



## INTERVIEW-DIALOGUE

### Why Black Lives Matter: Power, Privilege and Patriarchy?

**Todd DuBose & Michael R. Montgomery**

**Michael R. Montgomery [MM]:** Having watched many months of protest about police brutality and racial inequality, I published a few pieces on power and racism. Through reflection, listening and encounters with others, I have concluded that difficult conversations and action need to take place by white people – in particular, white males. But rather than write more on the subject, I thought I could call upon my good friend and brother for some deeper insights. Before we begin, I wanted to position a few themes that may also contribute to the backdrop of our discussion.

The first is Miki Kashtan's (2020) timely article 'The power of soft qualities to transform patriarchy'. She argues convincingly that patriarchy cannot be fought in traditional ways, and instead proposes the use of soft qualities. The second is Manu Bazzano's (2020) new concept of the necessity to create a 'counter-fantasy' on the political Left to combat the fantasies on the Right, such as fear of immigration, fear of diversity, fear of Other. Bazzano argues that without adequate (counter)-

fantasy, there's no future for justice, equality, or for an ethics of solidarity.

I also wanted to acknowledge how I experience your personal presentation of masculinity because I see you as a powerful man who has so much of what we would think as the more feminine qualities. You haven't let go of your strength and your power, but you're deeply connected with vulnerability, compassion, and soul. I have a background curiosity in how much of that impacts some of the thinking on race. I will begin by asking, do black lives matter?

**Todd DuBose [TD]:** I think the reason why we must insist that black lives matter is because of the very fact that we seem to need a slogan, 'Black Lives Matter', on placards in the streets and shouted through megaphones to remind us of what should be automatic – but it's not. I think black lives and black bodies have been forgotten, or at least relegated to the subjugated. This, as you know, originated to protest the reduction of policing to soldiering, and with a particular target of its brutality against black bodies. I got

that phrase from my son, who sent me a clip from the series, 'The Wire'. A beautiful clip about the difference between policing and soldiering. My partner and I were talking last night about how this fact led us to the idea of 'defunding the police' or not. The way the Left communicates this is heard by the Right as 'We're not going to pay the police any more, we don't need the police and we're just going to be anarchic on the streets'.

I don't think that's what is being proposed. It's about being able to pay for training and experience to uncouple policing from soldiering, and deconstructing institutionally racist practices of soldiering. It gets down to the fact that if you watch these videos of these young black kids – basically, most of them kids – being shot, up to George Floyd's murder and other incessant violence perpetrated on other black men and black women, it is no wonder that particularly the black males I work with here on the southside in Chicago don't expect to live past 18 or 19 years of age.

What I see in some of these shooting videos is somebody walking away, or they may be waving a knife, but nobody is charging any police officers, and besides, police are equipped with tasers and a variety of different ways to disarm a dangerous person. Why, then, should any of these kids be shot in the back, or shot anywhere lethally? I know that I am not in the moment, but there is a moment of choosing, or having already chosen, to value killing somebody rather than letting them get away?

I began asking why the violence so specifically targeted black Americans and particularly black males, and not, of course, forgetting women like Breonna Taylor. And yet, the response tends to be: 'That's horrible but let's keep moving on.' When some of these horrendous things like the George Floyd situation 'wake us up', the black

community says 'What are y'all surprised about? This is stuff that's been going on for centuries.'

This brings us back to the question, why has it been going on for centuries? It's because black lives haven't mattered due to the fact that supremacism of various sorts has mattered. So yes, I think that absolutely people misunderstand what's meant by privileging Black Lives Matter as if this were saying no other lives matter – this just underlines the point of why Black Lives has to Matter; we have not mattered equally, if at all. The whole comment by whites that 'White Lives Matter too' forgets events such as when I was a kid going to school: I didn't have to be escorted by the National Guard to get in the door; black children did.

**MM:** Since the widespread protests and broader acceptance of the concept of black lives matters, I have had quite a few disappointing conversations with fellow white people who either don't get – or don't want to get it. Recently I have been citing Gerry Adams (previous leader of Sinn Féin) as an abstract example. He received a lot of criticism for tweeting, 'Watching Django Unchained – A Ballymurphy N...'. He used the N-word. Despite him being on the opposite side of the armed conflict and being a historic enemy, I completely empathised with the sentiment of the tweet. The population of Ballymurphy was economically disadvantaged, and definitely discriminated against. The police were predominantly Protestant, so they were immediately biased and, at times, brutal. However, as one of the only prominent Black IRA men said, Gerry was never enslaved; and whilst having sympathy for the remark, Gerry completely missed the point of racism. The experience of a Black man walking through Belfast in the 1970s would have been objectively different from that of a white man, regardless of religious loyalties. It seems to be a challenge for many white people to acknowledge

that racism exists, and why privilege is not simply economic. In his acceptance speech, then President-Elect Biden acknowledged the existence of systemic racism, and re-iterated his commitment to address it. I felt that this was a truly historic moment, as one cannot begin to address an issue until one acknowledges its existence.

