

TOWARDS A WOMANIST PNEUMATOLOGICAL PEDAGOGY:
AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE DEVELOPMENT AND ARTICULATION
OF A THEOLOGICAL PEDAGOGY BY AND FOR MARGINALISED AFRICAN-
CARIBBEAN WOMEN

by

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DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to my loving God who loves and protects me regardless of what journey I'm on. It is also dedicated to those who have travelled alongside me on this journey towards a Womanist Pneumatological Pedagogy -the 'sojourners', my husband Pele, son Eden and last but by no means least my late mother, Mazie Adassa Green, who paved the way.

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This journey has been long and at times very difficult due to adverse circumstance, but in the celebratory tone of this study I want to acknowledge all those who went out their way to make it easier by reminding me of the need to keep heart, keep the faith but don't keep quiet.

In the community I am particularly grateful for all those who completed questionnaires and entered into dialogue with me, but for reasons of confidentiality I cannot name. I am also grateful for those who gave me financial and emotional assistance by attending and helping to organise the Black Heroes and Sheroes fundraiser way back in 2001. As you can see I haven't wasted the funds. Without a doubt I am grateful for the support I received from the late Gerry German who helped me to get back up on my feet after I was so brutally knock down. Perhaps more significantly I am so grateful that he, a White Welsh man embraced the alternative ways of knowing that characterises the Black woman, demonstrating the fruit of the Spirit that is given to us all.

In the safe spaces we created I am indebted forever to the sojourners and the other Black women who gave me what we so desperately lack- time and space for critical reflection that changes things for good.

In the academy I am thankful for the assistance of three men, Robert Beckford, Anthony Reddie and my supervisor Martin Stringer who played their role in getting me started, keeping me going and finally finishing this leg of the journey.

Stay blessed and continue to be a blessing all of you.

Finally I want to praise and thank God, my Lord and Lady, Mother and Father who has been with me every step of the way. Even carrying me, when I found the journey akin to wading through treacle, because I was trying to push the river rather than let it flow.

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INTRODUCTION

LOCATION, LOCATION, RELOCATION: THE JOURNEY BEGINS AT THE CROSSROADS OF AFRICAN-CARIBBEAN WOMEN LIVES IN BRITAIN¹

Womanist 1. From womanish... Usually referring to outrageous, audacious, courageous or wilful behaviour. Wanting to know more and in greater depth than is considered “good” for one.²

Located on the margins, the cutting edge of educational success

Achieving educational success in postmodern Britain, along with my brothers and sister, within a single female-headed impoverished household, in which my mother was critically ill for most of her reign, is worth celebrating. Far from seeing my working class, African-Caribbean cultural background as deficient and at odds with achievement, unlike the western, bourgeois and patriarchal culture that is usually heralded, I contend it is, culturally rich (as much by what is absent as well as what is present) and empowering. Empowering and rich, because it innovatively and robustly continues to refuse the shackles of the oppressive culture that pervades and asserts the liberating message of God’s word! Jacqueline Grant illustrates this point in her essay “Womanist Theology: Black Women’s Experience as a Source for Doing Theology, With Special Reference to Christology”, especially in her account of the

¹ This chapter contains extracts from a paper about the need for a Womanist Pneumatological Pedagogy (WPP) which I wrote, under my previous name of Maxine Howell-Baker, entitled “Towards a Womanist Pneumatological Pedagogy: An Investigation into the Development and Implementation of a Theological Pedagogy by and for the Marginalized”, *Black Theology: An International Journal* 3.1 (January 2004), 32-54 especially 44-47

² Extract taken from Alice Walker, *In Search of our Mother’s Garden* (London: The Woman’s Press, 1984), xi. Walker’s definition of womanist is adopted by many female African American and a few UK theologians, although, not always in its entirety, who are equally committed to the struggle against racism and sexism and its intersection with other forms of oppression.

liberative interpretation of the Bible and Jesus many Black women³ traditionally have undertaken by rejecting any reading that contradicts their experiences or compounds their oppression.⁴ A view substantiated by Black UK scholar Valentina Alexander when she writes:

They [Caribbean female migrants] had implemented a religious life-style which changed an alien faith [British Christianity] into their own and then utilized it in the general struggle for the ideological liberation of their people; second they had created an institution where their specific needs as oppressed women could be met and dealt with in a context largely developed by themselves.⁵

Accordingly, my impoverished mother and the African-Caribbean community, including the Pentecostal churches we grew up in, provided for us a culturally rich learning environment grounded in an independent Christian consciousness.⁶ As a result it was an environment that often consisted of unauthorised knowledge⁷, free of the fear of failure and conscious of a God who has the power and strength to transform our material circumstances for the better. One that encouraged us to achieve spiritual purity whilst emphasising personal meaning that is derived from a personal encounter with Jesus. In other words it facilitated a metanoia⁸ that is, as argued by Cheryl Bridges John, akin to Paulo Freire's 'conscientization',⁹ except that it is 'initiated and maintained by a transforming encounter with God, which refigures the

³ Although Black is often used by American womanists to refer specifically to African-American citizens in the context of this work it is generally taken to mean people of African descent regardless of their specific locality unless otherwise stated. Accordingly, Black is not automatically equated with people who are not White unless stated but it does presume all people of African descent are Black even when the category African-Caribbean or African American are used.

⁴ Jacqueline Grant, "Womanist Theology: Black Women's Experience as a Source for Doing Theology, With Special Reference to Christology" in James H. Cone and Gayraud S. Wilmore (editors) *Black Theology: A Documentary History Volume Two: 1980 -1992* (Maryknoll, NY, Orbis Books, 1993), 273-289 especially in her account of biblical hermeneutics and Jesus within the womanist tradition. 279-283

⁵ Valentina Alexander, "'A mouse in a jungle': the Black Christian woman's experience in the church and society in Britain" in *Reconstructing Womanhood, Reconstructing Feminism: Writings on Black Women* edited by Delia Jarrett-MacAuley (London, Routledge, 1996), 90

⁶ Alexander, "'A mouse in a jungle'" refers to this consciousness as does Michael N. Jagessar and Anthony G. Reddie when they talk about the origins of Black Christianity in the African Diaspora in the opening chapter of *Black Theology in Britain: A Reader*, (London, Oakville: Equinox, 2007), 1-4

⁷ That is, unauthorised by the dominant knowledge validation system

⁸ Metanoia put succinctly is the process of spiritual formation or conversion.

⁹ 'Conscientization' is a concept describing the process by which subalterns educate themselves to identify and challenge the real causes of their oppression. It was coined by Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (London: Penguin Books, 1972)

corresponding historical action'¹⁰ rather than existential analysis of structural inequalities. A cultural and spiritual dynamic that stimulates, I believe, genuine and meaningful learning because it seeks to alleviate the harshness of suppression in our lives.

This dynamic, for instance helped me and my family to reduce the social psychological state of unease and conflict that results from having to deal with or make sense of the barrage of inconsistencies that permeate a society entrenched in inequality, which by extension threaten our sense of self and moral integrity. A state of tension and conflict Leon Festinger in 1957 labelled 'cognitive dissonance' characterised by the discomfort of possessing contrary beliefs, behaving in ways that transgresses your ethical beliefs, or being coerced into choosing between two appealing but incompatible options.¹¹ In the context of this study, cognitive dissonance often results when Black women of faith are forced to either capitulate or assert their identity both as individuals and members of multiple social groupings and communities, risking material wealth or mental health and integrity.¹² A belief supported by ethicist Katie Cannon's claim that a womanist approach to teaching and learning seeks to analyse the cognitive dissonance in our lives for the purposes of liberation.¹³ As a result it facilitates the

¹⁰ Cheryl Bridges John, *Pentecostal Formation: A Pedagogy among the Oppressed* (Sheffield Academic Press, Sheffield, 1993), 65

¹¹ Benoit Monin, "Cognitive Dissonance" in William A Dancy Junior (Editor-in-Chief), *International Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences Second Edition Volume 1: Abortion to Cognitive* (2008), 599-601. See 599 for the definition used above.

¹² The former decision increases their chances of social advancement but at the cost of denying their self-defined identity, whilst the latter choice offers social and psychological wholeness at the expense of material betterment. As many postmodernist scholars have pointed out the imposition of an identity by another is not a real identity whether it is imposed by a White supremacist, Black or female activist or any other group.

¹³ Katie Cannon, *Katie's Canon: Womanism and the Soul of the Black Community* (New York: Continuum, 1996), 139

formation of 'self-conscious and deliberate learners who continually confront the contestability of life's contradictions.'¹⁴

Accordingly, my mother encouraged her children (two of each sex) to use what limited material resources we had at our disposal, plus the unlimited resources God provides, to refuse the intersecting class, race and gender inequalities that comprise the Black woman's and man's subordinated position in life. As well as to use those resources to solve the real life problems inequalities generate in order that we not only survive but also thrive in a society entrenched in, but not totally ruled by, discrimination. Hence when my mother purchased a set of encyclopaedia, from a door-to-door salesman, by paying him a small amount each week for many years, she knew (like Alice Walker recognised in her mother when she presented her with a library card) the insurmountable wealth of a liberated mind.¹⁵

Furthermore, and what I believe significantly contributed to my outstanding educational performance, was what my mother *did not* do. She did not discourage me from my love of learning. She knew, like my father and so many other African-Caribbean mass migrants to Britain, the liberating effect of a good education in terms of greater economic and social freedom.¹⁶ Unlike my father however, who pressed me to do better in school even when I achieved 'A' grades, my mother did not encourage me to learn what the school expected me to learn. Indeed she often said studying (never learning) makes you mad, but she never went

¹⁴ Cannon, *Katie's Canon*, 139

¹⁵ Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought, Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York & London, Routledge, 1991), 97

¹⁶ Beverley Bryan, Stella Dadzie and Suzanne Scafe, *The Heart of the Race: Black Women's Lives in Britain* (London: Virago, 1985), 59 note the liberative significance of education for Black families from the Caribbean.

out of her way to stop my perpetual reading and self-directed learning about my Black identity. Her anti-scholarly view of studying reflected the equity that flourished within the Pentecostal movement in its infancy because, to concur with Iain MacRobert, '[a]mong the Pentecostals, black people were no longer disadvantaged because of their colour or lack of education, for the Spirit could minister through whoever was yielded to [Her/]His influence.'¹⁷

Thus, by not discouraging me from meaningful learning yet fostering the value of educational credentials and respect, my family (especially my mother) and community provided me with a cultural rich learning environment that was unashamed of failure (except when reciting the times tables or sinful behaviour) and conscious of a God who has the power and strength to transform life.¹⁸ Truly, I believe my mother enabled me by her disinterest to engage in the real intelligent learning John Holt describes when he writes:

The intelligent person, young or old, meeting a new situation or problem, opens [her/]himself up to it; [s]he tries to take in with mind and senses everything [s]he can about it; [s]he thinks about it; instead of about [her/]himself or what it might cause to happen to [her/]him; [s]he grapples with it boldly, imaginatively, resourcefully, and if not confidently at least hopefully; if [s]he fails to master it, [s]he looks without shame or fear at [her/]his mistakes and learns what [s]he can from them. This is intelligence.¹⁹

In such a personal and culturally specific context, therefore, the bestselling tabloid newspaper was understood purely for what it was, escapism, which taught me the need for acumen and

¹⁷ Iain MacRobert, *The Black Roots and White Racism of Early Pentecostalism in the USA* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988), 84

¹⁸ See Karen Baker-Fletcher, *Sisters of Dust, Sisters of Spirit: Womanist Wordings on God and Creation* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1998), 116 who makes explicit this understanding of God embedded in Black women's cultural traditions.

¹⁹ John Holt, *How Children Fail* (Middlesex: Pitman Publishing Corporation 1964 & Pelican books, 1969), 163

“respite”²⁰. Similarly my father, despite not living with us instilled in me from an early age, my purpose for being in school – to learn without being disrespectful, which helped me to navigate so successfully the school system, that I left school with the equivalent of seven O’ level passes rather than children. I also didn’t need to retake my mathematics exam, as the post-16 college interviewer had predicted. Indeed, I didn’t have my first child until I was 44 years old and in possession of two degrees, rather than the usual expected school age for girls of my socio-economic and ethnic background.

Not surprisingly, I achieved a great deal as a pupil and later on as a teacher. Or rather, it would not have been, except for the prevalent notion that impoverished African-Caribbean female-headed households are synonymous with underachievement. Yvonne Channer, for example, in her historical overview of mid- twentieth century educational policy observes how politicians surmised that African-Caribbean pupils were, like their White working class counterparts, doomed to academic failure because of their home environment.²¹ A prediction mainly based upon data which exposed the extreme social and economic disadvantages of Black people but ironically did not lead the analysts to address, the racialised discrimination prevalent within schools to explain our disproportionate failure. In a similar vein A. Gibson with J. Barrow, who conducted research on African-Caribbean pupils in British schools, are

²⁰ See Alistair Smith, *The Brains Behind It: New Knowledge about the brain and learning*, (Stafford: Network Educational Press Ltd, 2002) for theories about brain-based learning (using what we know about the brain to enhance learning) advocated by organisations like The University of the First Age Birmingham, who point out how the brain needs to rest often since on average it can only concentrate for twenty minutes at a time. Furthermore, advocates are also aware that the brain processes information subconsciously so turning off from your focus of study can actually help you digest information and comprehend the subject of study better.

²¹ Yvonne Channer, *I am a Promise: the school achievement of British African Caribbean* (Stoke on Trent, Trentham Books Limited, 1995)10

noted by Heidi Safia Mirza as falling into the same camp as The Moynihan Report²² because they too blame the matriarchal structure of some Black families for these achievement gaps.

Correspondingly, in my experience many African-Caribbean school teachers are similarly associated with underachievement because of the drawback of being negligible in numbers and located in the lower ranks of the career structure²³ because, as is often suggested or implied but not substantiated with credible research or overt policy and decision making, they too are cultural deficient and therefore incompetent. An interpretation of our poor career prospects that concurs with influential educationalist and Chair of the social exclusion advocacy group the Communities Empowerment Network (CEN) Gus John, who recalls how in the latter decades of the last century lack of credentials or confidence were offered to explain away the dreadful recruitment and retention of Black people in certain jobs like teaching.²⁴ Defiant in the face of such suggestions, neither underachievement nor professional incompetence as a consequence of deficit reflects the realities of my life or the lives of many others, as this piece of research sets out to demonstrate.

In my experience, which is substantiated by other research into the matter, it was and is the ignorance, low expectations of and abuse of power by my superordinates, intersecting with other axes of discrimination, which created and creates oppressive life-limiting conditions.

²² D. Moynihan's US Government's commissioned report entitled 'The Negro Family: The Case for National Action' pioneered this negative thinking about Black female-headed families.

²³ Audrey Osler, *The Education and Careers of Black Teachers: Changing identities, changing lives* (Buckingham, Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1997), 49 cites data from a survey funded by the Commission for Racial Equality, which supports this statement; details of which are given on page 131 in this study.

²⁴ Gus John, *Taking a Stand: Gus John Speaks on education, race, social action & civil unrest 1980-2005* (Manchester, The Gus John Partnership, 2006) 276.

For example, Bernard Coard in his landmark publication in 1970, the year I started school, entitled *How the West Indian Child is Made Educationally Sub-normal in the British School System*, exposed how institutionalised cultural, bourgeois and socio-psychological biases in assessments, prejudicial and patronizing teacher attitudes together with low expectations that govern practice are real culprits in explaining mainstream failure to release and develop the potential of Black children to achieve.²⁵ Compensatory strategies like separate schooling for pupils deemed to have educationally sub-normal needs (ESN) as in the 1960s when Coard was teaching or behavioural, social and emotional difficulties (BESD) today. Along with mentoring for many Black pupils and some teachers they reflect the intersecting structural arrangements, institutional practices and ideological processes that perpetuate our subordination because they are entrenched in notions of cultural deficit. As explained by Gus John, mentoring buys into ‘the general perception of black people as deficient, not quite managing to make it in their own right and therefore needing to see those who ‘break through’ and get to sit at the table with the white man, as individuals to emulate.’²⁶

Furthermore, as revealed by the work of Beverley Bryan, Stella Dadzie and Suzanne Scafe published in the mid-1980s,²⁷ institutional exploitation of Black women’s teaching skills and their insider knowledge of their communities suppresses our ability to advance professionally and effect real social change. The education system, as part of a matrix of domination, does this on structural and institutional levels by denying us access to positions of real power and

²⁵ Bernard Coard, *How the West Indian Child is Made Educationally Sub-normal in the British School System*, (London: New Beacon Books for Caribbean Education and Community Worker’s Association, 1970), 13-25

²⁶ John, *Taking a Stand*, 276

²⁷ Bryan et al, *The Heart of the Race*

by labelling us trouble makers if we do find innovative ways to bring about change.²⁸ A matrix of domination that Mirza argues takes different forms, and one this study will expose does not end when we grow up and enter the school gates as teachers.²⁹ Indeed the education system is a particularly potent site for the convergence of different strands of discrimination when you consider, as David Gillborn does, the Department for Education's decision to ignore racism, unlike other government departments, as a priority area for policy.³⁰ Only a few years after the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry and corresponding amendment to the Race Relations Act in 2000 urged that 'There must be unequivocal acceptance of the problem of institutional racism, and its nature before it can be addressed, as it needs to be, in full partnership with members of minority ethnic communities.'³¹

Nonetheless, my particular experience of educational success centred in this chapter provides tangible evidence that educational failure is not a universal truth claim. Furthermore, it demonstrates that neither race, nor gender, nor class and the dynamic way they intersect with each other and education or faith are the one-dimensional, mutually exclusive categories that they appear to be in public discourses. Thus, this simple act of centring my particular experience of educational success in that particular time and geo-political context whilst

²⁸ Bryan, et al, *The Heart of the Race*; 87

²⁹ Heidi Safia Mirza, "The more things change, the more they stay the same: assessing Black underachievement 35 years on" in Brian Richardson (editor), *Tell it like it is: How our schools fail Black children* (London and Stoke-on-Trent: Bookmarks Publications/ Trentham Books, 2005), 108-116; especially 109

³⁰ David Gillborn, "It takes a nation of millions (and a particular kind of education system) to hold us back" in Brian Richardson (editor), *Tell it like it is: How our schools fail Black children* (London and Stoke-on-Trent: Bookmarks Publications/ Trentham Books, 2005), 92-100; especially 96-97

³¹ William Macpherson, *The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry*, CM 4262-1(London, 1999), 31 cited in Gillborn, "It takes a nation of millions," 97

simultaneously placing it within this research provides a platform for me to ‘critique dominant structures, [from] a position that gives purpose and meaning to struggle.’³²

Furthermore, this act of centring allows me to commence an ongoing liberative praxis that is simultaneously theological and pedagogical, and leads to the articulation of a spirit-led teaching and learning approach. An approach moreover that is grounded in the varied as well as variable experiences, wisdom and commitment of five other African-Caribbean women living in Britain to embody the liberating message of the Gospel in a way that builds on the agency of our foremothers and transcends it. One that this study argues is a necessary tool for both the Black Majority Churches (BMC) and the state education system of this country to employ if they are to include African-Caribbean female educators and the communities these women serve as both subjects and partners in their plans for bringing about greater equality and amelioration. A theological pedagogy I call a Womanist Pneumatological Pedagogy (WPP) on which this study’s argument for a new theology for our particular time and place rests. One that is capable of addressing faith in action as well as education and difference as they present at different points along the multiple axes of inequality.

Intersectionality and the politics of identity, difference and location

Just as Sojourner Truth’s experience of being a Black woman in a nineteenth century slave-owning society enabled her to deliver a ‘cutting edge speech (in all senses of the term) [that] deconstructs every single major truth claim about gender and a patriarchal slave social

³² See bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (Routledge, NY & London, 1995), 88-89 for this assertion.

formation’³³ so too can the particular experiences of one, much less the six, faithful African-Caribbean female educators who are at the heart of this study. After all, experience that is critically engaged with can open up avenues for dismantling the fallacious assertions about different social groups that entrench our society. As Gillborn points out in his outline of critical race theory and its use of experiential knowledge, ‘ This approach not only adds essential data and perspective, it can offer a fundamental challenge to the ‘common sense’ assumptions through which so much racism operates and the mechanics by which it is legitimized.’³⁴ In this particular case, assumptions about African-Caribbean and working class males and females as well as people of faith are challenged in this way.

This assertion is not to claim that we, as individuals or even a small collective, can speak for every African-Caribbean female educator or other subjugated groups in this country or beyond. Rather it is to recognise our multiple-identities, like everyone else’s, are not disembodied variables or fixtures that can be separated, conflated or negated for the convenience of constructing theories, policies or even counter-hegemonic manoeuvres by Black and feminist liberation movements. A tendency that has been criticised by British Black feminist of Asian ancestry, Heidi Safia Mirza³⁵ and African-American critical race theorist, Kimberle Crenshaw³⁶ in their respective examinations of the British and American socio-political contexts.

³³ Avtar Brah and Ann Phoenix, “Ain’t I A Woman? Revisiting Intersectionality” in *Journal of International Women’s Studies*, Volume 5, Issue 3, (May 2004), 75-86; 77

³⁴ David Gillborn, *Racism and Education: Coincidence or Conspiracy?* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), 31

³⁵ Heidi Safia Mirza, *Race, Gender and Educational Desire: Why Black Women Succeed and Fail* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), Chapter 5

³⁶ Kimberle Williams Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color” in Kimberle Crenshaw, Neil Gotanda, Gary Peller, & Kendall Thomas (editors), *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings that Formed the Movement*, (New York: The New Press, 1995) 357-383

To proceed with this study as if our experiences as subjugated Black women of African-Caribbean heritage in Britain gives us authority to speak for everyone who identifies with the category would find us guilty as charged by British, African-Caribbean activist Julia Sudbury³⁷ and African American teacher and critic bell hooks, of mirroring the very exclusionary and totalizing essentialist activities we are intent on removing. In the words of Sudbury, 'The weakness of standpoint theories, as they have been elaborated by black feminists, is their tendency to essentialise, to assume that black women's characteristics can be described with the little more than lip service to their specific historical or spatial location.'³⁸

To speak up, however, from a critical space that finds our particular knowledge and understanding of the dynamics of intersecting oppressions within a specific historical and geopolitical context fully appreciated as relevant to propelling the wider struggle for freedom and betterment, is to enter public discourses as empowered subjects with no need to resort to othering activities. As hooks observes in her role as a teacher 'Usually, it is in a context where the experiential knowledge of students is being denied or negated that they may feel most determined to impress upon listeners both its value and its superiority to other ways of knowing.'³⁹ From such a situated and affirmed position, as maintained by Sudbury and hooks, there is no need to take an extreme stance against subjective standpoints and call for their negation, as some post-modern critics have done, like Donna Haraway, Bat-Ami Bar On or Diana Fuss. Even if it were possible to extract experience from all intellectual projects,

³⁷ Julia Sudbury, *'other kinds of dreams' black women's organisations and the politics of transformation* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998)

³⁸ Sudbury, *'other kinds of dreams'*, 29

³⁹ hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*, 88

which it is not,⁴⁰ both Sudbury and hooks are right to point out the irony in a call to rid discourses of experience whilst being oblivious to ‘the complex processes of validation which enable those operating within social scientific orthodoxy to speak.’ such as these White feminists mentioned in their respective works.⁴¹

Even so, this study is not lulled into a state of complacency regarding the risk of othering that can move a postmodernist stance on Black identity that acknowledges difference back into the realms of what Victor Anderson calls ‘ontological blackness’. That is ‘a covering term that connotes categorical, essentialist, and representational languages depicting black life and experience’⁴² which renders Black subjectivity a totality of experience, thereby threatening individual differences and ‘cultural fulfilment as the content of liberation’ which Anderson so vehemently opposes. Indeed, beginning this study with a celebratory account of my achievements or choosing to centre the experiences of African-Caribbean women opens this work up to those very charges.

For reasons already given above about the need to acknowledge a situated standpoint without claiming to be speaking for every African-Caribbean woman it is sincerely hoped that this threat has been removed, but as Anderson admits, postmodern blackness ‘recognizes that black identities are continually being reconstituted as African Americans inhabit widely differentiated social spaces and communities of moral discourse.’ African-Caribbean women living in Britain concerned with faith and education and other social dynamics are no

⁴⁰ This point is elaborated in my discussion of reflexive ethnography presented in the next chapter.

⁴¹ Sudbury, ‘*other kinds of dreams*’, 31-32

⁴² Victor Anderson, *Beyond ontological blackness: an essay on African-American religious and cultural criticism* (New York: Continuum, 1995), 11

exception and it is with this in mind that this study is a continuous journey towards a WPP which does not end when this particular argument is done.

Opening the gateway to emancipatory reflection

According to bell hooks, 'The process [of becoming a subject] emerges as one comes to understand how structures of domination work in one's own life, as one develops critical thinking and critical consciousness, as one invents new, alternative habits of being, and resists from that marginal space of difference inwardly defined.'⁴³ Experiencing achievement along with my brothers and sister, together with a passion for justice and freedom, has equipped me with an ideological suspicion when critically engaged in reflecting on the social realities of my world. Coined by Juan Luis Segundo in his book *Liberation of Theology*, 'ideological suspicion' is the consequence of 'cognitive dissonance' which exposes contradictions between existing belief systems, and our experience of many intersecting differentials and constitutes the first part of his four part interpretative tool the 'hermeneutical circle'⁴⁴ which many theologians, have found invaluable in articulating reality from a subjugated perspective.⁴⁵ In this case my ideological suspicion pertains to, amongst other things, the thinking that links my home environment and career prospects to cultural deficit.

For example, The Plowden Report, *Children and their Primary Schools*⁴⁶ in 1967 explained Black and working class underperformance with family deprivation theories. Or K. Griffiths

⁴³ bell hooks, *Yearning: race, gender, and cultural politics* (London: Turnaround, 1991), 15

⁴⁴ To be explained in great detail in the following chapter.

⁴⁵ Juan Luis Segundo in his book *Liberation of Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books 1976), 9

⁴⁶ The Plowden Report, *Children and their Primary Schools* cited in Maureen Stone, *The Education of the Black Child in Britain: The Myth of Multiracial Education* (Fontana Paperbacks, 1981), 21

enquiry entitled “British, West Indian and Asian Children – Assessing conceptual development” published the year I graduated from secondary school in 1982,⁴⁷ which identified single female-headed families along with multiple deprivation as the key reasons for lower score levels reached by African-Caribbean children. Additionally, over the years the proliferation of compensatory strategies⁴⁸ to accompany this kind of thinking, whether designed to raise our children’s self-esteem without raising their academic standards as in the past,⁴⁹ or ostentatious attempts to do both as it is now,⁵⁰ along with social exclusion measures to control their behaviour, are all highly suspicious. As is the lack of career development of Black teachers, even in schools where we share the same ethnic background as the majority of pupils and / or are better qualified than many of our colleagues.⁵¹

It would appear that today institutional racism, as argued by Mirza, uses culture and religion rather than race and biology to alienate and dominate Britain’s non-White communities. Furthermore, official attempts to eradicate inequality continue to ‘divide and cut across women’s natural multiple identities in terms of the intersection of their age, sexuality, disability, religious and class and cultural differences.’⁵² Thus these equality measures effectively marginalise Black women whose needs clearly span across multiple social categories which they are not designed to address.⁵³ By way of example, in this study I will present evidence to show that the education authorities ignore / fail to institute the good and

⁴⁷ K. Griffiths, “British, West Indian and Asian Children – Assessing conceptual development” in *New Community* Volume 9, Issue 3 (1982) 407 – 422.” Cited in Channer, *I am a Promise*, 11

⁴⁸ From separate special schooling to mentoring as mentioned earlier

⁴⁹ See Stone, *The Education of the Black Child in Britain*

⁵⁰ Mirza, “The more things change”, 109 asserts that the drive for positive role models and mentors is the twenty-first century approach to raising self-esteem as a strategy for raising attainment levels.

⁵¹ See The Swann Report published in 1985 along with other research that supports this claim cited in Osler, *The Education and Careers of Black Teachers*, 48

⁵² Mirza, *Race, Gender and Educational Desire*, 152

⁵³ Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins,” especially 358

outstanding practices of many African-Caribbean mostly female teachers, a significant proportion of whom are Christians because the equalities policies and practices usually address the direct concerns of White female teachers. This would easily explain why only 0.6% of heads were reported as being Black women in 2011. Yet a mere three years earlier 67% of primary and 44% of secondary schools were headed by women representing an annual upward trend of several percentage points; a staggering 13 points in the case of secondary heads.⁵⁴

Consequently, a good percentage of us internalise the controlling images or find ourselves so abused and violated by the system that we barely survive our school days as pupils or teachers. The social exclusion of Black pupils is well documented in Government reports such as The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) priority review 'Getting it. Getting it right' published in 2006 which found, with the exception of travelling communities, Black pupils top of the exclusion rates with a percentage almost double that of the average rate of 5.07%.⁵⁵

More alarming perhaps is the equally well documented interpretation of the exclusion data of Black pupils in terms of, like the writers of the DfES report claim, 'an "X factor" related to

⁵⁴ Since employment statistics on female teachers rarely give an ethnicity breakdown these figures were arrived at by correlating figures reported in two online newspaper articles. One by Polly Curtis, "Staff Room Revolution as Women Take Top School Jobs" in *The Guardian* (Friday 25 September 2009), online at <http://www.theguardian.com/education/2009/sep/25/headteachers-secondary-school-women>. The other by Jessica Shepherd, "Black male headteachers in England's state schools number just 30" in *The Guardian* (Thursday 21 April 2011), online at <http://www.theguardian.com/education/2011/apr/21/black-male-headteachers-state-schools>

⁵⁵ Department for Education and Skills, *Exclusion of Black Pupils: Priority Review Getting it. Getting it right* (London: DfES, September 2006) 5

ethnicity, which explains the exclusions gap.’⁵⁶ For example, Tony Sewell’s research entitled *Black Masculinities and Schooling*⁵⁷ centres on the socio-psychological dynamic between school teachers and Black pupils in its effort to name and address the high level of school exclusions among Black boys. In doing so his recommendations for change are confined to tackling the “sex” factor or in his words the social phenomenon that means ‘African Caribbean boys are too sexy for school...referring to their normative attraction for peers and the media and, equally, the way teachers perceive them as threatening’.⁵⁸ Rather than comprehending it’s significance as a symptom of the very real socio-economic inequalities that intersect at both micro and macro levels of society. That is, ‘intersectional discrimination’ which Timo Makkonen describes as ‘a situation in which there is a specific type of discrimination, in which several grounds of discrimination interact.’⁵⁹

As will be made very clear later on in this study such an interpretation of the exclusions data distract liberation activists from naming and challenging the root causes of their oppression and as a consequence they slow down the processes of radical transformation. It fails to address what it means to fully take on board the power relations that divide us and bring us together. The WXYZ factors so to speak, which are the intersection between race, gender and social class, at the very heart of these complex power relations. Hence in much of the discourses on race, gender and education neither government policies on the content of the curriculum and student funding nor decisions on school exclusion, assessment criteria and

⁵⁶ Department for Education and Skills, *Getting it. Getting it right*; 10

⁵⁷ Tony Sewell, *Black Masculinities and Schooling*: How Black boys survive modern schooling (Stoke-on-Trent: Trentham Books, 1997)

⁵⁸ Sewell, *Black Masculinities and Schooling*, 220

⁵⁹ Timo Makkonen, *Multiple, Compound and Intersectional Discrimination: Bring the Experiences of the most Marginalized to the Fore*, (Turku: Institute for Human Rights, Abo Akademi University, 2002) cited in Sara R Farris & Sara de Jong, “Discontinuous intersections: second-generation immigrant girls in transition from school to work,” in *Ethnic and Racial Studies* (March 2013) 1-21, DOI: 10.1080/01419870.2013.774033; 3

pass marks, or the recruitment and selection processes of teacher training colleges, local authorities and school governors are scrutinised sufficiently to make tangible and precise demands for change. Like Sewell's important but limited research they tend to call for reform in the attitudes of teachers and responses of pupils played out within the microcosm of the school setting.

