

Beyond anti-blackness? Engaging Black Theology and the entanglement of metaphysical brutality

**Author:**Fabian A. Oliver¹ **Affiliation:**

¹Department of Philosophy, Practical and Systematic Theology, School of Humanities, University of South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa

Corresponding author:

Fabian Oliver,
18070361@mylife.unisa.ac.za

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This article explores the role of Black Theology within the context of sustained anti-blackness. It argues that anti-blackness is not only a political failure but the ontological ground of modern life. Engaging critically with Black Theology of Liberation, the article examines how even liberatory theological discourses can become entangled in Christianised redemptive frameworks that inadvertently uphold anti-black metaphysics. Drawing from a broader scope of black studies, it argues that Black Theology often remains entangled in anti-black metaphysical structures, especially in its assumptions about being, life and liberation. The article turns to Armstrong's 'Wayward Black Theology', which foregrounds waywardness, refusal, lament and disruption as theological imperatives. Building on this, it proposes a both-and approach to blackness. That is, blackness as poiesis: a creative, spiritual and ideological force tethered to waywardness, and blackness as a condition that signals the end of the world as we know it, where black existence has been positioned as non-being.

Contribution: Ultimately, the article asks: What theo-political and spiritual imperatives must Black Theology embrace if it is to move beyond the limits of the world structured by anti-blackness and its metaphysical foundations?

Keywords: Black Theology; being; metaphysics; ontology; black studies; blackness; spirituality.

Introduction

Canadian poet and novelist Dionne Brand writes, 'History is already seated in the chair in the empty room when one arrives' (Brand 2001:25). This powerful image captures the enduring presence of colonial and racial histories in spaces presumed to be new or reformed. For black life, this is not simply a metaphor; it is phenomenology. Entry into classrooms, institutions and public spaces in so-called postcolonial or democratic contexts is never onto neutral ground. Instead of open futures, black individuals often encounter structures haunted by historical violence: exclusion, inequality and betrayal remain materially and symbolically embedded. Brand's observation reveals how the past is not left behind but actively shapes the present – occupying the very spaces black life is expected to engage.

This reality complicates dominant theological imaginaries. While biblical narratives often present sacred ground as a site of divine encounter and transformation, Katherine McKittrick's *Demonic Grounds* (2006) reframes space as shaped by the ontological displacement and violence endured by black bodies. Sacredness, then, is not untouched or pure; it is entangled with histories of spatial domination and metaphysical negation. Black inhabitation, in this view, occurs within spaces already overwritten by the afterlife of slavery and colonial conquest.

We are compelled to confront the unsettling question of whether what is commonly framed as 'progress' truly constitutes progress for black¹ life. How do we reconcile the seductive narratives of technological advancement, economic growth, the rise of a black elite, and global capital expansion with the persistent and systemic realities of inequality – manifested in the marginalisation of the poor, the dehumanisation of migrants and refugees, the continued violation of women's bodies, and the resurgence of imperial and neofascist logics? These contradictions expose the limitations of celebratory discourses on development and inclusion. Within the multiple traditions of liberative and decolonial thought, there remains a need for deeper critical reflection on the lived realities of those situated on the underside of history – those for whom the refrain, 'the more things change, the more they stay the same' (Vellem 2015:2), remains tragically apt.

1. I use the term 'black' in the Biko-ist tradition, broadly encompassing people of colour and those positioned on the underside of history, with attention to the diverse intersections of race, gender, sexuality and other axes of identity. Informed by black studies, I also approach blackness through the lens of anti-black logics that historically rendered black people as non-human and subject to erasure. This article brings these tensions into critical conversation.

This article argues that the persistence of anti-blackness is not accidental but embedded in the very metaphysical foundations structuring life itself – foundations rooted in anti-black logics. Engaging Christina Sharpe through a black theological lens, it explores the kind of rupture required when we confront the fact that black death, systemic dispossession, and the afterlives of slavery are not deviations but constitutive of modernity and the liberal democratic order (Sharpe 2016:7, 12).

