

Public Abstract

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Because of the influence of Christianity in Western culture, the Bible became a reservoir of potential and diverse representations that could be called upon in order to explain the unknown to Western audiences. Ever since the first exploration of undiscovered spaces, Western travel narrators and ethnographers relied heavily on the biblical imaginary to describe these newly “discovered”lands and their inhabitants. Motifs and images from the Bible became the normative measure to be used in order to label and/or judge the value of the Other. In order to support and justify the slave trade and the colonial enterprise, Western powers relied heavily on distorted interpretations of Christian scriptures to justify the domination black people by white people. The biblical curse of Canaan and the letters of Paul were often called upon to justify turning millions of human beings into merchandise to serve the Western semi-god of capitalism under the protective cloak of the Christianizing mission.

In the pages that follow, I will demonstrate how a group of artists in the Black Atlantic re-appropriated the biblical Christ-figure to make their own political arguments within an aesthetic context. Just as the West used the Bible to deprive slaves of their human rights, these artists re-cast Jesus in their own image, one that is interestingly gender-neutral and non-white. For these writers, the attributes that confer significance on the redeemer figure are linked less to his divine status than to his propensity for healing, his transcendence of suffering, his rebellion against a corrupt and materialistic status quo and the bracketing of bodily violence and redemptive transcendence.