Indeed, desiring to slow down the rate and depth of change may be the "X factor" that explains why equal attention is not given to investigating the social exclusion of Black teachers, girls and those belonging to the faith communities as it is to the exclusion of supposedly secularised Black boys. Since, as this study intends to highlight, such research would re-focus attention on external factors and the need for far-reaching structural not only attitudinal changes. In short, an intersectionality approach which Avtar Brah and Ann Phoenix maintain 'emphasises that the different dimensions of social life cannot be separated out into discrete and pure strand.'⁶⁰

Even so, for an inquisitive mind like mine the ideological suspicion of mainstream praxis that I possess naturally lends itself to asking the following questions:

1. How common place are my experiences / observations?
2. How can I harness my experience of educational success to empower myself and others to achieve our God-given potential?
3. How can we, whilst pursuing educational success, free ourselves from the ideological and structural chains designed to fail us?

⁶⁰ Brah and Phoenix, "Ain't I a Woman?", 76

The subsequent existential analyses that they open up, to be presented in this investigation, sits comfortably next to if not within the womanist tradition of pedagogy and biblical hermeneutics described respectively by pioneering womanists, Katie Cannon⁶¹ and Jacqueline Grant.⁶² The role of womanist theology – a relatively fresh approach to theology exported from the United States- is therefore central to this enquiry in spite of the debate around the use of the label womanist to describe the work of Christian Black feminists on both sides of the Atlantic. If for no other reason than that traditionally Black people, especially the women and faithful are not sources for mainstream race, class and gender discourses or institutional practices pertaining to differential outcomes for Black people. Our life stories are not prioritised and if we are mentioned we tend to be the objects rather than subjects of research.⁶³

Furthermore, a point made emphatically by Yvonne Channer, the role of religion in academic success is overlooked in mainstream domains;⁶⁴ yet it is for many of us, and was, an antidote to the rejection and oppression we encounter or cognitive dissonance we experience and therefore it removes barriers that can hamper our achievements.⁶⁵ Perhaps more significantly from the celebratory perspective taken by this work, it is also a major source of ethical and practical encouragement for believers to fulfil their vocation and become successful in all walks of life. After all, the doctrines of the major BMCs in Britain like the Seven Day Adventist (SDA) and various Pentecostal denominations all, as Channer highlights, assert

⁶¹Cannon, *Katie's Canon*; especially 137-143

⁶² Grant, "Womanist Theology", 279-283

⁶³ As in research mentioned earlier, like The Plowden Report and K. Griffiths.

⁶⁴ Channer, *I am a Promise*, ix

⁶⁵ Channer, *I am a Promise*, 26-28

their moral responsibility and freedom to take social action that reflects our God given talents and calling.⁶⁶

In contrast, using the Black faith experience as a source of enquiry opens up fresh and rich pathways for this theological journey into the race, gender and education debate. Notably, it questions why, if the BMCs believe so strongly in educational performance as an expression of our God given talents, they haven't established faith schools in a similar fashion as they have established independent churches or the Anglicans and Roman Catholics have established church schools. It also questions whether or not the BMCs without a new theology can transform the pedagogical and cultural infrastructure of the education system with the same or deeper impact that they have changed the communal and ecclesiastical landscape of post-war Britain. Questioning made even more potent in a Black theological climate that is dominated by a belief in the sudden intrusion of divine power to enable Christians to take radical social action on behalf of the poor and marginalised and be certain of victory despite the odds.⁶⁷

Equally, using the experience of Black educators, notably female teachers in state schools, as a source of enquiry opens up fresh and rich pathways for this theological journey into the race, gender and education debate. Namely, it questions why institutional racism within the education sector is perceived as an attack on the advancement of Black pupils and not Black teachers too? In other words, why is an attack on one section of the community and not

⁶⁶ Channer, *I am a Promise*, 30-35

⁶⁷ This belief is a theological tenant of many Pentecostal denominations that make up BMCs in Britain as documented by Channer, *I am a Promise*, 34

another seen as an attack on the Black communities? Is it a case of Black women being devalued in a similar way that Crenshaw claims they are in America regarding the focus of anti-racist critiques of rape law?⁶⁸

Research as liberative praxis: relocating to the centre via the hermeneutical spiral

In the tradition of liberation praxis, as Michael N. Jagessar and Anthony G. Reddie state in their opening chapter to *Black Theology in Britain: A Reader*⁶⁹ which they edit, ‘Black theology [including womanist theology], like all liberation theologies, is governed by the necessity of ortho-praxis [right action] rather than orthodoxy [right thought].’ This study therefore, will present a case for the need to take action that celebrates our achievements and raises our political consciousness about the agency of faithful Black females in oppressive Britain. The argument for a WPP demands the construction of a theological pedagogy that embraces differences inside as well as outside the African-Caribbean experience. In accordance it will take account of the routes as well as roots of our success, something the British authorities have failed to do in over fifty years of trying. The crux of the argument relates to the need for a new pedagogy that is also liberative theologically and simultaneously a new theology that is liberative pedagogically in its intent and purpose. On the grounds that neither the British education system nor the Black led faith communities can act as agents of whole and lasting change without one, and besides which the latter is compelled to herald the way.

⁶⁸ Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins,” especially 370

⁶⁹ Jagessar and Reddie state in their opening chapter to *Black Theology in Britain*, 5

Within the tradition of liberation theology that is distinguished, as maintained Juan Luis Segundo, by its methods more than its content,⁷⁰ this study accordingly constructs this new theological pedagogy I call a WPP, using the methodological tool developed by Segundo, the hermeneutical circle. Put briefly here (but to be expanded greatly in the main body of this study), the character of WPP is womanist because of its primary focus on ordinary Black women; it is pneumatological because of their love of self, others and the Spirit; and it is pedagogical because of its multi-dialogical and didactic intentions to construct a teaching and learning heuristic that will empower marginalised African-Caribbean women to enter into meaningful dialogue with others and vice versa. In this way, voices and perspectives traditionally buried by dominant sections of society can be resurrected and given new life.⁷¹

And when the experience of Black women overlay the White masculine bourgeois bias in British society and church, this study will assert, new pathways are opened up in terms of praxis concerning the nature of justice, liberation and biblical interpretation and related issues.⁷² For instance, considering whether or not the very thought processes and actions of the liberationist can break the ideological chains of the structures that help to create the oppressive conditions s/he fights to eradicate?⁷³ The answer within this study is that *in time* subjugated epistemologies can, so long as each liberationist is conscious of their alternative

⁷⁰ Segundo *Liberation of Theology*, 9 identifies liberation theologies principally by their methodology and not content.

⁷¹ See British Black scholar Doreen McCalla, *Unsung Sherones in the Church: Singing the Praises of Black Women Now* (Bloomington, Indiana: Author House, 2007) on the benefits of womanist theology for giving Black women a voice.

⁷² Segundo, *Liberation of Theology* asserts that when the experience of the oppressed ‘discovers a deeper or rich layer of reality, it enriches theology with new questions and obliges it to undertake a new interpretation of its own sources’ 19

⁷³ Audrey Lorde in *Sister Outsider* (Trumanberg, NY, Crossing Press, 1984) 123 puts it like this “the true focus of revolutionary change is never merely the oppressive situations which we seek to escape, but that piece of the oppressor which is planted deep within each of us” cited in Collins *Black Feminist Thought* 2nd Edition, 287

way of knowing, and shrewd enough to employ this epistemology so that it does not decentre other epistemologies nor let them dominate.

The methodology chapter that follows next is where I detail how I will ensure a liberative praxis in line with the intents and purposes of this new theological pedagogy using the hermeneutical circle. My methods deliberately demonstrate a working definition of a WPP both as a liberative methodology and theological pedagogy that utilises the spiritual (religious or not) experience, history and culture of Black women as a source for addressing complex issues in British society. Accordingly, all chapters are structured on the hermeneutical circle to create a hermeneutical spiral of overlapping but advancing themes and actions. In line with womanist epistemology and postmodern Black subjectivity, there are no claims of this thesis being *objective* or *representative*. Instead, it unashamedly proclaims its subjectivity based on a relational and spatial sense of identity (not disconnected and isolated individualism), which the hermeneutical spiral facilitates. It is therefore the most important consideration when judging the credibility of the claims made in this thesis and the reliability of its methodology.

Chapter Outlines

All the chapters focus on a particular stage of the hermeneutical circle but each chapter also reflects the hermeneutical circle in its own right. That is, all four stages of experience, social and scriptural analyses as well as accompanying action are illustrated. Inevitably, there is overlap, but in a way that advances the argument and avoids unnecessary duplication.

Chapter 2 for instance, marks my entry into the hermeneutical spiral with a presentation of my own experience of being a Christian Black female educator in relation to the specific situated

experience shared in interviews with five women or ‘sojourners’ as I refer to them for reasons explained in the chapter. Our experiences are celebrated and micro-analysed through multi-dimensional, intersectional social and scriptural lenses and become the backdrop for raising the question at the heart of this thesis, “Is it feasible to teach to the Spirit and not just the text without a new theological pedagogy?”

By extension, even though I recount the experiences of one person in relation to a few, and that one person being me, this personal testimony explains my motivation for taking steps towards a WPP. Moreover, in line with the core epistemological principles in Black and subordinated thought systems (including the hermeneutical circle) that make real life experiences supported by hard evidence necessary to the creation and articulation of meaning⁷⁴ it simultaneously permits others to test the truthfulness of my claims because they can examine the extent I am a witness, activist and expression of the divine liberation rooted in the gospel.⁷⁵

Accordingly, Chapter 3, although it begins with a presentation of the subordinated experiences of Black people in the UK, it uses information gleaned from ten questionnaires of a wider diverse group of respondents alongside secondary sources to focus on a macro-analysis of the processes and multi-layered, intersecting structures that provide the context for developing a WPP. In this way it is a legitimate continuance of the journey begun in the

⁷⁴ Henry H. Mitchell and Nicholas Cooper Lewter, *Soul Theology: The Heart of American Black Culture* (San Francisco, Harper and Row; 1986) cited in Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 209 uses African-American rather than Black but it is equally true of the Atlantic African diaspora, in the Caribbean and UK where I come from.

⁷⁵ Very similar to the way James Cone, the father of Black Theology, insists others should examine the authenticity of church in his testimony *My Soul Looks Back* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1986)

second chapter by helping to contextualise the experiences of the sojourners as well as my own and to consider what, how and why particular Black people perform in a manner worthy of their God given gifts and talents. Both chapters are therefore crucial to this study, since lived experience is at the heart of any transformative praxis.

A point eloquently made by bell hooks who asserts; ‘By recognizing subjectivity and the limits of identity, we disrupt that objectification that is so necessary in a culture of domination.’⁷⁶ Also within the political arena as feminist Maggie Humm rightly identifies, ‘personal, lived experience is intensely political and immensely important politically.’⁷⁷ But perhaps most significantly from this paper’s epistemological and celebratory perspective is Patricia Hill Collin’s argument that experience of the dynamics of intersectional discrimination constitutes wisdom for many US Black women and it is the ‘cutting edge’ that separates it from knowledge that transcends their particular experience.⁷⁸ The difference between these two types of knowing is a key feature of Black feminist thought in the US, and I would argue for many Black women here who share its purpose, and therefore a distinguishing feature of our alternative knowledge validation process.⁷⁹

Scriptural analysis is the main purpose of Chapter 4. It advances the journey towards a WPP with re-readings in light of the personal reflections on, and social analyses of African-Caribbean achievement and Black female agency presented in the earlier chapters. It illustrates an application of a WPP in its use of anti-oppressive teaching and learning

⁷⁶ hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*, 139

⁷⁷ Humm, Maggie, *The Dictionary of Feminist Theory* 2nd Edition (Harvester, Wheatsheaf, London 1995) 84

⁷⁸ Collins, *Black Feminist Thought* 2nd Edition, 257

⁷⁹ Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, especially Chapter 10

strategies that rely on the experiential imagination of the participants, implemented from four integral perspectives of marginalised characters, tellers, listeners and a centred spirituality or political pneumatology. It raises new theological questions and takes corresponding action. The latter is elaborated upon in Chapter 5, the social action chapter, where appropriately the specifics of each sojourner's agency are described. The diverse and dynamic nature of the need for African-Caribbean women to journey towards a WPP and others to engage with it is demonstrated as liberative praxis and the thesis concluded for now!

CHAPTER 1

WALKING THE WALK TO FREEDOM NOT JUST TALKING FREEDOM

Introduction

Also: A woman who loves other women, sexually and/or nonsexually. Appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility (values tears as natural counterbalance to laughter), and women's strength.⁸⁰

My experience of the British education system and life in faith have been the catalyst for embarking on this theological journey that is unashamedly subjective concerning the personal and alternative regarding its epistemological perspective. For instance, from the onset, based upon personal knowledge I knew that the comparative success of some Black pupils is ignored by mainstream researchers, without the need for it to be pointed out by scholars like Heidi Safia Mirza,⁸¹ Yvonne Channer,⁸² and Cheron Byfield.⁸³ I also knew, without scholarly reinforcement from fellow teachers like Anuradha Rakhit⁸⁴ that the accomplishments of many Black teachers⁸⁵ are also ignored within the school system, by staff and researchers alike. Nonetheless the work of these Black⁸⁶ female scholars and others who have not ignored experiences like mine has been invaluable in keeping me sane by reassuring me I am not paranoid! Hence, I concur with UK African-Caribbean activists, Beverley Bryan, Stella Dadzie & Suzanne Scafe when they write:

⁸⁰ Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, xi. Extract taken from the second part of her definition of a womanist.

⁸¹ Mirza, *Young, Female and Black* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), 11

⁸² Channer, *I am a Promise*; ix

⁸³ Cheron Byfield, *Black Boys Can Make It: How they overcome the obstacles to university in the UK and USA* (Stoke-on-Trent: Trentham Books, 2008)

⁸⁴ Anuradha Rakhit, "Silenced voices: life history as an approach to the study of South Asian women teachers" in Paul Connolly and Barry Troyna (editors), *Researching Racism in Education: Politics, Theory and Practice* (Buckingham, Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1998), 55-66

⁸⁵ As stated earlier the term Black is used in this study as a synonym for anyone of African descent however in this particular instance it is applied to an Asian teacher for the reason it is used by Rakhit herself, as a political colour to denote solidarity with all non-Whites fighting for justice and equality.

⁸⁶ The category is used here in its wider political understanding of including Asian and other non-White groups.

If we are to gain anything, from our history and from our lives in this country which can be of practical use to us today, we must take stock of our experiences, assess our responses – and learn from them. This will be done by listening to the voices of the mothers, sisters, grandmothers and aunts who established our presence here. And by listening to our own voices.⁸⁷

In line with this thinking, I knew that in this investigation I could *not* by-pass my own experiences under ‘the illusion of somehow being outside it all’⁸⁸ denoted by notions of “objectivity” embedded in traditional approaches to academic research. I also knew that I needed to gather first-hand accounts of teaching and learning from other African-Caribbean women especially those of faith, because characteristic of established sources there is a general disregard for *both* faith as a contributing factor in educational success,⁸⁹ and the accomplishment of Black females. As Mirza contends, and I validate, deliberately ignored in order to ‘maintain the myth of black underachievement’.⁹⁰

Consequently, I have embarked on this journey suspecting that the liberative theological pedagogy that I pursue already exists as raw material. Black women of faith, like myself are successfully but probably reflexively implementing it as part of their daily lives. It just needs gathering, celebrating, and articulating in a more polished form by and for other marginalised African-Caribbean female educators. Furthermore, another valid point made by Mirza, regarding the dominant race and education discourses, is that their pathological view of social change which centres on tackling underachievement ironically sustains the status quo because

⁸⁷ Beverley Bryan, Stella Dadzie & Suzanne Scafe, *The Heart of the Race: Black Women’s Lives in Britain*, (London: Virago Press, 1985), 2

⁸⁸ Ratcliff, Donald, *The Beginnings of a Christian Perspective on Qualitative Research: A hand-out to accompany a seminar on qualitative research*; pre-conference session, 1998, Christian Association for Psychological Studies (CAPS), 2

⁸⁹ See Channer, *I am a Promise*

⁹⁰ Mirza, *Young, Female and Black*, especially Chapter 2

it neglects to adequately challenge the structural inequalities that oppress us.⁹¹ As a result I believe race and education policy and practices have failed to bring about whole and lasting change in over forty years of supposedly trying because of this negligence. Not surprising if you consider that by not adopting an intersectionality approach they are ignoring what Brah and Phoenix comprehensively describe as ‘the complex, irreducible, varied, and variable effects which ensue when multiple axis of differentiation- economic, political, cultural, psychic, subjective and experiential- intersect in historically specific contexts.’⁹²

All that is required to reveal this theological pedagogy is for me to find the means by which I can harness the collective experiences of success achieved by African-Caribbean women specifically, in order to distinguish the liberative features of our theology and pedagogy. Perhaps more importantly these means must allow me to articulate what I find in a systematic and reliable way. By reliable I mean methods that allow me to retain our flair as Black women for connected knowing and reflection. In particular those features, highlighted by Patricia Hill Collins, which identify and undermine the structural mechanisms that oppress us such as our particular ethics of caring and personal accountability.⁹³ My understanding of the role of experience in this research, therefore, concurs with D. Smith’s remark:

The work of inquiry in which I am engaged proceeds by taking this experience of mine, this experience of other women... and asking how it is organised, how is it determined, what the social relations are which generate it.⁹⁴

⁹¹ Mirza, *Young, Female and Black*, Chapter 2

⁹² Brah and Phoenix, “Ain’t I a Woman?”, 76

⁹³ See Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, especially Chapter 10 and Chapter 11.

⁹⁴ D. Smith, “A Sociology for women” in *The Prism of Sex: Essays in the Sociology of Knowledge*, edited by J. Sherman and E. Torton Beck, (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1979), 137 cited in Anuradha Rakhit, “Silenced voices”, 55

Appropriately, it is what I do not know through personal experience alone that sustains this theological pursuit:

- To discover how widespread are my personal experiences and observations.
- To harness the collective experience of achievement of living Black women of faith.
- To identify distinguishing features of our theological and pedagogical praxis especially pertaining to our ethics and epistemological thinking.
- To celebrate and articulate these features in a new theological construct that is designed to enable marginalised African-Caribbean women in the UK to break free of the ideological structures that oppress us.

Thus, from the onset I also knew that my approach would have to be ethnographic in terms of listening to the direct speech of living Black women, as well as overtly subjective in order to navigate the lives and experiences of pedagogy that mainstream researchers have by-passed. I also knew that it would have to break away from the convention to problematize the Black experience followed by *both* mainstream authorities strategically promoting the myth of Black underachievement *and* well intentioned community groups trying to offer a solution. In other words a celebratory approach would be undertaken in order to undermine the untrue and unconstructive perception of Black failure embedded in the nation's psyche. That is, Black failure is not the essence of the Black experience in Britain. But I did not know what form it would take.

This chapter therefore, aims to detail how I have ensured a liberative praxis in line with the above intents and purposes. In particular, why I have first and foremost relied on primary sources and selected ethnographic methods out of the womanist toolbox even though as anthropologist and theologian Linda E Thomas observes, these tools of analysis are not typical when she remarks that '[t]he overwhelming majority of contemporary womanist religious scholars rely primarily on written texts, such as fashion, biography, and autobiography.'⁹⁵ Accordingly, it will show how my personal experience of research raised certain enquiry questions that put me on a quest to find a methodology that resonates with the marginalised experiences of contemporary Black women in the UK, including my own. One that provides, to quote British Black feminist Helen (charles), 'a viable language from which the black woman can speak and, more importantly, is listened to.'⁹⁶ This latter point is also why throughout this presentation I have, similar to Doreen McCalla in her book *Unsung Sheroes in the Church: Singing the Praises of Black Women Now*, endeavoured to use Black British female sources to drive the thesis.⁹⁷ Moreover this would be my endeavour if for no other reason than that despite the prolific commonalties between Black women in Britain and elsewhere in the world there are significant contextual differences too.

In Britain for example, the 2001 Census revealed that the African Diaspora represented less than 2% (1.2million) of the population.⁹⁸ The American 2010 Census in contrast showed it

⁹⁵ Linda E. Thomas, "Womanist Theology, Epistemology, and a New Paradigm" in *Living Stones in the Household of God: The Legacy and Future of Black Theology*, edited by Linda E. Thomas, (Fortress Press: Minneapolis, 2004), 37-48; 45

⁹⁶ Helen (charles) "The Language of Womanism: Re-thinking the difference" in Heidi Safia Mirza (editor), *British Black Feminism: A Reader* (London: Routledge; 1997), 278-297; 278

⁹⁷ Doreen McCalla in her book *Unsung Sheroes in the Church: Singing the Praises of Black Women Now* (Bloomington, Alabama: Author House, 2007), 7-8

⁹⁸ Office for National Statistics; General Register Office for Scotland; Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, *Census 2001*, (London: HMSO, 2001) cited in Helen Connolly and Amanda White, "The different experiences of the United Kingdom's ethnic and religious populations" in *Social Trends*: Number 36 (2006 Edition), 1-8; 2

made up 13% (38.9 million) of the US population.⁹⁹ Our negligible numbers mean, as Helen (Charles) argues that Black feminists in Britain cannot, without greater risk of undermining our cause, be insular and exercise the same political weight our American sisters can to establish a separate Black feminist movement.¹⁰⁰ Moreover, regardless of the nature of the differences between us and our overseas sisters, the fact that they exist means it is wise to take heed of Kate Coleman's warning that 'Further exploration and investigation of this particular lake [US womanism] is necessary if black British women are to do more than continue to catch everyone else's fish.'¹⁰¹ Using Black British sources is one way I intend to catch British fish!

Section I: Personal experience of being taken for a ride by educational research

Many years ago, when I was a student in Sixth Form College, my sociology lecturer sought my permission to take part in research he was doing for his masters' dissertation. Although, I was not used to White people, much less lecturers wanting to know my views or details of my poor underclass and Black female existence, because of the rapport we had, coupled with his eccentricity I agreed and happily answered his questions about my schooling. Some questions, I can't remember the details of now, perplexed me; others made me think long and hard. Notably, I thought hard about the impact of class, gender and racism on the educational attainments of my peers and African-Caribbean community. It wasn't until I, as an undergraduate, conducted an ethnographic study into the social mobility of African-Caribbean people in the UK and USA that I had an opportunity to formulate enquiry questions of my

⁹⁹ U.S. Census Bureau News, *2010 Census Shows America's Diversity: Hispanic and Asian Populations Grew Fastest During the Decade* (Washington: The Census Bureau, 2010) 2

¹⁰⁰ Helen (Charles) "The Language of Womanism: Re-thinking the difference"

¹⁰¹ Kate Coleman, "Black Women and Theology" in *Black Theology in Britain: A Journal of Contextual Praxis* 3 (November 1999), 51-65; 65

own on this topic and seek answers to them, since his research did not involve me in its design nor in dialogue.¹⁰² Should I have been treated as a subject not an object of research which dialogue requires, and have had active rather than passive involvement in its design?

Many years later I met him again but this time I too was doing research as an associate at a red brick university and he was a newly appointed education lecturer there. Hearing of his publication on gifted Black youth I suddenly realized that I did not know what documented form his masters' research had taken because he never consulted me regarding the write-up of our sessions. Should he have done? It was not the convention at the time and I don't believe it is today. More recently, whilst working as a community educator I came across the grandmother and carer of one of the children attending my after school sessions. This grandmother, a Black Christian woman was case studied by a PhD research student for her pioneering work in helping to establish the Black Church in Britain. When I mentioned the thesis to this 'Mother of the Church',¹⁰³ she had no idea what I was talking about. Should she have done? Assuming permission to participate was gained it is hard to imagine such a lapse in memory if she had also been involved in dialogue with the researcher throughout the entire research process.

Indeed, the quantitative research I carried out as a research associate only sought permission from respondents to participate in the data gathering not in the write-up. Similarly, with the qualitative school based action research projects I conducted as a postgraduate student, I only

¹⁰² Dialogue is, as explained by Collins in *Black Feminist Thought*, 212, interaction, not just conversation, that must take place between two subjects rather than between subject and object as in mainstream discourses.

¹⁰³ Title of respect often given to female elders in the Black Church

sought permission from the schools to gather data but not for them to participate in the write-up. At least I gave them a copy of my report when it was finished which my lecturer had not done. But alas I did not get permission from the parents of the pupils to use our lessons for research. Should I have done? It wasn't the convention at the time and I don't believe it is today. The ethical framework guiding school-based research tends to ask parents for permission to use their child's visual images and no other data pertaining to their learning processes or outcomes unless the child can be identified. Generally, it is the convention to keep findings confidential and the identity of pupils anonymous.

It wasn't until I participated in community-based action research projects on sustainable development in collaboration with other teachers and educators that I experienced collaborative write-up with the researcher and other participants involved in the data gathering process. Here again permission was not sought from parents to use the data collected from their children's lessons. Should we have done? But parental permission was sought for the pupils to be involved in presenting the findings to the public in the form of a celebratory event. Once again I don't believe it was the convention at the time nor is it today. Should it be?

My own personal experience of the problematic nature of participation and accountability in research therefore raises questions, which are really quite rhetorical, given the nature of my study. Should I, as a Black Christian woman undertaking research in which Black women are at the centre, involve them in dialogue regarding the design, collection and the presentation of the data they have helped to generate? Of course they should be involved. How credible

would it be to construct a theological pedagogy for and by marginalised Black women without their involvement throughout the research process? Clearly the new construct would not be very credible at all. For this reason I knew I too would centre the experiences of Black women as well as strive to be accountable to my participants. Additionally, my research would endeavour to engage them in dialogue regarding data collection and presentation of its findings; not only in the construction of a theological pedagogy but also in the write-up of the thesis. Given that the above questions are rhetorical, one of the key issues for this research is how can I ensure dialogue and accountability throughout the research process?

My experience in relation to other Black female scholars¹⁰⁴

Proceeding with my experience of research in relation to other Black female academics¹⁰⁵ concerned with the lives of Black women reveals a preference by a significant number of British scholars to include the voices and standpoints of Black women and to endeavour to be accountable to them such as Alexander¹⁰⁶, Bryan, Dadzie & Scafe¹⁰⁷, and Mirza¹⁰⁸, already mentioned in the introduction and McCalla¹⁰⁹ cited earlier in this chapter. An approach to research that reflects some Black women's epistemic stance but is not exclusive to them, as Collins acknowledges in her explanation of the contours of a Black feminist epistemology.¹¹⁰ A subjective stance that makes lived experience accompanied by concrete illustration

¹⁰⁴ Aspects of this section, especially those pertaining to the role of experience in research, are duplicated in Howell-Baker, "Towards a Womanist Pneumatological Pedagogy," namely, 34-37

¹⁰⁵ In the area of researching the lives of Black women of African descent I include the work of Asian scholars who identify with the term 'Black' like Heidi Safia Mirza.

¹⁰⁶ Alexander, *Mouse in the Jungle*

¹⁰⁷ Bryan et al, *The Heart of the Race*

¹⁰⁸ Mirza, *Young, Female and Black*

¹⁰⁹ McCalla, *Unsung Heroines in the Church*

¹¹⁰ Collins, *Black Feminist Thought* 2nd Edition, Chapter 11, especially 256

indispensable to the process of constructing and representing meaning.¹¹¹ Crucial, as Collins argues to the survival of many Black women who need the ‘connected knowing’ through dialogue, of wisdom (knowledge grounded in experience) rather than understanding separated from personal meaning, which characterises the prevailing White Eurocentric masculinist epistemology.¹¹²

Although unusual by mainstream standards it is not surprising within the conventions of a Black feminist epistemology that McCalla preludes her study with personal profiles of herself, all her contributors *and* testimonials from Gee and Dominique Walker, the mother and sister of Anthony Walker, a Black teenager who in 2005 was murdered in an unprovoked racist attack in Liverpool city.¹¹³ This technique reflects an essential component of many Black women’s knowledge validation system which hinges on knowing that the writers / speakers are personally accountable for and emotionally connected to their words and ideas because to quote Collins, ‘those individuals who have lived through the experiences about which they claim to be experts are more believable and credible than those who have merely read or thought about such experiences’.¹¹⁴

In line with Black feminist thinking many Black British female researchers have consciously or subconsciously employed research methods that are compatible with the consequences of perceiving ‘the contradictions between everyday experiences and the controlling images of

¹¹¹ A point made by Henry H. Mitchell and Nicholas Cooper Lewter, *Soul Theology: The Heart of American Culture* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986) cited in Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 209

¹¹² Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*

¹¹³ McCalla, *Unsung Sherones in the Church*, xiii-5

¹¹⁴ Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 209

Black womanhood',¹¹⁵ and being able to replace them with self-defining and validating ones that are consistent with the realities of their lives and their thinking. Methods like the use of dialogue during in-depth interviews and in the retrieval of and response to historical and contemporary oral accounts. Executed in order to connect with and analyse the complex lives and thinking of Black women, in a way that will ensure their work is validated by those very Black women.¹¹⁶

For example, religious scholar Alexander is one of the few to acknowledge the crucial contribution Black women have made to the development of the BMCs in Britain. In her enquiry about British Black Christian women entitled "Mouse in the jungle: The Black Christian woman's experience in the church and society in Britain" she centres the experience of our foremothers and contemporaries.¹¹⁷ Using oral narrative accounts as a significant source of information, she explains how religious and socio-political pioneering women, such as Esme Lancaster, skilfully adapted strategies that had ensured the growth of the church and community in the Caribbean for the British context. Although not religious scholars Bryan, Dadzie and Scafe similarly in their study cited earlier¹¹⁸ utilise oral accounts obtained in various settings from discussion groups and working collectives to historical records, and reclaim as well as proclaim the contribution Black women, (pre, post and during the slave era) have made to the development of their community and society as a whole.