I argue that the persistence of anti-blackness in contemporary society raises questions about the role and direction of Black Theology. While Black Theology has remained rooted in resistance and liberation, perhaps because of its struggle for survival under permanent attack, it must simultaneously reckon with the possibility that it, too, can be implicitly or explicitly entangled with the very metaphysical and ontological structures it seeks to dismantle. Drawing on insights from an expanded trajectory of black studies, this work contends that aspects of Black Theology remain entangled with anti-black metaphysical frameworks, reflecting what Calvin Warren terms a ‘metaphysical holocaust’ – a condition of ontological negation akin to Frantz Fanon’s (1896) analysis, in which black existence is reduced to instrumentality, stripped of subjectivity and rendered as presence without being (or the absence of being). These entanglements are not merely ontological or abstract, but material, surfacing in legal frameworks, patriarchal and misogynistic systems, socio-economic disparities, and dominant theological constructs that render black life disposable.

Research methods and design

This article emerges from a methodological tension that is not resolved but intentionally held: a convergence between two seemingly irreconcilable claims. On one hand, Black Theology positions blackness as a sacred site of divine liberation, grounded in God’s preferential option for the oppressed. Here, blackness as poiesis or spiritual resistance resonates with Biko’s claim that defining oneself as ‘black’ is a refusal of imperial order, a gesture towards living otherwise (Biko 2004:52–57). On the other hand, black studies, particularly in its radical ontological critique, reveal blackness as the structural position of negation, the foundational absence that sustains the anti-black world.

Rather than choosing between these frameworks, this article embraces their tension through a methodology of rupture and refusal – one that resists synthesis, coherence and the demand for resolution. Black Theology draws from embodied faith and lived experience (Cone 1975), while black studies pursues anti-disciplinary methods shaped by fugitivity, disorder and ontological unsettlement (Moten 2017; Wynter 2003). This work resists the Western demand for coherence, treating contradiction as generative. Blackness is held both as a theological claim and as the apocalyptic marker of the world’s end.

Following Armstrong’s ‘Wayward Black Theology’, this approach refuses to reconcile the liberatory claims of theology with the ontological negation central to black studies. In dialogue with Calvin Warren’s (2018) account of metaphysical absence, it insists on fragmentation as necessary. Thinkers such as Hartman (2019), Sharpe (2016) and Moten (2017) offer tools for staying with disorder, rupture and refusal as methodological imperatives.

Ultimately, this article seeks to contribute to Black Theology by bringing it into critical engagement with black studies – foregrounding their tensions as sites of both fracture and theological possibility.

Ethical considerations

This article followed all ethical standards for research without direct contact with human or animal subjects.

The vicarious nature of black life

In his book, *Ontological Terror: Blackness, Nihilism and Emancipation* (2018), black Nihilist² thinker, Calvin Warren, examines what it means to say, ‘Blacks have life’. More precisely, can there be such a thing called ‘life’ for a black ‘being’ in an anti-black world? He argues that the very foundation of metaphysics is structured by an innate anti-Blackness (Warren 2018:1–2). If this is true, then, ‘One must take a step backward and ask the fundamental question: is the black, in fact, a human being’.

Warren (2018:5–9, 15) begins his argument by engaging the enduring philosophical dilemma of nothing and nothingness. He contends that historically, any effort to conceptualise, define or theorise nothingness inevitably transforms it into something, thus betraying its very nature. This paradox reveals a fundamental limitation within Western philosophical thought. Citing Martin Heidegger’s assertion that ‘nothing is the horror of science’, he observes that philosophy, unable to reckon with the void of nothingness, seeks to dominate it. This mastery, he argues, takes shape through the construction of blackness as the material embodiment of nothingness. In this metaphysical schema, black bodies are rendered as sites through which the West can symbolically control, objectify and annihilate the unthinkable void. As such, black people were ascribed function, but denied being. Hence, acts of enslavement, lynching, sexual violence, state-sanctioned killings and systemic impoverishment are thus not merely historical or socio-political phenomena, but metaphysical attempts to conquer and destroy ‘the nothing’ through the domination of black life. Zakiyyah Iman Jackson describes black life in terms of ontological voidance as ‘plasticity’ – that which can be shaped, bent, moulded into anything (and nothing), be it colonial function, or the voice of non-performative

²The term black Nihilism speaks of a way of cutting through the illusions that often surround political hope. It feels like a refusal to be seduced by promises of liberation that rely on systems already steeped in anti-blackness. Rather than seeing politics as a path to freedom, black Nihilism forces me to confront the possibility that those ideals may serve to mask the structures that continue to harm us (Warren 2018:10–17).

performance of liberation. She describes plasticity as blackness is treated as endlessly malleable linguistically and biologically, shaped into something that is simultaneously less than, more than, and not quite human, making it unstable and unfixable at the level of being (Jackson 2020:3).

