

Joshua Maponga’s Concept of ‘Blackness’ in Theological Discourse: An Examination

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Abstract

The article examines Joshua Maponga’s concept of “blackness” in theological discourse. Maponga’s work has been instrumental in shaping the field of Black Theology in South Africa, and his concept of “blackness” is central to his theological discourse. Through a qualitative research methodology, combining critical discourse analysis and theological hermeneutics of Maponga’s writings and interviews on YouTube, Facebook and Instagram, this article explores the complexities and nuances of his concept of “blackness” and its implications for theological discourse. The analysis is informed by critical theory of intersectionality that embraces aspects of race, identity, and power, as well as theological concepts and frameworks. The article concludes by arguing that Maponga’s concept of “blackness” is multifaceted and context-dependent, and that it challenges dominant Western theological paradigms.

Contribution: Through exploring the intricacies and shades of Maponga’s concept of “blackness,” the article validates the position of contextualising theological discourse within specific cultural, social, and historical settings to advance the field of Black Theology in South Africa.

Keywords: Blackness; Discourse; Examination; Joshua Maponga; Theological

Introduction

Joshua Maponga is a prominent Zimbabwean born public speaker, author, philosopher, leader, musician, social entrepreneur, theologian and Pan Africanist who has made

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significant contributions to the field of Black Theology. He has a BA Theology degree in Philosophy and Personal Ministries. He has also received a Construction Entrepreneurial Training (CET) through the International Labor Organization. He was conferred a bishop after 33 years in ministry as a pastor, (Masvotore & Mujinga 2025:294, Pindula n.d, Events Cloud n.d). His work has been instrumental in shaping the theological discourse in South Africa and Africa at large, and his concept of “blackness” is central to his theological project.

This article meticulously analyses Maponga’s view of “blackness” within theological discourse, exploring its intricacy and gradations, as well as its significance for theology. Furthermore, this paper is motivated by the impact of Joshua Maponga’s superlative and outspoken teachings and passion for decolonising theology and re-enforcing black theology to Africans. In his own words

This works as a means of addressing socio-economic and political African problems, that are flawed with poverty, corruption, and the forces of remnants of colonialism, which includes white supremacy, racism, land redistribution, neo-colonialism, and the continuous impact and effects of coloniality of power, knowledge and being in the theological discourse (Maponga 2022:2).

The purpose of this paper is to introduce the idea of blackness from the Greek mythological and philosophical concept and to analyse Joshua Maponga’s contribution to the discussion of blackness with an emphasis on Africa and African culture. Furthermore, as a seasoned pastor who became a culturist, this study contends that Maponga’s teachings have become intense, harsh, and highly contentious in the theological space.

Methodology and Framework

The study employed qualitative research methods combining critical discourse analysis and theological hermeneutics. This research is based on a literature review method, making use of existing data such as literature (articles and books) and sources from the internet and social media platforms such as videos. The research is based on a close reading of Maponga’s writings and interviews on YouTube, Facebook and Instagram, as well as an analysis of the theoretical frameworks and concepts that underpin his work. The analysis is informed by the concept of blackness and critical theory of intersectionality that combine issues of race, identity, and power, as well as theological concepts and frameworks (Maldonado-Torres 2014). In this qualitative study the researchers’ purpose is to get an in-depth and holistic view on groups of people, places, programmes, events, or any phenomenon of interest by engaging directly with the persons being studied, in this case Maponga. Qualitative research focuses on specific individuals, places, subcultures, and scenes to gain a subjective understanding of how people perceive, reflect, role-play, interpret, and interact (Adler and Adler 2012).

This study utilised social media platforms as primary sources of data. Specifically, the authors analysed content from YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, Pinterest, and Facebook, where Joshua Maponga, a pastor and public speaker, shared his insights and responded to interview questions. As Rogers (2019:5022) notes, “research is about producing new information, and social media offers unique opportunities to present new content.” Furthermore, Tsvetkova (2023) highlights the rapid growth of social media,

with almost one million new users joining some form of social media every day, or a new user every 10 seconds. 300 hours of video are uploaded to YouTube alone every minute. Given the vast amount of data available on social media, it has become an essential source for primary data collection in research. Be that as it may, a sift through this vast amount of data is needed to evaluate data that is relevant and credible. Attention will be paid to content curated by Maponga and full interviews posted by reputable sources instead of Tik Tok videos of people editing or commenting on Maponga's work, which might not accurately represent Maponga. Furthermore, the authors examined some of Joshua Maponga's presentations, which showcased his expertise as a pastor, public speaker, author, philosopher, leader, musician, social entrepreneur, anthropologist, and hermit (Masvotore and Mujinga 2025:295). Through analysing his online content, the authors gained insights into his thoughts and ideas on various topics.