## The Problem of Privilege

**TD:** I think there's a tendency for whites to believe that if they've never treated somebody Black in a mean way or a discriminatory way, or if they've never used the N-word or if they have tried to be fair to all others with attention and resources, regardless of race, then they think they're not racist. I think they see racism as a particular act, and they are hurt when they feel like they have a pass if they have black friends, or they believe that they have been kind to Black people, then they are offended by any suggestion that they are racist.

**MM:** A perfect example of the theory of social licensing. They question, for example, how they can be racist if they voted for Obama.

**TD:** And not even seeing how they frame the discourse ('I have black friends') reinforces the point that there's structural racism in terms of where you get to start in the conversation ('I treat us all as equal'). I think it's just a kind of blindness to privilege because many whites will hear privilege as merely economic advantage, and by that phrase meaning simply how much money is in the checking account. The assumption is that if I don't have a lot of money in the bank then I'm not privileged. When I went to seminary in North Carolina and the best man at my wedding, who was Black, walked with me into a diner, they wouldn't serve him simply because he was Black – even in the early 1980s. There are Black kids I know that when a police

officer pulls them over, they just assume the worst, and I as a white man simply don't have to worry about those things. Trying to explain this to many whites, particularly white males, is like trying to explain to a fish that they are in water. Because it has been so much of our experience for so long, it is very hard to get distance from it for analysis.

Where that has taken me these days is beyond a race concern particularly to just supremacism in general as ideologies embedded in everyday policies. I think at any time we're in this rank ordering of comparisons – of 'better than' ideals that negate any privations of those ideals as 'less than' – it sets up a firm basis for any kind of supremacist thinking. This whole idea of 'Be all you can be', 'Be better, be the best', even the whole idea of 'America is great', infuses supremacist thinking, rather than a position of inclusive and egalitarian, open commensality, or the equalization of all things and of relative gradation – phrases I learned from reading the works of Jon Dominic Crossan on the early Jesus movement, and of the third century Taoist scholar, Zhangzhi (Ziporyn, 2020).

I think that racism is a symptom of racial supremacist thinking, just as sexism is a symptom of patriarchal supremacism, and heterosexism is a symptom of heteronormative supremacism, or speciesism is a symptom of human-centric supremacism, and so forth. I think there are some very close affinities with how to address these shared forms of supremacism. At the same time, I don't want to lose the distinctiveness of racial supremacism in equating racism with a particular kind of singular behavior in particular situations. It can be, but this is a symptom of structural biases in everyday encounters. Biases are present in the situations we come up on long before we arrive; we are treated differently, served differently,

cared for differently, start at different starting lines, based on those racial biases.

For instance, a client of mine who's Black owns his house and he's having struggles with some structural repairs and with the Water Department where he lives. So I had asked him, had he thought about selling it? He and his family had bought it and finished paying for it two years ago. In spite of the fact that it's run-down, his taxes are enormous, and having ongoing problems with utilities, he explained to me what it takes for a Black man to save enough to be able to buy a house relative to a white man being able to do the same. Once again, highlighting we don't start from the same place. I think it's very hard for folks to say, 'Yeah, we're all starting at the same point, so how can I be racist?'. I think we have to think about that continuously.

## Patriarchy and Re-orienting Identity

**MM:** We have both mentioned patriarchy. Miki (Kashtan, 2020) avoided giving a definition, which I found very thought-provoking. How would you define patriarchy?

**TD:** Patriarchy is a hierarchically imposed hegemony of values that include the privileging of dominance, essentialism, homogeneity, rationality, independence, control and rank-ordering. One of the vivid ways that I see it played out in Psychology is how it is so deeply embedded in developmental psychology. I learned this from reading Erica Burman's (2008) work on *Deconstructing Developmental Psychology*. For instance, Burman's work prods us to wonder why it is that we privilege formal operations over sensory motor experiences. Why do we privilege maturity as autonomy and independence? Why is it that autonomy is the goal – you know? Why is autonomy and reasonableness 'better than' dependency or emotion or intuition? It's because of the

privilege of certain ways of being in the world as better than others. And so, patriarchal experience is, again, a kind of supremacism of dominance, control and superiority. And so, if we're really, truly interested in deconstructing institutional racism, we have to get a more prior or macro deconstruction of supremacism, of any and all sorts in ideologies and policies and everyday discourse, or we will merely be rearranging deck chairs on *The Titanic*.