¹¹⁵ Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 93

¹¹⁶ See Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 212-220

¹¹⁷ Alexander, *Mouse in the jungle*

¹¹⁸ Bryan et al, *The Heart of the Race*

Indeed these intellectuals mentioned utilise multi-disciplinary, intersectional tools of analysis to demonstrate how Black women have exercised power from the periphery by creating safe spaces, which have the traditions, culture, art and language of Black women at their heart. Likewise, Mirza uses oral narrative accounts alongside sociological and statistical tools of analysis to more fully comprehend numerous Black women's experiences of education without problematizing them. In this way she is able to explain how Black women, who appear to conform and accept, actually transform and reject the institutional values and methods that oppress their communities.

Rather predictably, given the epistemological standpoint of Black women, these Black female intellectuals and many others employ dialogical methods that are valued by our American and overseas counterparts such as oral narrative researchers (ONRs) and/or womanists. By the same token up-close and personal dialogue is also necessary for this journey towards a WPP because it requires collaboration with and analysis of the lived experience of my own community and peer group- other Black women who share a passion for teaching and learning from an emancipatory faith perspective. Besides which face-to-face dialogue is crucial to this study because as McCalla points out in her use of first-hand narrative accounts, 'Oral tradition is the medium through which Black people customarily and predominantly convey information.'¹¹⁹

¹¹⁹ McCalla, *Unsung Heroines in the Church*; 9

Yet, as a Black woman I have found myself, like fellow indigenous researcher, Christine Obbo from East Africa,¹²⁰ being questioned on my decision to make use of ethnographic research methods in this investigation. After I'd completed the initial theoretical stages of my research, which drew heavily on my personal experience in its analysis, my original supervisor made it clear he was not happy to continue in his role, if I insisted on obtaining first-hand accounts from other Black women. In Obbo's case, a colleague wondered why she bothered with fieldwork when, presumably, as an indigenous researcher she already knew the answers the village and slum women would give! Commentating on the reports generated about the Aids Intervention Programs she recounts: 'two camps of reporters developed: (a) "Those of Us Who Know the Culture", purporting to offer the emic view even without in-depth interviews with the people and (b) those who wanted to give the people voice to explain what was going on.'¹²¹ I'm not saying that my former supervisor fell into the first camp; on the contrary I believe he understood that although valuable, it takes time as well as skill to do this kind of research justice.

Certainly, ethnography or participant observation for these intents and purposes can be a methodological nightmare, for both students and supervisors, constricted by the ideal three years full time or six years part time PhD programme, and therefore something best avoided. Indeed, taking ten years or more to complete a thesis, as I have done, is comical in the academic setting, implying you are not serious when truly the opposite is the case. Obbo took over 25 years to collect her data and had to master recording narratives when several people

¹²⁰ Christine Obbo, "'What do women know?...And As I Was Saying!'" in Kim Marie Vaz, *Oral Narrative Research with Black Women: collecting treasures* (Thousand Oaks, London and New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1997)

¹²¹ Obbo, "What do women know?", 46

are talking at the same time.¹²² Roswith Gerloff a White female theologian took seventeen years to complete her ethnographic study of Black-led Pentecostal churches in Britain.¹²³ All the same, it raises the question of how practical the liberative intents and purposes of this theological journey are to achieve with living Black women?

Section II: The analytical road to the womanist theological approach to ethnography

In the process of their spiritual and material survival in the jungle of British oppression, these [British Christian Black] women have, perhaps coincidentally, formed a Christian womanist theology that seeks to assert their dignity and personhood, because they belong to a God whose interaction with the downtrodden of society inevitably must involve the liberation from all sources of their oppression.

Valentina Alexander¹²⁴

How suitable is a womanist approach for this theological journey?

An examination of techniques used by Black female researchers in Britain and traditionally employed by African-Caribbean women in their struggle for personal and collective advancement exposes dialogical methods that are favoured by numerous Black female intellectuals, especially womanist scholars in America and /or Black female ethnographers around the world. Both womanist and ethnographic oral narrative research approaches legitimate starting enquiries such as this one with the experiences of indigenous Black women. Oral narrative research (ONR) as an ethnographic / participant observation tool for instance is interested in engaging in face-to-face meaningful conversation with a range of people because, as articulated by Renee T White, its approach ‘centres on developing concepts through observation and in-depth interviews... [As well as being] interested in

¹²² Obbo, “What do women know?”, 48

¹²³ Roswith Gerloff, *A Plea for British Black Theologies: The Black Church Movement in Britain in its Transatlantic cultural and Theological Interaction* Volume 1 (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1992)

¹²⁴ Alexander, *Mouse in the Jungle*, 106

clearly understanding the social space or context in which attitudes are formed and acted on by individuals.’¹²⁵ Consequently, when ONR is adopted by indigenous researchers in the study of living Black women it centres our experience and engages us in dialogue.¹²⁶

Womanist theology is interested in dialogue too, for much the same reasons as ONR except in relation to the scriptural revelation and liberation praxis. As a result it uses a methodological approach that provides the multi-dimensional and hermeneutical tools needed for a systematic and meaningful analysis of our complex existence in British society. Like other liberation theologies its purpose is to witness God’s existence in the history of the oppressed and it makes this pursuit indispensable to doing theology. This is largely accomplished through the hermeneutic circle. Juan Luis Segundo in his book *Liberation of Theology* developed this theological methodology to facilitate and authenticate ‘the continuing change in our interpretation of the Bible which is dictated by the continuing changes in our present-day reality, both individual and societal.’¹²⁷ There are four stages in the circle beginning with an ideological suspicion which at stage two is applied in its deconstruction of the social system and in turn generates an exegetical suspicion. This suspicion opens the doorway to the third stage of scriptural analysis out of which a new and liberative hermeneutic is constructed to be implemented in the final stage of transformative action.

¹²⁵ Renee T. White, Talking About Sex and HIV: Conceptualizing a New Sociology of Experience, in Kim Marie Vaz editor, *Oral Narrative Research with Black Women: collecting treasures*, (Thousand Oaks, London and New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1997), 99-118; 102

¹²⁶ See Kim Marie Vaz, *Oral Narrative Research with Black Women: collecting treasures*, (Thousand Oaks, London, New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1997), for a collection of essays by ONRs for illustrations.

¹²⁷ Segundo, *Liberation of Theology*, 8

Hence, womanist theology is committed to bringing to the centre of the Christian hermeneutical circle Black women's experiences. That is, womanists are compelled to interpret the Bible from the standpoint of the oppressed for the purposes of liberative praxis and therefore *must* centre the collective experiences of Black women. It is therefore, as articulated by Williams, intent on engaging in dialogue but for purposes of also challenging unjust forms of church worship, language and thought as well as developing models of teaching and learning that herald Black women's ethics.¹²⁸ Analytical features that an ethnographic ONR approach lacks, but ones that are necessary on a journey towards a liberative theological pedagogy like this one. By the same token face-to-face dialogue is also necessary for this journey towards a pneumatological pedagogy. Yet, womanists do not necessarily engage in face-to-face dialogue to the dismay of womanist scholar Thomas, who asserts that 'Ideally the womanist religious scholar is an indigenous anthropologist...[who] gives priority to the life story of the subject in a way that underscores the narratives of the long line of subjugated voices from the past to the present.'¹²⁹ As a result, the characteristic tools of ethnographic ONR, in-depth face-to-face interviews and observations are preferred only by a few womanist theologians.

Nonetheless this neglect is perfectly legitimate from this epistemological standpoint because it is as Collins stresses 'connectedness rather than separation [that] is an essential component of the knowledge validation process... People become more human and empowered only in the context of a community, and only when they 'become seekers of the type of connections,

¹²⁸ Delores S. Williams "Womanist Theology: Black Women's Voices" in *Christianity and Crisis* 47 (March 2, 1987). Essay reprinted in in *Black Theology a Documentary History Volume Two: 1980-1992*, James H. Cone & Gayraud S. Wilmore (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1992), 265-272; 266, labels these intentions multi-dialogical, liturgical and didactic intents.

¹²⁹ Thomas, "Womanist Theology, Epistemology, and a New Paradigm", 47

interactions, and meetings that lead to harmony'.¹³⁰ Thus many womanist theologians tend to connect with other Black female voices through examining ex-enslaved African narratives and contemporary literature whilst being equipped with the interpretative tools of the hermeneutic circle that enables them to transcend specific and localised experiences and consider all facets, forms and expressions of oppression, internal and external (bi-focal) and intersectional of Black women's complex lives –past and present.

In other words a womanist theological approach to the hermeneutical circle appreciates that our survival depends on an integrated double consciousness. That is, knowing *both* the world of the oppressor *and* simultaneously knowing ourselves autonomous of their controlling notions and images.¹³¹ The vitality of which can only be appreciated if one considers, as The Mud Flower Collective of Christian feminists do, that our marginal position means 'the privilege to reflect in order to prevail beyond survival is not granted to [us] so [our] epistemological privilege either lies dormant, in some kind of state of denial or self-delusion, or it is acted out in ways that can get [us] beaten up, incarcerated, mutilated. How to channel this wisdom is the essential concern of the ongoing survival of women of colour'¹³²

In line with this thinking, the hermeneutical circle or 'pastoral cycle' of action and reflection¹³³ is essential to the praxis of liberation theology, of which this journey towards a pneumatological pedagogy is guided, because it interprets for the sake of liberative action. A theological approach like womanism, done by Black women, that promises to be accountable

¹³⁰ Molefi Kete Asante, *The Afrocentric Idea* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987) 185 quoted in Collins *Black Feminist Thought*, 212

¹³¹ Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 26

¹³² Katie G. Cannon, Beverley W. Harrison, Carter Heyward and Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz, Bess B. Johnson, Mary D. Pellauer & Nancy D. Richardson - The Mud Flower Collective, *God's Fierce Whimsy: Christian Feminism and Theological Education*, (Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 1985) 41

¹³³ Elaine Graham, Heather Walton and Frances Ward; *Theological Reflection: Methods* (London, SCM Press, 2005) 171

to ordinary Black women, and engage them in dialogue as equal partners in our struggle for justice and emancipation cannot be diverted away from this study. Especially as the wisdom of Black women is generally rendered invalid by the mainstream knowledge domains, which privilege the voices of White bourgeois men. In the words of Obbo:

Women's voices have been devalued by male chroniclers of cultural history even when the men acknowledge female informants; they are overshadowed by the voice of male authority and ascendance in society...This attitude is not limited only to men in societies we study; until recently, professional academics, too, had problems taking women's utterances seriously...¹³⁴

Consequently, there is a dearth of literature that gives expression to Black female voices except occasionally to provide background music or sound bites to matters pertaining to public affairs.¹³⁵ Collins for instance highlights how Black women are usually portrayed as the objects of intellectual enterprises never the agents creating a false dichotomy between conceptual labour and activism.¹³⁶ Womanist theology with its onus on Black women's experience does a lot to rectify this injustice within academia. This aspect together with its hermeneutical and dialogical methods, which facilitate the participation of and accountability to Black women of faith struggling for self-actualisation, provides a way forward for this study endeavouring to stay true to God's liberating message and an Afrocentric feminist epistemology.

Thomas however, observes that many womanist scholars prefer to use secondary sources, such as historical documents and literature, even though hearing the women speak for themselves would enhance their work. As she chides: 'Not only should womanist scholars

¹³⁴ Obbo, "What do women know"; 42

¹³⁵ For an example pertaining to race and education discourses see the works of Mirza, *Young, Female and Black and Race, Gender and Educational Desire*

¹³⁶ Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment* 2nd Edition (NY & London: Routledge, 2000) 17

include historical texts and literature in our theological constructs and reconstruction of knowledge, but they should also embrace a research process that engages poor black women who are living human documents. This is a very appropriate way to access the direct speech (the primary textual narrative) of subordinated African American women in our midst.’¹³⁷ All the same, given the constraints of time and the demands of in-depth interviews and complex analysis on the participants as well as the researcher, it begs the question can such a high level of participation and accountability happen anywhere but in an ivory tower?!

How practical are ethnographic tools?

It is not easy to record history as it is still being made, particularly when so much of our story lies buried, so there is much which has to be said...Our aim has been to tell it as we know it, placing our story within its history at the heart of our race, and using our own voices and lives to document the day to day struggles of Afro-Caribbean women in Britain over the past forty years. As a people, we have rarely been accorded recognition for the part we have played in shaping this land. If acknowledged at all, we are usually portrayed as the passive victims of an historical necessity...¹³⁸

Bryan et al

The fuel for this journey towards a WPP is my own personal experience and the collective experience of ordinary African-Caribbean women who share a passion for celebrating our culture of origin;¹³⁹ particularly our faith perspective, and the wisdom it imparts. Therefore, in order to access these muted voices as sources of information for intellectual development and social betterment, as indicated by Bryan et al in the quote heading this section, I need to listen to our stories spoken in our own tongues. In other words I needed to embark on an extensive journey of data collection using ethnographic interviewing techniques, or to use

¹³⁷Thomas “Womanist Theology, Epistemology, and a New Anthropological Paradigm” 45

¹³⁸Bryan et al, *Heart of the Race*, 2

¹³⁹Thomas, “Womanist Theology, Epistemology, and a New Anthropological Paradigm”, 43

Kim Marie Vaz's preferred term when it is conducted with Black women, oral narrative research techniques.¹⁴⁰

Generally, the art of ethnographic interviewing as opposed to survey interviewing is distinguished by its reflexive rather than standardised interviewing characteristics.¹⁴¹

Reflexive, that is, because all researchers automatically participate in the social world they observe and they can reflect on their participation.¹⁴² Sociologists Martyn Hammersley and Paul Atkinson¹⁴³ identify its characteristics in the following manner:

- Unstructured interview schedule, so the researcher does not initiate the interview process with any prepared questions, although they may have a list of the issues they want covered.
- A mixture of closed and relatively open-ended questions that are asked at random points in the interview(s).
- The researcher acts as facilitator not director, listening attentively throughout the process.
- At times, facilitating the interview process may require the researcher to, tactfully as possible, 'steer' the interview. In order, for example, to elicit more detail or to keep irrelevant information to a minimum or even to expose lies.
- Leading questions rarely feature, except perhaps, where the researcher needs to dig beneath the surface or test out theories.

¹⁴⁰ Vaz editor, *Oral Narrative Research*, vii-x and 1-3

¹⁴¹ Martyn Hammersley & Paul Atkinson, *Ethnography: Principles and Practice* (London and New York: Tavistock Publications, 1983), 113

¹⁴² Hammersley & Atkinson, *Ethnography*, 14-25

¹⁴³ Hammersley & Atkinson, *Ethnography*, 113-116

Oral narrative research with Black women interprets standard ethnographic interviewing techniques from Black women's epistemological perspective. Consequently, it is not concerned about dangers of subjectivity that may arise from over-rapport¹⁴⁴ but endeavours to increase the rapport between interviewer and interviewee on which connected knowing through dialogue, empathy, personal accountability and by extension knowledge validation hinges.¹⁴⁵ For instance by never adopting the role of covert researcher,¹⁴⁶ but being open and honest with respondents and conducting interviews where women feel safe and, a point made by Obbo, won't be interrupted. That is, Black women are interviewed in a safe space where no one 'assum[es] to know the truth and explain[s] away or even dismiss[es] women's attempts to describe knowledge and perhaps suggest a theory or two.'¹⁴⁷ As a result the ethnographic oral narrative researchers in Vaz's collection of essays report that 'their investigations have led to increased personal affirmations and feelings of validation about being black and being a woman.'¹⁴⁸

Regrettably, such reflexive and epistemological considerations are not valued by conventional researchers who are interested in universalising what they hear and see for the expediency of generalising and constructing theory.¹⁴⁹ Given that many generalisations and theories about Black women, which sustain conventional research, are disingenuous about us,¹⁵⁰ research that is openly reflexive, like oral narrative done by Black women, is also extremely empowering for womanist scholars and their subjects. Empowering, because of its tendency

¹⁴⁴ Hammersley & Atkinson, *Ethnography*, 98 list impaired judgement and ability to move about in the field as some of the risks of "over-rapport".

¹⁴⁵ Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*

¹⁴⁶ Hammersley & Atkinson, *Ethnography*, 2

¹⁴⁷ Obbo, "What do Women Know" 46

¹⁴⁸ Vaz, *Oral Narrative Research*, vii

¹⁴⁹ See Obbo, "What do Women Know"

¹⁵⁰ Obbo, "What do Women Know", 43; and Vaz, *Oral Narrative Research*, viii

to increase the involvement of the researched and reduce the control of the researcher. In traditional approaches, the researcher directs the study from its design to its execution and by extension the results and analyses that it produces. In oral narrative research, particularly through in-depth interviews, the shape of the research evolves out of the dialogue the researcher initiates and facilitates but never dominates. Accordingly, as Vaz explains, 'Learning and absorbing from other black women is part of the process of oral narrative research as carried out by black women.'¹⁵¹

Therefore, could perceived impracticality be one of the underlying reasons why so many womanist theologians shy away from ethnographic oral narrative research tools, despite the value of actively engaging and hearing the voices of ordinary Black women living today! If true, it is a rather a naïve position to take if one accepts, as I do, that all research is ethnography because of its 'reflexive' nature, regardless of it sitting comfortably in the positivist or naturalist camps.¹⁵² This being the case, ethnography in its transparent state, for womanist theological pursuits may be difficult to implement, but I would contend and this work will demonstrate, it is not a futile endeavour. Indeed, given the British context where our mass presence is embryonic and our invisibility magnified, compared to Black women in the Caribbean, Africa and America, ethnographic oral narrative research tools have a compelling and practical appeal for many Black British female scholars desiring to expose the inimitable knowledge spheres of Black women.¹⁵³ The pioneering work of British African-Caribbean female scholars such as Alexander, Bryan, Scafe & Dadzie, and McCalla who all utilise oral narrative accounts attests to this claim.

¹⁵¹ Kim Marie Vaz, "Introduction", 3

¹⁵² For a comprehensive look at reflexivity see Charlotte Aull Davies, *Reflexive Ethnography: A Guide to Researching Selves and Others* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999)

¹⁵³ Christine Obbo, "What do women know?", 42

What is impractical, are studies that employ research methods that attempt to remove the influence of the researcher by denying the reflexive character of all enquiries. This is certainly the case with traditional ethnography and theology whose scholars make fallacious claims of objectivity. Doing theology, for instance, cannot involve repeating a past theology based on grand and naïve notions of working objectively and wholly within the word of God as recorded in the Bible. For whether conscious of this fact or not, all theologians are contoured and influenced by the historical and social context in which they find themselves working. Thus, as stated by David F. Ford in his overview of modern Christian theology, ‘Some [modern theologians] may wish to repeat a past theology, but this is not possible. The context has changed, and what is actually communicated and understood today can be very far from the original meaning.’¹⁵⁴

Moreover, I agree with Hammersley and Atkinson when they write that ‘[t]here is no way in which we can escape the social world in order to study it; nor, fortunately, is that necessary...instead of treating reactivity merely as a source of bias, we can exploit it. How people respond to the presence of the researcher may be informative as how they react to other situations.’¹⁵⁵ Martia Graham Goodson, for instance, regarding ex-enslaved African narratives, maintained that they were accounts that ‘ex-slaves would have been reluctant to tell white interviewers, stories their interviewers would probably have been reluctant to hear.’¹⁵⁶ Ethnography is evidently is an honest and therefore feasible approach to this

¹⁵⁴ David F. Ford, *The Modern Theologians* (Oxford: Blackwells, 1997)

¹⁵⁵ Hammersley & Atkinson, *Ethnography*, 15

¹⁵⁶ Martia Graham Goodson, “Ophelia and Me: Tribute to an Early Narrative Researcher”, in Kim Marie Vaz (editor), *Oral Narrative Research with Black Women: collecting treasures*, (Thousand Oaks, London and New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1997), 7-23; 15

theological journey towards a WPP if for no other reason than all research is reflexive. Given that they are all affected by the researcher and the methodology, and these affects therefore must be considered, how can I avoid falling into the self-referentialism trap? That is, is it possible regarding the research process, to avoid a never-ending circular process of critical self-reflection which K. J. Gergen and M. M. Gergen call ‘self- reflexive iterations’.¹⁵⁷

Can a womanist ethnographic approach advance this journey or will it end up going round in circles?

In line with womanist intents and purposes and oral narrative research thinking, Arlene Hambrick, a Black female teacher in the USA, seeking out Black female inventors,¹⁵⁸ not only learnt that they existed, but through interviewing these women written out of the annals of history, she also learnt about their political and social agency:

Black womanists, as seen through these inventors, have shown themselves to be more than just a defensive reaction to the devastating oppressive circumstances of anguish and desperation whose etiology emanates and is perpetuated by Western cultures. It’s an attitude – an attitude that carries out a pragmatic philosophy of life that refuses to be bound in any manner to what others think they ought to do or think... Throughout the annals of black women’s existence in the United States, black women have used their creativity to silently carve out living space within multilayered opposition to their “being.”¹⁵⁹

Insights gleaned that only could have been obtained through the dialogue or rapport that oral narrative and womanist research requires. Certainly, insights that Collins in her espousal of the politics of Black feminist thinking maintains are traditionally shared between Black

¹⁵⁷ K. J. Gergen and M. M. Gergen “Towards reflexive methodologies” in F. Steier (editor), *Research and Reflexivity* (London: Sage, 1991) cited in Charlotte Aull Davies, *Reflexive Ethnography, A Guide to Researching Selves and Others* (Routledge, London and New York, 1999), 7

¹⁵⁸ Arlene Hambrick, “You Haven’t Seen Anything Until You Make a Black Woman Mad”, in Kim Vaz *Oral Narrative Research with Black Women: collecting treasures* (Thousand Oaks, London, New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1997)

¹⁵⁹ Hambrick, “You Haven’t Seen Anything”, 79

women ‘within that social space where Black women speak freely.’¹⁶⁰ Moreover, exemplified in the journey towards a WPP ‘[t]his realm of relatively safe discourse, however narrow, is a necessary condition for Black women’s resistance.’¹⁶¹ Collins lists a number of potential safe locations such as churches, community groups and extended family networks but any location suitable for conducting oral narrative interviews without interruptions is certainly among them. Accordingly, through their connection Hambrick and I suspect Mrs Kenner too, also learnt to celebrate, validate and affirm our existence as Black women, who are traditionally but often noiselessly living a culture of resistance in a world hostile to our presence:

As she spoke, all the painful pointillist, didactic memories of being told that I was less than everyone else were evoked. Here I became connected. Here I discovered that I was not the only one who had been discarded by sociological dictates. Only those who truly loved me stayed near. A gentle peace and calm encompassed my being as I began to understand that many of my life experiences were part and parcel of my ethnic and cultural legacy. My will to survive despite all life’s atrocities energized me. The magical moment of Mrs Kenner’s story brought out the joy of being a black female.¹⁶²

Hambrick’s womanist ethnographic account of the interview that took place with Mrs Kenner demonstrates clearly the value of oral narrative interview techniques when utilised by indigenous researchers. Notably when Black women research each other in this way they present themselves in a way that is ‘both highly reflexive and at the same time intrinsically social’¹⁶³ generating self-defining concepts that foster as well as help elucidate actions of resistance.¹⁶⁴ They are able to do this because they operate within an ontological and epistemological framework that recognises, similar to the ‘critical realism’ Charlotte Aull

¹⁶⁰ Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 95

¹⁶¹ Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 95

¹⁶² Hambrick, “You Haven’t Seen Anything”, 81

¹⁶³ Davies, *Reflexive Ethnography*, 22

¹⁶⁴ See Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*

Davies argues is necessary for a ‘philosophically sound basis for ethnographic research’,¹⁶⁵ that recognises society exists external to our perceptions of it, yet it is rooted in contexts of real people’s lives.¹⁶⁶

It is, to borrow R. Bhaskar’s term, ‘transcendentally real’ in much the same way magnetic fields exist.¹⁶⁷ As such, social phenomena can be studied as an object external to the ethnographer whilst retaining their reflexive awareness, producing contextual knowledge that cannot be gleaned through introspection alone.¹⁶⁸ In much the same way Davies maintains ‘critical realism requires a continuing reflexive awareness as part of the condition of ethnographic practice, without allowing such awareness to blind us to the existence of a reality beyond ourselves which provides a legitimate basis for the production and critique of theoretical abstractions.’¹⁶⁹ Accordingly, these self-defining concepts are not narcissistic because it is the social construction of self and not individual subjectivity that is at their heart. As writer Alexis DeVeaux asserts; ‘It’s the self in relationship with an intimate other, with the community, the nation and the world.’¹⁷⁰

Neither are these concepts fanciful because the social understanding of ‘self’, as espoused by G. H. Mead,¹⁷¹ which underpin them, involves an ongoing process of social interaction and reflection and therefore opportunities, as Davies puts it, ‘for human agents to affect and

¹⁶⁵ Davies, *Reflexive Ethnography*, 20

¹⁶⁶ Davies, *Reflexive Ethnography*, 17

¹⁶⁷ R. Bhaskar, *The Possibility of Naturalism: A Philosophical Critique of the Contemporary Human Sciences* 2nd edition (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989), 45-46 cited in Davies, *Reflexive Ethnography*, 20

¹⁶⁸ Davies, *Reflexive Ethnography*, 17

¹⁶⁹ Davies, *Reflexive Ethnography*, 21

¹⁷⁰ Cited in Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 104

¹⁷¹ G. H. Mead, *Mind, Self and Society*, (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1934), cited in Davies, *Reflexive Ethnography*, 23-24

transform social structure.’¹⁷² Indeed the survival of Black women is based upon a double consciousness of self and society, and sharing this wisdom with others. In the words of Audre Lorde, ‘In order to survive, those of us for whom oppression is as American as apple pie have always had to be watchers...become familiar with the language and manners of the oppressor, even sometimes adopting them for some illusion of protection’¹⁷³, while hiding a self-defined standpoint [collective Black women’s consciousness] from the prying eyes of the dominant group.’¹⁷⁴

The creative ability to alter their “selves” in this dual way regardless of the controlling social and cultural concepts of the social institutions Black women encounter refutes the argument that it is impossible for all ethnographers to gain trustworthy knowledge of the character of other “selves” and societies that are fundamentally different from their own. However, I do not concur with Davies that merely paying ‘attention to this process of transforming the ethnographers ‘me’ [the collection of ideas decoded and adopted as an outcome of reflecting on social interaction] can provide genuine knowledge of the nature of other “selves” and societies.’¹⁷⁵

Without making it explicit, Davies is referring to White ethnographers from the dominant sections of society whose survival isn’t, unlike most Black women, dependent on understanding the character of other “selves”. Nor is their advancement in society, like many

¹⁷² Davies, *Reflexive Ethnography*, 23

¹⁷³ Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider*, (Trumansberg, NY: The Crossing Press, 1984), 114 cited in Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 91

¹⁷⁴ Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*; 91

¹⁷⁵ Davies, *Reflexive Ethnography*, 24

Black women, necessarily linked to a commitment to overcoming boundaries erected to keep them invisible and oppressed. Indeed the privileged position of Whites in society often means they are not only ignorant of the presence of Black people in their daily lives they are also unaware of aspects of their own “selves” revealed to Black women who benefit from the outsider/insider gaze of their subjugated position as shown in the following extract from John Langston Gwaltney’s book, *Drylongso: A Self-Portrait of Black America*:

Now, I understand all these things from living. But you can’t lay up on these flowery beds of ease and think that you are running your own life, too. Some women, white women, can run their husband’s lives for a while, but most of them have to ...see what he tells them there is to see. If he tells them that they ain’t seeing what they know they *are* seeing, then they have to just go on like it wasn’t there!¹⁷⁶

On the other hand, the outsider/insider position that Black women tend to have structurally, and White people tend not to share, means the latter are always visible to the former but it is not always reciprocated. Thus Black women are often strategically placed to be, on the whole, more conscious of the power dynamics that shape our “selves” in relation to the dominant groups. Such as dynamics of colonial contact that many anthropologists were once notorious for overlooking. At the same time we are not powerfully placed to make projecting our cultural assumptions onto others radically different from us a likely possibility; except perhaps within the category of Black woman itself, as illustrated by the divisions around sexuality that undermined the coalition of British feminists in the Organisation of Women of African and Asian Descent.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁶ John Langston Gwaltney, *Drylongso: A Self-Portrait of Black America* (New York: Vintage, 1980), 148 cited in Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 11

¹⁷⁷ Sudbury, ‘other kinds of dreams’, 18

Summary

The value of putting the social construction of self at the centre of reflexive research as opposed to an isolated individual subjectivity is drawn to our attention by Alexis DeVeaux and Charlotte Aull Davies. In this way ethnographies can deepen our understanding of social structures and processes which channel human agency and vice versa. As a consequence, the concepts they produce elucidate the social world grounded in concrete experiences, rather than the transcendently ideal or empirically real notions of many postmodernist or positivist researchers.¹⁷⁸ Thus, avoiding the pitfall of infinite self-referentialism or opaque meta-narratives of research based on postmodern or positivist thinking, but nonetheless, as Charlotte Aull Davies commends, ‘are open to informed debate and criticism and which provide qualitatively better understandings of human societies and cultures.’¹⁷⁹

Hence it is plausible and necessary to advance this theological journey towards a pneumatological pedagogy through a womanist ethnographic approach if the wisdom gleaned from our epistemological standpoint is to be channelled to ensure we not only survive but thrive.¹⁸⁰ Even so, Black women are at risk of replicating the very forms of domination we fight against so every effort must be taken to suppress the oppressor within. For as Angela Davis chastises, ‘We can no longer ignore the ways in which we sometimes end up reproducing the very forms of domination which we like to attribute to somebody or something else.’ The key concern for the next section is how I can empower both the researched and myself to engage in productive dialogue, particularly around scripture.

¹⁷⁸ Davies, *Reflexive Ethnography*, 18

¹⁷⁹ Davies, *Reflexive Ethnography*, 18

¹⁸⁰ The Mud Flower Collective, *God’s Fierce Whimsy*; 41 comment on the epistemological privilege of Black women supports this point.

Section III: Warning, Womanism can Damage your Theological Drive

¹¹ So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, ¹² to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up ¹³ until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.¹⁴ Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. ¹⁵ Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. ¹⁶ From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

Ephesians 4:11-16, New International Version (NIV)

Is womanism a barrier to productive dialogue around scripture?