The concept of discourse has undergone significant evolution across various academic disciplines. Originally, it focused on language in use, but now it encompasses broader understandings of language as a form of social practice and power. Scholars working in fields such as linguistics, critical theory, sociology, and education have shaped discourse into a central analytical concept. At its core, discourse refers to language in context, particularly in extended texts or speech. Brown and Yule (1983) emphasise its contextual nature in meaning-making. Critical scholars like Fairclough (1992) define discourse as both representation and social practice, highlighting its role in constructing social identities, relationships, and knowledge systems. Fairclough and Wodak (1997) stress that discourse is context-dependent and interconnected with other discourses. Wodak and Meyer (2009) also argue that discourse shapes and is shaped by social structures, institutions, and power relations. This perspective is fundamental to Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which examines how language contributes to social inequality.

Foucault (1972) views discourse as a system of knowledge that defines what can be said, who can speak, and what counts as truth. Gee (2011) introduces the concept of "Discourses" (with a capital D), highlighting how discourse enacts particular identities and social roles beyond speech or writing. The academic literature presents discourse as a multifaceted concept encompassing ideological, institutional, and historical dimensions of language. The Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) developed by Fairclough and Wodak offers a valuable tool for analysing how language reflects and reinforces power relations, ideologies, and institutional identities. DHA's emphasis on historical context, intertextuality, and strategic language use, makes it suitable for exploring Maponga's contribution to the concept of blackness.

The intersectionality theory has been employed as the lens to view the blackness concept propagated by Maponga. As highlighted in the introduction, the researchers have long acknowledged the intricate relationships between various forms of identity and social hierarchies, as well as the interconnected nature of social divisions (Anthias, 2012). This paper examines a selection of material on Maponga's social media platforms that employs an intersectionality approach, as described by Dhamoon (2010). This approach involves studying not only different social groups but also the differences within and among these groups. According to Dhamoon (2011:230), intersectionality theory in research aims to describe, explain, and critique complex power dynamics in various contexts, ultimately offering alternative perspectives. In using this approach, the

study aims to examine how social identities are constructed and experienced in Maponga's blackness concept, and to analyse how social categories, such as race, gender, and class, are created and maintained. It further helps to investigate how social differences are produced and reproduced and to examine how power operates in society, perpetuating inequality and marginalisation (Dhamoon 2011). This paper reviews various applications of intersectionality across multiple topics with particular emphasis on the concept of blackness to uncover how social differences are produced and maintained, and how marginalised groups are affected. Furthermore, to examine how social categories intersect and interact, and how these relationships shape individual and group experiences.

Literature review

This literature review will explore blackness from the Greek mythological and philosophical concept of blackness and the African Black consciousness movement in South Africa in order to situate this paper in its proper context for the benefit of the reader.

Concept of Blackness from a Greek mythological, philosophical perspective

The association between "black" and negative connotations has its roots in ancient Greek literature. In Homer's epic poem, the Iliad, the anger of Agamemnon is described using the phrase "μενος δε μεγα φρενες αμφιμελαιναι πιμπλαντ" (Gordon 2010:3), which introduces the concept of "black" as a metaphor for darkness and negativity (Hrabovosky 2013:68). This metaphorical connection between "black" and negativity is also evident in Greek mythology (Graves 2004). The creation myth of Homer and Orpheus features the black-winged Night (Νυξ; νυκτος – niktos) and Erebus (darkness) giving birth to a silver egg, from which Eros, a symbol of light and the sun, emerges. This mythological narrative reinforces the idea that darkness and blackness are antithetical to light and life (Hrabovosky 2013:68).