I think patriarchy is a contradistinction to feminism, but it is very important to note that women can share and perpetuate patriarchal values – and I've seen many men who live out feminist values. I am aware, though, that, like structural racism being in place even when whites are behaving in racially equal ways, structural patriarchy is in place even if men live out feminist values. Now we are challenged to push ourselves even further beyond supremacism into non-binary gender norms. By 'feminist', though, I mean, again, relative gradation, the equalization of all things, and open commensality, to which I'm very much committed, though find this a life-long discipline. Another way to say it is that I have tried to challenge supremacism in therapeutic care; I've shifted from thinking of strong thought and therapy, in my work, to the force of weak thought and therapy. On this point, I've been highly influenced by the work of Gianni Vattimo and by John Caputo's work, who discuss power in a very, very different way. It's like the strength to be vulnerable, the strength to trust, the strength to cry – you know, the strength to ask for help, lean on somebody, the strength to host, invite, companion, allow someone else to matter. The strength to not know, to risk when uncertain, to share. All of those things that I think are very counter to toxic patriarchy.

**MM:** I've sometimes struggled with how the term is and was used – probably on a personal

level because I am married to a very powerful woman and I've raised my two boys whilst she pursued her international career. So I see myself very much as a sort of contemporary man in comparison with my father's generation. After reading Miki (Kashtan) discussing 'soft qualities', I spent the next 24 hours harshly critiquing my own parenting. I had to stop and think about what I was communicating about maleness and some of the categories that we have discussed: power, vulnerability, expression. I also reflected on what is currently being communicated more broadly to young men and their place in the world. What would your message be to white men – and more specifically, white male therapists – when it comes to addressing patriarchy and racism?

**TD:** First of all, to have the strength to share and not think of relationships as merely competitions for acquisition. I think it's going to take true strength and guts to let go of control. Regarding the confrontation of our racism, one of the issues will be 'whitelash' (Smith, 2020) – the pushback by some white people against racial progress or the examination of white privilege – as we move into real structural change. It is often the case that a rebalancing of power will feel unfair to those in power, but part of addressing whitelash is taking this experience in without panic and its accompanying impulse to 'get back to normal' – meaning 'familiarity with privilege'. Strange how patriarchy and racism frame matters such that one can't experience the privileged experiences of sharing, structural equality and being in community.

I think white males will experience increased anxiety when they're not in control, and I think dismantling patriarchy will evoke the same kind of experience. It doesn't mean that one can't value what it means to be courageous, and what it means to be sacrificial, and what it means to use your strength. Some of the most powerful

bonds I know are between athletes and former combat soldiers. It is ironical, though, that these bonds are about having been through suffering, fear and pain, together, having sacrificed yourself for others – which I consider feminist values! Moreover, regarding the question of giving up privilege, I remember having a conversation with Cornel West at Union Seminary about this concern. Union had a knack for evoking the painful awareness of privilege as an oppressive stance, about which we felt ashamed. But Cornell told us to use our power for liberative purposes.

I think there is a necessity for white men to truly understand what power is, and I think it takes tremendous guts to let go and use power to ease oppressive suffering. Cornel also said, quoting words attributed to Yeats, 'It takes more courage to examine the dark corners of your own soul [and, I would add, the back alleys of your society] than it does for a soldier to fight on a battlefield'. I think for some white males there is an anxiety around thinking that giving up privilege will mean becoming subservient – which discloses how deeply binary the rank-ordering in supremacist ideology can be (i.e. if you're not dominant, you are subservient). I think it is going to require a reorientation of identity, which can feel like a death of a particular construct of the self, and a revaluing that we are actually in this together, that we don't have to do that alone. That this would be seen as a failure at being a man who can do it himself, even if it kills him; that's part of the toxicity.

I watch men struggle with this stuff when I talk with them, and I remember that at one time they were little boys. Contrary to what evolutionary psychologists may think, I don't believe that we are born with this idea of having to hide pain and feeling – 'I've got to do it on my own, and if I don't win I'm going to lose'. We are taught that,

and incur that pain out of toxic competition; we actually survive as a species and as societies through collaboration (Kohn, 1992). Non-toxic competition is challenging each other to unfold all we have, and affirm the uniqueness of what we have to offer. Nevertheless, many white males feel that if we adopt values closer to relative gradation or equalization or open commensality or trust or sharing, that somehow or another we're going to go crazy or go insane. I think it's going to feel that way as we shift identities, but I don't think that is part of the journey, part of what the poet Robert Bly (Bly & Moyers, 1989) talks about when he says we have to go through the forest. Again, I think we just need to reframe strength and power, hermeneutically, to get us through the forest.

**MM:** You have had a few words to say online about the far-right political organization Proud Boys. I thought about the fact that they refer to themselves as 'boys', and thought about the connection between the under-matured man and toxic masculinity. If that hypothesis was correct, what support can we offer these boys to mature into men?

