⁴⁴

The problem for Reeves was that radical Māori activists were already driving forward this rearrangement: at that time, Pākehā Christians of an activist bent were being taught how to shift their framework from the 'Māori problem' to the 'Pākehā problem' by Hana Te Hemara of Ngā Tamatoa.⁴⁵

Te Hemara's shift in frameworks, cognate to Borrie's, connotes a shift in political and theological identification – from a generic white (American) to a *settler* (Pākehā). And this shift gives rise to a question: was it possible for Pākehā to cultivate their own liberation theology appropriate for Aotearoa NZ? Following this line of inquiry, let us now turn to the other side of the exchange – a trip by Borrie and a contingent of three other Pākehā as well as Gnanasunderam to the USA under the auspices of Paul Schulze, Director of the Centre for Social Change in Oakland, and Terry of the Detroit Industrial Mission.

In Borrie's assessment, the visit cultivated a new white consciousness among its Pākehā participants, especially in terms of the revelation, contra the exceptionalist narrative, that white racism was part of a 'global reality' and that Pākehā paternalism did not sit outside of this reality.⁴⁶ Rev John Grundy was also part of the trip and subsequently reflected upon the Pākehā tendency to apply anti-racist activities mainly to foreign situations – especially to the sporting relationship between Apartheid South Africa and New Zealand. This, Grundy supposed, was a way for Pākehā to avoid complicity in similar structures of inequality at home.⁴⁷ The trip also addressed Reeves' concerns that a radical agenda for anti-racism in the Christian ecumene should proceed in ways that were accountable to Māori.⁴⁸ While in Detroit, the visitors studied Terry's methods in developing new white consciousness. And one particular practice stood out, namely, the presence of a Black "monitor" in workshops run by and for whites. The principle applied in this case was that whites must accept not just responsibility for their own transformation but also accountability in the process, so that 'where others are affected, they need to be consulted at every stage of planning'.⁴⁹

Subsequent to this visit a planning committee was charged with developing an anti-racism training programme for Pākehā under the

auspices of the PCR.⁵⁰ As plans were being slowly developed, Paulo Freire visited Auckland to promote the strategies of learning that he had outlined in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. To diverse constituencies – Māori, Pasifika and Pākehā – Freire suggested that each had a complementary agenda, and that the act of working together, in a context of significant power imbalance, was often most meaningfully achieved through a co-intentionality of discrete agendas and projects.⁵¹ Freire's suggestion accords to the binding skills of Tāne/Māui, which do not seek to collapse domains but, rather, to make their agents and energies traversable in the pursuit of restitutive justice. Hence, Freire's strategy addressed Reeves' concerns and also supported the lessons learnt at the Detroit Mission.⁵² A planning committee was put together in late 1973 with the aim of training 50 Pākehā that would facilitate the engagement with 'white racism as a white problem.'⁵³ By 1974, however, the project had run into inertia on multiple fronts and was temporarily sidelined.

Meanwhile, around the time that Spivey was making an impact in Aotearoa NZ, Bob Scott, a Pākehā Anglican, travelled to South Africa to participate in a University Christian Movement (UCM) conference that was also being attended by Steve Biko. On the first evening that Scott spent in Johannesburg, he attended a South African Soccer Federation reception where he was introduced to the Black Consciousness movement and its critique of white paternalism.⁵⁴ Soon afterwards, Scott attended the UCM conference, where, on the first day, resolutions of dissolution were passed. By evening time, Scott was the only white who had remained and was witness to the telling of stories by Blacks about white racism. Scott was daunted at the scale of the struggle that he was witnessing.⁵⁵

At this point, Biko personally took Scott for a grounding session and explained that what Black people required from white people was not sympathy but anger over the debilitating effect that white supremacy had upon whites themselves. Biko told Scott that they could never be sure that whites would stick with them for the duration of the struggle. However, if whites were angry themselves they would be personally

invested in the issues and could be counted upon. Biko suggested that to be committed and accountable to the struggle in this way rendered Scott's prime task as 'working with your community, not ours'.⁵⁶ When Scott protested that he knew too little to undertake this work, Biko replied that 'what you're hearing gives you enough to start'.⁵⁷

As I noted in the last chapter, it was only in the aftermath of the Springboks tour that the majority of Christian anti-Apartheid activists would sense the need to address the race question not just as a white problem but as a *Pākehā* problem – i.e. as a problem of colonial settlement in Aotearoa NZ.⁵⁸ In the early 1980s Scott, with help from Māori Anglican and WCC member Hone Kaa, finally managed to put the 'new white consciousness' agenda to work in a series of anti-racism workshops.⁵⁹

In these ecumenical workshops that spanned 1982 to 1987 the directions for *Pākehā* attendees were as follows: first, you must know that you are not cultureless, but carry a particular culture of individualism, a culture that is embraced and privileged in the mainstream institutions of society; and second, you must know your own history, not the sanitized history of the Commonwealth, but rather the history of colonial dispossession that, like it or not, you – and your culture – are implicated in and benefit from.⁶⁰ Cognate to the protocols of the Detroit Mission, a Māori monitor would always be in attendance.⁶¹ (Scott often worked with veteran Māori activist Titewhai Harawira.⁶²)