This theory is echoed in Achille Mbembe's *Critique of Black Reason* (2013), which argues that the existence of black logics formalised in metaphysics of black nothingness to liberate black people is deeply destructive. Various works of combating anti-blackness rely on the principal coordinates of ontological being postulated by the likes of Hegelian synthesis, Kantian rationalism and Platonic idealism. Even liberties such as human rights and freedom are rooted in beingness and cannot be attained through social, political or legal action. Freedom thus serves as the antithesis of blackness (Warren 2018:4, 15). Hence, with critical enquiry, we must ask post-modernity and in contemporary discourse on epistemological inquiry and thought, who or what is the thinking subject in Descartes' *Cogito, ergo sum*? What does it mean to know that the modes of subjugation may have changed, but the reality of [black] subjection remains imminent? Put differently, 'How do we memorialize an event that is still ongoing?' (Sharpe 2016:20).

Indeed, I maintain that the political [system] is inseparable from anti-blackness. J Kameron Carter boldly claims that 'anti-blackness as itself a mode of religion, the religion of anti-blackness' (2023:3). Furthermore, he denotes that the modern invention of religion is deeply entangled with the rise of capitalism, the formation of the state, and the production of a racialised conception of the human. This entanglement underwrites a violent logic of separation and individuation, particularly through the devaluation of blackness that informs how matter, the earth and social life are imagined and controlled. Christina Sharpe avers 'we can meditate on black suffering, we can experience the violence, we're marked. But we cannot "be"... since the idea of being is foreclosed to us: we're non-being' (Terrefe 2016:11). The present struggle, then, is not only political or economic, but ontological and material: it is a struggle over matter, over ways of mattering otherwise, and over remaking the social beyond logics of ownership, domination and exclusion (Carter 2023:3–5). Thus, any talk of black struggle or liberation without undoing the cosmology of the political is to perpetuate black suffering, by reaching for something unattainable (Warren 2015:232–233).

The case of Joshlin Smith³: Unveiling the logic of anti-blackness

While it may be tempting to dismiss Warren's ontological framing and that of others as pessimistic or lacking liberatory potential, still, such critiques compel us to confront the pervasive and structuring role of anti-blackness in contemporary life.

3. Joshlin was reported missing in February 2024. Her mother, Racquel 'Kelly' Smith, was later found guilty alongside her boyfriend and a friend of kidnapping and trafficking Joshlin, allegedly selling her to a traditional healer. Despite national outcry and extensive searches, Joshlin has not been found.

I am particularly struck by the disappearance of 6-year-old coloured⁴ child Joshlin Smith from Saldanha Bay in the Western Cape (Cruywagen 2025). Beyond the judicial arrests, prison sentencings, or failure to recover Joshlin – dead or alive – what emerges with disturbing clarity from the visual documentation of the case, including the images of the family's shack⁵ and their daily living conditions, is the presence of what Fanon and later theorists have described as zones of non-being. Here, life unfolds on the margins of society, in conditions of profound deprivation and squalor. These conditions, which could be described as the normalisation of social death, are rendered legible only through frameworks imposed by the centre: law, reason, justice and the human. In this context, the very notion of what counts as a 'life' is saturated by logics that render such existence both invisible and disposable.

That thousands of children go missing daily in South Africa, some lost to forms of modern slavery, some dying in pit latrine toilets, and others perishing on hospital floors, underscores the normalisation of anti-black violence visited daily on the likes of Joshlin. These recurring tragedies reveal a justice system more invested in performative awareness than in substantive transformation, further entrenching the disposability of black life as a structural and systemic norm. I experience or witness these realities as constituting the afterlife of slavery and coloniality: 'ongoing structures of sin and injustice that manifest in diminished life prospects, systemic barriers to health and education, premature mortality, mass imprisonment, and enduring poverty' (Hartman 2008:6).