**TD:** I am diametrically opposed to what the Proud Boys represent, though I don't want to slip into another kind of supremacism by privileging mature masculinity over toxic masculinity, and attributing the latter to the Proud Boys. I honestly believe that to date, but am struggling to see different kinds of masculinity rather than rank-ordering them. That said, there are different kinds of masculinity. Although I consider myself aligned with feminist values, I am still a power-lifter, and I like lifting heavy shit and hanging out with that community, which, by the way, is one of the most inclusive communities I have experienced in sports. No one is shamed for lifting less weight than someone else. But it is okay to celebrate personal records.

In any form of masculinity, there are virtues, albeit sometimes drowning in toxicity. Even with Proud Boys and others like them, there is this idea that the safety and provisions of the world are up to the men. We may differ on what that task is: maybe it's maintaining purity, maintaining dominance, maintaining control or protecting others and providing for others, but somewhere along the line we had that task handed to us, shaped by us, formed by us. We have required ourselves to accomplish this task without feeling pain, without whining, or at least hiding it. So, I think we've got to start revolutions where people are, and find what value is in what they are trying to do as is, even if we disagree with such values.

I think supremacism is destructive, white or any sort. At the same time, I know the Proud Boys are human beings, that somewhere along the line they have felt that they're inescapably tied to a task that they feel is a duty, their own sense of sacrifice, and they would give whatever they have to get at that. I think unless somebody can say 'I hear where your significance and meaning is coming from', I don't think we're going to be open to shifting hearts. Why trade evil for evil? Isn't the greatest courage to listen to and care for your enemies? When we claim we are inclusive, are we inclusive enough to include those who are exclusive – without sacrificing what we stand for in that difficult dialogue?

This is where the beauty of hermeneutical reframing becomes important again. Protection, for instance, could mean the protection of the oppressed of any sort, strength can mean defending or advocating for such disenfranchised groups, violence can mean violating oppressive ideologies though civil disobedience or non-violent resistance, and integrity and honor could mean being accountable and apologetic for how we have harmed others. I think there is value in some of these men's groups that are working

with reframing typically socially conditioned male comportment. Again, I am thinking of Robert Bly's work on *A Gathering of Men*, for instance, which supports spaces where groups of men who honestly can be with each other and let a man cry in the arms of another man – the resistance against which is not only fear of being ridiculed for being vulnerable, but also due to our homophobia.

I find that in therapy, if a man can have the strength to cry and to stay in there with me or vice versa, I think this event can be one of the most healing factors a man can give or receive. I guess what I would say more simply and directly is that I truly believe, whether it's rejection or not, that underneath the kind of bravado of toxic masculinity is a lot of pain and tears. But the bravado may be called on in situations where to stabilize another person calls for us to contain our own pain. The toxicity is to pretend not to have pain any time and never to share it. I think perhaps the movement has to start with, 'I hear what you're trying to do and I understand how you see it as a virtue and what you're after, but I also want to look at how fear and sadness and worry has shaped all that'. I also believe – and this also may be controversial – that this has to happen with men who are not typically experienced as feminists, who are so-called 'hard core'. The challenge is to provide a space to hear that without apologizing for one's own position, or damning them.

**MM:** Through my experience of running workshops to support people with issues around polarization on social and political issues, I am struck by the weaponization of language. I have queried the delivery of important concepts or talking points like 'white privilege' and 'while fragility'. An 'enlightened' white person smugly shouting 'Check your privilege' at a working-class man who has not yet acknowledged the prevalence of racism seems to me as being

potentially counterproductive. It is unlikely to open a heart. Is there a different language to open these discussions, whilst acknowledging the urgency without molly-coddling?

**TD:** I am not sure if there is a better way, but, brother, you and I agree that we will get nowhere but stuck, or foster more resistance, if we don't reach heart-to-heart dialogue. My exposure and experience to most of those guys (white, hardworking, trying to live the best life they can, good, simple but not simplistic) came from growing up in Georgia. I also grew up on Southern Baptist soil, before the fundamentalist takeover of that denomination, where relationships were everything – well, that and the 'preaching event'. I know a lot of guys, guys who gave me some of the deepest friendships experiences I have had, that don't see their privilege as white or male and not because they are hateful or ignorant. They try all their lives to 'be a good man', and rightly are hurt and offended when told their whole lives have been nothing but pain to others. I had to go through this gauntlet at Union. The irony is, again, that most all of them have a sense of sacrifice as a prime value, and that a man's sacrifice is for others. I think we can start there, to understand what that actually looks like, what we sacrifice and affirm. I would much rather take a conservative dialogue partner who is honest, than a virtue signaling liberal who doesn't even see his or her or their own fundamentalism on the left – something else I encountered at Union.