Furthermore, Hrabovosky declared that,

In Greek mythology, the underworld, Tartarus (Ταρταρος), is depicted as a grove of black poplars, symbolizing death and the afterlife. In contrast, Elysion (Ηλυσιον) is a paradise-like realm filled with light. This dichotomy between light and darkness, white and black, is a recurring theme in ancient Greek thought. The Pythagorean school of thought also explored the concept of opposites, including the contrast between light and darkness. Aristotle attributed to Alcmaeaon of Croton the idea that light (φως – fós) and darkness (σκοτος – skotos) are fundamental opposites. Diogenes Laertius noted that the Pythagoreans associated white with good nature and black with bad (Hrabovosky 2013:68).

The etymology of the Greek word for black, φλεγειν (flegein meaning to burn, to scorch), is also revealing. The root of the word is connected to φλεγμα (flegma meaning flame, heat, fire), which was used to explain the origin of black skin in ancient Greek theories of race (Liddel & Scott 1875; Hrabovosky 2013:68). The Phaeton myth, in which the sun god Helios' son borrows his chariot and scorches the earth, was used to justify the idea that black skin was a result of the intense heat of the sun (Hrabovosky 2013:68).

The negative Understanding of Blackness from the Greek Mythological and Philosophical perspective through the Empires and Colonialism

The concept of Blackness has been permeated with adverse undertones throughout antiquity, starting from ancient Greek mythology and philosophy. This undesirable thought has been preserved and strengthened cutting across innumerable domains, including colonisation, becoming an intricate and intensely deep-rooted phenomenon (Hall 1996; Dyer 1997). As discussed in the section above, in Greek mythology, the gods and goddesses remained portrayed as white, whereas the felonious and darkness remained connected with the mysterious, chaos, and evil (Bernal 1987). Some of the philosophers, such as Aristotle, labelled the Ethiopians as “farthest removed from the Greeks”, seeing a direct link between their dark skin and inferiority (Aristotle 350 BCE, Book VII, Part 7).

During the Roman Empire, the association of darkness with evil and inferiority was further coagulated (Snowden 1970). The transatlantic slave trade and European colonialism aggravated these negative labels, describing Africans as “savage,” “heathen,” and “inferior” to justify exploitation and oppression (Jordan 1968). The idea of white supremacy emerged, with whiteness being associated with purity, goodness, and civilisation (Hooks 1992). These negative associations have been embedded in Western culture through various channels, including language. For example, words such as “blackmail,” “blacklist,” and “black sheep” disseminate damaging meanings (Smith 2014). When one looks at the art and literature used in Western culture, the portrayals of Black people in art and literature have often reinforced stereotypes and negative tropes (Gilroy 1993). The way history is taught often distorts or erases the contributions and experiences of Black people (King 2014). Any discoveries or inventions of good things are associated with white people while anything that is dark or negative is attributed to blacks. The embeddedness of negative understandings of Blackness has led to systemic racism, discrimination, and inequality (Feagin 2006). It has also contributed to internalised racism, self-doubt, and marginalisation within Black communities (Fanon 1967:26, 27). Recognising and challenging these negative associations is crucial for promoting equity and justice. This can be done through reclaiming and redefining Blackness and Black identity (Asante 2007:174). Practical examples include promoting diverse and inclusive representations in media and education (Hooks 1992) and addressing systemic racism and inequality (Feagin 2006) through raising black consciousness.

A Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of the above provides a critical examination of the negative understanding of Blackness from a Greek mythological and philosophical perspective through the empires and colonialism. Through applying CDA, we can uncover the underlying power dynamics, ideological assumptions, and social relationships embedded in the passage. In terms of power dynamics, it shows how dominant narratives have perpetuated negative associations with Blackness, reinforcing systemic racism and inequality. The above passage critiques the role of colonialism and imperialism in perpetuating negative stereotypes and labels, emphasising the need to challenge these dominant narratives. It further outlines racial superiority, where the ideological assumption of white supremacy dominates, highlighting how it has been used to justify exploitation and oppression. Elements of cultural bias are indicated where the

article highlights how Western culture has embedded negative associations with Blackness, reinforcing stereotypes and negative tropes.