In essence, I agree with Jackson (in Wilcox 2022:122) who argues that trauma and violence, like anti-blackness are not just experienced cognitively or psychologically; they are woven into our endocrine, organ, neural, and cellular systems, such that socio-political violence literally changes the body's biology. She uses the metaphor of 'cells' which operate on two registers: institutional cells (prison, political, military) and bodily cells, emphasising how structural oppression infiltrates our physical matter rendering bodies invisible and disposable before they are legally seen as such.

Entanglements with Black Theology

In an online conversation titled *Black Nihilism as Spiritual Practice* (2024), Warren engages the work of renowned black theologian Dwight Hopkins, who asserts that 'God is where the human being speaks justice'. Elsewhere, Hopkins (2005:168) says that 'all human beings are created with a spiritual purpose ... to share in the material resources of the earth'. In this theological formulation, the divine is located within the domain of being, subsequently,

4. In South Africa, a coloured person refers to someone classified under apartheid and still commonly identified today as being of mixed racial heritage, with ancestries that may include Indigenous Khoisan, African, European, and Asian lineages, reflecting a complex identity shaped by colonialism, segregation, and resistance and self-affirmation.

5. Also referred to in isiZulu as a "mokhukhu" is 'mokhukhu' an informal dwelling typically constructed from corrugated iron, wood, plastic or other salvaged materials.

where justice, equality and human agency intersect. This framework, Warren argues, effectively situates God within the terrain of a crime scene: the violent and ongoing enterprise of anti-blackness. By grounding the divine in the human pursuit of justice, Hopkins perhaps inadvertently renders God a consequence of ontological violence, rather than a source that transcends it.

Similarly, Warren explores James Cone's claim that 'Blackness is an ontological symbol', suggesting that such symbolism risks becoming a form of conceptual idolatry: a philosophical move that makes being the condition for divine encounter. Furthermore, he argues that Christian theology is:

[A] rational study of the being of God in the world in light of the existential situation of an oppressed community, relating the forces of liberation to the essence of the gospel, which is Jesus Christ. (Cone 2010:152)

For Warren, in this reading, ontology becomes a kind of philosophical idol – an altar at which theology mistakenly worships. The result is the subordination of God to the logic of being, forfeiting a mystical or apophatic understanding of the divine. In doing so, Black Theology risks suppressing the Spirit and the mysterious work of the divine by anchoring itself too firmly in philosophical categories of existence.

While the subject matter discussed above is not new to Black Theology, the entanglements of anti-black metaphysics still warrant further investigation. I have agreed elsewhere with Vuyani Vellem who concurs with Allan Boesak (1976:14) that to be a black person is to be considered a non-person, less than human, and this usually meant being relegated to a second-class citizen *living* in unliveable conditions (Oliver 2024:7). Meaning Black Theology is aware of the scourge on sustaining non-beingness but is perhaps implicitly involved in moments of metaphysical entanglement and subsequently halts or narrows theological rupture.

Frantz Fanon's articulations of black subjectivity, or the lack thereof, illuminate the existential void experienced by black individuals under colonial domination, a condition he describes as 'zones of non-being' (Fanon 1996:6–7). Vellem (2020:1–14) examines this concept from the realm of Black Theology as a designated ember characterised by marginalisation and exclusion, particularly affecting those who endure systemic oppression, liminality and ontological deferment. I concur with Njamani (2024), noting that according to Vellem (2020:4), Black Theology of Liberation should not conform to the conventions of Western epistemology; rather, it emerges as the smouldering embers of hermeneutical insight within the zone of non-being. These zones denote a state where black bodies are systematically erased from the narratives that shape human existence and societal value.

The metaphysics of redemption

In her essay on Black Theology, Armstrong (2023:327) notes that both theologians and secular scholars emphasise Christianity's ongoing refashioning through black subjectivities, an effort that is both creative and, at times, pathologising. Scholars argue that Black Theology's continued reliance on core Christian concepts, especially revelation and redemption, may compromise its critical edge. Armstrong further asserts that critiques of redemption in black theory call for reimagining Black Theology through loss, rupture and irregularity, rather than salvation or liberation. Traditional theological-political structures, she argues, have historically upheld anti-black violence and exclusion. Thus, the current crisis in Black Theology signals not failure, but an impasse in addressing post-slavery black life, exposing the limits of Christian categories like justice, liberation and salvation in confronting persistent anti-blackness (pp. 424–426).