To acknowledge what these conservative guys do, to even be in the conversation, takes guts, strength and power to sacrifice, that may be the starting point for unlocking a lot of other things. I saw a picture on social media that moved me to tears. It was of a white, apparently working-class man in a wheelchair, middle-aged, holding a sign that said, Black Lives Matter, and 'I'm sorry I was late getting here, I had a lot to learn'.

Simply beautiful. But in a real dialogue, I would want to know from the sanctimonious liberals ‘teaching him’ what they could learn from him! All that said, most of these guys, at least in the Southern United States for instance, or in survivalist arenas, are more evangelically Christian, again, just trying to raise Christian families; but yet they miss the sort of model of Jesus as a man who sacrificed in different and very feminist ways, in egalitarian, inclusive ways that had an open communion table for anyone to attend, like the communion scene at the end of the film, *Places in the Heart*. Their faith is so very central to who they are, and so tied into their politics, that challenging lifelong values and commitments requires an entire identity death and rebirth.

So I think another avenue is, let’s take *another*, closer look with them at the strength that Jesus had to address what Jesus did in the way Jesus did it. It is through their Christology that we will be invited to discuss everything else. But of course, it depends on whether a fundamentalist – on the right or left – has room for other, divergent stances and values. They could very well look at my hermeneutical kind of invitation as work of the devil, and immediately shut things down. If there’s a fundamentalist you know, what has to be addressed up front is how faith is considered be the ability to hold on to beliefs at all cost, and no matter what evidence there may be to the contrary. But again, I would applaud faith but take that category and open it up to another possibility of the ability to open up, and let go and trust the process to take us all where we need to go. It takes more faith to reconsider a deeply held belief than to jump out of an airplane, even as you have a parachute to do the latter, but none to do the former.

**MM:** Especially if you did not pack it yourself!

**TD:** That’s right – and we underestimate the guts of being able, as the Quaker Douglas V. Steere (1901–95) used to invite us to do, to go into a conversation truly interested in the transformative power of a conversation, such that you’ll open yourself up so much so that you’re willing to be changed by it and leave the conversation a different person. My hope, particularly in speaking to patriarchy, is again inviting others to have the guts, the balls, so to speak, to be able to let somebody else’s values wash over us – as Gadamer (2004) used to say – to put oneself into play in such a way that I may walk out of that conversation a different person. What we have as a broader anxiety in which discussions of privilege and patriarchy occur is the Cartesian anxiety of a loss of certainty, knowing and identity. We are asking people to die as they have known themselves to be, and those asking them to do so aren’t often doing it themselves and don’t offer condolences or wakes in the process – just more often than not offering self-righteous shame and condemnation.

So, we want to start with the octagon in an ultimate fighting martial-arts kind of contest and look at that as an analogy. But this octagon is a battle with yourself: let’s see if you can step into the arena and let yourself be open to hearing what Black Lives Matters is saying to you. What women are saying to you, what those who are gay and lesbian are saying to you, what transgender people are saying to you. Can you listen so much so that you’re willing to let go of who you are and die? You know, the sacrifice of yourself for the other person is the greatest act of love that can happen. What better understanding of what it means to be male, to be loving than to do that? But like all octogen fights, this takes training and time. The hard part is that we are on different timetables, and those oppressed have much less time to wait to end their suffering than those who are oppressive to release their grip. Painfully, ironically, those who suffer have been

the graceful ones, regarding structural racism, for over 400 years. We need to get with it as oppressors!

To reiterate, then: Can we have the guts and the balls to step in there and say, ‘I’m going to be open to the fact that I may be a different man when I leave this conversation, in spite of the macrostructures that could press down on this possibility’. But I don’t think that we need to go through it together, and not some of us point the finger at others to do it alone; that stance is patriarchal itself.

**MM:** Miles Groth (2012) wrote a controversial article about the challenges of male students increasingly feeling less welcome in academia, and the significantly diminishing enrolment as a potential result. What is your experience within the teaching arena?

**TD:** Some of the stats, though I can’t recall specifics at the moment, are suggesting that in ten years there won’t be any more males in psychology. There are certainly now fewer males in terms of incoming classes that we have at the Chicago school and what I have seen elsewhere. That’s a national trend at least. I don’t know whether it’s a global trend, but I think it’s happening here. I do think this is due in some part to toxic masculinity that has infused in all kinds of different ways. I think on one hand, there are a lot of men feeling that Psychology is a feminine profession, to listen to people, to deal with feelings and so forth. But I also do see a lot of men in Psychology pathologized if they talk about strength and power. Like when I told one of my colleagues that I was into power-lifting, she said, ‘Oh, you don’t seem to be the kind that’s a power-lifter’ – and so I wrote a little piece on that in terms of power and what that means – and what it doesn’t have to mean.