Pedagogically, the workshops proceeded by encouraging *Pākehā* participants to write as much history as they knew on a white paper above a line that divided the sheet in half. In almost all cases this took shape as a sanitized history of settler colonialism: of discovery, development, gentlemanly disagreements and honourable battles, of reasonable assimilation and the triumph of civilization. Afterwards, the facilitator, with support from the Māori monitor, would fill in the other half of the story under the line as a counterpoint: a history of prior discovery and indigenization, of incursions, dishonourable agreements and genocidal war, dispossession and racial oppression.

In the spirit of Freire, through the mandate of Biko, and inspired by the practice of Terry and Spivey, the workshops aimed to be positively

therapeutic and to empower Pākehā with the personal accountability to tackle a white supremacism that, while global in extent, started with its detrimental effect upon them as Christians who sought to live in good faith. Nonetheless, the challenge of building a new Pākehā consciousness should not be underestimated. White theology was, after all, built upon categorical segregation as much as anthropology had been. The native could not ground with God; she might only enjoy a vicarious attachment to creation through a biblical *whakapapa* that was owned by whites. And yet, the white laity had never placed themselves personally within this *whakapapa*. Indeed, they could not do so: their personal investment in the story began with Jesus, not with the patriarchs and matriarchs of the Old Testament; their missionary licence (and we shall return to this in later chapters) tasked them with proselytizing the Good News of the Son and not the outstanding legacies of his ancestors. This preference for brand new beginnings promised by the Son theologically mirrored the settler-colonial practices of making ‘god’s own’ land anew.

A fundamental rule of the anti-racism workshops stipulated that participants were not allowed to address statements or questions to the monitor because to do so would deflect the responsibility for change away from Pākehā.⁶³ However, during one workshop the head of the Salvation Army broke protocol and asked the Māori monitor, Hone Kaa, where Adam and Eve fitted in to the Māori creation story: had not the whites brought this biblical story with them? For 20 minutes Kaa proceeded to recount a detailed *whakapapa* (similar to that of Māori Marsden that I rehearsed previously) that bound manifest and spiritual domains together so that he could personally walk a path from himself, through his ancestors, back to creation. Kaa then asked his inquisitor, ‘What’s your creation story; where are you from?’ Kaa had deftly exposed the spiritual and theological challenge of building a new white consciousness in the settler context of Aotearoa NZ: in order to master the manifest domain, the settler had to segregate himself from creation. Fundamentally disturbed, the Pākehā attendee left the workshop.⁶⁴

Kaa's *whaikōrero* (speech making) reveals the rich binding skills inherited by the children of Tāne/Māui. In fact, Gnanasunderam had long been aware of the living heritage of Māori cosmologies, and was interested in comparing the indigenization of Christianity by the Māori prophet T. W. Rātana with that of African independent churches.⁶⁵ In 1974 Gnanasunderam wrote a discussion piece wherein he noted that theologies of liberation might differ in terms of their context, meaning and purpose between continental and diasporan Africans. And if Black liberation theology was being diversely cultivated even among the children of Legba, then surely the children of Tāne/Māui would have to intentionally cultivate their own spiritual *whakapapa* of liberation.⁶⁶

T. R. Tahere, a pastor from South Hokianga, was one such church member who, it seems, picked up this calling in 1971. Initially accepting the mainstream apprehension of Black Power as a violent departure from the peaceful civil rights movement, Tahere was worried that the same mutation might take place in Aotearoa NZ through the likes of Ngā Tamatoa. As an antidote, Tahere wished to undertake study in the United States on the supposedly opposing gospel to Black Power administered by Martin Luther King.⁶⁷ Tahere himself came from an Ngāpuhi family with a long tradition of leadership and had been actively involved in social justice issues, such as improving substandard housing for local Māori.⁶⁸ Through the WCC, Tahere received a scholarship at the end of 1971 to study at Colgate Rochester Divinity School. Tahere also met Spivey during his studies there and discussed with him further research projects in Oakland. A couple of years later Gnanasunderam commented on Tahere's American sojourn and its effect:

like many of the Māori clergy, [Tahere is] sensitive about their culture with a deep desire to serve their people, but quite happy to work along with the white clergy on white norms. They are polite to them even in matters affecting their people ... [But] his studies have given him a deeper awareness of the real needs of the Māori people and he now writes in terms of empowerment of his people.⁶⁹

Henceforth Gnanasunderam proposed that Tahere could even act as a bridge between the elders and the young radicals.⁷⁰