Drawing on Hartman, Armstrong (2023:329–332) critiques diasporic return narratives and heritage tourism for obscuring the irreparable rupture of the Middle Passage. The African American tourist, she argues, often displaces the enslaved figure in a redemptive fantasy of reunion – imagining lost kin as recoverable through spiritual or economic means. Yet what emerges is what Hartman calls 'the loss of loss', marking the impossibility of return. Armstrong also critiques the political use of the black maternal, identifying the 'captive maternal' as a figure burdened with bearing state-sanctioned hope. She rejects liberal and theological kinship models, arguing that redemption functions as a political technology that sustains black captivity under the guise of healing, belonging and freedom.

Armstrong ultimately proposes a 'Wayward⁶ Black Theology': a theological posture rooted in refusal, estrangement and loss. This approach resists the impulse to retrieve blackness into the symbolic family of God or the nationalist project. Instead, it aims to unsettle the very terms through which redemption has come to structure black life. To articulate this alternative, Armstrong turns to the notion of gnosis. In early Christian heresiology, Gnosticism referred to the heterodox knowledge expelled to consolidate orthodoxy. Reimagined in her framework, gnosis becomes a weaponised, heretical knowledge – one unmoored from institutional authority and legitimacy. It is a form of black thought forged not through recovery or return, but through the ruins and fractures of both secular and theological orders. Gnosis rejects reconciliation as offered by the state or the church, and instead dwells within the contradictions, disorientation and irreparable losses that define the historical experience of black existence (Armstrong 2023:332–337). Armstrong's work facilitates a vital convergence between Black Theology and

6. Borrowing the term from Hartman's lexicology famously captured in her book *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Riotous Black Girls, Troublesome Women, and Queer Radicals*, published in 2021. Hartman (2021) explains it as follows: Waywardness is a practice of possibility at a time when all reads, except the ones created by smashing out, are foreclosed. It obeys no rules and abides no authorities. It is unrepentant. It traffics in occult visions of other worlds and dreams of a different kind of life ... It is the untiring practice of trying to live when you were never meant to survive. (p. 227)

black studies while simultaneously contributing to Black Theology's self-critical stance and the broader project of 'unthinking the West' (Vellem 2017) through a sustained critique of dominant theological and political paradigms.

Waywarding Black Theology: Poetics and poesis in black

While Armstrong writes and notes largely Black Theology from the North American context, in South Africa, Black Theology shares strong similarities and differences with the themes shared. More can be said in this regard, especially in terms of the Christological reading of black Jesus' ontological variance from the Western norms and subsequent Christian redemption itself.⁷ Still, I argue that South African Black Theology faces a dual crisis of identity. Firstly, in the post-1994 democratic dispensation, it must continuously defend its relevance and legitimacy amid widespread dismissal, framed as either theologically heretical or politically obsolete. The rise of frameworks such as public theologies and contextual theologies has contributed to its marginalisation, often positioning Black Theology as a relic of the liberation era. This has forced it into a posture of self-justification, perpetually reclaiming its place within theological and political discourse. Secondly, in its prolonged confrontation with whiteness, and the effort to remain theologically and politically relevant, Black Theology has become vulnerable to a more insidious crisis: the implicit importation of reconciliatory, redemptive narratives that carry with them the very anti-black logics it seeks to dislodge. This is also apparent in its more current conformity to ivory tower disposition. This is further complicated by the navigation of pseudo-hierarchies within blackness itself, which risks reinforcing internal exclusions.

In conversation with Warren's call for a black theological search for a God unbound by metaphysics, I ponder what alternative avenues for black existence become imaginable and liveable when the divine is no longer tethered to Western ontological categories. I am advocating for an 'un-epistemology' premised in refusal, spirituality of resistance (Vellem 2014:3), white theological heresy, and most importantly, a quest for Black Theology in search for a world (or otherworldly) where black existence can be realised.

There are tensions and convergence we are forced to confront: Black Theology's recreations of blackness as tethered to God's liberation, and blackness as itself the underpinning measure of anti-blackness. In thinking with the former, thinking about blackness as divinity, Carter (2013:605–607) understands blackness not as a fixed identity or solely as a condition of suffering, but as a paratheological, creative and experimental mode of being that emerges through and beyond death, coloniality, and racialisation.