So I do think Psychology has its own biases about pathologizing other kinds of typical male-oriented, sociologically constructed categories like sacrifice, courage, strength, suffering and so forth. Another male colleague once said to me, ‘Why would you want to put yourself in the place you know inflicts pain on yourself?’, implying, of course, that I was masochistic. A guy who comes into the field, who’s interested in football and power-lifting, or martial arts, or is or has been a soldier, is already going to be viewed as suspect (e.g. Is he one of those toxic males?). Funny how educated, licensed and seasoned psychologists can be absolutely blind to how they are patriarchal in reprimanding others for their patriarchy! At the same time, being told how oppressive one’s patriarchy is to them isn’t being patriarchal. Alas, presuming as I am doing that I can define patriarchy for others is itself patriarchal! We are in this process of awareness and growth for life, together, my friend. I just think we can move along better without shaming each other, and moving along also means to me to see value in anything – including and especially places where we don’t immediately value.

**MM:** I remember being told by a senior social worker that they were shocked and disappointed that I had the Rocky ringtone on my phone. I was taken aback as to why caring was believed to be mutually exclusive from also admiring determination and dedication. She was clearly interpreting Rocky in a way that made inference about the male. The team heard about it, and bought me the Rocky box set as a leaving gift.

**TD:** That is exactly what I’m talking about!

**MM:** Given where we are in 2020 as we write, how can psychotherapy training and educational institutes respond adequately to address racism in a way that is effective?

**TD:** What we do at the Chicago school is we have students take a whole year of diversity. In Year One, they have two semesters of diversity and they're in small groups, they're reading a variety of things that most of them have not been exposed to regarding differing values, life styles and cultures. In my own classes, for example, I begin to introduce some of the black existential literature that you've written about. For instance, they would read Frantz Fanon. I think it is very important to highlight the heritage of how therapeutic process and techniques came to be what they are, such as how counseling techniques and interviewing have their heritage in the Inquisition, or how diagnostic labeling comes from 'kata agoria', meaning 'to accuse in the market-place'.

I also believe indigenous cultures and their healing, the grounding of therapeutic care in the history of cross-cultural religion, inclusion of 'left-out' cultures that have been unacknowledged though incorporated or colonized by Western culture – all should be a part of class. But I also believe that different ways of thinking about personality, health, suffering, care, privilege, different ideologies, should be engaged – and they really struggle with it. What I still see is a lot of judgementalism in how those courses are run, and yet they are places to speak about pain, hopefully safe places, where 'safe' does not mean staying comfortable. The impatience with particularly white males shows up there at times, understandably so. But there is a time to listen, and it is long overdue.

A continual aporia arises in class where the white males are told they need to grow and learn and want to do so, but don't know how at times, but then are told by people of color, and women, that don't want to be the ones having to teach them. Absolutely understandable. But white men often at that point throw their hands up in the air, and say 'to hell with it' when they feel that

double-bind. This is unfortunate. I think they misunderstand that a person of color teaching them still feels like someone abused being required to teach her abuser how not to abuse her, or just once more being put into a position of subjugated labor for the white male.

I also think that this white male reaction is part of the 'whitelash' referred to earlier, that is triggered when he feels that, as a white straight male, he has caused nothing but suffering to all others, that his very existence is pain to others, it seems that he is a pathology. How does one dialogue if viewed that way? Are these discussions just legitimized retributive violence where someone holds my arms behind me while everybody kicks me in the dick... – for being a dick?! For many white males, there is a strange and unnamed feeling that happens where one feels both the unfairness of this, and the justification of it. We can't avoid these difficult conversations. We have to just get in the pit and wrestle it out with each other.

It will necessarily feel unfair when you feel it's being done to you as a white, straight male, when actually what may be occurring is just stopping the lineage of us doing it to everybody else, our entire existence, for multi-generations. I still don't know whether the answer is that we have to go through this together to come out on the other side in a place that is more collaborative. What continues to amaze me, though, is the amazing grace offered to us as white straight males by those who have suffered from our existence.

Regarding patriarchy and its infliction of abuse on others, I honestly think men don't have to forfeit being strong and sacrificial. I think, though, that what we can do is say 'we are not all right', when we aren't. We have to rethink what it means to be a man, and it doesn't mean that you dismiss your father and your

grandfather, it doesn't mean that you don't love them, but it may mean that you're going to rethink this differently compared with what we inherited, but we aren't going to have to do that by ourselves, you know. By being there and being understanding about that transformation, somebody's going to go through it with us.

**MM:** In response to some of the deep struggles I was witnessing in men and their desire to grow, I explored starting a men's group. However, as I observed a lot of these dialogues, I was not convinced that I could in the short term avoid it slipping into pockets of misogyny. I did not want to host a group with men including gay men, venting about women. I was eager to work in the space that you're talking about, but there seems to be a transition where some of that rage and anger needs to be witnessed before one arrives at a clearing where the deeper experiences can be explored.