On theological grounds alone, there are significant differences between the US and UK contexts, which it pays to be mindful of when implementing a womanist approach with British women. One of the major differences is that US womanists like Kelly Brown Douglas are more willing and able to reject outright aspects of scripture they find offensive. For instance in *Sexuality and the Black Church: A Womanist Perspective*,¹⁸¹ Douglas goes behind and in front of scriptural readings pertaining to homosexuality and ingeniously through her analysis deflects attention away from homosexuality and onto homophobia as the real abomination unto the Lord.¹⁸² The absence of any comparable work listed in Jagessar's and Reddie's overview of the development of Black theology in Britain since the 18th century attests to this fact.¹⁸³

¹⁸¹ Kelly Brown Douglas, *Sexuality and the Black church: A Womanist Perspective* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999)

¹⁸² Douglas, *Sexuality and the Black church*, especially Part II

¹⁸³ Jagessar and Reddie, *Black Theology in Britain*

Given the centrality of the Bible in our faith practice rejecting scripture is virtually inconceivable in the UK BMCs because as Reddie has pointed out on several occasions ‘Black people are not going to let go of the Bible anytime soon’.¹⁸⁴ Consequently unlike in America where there is a large professional community of Black theologians it is unwise for us in the UK (who tend to be strongly linked to the churches) to blatantly disregard scriptures.¹⁸⁵ If scripture is perceived to be disrespected, then the controversy surrounding womanism within scholarly circles, as played out in the works of Cheryl Sanders and Douglas is likely to be repeated here, but magnified because of our relative small numbers, less established presence and strong links to the church.

A very real possibility when one scrutinises the literary but original definition of the term womanism coined by Alice Walker, particularly part two quoted at the start of this chapter, which Sanders argues, ‘carries the connotation of black lesbian’¹⁸⁶ which is at odds with the Biblical scriptures. This is probably the view shared by many Black Christians in Britain the majority of who are women. Furthermore like Sanders they too are likely to believe that the womanist label is not an appropriate one for Black female theologians, since it runs the danger of diverting them away from their struggle to further the liberation of the oppressed in a way that substantiates, not rejects, the word of God.

¹⁸⁴ Anthony G. Reddie, “Editorial”, *Black Theology: An International Journal* 4.1 (January 2006), 9

¹⁸⁵ Jagessar and Reddie, *Black Theology in Britain*, 18

¹⁸⁶ Cheryl J. Sanders, “Christian Ethics and Theology in Womanist Perspective” in *Black Theology a Documentary History Volume Two: 1980-1992* James H. Cone & Gayraud S. Wilmore (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1992), 336-344; 337

To be, or not to be, a womanist theologian

On the other hand British Black women in the church ‘use caution within their reading, as they see it [the Bible] as a book that has been used as a tool of subjugation and oppression.’¹⁸⁷ They are also aware of the inequalities that are played out in the church in terms of sexism¹⁸⁸ and racism.¹⁸⁹ It is therefore also conceivable that they can appreciate Douglas’ argument that ‘...our history of oppression as Blacks in America has impeded the Black church and community from appropriating the meaning of God’s revelation on this [sexuality] matter, and it has also contributed to a slow response to HIV / AIDS....’¹⁹⁰ As a result Douglas believes that the womanist label is inappropriate for Black female theologians who are not prepared to speak out against the injustices of sexual oppression and repression. Fundamentally, because they are imprisoned, to some degree, by a traditional hermeneutic, that is grounded in notions of White supremacy and patriarchy. This is certainly a view held by some Black theologians in Britain like the late Caroline Redfearn.¹⁹¹

Given the intents and purposes of this work and the suitability of womanist ethnographic methods to these ends this work must facilitate a hermeneutical process by which participants are not alienated by its radicalism but instead become as Reddie suggests ‘more attuned to the subtle and not so oblique ways in which the Bible has been used as a weapon against us’.¹⁹²

¹⁸⁷ Hyacinth Sweeney “The Bible as a Tool for Growth for Black Women” in Michael N. Jagessar and Anthony G. Reddie (editors), *Black Theology in Britain: A Reader* (London and Oakville: Equinox, 2007), 154-159; 159

¹⁸⁸ Elaine Foster, “Women and the Inverted Pyramid of the Black Churches in Britain” in Gita Sahgal and Nira Yuval-Davis (editors), *Refusing Holy Orders: Women and Fundamentalism in Britain* (London: Virago, 1992), 45-68

¹⁸⁹ Mukti Barton, *Rejection, Resistance and Resurrection: Speaking out on racism in the church*, (London: Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd, 2005)

¹⁹⁰ Douglas, *Sexuality and the Black Church*, 5

¹⁹¹ Caroline Redfearn, “The Nature of Homophobia in the Black Church” in *Postcolonial Black British Theology: New Textures and Themes*, Michael N. Jagessar and Anthony G. Reddie editors, (Peterborough: Epworth, 2007), 102-123

¹⁹² Anthony G Reddie, “Editorial”, *Black Theology*, 7-9; 9

That is, it must ‘develop a Black hermeneutic in order that the Bible might be a tool for empowerment and liberation.’¹⁹³ As Coleman advises and Hyacinth Sweeney demonstrates, I must use hermeneutical tools suitable for the British context¹⁹⁴ because they will resonate with the experiences of the Black women in this study and allow them to grow.¹⁹⁵ Otherwise it risks sacrificing the liberating message of God’s word because of knee-jerk reactions to perceived blasphemy.

Thankfully, the work of other womanists in America demonstrates that womanist theology is diverse and dynamic enough to de-centre oppressive interpretations of scripture without being seen to disrespect it. So much so that Sweeney identifies four womanist approaches to biblical hermeneutics, the recuperative (reclaiming the historical presence of Black women), suspicion (suspects a White Eurocentric masculine bias), postmodern (rejects the biblical portrayals of women as an oppressive tool) and the survivalist (uses a combination of the others for a liberative re-reading) approaches.¹⁹⁶

Using a ‘suspicion approach’, Jacqueline Grant¹⁹⁷ for instance, represents those womanists who believe in a God of liberation that identifies with Black women, and therefore proclaims the urgent need for Black women to free Jesus and by extension themselves from the triple yoke of White supremacy, patriarchy and class privilege oppression. In contrast Delores

¹⁹³ Jagessar and Reddie, *Black Theology in Britain*, 18

¹⁹⁴ Coleman, “Black Women and Theology” in *Black Theology in Britain: A Journal of Contextual Praxis* 3 (November 1999), 51-65; 65

¹⁹⁵ Sweeney, “The Bible as a Tool for Growth for Black Women”

¹⁹⁶ Hyacinth Sweeney “The Bible as a Tool for Growth for Black Women”; 156-158

¹⁹⁷ Jacqueline Grant, “Black Theology and the Black Woman” in Gayraud S. Wilmore, & James H. Cone (editors), *Black Theology: A Documentary History, 1966 – 1979*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979) & Jacquelyn Grant, “Womanist Jesus and the Mutual Struggle for Liberation” in Randall C. Bailey & Jacquelyn Grant, (editors), *The Recovery of Black Presence: An Interdisciplinary Exploration* (Abingdon Press; 1995)

Williams¹⁹⁸ argues that God has never offered biblical and contemporary Black women liberation for He is a God of survival / quality of life.¹⁹⁹ Using a 'survivalist approach' to hermeneutics, she contests Christ's surrogacy and the cross as a symbol of God's grace and atonement.²⁰⁰ Instead, she asserts that the ministry of Christ is a far more empowering motif than the cross for Black women. In her words:

The resurrection of Jesus and the kingdom of God theme in Jesus' ministerial vision provide black women with the knowledge that God has, through Jesus, shown humankind how to live peacefully, productively and abundantly in relationship...Humankind is then redeemed through Jesus' ministerial vision of life, not through his death. There is nothing divine in the blood of the cross. God does not intend black women's surrogacy experience.²⁰¹

The womanist belief that God gives Black women sustenance not liberation, I would contend, is supported by the British context. As illustrated earlier, we have not experienced the qualitative change holistic liberation would bring, therefore we remain the most disadvantaged and/or marginalised group in British society. Our overrepresentation within the caring sector and single-parent category coupled with our surrogacy experience during slavery²⁰² renders the cross as problematic for us as it is for our American sisters. The movement between churches by activists Esme Lancaster and Clarice Nelson, fuelled by an awareness '...not only of the God of love but also the God of justice'²⁰³ testifies to this tension. We have, however, experienced the quantitative change, faith in a God of survival/ quality of life promises. Hence, through our struggles we have made a way out of no way,

¹⁹⁸ Delores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenges of Womanist God-Talk*, (Maryknoll New York: Orbis Books, 1993)

¹⁹⁹ Gayraud Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism: An Interpretation of the Religious History of African Americans* 3rd Edition (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1972), Chapter 10 describes this quality of life as the elevation tradition. That is the trajectory point between oppression and liberation.

²⁰⁰ Sweeney, "The Bible as a Tool for Growth for Black Women" 158

²⁰¹ Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*; 167

²⁰² See Introduction of Bryan et al, *The Heart of the Race*

²⁰³ Alexander, "The mouse in the jungle", 104

obtaining significant improvement to the quality of our personal lives and the communities we serve.

Sanders, I would assert, although strongly against the concept, exhibits traits that some like Williams would categorise as *womanist theology* as opposed to *womanism* in the Walker literary sense. The tools – historical memory, hermeneutic of suspicion, multifaceted intersectional analysis, and the pursuit of socio-political wholeness- which Sanders employs in her work, I would contend, are characteristic of a womanist approach to theology. For example she critiques Walker’s presentation of essential qualities, such as love and the spirit, with regard to our foremothers for not being ‘contingent upon the idea of God or revelation.’²⁰⁴ By employing the tools of historical memory and multi-dimensional analysis that considers intergenerational and dialogical dynamics²⁰⁵ within Black female traditions she reclaims and proclaims the strong love for God and respect for the sacred, that traditionally shaped Black women’s struggle for freedom experience.

Furthermore, by this route, as the quote cited below demonstrates, Sanders exposes Walker’s secular bias when recounting Black women’s traditions, thereby deftly applying a hermeneutic of suspicion that centres the Christian Black woman’s ontological perspective, and de-centres Walker’s in the process. As she writes ‘Not only does this [Walker’s definition] scant attention to the sacred render the womanist perspective of dubious value, as a context for theological discourse, but it ultimately subverts any effort to mine the spiritual traditions and resources of black women.’²⁰⁶

²⁰⁴ Sanders, “Christian Ethics and Theology”, 339

²⁰⁵ Sanders, “Christian Ethics and Theology”, especially 341

²⁰⁶ Sanders, “Christian Ethics and Theology”, 341

Thus, in line with Williams perspective on womanist theology, Sanders in the very essay she criticises the womanist concept to describe Black women's theology employs their tools for similar ends as outright womanist theologians like Douglas. Notably, opening up dialogue between the different camps within Black female theology, and challenging unjust forms of church action and thought in order to facilitate social change. Moreover Sanders, like many womanists, develops a model of learning that champions Black Christian women's ethics, when she warns both potential and established womanists about the dangers of embracing a secular concept that 'is ambivalent at best with respect to the value of heterosexual monogamy within the black community'.²⁰⁷ She also, like womanists, draws upon the experiences of ordinary Black women as a major source for interrogating Walker; maintaining, such thoughts on sexuality are an injustice to a community being crippled by a disproportionate number of female-headed families.

The fact that Sanders, does not agree with self-proclaimed womanists like Douglas, in my opinion does not put as much distance between herself and those who do (as my review of her work above indicates). Neither does her view that womanist theology is like a mule (a hybrid that cannot reproduce) find as much credence in the work of womanist theologians as she would like to believe. For as the works of Grant and Williams show, womanist theology has developed a spectrum of ideas on key theological themes such as liberation, survival and the cross. Moreover the rich and complex range of their thoughts testifies to the womanist claim, documented in Coleman that they are against universalism²⁰⁸ and for celebrating the diverse nature of their experience.

²⁰⁷ Sanders, "Christian Ethics and Theology 342

²⁰⁸ Kate Coleman, "Black Theology and Black Liberation: A Womanist Perspective" in *Black Theology in Britain: A Journal of Contextual Praxis* 1 (October 1998), 59-69; 66 highlights this feature of womanism. It criticises 'universalism', the tendency within traditional theology to present White male patriarchal values as the

Summary

Thus womanist theology in my opinion, contrary to Sander's view, is an applied discipline, more easily recognised by its methodology rather than its defining qualities; by its intentions not any monolithic thought – sacred or otherwise; by its ability to create not regurgitate! The usefulness of womanism with its various techniques to develop a liberative hermeneutic with Black women is stipulated in the work of Sweeney with ordained and lay Black Christians in Britain. Her interviews with and questionnaire responses from a diverse number of women reveal how they read the Bible in various emancipatory ways within the real constraints of survival, seeking out the presence of Black women but never rejecting the Bible outright.²⁰⁹

Her findings leave Sweeney to conclude:

As we can see, the approaches used are varied, according to what your experiences and needs are. However, in order to attain tools for growth, black women need to employ approaches that will negate oppressive structures and help to promote empowerment, physically, mentally and spiritually. These tools I contend are found within the approaches adopted by womanist theologians as they are drawn from all sections of the community of the African Diaspora.

A contention I support, ironically using the work of one of womanist theologies greatest critics, Cheryl Sanders. Thus despite the controversy and possible risk of a backlash to the term, womanism does not automatically spell alienation for ordinary British Black women faithful to scripture. Thus, it is possible in theory to conduct this research so that the faith beliefs of my interviewees are respected. How feasible is it in practice? Is it possible to do this ethnography in the 'field' without it losing its integrity as a liberative theological

norm, that has infected the work of Black and feminist theologians. Both have normalised their experience, when clearly not appreciating the experience of those who are neither male nor White.

²⁰⁹ Hyacinth Sweeney "The Bible as a Tool for Growth for Black Women" 159

enquiry? The final section of this chapter captures the actions I have taken and continue to take to ensure that the intents and purposes of this research are practicable.

Section IV: ‘Candid Participant’- the driver of a WPP²¹⁰

From my previous experience of research I know that people are often tempted to tell you what they think you want to know. Simply hearing accounts that mirror my experiences, thinking or actions is not the point of this research. The point of the research has always been to hear, validate and celebrate the social transformation Black women have been and are presently involved in as part of their every day practices –professional and non-professional. Therefore, unlike the action research projects I have been involved in previously, I need to ascertain what others are *truly* experiencing and *really* thinking and doing as a consequence of that reflection; because it is these diverse and creative responses to social structures and processes that enables transformation through human agency.²¹¹

In other words, the research demands what I call ‘candid participants’ who are allowed to speak freely, as Black women have traditionally done in concealed gatherings’.²¹² Speak freely about their achievements and to critically reflect upon their contact with the diverse and interlocking structural domains of power.²¹³ Participants, whether formally researcher or researched, who are prepared to engage in honest and open dialogues that enables both to shape the research and the collective consciousness / knowledge it creates which for all intents and purposes constitutes a WPP.

²¹⁰ In this section I switch to using the progressive/ continuous forms of the verb tenses because it is important to convey the continuous nature of this theological journey that has not ended with the submission of this thesis.

²¹¹ Davies, *Reflexive Ethnography*; 23

²¹² For a description of these gatherings and where they traditionally take place see N. Lynne Westfield, *Dear Sisters: A Womanist Practice of Hospitality*, (Cleveland, Ohio: Pilgrim Press, 2001) 64-75

²¹³ Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Second Edition*; 100 -101

Like the members of The Mud Flower Collective, candid participants endeavour to make the research accessible and empowering for all involved.²¹⁴ Similar to ‘complete participants’ the lead candid participant / researcher totally immerses themselves in the setting they are observing and completely identifies with the other participants. Unlike the ‘complete participant’ or ‘complete observer’ they do not operate undercover in the field marginalising their participation. Nor do they hog the centre of the discourse once they return to the academy.²¹⁵ Instead they constantly pivot the centre, seeking to establish mutual relations through open and honest dialogue about the research with the other participants who are also required to be candid.²¹⁶ Integrity combined with complete involvement and accountability, rather than dishonesty, pretentiousness and disregard when the data collection is over, are the defining characteristics of the ‘complete’ participant observer referred to here. For this reason I have coined the term ‘candid participant’ to distinguish them from unscrupulous covert researchers like Malcolm Calley whose work on Pentecostal churches in Britain is notorious for the unfavourable effects it had on those observed.²¹⁷

Predictably, the role of the ‘candid participant’ mirrors the liberation theologian, described by Emmanuel Lartey who ‘begins from the position of being immersed in the experiences of poverty, marginalisation and oppression.’²¹⁸ Unlike conventional academic research

²¹⁴ The Mud Flower Collective, *God’s Fierce Whimsy*

²¹⁵ See Hammersley and Atkinson, *Ethnography*, 93-96 for a description of the complete participant and the complete observer.

²¹⁶ The Mud Flower Collective, *God’s Fierce Whimsy*

²¹⁷ Valentina Alexander, *Breaking every Fetter? To What Extent has the Black Led Church in Britain Developed a Theology of Liberation?*, (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Warwick, 1996) 13 details the unethical and dubious methods of Malcolm Calley’s ethnography entitled, *God’s People: West Indian Pentecostal Sects in Britain*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965)

²¹⁸ Emmanuel Y. Lartey: *In Living Colour: An Intercultural Approach to Pastoral Care and Counselling*, (London: Cassell, 1997) 87

processes described by Collins,²¹⁹ I'm under as much scrutiny as the other participants. Furthermore, their role doesn't end with answering questions but involves evaluating the knowledge presented in the write-up stages, which is usually the preserve of a community of professional academics. We are accountable to each other first and foremost and not any other authority like the education hierarchy by nature of the fact that 'people who pursue institutional change can only do so on behalf of particular people, because oppression only comes in specific, concrete forms...Who needs, wants, and trusts our voices specifically in relation to this project? Whose experiences and languages do we know? From whom can we reasonably expect candid response, affirmative and critical? ...women who are struggling against injustice.'²²⁰ Ironically, the role of 'candid participant' is rarely taken up formally by ordinary Black women. Our marginalisation means we lack the luxury of time and space needed to take full advantage of the epistemological insights we possess to carry out formal research.²²¹ This final section therefore, documents the concrete and practical steps I have taken over the past six years, and continue to take, in order to facilitate the means by which I and my fellow participants have and can continue to become candid participants or 'sojourners'²²² as I prefer to call them.

²¹⁹ Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 253-256

²²⁰ The Mud Flower Collective, *God's Fierce Whimsy*, 5-6

²²¹ The Mud Flower Collective, *God's Fierce Whimsy*, 41

²²² Anne Streaty Wimberley, *Soul Stories: African American Christian Education*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994) 22 uses the term mutual sojourner to highlight a pedagogical approach to Bible studies in which all are actively engaged as learners in the story-linking process. I prefer to refer to my fellow participants as sojourners to convey the mutual and equitable nature of the relationship between me as lead researcher / candid participant working in solidarity with them on this journey towards a WPP.

‘Beginning with our lives-in-relation’:²²³ From Consciousness-Raising Group to 1:1

Dialogue²²⁴

In order to have responsible and creative dialogue, in such a way that each participant actually learns, we must begin with the study of our lives²²⁵

The Mud Flower Collective

Back in 2005 I began by considering a community-based action research approach to inquiry; the practice of a community of activists beginning with a problem and embarking on a journey of reflection and action to solve it, as advocated by Ernest Stringer.²²⁶ With its basic ‘look, think, act’ spiral routine giving action research concrete and conceptual results alongside its characteristic values of democracy, equity, liberty and life-enhancement, it seemed to complement the intents and purposes of a journey towards a WPP extremely well.²²⁷ Its participatory democratic style or what Jean McNiff calls ‘the creation of dialogical communities’²²⁸ for instance, meant it wouldn’t be prescriptive and I would have access to those aspects of their pedagogical praxis that foster mutual growth and development.²²⁹

Alas, the strategy of establishing a consciousness-raising group was abandoned in the early stages of data collection for 1:1 dialogue sessions. My initial approaches to women whom I thought would be keen to participate were met with apathy at the mention of a group. It soon dawned on me that in a group setting participants need to trust each other, not just me, in

²²³ The Mud Flower Collective, *God’s Fierce Whimsy*, 24, identify ‘beginning with our own lives-in-relation’ as one of the conditions of liberative praxis.

²²⁴ Tables giving the breakdown of the research sample can be found in Appendix II

²²⁵ The Mud Flower Collective, *God’s Fierce Whimsy*, 24

²²⁶ See Ernest T. Stringer, *Action Research*, 2nd edition, (London, Sage 1999) 43

²²⁷ Ernest T Stringer, *Action Research* highlights the features listed about action research.

²²⁸ Jean McNiff, *Teaching as Learning, An Action Research Approach* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 44

²²⁹ McNiff, *Teaching as Learning*, 44-45

order to feel genuinely safe and empowered to share intimate insights into their creative ability to alter their selves to accommodate the oppressor's gaze whilst simultaneously retaining a self-defined standpoint of who they really are in the world / in Christ. Something, N. Westfield asserts, women of African descent do in 'Concealed gatherings, away from Whites and African American [Black] men...filled with food, laughter, and deadly serious moments of healing, release, and relaxation.'²³⁰ Something my friends and I do in 1:1 settings.

Proceeding with my life in relation to another: One to One Interviews and the convergent interview technique

Thus, I have opted for what I believe is a feasible two pronged approach to recruiting candid participants. First, within a relatively short time I recruited four interested Black women from my personal network of family and friends. They consist of two other professional teachers, one social worker and one artist. The latter being the only one who is not a born again Christian but nonetheless equally spirit-led. All are passionate about teaching and learning within and outside the education system and most have contributed to the development of BLESS Teachers (Black Leadership and Educational Support for Teachers). Next, I have interviewed them one on one to retain the trust which is so vital to meaningful dialogue.²³¹ After all, as expressed by The Mud Flower Collective 'Often candour is born between friends who already share a bond of assurance that speaking the truth of one's life will not be futile.'²³²

²³⁰ N. Lynne Westfield, *Dear Sisters*; 41

²³¹ The Mud Flower Collective, *God's Fierce Whimsy*, 68-71

²³² The Mud Flower Collective, *God's Fierce Whimsy*, 35

The pronounced intimacy of conducting one-to-one interviews, however, requires a technique that will empower my respondents to speak and be heard without interruptions as well as becoming co-researchers in determining the shape and development of the data collected. The convergent interviewing technique, which was drawn to my attention by a fellow PhD student and activist who declined my invitation to participate formally but still wanted to support the research, has enabled this to occur.

Basically, the technique, promoted by Bob Dick in his online resource file: *Convergent interviewing: a technique for qualitative data collection*²³³ helps researchers identify information to be collected by providing a systematic way of gathering information that has been for the most part determined by the participant. This is the consequence of its progressive focusing or ‘funnel’ structure.²³⁴ Firstly, the initial interview begins with a very general description of the information to be collected. Throughout the process questioning is kept to a minimum and long (about one hour) uninterrupted answers are encouraged. In addition, during that hour the researcher does very little except listen attentively. This is supposedly made easier by the fact that note-taking and recording devices are not recommended but making plenty of eye contact, requesting examples or friendly gestures and utterances are given as tips for keeping the respondent talking. Once the participant has finished the researcher can ask for clarification. Secondly, subsequent interviews are linked to the researcher’s interpretation of the information acquired from earlier interviews with the same or other respondents. These follow-up interviews serve to test or explain any

²³³ B. Dick, *Convergent interviewing: a technique for qualitative data collection* [On line] Available at <http://www.scu.edu.au/schools/gem/ar/arp/iview.html> (1998)

²³⁴ Hammersley and Atkinson, *Ethnography*,

convergence / non-convergence the interpretations highlight and they continue until the ‘most salient issues in the community or organisation or the like’²³⁵ are apparent.

The convergent interview technique, as adapted for this study, I find is good for building ‘mutuality in our relating’²³⁶ because I am able to pivot the centre by encouraging the sojourners to speak as well as collaborate in the interpretation and presentation of data. As someone who likes to engage in the lively banter of concealed gatherings there is always the risk of dominating the centre.²³⁷ The technique has improved my own listening skills; although I do need to take notes during the interviews to aid my recall. Initially when I’d given the sojourners my notes to ratify I learnt of their inconsistency in verifying what I had recorded. It was at that point, because of the importance of accountability and participation I decided to use tape recorders alongside notes. Nevertheless, in this one-to-one approach, the interviews are by no means uniform in shape and content and this diversity supports my belief that I am implementing a methodology that recruits candid participants because it means the sojourners have had a greater say in the questions raised to develop the research and by extension the knowledge validated.

Advancing with our lives in relation to significant others: Story-linking approach to Bible reading²³⁸

Furthermore, each person is effective only insofar as she acts honestly on the basis of her own life situation, interests, history, and goals as these dimensions of who she is intersect the lives of particular people.²³⁹

²³⁵ Dick, *Convergent interviewing*, p7

²³⁶ The Mud Flower Collective, *God’s Fierce Whimsy*, 36

²³⁷ Westfield, *Dear Sisters*, vii- description of concealed gatherings mirror my own.

²³⁸ Aspects of this account of my use of the story-linking approach is expanded in Chapter 4 and/or published in Maxine Howell, “Towards a Womanist Pneumatological Pedagogy: Reading and Re-Reading the Bible from British Black Women’s Perspectives” in *Black Theology: An International Journey* 7.1 (2009), 86-99

²³⁹ The Mud Flower, *God’s Fierce Whimsy*; 5-6

The dynamics of spirituality is likely to be an important part of any research with Black women whose standpoint imbues them with a heightened sense of relationships *and* declares its pneumatological intent in the title. Certainly the case, if one accepts as I do, Lartey's claim that spirituality is really about relationships with self, another, collective others, the environment, as well as beyond our senses such as with God. As such it 'often leads to specific forms of action in the world.'²⁴⁰ With the above in mind, I facilitated paired readings with five sojourners of the biblical activists who like them, have had their voices and/or events in their lives buried beneath those of the dominant sections of society- Mary and Martha. The fifth sojourner was recruited from my church because of the independent and critical reflection she has done on the same characters, to further her liberative praxis, detailed in Chapter 4.

Briefly put here but to be elaborated in the Chapter 4, using the story-linking approach of Christian educator Anne Wimberley²⁴¹ with its dialogical approach complements the epistemological and biblical perspectives of the sojourners enabling us to relate and reflect in our readings from integrated perspectives of selves, others and the biblical characters.²⁴² The process also facilitates 'spiritual and educational enrichment through [our] dialogue with the Bible and one another... in ways that deepen [our] spiritual lives and [our] relationships with others.'²⁴³ Ways such as those illustrated by the work of Bryan et al who advocate writing in a way that interweaves the lives of Black women from the past with those from the present with the 'hope that the importance of the part played by our foremothers in determining our

²⁴⁰ Emmanuel Y Lartey. *In Living Colour* 2nd Edition, 141

²⁴¹ Wimberley, *Soul Stories*

²⁴² In Chapter 1 of Wimberly, *Soul Stories* she explains the four phases of the story linking process.

²⁴³ Wimberley, *Soul Stories*, 19

lives now, will become more alive, more immediate and above all more accessible.’²⁴⁴

Womanist ways that channel our wisdom so that we can develop the tradition of Black Christian consciousness beyond the passive radicalism of survival developed by our foremothers in the Caribbean and post-war Britain, because it facilitates a process of ‘conscientization’²⁴⁵ that centres the leadership role of Black women and it sees the need to tackle oppression at its roots.

Ending with our lives in relation to collective others: The Questionnaire²⁴⁶

The purpose of the questionnaire was to neither generalise nor generate representative data but to see how our lives connected with others engaged in teaching and learning and faith. In this way deepen the process of conscientization we were and are undergoing so that we can articulate a specific type pedagogy born of a particular theology and pneumatology. After I had conducted the main interviews and the sojourners and I started seeing patterns it became obvious that our knowledge needed contextualising beyond our lives. So some of the pertinent questions and notions that came out of these dialogue sessions, together with an examination of references to pedagogy in the Bible I collated in the form of a questionnaire.²⁴⁷

All ten respondents who participated were drawn from my various education and faith networks but unlike the sojourners I did not necessarily have a close and personal relationship with them and they were from diverse ethnic, racial, socio-economic and faith backgrounds. Nonetheless I still had a connection with them. Half this sample was followed up with a more

²⁴⁴ Bryan et al, *Heart of the Race*, 3

²⁴⁵ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*

²⁴⁶ A sample of the questionnaire and a breakdown of who responded can be found in the appendices.

²⁴⁷ See Appendix I

in-depth interview. They consisted of a former Quaker, two pastors, and two mothers, one of whom educated her children at home. I tried to establish a good rapport by having a good chat with them before the in-depth interview stipulating that anything they didn't want recorded would be left out. Coupled with techniques to keep respondents engaged this disclosure helped to establish trust. Indeed the fact that most interviews were carried out in a participant's home indicated trust-building on both sides. For reasons of my own personal safety I too needed to be comfortable and trust them.

Moreover, marginality was not a problem for me because my research is about creating a space where others can be centred. In the field so to speak, I come alive and have the connectedness Arlene Hambrick speaks about because the research is about wanting to understand the perspective of the other and to learn from each other. Thus in our initial reflections and musings I tried not to lead my subjects on by deliberately describing the research in very general terms. I did not always remain on the margins. For example, some questions were raised because they concerned issues that had come out of my own experience rather than out of any other. For example, would you like to teach to the spirit rather than the test? These content laden but reflective questions, I believe were justified as a strategy for practising dialogue that is empowering for all – including me- because it pivots the centre rather than centres one standpoint at the expense of others. Besides from a Black woman's perspective they were not leading questions but rather they revealed my willingness to share my life with my fellow participants as they were sharing their lives with me.

Summary

Like the sojourners in the story-linking process, but unlike the typical interviewer Bob Dick targets with the convergent interviewing technique, I am a candid participant fully involved in the process as part of the sample not just as researcher. Moreover, unlike the typical interviewee my sojourners were, to a lesser extent than myself, similarly involved as researchers not just as the researched. For their purposes too, not just mine. To be sure, narrative, especially in the form of autobiography and testimony is a legitimate starting point for theological and cultural enquiries.²⁴⁸ Indeed some theologians would espouse, biblical and faith, narrative *is* theology. That is, such narratives are dedicated to establishing some meaningful interaction with the word of God. Coupled with the systematic way liberation theologians interpret the word of God, which invariably involves analysis and action, that reflects the theologian's subjective experience of the world they live in, narrative is, for all intents and purposes, theology.²⁴⁹

Conclusion

My past experience of research, both as the researcher and the researched, presses me to pursue a liberative methodology that reflects Black women's ethics regarding caring and personal accountability as well as many Black women's epistemological flair for connected knowing and reflection. In this chapter I have shown that womanist theology is the way forward for faithful British Black women committed to the liberating message of the gospel. Its purposes, intentions and tools of analyses are compatible with my own, and are achieved via the hermeneutical circle. Not surprising, given that it was conceived in a socio-political

²⁴⁸ Cone *My Soul Looks Back*, 12 in his testimony the founder of Black Theology, reflects the conviction that narrative accounts of a person's encounter with God is theology.