This episode suggests that, rather than learning how to consume another's beloved community, Tahere's grounding with Black liberation theology through the networks of the WCC cultivated a radical renaissance with his own beloved. Tahere was not the only one to renew his soul power; the spirit was abroad across the islands. Indeed, Hone Kaa's commentary to the Pākehā attendee at the anti-racist workshops might have been partly enabled by a WCC conference that he attended in 1976. There, Kaa and others met with the Black Mauritius Catholic priest Filip Fanchette (an associate of Paulo Freire) who, in closed session, led them to face the fact that they were 'house niggers'.⁷¹ Fanchette also heavily influenced Zena Tamanui, a key member of the activist group Whakahou, some of whose *tīpuna* (ancestors) had already cultivated 'Māori understandings of Jesus'.⁷² Whakahou had both Pasifika and Māori members and enjoyed close links with the Polynesian Panthers. Alec Toleafoa, a Panther, later became a minister and today works on cultivating a Christianity indigenous to Oceania. Toleafoa argues that the special relationship between brother and sister, prevalent in many Oceanic cultures, was done great damage to when missionaries proselytized that only one beloved relationship was allowed – to a Jesus that they claimed to be the sole avatars of.⁷³ This is surely one of the deepest colonial cuts in need of repair: to segregate a people from creation, thereby commanding them to surrender their souls to the master's son.

These were the new cultivations of Aotearoa liberation theologies – indigenous and also, as in the Pākehā case, endogenous. And I would suggest that the groundings with Black liberation theology were influential in these rejuvenations of soul power. But what of the children of Legba: how did these theological groundings affect their soul power?

During his second trip to Aotearoa NZ, Spivey attempted to deepen his relationship with *Te Ao Māori* (the Māori world) beyond its urban settings. He spent time with Māori in their rural areas and engaged with indigenous biblical faiths, visiting the small town at Rātana

Pa as well as members of the Ringatū church around Whakatane through a respected intermediary, Norman Perry.⁷⁴ Spivey's register of Black Power was somewhat lost on many rural people's ears;⁷⁵ nevertheless, he himself was enamoured of the Māori prophetic faiths, especially Rātana and Ringatū, and hoped for further interaction in the future.⁷⁶ Spivey's experience of these rural wellsprings affected him greatly. Writing to Roka Paora Tekaha – future co-editor of the Ngata Dictionary – he reflected:

Your deep sense of roots, from which you cannot be removed, your sense of being part of a living vital ongoing tradition coupled with a quiet certainty and security is greatly to be admired. These qualities are not found often enough where I come from – among Black people in the United States. Perhaps it is due in part to the fact that you live breathe and stand on your land, yours, your fathers' and your fathers' fathers.⁷⁷

Visiting Aotearoa NZ through the PCR scheme the following year, a group of African American churchmen – including another AME Bishop, Vinton Anderson, and Al Ragland, director of the Chicago Conference on Religion and Race – had a similar experience. They also picked up on how the binding skills provided by Tāne/Māui had enabled indigenous culture to defer a total uprooting visited by settler colonialism.⁷⁸ Presciently, Ragland had already been introduced to the suffering of First Nations in Alaska where he had served as a medical technician in the US Army and had developed a working relationship with the American Indian Brotherhood.⁷⁹

Conclusion

The children of Tāne/Māui and Legba are grounding through liberation theology and the children of Arcadian Hermes are learning to participate, but not as colonial masters. The theological challenge of identifying with Blackness has compelled Pākehā to re-examine

and even dissolve their colonial privileges for the sake of their own souls. No longer Britannica, from whom all meaning must derive, they are striving, as Sartre had, to witness and appropriately support a liberation struggle that is being planned around campfires that are not their own. The same challenge has led some Māori to connect the liberation of their souls to the radical struggle for *mana motuhake* in the political realm. Through this connection they will also bind back to their decolonial pasts utilizing indigenous prophetic *whakapapa*, an enterprise to which we shall turn soon enough. Meanwhile, Black theologians have come to spread a Black love of liberation, and have found indigenous resources that are instructive – even awe inspiring – to their own cause. These theological groundings have not been undertaken on the thin grounds of comparison but rather through identification with the godhead, the seedbed of creation.

Black power has become soul power. The theological identification with Blackness – becoming Black with God – has quickened a retrieval of the sanctity of ancestors in the story of creation. And so we have moved closer to the spiritual hinterlands. But we are not there quite yet. For between theology and the liberated spirit there stands art, the quotidian theology of the sufferers. Art is the binding skill practised by those who do not occupy a privileged place in the laity, yet who nevertheless wish to pursue the ethos of humanity, that is, the cultivation of deep relation for the sake of restitution. Take, for instance, Eruera Nia, a founding member of the Wellington branch of Ngā Tamatoa. Nia recalls how his ancestors in Taranaki densely encoded their experiences of land dispossession and their wisdoms of creative survival through *karakia* (chants) and *waiata* (songs). Black radical thinkers helped Nia to decode them for mobilization in present-day struggles.⁸⁰ We now turn to an arts project that intentionally sought to provide just such a key: Keskidee Aroha.