7. By this I mean, more time and thought can be given to reflect on the role of the black Jesus in South African Black Theology and his ontological rupturing from Western norms and turning Christianity's own redemptive upside down. I am thinking of particular of Mofokeng (1983) and Maluleke (1997:13–30).

Drawing on Richard Wright's mid-20th-century writings, the passage presents blackness as a kind of 'blue-jazz' unfolding – a dynamic, improvisational, and affective rearticulation of self and world. This is described as a 'counterfolding' of modernity's ontotheological (racialising and limiting) structures, in which blackness becomes a site of reimagination and becoming. Carter further elaborates on Fred Moten's 'life out of death', where he conceptualises blackness as a generative force – a hopeful, future-oriented expression of life that refuses its reduction to non-being. Thus, blackness is portrayed not only as a critique of the modern world's racial logic but also as a source of alternative futurities and ontological creativity, a life that wells up from 'history's downstairs', asserting itself even amid death and dispossession.

While I am drawn to this thinking of blackness as a poetics of refusal, rethinking being and embodying black spiritualities that resist and rupture dominant orders. However, as has been established, such formations also risk reproduce anti-black logics. For instance, critiques of the 'para-ontological' (as in Fred Moten and Nahum Chandler) raise concerns in that para-ontological discourse makes a return to the question of being, albeit from a different or similar metaphysical foundation. Furthermore, in *Anteaeesthetics: Black aesthetics and the critique of form*, Rizvana Bradley (2023) cites Axelle Karera's (2022:8–197), warning against equating ontological unreadability with fugitivity, noting its limited resonance with lived black experience. Ultimately, Bradley's concept of anteaeesthetics proposes that black existence both precedes and exceeds ontology and aesthetic form, requiring a framework beyond ontological or phenomenological terms (Bradley 2023:10–14). This opens space to rethink Black Theology through Warren's call to return to the abyss,⁸ the unfounded world prior to the metaphysical empire of whiteness.

Waywarding Black Theology: Towards the end of the world

Reflecting on this line of analysis, Chipato and Chandler (2023:15) cite Warren's assertion that blackness derives its meaning only within a world structured by anti-blackness. It is this systemic negation that underpins and sustains modern conceptions of being. In other words, 'the world' itself is constituted through the exclusion and subjugation of blackness. This aligns with Da Silva's (2014:84) notion of living 'at the end of the world as we know it', signalling not merely historical crisis but ontological rupture. Such rupture extends into the domain of Black Theology, where the political and philosophical task is not to imagine more just futures within the existing world, but to refuse the world altogether and confront the anti-black foundations upon which it rests.

8. For Calvin Warren, the abyss names Black existence as that which escapes all conceptual capture. Read through David Marriott, it marks the collapse of meaning itself – the point where thought, language, and ontology fail to hold Blackness. Far from despair, the abyss is a radical site of unmeaning: a tabula rasa from which to think otherwise, beyond the liberal and metaphysical frameworks that depend on anti-Black exclusion. See, for example, Sirvent (2022).

This resonates with apocalyptic or eschatological traditions where the world must end for justice, salvation or liberation to begin (although these theological schools remain largely entrapped in status quo Christianised metaphysics). Instead of working to redeem the world, a Black Theology aligned with the 'end of the world' thesis might embrace refusal, the rejection of the world as it is, not because there is no hope, but because hope within this world is a trap. A Black Theology in conversation with the idea of the end of the world might not seek to save the world but to unmake it, to side with the divine not as a saviour of civilisation, but as a force of rupture, justice and refusal. It asks not how God can help us survive in the anti-black, misogynistic, homophobic world, but how or if God (or the sacred) might exist with us outside it altogether. I am raising the tension therefore offering a both/and approach subject to further reflection between blackness reconfigured as through divinity or God the Liberator, and blackness and the end of the anti-black metaphysical, captured profoundly by artist, jazz percussionist, and thinker Tumi Mogorosi (2022) who articulates the following in a video documentary:

We need to start thinking about song beyond its representational qualities within the sonic but to think about song in terms of Blackness as an experience in the world, that in the end, when the world ends, Blackness will also end ... [and] We will be something else on the other side ... If the world doesn't end, we will remain black. (00:03–00:46)