²⁴⁹ See Ford, *The Modern Theologians*, 2-3 for this popular but not exclusive definition of theology associated with Paul Tillich.

context similar to ours. For instance, on both sides of the Atlantic both Black and feminist movements have failed to protect and advance Black women as much, if at all, as they have protected and advanced our male and White counterparts. Similarly, globally Black women's voices have been muted in mainstream approaches to record-keeping and intellectual activities, creating a false impression of our agency and an artificial split between conceptual labour and activism.

However, there are significant differences too, regarding population size, segregation, historical presence, immigration, and theo-political climate. Attempts to adopt a womanist approach in Britain should take account of our small numbers yet great need to be heard; in this case the use of British Black female sources wherever appropriate and a range of inclusive strategies to engage participants in open, honest and meaningful dialogue such as those favoured by womanist ethnographers and oral narrative researchers (ONR). The value of putting at the centre of reflexive research the social construction of self as opposed to individual subjectivity is that the concepts they produce elucidate the social world grounded in concrete experiences, rather than the transcendently ideal or empirically real notions of many postmodernist or positivist researchers.²⁵⁰ Thus, avoiding the pitfall of infinite self-referentialism or opaque meta-narratives of research based on postmodern or positivist thinking, but nonetheless, as Charlotte Aull Davies commends, 'are open to informed debate and criticism and which provide qualitatively better understandings of human societies and cultures.'²⁵¹

²⁵⁰ Davies, *Reflexive Ethnography*, 18

²⁵¹ Davies, *Reflexive Ethnography*, 18

CHAPTER 2

THE LONGEST JOURNEY BEGINS WITH AN ALTERNATIVE ROUTE FOR TEACHING & LEARNING²⁵²

Introduction

The hunger and need to express black women's realities in the light of faith are powerful motivations to step into the streams of womanist thought. The continued marginalization of black women with personal experience of oppression is a powerful incentive to think about God's action in daily life.'²⁵³

The previous chapter makes clear my rationale for embarking on this journey towards a theological pedagogy using tools of analyses and ethnographic methods for womanist intents and purposes. Despite doubt in certain academic quarters, that womanism may not be appropriate for the British context; the chapter makes clear that this adoption of womanist theology will ensure consistency between method and content. Moreover, in line with the quote above, I am a Black Christian woman and educator, conscious that the realities of *my* existence illuminated by *my* faith are potent incentives for me to do theology from the standpoint of poor and marginalised Black women. A Black woman, living in a way that endeavours to be faithful both to the liberating message of God's word, and by extension to the very present struggles for justice and freedom of the 'non-persons'. As explained by the author of the 'theology of liberation', Gustavo Gutierrez 'non-persons' are 'those who are not recognised as people by the existing social order: the poor, the exploited, those systematically and legally deprived of their status as human beings, those who barely realise what it is to be a

²⁵² Aspects of this chapter too, are duplicated in Howell-Baker, "Towards a Womanist Pneumatological Pedagogy," especially 41-50

²⁵³ Stephanie Y Mitchem, *Introducing Womanist Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 78

human being.²⁵⁴ Furthermore, it is an existence which inevitably generates ‘new questions as well as pointing to fertile new pathways in the discourse about faith.’²⁵⁵ New questions and pathways that form the bedrock of this study about faith and pedagogy as well as put me en route towards articulating a new liberation paradigm I call a Womanist Pneumatological Pedagogy (WPP).

Chapter 2, therefore, accesses the hermeneutical spiral and begins my journey with an account of my personal understanding of living in the UK as an African-Caribbean Christian teacher linked to the experiences of my fellow sojourners. My up-close and personal reflection in relation to significant others recognises that success is intrinsically a social not solitary affair. Certainly, if it were not for the support I received from likeminded activists, especially Black women armed with an independent African-Caribbean and feminist Christian consciousness,²⁵⁶ I wouldn’t have achieved what I did with the pupils of ‘The Shallow Whale Primary School’.²⁵⁷ These Black women have analysed their social situation and devised alternative routes for teaching and learning that serve to foster empowerment in, and by extension, accomplishment for themselves and others, despite the institutional structures and processes that inhibit and ignore our agency.

These alternative routes for teaching and learning reflect both the creolized Christian spirituality of enslaved African women in the Caribbean²⁵⁸ and the feminist thinking of

²⁵⁴ Gustavo Gutierrez translated by Judith Connor “The task and content of liberation theology” in Christopher Rowland (editor), *The Cambridge companion to liberation theology* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999, reprinted 2002) 28

²⁵⁵ Gustavo Gutierrez, “The task and content of liberation theology” 19

²⁵⁶ That is, defining who we are as African-Caribbean women, independent of any cultural hegemony based on race or gender oppression.

²⁵⁷ The pseudonym my colleague and I invented for the school I describe in this chapter.

²⁵⁸ Alexander, *Mouse in the Jungle*, 86

African American women²⁵⁹ more than a womanist praxis that centres Black women in its struggle for full and total liberation of all non-persons. The former consciousness tends to focus on the betterment of the nation at the expense of the struggle for gender equality and the other whilst centring Black women's struggle for freedom does not emphasise their spiritual identity. Thus the difference, essentially, between a Black woman's and a womanist epistemology is a commitment to breaking down the structural domains of power rather than, as observed by Mirza in the UK and Collins in the US, refusing the means by which the dominant forces try to control them. Or as Valentina Alexander maintains, they merely develop appropriate resistant responses to these mechanisms. Nonetheless, these experiences constitute the raw materials needed to construct this liberation paradigm I call a WPP. After all, as Juan Luis Segundo, who constructed the epistemological framework for doing liberation theology known as the hermeneutical circle maintains, reflecting on God's Word and constructing meaning for the purposes of liberation through the hermeneutical circle 'begins with a special or particular way of experiencing and evaluating reality in general...A human being content with the world will not have the least interest in unmasking the mechanisms that conceal the authentic reality.'²⁶⁰

Consequently, this chapter and the one that follows it, explains in part the impetus for undertaking this voyage of discovery and social action towards a pneumatological pedagogy. Whilst at the same time addressing how and why particular Black people perform in a manner worthy of their God given gifts and talents. Presenting my personal experience in this manner allows others to examine the validity of my praxis. In line with its interpretative tools and

²⁵⁹ See Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*

²⁶⁰ Segundo, *Liberation Theology*, 10

non-pathological position, Black women's ethics and achievements are applauded *and* analysed from multifaceted social and spiritual perspectives that are the backdrop for raising the rhetorical question at the heart of this thesis; can society foster and sustain an approach to education that teaches to and learns from the Spirit and not just tests and the 3Rs²⁶¹ without a new theological pedagogy?

Beginning with my life in relation to significant others

My experience of the British education system, has been one of great achievement, worthy of praise and celebration but alas, rarely forthcoming. Regardless of any oversight by mainstream sources, this achievement means I have strong resources to draw upon in order to illuminate the nature of a liberative approach to theology and education as well as engage in its praxis. Detailed below, these resources or sources as James Cone²⁶² terms them are legitimate and fundamental tools for substantiating theological enquiries, such as this one, that have the liberation of the oppressed at their heart. After all, as Karl Barth asserted, the role of theology is to enable the church to self-test its faithfulness as a church of God.²⁶³

As an educator for over two decades, I have worked in inner-city education (school, church and community), striving to ensure the educational achievement of all children, especially the subordinated. At the turn of the century, whilst working at The Shallow Whale Primary School I reached a high level of achievement with such activities, when I obtained funding

²⁶¹ 3Rs denoting both the popular definition of reading, writing and arithmetic alongside the sojourners understanding of rituals, rules and regulations.

²⁶² James Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, Twentieth Anniversary Edition (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1986) 23-35

²⁶³ See Jacquelyn Grant, "Black Theology and the Black Woman" in James H. Cone, & Gayraud S. Wilmore (editors), *Black Theology: A Documentary History, 1966 – 1979* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979), 323-338; 327 for this presentation of Barth's thoughts on the role of theology.

from the Teacher Training Agency (TTA) to carry out research into enhancing literacy skills through geographical enquiries. The research was grounded in my own experience of reading, which was wrenched from a road to illiteracy when I discovered Ladybird History books and was inquisitive about the lives of real people like Henry VIII. The lives of fictional characters like Janet and John and their dog at the heart of the reading scheme I was put on never engaged me. In stark contrast, with the historical characters at the heart of the Ladybird books I was driven to read by curiosity rather than mere ambition to jump through the hoops (stages) of the reading scheme that at seven I had already learnt were designed to topple me with their cultural exclusivity. For one thing, like many Jamaicans at that time, I could not understand the love affair with the dog in the Janet and John books. As Black comedian Leo Chester once remarked – “Have you ever heard of a Jamaican RSPCA?”

The research, therefore, represented a concerted effort on my part to *refuse* the excesses of the National Literacy Strategy (NLS), which I feared would alienate rather than educate pupils. I prefer to use the word *refuse* rather than *resist*, to convey the point made by Mirza that ‘...black women do not accept the dominant discourse, nor do they construct their own identities in opposition to the dominant discourse. They redefine the world, have their own values, codes and understandings, and *refuse* (not *resist*) the gaze of the other.’²⁶⁴ In my opinion, the NLS took literacy out of any real and meaningful context, and with its links to Standard Attainment Targets (SATs) posed a threat rather than an opportunity to develop intelligently. John Holt describes the nature of teaching that alienates rather than engages children that I am referring to when he writes:

We destroy the disinterested (I do not mean uninterested) love of learning in children, which is so strong when they are small, by encouraging and compelling them to work for

²⁶⁴ Heidi Safia Mirza, “Black women in education: A collective movement for social change,” in Heidi Safia Mirza (editor), *Black British Feminism, A Reader* edited by (London: Routledge; 1997), 269-277

petty and contemptible rewards – gold stars, or papers marked 100 and tacked to the wall, or As on report cards, or honour rolls, or dean’s lists, or Phi Beta Kappa keys – in short, for the ignoble satisfaction of feeling that they are better than someone else. We encourage them to feel that the end and aim of all they do in school is nothing more than to get a good mark on a test, or to impress someone with what they seem to know. We kill not only their curiosity but their feeling that it is a good and admirable thing to be curious, so that by the age of ten most of them will not ask questions, and will show a good deal of scorn for the few who do.²⁶⁵

In stark contrast to the NLS the literacy involved in my project was connected to a relevant child-centred enquiry which focused on the local park’s regeneration. It was relevant to all the pupils because even if they neither lived locally nor visited the park out of school hours, for half the year they had swimming lessons at the leisure centre situated on the park grounds. Indeed one pupil who lived miles from the school was so engaged by the project that she took it upon herself to write to the Prime Minister and demand he support the campaign to restore the park’s play area to its former splendour, which after several letters he complied! The project was so successful in raising the literacy and numeracy levels of all my pupils, (Asian, African-Caribbean and White) whilst empowering them to make a significant contribution to the regeneration of their locality, that the event designed to show case their work and in turn inspire others to use the park as an outdoor classroom had its tenth anniversary in 2008.

Paradoxically, the TTA research project also became the activity that triggered a backlash that brought my advancement up the career ladder to an abrupt halt. My predominately White, middle class, female colleagues at school ignored or belittled my work. This state of affairs intensified when I proclaimed to the head teacher that Jesus Christ was my role model and rejected the specialist²⁶⁶ he suggested I should follow if I wanted promotion. For the first

²⁶⁵ Holt, *How Children Fail*, 165

²⁶⁶ From what I observed of her teaching and what she related to her colleagues, she was a specialist in suffocating curiosity in order to (using one of the management’s favourite expressions) ‘keep heads down and

time in my school experience I felt the blunt end of the intersecting institutional processes and structures that alienate talented Black pupils and see a disproportionate number of them feature in exclusion statistics; but with the twist that I was experiencing this as a teacher and not a pupil. The varied, variable and even discontinuous way multiple differentials can intersect to create different patterns of discrimination for the same groups at different points in their life, argued by Sara Farris and Sara de Jong, in their study of second-generation immigrant girls,²⁶⁷ would apply in my case, but that time I was totally unprepared. When I sought help there was nothing out there. On the whole, the groups tackling racism in schools – community or governmental- were focused on pupils not teachers. By and large teachers are perceived as the perpetrators and never the target of institutional racism. Moreover, my isolation and despair at the unjust way I was treated by the school was compounded when I met with a local pastor who advised me to leave without protest.

I did leave eventually but not before establishing BLESS Teachers, a community network of Black educators- teachers, parents, and educationalists- committed to providing advice and support which is grounded in our experiential knowledge of teaching and learning strategies for overcoming the limitations of the education system. I was motivated chiefly by the belief that despite my circumstances I am not alone, and I am not the first and I certainly will not be the last teacher to experience such a backlash. I am also hopeful that there are others who have positive or less debilitating experiences of the education system which can inspire you to believe you can make a difference because others have made and are making a difference.

Accordingly, my view on education is that any child or teacher, regardless of any perceived

bumps on seat' so that they could use any means necessary to ensure they passed the SATs. This ranged from rote learning to knocking their desks when it was time they started a new paragraph.

²⁶⁷ Sara R. Farris & Sara de Jong, "Discontinuous intersections: second-generation immigrant girls in transition from school to work" in *Ethnic and Racial Studies* (26 March 2013), 1-21. DOI:10.1080/01419870.2013.774033

disadvantages within the system and society, can achieve! Moreover they can and *do* achieve by remaining true to their identity, their culture and their spirit, even if, as my own experience confirms, the risk of a backlash is great and invisibility whilst in plain sight certain.

Thus, despite the endless bullying tactics that threatened to undermine and discredit me as a teacher at The Shallow Whale, I continued with my liberative approach that celebrates the understanding and perceptions of my working class, mainly non-White pupils and Black women like me rather than league tables. Psalm 37 got me through days and nights that would not have been possible without spiritual discernment and faith in a God that liberates. Thankfully, practical and spiritual support came to me from marginalised others in the school and community, especially from fellow sojourners Samaria and Grace. In particular, Samaria's spiritual expression and Grace's innovative pedagogy alongside their political consciousness, that although different in parts served to affirm mine and vice versa. It is to their routes towards a WPP in relation to my own that I now turn; beginning with Grace's career route with its uncanny parallels and crossings followed by Samaria's spiritual departure from the mainstream.

Proceeding with my life in relation to significant others

Grace's crossing

As a newly qualified teacher (NQT) working at The Shallow Whale, an apparently progressive school located in the ghetto, she taught her majority Asian and African-Caribbean pupils in a way that reaffirmed their Black/working-class identities as having equal worth to the dominant group. Long before the NLS, twenty-one year old Grace, a joint English and Education graduate from Durham University, was teaching her Year 3 class to identify, use,

and apply similes and metaphors in their writing along with using their writing to transform their local community. As I reminded her in one of our dialogues:

Max: What happened at the Shallow Whale was a collective achievement because you were right there with me. In fact, it was you who introduced me to the pressure group; it was you who taught the kids to go straight to the top – the Queen or the PM- if they wanted to make a difference. There wasn't anything I achieved that I did by myself and you were a big help if for no other reason than you reassured me I wasn't mad! .

Grace: I know because you were my life plank... I wish I didn't get caught / wrapped up in thinking that doing well would mean they'll promote me...I'm doing this and I'm doing that and getting no real recognition for it but it was very much like "Maxine is coming in and affirming what I'm doing." This made me know I wasn't mad, I wasn't crap... I went to my [Asian] friend's school once and I had paintings hanging from the ceiling and interactive displays she had none of that yet she had her two points. I got them doing portraits in proportion which is Level 4+ and I wasn't even on a point. EJ [White teacher] had half a point but it was all very hush, hush...²⁶⁸

Grace and I kept struggling within the school for the betterment of ourselves and the children long after the bullying had damaged us because we expected the local Black conscious community to support us and hold the school to account, but they didn't. Unbeknown to each other at the time, our disappointment in the progressive White and conscious Black people we met at the school stirred us to return to church and stay. Even though we had both in the past experienced some degree of alienation as a result of racist acts or Eurocentric notions which Black consciousness as a tool of analysis seems to explain and offer an alternative. As Grace later explained in another of our dialogue sessions:

Two things spurred me to go to church:

1. The negative working experience at my first teaching post [The Shallow Whale] meant that I did not get promoted, which made me realise that the hand of flesh failed me at this place.
2. Relationship mistakes made me realise that "I'm in a mess"!

In the C of E, it's "God bless you" one week and next week Black hand may not be shook... The witness of women who invited me to their church [Pentecostal] and their

²⁶⁸ Interview September 20011

mother made me realise that God is REAL. Through the mother's testimony, a capital C stood for consistency. For example always smiling, always knew my name. By Easter I felt my heart was going to burst out of my ribcage. I knew I'd have to take God and make him part of my life, but I'd disobeyed. So whilst walking to church I burst out crying –I realised it was not just a literal but also spiritual walk. I lay my head on "Mother X's"²⁶⁹ shoulder and put down a piece of bawling and declared "Mother X" I really want to know Jesus!" With those three women surrounding me, that's when I gave my life to the Lord... gave my all to the Lord.²⁷⁰

In comparison, my revelation that God is REAL began with a genuine encounter with the Holy Spirit in 1999 when I, a religious sceptic, along with an unmarried pregnant teenager committed our lives to God and were baptised in the name of Jesus 10th July of that year, at a Sabbatarian, Pentecostal church. After all, what could have persuaded me an ardent activist to get baptised into an institution I viewed as too conservative to bring about real social change. Similarly, what could have swayed the elders to baptise us if not, in the words of William Seymour's newspaper 'Divine love, which is charity. Charity is the Spirit of Jesus.'²⁷¹

Following our conversion to Pentecostalism within months of each other Grace and I both felt compelled to act out our faith in a God of transformation, even if it went against the grain as this next extract from our sessions illustrates:

Grace: [T]hey didn't like it if you had an opinion. They'd cuss you off in their own way. Like when I informed the KS1 teachers that I didn't like the stickers they'd purchased. "Oh, it's unfair!" They'd take it personally, like I'd berated their family tree...²⁷²

Yet, in stark contrast, the local Pentecostal leader, Pastor Y, hailed as a British Martin Luther King for his work with gangs, who I went to see several months after my baptism regarding bullying in my workplace, advised me to 'leave the school and leave quietly or they [the

²⁶⁹ For reasons of confidentiality the identities of the women in question remain anonymous.

²⁷⁰ Interview February 2006

²⁷¹ MacRobert, *Black Pentecostalism*, 109

²⁷² Interview September 2011

education establishment] will see to it you never work again.’ His response surprised me because I couldn’t quite fathom why he felt empowered by God to tackle warring gangs but not a racist, atheistic head teacher. My African-Caribbean Christian consciousness could give a reason for the White head’s reaction, in terms of hegemony, but not a passive response from a conscious Black spiritual leader struggling for the liberation of his community.

Accordingly, the episode served to strengthen my resolve to do God’s work but with circumspect regarding believers. After all, I gave my life to Christ not church members when I converted. Wisdom shared by Samaria whose journey follows next:

Samaria’s Departure

I was about 28 when I began my relationship with God. I didn’t go to church or anything like that because I knew I didn’t have to celebrate His life and everything in church, but just through the way I was and the way I spoke to people.

Go to church and praise God and sing and what you call it, but I find that [praising and singing] in my life every day when I go outside in my garden (especially when I’ve been stressed) and there is a new flower that has come up; that to me is celebrating God, because God has given that to me. All that beauty –I’ve probably overdone it with my garden, I’ve totally packed my garden with flowers etcetera and they are only going to last for two months if I’m lucky but I don’t care. It’s just going out there and seeing that new one come up, and that little bud there, and when it opens up. The simple things to me are God, simple little things. Seeing a little child outside, regardless of colour, and you look at them and smile and that little child smiles back that’s God...I have been fighting that all my life, saying to people that I don’t have to go to church to find God, because I find God and goodness and everything else in myself (which I’ve only just learnt) and nature and being good to people, being here with Maxine, that is my God!

When others in church authority could not support me, Samaria’s spiritual outlook enabled her to affirm, validate and encourage me to believe in myself. Something we both recognise, as the passage from one of our dialogue sessions reveal:

Max: How do you believe you have helped me to achieve what I have achieved? Particularly regarding my time at that school?

Sam: I feel I've given you confidence in yourself. I feel that when you've lacked confidence I've been there for you encouraging you...I really loved you and saw a lot of you in myself and wanted to help you...Maxine you tend to take on what horrible people say and paint yourself with it. Sometimes you're too hard on yourself and sometimes you forget the impact you have on others. I like to remind you and encourage you. I like to look after people's minds, bodies and souls because that's what I would like others to do for me.

Max: You know before I asked you that question I asked myself it and you know what I said about you? You're church to me, because you help me to achieve by tending to my spirit. With my son now, encouraging me and reassuring me I'm a good mother; babysitting so I can study but also back then when I was going through what I was going through at that school. One of the women in this study helped me by advising me how I could put my portfolio together to provide the evidence I needed to go up the pay scale. Another worked with me, and we taught together and her class was involved in the park work and Windrush. All of which helped me because I was not alone and I knew...

Sam: Knew you weren't mad.

A decade after graduating, my experience of the British education system as an accomplished teacher has exposed contradictions within commonly held theological and pedagogical theories about the character of church and the type of teacher / teaching that impacts positively on student learning and achievement. This has also been the same for the sojourners, including Chayil, Mariet and Rachel, whose particular routes for teaching and learning cannot be detailed here due to the constraints of time and space. Suffice to say theologically, we are suspicious of notions of church based on what Chayil describes as the 3 Rs – rituals, rules and regulation, rather than the Spirit, as expressed in the quality of the relationships at the heart of its spirituality and praxis. We are aware, for instance, that not all signs of the “spirit” are of the Holy Spirit. The high profile given to glossolalia over “[d]ivine love, which is charity” makes us suspect that spiritual love and power have limited authority

in institutionalised church lives. Equally, we are suspicious of claims outside the Black church that the Bible enslaves rather than is a tool of liberation. From being the centre of worship at church, to being a key method of protecting our family members (it was/is always laid open in the cot above a baby's head in my home) the Bible has been revered for knowledge that fulfils needs and transforms lives for good. Cultural and radical practices certain Black consciousness claims neglect. Besides which, as pointed out by Grace, 'the Bible doesn't actually enslave; it is human beings that enslave and use tools isn't it?' ²⁷³

It is clear from my own personal account that the lack of support I received from Pastor Y, when I asked for his help regarding the school bullies, has compounded my suspicions regarding displays of church radicalism that doesn't go deeper and wider than the popular appeal of tackling gang warfare or getting in the "spirit" during sermons and worship. Furthermore, my suspicions brought about by such instances of inconsistency in our ideological institutions (not just churches) have been the driver for this journey. My fellow sojourners Grace, Chayil, Mariet, Rachel and Samaria have had similar suspicions about the equality, truthfulness and potency of the relationships / spirituality they encounter in social institutions. For example, in schools or social services where they fail to promote you yet always give you the most challenging classes or clients, in terms of learning or social and / or behavioural needs. Or in churches where they claim to love and care for you yet they fail to remember your name or take time to walk your journey alongside you; refuse to portray Jesus as Palestinian; and they would happily applaud a mother for kicking out her pregnant school aged daughter!

²⁷³ Second interview session with Grace: June 2006

Pedagogically, we are suspicious of the accepted inclusive approaches (multicultural / anti-racist and anti-sexist teaching) that exude ambiguities and exclude those supposedly intended to benefit the most from them, like the sojourners. Ironically, maintaining rather than changing the status quo like the self-confessed conservative approach of the assimilationists. That is, they perpetuate the notion that attributes and values conducive to educational success and professional advancement are White, bourgeois and conformist. Such as, high self-esteem, effective communication, higher order thinking skills, nurturing children to do well at school and other meritocratic ideals. Hence, these inclusive approaches for Black pupils are taught, in the main, by White teachers armed with big books and synthetic phonic drills for higher literacy skills. If they do acknowledge that Black people can make a difference then it's a token understanding such as the belief that any Black teacher will do for Black pupils and / or only Black male mentors for Black boys. Then they struggle to engage pupils or recruit / retain or promote Black members of staff because, in my opinion, they undervalue the prior knowledge and achievements Black pupils, parents and teachers bring into the school!

In stark contrast, I and professional teachers like Grace and Chayil, staying true to our faith and alternative epistemological perspectives, have been able to raise standards of attainment of pupils regardless of race, gender, or class without confining their learning or our teaching to measurable outcomes or any "essentialist" notions about being Black. Furthermore, humble members of the community from a similar standpoint, like Samaria, Mariet and Rachel as artists, health professionals, social workers and "church" activists have nurtured the minds, bodies and souls of its most vulnerable and marginalised by building meaningful and consistent relationships with them. As a result, today, questions relating to the role of the

Spirit in our day to day lives are even more pertinent for me in my conscious determination to provide a liberative education for all- children, the youth and their educators: Given the spiritual consistency of a conscious British Black woman's way of knowing the key questions for this thesis must be:

- Can the established schools truly embrace a womanist epistemology without a new pedagogy?
- Can the established churches fully embrace a womanist epistemology without a new theology?

The BMCs clearly struggle to embrace the less dynamic Black woman's epistemology that will challenge but never purposefully dismantle the oppressive structures. Nor by extension do they build upon the radical tradition of Black women as shakers and movers that helped to form a self-determining African-Caribbean Christian consciousness and Black Church movement.²⁷⁴ Put succinctly, can the BMCs foster and sustain a liberative approach to education that teaches to and learns from the Spirit and not just tests or the 3Rs without a new theological pedagogy?

Up-close and personal intersectional analysis in dialogue with others

During our time at The Shallow Whale, however, Grace and I simply analysed the operational arrangements and contradictions exposed to us from the subjective lens of Black consciousness as we perceived it. In order to adapt the dominant pedagogy so that it reflected and affirmed the worth of non-White cultures and identities. As well as equip every child with the credentials needed to fulfil their potential and take their place in the world as equals

²⁷⁴ Alexander, *Mouse in the jungle*

with the dominant groups in society. Hence, the position taken by EC, the only other Black teacher at the school and responsible for home-school liaisons, we could explain easily as this extract illustrates:

Grace: You remember they had an issue about me using words greater than six syllables.

Max: Yeah...but I can't remember which word it was.

Grace: Neither can I...but that is how you treat Black staff. If they're socially White then they're acceptable.

Max: Do you think that is how they treated the Home-School Liaison Officer?

Grace: Well that wasn't an authentic accent was it? Not being funny... raised in Nottingham and born in Jamaica and not able to speak the dialect / language. I mean that was a forced RP [Received Pronunciation] like you have to be Whiter than White to be accepted. I think her heart is in the right place but from a social / cultural background, she fulfilled a stereotype. Don't get me wrong EC had to wear her White mask, as Fanon explains, to have acceptability she had to keep her distance. A bit like an overseer, but I'm sure she had to buss one little patois to those parents to do her job.

Unsurprising to us then was the state of play regarding the school hierarchy in this White-led school, which found EC (who ostentatiously chose to assimilate rather than assert her Black identity) being included as a senior team player whilst we were overlooked from all career progression opportunities. Indeed, the inconsistencies between the reality of our lives and the ideological claims of equality, equity and caring by the school's custodians watered the seeds of suspicion about their White supremacist and self-centred interests into saplings of unrelenting resistance to such hegemony.

This included a range of activities, such as Grace continuing to outperform her fellow NQT teachers in the classroom by drawing upon the text of her life as a dancer and practising

routinely the techniques that got her an outstanding grade for a PE lesson in her first weeks of teaching; a club that the leadership tried to dissuade her from setting up. As well as the park regeneration / community work I continued doing (that they had also tried to nip in the bud) by obtaining further funding and support from the ghetto schools' consortium and the centre for development education alongside establishing an environmental club. To negligible acts such as Grace's regular use of higher order vocabulary and my use of higher order questioning skills even though we knew they didn't think it was appropriate to use such concepts with "our kids".

As women we asserted our Black female and later Christian conscious identities and innovatively and habitually raised literacy and numeracy standards through the arts, humanities and our pastoral work. Areas of pedagogy the White leaders neglected in their drive to get better SATs results than their rivals. In short we helped our pupils to exceed measurable expectations by teaching to the immeasurable -their spirit of curiosity and creativity.²⁷⁵

Conversely, the binary and disjointed oppressive thinking underpinning the White-led school's praxis coupled with their individualism enabled them to perpetuate and/or tolerate the type of bullying and undervaluing Grace and I experienced at their hands whilst maintaining a pro-Black / underdog front. For example, they reprimanded me for the ACYA (African-Caribbean Young Achievers) award nominations I made, despite professing their commitment to raising standards for all pupils and boasting about the number of ghetto pupils they have helped to pass the 11+ exams. The Year 3 and Year 4 African-Caribbean pupils

²⁷⁵ See Holt, *How children Fail*, 163-167 for a description of the type of curious spirit I'm referring to here.

were nominated by me to recognise their effective participation in regenerating the ghetto park. Nevertheless, as the deputy explained, they perceived the awards as racist; and for ethical reasons they should not and would not support the park regeneration work. Equipped with her White, bourgeois disconnected way of knowing, she failed to see the irony in the fact that as she was informing me of this state of affairs the head had accepted his invite to attend the award ceremony taking place during Black History Month! A blatant contradiction to their claims of being about embracing diversity, raising standards for all and putting the interests of all their pupils first, because the regeneration work received international and national recognition for raising standards but never school recognition.²⁷⁶ So it was in line with this thinking that the deputy was able to socially exclude me without any compunction or repercussions whilst I was left in such a heightened state of cognitive dissonance and isolation that I needed several weeks off work with anxiety.

This type of blatant contradiction Grace and I could not adequately explain for some time due to the limitations of our main tool of analysis -Black consciousness, and our belief in meritocratic ideals within the parameters of race and gender. We naively thought that if they were keen to see Black children pass tests then they would also want to see them get community awards as well as promote Black teachers who were raising standards, helping pupils make outstanding progress and opening up opportunities for school recognition too. Engaging in practices that threatened to break our spirit and sense of identity in very real and tangible ways because we raised the bar to a very high level was baffling and regrettably led to episodes of physical and spiritual burnout for both of us.

²⁷⁶ Through the Centre for Development Education I went to Greece and Gambia to share my good teaching and learning practice regarding education for sustainability. Through the Geographical Association I presented papers on how geography could enhance literacy for their readership and also conference delegates in Oxford. The Times Educational Supplement also featured an article on the park regeneration project. But never was I invited to share my work with staff at The Shallow Whale.