**TD:** I really get this dilemma, and it *is* a dilemma, meaning each direction offers something and takes something away. I don't think women are innocent in the co-construction of relational troubles. Women have, and do, and will hurt men, and hurt them deeply. I don't think acknowledging this reality means we are blaming the victim. Even if traumatized, I don't think this gives someone a pass to traumatize others. The traumatization should not have happened. Period. But handling one's traumatization by inflicting more traumatization only leads to more, not less, trauma. And I don't think we can call ourselves hosts if we don't start with how one shows up, and with whatever pain and frustration they want to bring. A host doesn't require a guest to be other than who the guest is when they arrive. We want men to share their pain, rather than keep it to themselves and die from stress, but then tell them what and how they share about their pain isn't 'appropriate'. No, that dog won't hunt with me.

But this dilemma reminds me of my work with men, mostly men, in batter intervention programmes. I was trained in the Duluth program, the motherland of domestic violence training. One of the hardest things to do with them is help them back up from blaming others to taking accountability. I think this is hard in a couple of ways, at least. One is that it is hard to look at one's own inflicting of pain on others when you feel others have hurt you, and you're waiting on them, or life, to apologize. There isn't a couple I have seen in 30 years that hasn't felt if their partners would just get it together, then they would be just fine.

Secondly, it can be brutally painful to own one's violence against another person, and how they have and will continue to hurt because of it. Kierkegaard (2015) noted that the deepest pain a person can feel is to own his own sin. I have seen men become suicidal at this point in their transformation. Guilt can be a savage batterer as well, and as lethal as Covid-19. But this metanoia is vital for expanded possibilities of freedom and love. Our freedom is about what we can do with ourselves in the world, not to be found in controlling others. No matter what others have done, we are responsible for ourselves. This can feel unfair, and can be the hardest work we can ever do, but it is ontologically, existentially unavoidable, if we want to proceed with empowerment and empowering others.

I watched those men sit with each other as they sort of walk over that bridge, and it is very powerful, some of the most meaningful times I have had in therapeutic process and personally. Being able to say 'I did this', and 'I am sorry', without a conjunction (e.g. '...but...'), and with just a period. This is the *sine qua non* act of courage. My frustration comes in how many others not in batterers' intervention programs

need to do the same, but don't. Once again, though, whatever someone else is doing does not mean I can excuse away my chosen compartment of what I am going to do.

**MM:** As you speak it sounds to me like you're nearly beginning to offer a counter-fantasy, as Manu (Bazzano) called it, for contemporary masculinity.

**TD:** Yes, I would say that is what I'm trying to lean into. I think we're trying to think through it together. The irony of toxic masculinity is, I think, something a lot of us are thinking about – a lot of us are open to that, but part of the toxicity is that we're not letting each other know that that is what we're doing because it's feminine to do that. Yet we're all suffering in isolation and loneliness, which, again, we don't talk about. That is where the men's group is important, but as something other than as a traditional 'therapy' group, but different from gatherings where we are performing in conditioned, toxic ways to each other. Without such possibilities, one can reach critical mass and then we can blow spewing toxic waste.

**MM:** Like the Proud Boys.

**TD:** Yes, like the Proud Boys. We put ourselves in a pressure cooker. It's not that men don't feel pain. That's bullshit. But when they feel pain, and can't let themselves know that and they sure as hell can't let themselves share that, it's going to blow. And the top blows, you know, and then they try to arrest the governor in Michigan. Stuff like that happens.

One can chose not to blow, yes indeed – but where is the support for that to happen? We have to get at it before we get to boiling point, but this means allowing oneself as a man, as a white man, to be fallible, to be limited, broken and not a god. This is the cancerous part of the heart of

supremacism and masculine toxicity, and the hardest to come to terms with in the presence of other men. Perhaps the best therapists are power-lifters or survivors of war violence who can cry. I don't know. My male mentors were gentle and sweet. I don't think the warrior motif, archetype, metaphor is going away, but we need to keep trying for a reframing of it. We are all desperately trying to feel how I am supposed to be in the world as a warrior, but need to remember that maybe we are not always at war, and to live into the upside-down of how toxic masculinity has worked. We need to be warriors of extraordinary strength to sit with the unknown, and the uncertainty in not knowing and not controlling how someone will respond to us. That's one of the greatest fears of a batterer in a spousal abuse situation.