In regard to social relationships, negative understandings of Blackness have led to marginalisation within Black communities, contributing to internalised racism and self-doubt. Systemic racism and inequality have been perpetuated through negative associations with Blackness. Furthermore, the paper critiques how language has been used to disseminate damaging meanings, reinforcing negative stereotypes and associations with Blackness. It further highlights the importance of promoting diverse and inclusive representations in media and education to challenge negative stereotypes and associations. There is need for reclaiming and redefining Blackness and Black identity to promote equity and justice. Lastly there is need to address systemic racism and inequality through raising black consciousness and promoting diverse and inclusive representations.

The African Understanding of Blackness from the Black Consciousness perspective

A thorough analysis of Black Consciousness necessitates a clear and comprehensive definition. The 1972 Policy Manifesto of the South African Students' Organisation (SASO) defines Black Consciousness as "an attitude of mind, a way of life" that rejects value systems imposed by outsiders, which undermine the dignity and humanity of Black people (SASO 1972). The definition implies that, Black Consciousness embodies an awareness and pride in Black identity, emphasising the importance of self-appreciation and self-worth. It also acknowledges the significance of indigenous value systems, including socio-economic, political, and cultural values (United Nations 1976). This appreciation is rooted in the need to reject foreign-imposed value systems that perpetuate exploitation and oppression (Resane 2021).

The essence of Black Consciousness lies in redefining and reidentifying oneself, free from the imposed values of the oppressor (Dolamo 2017). This requires a critical reappraisal of the Black experience in the context of a racist, exploitative South Africa. Resane further buttresses this idea by reiterating that,

Black Consciousness challenges Black individuals to redefine themselves, reject foreign values, and reclaim their dignity and humanity. A crucial aspect of Black Consciousness is the call for cohesive group solidarity, or Black solidarity. This solidarity is essential for building a strong base to counter the oppressor's divide-and-rule tactics. Black Consciousness emphasizes group pride and determination, enabling Black people to rise together against oppression and exploitation (Resane 2021:7).

At its core, Black Consciousness recognises that the most potent tool of oppression is the mind of the oppressed. The oppressors have manipulated and twisted the minds of Black people to make them susceptible to exploitation. Black Consciousness advocates for a psychological revolution, aimed at eliminating stereotypes, slave mentality, and feelings of inadequacy. For Dolamo

The fundamental logic of Black Consciousness is that true liberation requires the eradication of slave mentality and the acceptance of oneself as a full human being. Black Consciousness empowers Black people to see themselves as complete, total, and worthy of dignity and respect. Some critics have accused Black Consciousness proponents of rejecting coalition-building with white liberals (Dolamo 2017:6).

However, a critical evaluation of the history of white liberal involvement in the Black struggle reveals that their efforts have often arrested and aborted the struggle, serving as a buffer zone between Black people and the oppressive white system.

Presentation of Findings and Discussion

Having gleaned through the literature review that informs this study, the following are the findings that this paper will discuss under the given subheadings. Theologising the colour black to situate the discussion into context and Maponga's view of the concept blackness where critical discourse analysis and hermeneutical interpretation shall be used to analyse the findings.

Theologisation of the Colour Black

The idea of blackness remains a primary criterion for determining a person's racial origin, with negative connotations. The ancient environmental explanation for black skin, attributing it to the effects of sunlight, has become intertwined with symbolic meanings of blackness, including negation, death, evil, and illness. This understanding is rooted in a physiological conception of black skin. During the Middle Ages, the colour black became theologised, associating it with darkness and the devil (Fanon 2008). This led to the stigmatisation of black skin, with its bearers being viewed as cursed and sinful. The theologisation of blackness was further perpetuated by the story of Ham's condemnation (Genesis 9:18–27), which was later used to justify the enslavement of Africans. In the modern era, this theological understanding of blackness was incorporated into racial theories, solidifying blackness as a "scientifically" accepted indicator of inferior status (Jablonski 2006:95). Despite the lack of scientific basis for these theories, they continue to influence racist perceptions of blackness. Linguistic studies have failed to provide a clear definition of blackness, highlighting the artificial and socially constructed nature of racial concepts. As Nina G. Jablonski notes in her book *Skin: A Natural History* (2006:5), "The best way to beat prejudice is not to dismiss skin as 'just skin' or to brag that one is 'color blind.'" Instead, the most effective way to defeat skin-colour bias is to foster an appreciation of skin function and the wonderfully adaptive roots of its variation. Prejudice cannot be eradicated by mere tolerance. It is only a deep understanding that can eventually lead to the demise of racism.