Similarly, regarding the contradictory behaviour of the Black radicals within the school community we realised the limitations of Black consciousness as a practical tool of analysis. Its one-dimensional focus²⁷⁷ on race in dichotomous terms did not enable us to appreciate why this community renowned for its Black radicalism, inside and outside the church, didn't appear to see the contradictions much less take action against our oppressor. Or at least take action to support the kind of pedagogy that gave equal worth to Black people which they claimed they wanted. In this case a pedagogy based on a Black woman's epistemological standpoint.

Consequently, our rudimentary understanding of oppression meant Grace and I kept struggling within the school for the betterment of ourselves and the children long after the bullying had damaged us because we expected the community to support us and hold the school to account. As this next extract reveals:

Max: [W]hat kept me there so long was the fact that it was the ghetto where I was born and raised. When they told me "our kids can't do this, our kids can't do that", I thought I would have been sitting at those desks twenty odd years ago and I can do this and I can do that. Indeed. I had more qualifications at that time than the head and deputy because I had my masters. I came back to the ghetto after years of training, working in Soho where expectations were high and children learnt intelligently rather than by rote, and I wanted to do the same in the ghetto- do the same for my community that ten years before claimed they wanted Black teachers.

Grace: But was the ghetto faithful?

Max: NO!

Grace: NN [African-Caribbean poet and screen writer living in the ghetto]
"Wheeler Mouth" was in the head's back pocket. You know he, like IR's
mom and dad [White/Black bohemians] were attracted to a ghetto school like

²⁷⁷ One-dimensional in terms of Valentina Alexander's argument in her thesis *Breaking every fetter? To What Extent has the Black Led Church in Britain Developed a Theology of Liberation* (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Warwick, 1989), 244-245

The Shallow Whale... Everyone had their narcissistic reasons for being there. No one went in saying “Why aren’t there more Black teachers on staff? Why aren’t you retaining you’re Black teachers?”

Max: That’s so true. You know, ES’ dad (he was another Black leader – they were all male that I went to for help) despite his Pan-African radicalism and being a community leader told me I’m a strong Black woman I can handle them by myself!²⁷⁸

With hindsight, it became clear to us that this community of Black radicals acted against us because despite the rhetoric they lack the ethics of caring and personal accountability to the collective that permeates our Black feminist thinking.²⁷⁹ Hence they were able to disengage themselves from the reactionary cycle of oppression and resistance we found ourselves in by accommodating the White progressives with whom they share certain values and an epistemological outlook that doesn’t prioritise gender / class oppression or the ethics of Black feminist thought, as this next transcript elucidates:

Grace: They’ve brought into the results driven system – it’s capitalism called league tables. They don’t care who teaches their daughter / son so long as she / he gets Level 6a. It’s not a case of “I’m glad she is being taught by a Black, culturally aware village raising my child mentality. The holistic tradition has gone out the window. It’s a pseudo-culture where they pick fights that aren’t going to really rock the boat...Black people have bought into this pseudo-culture big time, so if he supported you his daughter’s grades would have been put in jeopardy, and you being the reason for his relationship breakdown with the system weren’t worth it...When he referred to you being a strong Black woman (which you are because you’re mother raised you to be caring and hardworking), he doesn’t realise the history he’s stepping on and that he should be continuing it with you. We’ve come into teaching but the village is no longer! I know it sounds bitter but I didn’t have time for people like that the way you did.

Some years after leaving the school, however, fortified with a better understanding of institutional racism, that reflects the diunital (both/and) cognition of Black women’s

²⁷⁸ Analysis consultation, September 2011

²⁷⁹ Collins, *Black Feminist Thought 2nd Edition*; 262-265

consciousness, we were able to recognise in the backlash an allergic reaction to Black sourced creativity as well as an appropriation of Blackness for their own ends:

Max: What do you think was the reason for the backlash at the Shallow Whale?

Grace: Racism was the reason for the backlash and I tell you why? Your ability and your ability, to handle situations. For instance with RO [pupil] whose behaviour was a challenge and had to be handled with sensitivity I'd say to him, "Hey bwoy, we have a 50p jar (no 50p jar, it was fictional) but true LG (deputy) come in, and he said a swear word, so I told him "You need to put 50p in the jar." Next thing I know she's lecturing me about the appropriateness of taking money off children. There's no 50p jar, it's like emperor's new clothes- it doesn't exist. It's a point of reference / a visual stimulus. Instead of telling him off all the time for swearing, I invented the 50p jar as a way of reminding him not to swear but she didn't get it! Now if LC [White KS2 Coordinator hailed as the best teacher in the school] had a whip in the corner and RO had welts on his body she wouldn't go "This is unacceptable!" Basically, anything that is creative and doesn't fit the mould is inappropriate for these people. You [we as Black female teachers] got through because of what you look like as opposed to who you are. SC [White male head] was on the local authorities teaching pool and he took my name out of the pool. Selfish! SC wanted his teaching demographic to look a certain way [over 90% of the school population non-White]. So I had no chance to see other schools. Would he have done that with a White teacher? You [he] play games with people's lives...LC was the opposite; she was "wow, wow, wow!" even when it wasn't very good, not that hot...just being patronising. Puppy dog praise.

Continued critical reflection on our experiences through dialogue at the time and a decade later left Grace and I certain that on an epistemological and ontological level the interlocking structural inequalities of sexism, racism and ageism alongside elitist and individualistic values were behind the White liberal backlash against us and the indifference of the radicals, as the dialogue from 2012 below highlights:

Max: I've been speaking to someone from Black Lads Succeed (BLS) [a mentoring organisation for Black boys set up by Christians from a Pentecostal BLC] and he's not concerned about Black teachers. Why don't they see that the same institutional racism that disadvantages our children is the same that is disadvantaging us as teachers? Why are they so short sighted? You know the head invites his organisation into The Shallow Whale! Yes, he knows SC.

Grace: Black Lads Succeed Inc. they should call it. The plight of the Black teacher is not worth jeopardising the business. Black Lads Succeed, where's Black Men Succeed? Empower the boys to be men but instead it's the puppy mentality; and SC will love it because the clue is in the name, it's about boys. If they start talk about Black *Men*

Succeed then SC will not let them in...God bless them, they've got a niche but problem is when those boys become men.

Max: Bigger problem is what you're going to do with the Black girls and women.

Grace: This is anecdotal but Black men tend to be more docile [in educational management] than Black women so we're kept down because we are more vocal and more pragmatic – we get on with it. Whereas for them it's a case of "I'm a bloke" because they are, still men and they work in a similar fashion to White men. Whereas women (and that's where we have something in common with White women) think and act differently. The likes of SC don't like us because we *do*. So Black Women Succeed and Black Girls Succeed would be a bigger threat [than Black Lads / Men Succeed] because we can deconstruct the system with great accuracy. We can think outside the box and we're penalised for this and that's why we get frustrated but they'd never be able to understand this and that's why they'd never be Black Women Succeed or Black Girls Succeed. For example, the park event you helped to launch. You were thinking about environmental ethics long before it was on the mainstream agenda.

Max: You were doing the same thing too.

Grace: We were getting kids to own, we were empowering them.

Max: I don't think it's going on at the school.

Grace: He wouldn't be able to sustain it. Same with Black Women Succeed and Black Girls Succeed so that's what we have to harness. Remember the husband and wife [African-Caribbean]. They love off the husband but they worked to get rid of the wife. They tried to discredit her whilst ironically at the same time the husband promoted as being the best thing since slice bread; working not just for SC but other schools in the [ghetto] consortium of schools. He was quiet, chilled and unthreatening.

Max: That's what I write is that...

Grace: We didn't emulate the people they wanted us to emulate – the matriarchs...

Max: There were two matriarchs the White KS 2 Coordinator [LC] and the Black Home-School Liaison Officer [EC]. I'd remembered the LC but had forgotten EC.

Grace: EC very important, the White managers they all showed kindness but it is important to recognise that, but it is important to remember that when it came to treating us like women and not girls, equals not inferiors...

Max: There was nothing we could have done to be promoted except imitated them.²⁸⁰

The need for a new pedagogy and theological reflection

Our up-close and personal analysis of the education system demonstrates it cannot prevent independent thinking Black educators from adapting the dominant pedagogy. We have tailored the existing structures and processes to fit, like a bias-cut,²⁸¹ the ontological and epistemological perspectives of countless Black women and implemented a far more stimulating and suitable pedagogy for active not passive learning. On this small and localised level, personal reflection on our collective experience as autonomous thinking Black women has revealed to us that an education system is knowingly more likely to allow a pupil to achieve than it is going to deliberately allow a Black teacher, much less as an autonomous thinking one. To put it bluntly, based on our experience, the education institution cannot truly embrace and nurture a womanist epistemology without a new pedagogy because of its need to dominate and the limitations of its White hegemonic epistemology.

We believe this to be so because achieving Black children are not perceived as a threat but a credit to the “superior” abilities of White teachers. Conversely, as teachers, clearly happy with the Black female skin we are in *and* making great leaps and bounds with our pupils, we expose their inadequacies. Inadequacies made acute by virtue of us doing something that the establishment could never do- use our subjective experience of being gifted Black females as a teaching and learning resource. More significantly, it is in this way that we take pupils

²⁸⁰ Analysis consultation with Grace, September 2011

²⁸¹ Just as the bias-cut in clothing is used to describe cutting in the diagonal direction of the material using or not using established sewing patterns and shapes, I prefer to use the term in this context to convey the radical nature of our pedagogy whilst working within yet outside the system

beyond the 3Rs and the shallowness of the ‘three S’s’ (saris, steel pans and samosas) and challenge the White leaders’ hegemony.²⁸²

For example, Grace and I inspired a subjugated consciousness in our pupils through marking celebratory events like forty years since the Windrush docked with the first wave of migrants from the Caribbean. We also developed their political credentials through sustainable projects like the campaign to restore the ghetto’s flagship park. Moreover, we accomplished these things not as mere individuals but in the tradition of community. The pupil who wrote to the Prime Minister was sown the seed of taking concerns to the very top by Grace, when the year before she encouraged her class to write to the Queen or the PM during literacy lessons, which I watered in geography sessions, and Samaria ensured the well of our creativity and self-identity was replenished!

The hermeneutical tool of the liberation theologian necessitates that any new understanding about the social mechanics of oppression engages them in fresh theological reflection and construction of a new paradigm. One, capable of dismantling, not merely bearing / repudiating the oppressive structures and processes that inhibit our agency. Womanist theologians, aware of the interlocking nature of structural inequalities in official and unofficial spheres of influence, stress the need for reflection that informs action to be carried out from micro and macro perspectives. Accordingly, before engaging in social and theological reflection on a larger scale in order to construct a new paradigm, my personal analysis in relation to significant others will continue with an equally up-close and personal theological examination of dynamics within post-war established churches. Ascertaining

²⁸² Mirza, “*The more things change*”, 114 uses the term ‘3 S’s’ to refer to the remedial measures to tackle alleged cultural deficit and low self-esteem, popular in schools during the heyday of a multicultural approach to education of the 1980s.

whether or not the established church can fully embrace a womanist epistemology without a new theology will be its primary focus, particularly in the light of the specific question to be raised by the personal analysis already undertaken namely, why do BMC activists, like Pastor Y, appear not to comprehend that the same institutional racism that disadvantages our children is the same that is disadvantaging us as teachers?

Up-close and personal scriptural analysis in relation to significant others

¹⁶ So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. ¹⁷ For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want. ¹⁸ But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. ¹⁹ The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; ²⁰ idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions ²¹ and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. ²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. ²⁴ Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. ²⁵ Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. ²⁶ Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other

Galatians 5:16-26 New International Version (NIV)

Undoubtedly, our teaching experience at The Shallow Whale has deepened Grace's faith and mine. Indeed, as liberation, Black, feminist and narrative theologians acknowledge about life stories, our personal experiences mould and drive our theological and pedagogical praxis. In her book, *Yearning: race, gender, and cultural politics*, bell hooks makes a similar point when speaking about narrative in popular culture as an effective means of engaging students in critical and meaningful reflection. She also highlights the benefits of challenging narrative for any struggle committed to social change when she writes:

Engaging in intellectual exchange where people hear a diversity of viewpoints enables them to witness first hand solidarity that grows stronger in the context of productive critical exchange and confrontation.²⁸³

Hence, my experience is presented in part, as an explanation for my decision to undertake this voyage of discovery and social action towards a WPP. Particularly, my growth in understanding spiritual warfare; from the early days when my mother explained the reason why Sister Y behaved the way she did whilst in the throes of glossolalia / the spirit was because, “the devil ah jook ar.” That is, as suggested by the scripture above, she was actually ‘gratify[ing] the desires of the flesh’²⁸⁴ and not the Spirit. By and large the racially homogenous composite of the churches together with their contradictory social actions are indicative of this spiritual warfare as are the feelings of cognitive dissonance Black people have to handle on a day to day basis.

Not surprisingly, the dynamics within as well as outside the church are often scrutinised and understood in much the same way as my mother observed them, in terms of spiritual struggles *and* in very specific and personal ways. I am no exception. My earliest experience of apparent ecstatic glossolalia / charismata pneumatic (signs / gifts of Spirit baptism)²⁸⁵ was as an infant when my mother’s friend had such a frenzied attack of the “spirit” she stepped on my toes. The pain was so excruciating that for one moment onlookers believed I too was in the “spirit”, but this was soon dismissed when they saw the look of disgust and pain on my

²⁸³ hooks, *Yearning*, 6

²⁸⁴ Galatians 5:16

²⁸⁵ Though there is no real consensus within the Pentecostal movement on what exactly constitutes genuine evidence of spirit baptism, generally it is understood to include speaking in tongues- glossolalia (nonsensical blabbering) and xenoglossia (lucid speech) as well as the nine gifts listed in I Corinthians 12:8-10) which the apostle Paul qualifies with love (presented in I Corinthians 13) and other qualities that make up the fruit of the spirit (presented in Galatians 5:22-23). See Iain MacRobert, *Black Pentecostalism in Britain : its origins, functions and theology: with special reference to a Midland borough* (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Birmingham, 1989) 107-109 and Iain MacRobert, *The Black Roots and White Racism of Early Pentecostalism in the USA* – Foreword by Walter J Hollenweger, (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988) 85

young face. Why would the Holy Spirit let her hurt me in that way? I deliberated. Moreover this seed of doubt about what “spirit” actually entered her was watered when I observed her wild party life-style and hunger for gossip on the other days of the week.

The sojourners are no exception too, as shown in Grace and Samaria’s journeys (presented earlier)²⁸⁶ the established churches can be, contrary to the liberating message of the gospel, filled with self-serving, self-deprecating and judgmental members who can lack time, compassion and empathy for others. Regrettably, making churches at times, racially and socially exclusive places on many levels, as these recounts from the other sojourners demonstrate:

Mariet: I couldn’t understand how Christians could just be content to come and sit in church, hearing the word of God and narrow it down to a very “unnatural”, to me, evangelist message. Such that you go and you try to get someone saved, you tell them the Good News, they’re saved, and that’s good because that’s another one on your bit of paper but you haven’t actually walked alongside them on their journey.

Chayil: As a teenager, I got pregnant and they put my mom on the back bench because she refused to throw me, her teenage daughter, out on the streets. Yet there were bwoy[boy] child having children left right and centre yet their mother could be in the pew same way but my mom had to go on the back bench – isn’t that demonic. If my mother had thrown me out on the streets, they would have been happy. But it would have stopped that light – because my child has been a light to our family – Satan would have seen that and tried to stop it by using the institutional church.

Spiritual and social dynamics that can intensify the struggle to build an intimate relationship with Christ, self and others by socially marginalising us and increasing rather than reducing the cognitive dissonance we endure. For example, the apostle Paul was earnest in his endeavours to keep glossolalia in check without hindering manifestations of the Holy Spirit

²⁸⁶ In Samaria’s journey, presented on page 7, she recalls the supercilious stance of churchgoers who insist she has to attend church to have a relationship with God. On page 5 Grace recalls the erratic behaviour of Anglicans who would shake her Black hand one week and show her scorn the next.

by stressing the gifts that edified church and community but not the individual.²⁸⁷ Yet time and time again I would witness individuals, unchecked by the church, get in the spirit with no obvious other purpose but to edify self. My uneasiness intensified as I matured and became passionate about social justice, leading to me leaving the church and joining a Pan-African organisation only to return when I experienced God's grace and was able to dismiss the nonsense in church.

Other sojourners have struggled to build a relationship with God whilst dealing with the uneasiness they experience in similar ways of *both* removing themselves from church *and* accepting the liberating message of God; as the following recounts demonstrate in diurnal terms

Chayil: For instance, when I became a Christian [after years of abstinence from church] one of the major changes / processes I had to go through, was understanding what love is from God's point of view. Because up to that point I had a warped idea about love, and my spirit was showing me on a daily basis what His love is which is unconditional. I felt each day that God was telling me that He loved me. I felt that each day God was *reminding me* that it had nothing to do with what you are able to do for me or any sort of qualification only that He loved me...

Sam: When I was a teenager in a way, I had stopped believing in God because I was so unhappy and going through so much that I thought He'd deserted me, I needed a God that was living now, sort of thing. Who was going out there doing good work and things like that ... That was what I needed and that's why I was drawn to good people even to this day I am like that. If I see a person and they are humble, I am drawn to that person because that is the way I am.

When I was a little girl, my mum every Sunday went to church. I enjoyed Sunday school but then I was discovering... getting into Black people. There was a hunger to learn about my race and then I started to think. I remember getting this bible and I was really (you had to reach a certain level in the church before you got this bible) so the bible came and I was really excited. It had my name on it and all this pretty writing on it. Then I opened it up and saw looking at me a picture and it didn't seem right, because

²⁸⁷ See Veli-Matti Karkkainen, *Pneumatology, The Holy Spirit in Ecumenical, International, and Contextual Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 33-34 for a description of Paul's pneumatology.

to me all the stories I'd heard about Jesus and where He lived and things like that, this blonde haired, blue eyed person looking back at me wasn't Jesus. And I changed. The funny thing about it, I don't know how it happened but as I got older I transferred... my Jesus didn't have a colour as such, I looked for Jesus in people and my father and mentor was Bob Marley. I listened to his lyrics and he taught me how to be the caring person I am today!

Rachel: I am not the Christian that people would perceive you're supposed to be a Christian. I drink and if I felt like a cigarette now I would probably have one. I have a boyfriend say no more, and I am not holier than thou and I think because I think of (and I am not saying God approves of it because I don't think that He does) but I think that because He knows me and He sees with me and He sees the jewel in the crown or He sees the rose amongst the thorns then... He knows the potential that I've got and He is willing to sort of see with me and *trust* in me that I'm going to do the right thing then.

Grace: I think being brought up C of E - I still feel funny about praying without my hands clasped together. I still feel a bit funny without doing the sign of the cross on my... when I pray I still feel slightly condemnatory (the bible says there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus) but there is still a condemnatory aspect to it that may be I've grown up with. Not necessarily from home but maybe my interpretation of what high church was about. So some Catholic guilt that I have to do this, I have to deny myself this because if I deny myself this I will make things O.K.

At The Shallow Whale Psalm 37 and the song 'Can't Give Up Now' by gospel duet Mary, Mary²⁸⁸ helped me to overcome feelings of despair and hopelessness regarding inability to continue to resist the domination of the White leadership, and fear that I would assimilate or accommodate their dehumanising ways. As women with faith in a loving, gracious God and strong self-beliefs about being Black, underpinned by equally strong ethics of caring and personal accountability the social and spiritual dynamics of churches mirror the struggle in all walks of life to keep your faith, have a heart and not become hardened because as Rachel confessed 'It's a struggle I have to... One of my philosophies in life is that without Him I have nothing-sons, family, and friends. So I have to struggle to remind myself to put Him first... [Plus,] I'm glad I have a heart because the job can make you do nasty things.'²⁸⁹ Indeed as Chayil knows from experience so can the church because 'Satan would have seen that my

²⁸⁸ Mary, Mary, "Don't Give Now" in their album *Thankful*, produced by Warryn "Baby Dubb" Campbell for Nyrraw Entertainment Inc.; EMI April Music Inc.(2000), Track 05

²⁸⁹ First interview with me in January 2005.

child [conceived out of wedlock] has been a light to our family and tried to stop it by using the institutional church to get my mom to throw me, her teenage daughter out onto the streets.²⁹⁰

It is a struggle though, for all who have faith, ‘to keep in step with the Spirit’. Accordingly, from my personal reflection, in dialogue with the sojourners, the contradictory binary and disjointed oppressive thinking underpinning the progressive White-led school’s praxis is also at work in the established churches’ praxis. Coupled with individualism, this thinking enables those members, like Pastor Y to tolerate the social exclusion of females; like the bullying Grace and I experienced. For example, a founding member of the Christian-led Black Lads Succeed, in his explanation of why the organisation has not connected meeting the educational needs of Black boys with the needs of Black girls told me:

YN You’ve got to put them [children] in a place where they have a chance. We [parents] decide rather than them.

MH So what about girls?

YN Excluding girls was about capacity.

MH Weren’t you concerned it would exclude or marginalise females?

YN No because we recognise that there are female-headed households, but boys will be looking for male role models at about thirteen or fourteen as part of their development.

MH Don’t girls need that too?

YN Yes they do. Many don’t know they are beautiful and there is no need for tattoos because our ancestors were branded.²⁹¹

²⁹⁰²⁹⁰ First interview with me, January 2005 in which Chayil explained why her mother was put on the back bench as a punishment by her church.

²⁹¹ Telephone interview with me conducted March 2011.

These aspects of his thinking reveal the positivist compartmentalised male-centred rationale of the dominant classes rather than the holistic ‘connected knowing’ that characterises our Black feminist thought.²⁹² Rendering him, like a ‘sinful nature’, incapable of appreciating the full impact of Black female social exclusion, such as unsupported school-aged pregnancies, need to re-take examinations, limited career opportunities, sexual abuse and controlling images, on the capacity of Black boys and their families to thrive. Or comprehending the full extent of the role played by females (great and small), through outspoken and far reaching acts, for the amelioration of all in the Black community, including the sons, brothers and nephews they help to nurture. Beyond, as is apparent, being beautiful appendages for men or role models to girls only.

Even when faced with concrete evidence to contradict his perceptions he still separates the needs of boys from girls. Such as the advocacy of his mother ‘a school cleaner, and a Jamaican school cleaner’ he relayed to me, ‘is staff. So she tell them about her grandfather who fought in World War II and tell them to put her child back into class. I got an A.’²⁹³ Simultaneously, his empowerment of young lads to self-advocate as well as to have advocates in parliament ‘keeps in step with the Spirit’²⁹⁴ and exposes the wisdom and independent Black Christian consciousness thinking he has learnt from his mother. Thinking which has brought about institutional transformation on many levels. As he told me, ‘We devised a ten year strategy. God has allowed a lot of things to happen and to give us a national profile with MPs, Police, House of Lords, 31 Chief Education Officers, parents etc. We got the boys to speak to

²⁹² Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*

²⁹³ Telephone interview between me and YN: March 2011.

²⁹⁴ Galatians 5: 25

the MPs (obviously we trained them before hand) because we knew it would be alright me saying it but with the boys ...²⁹⁵

The need for a new theology

On the whole, the sojourners and I believe that those authorised church members who exhibit signs of ‘the sinful nature’ rather than ‘the fruit of the spirit’, especially those in leadership and headship positions, possess limited amounts of the political pneumatology that is embedded in our consciousness and mirrored in our image of God and understanding of faith in action.²⁹⁶ This political pneumatology is embedded in the womanist image of God as depicted by Karen Baker-Fletcher in her book *Sisters of Dust, Sisters of Spirit* ‘as empowering, sustaining, life-giving and strengthening, delivering bodies and souls from the pit of death, whether such death is imposed from outside by oppressive forces or from within by self-destructive, suicidal tendencies.’²⁹⁷ Pioneering British Black theologian and broadcaster Robert Beckford refers to the political pneumatology I am alluding to as:

dynamic pneumatology [which] introduces the concept of dread pneumatology, that is, conceiving the Spirit of God and possession by it as a mandate for radical activity consistent with a ‘strong dread’ [Rastafarian / Christological cultural and political praxis] analysis. Such a conception is prophetic in so much as it challenges the status quo and offers an alternative vision of social relationships.²⁹⁸

In our case, relating to a tender loving, protective, faithful, humble and substantial God who privileges the most oppressed and marginalised articulated below, that permeates our thinking, our very being!²⁹⁹

²⁹⁵ Telephone interview between me and YN: March 2011.

²⁹⁶ See Alexander, *Mouse in the jungle*

²⁹⁷ Baker-Fletcher *Sisters of the Dust* 116

²⁹⁸ Robert Beckford: *Dread and Pentecostal: A Political Theology for the Black Church in Britain* (SPCK, London: SPCK, 2000), 177

²⁹⁹ See Collins, *Black Feminist Thought 2nd Edition*; 262-265

Sam:

MY MOTHER SHE WAS LIKE
A BEAUTIFUL AND RARE EXQUISITE FLOWER
SHE WAS CULTIVATED AND NURTURED IN
GOD'S OWN "MAGNIFICENT GARDEN"
AND TENDED BY HIS OWN "MAGICAL MYSTICAL" HANDS...
FINALLY HE LOVINGLY FED MY MAMA WITH
AN "ABUNDANCE" OF MATERNAL INSTINCTS
STRENGTH OF CHARACTER STRENGTH OF MIND AND BODY
HE KNEW MY MAMA WAS SPECIAL HE KNEW MY MAMA
HAD A HARD ROAD AHEAD AND HE KNEW MY MAMA HAD TO BE
"EXTRA STRONG"
AS HE WATCHED MY BEAUTIFUL MAMA GROW.... BLOSSOM
BLOOM AND FLOURISH UNDER HIS TENDER LOVING CARE
HE WAS HAPPY AND PLEASED AND "EXTREMELY PROUD"
HE STOOD BACK AND ADMIRER HE WAS WELL.... "WELL SATISFIED"
THEN HE DID THE MOST WONDERFUL..... THE MOST "FANTASTIC"
YET TOTALLY TOTALLY "SURPRISING THING"
HE GAVE HIS PRECIOUS UNIQUE "EQUISITE FLOWER" TO HER FIRST BORN YES
TO "HER FIRST BORN"
LUCK, LUCKY LUCKY, LUCKY.... "ME"³⁰⁰

Chayil: Who am I in Christ? I have an image of sitting on Daddy God's lap when I got to know the real God. I am a Christian, a child of God, being saved and receiving God's love. It's about knowing He is real- having an intimate relationship with God.

Rachel: He knows my potential; which is sort of like clients ain't it? You know they have got the potential to do better they just need that support. They just need you to have that faith in them, and I think that is God. I think that's Jesus...Why I don't look down on my clients is partly because of my *beliefs*. I know that Jesus was with the down and outs and disadvantage and the vulnerable.

Sam: Black people go through different things. You know we have been persecuted right through history. We go through different things but God went through that because nobody wanted to –well they ended up killing Him! But I needed a God that was living now, sort of thing. Who was going out there doing good work and things like that ... That was what I needed and that's why I was drawn to good people even to this day, I am like that. If I see a person and they are humble, I am drawn to that person because that is the way I am.

We, Maxine, think of things not the way society tells us to. You have to look at what Jesus did, he was humble not like the celebrities. If I was a millionaire the amount of people I would help I wouldn't be a millionaire for long. If the money was distributed properly (because there is enough for everybody)... but the rich hold onto

³⁰⁰ Abridged version of her poem *God's Magnificent Garden*, (Birmingham, unpublished, 2003) but the full version appears in Chapter 5 page 164

it. If the world was fair, but they [the rich and powerful] are not fair and we [the weak and less powerful] are not struggling to change things.

Grace: How does the bible enslave? ...I can use a chair to sit down (as I tell my students) or it can also be a lethal weapon because I can pick it up and hit you over the head. Do you know what I mean? So it is about the tool and how it is used. But that all comes from application [of the Word] from the Bible itself, and understanding... So the Lord has truly liberated me. As I've been seeking, the Lord has made Himself known to me daily. There are still frustrations in the church but the Lord puts out what He wants me to do in the world. He answers prayers and challenges me daily.

This dialectic is the reason why we definitely need a new theology to deliver a liberative praxis; one that is based upon a liberative pneumatology and ensures that the marginalised people do not, to quote Grace, 'go begging bread rather than realising [their] potential / who [they] are in Christ' because 'It's only when you unravel yourself, that's when you soar but only if you come out not too broken.'³⁰¹ Furthermore, it is this dialectic why the sojourners and I are motivated to go on a journey towards a WPP because as Samaria discerns 'if you truly suffer under the existing system, if you are burnt by the ethics of greed and selfishness, then you can afford to abandon it in favour of an ethic of caring and respect for others, particularly the powerless, weak, gullible. You will have a vision to create a world that doesn't let anyone else suffer the way you have suffered.'

Suffering is where the sojourners and I have our paths converge – and a strong African consciousness that has instilled in us a strong drive to transform society into a better place for the non-person led by the Spirit. To use what power we have, especially at the level of an alternative perception that we share with others, so that it demystifies what society tells us about ourselves. In this way, we expose the false reality that society creates for the non-persons with its stereo-types of scroungers, strong Black women and Black

³⁰¹ Follow-up interview with me in June 2006

underachievement. Our diunital understanding of the theology of the Black Led Churches (BLCs) indicates they are unable to tackle injustice holistically and explicitly around the recruitment and retention of Black teachers in UK schools.

Proceeding with our lives in relation to others

Our micro-analyses on this up-close and personal level reveals a lack of compassion and the greed that creates dehumanised and desensitised people who are so unhappy and / or insecure in the positions of power they hold. So they try and make themselves feel better by the unscrupulous but passive means, by which they have been taught- to put others down, look out for number one and accumulate more than you neighbour to convince yourself that you are better than them. Reflecting critically on our experiences of the established churches with their authorised praxis and its narrow application of God's liberating message reveals both the conservative pneumatology of the oppressor and the transforming spirit of Jesus. The extent of the spiritual warfare and the cognitive dissonance it creates means we have to come together like the fingers on a hand to think through the real causes of our confinement / our achievements.

Based on this fresh understanding of the social and spiritual dynamics of institutions, Grace and I did eventually leave the Shallow Whale Primary School but after establishing BLESS Teachers a network of Black community educators- teachers, parents, and educationalists- dedicated to providing guidance and care which is rooted in their experiential understanding of teaching and learning strategies for overcoming barriers within the education system. Notably, we humanise social existence in meaningful and empowering ways by refuting the stereotypical portrayals, such as Black underachievement and the Black superwoman, used to

control non-persons with the knowledge we have gained from living in the world. A counter-hegemonic epistemology similar to that undertaken by the Black-led Churches in that doesn't seek to dismantle the apparatus that oppress us, which is vital to developing a WPP.