I wrote a paper one time, which was never published of course, called 'The Batterer's Lamach', the Hebrew word *Lamach* meaning 'the cry of why?'. Why has this happened to me? Most people have said that a batterer has no 'why', as the why is in the hands of those he has hurt over and over again. But the batterer's *lamach* is that they're ontologically feeling unlovable and so, unless they force you to love them you won't do so on your own. And so, the strength it takes to let somebody freely choose to love or not, to go their way or come towards you by choice and by freedom, is terrifying for someone who doesn't feel loveable and has foreclosed on you choosing to love them if left to your own decision. That is the kind of pain I think that it takes tremendous guts to face, and tremendous courage when you feel it, to allow others to be free beyond manipulating them to love you.

**MM:** I wonder when we think of race, is there something also about leaning into the unknown of how that will play out in terms of white bodies and white identities in a world where

supremacy is being challenged and a new vision of society is being offered up?

**TD:** I just finished a paper on post-pandemic hope where I argue, among other things, that hope isn't 'imagineered pro nostalgia' or salvaged, recycled nostalgia. With the challenge to white bodies and white identities, we have to be careful not to 'Make America Great Again' by seeking to retrieve when we were in power, or look to a future that we can eventually manipulate back into white privilege 2.0. I think probably the best starting point is trying to take our privilege to deconstruct privilege. Try to use power to liberate rather than oppress. Allow ourselves to mourn the loss of privilege, to have a funeral for white, male privilege. But at the same time, to awaken to the gifts and beauty of sharing in inclusive and egalitarian models.

It is like my stance, for instance, on taking down confederate statues and the confederate flag. Growing up, the prime value of good Southern hospitality is that you were a host, that you provided a receptive home for people and you wouldn't have anything in the home that would hurt people or dismiss people. The blessed irony is that it is a very Southern thing to *take down* the confederate flag because that's what Southerners should do. They care about the well-being of those guests whom we invite in and host, and so, I think white males have to do the same thing with patriarchy, and whites have to do the same thing with racism. They need to own the initiative and take down the structural racism that is hurtful to others, and see this done in specific acts in their everyday worlds (e.g. Biden's cabinet is the most diverse cabinet in presidential history), without seeing this as a concession, and, instead, see it as a gifted and gifting way of being in the eternal now... – which is where hope resides.

I think it is also important to have more and more direct encounters and experiences of different kinds of power, you know, other than dominating oppression and secured privilege. I would even say we need to rethink a different kind of privilege, like the privilege to have a conversation, or the privilege to share, or the privilege to have somebody who has your back and you their back, and the privilege to cry – those kinds of privileges, privileges that have a different economy from being traded to the highest bidder. These privileges multiply when spent, and where the one is greater than the many. It's when this particular person's black life matters, Emil, and I live my life congruently with what I claim when I tell him so.

**MM:** What comes to mind as a theme for me is that I believe people fundamentally do not understand power and how it works. How it shifts and bends. I've been thinking lately about when the British left the south of Ireland in 1922: the previous power structures were quickly replaced by the Catholic Church, you know. They took over the parishes, laying a foundation of the worst strands of patriarchy.

**TD:** Yes, this is why oppressive power isn't resolved by trading who is in power, if by power we mean the supremacist kind that has its origin in theological ideologies. And I say that as both a licensed psychologist and an ordained minister. So there is something about getting into the vacuum quickly with the counter-fantasy that filling it with someone else will be better without the counter-fantasy of rethinking power, one powerful thing being able to sit with the vacuum. This means we have to have Keats' negative capability, the ability to let go of power-as-control in concrete ways, and to tolerate the anxiety and the unknowing and uncertainty of the coming of the other about whom and from where we do not know.

I think we need each other to kind of walk together into the between, how to do our own work on one hand, and aligning as much as we can with the courage to invite otherness. The irony for me is that my original exposure to what power means came out of the phenomenology of religious experience as *numen*, and it's that numinosity... – I think the coming of the Other is the experience of numen or numinosity, which is power. So, being in the face of power as that which is more than what we are calls forth an awareness that we are a part of what is more, much more, and calls forth a kind of hospitality, as Jacques Derrida, John Caputo and others in the continental philosophy of religion have discussed, of the coming of the stranger without qualifications. A statement of what whites need to do again is to take the risk of welcoming that which is Other and allow a de-centering of ourselves in such a way that we find ourselves graced by journeying to wherever such otherness takes us.

**MM:** I think you have a new book in there about gender, masculinity, and racism! I feel my soul has been enriched. Thank you, brother.

**TD:** And my soul has been enriched as well, my brother. As always and already, truth lies in between us all.

## Note

1 Please note that we are very conscious that the focus of our discussion was through the lens of our own identity. This was an organic and fluid dialogue between two friends and colleagues who, if pushed, identify as CIS heterosexual. To promote anti-racist engagement and as a challenge to supremacy we are thinking and learning publicly. This is the context. The dialogue is raw and unscripted, any mistakes are our own. In another context we would prize voices that may be less represented especially from our BME and LGBTQ+, brothers, sisters, and non-binary folk.

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