Furthermore, Willie James Jennings' book *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* (2010) is a seminal work that explores how Christian theology has been intertwined with the concept of race, particularly in the context of colonialism and imperialism. Jennings argues that Christianity's highly refined process of socialisation has inadvertently created and maintained segregated societies, despite its premise of neighbourly love (Jennings 2010). Jennings further contends that the concept of race was embedded into Christian theology through the processes of displacement, translation, and intimacy. He examines how Christian intellectuals and theologians participated in

the geographical and geopolitical construction of imperialism, often justifying the subjugation and commodification of non-European peoples (Jennings 2010: 4). Additionally, he analyses how the displacement of people from their homelands and the reconfiguration of bodies and space were performed as theological operations. This led to the formation of racial identities and the naturalisation of separatist arrangements within institutional orders. He also explores how Bible translation and biblical literacy movements contributed to the creation of segregated mentalities and Christianity. Jennings argues that these movements often alienated Christian Africans from their land, communities, and traditions. Be that as it may, Jennings proposes a new imagining of intimacy and community, one that involves deep joining and the opening of lives to one another in love and desire. He suggests that this can be achieved by reimagining Christian identity through the particularity of Jesus and the joining of lives across cultural and racial divides (Jennings 2010:7–8). It can be noted that Jennings’s contribution is significant in highlighting the ways in which Christian theology has been implicated in the construction of racial identities and the perpetuation of segregation.

Joshua Maponga’s Concept of Blackness

Maponga’s concept of “blackness” is multifaceted and dependent on context. He defines “blackness” as an intricate and multifaceted concept that encompasses the experiences, cultures, and identities of black people in South Africa (Maponga, 2022). When applying critical discourse analysis (CDA)³ to the statement above which involves examining the language, power dynamics, and social context (Fairclough and Wodak 1997:258), one can discover that there is essentialism versus complexity. Maponga defines “blackness” as complex and multilayered, acknowledging diversity within black experiences. This challenges essentialist philosophies of blackness, promoting a diverse understanding. On the aspect of contextualisation, the definition is rooted in the South African context, highlighting the country’s specific history, culture, and social dynamics. This contextualisation is crucial for understanding the complexities of black experiences. In centring black experiences, cultures, and identities, Maponga’s definition potentially subverts dominant narratives that often marginalise or erase black perspectives. The use of “encompasses” suggests an inclusive approach, implying that Maponga’s definition aims to capture the breadth of black experiences. On ideological underpinnings, Maponga’s definition may reflect a critical or radical perspective, challenging dominant discourses that homogenise or stereotype black people. The above analysis tried to answer questions such as, what are the historical and social contexts that shape Maponga’s definition? How does this definition relate to existing power structures and dominant narratives, and what implications does this definition have for understanding

³ The use of Fairclough and Wodak’s Discourse-Historical Approach (Fairclough and Wodak 1997; Wodak and Meyer 2009) is used to analyse Maponga’s understanding of blackness. Discourse in this study refers to the way language is used within a community, encompassing speech patterns, dialects, and accepted statements. Discourse analysis is the study of language in social contexts, examining how language shapes and is shaped by society. CDA is a method of analysing language to uncover power relationships and inequalities in social contexts. It considers how language works within institutional and political discourses to reveal hidden power dynamics. According to Fairclough and Wodak, language use is a social practice that has a dialectical relationship with the social structures and institutions that frame it (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997:258). For the benefit of the reader Critical Discourse Analysis will examine the language, power dynamics, ideological assumptions, and social relationships embedded in Maponga’s understanding of blackness.

black experiences and identities in South Africa? Through examining these aspects, CDA uncovered the underlying power dynamics, ideological assumptions, and social relationships (Wodak and Meyer 2009) embedded in Maponga's definition of "blackness." For Maponga, "blackness" is not just a racial category, but a cultural and existential reality that shapes the lives and experiences of black people.

