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Introduction

On 12th July 2019, an unusual public event unfolded in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada: The Anglican Church of Canada offered “An Apology for Spiritual Harm”. The Church apologized for the “cultural and spiritual arrogance toward all Indigenous Peoples—First Nations, Inuit and Métis—and the harm ... inflicted.”¹ The Apology, read out by Archbishop Fred Hiltz, acknowledges the Church’s moral failures, especially in not caring about the ways that indigenous spirituality “has always infused ... governance, social structures and family life”; in “demonizing Indigenous spiritualities, and in belittling the traditional teachings ... through the elders”; and in robbing younger generations of the opportunities to be rooted in their spiritual ancestry. The Church also recognized the transgenerational trauma resulting from past abuse and made explicit commitment to healing the spiritual wounds and to walking together with the indigenous communities “in the newness of life”.²

Five years later, on 1st August 2024, an equally unusual event took place during the Emancipation Day programme in Kingston, Jamaica. Emancipation Day is an annual celebration across the Caribbean, to mark the end of transatlantic slavery, colonialism and centuries-long atrocities inflicted upon people of African and indigenous descent. The 2024 Emancipation Day programme had an unusual element because it included an additional ‘performance’—public apologies from organizations and descendants of those who “enabled, partook of or profited from the transatlantic slave trade ... to the descendants of those who were enslaved.”³ Recognizing their ancestors’ parts in the “brutal and dehumanising era”, members of ‘Heirs of Slavery’⁴ also acknowledged the enduring trauma and legacies of injustice that continue to shape the lives of the Africans and African diasporas around the globe. In view of the consequences of slavery and colonialism, they call for political commitments to reparation and reconciliation.

1 Anglican Church of Canada (2019). “An Apology for Spiritual Harm”. <https://www.anglican.ca/news/an-apology-for-spiritual-harm/>, accessed Dec. 2024.

2 Anglican Church of Canada (2019). “An Apology for Spiritual Harm”.

3 Ducan, N. and Lugg, A. (2024). ‘Our history is intertwined’: heirs of Jamaican enslavers apologise to descendants of the enslaved, *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/article/2024/aug/01/jamaica-slavery-apology>, accessed Dec. 2024.

4 *Heirs of Slavery* refers to a group of people who have learned that their ancestors acquired significant wealth from, or helped organise, the industrialised enslavement of African people in the Americas. <https://www.heirsofslavery.org/>.

These public apologies are significant acts of acknowledgment. The Anglican Church's apology for its spiritual abuse represents a step towards rectifying the damage it inflicted and restoring the spiritual strengths that are central to Indigenous (and African) ways of life. Similarly, the apologies for the transatlantic slavery and colonialism signal a commitment by the heirs of slavery to embark on a journey of healing and transformation to build a more humane world.

Public apologies for such monumental harms are not isolated events. On 18th June 2009, the U.S. Senate passed a resolution acknowledging the “fundamental injustice, cruelty, brutality, and inhumanity of slavery” and apologizing “to African Americans on behalf of the people of the United States.”⁵ More recently, on 19th December 2022, Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte publicly apologized for the Netherlands' participation in slavery.

However, despite these acts of contrition, the world continues to witness violence, mass atrocities, and dehumanizing acts. These ongoing brutalities prompt us to revisit Robert Burns's haunting question about “man's inhumanity to man,” first posed in his 1784 poem *Man Was Made to Mourn: A Dirge*. Burns captured the “regret, remorse, and shame” of those whose actions have caused “countless thousands to mourn.” This same question—revisited nearly a century ago by Einstein and Freud in their exchanges—continues to demand urgent reflection. Scholars, researchers, and communities are still grappling with the enduring harms of inhumanity and seeking pathways to healing.

While there must be an emphasis on understanding and addressing the persistent damage of inhumane acts on the subjugated and the resulting transgenerational trauma, a connected inquiry seems to be also necessary—what might inhumanity do to those who carry out the harrowing acts directly and indirectly, perpetuate a system of brutality and profit financially from the pains and sufferings of the oppressed. What impact does inhumanity have on those who commit such acts, perpetuate systems of brutality, or profit from the suffering of others? Equally important, how do acts of inhumanity devastate not only human experiences but also the ecological integrity of the planet?⁶

The psychological, moral, relational and spiritual harms resulting from inhumane acts and dehumanizing systems demand a response that goes beyond merely acknowledging economic injustice or demanding material redress. It calls for a deeper engagement with what it means to be and become more fully human and how to foster structural conditions, institutional practices and societal

⁵ H.Res.194–110th US Congress (2007–2008).