The purpose of the next chapter with its focus on macro-analyses is to develop a wider collective consciousness. Since I know that without it underpinning our personal, and by extension, political pneumatology dependent on mutual relations, we will not have sufficient power both to impact substantially on and to withstand the spiritual onslaught we encounter in church and society. Furthermore, the degree to which we act on our suspicions, however, and think through the real causes of our confinement / for our achievements, in an attempt to reassess our existence so that we can give it genuine meaning, depends on the extent to which we are journeying towards complete liberation and fulfilling God's calling for ourselves and for others; as well as the extent to which we are hindered along the way. The journey towards a WPP, therefore, is about Black women of faith coming together in a purposeful and dynamic way; and having enough provision for the journey towards liberative change by making explicit, as Robert Beckford espouses our presumptions regarding liberation, praxis, revelation and history.³⁰²

³⁰² Beckford, *Dread and Pentecostal*; 144 – 156 identifies these as essential elements in a Liberation Theological Praxis (LTP).

CHAPTER 3

DECONSTRUCTING THE COMMON ROUTE TO SUCCESS & REVEALING THE ROOTS OF A WOMANIST PNEUMATOLOGICAL PEDAGOGY

Introduction

In the previous chapter an examination of the alternative routes for teaching and learning that the sojourners and I have devised, identifies underlying features for our success as well as hindrances to our progress. Notably, our Black Christian and female consciousness has empowered us to teach and learn along the bias-cut by equipping us with a pneumatology entrenched in the value of relationships and the ethics of caring and personal accountability that opposes the authorised individual praxis³⁰³ of the established schools and other mainstream institutions that oppress us. This pneumatology believes in a God who can, and will make a way out of no way. We, our children and fellow subalterns can and will achieve anything for as long as we have faith in Him/Her. Accordingly, this pneumatological pedagogy strives to teach to the Spirit and not just the tests / the 3 Rs in church and society. Additionally, it is one that provides affirmation from like-minded people that we are not mad and validation that what we are doing is sensible and right. Effectively reducing the impact of the cognitive/ epistemological dissonance we encounter in a world full of treacherous conflicts regarding the spirit of love and relationships.

Regrettably, our pneumatological pedagogy has lacked the political astuteness needed to identify both the root causes of our successes and simultaneously unravel the real causes of the contradictions and oppressive practices that plague our lives. Coupled with the neglect of

³⁰³ Mud flower Collective, *God's Fierce Whimsy*

established church leaders to centre the lives and struggles of Black women like us in their efforts to liberate and elevate the community from injustice and oppression we became casualties. Far from being superwomen, I needed nine months off work with stress related anxiety and depression and Grace left the teaching profession to become a learning mentor. Similarly, Samaria has been incapacitated with chronic depression for many years because of the rejection she has experienced from people who should have cherished her and the youth she has nurtured and edified, like HN who should respect her.

Hence it is a struggle to 'keep in step with the Spirit'³⁰⁴ and fully enjoy the whole and lasting freedom Christ promises. Yet it is one I and the sojourners must continue in relation to the wider community because whilst recognising the multiplicity of Black people's routes to success because we are not a homogenous group, it is vital that we do not lose sight of the common roots of our success on which to build a new theological paradigm capable of overcoming the limitations of a traditional independent Black and female Christian consciousness as a liberative tool.³⁰⁵ That is, we must make explicit our liberation in its fullest intent whilst revelling in the tradition that witnesses our shared and dialogical experience of being Black as the foundation of a supportive environment in which we understand our true significance and worth as daughters and sons of God.³⁰⁶

Accordingly, it is a struggle that requires large-scale intersectional analyses from the subjective standpoint of a subjugated community in order to validate our accomplishments

³⁰⁴ Galatians 5:25

³⁰⁵ For this type of counter argument to the anti-essentialist camp fronted by Paul Gilroy see Anthony G. Reddie, *Nobodies to Somebodies: A Practical Theology for Education and Liberation* (Peterborough, Epworth Press, 2003) 31-33

³⁰⁶ Alexander, 'Breaking Every Fetter', 237-243 provides details of how the BLC enables its believers to succeed as individuals.

and address the significant discrepancies, exposed by our up-close and personal reflections, between the pro-Black / underdog stance taken by those in authority whilst they tolerate or perpetuate the social exclusion of Black females. A struggle our successes and sufferings have revealed requires the transformation of schools so that they are liberative by nature and not by token exceptions or ignorance. A transformation, I believe the authorised praxis of BLC members cannot facilitate without a new theological pedagogy because it requires them to fully and explicitly embrace a Black woman's epistemology and spirituality rather than accommodate the thinking of the oppressor and marginalise us.

Thus this chapter, in its macro-analyses of Black success and articulation and celebration of a liberative theological pedagogy that centres Black women's wisdom,³⁰⁷ aims for broader and more sophisticated intersectional analysis for purposes of action (praxis) that pursues *complete* liberation. The findings, together with our strategies, constitute the foundation of a theological pedagogy I call a WPP that is established in praxis. In this way it is distinct from the alternative routes for teaching and learning presented so far or the liberation theologies (or pedagogues) of the BLCs in Valentina Alexander's study that do not, in her words, 'seek to dismantle systems of oppression but merely to develop appropriately resistant *responses* to them.'³⁰⁸

In this chapter, therefore, I will do among other things:

1. Retain the communal / dialogical aspects of our journeys by presenting the alternative pedagogical routes we have devised in relation to the routes constructed by the wider community.

³⁰⁷ Collins, *Black Feminist Thought 2nd Edition*, 257-258 defines wisdom as knowledge embedded in experience.

³⁰⁸ Alexander, 'Breaking Every Fetter', 244

2. Expose the social analysis that is embedded in the approaches I present.
3. Identify and interpret the aspects of dynamic and conservative vision of transformation within them such as:³⁰⁹
 - Counter/hegemonic epistemology
 - Explicit/ implicit social analysis regarding liberation, revelation and praxis
 - Evidence of innovation or conservatism
 - Multi / uni-dimensional analysis of social transformation
 - A/historico-analytical elements
4. Address the revelations raised in the previous chapter, such as focusing on students (particularly boys) in isolation of the needs of their (majority female) educators is to the detriment of the entire community.

Advancing with our lives in relation to the communal other

On 20 June 2012, assistant comment editor for the Guardian newspaper, Joseph Harker posted this article on its 'Comment is Free' website:

This month I attended an awards ceremony at the House of Commons in which black youngsters were celebrated for their achievements. There was the Nigerian author who had become the youngest woman ever given a book deal by top publishers Faber & Faber. There was the young man who'd achieved six A*s and two As at A-level – four of which he'd taught himself outside school – and was now an organ scholar at Oxford University. And there was the Cambridge student who's also an award-winning community poet.

This event, the Rare Rising Stars 2012, is just one of a number of initiatives showcasing the best young black talent. The individuals recognised all have outstanding drive, ability and dedication – and have proven themselves academically too.

All these award schemes have been set up with one main aim: to challenge the perpetual

³⁰⁹ Basically this list is an amalgamation of the key aspects of liberation theology identified by Valentina Alexander in her thesis *Breaking Every Fetter* and Robert Beckford's interpretative tool for change the LTP presented in his book *Dread and Pentecostal*

stereotype of black kids, especially boys, as uneducated, disaffected and demotivated.

I left the ceremony feeling uplifted by the talent on display; but also with a deflated sense that, despite the organisers' efforts, they really will have their work cut out to try to change society's perceptions. On the same day as the awards, news reports were leading with the story of a gang of six black boys who'd been convicted for their roles in the rioting last August. On Radio 4's flagship Today programme, a series ran all last week on the problems of black gangs. Each day, it seems, there's another story which reinforces the idea of black kids being a homogeneous block of criminally minded underachievers. The positive stories to counterbalance this are non-existent.³¹⁰

The female-centred view of change, articulated by Heidi Safia Mirza, that it is a process not a confrontational event means this study recognises that dismantling oppressive infrastructures takes persistent, often ostentatiously conformist acts of resistance over time. Joseph Harker's comment about the aim of Black award schemes is to challenge controlling images is in line with this presupposition. Undeniably, the low visibility of Black educational achievers, highlighted by scholars such as Mirza,³¹¹ Cheron Byfield³¹² and Yvonne Channer,³¹³ provide an example of the systematic subordination that colours the experiences of Black people in Britain. Thankfully, the plethora of Black alternative education provision³¹⁴ organised in the main by women, such as supplementary schools³¹⁵ and mentoring organisations³¹⁶ highlight

³¹⁰ Joseph Harker, "Our black youngsters: how often do you hear the good news? The media create a damaging stereotype, portraying black youths as criminally minded underachievers," (online at theguardian.com, The Guardian: Comment is Free 20th June 2012) http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2012/jun/20/where-is-good-news-black-youngsters?CMP=tw_t_gu

³¹¹ Mirza, *Race, Gender and Educational Desire*

³¹² Byfield, *Black Boys can make it*

³¹³ Channer, *I am a promise*

³¹⁴ The term supplementary or more recently complementary school is commonly used by scholars and the community alike to describe these organisations. This study prefers to use the term alternative education for the main reason that not all provision has been an appendage to or joined-up with mainstream education, like home schooling and the countless grassroots establishments that don't appear in official records. What they seem to have in common, as Mirza, *Race, Gender and Educational Desire*, 142 observes, is an alternative epistemology.

³¹⁵ In 2011, according to the National Resource Centre for Supplementary Education there are approximately 5000 supplementary schools registered in the UK. In Birmingham, 15 (almost 11% of total of 164 supplementary schools) are identified as Black/African/BMC run organisations. Although not exhaustive the National Association of Black Supplementary Schools (NABSS) website: www.nabss.org.uk/#/directory/4529353383, records 66 actively registered supplementary schools across the country, between October 2010 and June 2010, some of which provide mentoring as well as tutoring for children of African descent.

³¹⁶ Oona Black British Business Directory website: <http://www.oonablackbritishbusinessdirectory.com/Black-UK-Directory/Mentoring.html>, lists 6 mentoring businesses (August 2012).

some of the innovative and effective female-led ways we as accomplished people have traditionally subverted and continue to subvert the ideological apparatus accompanied by oppressive practices, such as school exclusions, to nurture and equip our youth for success. African-Caribbean community education is rarely open about its political intents in and outside the school gates yet it tackles hegemony at its very root. Something American cultural critic and feminist bell hooks appreciated when she recalls:

I understood from the teachers in those segregated schools that the work of any teacher committed to the full self-realization of students was necessarily and fundamentally radical, that ideas were not neutral, that to teach in a way that liberates, that expands the consciousness, that awakens, is to challenge domination to its very core.³¹⁷

In 2010, a study of supplementary schools commissioned by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCFS) entitled *Impact of Supplementary Schools on Pupils' Attainment: An Investigation Into What Factors Contribute To Educational Improvements*³¹⁸ confirmed what previous research had ascertained about the outstanding impact that these alternative pedagogical routes have had on the educational outcomes of Britain's Black youth when compared to those who have not had access to this type of education. For example it cites Joe Clancy's article on the Kokayi Raising Achievement Project in 2008, which provides data showing that a 12% higher proportion of Black boys who participated in the project gained Level 4 or above in their Standard Attainment Targets (SATs) when compared to Black boys who did not participate.³¹⁹ Interestingly, girls were not part of the project.

³¹⁷ bell hooks, *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black* (Boston: South End Press, 1989), 50 cited in Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 131

³¹⁸ Uvanney Maylor, Katie Glass, Tozun Issa, Kuyok Abol Kuyok, Sarah Minty, Anthea Rose and Alistair Ross: (Institute for Policy Studies in Education, London Metropolitan University), Emily Tanner, Steven Finch, Natalie Low, Eleanor Taylor and Sarah Tipping: (National Centre for Social Research) Susan Purdon: (Bryson Purdon Social Research), *Impact of Supplementary Schools on Pupils' Attainment: An Investigation Into What Factors Contribute To Educational Improvements*, (London: London Metropolitan University 2010) 64-65

³¹⁹ Joe, Clancy, "Aged 10 and already at College: Black boys' ambitions are soaring along with their Sats results, thanks to extra classes after school", in *The Guardian*, Tuesday 11th March 2008

Nonetheless, the authors of the DCSF report acknowledge the value supplementary schools add to the holistic development of children and young people, and not just regarding their academic attainment. Accordingly, the youths' enhanced self-esteem/belief and confidence, higher aspirations, better social relationships and sense of belonging, to name but a few mentioned in the study, are accredited to the impact of alternative community led education.³²⁰ Not surprising when one considers Mirza's observation that whether or not they prepare students for exams or are officially registered, alternative community-led schools "provide an alternative world with different meaning and what we have called 'other ways of knowing'"³²¹ In the words of one of the DCSF report's respondents:

Coming here can prevent [children] from getting excluded at school and can reinforce their self-esteem, and can encourage them to try that little bit harder. People are not just coming to us for the learning; it's about showing them the opportunities. So we have a lot of children coming back to us who have gone on and I keep in contact with people so that they can come back to our prize giving. We have had so many over the years. This is about children experiencing sometimes negativity and being very small fish in very large ponds in their ordinary day to day school and coming here, and standing out, and having people take notice, and focus and saying: 'actually you can do this'. And go back and still be the little fish in the big pond, but we still have you swimming somewhere ... and so definitely we wouldn't keep doing it if we didn't make a difference. In fact that was a theme of one of our prize giving's. We've had 25 years of making a difference, and because we know we do, we keep doing it. (Teacher)³²²

Whether through award ceremonies or improved examination results and enhanced sense of self and community identity these alternative routes for teaching and learning, I would argue, develop and sustain an independent consciousness based on knowledge the community has produced. I would go so far as to argue that they are praxis-oriented pedagogues (because

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2008/mar/11/furthereducation.news1> cited in Maylor et al, *Impact of Supplementary Schools*, 38

³²⁰ Maylor et al, *Impact of Supplementary Schools*, 165-166

³²¹ Mirza, *Race, Gender and Educational Desire*; 142

³²² Maylor et al, *Impact of Supplementary Schools*, 161

reflection and action are dialectically held in tension) that facilitate the process of 'conscientization'. The process described by its author Paulo Freire, by which dehumanized, oppressed people learn to critically identify the socio-political and economic causes of their oppression. Additionally, as a consequence of this reflection they act to liberate themselves from these causal factors by changing the world they live in so that their humanity can be restored.³²³ A process that produces knowledge that we are achievers, grounded in our experiences and understanding of achievement, that isn't just about academic results and competitiveness but values of self-actualization and the ethics of caring and personal accountability. Particularly, the holistic values mentioned in the DCSF report, of self-belief/worth, respect, high aspirations / expectations, commitment and dedication, in the context of community embedded within it.

An argument supported by the experiences of the sojourners and a broad range of people from the wider community, who have been interviewed and/ or have completed a teaching and learning questionnaire for this study.³²⁴ Black or White, Christian or Jewish or agnostic, people who may not have encountered an alternative education provider but identify personally with many of the qualities mentioned or intimated in the report such as enthusiasm, affirmation, compassion, motivation and ability to manage self and others. Qualities they believe grew out of their relationships with significant others who, like the supplementary school teacher quoted above, inspired them in some way to achieve.

Pastor X, for example, a Pentecostal minister and regional director of the National Black Lads Succeed franchise in an interview recalls how his dad, a qualified teacher, would 'bring home

³²³ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Pelican Books, London 1972), 15

³²⁴ Participants, I contacted through a number of networks, including my own social and teaching networks and The Black Theology Forum based in Birmingham.

books from work to teach his own children’ but also that ‘he went to great lengths to ensure that his kids had knowledge of the Caribbean and their Blackness.’³²⁵ He also acknowledges, in the questionnaire he completed, that along with being responsible and possessing the qualities of independence and self-managed learning skills, his mother was extremely instrumental in his achievements because of ‘her commitment and dedication to us as her children; plus her tenacity and resilience as a mother having to raise three boys alone.’³²⁶

Indeed, three of the four Black men (including Pastor X) and two of the three White women who returned questionnaires identified their family or parents as instrumental in their own achievements: Reasons ranged from simply ‘wanting my family to be proud of me’ and the feeling ‘that my parents expected me to go into higher education and supported that in terms of that expectation’ given by the Black male education consultant (Consultant Y) and the White female research consultant (Consultant W) respectively. To the deeper and more wide-ranging ‘Love from parents, affirmation from school, respect in and from the community and belief within myself that I could do it’ expressed by Pastor V, a White, female Pentecostal minister and qualified teacher.

Of the remaining Black male teacher (Teacher Y) and White female teacher (Teacher V) in the sample, whether ‘highly personable and excellent people management skills’ or ‘strong ethical and moral code’ respectively, being identified as core features in their achievements, quality relationships with others is clearly valued by them too. As it is with the three Black women who completed questionnaires as these extracts illustrate:

Listening skills, active listening and being non-judgemental of people I believe are responsible for my achievements. I take people as I find them, look at their qualities

³²⁵ Follow-up interview 10 June 2009

³²⁶ Questionnaire response returned 3 June 2009

and use that... Twenty-seven years of parenting, perseverance and possibly looking at my friends...I think it is a myth that only Black boys need their dads, I needed my dad more...

Miss X: Head Teacher of
a Supplementary School

I always try my best...My parents' approval and disappointment were significant aspects of my learning experience and shape my understanding of teaching the most.

Mrs Y: Promoting
Independence Officer

My parents, who both had amazing spirits and a thirst for knowledge (which I am trying to pass on to my children),

Parent X: Home Educator and Engineer

Other significant people mentioned by respondents were church members, lecturers, trainers and teachers from their school days, including Caribbean teachers from Pastor X and Parent X who were schooled in the UK and the Caribbean. These significant men and women were noted for the passion they had for their subjects as well as words of wisdom they passed on.

For instance, Teacher V recalls:

My lecturer in Anglo-Saxon and Old Norse saying that whatever flights of fancy I might take, my integrity was absolute. I have held to that ever since...One of my TEFL trainers in Israel stating that she would rather be known as the person who said hello to everyone every day with a smile, than one who only said it to a few. Manners therefore are integral to teaching and it is discourteous to assume that some don't deserve to be treated the same way as others.

Teacher V

Regarding the Caribbean teachers back home, they were praised for their compatibility and affirmation of the positive messages about learning and worthy dispositions to cultivate, being transmitted by the church:

It was in equal distribution or contribution to my learning achievements from both church and school in Jamaica, and each institution affirmed the other.

Parent X

Similarly, African-Caribbean majority church members in the UK were praised by Pastor X for ‘rekindling my fondness of reading and to study the things that were of interest to me such as my faith.’ Unfortunately, his experience of UK secondary schooling did not affirm the values and skills he learnt during his foundational years in Guyana, especially how ‘to be creative and to use my imagination.’ Hence as a mentor of Black boys he has gone into schools trying to bridge this gap between what schools input (teach) and community institutions, like the church, bring out (educate). As he explained in a follow-up interview 10 June 2009:

Enough is not being done about teaching them about being Black boys; providing them with the survival skills they need. The [education] system is ignorant of their culture...Racism means a curriculum that struggles to meet the needs of any child can’t meet the learning needs of Black children...The assumption behind ‘education for all’ is that one size will fit all. The same with Every Child Matters... the result is that there is a breakdown in communication, about what it [education] is really about. As it stands, in schools education is used to communicate what the dominant culture sees as important. Hence learning goes out the window for Black children. When I go into school I’m bringing to the surface what’s not being said. For example the youth want to talk and do things. How would a teacher respond? I have a different learning style. For example, I go in the classroom and say “You’re a genius (we have God’s DNA so that makes us all geniuses) and turn to someone and say you’re a genius.” And they are animated because it’s different...Using a church technique that involves young people in the teaching. They are teaching and learning and being taught. Rather than dealing with them as a mass, I’m engaging with them as individuals with the result that they are co-teacher and co-facilitator. I think about repetition as well because we’re dealing with children. For example, “Your teacher should only talk to you once, more than once is too much. Repeat and tell someone.” The result is that they retain it...Schools input and I educate, that is I bring out their genius / potential inside of them. My focus is about bringing about people’s ability to educate themselves and become self-directed, autodidactic learners [because] stories that are valued are foreign to you and your story is dismissed by schools...³²⁷

Parent X likewise found that only in Jamaica did teachers truly educate her in terms of drawing out her God given talents and gifts, rather than simply inputting knowledge. It was one of the underlying reasons why she decided to home educate her own children after the

³²⁷ Follow-up interview between me and Pastor X on 10 June 2009.

preparatory school her two year old son attended remained concerned that he wasn't speaking despite her reassurances that speech development at a more mature age was a family attribute. As she explained:

At no point did they reinforce that it was in [son's] interest for him to be talking. I was told that the school has a certain standard of achievement and if he wasn't talking it would be hard for them to access his learning...I started thinking that in children's formative years, it is much better to nurture and foster their desire to learn and interrogate their environments rather than force-feed them. In the beginning I started teaching him his name. In my culture there is an importance in knowing who you are, so he should know his name and know where he is from. That is the first thing you are exposed to in the New Testament, Jesus' lineage; where he comes from and his DNA. I want my children to have a spiritual knowledge of self and a historical knowledge of their DNA, which schools will never foster or nurture at this stage of their development...There is another reason, which I would like to think didn't influence my decision but I know that it did. I did supply teaching for two years and felt that the system was positively Dickensian. They were not allowing children to even think, let alone learn, they were churning them through the system without giving them a chance or the opportunity to explore their creative side...I so want my children to be creative. Throughout history the visionaries broke through barriers that were unimaginable for everyone else, except them.³²⁸

The DCSF report's findings and Mirza's comment pertaining to an alternative epistemology in particular are supported by the experiences of the sojourners and the other participants in this study, some of whom work / worked for Black supplementary and mentoring organisations like Pastor X and Parent X illustrated above. Indeed, all these initiatives and experiences display many of the characteristics of 'Black feminist thought',³²⁹ espoused by Patricia Hill Collins who observes: 'Just as Sojourner Truth deconstructed the term *woman* by using her own concrete experiences to challenge it, so in a variety of ways do every day African-American [Black] women do the same thing.'³³⁰ In a manner similar to the sojourners detailed in the previous chapter, the community equipped with a Black, often faith based consciousness defines its existence in meaningful and empowering ways by refuting the

³²⁸ Questionnaire response returned October 2008

³²⁹ See Collins *Black Feminist Thought*, her section "Concrete Experience as a Criterion of Meaning" especially 208- 209

³³⁰ Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 93

stereo-typical portrayals of Black underachievement and achievement used to control us, with the knowledge it has gained from living in the world. Often at great cost to the countless number of alternative educators / community mothers and fathers who sacrifice their health along with their weekends and week nights to keep supplementary schools running.³³¹

Deconstructing the common routes to success

Harker's comment however, reveals the ineffectiveness of these alternative routes in usurping the dominance of the controlling images in the media, education and other structural domains of power³³² that perpetuate the very systems of inequality and injustice the community challenges. Additionally it becomes clear, when you centre the Black female experience of the sojourners and other community mothers that the community tends to neglect the need to also bolster and edify all the adults providing holistic care and training to its youth. The Black, mostly female, teachers 'raising the race' within and outside the mainstream system are often invisible in the priorities made and visions shared for community development.

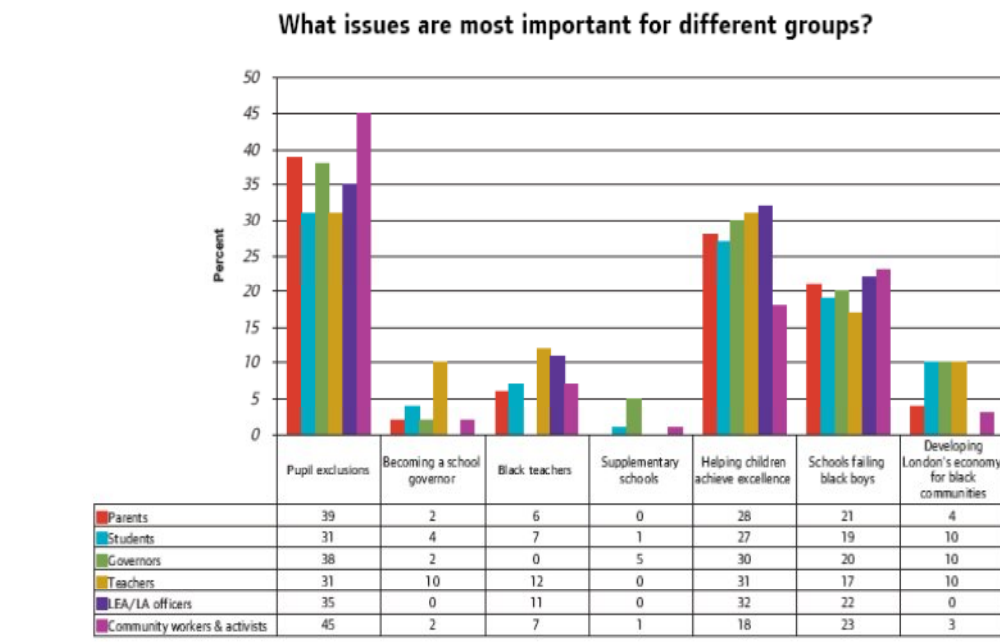
The community, for example, tends to be silent regarding the poor recruitment and retention levels of Black teachers and data that details their alarming career prospects. Indeed, a survey of over 1000 Black parents and other delegates at a conference entitled, *Towards a Vision of Excellence: London Schools and the Black Child* reveals, as indicated in Table A below, the overwhelming, pathological or reactionary concern for pupil exclusions in isolation of concern for the social exclusion of Black teachers or celebratory and proactive concerns, such

³³¹ Mirza, *Race, gender and educational desire*, 140

³³² Collins, *Black Feminist Thought* 2nd Edition

as helping children achieve excellence and developing the local economy for Black communities. Equally significant perhaps, from the teaching experience of the sojourners, is the low priority also given to issues relating to supplementary schools and becoming a governor; especially from governors who as employers of teachers do not appear to see the recruitment or retention of Black teachers as an issue worth prioritising.

Table A:



Source: *Towards a Vision of Excellence: London Schools and the Black Child*³³³

It also becomes clear, by the significant number of initiatives designed to raise the attainment levels of Black boys, such as the National Black Boys Can mentoring franchise, that the development needs of girls are not perceived as warranting equal attention.

Clearly, as observed by Mirza,³³⁴ there are aspects of both conservatism and radicalism in the community's social agency. Or, to use Alexander's term 'passive radicalism' because like the

³³³ Mayor of London, *Towards a Vision of Excellence: London Schools and the Black Child 2002 Conference Report*, (London: Greater London Authority, 2003)

BLC, it is reasonable to infer that the analysis employed by alternative education providers also tends to explain and resist the dominant oppressive practices and ideologies faced by their communities but they have no real intention of identifying the root causes or removing them.³³⁵ This state of affairs begs the question, are we as a community addressing the real causes of our oppression and building upon the true sources of our success when we challenge controlling images and decentre females?

The suspicion, based on my personal reflections in the previous chapter, is that we are not; as a consequence of the conservative aspects of our community consciousness, which leaves implicit the more dynamic aspects of our desire for real change and by extension our praxis. Deeper examination of this alternative education movement juxtaposed against mainstream provision and liberation pedagogues is required in order for the sojourners and me to advance towards a WPP in the tradition of community. The importance of social analyses and critical reflection at this level cannot be underestimated; particularly as at the time of writing, Britain is still in the grips of the aftermath of last summer's riots. No doubt the acts of violence and looting were an outpouring of the bitterness and frustration many poor and marginalised people feel about the austerity measures being implemented by the Government and the injustices Black people still experience at the hands of the police. But have they tackled the roots of their oppression?

Alexander maintains social analysis that clarifies and interprets the roots and processes of oppression facilitates liberation theology. This is because it enables participants to better understand their everyday experiences, and take corresponding action that effectively asserts

³³⁴ Mirza, *Race, gender and educational desire*; 138-139

³³⁵ Alexander, *Breaking every fetter*

their existence as full human beings and radically transforms their lives. Clearly the summer riots are not an effective, well thought out and pragmatic response to the oppressive social situation that is the reality of so many poor and marginalised people. It is nonsense to believe that obtaining a new flat screen television through looting the neighbourhood shop, will counter centuries of ideological assault that claims poor and marginalised people are inferior and don't deserve a better material life. If anything it exposes the dehumanising 'sinful nature with its passions and desires';³³⁶ an external manifestation of the implosion Anthony G. Reddie's study, *Nobodies to Somebodies*³³⁷ explains as being the consequence of a subjugated self-identity struggling with imposed notions of inferiority and a concrete knowledge of self-worth and value. Although Reddie specifically refers to the Black identity I am not suggesting for one moment that the all the rioters and looters were Black, only that this interpretation is transferable to other oppressed and marginalised groups in society.

Thus critical reflection, along the lines highlighted by Alexander, I believe would have helped the rioters and looters adjust their thinking and responses to become as effective at asserting their humanity and attacking the *real* causes of their oppression as they were at attacking a tangible expression of that oppression, property. More significantly, for the purposes of this journey, the ontological dissonance and backlash the sojourners and I have experienced means critical reflection along these lines will also help us move towards a WPP with minimum casualties, whilst building upon the common roots of our success as a people in touch with our humanity.

³³⁶ Galatians 5:24

³³⁷ Reddie, *Nobodies to Somebodies*, (Peterborough, Epworth Press, 2003) 22

Exposing the common roots of our success

Arguably our collective experience indicates that we do more than react to failure in the UK, we proactively foster success. We like other marginalised groups in this society and elsewhere, cultivate and nurture those qualities and dispositions that make us human by any means necessary. For example, a strong sense of self-identity in relation to community, perpetuated through strategies like home schooling and call and response techniques described respectively by Parent X and Pastor X. These pedagogical techniques and their African origins are well noted in Byfield's study of the educational success of Black boys who went to Oxford and Cambridge and the Ivy League universities in the USA.³³⁸ Moreover, from our fore-parents journey across the Atlantic in slave ships, and again in passenger ships from the Caribbean, to have our labour exploited and our minds inculcated with alien ideas we have executed a remarkable feat. To retain crucial aspects of our African identity that assists not only our survival but our ability to thrive is an incredible accomplishment of spiritual, social and psychological prowess and engineering; evidenced by the outstanding achievements of our people, past and present.