Maponga's concept of "blackness" is also deeply rooted in the African cultural and theological heritage. He draws on African cultural resources, such as traditional myths, rituals, and symbols, to develop a distinctive Black theological perspective (Maponga, 2020). For Maponga (2018:7.22–7.36)

When an African is demanding for his dominion, he is not asking for sympathy, he is in fact assuming a divine prerogative. It is an insult of the highest order to have a child and that child dies as a slave.

A Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to this statement reveals several key aspects, first and foremost that there is assertion of agency. The statement positions the African as a demanding subject, asserting their right to dominion. This challenges traditional power dynamics where Africans might be seen as passive recipients of sympathy or charity. Secondly, there is divine prerogative whereby, framing the demand for dominion as a divine prerogative, the statement implies a transcendent or natural right to self-determination. This elevates the African's claim to a sacred or moral imperative. The third aspect is resistance and defiance where the statement highlights the grave injustice of having one's child die as a slave, emphasising the emotional and moral outrage associated with such a loss. This underscores the brutality and indignity of slavery. Furthermore, Maponga challenges the oppressive systems. Through characterising the loss of a child to slavery as an "insult of the highest order," the statement implicitly condemns the systems and structures that perpetuate such injustices.

From a cultural and historical context, which in this case is an African perspective, the statement from Maponga appears to reflect an African viewpoint, potentially challenging dominant narratives or Eurocentric views on issues like slavery, colonialism, or identity. There is also evidence of historical resonance where the reference to slavery and dominion may evoke historical struggles for freedom, self-determination, and human rights, situating the statement within a broader historical context. In terms of rhetorical strategies there is an emotional appeal from the statement where the use of emotive language, such as "insult of the highest order," aims to evoke strong feelings and moral outrage, potentially mobilising readers or listeners to action. In framing the demand for dominion as a divine prerogative and highlighting the injustice of slavery, the statement employs moral language to legitimise the African's claim and delegitimise oppressive systems.

On YouTube, trying to discuss the concept of blackness, Maponga (2021: 13.44–15.39) has this to say,

If this God cannot identify with black people, then he is an idol. Ask me why, ask me why? Then it means that he is foreign to us. If a Zulu person walks in here wearing traditional attire, seeking to repent, then all of us feel embarrassed, such that we look for trousers or shorts to cover him first before he could meet our Jesus,

he needs to be removed from his *Zuluness* and become dressed first and worse still if you beat a drum and that Jesus runs through the window out. But when you play a soft English song and play organ he walks in gently and address his people, then this God is evil because for him the African or black person is a nullity. Theologically it means he never created a black person, because a black person scares him. He cannot relate with blackness but only with white people, then this God is not acceptable (YouTube 2021:13.44–15.39).

Applying Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and hermeneutics to this statement reveals several key aspects. In his statement, Maponga demonstrates power dynamics and identity by challenging dominant narratives. The speaker critiques traditional Christian representations of God, arguing that if God cannot identify with black people, He is an idol. This challenges dominant Eurocentric interpretations of Christianity. Furthermore, he is bringing African experiences from the periphery to the centre. The statement highlights the importance of African culture and experiences, emphasising the need for a God who can relate to blackness the same way that God would have to relate to Whiteness, or Asian Americanness and any other race. For it is written in the Scriptures that “There is no Jew nor Greek, there is no slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28). This verse is interpreted theologically to mean that in the eyes of God, distinctions like ethnicity, race, social status, and gender become irrelevant. All humanity created by God is equal before God. Additionally, Maponga critiques cultural imperialism through denouncing cultural erasure. The speaker criticises the expectation that Africans must abandon their cultural identity (e.g., traditional attire) to approach God. This highlights the tension between cultural identity and imposed Western norms. There is also an element of highlighting hypocrisy where the contrast between Jesus’ reaction to African cultural expressions (drumming) and Western cultural expressions (organ music) underscores the perceived hypocrisy and cultural bias.