⁶ <https://earthjustice.org/article/overlooked-connections-between-black-injustice-and-environmentalism>. Access in Dec. 2024.

cultures that foster dignity, justice, and mutual flourishing. At the heart of this exploration lies the understanding that inhumanity—as both an act and a system—disrupts the relational fabric at the core of our being and becoming more fully human. Inhumanity damages not only those subjected to its horrors but also those who perpetrate, participate and benefit financially and politically from it. Above all, inhumanity shatters ecological integrity and harmony amongst all.

Indeed, it is precisely the need for such a deeper engagement in these multidimensional harms that centres the focus of this book through informed analysis, compelling argument, imaginative proposals and illuminating case studies. Together, these momentums and movements demonstrate the dual challenge this book seeks to address: the recognition of past harms and the harnessing of transformative potentials in community-initiated processes of collective healing for justice and well-being of all.

Thus this book sets to investigate three sets of questions: (1) In the contexts of the multidimensional damage resulting from transatlantic slavery, colonialism and imperialism, how might the notion of spiritual harm shift our understandings of the relevant hurts and their enduring legacies? (2) In light of these new understandings, how might we reconceptualize healing to integrate the need to address spiritual harms of inhumanity (3) What should be the future directions of collective healing work building upon our existing efforts to advance social justice and support the flourishing of all?

Accordingly, this book is divided into three parts: Part One consists of 4 chapters that articulate what constitutes (spiritual) harms of inhumanity examined through the lenses including traditional African philosophical and spiritual, normative, psychosocial and political stances. Part Two features 4 chapters that put forward interdisciplinary arguments to define collective healing in the contexts of transatlantic slavery and colonialism and related wounds, trauma and legacies. These are drawn from diverse perspectives, such as decolonial black activism, traditional African and indigenous theology and spirituality, anthropology, feminist methodology, as well as psychology and psychotherapy. The last four chapters in Part Three present, reflect and analyze the myriad ways that emergent healing approaches and practices have served to address (spiritual) harms of inhumanity. They demonstrate that healing must be rooted in reconnecting with community rooted resources for spiritual resilience, aimed at enhancing and enriching communal well-being, alongside ecological integrity.

The book's structure serves as a helpful roadmap for readers to embark on a journey of raising awareness, critical reflection, and envisioning futures of collective healing and social justice. Each chapter contributes uniquely to the

overarching aim of this book: to deepen our understandings of structural discrimination, and to offer transformative pathways for community restoration and regeneration.

By engaging in the three-fold inquiry, this volume does not advocate for a single analysis of inhumane acts or dehumanizing systems. Instead, it brings together a range of perspectives that, while grounded in distinct religious, spiritual, philosophical, and cultural traditions, complement one another in their shared commitment to addressing harms of inhumanity. These include Afrocentric spiritual philosophies such as Ubuntu ontology and cosmology,⁷ normative argument on what constitutes spiritual harm,⁸ psychoanalytic analysis of mass trauma in the hand of an ‘other’,⁹ and theorization of structural anti-Blackness to challenge western-centric approach to international relations.¹⁰

The diverse theoretical stances in Part One of this book bring out differences in emphasis. For instance, some contributors foreground the historical and structural legacies of slavery and colonialism, stressing the systemic roots of inhumanity. In contrast, others prioritize the interpersonal and even intrapersonal dynamics of being at the receiving end of brutality. These differences, far from detracting from the book’s coherence, serve to enrich it by providing an interdisciplinary view of the problem. They reveal how varied conceptual frameworks can intersect, challenge, and ultimately coordinate with one another in illuminating different facets of a shared concern. By placing these theories in dialogue, the book offers a richer understanding of the multi-dimensional harms of inhumanity and myriad paths to addressing them—an understanding that no single framework could achieve in isolation.

The book does not offer a unified theory of healing and redress, and instead, it provides a wide array of approaches, from racial repair,¹¹ to women-driven spiritual paths,¹² from traditional religious rituals,¹³ to person-centred therapeutic

7 See Gill, S. (2025). *Understanding and Addressing Harms of Inhumanity: Mogobe Bernard Ramose and Souleymane Bachir Diagne on Ubuntu*.