Calling for the end of the world offers a clear departure from the anti-black metaphysical brutality of racism en route (Maluleke 2020). However, it does offer some, if not the same amount of vagueness that Karera prescribes on ontological variances in paraontology. What does the end of the world really mean, and how do we ensure we don't carry over the metaphysics of doom with it? Chipato and Chandler (2023:6–8, 13) note how the end of the world sometimes means never the end or everything. Furthermore, they agree that the end does offer great clarity in the end of the modern epistome, but that inquire what happens after the end of the world as being a critical question of avoiding reintroduction of the pervasive metaphysical. This sacred thought and spiritual undertaking, I offer, is critical for the agenda of Black Theology. Thinkers like Warren offer a refreshing if not startling diagnosis of the problem, and insolvability of anti-blackness, but offer little immediate praxis. I am also suspicious of certain notions of futurity as also 'being' reliant on time in its colonial sense, where anti-black time reveals a warped sense of time⁹ entrapped in the system of progress, advancement, which is directly proportional to black debt, mortality, violence and enslavement.

9. For example, in *Dismantling the Master's Clock*, Rasheedah Phillips (2025) offers a rigorous critique of Western constructions of time, arguing that dominant temporal frameworks are not objective or universal truths, but rather racialised constructs born out of colonial domination, scientific rationalism and capitalist expansion. She demonstrates how standardised temporal systems such as those embedded in colonial navigation, plantation time regimes, Daylight Savings, and Greenwich Mean Time have historically functioned as instruments of control, particularly over black bodies and spatial movements.

What this article offers, then, is not a resolution, but a holding – an impossible synthesis – between Black Theology's redemptive vision and black studies' exposure of blackness as the condition of the world's undoing. By naming this method Wayward Black Theology, I do not propose a stable theological framework, but a fugitive and fractured orientation grounded in lament, refusal, and the poesis of black life towards the end of this anti-black world. It is a theology that calls for the end of the world not simply as a political desire, but as a metaphysical rupture and dislodging of the ontological scaffolding that has rendered blackness as both the limit and the engine of being itself. If my approach cannot hold these tensions together, it is because they were never meant to be reconciled. Rather, by lingering in the break, this work gestures towards a black theological imagination that is not invested in repair, but in the sacred work of rupture, a refusal of the world as it is, and an opening towards the otherwise that blackness requires.

Conclusion

This article has argued that Black Theology, while historically a radical site of resistance and liberation, remains entangled in the metaphysical scaffolding of anti-blackness. Anti-blackness, as examined here, is not merely a political failure or colonial residue, but the ontological ground of modernity itself. As such, even liberatory theological discourses, particularly those rooted in Christian and philosophical notions of redemption and salvation, risk reproducing the very structures they seek to dismantle. Liberation, then, cannot be achieved within reformist logics or theological frameworks that remain tethered to the world as it is.

Drawing on interdisciplinary insights from black studies, and especially Armstrong's concept of 'Wayward Black Theology', this article proposed a reorientation that foregrounds continued refusal, lament, and the poesis of black life as theological imperatives. Waywardness is here taken as a method: A refusal of closure, coherence and metaphysical security. It names a theology that lingers in the break, unsettles ontological assumptions, and resists the lure of redemption within systems never meant to sustain black life. Black Theology, in this view, is not called to reconcile with the world, but to participate in its unmaking.

The article explored the tensions and possibilities of thinking Black Theology through black poesis as both radical creative force and world-ending condition. These tensions, held between Black Theology and black studies, call for deeper engagement. In response, the article advocates a both/and approach: one that unthinks the metaphysical holocaust imposed on black life. Here, this irreconcilability between liberation and negation is highlighted rather than resolved. By lingering with these tensions, the article gestures towards theological orientations that move before anti-black logics (ante) returning to the abyss, within the structures of the anti-

black world because this is where we find ourselves, and beyond its ruptured epistemes (the end of this world), towards the truth of the divine unbound by Western metaphysics. What is offered here is not a conclusion, but an opening for further dialogue between Black Theology and black studies.

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CRedit authorship contribution

Fabian A. Oliver: Conceptualisation, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. The author confirms that this work is entirely their own, has reviewed the article, approved the final version for submission and publication, and takes full responsibility for the integrity of its findings.

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