There is evidence of theological implications in the rejection of a culturally exclusive God. The speaker argues that a God who cannot relate to black people is not acceptable, implying that a truly universal God must be inclusive of diverse cultures and experiences. As we saw earlier in Galatians 3:28, earthly identifiers create no value distinction before God. No race is a master race, nor any ethnicity inferior to the other. Furthermore, Maponga questioned creation and humanity. The statement suggests that if God cannot relate to blackness, it implies that God did not create black people or value their humanity. In regard to rhetorical strategies, there seems to be an emotional appeal. The use of vivid imagery and rhetorical questions (“Ask me why?”) aims to evoke strong emotions and emphasise the speaker’s points. In his rhetorical expression, Maponga throws in provocative language. The characterisation of God as “evil” if He cannot relate to black people is a provocative statement meant to challenge dominant narratives and spark critical reflection.

There are also hermeneutic considerations in terms of interpretive framework where the speaker’s interpretation of God and Christianity is shaped by their experiences as a black person, highlighting the importance of contextual and experiential hermeneutics. Furthermore, there is a need to consider the cultural and historical context where the statement reflects the historical and ongoing struggles of African people to assert their

cultural identity and challenge dominant narratives. Generally, if we apply CDA and hermeneutics, we can gain a deeper understanding of the complex power dynamics, cultural tensions, and theological implications embedded in this statement.

Be that as it may, this perspective emphasises the importance of African cultural and theological traditions in shaping the theological discourse in South Africa. Maponga's concept of "blackness" has significant implications for theological discourse. Firstly, it challenges dominant Western theological paradigms, which have historically marginalised African cultural and theological perspectives (Maponga, 2020). Secondly, it highlights the importance of African cultural and theological traditions in shaping theological discourse in South Africa. Finally, it emphasises the need for a contextual and liberation-oriented theology that takes seriously the experiences and struggles of black people in South Africa.

Critique of Maponga's work

Joshua Maponga's concept of "blackness" is multifaceted and context-dependent, encompassing the experiences, cultures, and identities of black people in South Africa. While Maponga's work challenges dominant Western theological paradigms and highlights the importance of African cultural and theological traditions, there are potential criticisms and limitations to consider.

There is potential essentialism in Maponga's concept of "blackness" that might be seen as essentialising African experiences, neglecting diversity within African cultures, as his scope is quite limited. Maponga's work is primarily focused on the South African context, which might limit its applicability to other contexts. Last but not least, he uses provocative language. Maponga's use of provocative language, such as characterising God as "evil" if He cannot relate to black people, might be seen as alienating or divisive. Furthermore, Joshua Maponga's work is notable in African theology, but his multireligious background makes his ideas hard to accept as a solution to the conflicts between African theology and Indigenous knowledge systems. To truly benefit from his work, we need to critically evaluate his ideas. Maponga's experiences, including his excommunication from the SDA Church, may have influenced his writing. For example, his description of Jesus as the "blue-eyed boy" shows a misunderstanding of Christology, where Jesus' human nature is a revelation of God, not God himself. We need to approach Maponga's work with caution and critically assess his ideas to find value in them (Mujinga and Masvotore 2025:7).

Summary and Conclusion

Joshua Maponga's concept of "blackness" is a complex and multifaceted concept that encompasses the experiences, cultures, and identities of black people in South Africa. His concept of "blackness" is deeply rooted in the African cultural and theological heritage, and challenges dominant Western theological paradigms. The implications of Maponga's concept of "blackness" for theological discourse are significant, highlighting the importance of African cultural and theological traditions, and the need for a contextual and liberation-oriented theology. The article provides an examination of Joshua Maponga's concept of "blackness" in theological discourse, advancing the field of Black Theology in South Africa. Through exploring the complexities and nuances of Maponga's concept of "blackness," the article demonstrates the importance of

contextualising theological discourse within specific cultural, social, and historical settings. The article argues that Maponga's concept of "blackness" challenges dominant Western theological paradigms, highlighting the need for more diverse and inclusive theological perspectives. The article's methodology combines critical discourse analysis, theological hermeneutics, and critical theories of intersectionality, demonstrating the value of interdisciplinary approaches in theological research. The article's use of qualitative research methodology, including the analysis of Maponga's writings and YouTube interviews, contributes to the empirical research on Black Theology and its key concepts. In examining the implications of Maponga's concept of "blackness" for theological discourse, the article encourages critical reflection on power dynamics within theological contexts. The article's exploration of Maponga's concept of "blackness" expands the theological vocabulary, enabling more nuanced discussions of race, identity, and power within theological contexts.

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