8 See Thomson, G. (2025). *Spiritual Harm and Enslavement*.

9 See Volkan, V. (2025). *Massive Traumas, their Societal and Political Consequences, and Collective Healing*.

10 See Osman, O. (2025). *Meditations on the Dead, the Dying and the Displaced: Theorizing Structural Anti-blackness as the Root Cause of Africa’s “Forever Wars”*.

11 See Florant, A. and Yancy, N. (2025). *Towards a Transformed World: A Path to Repairing Slavery’s Spiritual Harms*.

12 See Bartholomew, M. (2025). *Remember Your Mother: A Spiritual Path to Healing Ancestral Wounds of Slavery*.

13 See Schmidt, B. (2025). *The Scars of Enslavement and Remembering as a Journey towards Healing: African-derived Religions in America as Sites of Memory*.

and relational practices.¹⁴ These healing methodologies, rooted in African and indigenous wisdom and spiritual thoughts, illustrate the conceptual frameworks offered in the first part of the book, and at the same time, serve to enhance their depths and highlight gaps and nuances. In this way, the theoretical and methodological dimensions are mutually reinforcing. Indeed, by providing the conceptual language and ethical imperative for addressing harms of inhumanity, the conceptual ensures that the methodological remain rooted in the human experiences with a view of seeking justice and systemic transformation; while the methodological challenges the conceptual to be open to refinement.

These are then illustrated by a variety of case studies from communities across the four continents connected by the Atlantic. More specifically, the book provides examples of how collective healing must be rooted in the local histories by including narratives from both the enslaved and their descendants and the enslavers and their descendants;¹⁵ when juxtaposing these against the healing practices, the case study reminds us that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to healing, and each antidote is tailored to the particular malaise and the needs of the particular people. Similarly, where there is a lack of opportunities for encounter, listening and dialogue, collective healing practices must take great care to create safe and caring spaces where all voices are respected, and where dialogue is the basis for co-creating visions for better futures.¹⁶ Furthermore, the book stresses two seldom integrated practices—one is taking an intergenerational approach to ensure that the younger generations will be able to tap into the resources for spiritual resilience embodied by the previous generations;¹⁷ and the other is that there can only be healing when all beings are emancipated, including both human beings and the more-than-human-beings.¹⁸

Throughout the book, African scholars and researchers' voices, as well as African and indigenous thoughts and approaches are highlighted. Likewise, African and indigenous practitioners and facilitators roles are accentuated in creating spaces, designing relational processes and scaffolding public conversa-

¹⁴ See Leonardi, J. (2025). *Healing Within and Healing Between*.

¹⁵ See Hasan, J. (2025). *A Story of Richmond, Virginia: Its Southern Origins and Black Tenacity*, and Keestra, M. Lynch, D. and Zandwijken, M. (2025). *Keti Koti Table: Healing Through Personal Dialogue Across the Color Line*.

¹⁶ See Keestra, et al. (2025), and Sommerville, A. (2025). *Healing Spiritual Harm: An Intergenerational Approach*.

¹⁷ See Sommerville, A. (2025).

¹⁸ See See Canela, I. and Cuissard, E. (2025). *Common Ground Programme and the Collective Healing Circle: A Symbiotic Approach*.

tions and engagement in collective healing, imagine just societies and proposing shared paths to move beyond inhumanity.

The diversity of ideas and practices represented in this volume is a testament to the complexity of the issues at hand. Through their interplay, these perspectives invite readers to reflect on their own assumptions, to appreciate the interconnectedness of human and more-than-human life, and to imagine new possibilities for living well together in dignity and mutual care. In an era marked by ongoing social and ecological crises, the urgency of addressing harms of inhumanity has never been greater. This book contributes to this endeavour by offering an integrative approach that brings together historical, philosophical, methodological and practical insights. By engaging with the spiritual, relational, and systemic dimensions of harm, it seeks to provide not only a deeper understanding of inhumanity but also offer concrete steps towards healing humanity and healing the planet.

This journey begins with recognizing our shared responsibility and ends with the hope that humanity can rise to meet its greatest challenge: to create a world where inhumanity is no longer possible, and life—in all its forms—is protected, celebrated and revered.