Alexander commenting on the emergence of an independent African-Caribbean Christian consciousness³³⁹ (a key manifestation of this identity) draws our attention to the significant role Black women played in the process as leaders and conduits:

This process of making the Christian message over into one's own image involved the slaves drawing from the memories of their African past in order to recreate them within the confines of their Caribbean present...The precise quantities of African cultural heritage visible amongst the populations of Christianized slaves varied according to a range of factors. For example the amount of autonomy permitted the slaves in expression, teaching and preaching of the faith... [and] the extent to which

³³⁸ Byfield, *Black Boys can make it*, 83

³³⁹ G. Wilmore, "The Religion of the Slave" in *Black Religion and Black Radicalism: An Interpretation of the Religious History of Afro-American People*, (Maryknoll, Orbis) cited in Valentina Alexander, *Mouse in the Jungle*, 87

women were permitted to become involved within the leadership structures of the church...In all of this the one overriding characteristic of the emerging faith was that it was in essence a communal one...and it is in this characteristic that the continued health and vitality of the faith became dependent upon the contributions of the Black woman.³⁴⁰

Likewise, Mirza draws our attention to the equally important role contemporary Black women [many of them Christian] in the alternative education movement of post war Britain have played, and still play, in fostering an independent consciousness and alternative epistemological pedagogy designed to 'raise the race'.³⁴¹

Armies of black women have worked alongside men to fuel this radical movement, which was often seen by the authorities as a separate, dangerous 'black power' place. But what is clear is that these schools are much more than a response to mainstream failure. They are spaces of hope and transcendence underpinned by invisible women's work.³⁴²

These untold social and cultural resources therefore, I would assert, are at the root of our academic and extra-curricular success as well as our group survival. Grace and I were suppressed at the Shallow Whale not because we were Black females but because like the armies of community educators, we were Black females who remained true to our autonomous Black feminist way of knowing; 'our accumulated wisdom and work [in] our community's best interest by enforcing our epistemology and not the dominant group's specialized thought.'³⁴³ And the Black radicals marginalised us. Similarly, on the face of it, like the mainstream power houses, the community appears to decentre the experiences of Black, mostly female educators as well as devalue their vital contribution to the successes of our community which is not conducive to the development of a WPP. Furthermore, even if decentring the experiences of Black females was not an issue (which it is), devaluing our achievements is problematic. For the simple reason, that in doing so, the community spends a

³⁴⁰ Alexander, *Mouse in the Jungle*, 87-88

³⁴¹ Mirza, *Race, gender and educational desire*; 140

³⁴² Mirza, *Race, gender and educational desire*; 140

³⁴³ Mirza, *Race, gender and educational desire*; 140

lot of time and resources addressing Black underachievement when it has first-hand knowledge of Black achievement which is blatantly ignored by mainstream power houses.

Surely, this deliberate policy and practice to ignore African-Caribbean successes when they are in plain sight, and choose instead to publicly display evidence of our failure, should be our primary concern rather than Black failure per se. So overlooked are our successes in the public domain that Harker cannot see any positive images to off-set the many negative ones. Even though, he had just attended a ceremony that showcased the ‘crème de la crème’ of Britain’s young Black talent. Hence, this thesis will go against the grain and remain true to its non-pathological womanist intents and purposes. It will expose the common roots of our oppression by centring the successes in the lives of Black women and the role of educators working for the betterment of the community. I will illustrate this key argument by beginning with a critical analysis of the work of two British Black female researchers; one who decentres Black women and the role played by educators and one who centres them.

Exposing the common roots of our oppression via our successes

Published in 2008 Cheron Byfield’s investigation on Black male achievers in the UK and US centres Black boys at the expense of decentring the parents and the ‘village’ that raised them. The self-imposed parameters of a study entitled *Black Boys Can Make It* rather than “The Black Community Can Make It”. Hence, 56 out of a total of 154 pages mention the role of Black parents and a mere 10 refer to the value-added role played by Black teachers. None however are about telling their stories or saluting their achievements on an equal footing to the boys. Even though they too, as a group, are subject to the ‘persistent deficit model [that]

reinforces negative stereotypes and adversely affects their expectations'.³⁴⁴ For example, in the education sector an investigation, conducted on behalf of the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE), discovered that the percentage of Black and ethnic minority teachers across eight boroughs was less than half of their proportion in the wider population.³⁴⁵ A contrast that is even starker in boroughs where Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities are concentrated, such as Birmingham. At the turn of the century a race equality survey of the city found less than 8% of teachers but over 40% of pupils are BME.³⁴⁶ Furthermore, both studies found that when compared to their White colleagues BME teachers tended to be on the lowest pay scales. The CRE survey also noted that their prospects of climbing higher are slimmer.

To her credit Byfield's research makes visible the positive contribution 'the village' of Black teachers (mostly male) and single Black mothers and fathers, working in community, have played in educating the youth.³⁴⁷ Her observation that even when their parents (single or otherwise) could not provide the type of support that within mainstream thinking is traditionally associated with successful children, these mothers and /or fathers effectively supported their sons in and out of school, goes some way in addressing the imbalance within the media that ignores African Caribbean parental achievement. Her revelation that the single mothers of these successful Black males³⁴⁸ did what so many have traditionally done within the Black community; rely upon their extended family and community resources, like

³⁴⁴ Byfield, *Black Boys Can Make It*, 3

³⁴⁵ Commission for Racial Equality, *Ethnic Minority School Teachers: A survey in eight local education authorities* (London: CRE, 1988) found they represented 2% of teachers even though they constitute 4.5% of the population. Cited Osler, *The Education and Careers of Black Teacher*, 49

³⁴⁶ Report of the Birmingham Stephen Lawrence Inquiry Commission, March 2001, *Challenges for the Future: Race Equality in Birmingham* (Birmingham, Birmingham City Council, 2001), 13 & 32

³⁴⁷ Byfield, *Black Boys can make it*, see Chapter 6 and Chapter 7 on the valuable role of Black parents and teachers respectively.

³⁴⁸ Just below 50% of her sample.

the church, to help them and their children survive, thrive and achieve³⁴⁹ goes even further in a climate that identifies matriarchal/ matrifocal family structures as being at the heart of Black educational failure.

Byfield's study provides us with useful information for constructing a WPP in that it reveals the social, as opposed to the individual, nature of success and it challenges the controlling image of Black failure. Regrettably, it does not challenge the very construction of Black failure and other controlling images linked to it, like the Black superwoman. Whilst working within the context of Black success Byfield's study remains within the parameters of gender disadvantage from the perspective of a Black male. Accordingly, she makes special mention of Black male teachers as role models for Black boys effectively bolstering notions that Black mothers disadvantage their sons by only being suitable role models for their daughters. At the same time she keeps the social exclusion of Black girls hidden from public scrutiny.

Additionally, Byfield remains within the parameters of age disadvantage from the perspective of the youth, effectively keeping the social exclusion of Black teachers invisible. Hence she knows the recruitment and retention of Black teachers is an issue³⁵⁰ and by implication an obstacle in raising achievement levels of Black boys if for no other reason than that she found '[t]he boys had perceived Black teachers as approachable because of their shared experience of being Black in a White dominated society. Their presence had a positive impact on the students; it adds value to the school.'³⁵¹ Yet her interest in this structural inequality is not to challenge it but simply to recognise how it enables Black teachers to connect to their Black

³⁴⁹ Byfield, *Black Boys can make it*: 62

³⁵⁰ Byfield, *Black Boys can make it*, 82

³⁵¹ Byfield, *Black Boys can make it*, 82-83

pupils and therefore help Black boys succeed!³⁵² If we contrast Byfield's study, however, with the work of one who centres the agency of Black females and is concerned with tackling structural inequalities we discover analysis, not just information, that is beneficial to the construction of a WPP.

In Chapter 2 of her study, entitled *Young, Female and Black*, Mirza's argues that a 'myth of underachievement' has been created and sustained by Britain's ideological power houses. Through the lens of Black feminism, Mirza's historical overview of race and education development during the late 50s and 1960s reveals how '[g]ender became submerged in the highly charged political exchanges' ³⁵³ that sowed notions of cultural and socio-economic deprivation as the reason for African-Caribbean underachievement. Inferior language, impoverished lifestyle and other notions along this vein³⁵⁴ took root and flourished in the academic research of the 70s, 80s and 90s³⁵⁵ and established the constructs that we see today. That is, female headed African-Caribbean households identified as the underlying cause of Black educational failure, mainly because they allegedly raise children with low self-esteem and negative self-concepts.³⁵⁶

Thus, Mirza argues, any data that contradict these notions are disregarded, such as the statistical evidence that shows Black girls academically doing just as well or better than their male and white counterparts. Even evidence of Black boys achieving and Black girls having high levels of self-esteem and aspirations are ignored for that reason. Furthermore, data that

³⁵² Byfield, *Black Boys can make it*, 82

³⁵³ Mirza, *Young, Female and Black*, 12

³⁵⁴ Mirza, *Young, Female and Black*, 11

³⁵⁵ Mirza, *Young, Female and Black*, 13-16

³⁵⁶ The subcultural argument in Tony Sewell, *Black Masculinities and Schooling* suggests it's the lack of male role models why boys turn to gangs.

exposes inequality in the labour market and the false reality of a meritocratic society is also ignored. Hence, Black females achieving high academic standards but are failing to achieve equivalent high flying careers are ignored.

The connected knowing of Mirza's counter-hegemonic thinking, the sophistication of her historical and social analyses together with her feminist approach to analysis are what makes her work conducive to a WPP and Byfield's lacking. For example she is able to link the exclusion of male pupils with the exclusion of female achievers because she is not reacting to the myth of underachievement or remaining within parameters set by mainstream research. Connected knowing along these lines is valuable to the development of a WPP in relation to others because it enables dialogue. Without dialogue a WPP cannot exist much less evolve, building on the successes and experiences of our community activists, past and present in a way that has relationships with others at its heart. Nor can the community develop in the future, building on the successes and experiences of the sojourners!

Furthermore, her Black feminist approach enables her to ask and answer new questions that open up rich pathways for this journey. Namely, by asking why the gender issue in race and education discourses and institutional practices is viewed so disingenuously Mirza exposes the reality of our oppressive circumstances that hinges on Black success and not Black failure.

As she explains:

The spectre of achievement among some blacks, or blacks up to a certain age, or in particular schooling environments, would suggest that a radical reappraisal of contemporary thinking on the subject is essential. Rather than focusing on the family, parental social status, economic and social disadvantage, IQ, poor self-concept, and ethnic self-esteem, commentators on the issue may have to address the far more controversial matter of the fundamental social inequality in British society.³⁵⁷

³⁵⁷ Mirza, *Young, female and black*, 31

Mirza's work in contrast to Byfield's exposes structural inequalities in the education and employment sectors which are perpetuated by other institutions that ignore the successes and educational achievements of the Africa-Caribbean community and sustain the myth of its underachievement instead.

Revealing the roots of a WPP

Based on the above revelations and those identified in the specific personal and general large-scale social analyses a WPP must establish itself by:

1. Addressing the real causes of our subordinated place in society.
2. Removing the false canopy of lies and slurs projected by the dominant White, bourgeois, male sections of society to cover-up their inhumanity to their fellow humans and justify a superordinate position that on the whole they do not merit.
3. Recognising and celebrating the achievements of the African Diaspora.
4. Engaging in dialogue with others.

A most effective way of achieving these aims and intentions of this pursuit is to take, like Mirza, a non-pathological, female-centred approach to liberative praxis and engage in activities that continually expose and challenge structural inequality, not just the controlling images the oppressive mechanisms generate and perpetuate. For in so doing we create, affirm and validate useful knowledge / wisdom needed to sustain our survival as a group against material and spiritual odds. Perhaps more significantly we continue the tradition of Black female agency that seeks self-actualization and provision for all.

Accordingly, in the latter half of this study I will demonstrate with my own liberative research praxis how a WPP approach empowers liberationists; by presenting extracts of dialogue with an activist who as part of his campaign for the educational inclusion of marginalised people, makes explicit his quest to identify and dismantle the oppressive structures.

Constructing a WPP route to success in dialogue

In 2001 still reeling from the backlash I experienced at The Shallow Whale I looked for help, high and low and thankfully, despite the many disappointments with people like Pastor Y there were some real blessings. The Director of the Empowerment Network for Communities (ENC), an advocacy and mentoring agency for anyone socially excluded within the education sector, was the package for many of them. Although most of the work the ENC conducted was with young people and their families, Director X mentored and empowered me by affirming and validating my experiences. His fatherly care, compassion and passion for justice and freedom helped me to overcome my depression and guided me in ways to move forward both on a personal and communal level when I established BLESS Teachers. The extract presented next, about his personal experience of the education system, from a dialogue session I had with him in August 2005 for the purposes of this study, illustrates an epistemological perspective not characteristic of a White male-centred bourgeois way of thinking even though to use his words ‘I am the beneficiary of White, male and middle class logic that has endowed me with privileges and power.’³⁵⁸

Director: When I taught in Jamaica in the 1950s & 60s it was a very exciting time. My first headship was at a school in Mandeville which was dominated by White- and light-skinned people at that time. That was a social hangover which took an intense effort to discard. The school reflected that, also in the way the forms were streamed, ostensibly

³⁵⁸ Dialogue session between me and Director X, 12 August 2005

according to ability. When I took over, the tennis court gave the appearance at least of being used exclusively by the White students. They didn't know that Black people could play tennis because they had never seen any play. So to change the thinking behind the practice, all I did was to go out and buy tennis rackets and balls for all. Suddenly Black students were seen to be able to play tennis! Things have to come together. I was against streaming by ability or any other formula – as I am wary also of setting - but we kept the alphabetic labels. However, the forms would change their simple letter labels every year – A in Year One, C in Year Two, B in Year Three, C in Year 4 and A or B in Year 5. At first some of the staff would complain that they couldn't remember which stream the students were in two years ago, and I would say good, I can't either. Nor can the students and nor can their parents! That is how it should be. We don't need labels that last forever, hanging like an albatross around our necks and denying us equal access to the full range of opportunities. And the young people excelled at their studies.

MH Do you think you have been a good role model to female pupils as well as male?

Director: If you are holistic in your approach to teaching students, you will be a good role model to everyone. Remember you have to go into yourself before you can go out to others. Our voyage of discovery must not forget self. It is too easy to be distracted by others. Do we respect ourselves and do we respect others, that is do we respect everybody equally? Do we respect ourselves and the boys and girls in our care as persons? The student³⁵⁹ you are tutoring at the moment needs something spiritual. I was brought up Wesleyan Methodist in Wales and my Welsh peasant mother quoted freely from the Christian bible. She had a saying for everything, and she invested her sayings with authority by saying it was in the bible. However, she was a modest woman with a sense of sin (or sinfulness) and she always added "And if it isn't, it should be." She didn't so much articulate it but she was a genuine anti-bureaucrat, a true inclusive believer who would be a credit to any faith. My Jamaican mother-in-law introduced me to the writings of Krishnamurti who survived being brought up as a child to believe he was the reincarnation of Jesus Christ. He said that "*organised religion is the frozen thought of man*" We need to remember this when we are considering the effects of religion on our spirituality. Great religious teachers had a sense of sin that informed their ideas of tolerance, respect and inclusion... Organisers and managers in churches and schools as well as other institutions seem obsessed with selection and categorising criteria which enables some to be included and welcomed and others to be rejected and cast out. Teachers should not exclude.

Director X's thinking resonates with the independent consciousness of a WPP with its creative spirit and innovative ways of challenging the oppressive structures that maintain inequality on both sides of the Atlantic. However, as this next extract illustrates Director X is fully aware of the real causes of oppression and the roots of success for the marginalised. In

³⁵⁹ An undergraduate student I was tutoring because she was being threatened with expulsion from university in the second year of her degree course.

our dialogue he advised me on the need for the community to use mentoring as a catalyst for change and networking to provide an effective service. As he explained there has to be commitment to values and principles like equality, freedom, justice, belief in children which mirror unconditional love that is rigorous not sloppy.

Director:

I often tell the pupils I work with “I believe in you but don’t let me go to a hearing and they surprise me. Win or lose we win because you will come through this situation transformed. So identify partners in the network – people who share in the principles and values. Don’t waste time and energy with people who don’t because they are basically obdurate...

MH: I remember the first conference I went to on social exclusion and I met the girls whom ENC had placed on a radical personal development course...

Director:

Thirteen girls had been rejected and now twelve out of thirteen are on a professional career path. They assist us with sessions we run for teachers in training. They can hold them spellbound for a couple of hours at a time. They know life at the sharp end. These are the ones we need to consult. They don’t cost the earth but they are like precious stones...I have lots of reservations about mentoring and counselling. Who is doing the mentoring? – Often a successful high achieving Black person who is there to pick up the pieces! I would tell anybody who is asked to be a mentor to tell the school that s/he will do it for a month and then advise the school about the structural and procedural changes it needs to institute in order to make the school inclusive and welcoming for everybody. Otherwise the mentor’s role is everlasting fire-fighting or crisis-management.

I deal mostly with mothers. Generally the establishment has a pathological view of Black women even though it is mainly Black women who are holding things together... It is important for teachers to learn about learning as much as perhaps as about teaching. Black activists have frequently been inveigled into the establishment; at great cost to accountability and progress towards parity and equality...It is helpful to examine exclusions research since 1985 and to try to assess the extent to which very valid recommendations have been ignored. Very little has changed, and of late the situation has deteriorated even further...I would suggest getting a dozen people together, including perhaps a majority of young people, to draw up a people’s educational manifesto.

MH: How do we achieve that solidarity? I notice that even though you are White you are politically Black, yet this ability to identify with the struggle of Black people doesn’t appear to be at the expense of de-centring your identity.

Director: That’s because I am not a denier but an affirmer. I seek to promote empathy (what does it mean to walk in someone else’s moccasins?)

Summary

A survey of the alternative education movement in this country demonstrates that our shared and independent knowledge or counter-hegemonic epistemology creates a community of affirmers and the affirmed, validators and the validated; revealing I would argue the intrinsically social and holistic nature of our success. In the next chapter I will continue the journey towards a WPP by demonstrating its use, particularly the use of dialogue that affirms not denies others. A biblical hermeneutic that connects with others and pivots who is at the centre of the discourse in its re-reading of scripture for purposes of liberation.

CHAPTER 4

FROM THE INTERSECTION OF BRITISH BLACK WOMEN'S LIVES, READING AND RE-READING THE BIBLE.³⁶⁰

Introduction

3. Loves music. Loves dance. Loves the moon. Loves the Spirit. Loves love and food and roundness. Loves struggle. Loves the Folk. Loves herself. Regardless.³⁶¹
Alice Walker

Within the tradition of liberation theology,³⁶² this chapter presents a hermeneutic for the reading of biblical texts so that voices and events traditionally railroaded by dominant narrators can be redirected from the periphery to the centre. Its unusual approach is that it implements anti-oppressive reading strategies from four integrated perspectives:

1. The marginalised characters being read about in the biblical story.
2. The marginalised women retelling the story.
3. The marginalised listeners responding to the story.
4. A centred spirituality that 'transcends sensory experience'³⁶³ and reveals God's 'liberating presence and activity'³⁶⁴ in these women's lives.

Accordingly, I believe such strategies are specifically relevant to churches striving to include marginalised groups, but a must for those with Black women present.

³⁶⁰ Much of this chapter is duplicated in Howell, "Towards a Womanist Pneumatological Pedagogy: Reading and Re-reading the Bible," 86-99

³⁶¹ Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, xii

³⁶² Lartey, In *Living Colour*, 87 makes it clear that liberation theologians adopt the persona of the subaltern.

³⁶³ Lartey, *In Living Colour*, 113 & 115 defines spirituality in relational terms, consisting of five dimensions, of which relationship with the transcendence is only one but a core dimension in this re-reading.

³⁶⁴ Wimberly, *Soul Stories*, 38 uses this expression to describe one of the important outcomes stories can have for any reader and not just women as I have used it.

The context for illustrating and developing these re-reading strategies was in independent or 1:1 Bible study sessions with six (including myself) marginalised British Black (African Diaspora) women or sojourners as I refer to them.³⁶⁵ The sojourners, who like the Mary and Martha characters in the biblical text we examined, have had their voices and/or events in their lives railroaded by those in positions of authority. As explained in the first chapter of this study, Anne Streaty Wimberly's African American story-linking approach to Christian education was employed to structure the sessions.³⁶⁶

The story-linking process has four key phases which begins with readers reflecting on those aspects of their everyday lives which connect with the biblical story (Phase 1) before they reflect on the biblical story itself (Phase 2). This phase is followed by a dialogue involving links with the faith stories of the Black Church's fore-parents like Josiah Henson³⁶⁷ (Phase 3), and ends with critical reflection on the meaning of liberation and vocation in their lives, as revealed through the story linking process (Phase 4). Later on in this chapter I justify my restricted use to only Phase 1, Phase 2 and Phase 4 in the implementation of WPP hermeneutic with British women. A Spirit-led pedagogical approach which is Bible / Word of God-centred³⁶⁸ yet recognises that scripture is not the only manifestation of God's word but also Her/His continued interaction with the world. Namely, God's ever present activity in the lives and struggles of the poor and marginalised against exploitation and injustices.

³⁶⁵ As mentioned in Chapter 1 of this study, Wimberly's, *Soul Stories*, 22 uses the term mutual sojourner to highlight a pedagogical approach to Bible studies in which all are actively engaged as learners in the story-linking process. I prefer to refer to my fellow readers / participants as sojourners to convey the mutual and equitable nature of the relationship between them and me as lead researcher / candid participant on this journey towards a WPP.

³⁶⁶ Wimberly, *Soul Stories*; Chapter 1 explains the four phases of the story linking process.

³⁶⁷ Father John Henson was an African-American slave who managed to keep his family together despite the cruelties of the slave system; see Wimberley, *Soul Stories*, 84

³⁶⁸ See Dwight Hopkins for an overview of Black Theology's perspective on the Bible in *Introducing Black Theology of Liberation*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999), 183

Section I: The sojourner's experience of biblical hermeneutics in relation to others?

I remember getting this Bible (you had to reach a certain level in the church before you got this Bible) and I was really excited. It had my name on it and all this pretty writing on it. Then I opened it up and saw looking at me a picture, and it didn't seem right. All the stories I'd heard about Jesus and where He'd live and things like that, this blonde-haired, blue-eyed person looking back at me wasn't Jesus. And I changed. The funny thing about it, I don't know how it happened, but as I got older I looked for Jesus in people- and my father and mentor was Bob Marley. I listened to his lyrics and he taught me how to be the caring person I am today!

Samaria³⁶⁹

The sojourners who participated in these re-reading sessions expressed awareness that traditional readings of the Bible have been used to oppress and suppress marginalised groups. In the words of Grace, 'I had an aversion to the church believing that the Bible is used to enslave. Out of an eighties Black consciousness I saw it as a White man's tool.' A reasonable aversion, when one remembers Japanese feminist theologian Satoko Yamaguchi's statement:

...even when we are informed of the ancient historical background, most of the information comes from privileged male perspectives and focuses on privileged men's lives.³⁷⁰

Samaria was so traumatised by the traditional portrayal of Jesus, which conceals his Palestinian ethnicity and in this way devalues His and other people's non-European ethnicities, that it changed her faith perspective for good, as the extract above reveals. The alienation Rachel feels from reading authorised versions of the Bible means, although a convert to Pentecostalism, she is not a habitual reader of the Bible. As she explained:

If I want to sleep it's probably the best thing for me to do is to open up the Bible. I don't know why but that's what happens to me *and* I say to myself; and even if I try to continue reading it (this is most times) I am just reading it I'm not digesting it, do you know what I mean? So for *me personally* my relationship with God is more through *prayers*)... It's *conversations* that I have, its principles that I try and remind myself in my work.³⁷¹

³⁶⁹ Extract taken from the June 2006 dialogue session I had with Samaria.

³⁷⁰ Satoko Yamaguchi, *Mary and Martha Women in the World of Jesus* (Maryknoll, New York, Orbis Books 2002), 10

³⁷¹ Extract taken from the dialogue session I had with Rachel, June 2006.

As detailed in Chapter 2, the other sojourners, Chayil, Mariet and I are dismayed, and in Chayil's case even outraged, by the suppressive or passive responses to the good news in the Bible many Christians take in their interpretations of scripture.³⁷² Our experiences are not exceptional. Mukti Barton for instance, in her essay "Hermeneutical Insubordination Toppling Worldly Kingdom" acknowledges:

History gives evidence that the Bible has been and is used to oppress various groups of people. In the name of the Bible slavery, racism, colonialism and women's oppression have been sanctioned.³⁷³

No wonder Jacqueline Grant asserts:

Jesus Christ historically has been, and remains, imprisoned by the socio-political interests of those who have historically been the keepers of principalities and powers... [Notably] (1) The imprisonment of Jesus Christ by patriarchy; (2) The imprisonment of Jesus Christ by White supremacy; and (3) The imprisonment of Jesus Christ by the privileged class.³⁷⁴

Nonetheless, we have all experienced the liberating message of God's Word as depicted in our personal images of Who S/He is and the wisdom that we cannot achieve anything without Her/ His grace.³⁷⁵ As such we are not prepared to relinquish the scripture anytime soon. Therefore, given our experiences of authorised biblical hermeneutics can this journey towards a WPP justify a re-reading of texts from the personal experiences of Black women?

Section II: The need for a redirection in biblical hermeneutics

The truth is, Christians have read and will always read the Bible differently from each other. They read it from their particular perspective in their own context: there is no other way of reading the Bible or any other books.³⁷⁶

³⁷² Chapter 2, page 102-105

³⁷³ Mukti Barton, "Hermeneutical Insubordination Toppling Worldly Kingdom" in Joe Aldred (editor) *Sisters with Power*, (London and New York: Continuum, 2000), cited in Michael N. Jagessar and Anthony G. Reddie (editors), *Black Theology in Britain: A Reader* (London and Oakville: Equinox, 2007) 166-164;167-168

³⁷⁴ Grant "Womanist Jesus" 130-131

³⁷⁵ See Chapter 2, 104-105

³⁷⁶ Barton, "Hermeneutical Insubordination Toppling Worldly Kingdom", 167

Why a Re-reading?

A re-reading of the text is necessary for any moves towards liberation and a WPP standpoint for two principal reasons: Firstly, the content of traditional readings of the Bible conceal rather than reveal the vitality of women, Black people and the poor in the fulfilment of the gospel. Secondly, the research methods used in readings, even unconventional ones, can be rooted in positivist approaches that reflect the Eurocentric masculinist epistemology which dominates our institutions and social processes.³⁷⁷ In doing so, these readings to varying degrees stifle the liberating message of the Bible resulting in the abhorrent and somewhat ironic situation which finds the Jesus of history and the resurrected life giving Christ railroaded by (or in the words of Jacquelyn Grant quoted earlier ‘imprisoned by’) a mound of cruel, unjust institutional practices and structures.

The vitality of Mary and Martha characters in the Bible has unsurprisingly been subjected to this kind of concealment by traditional readings. Yamaguchi for instance, points out how traditional readings of the miracle story of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead (John 11) usually focus on the two men –Jesus and Lazarus- without particular regard to the sisters, Martha and Mary.³⁷⁸ Effectively obscuring the fact that the miracle is the outcome of the faith the sisters have in Jesus’ power to save their dying brother. That is, the “I am” revelations of Jesus Christ as the messiah by Martha (John 11:27) and Mary (John 12: 2) which occur either side of the miracle.

³⁷⁷ See Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, especially 203-206

³⁷⁸ Yamaguchi, *Mary and Martha*, 113

Under the gaze of Yamaguchi the story offers ‘fertile ground for a critical feminist reading, particularly given our expanded historical imagination of women’s lives during this period of time’. Historical imagination she explains, is a rigorous tool employed to overcome the patriarchal and privileged bias, symptomatic of an oral culture like that of the early church because it, in her words ‘attempt[s] to listen not only to the male authors’ versions but also to the nuances of ordinary people’s versions, especially those of women.’³⁷⁹ For example, by considering John’s motive for writing this gospel (John 20:31) and by examining the words John uses for dinner, serve, and servant in his retelling of Jesus’ last meal with the sisters (12:2) Yamaguchi is able to claim that Martha ‘is a representative disciple who engages both in service of the word (to proclaim communal faith and in the service at table (to preside at the communal table / the Eucharist).’³⁸⁰ She presents a plausible case for Martha as the spokesperson for a community whose confession of Jesus as the Christ is not based on miraculous signs but on faith in His word alone.³⁸¹ Notably between John 11:22, 24 when Martha says ‘I know’ and John 11:27 when she says ‘I believe’ Yamaguchi argues is evidence that Martha grows in faith in response to Jesus’ “I am” revelation (John 11:25) rather than the miraculous sign that comes later.

Moreover, since John restricts his use of the aforementioned words to record Jesus’ discussion on true discipleship (12:26) and Jesus’ first miracle of turning water into wine (2:25) as well as this recount, it is reasonable to concur with Yamaguchi that Martha’s service is a ministerial service. Similarly, Yamaguchi’s feminist examination of the Johannine text magnifies Mary’s role as a leader with followers (11:31) as well as a prophet (12:7) and dedicated disciple (12:3). Furthermore, the parallels between the Last Supper (where Jesus

³⁷⁹ Yamaguchi, *Mary and Martha*, 10

³⁸⁰ Yamaguchi, *Mary and Martha*

³⁸¹ Yamaguchi, *Mary and Martha*, 120

washes the feet of his disciples) and His earlier supper with the sisters (where Mary anoints his feet with her hair) support Yamaguchi's claim 'that Mary is assigned the role of modelling discipleship, a model followed even by Jesus.'³⁸² Indeed, Yamaguchi goes so far as to conclude that 'By accepting his title from a woman and by following a woman's action, Jesus appears as a non-patriarchal and unconventional messiah.'³⁸³

As indicated earlier, the existence of unconventional readings of the Bible does not negate the need for a re-reading from the epistemological lens of Black women who make lived experience alongside by real depictions indispensable to the process of constructing and expressing meaning.³⁸⁴ For example, Yamaguchi's feminist reading of Luke 10:38-42, uses the tools of historical imagination to illuminate the cultural and religious significance of women, like Martha and Mary, in the reign-of-God movement³⁸⁵ being invited, to participate in gatherings in a way usually the preserve of men. Thus, Jesus is portrayed as pronouncing the need for all, regardless of social status, to participate in His life not as inferior prostitutes or servants but as equals!³⁸⁶ Given the purpose of pronouncement stories,³⁸⁷ the significance of Mary and Martha's roles as model disciples of Christ is obvious. In stark contrast to traditional readings in which Martha is portrayed as the naïve female saved from her "busyness" and "complaints" by the wise patriarch Jesus who pronounces her passive, silent sister as serving Him the best.

³⁸² Yamaguchi, *Mary and Martha* 122-123

³⁸³ Yamaguchi, *Mary and Martha* 115

³⁸⁴ See Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*; esp. 208-210 and Collins, *Black Feminist Thought 2nd Edition*, esp. 255 & 265

³⁸⁵ I use the term in the way Yamaguchi, *Mary and Martha*, 5 uses it- to distinguish the messianic movement that had Jesus Christ as its figurehead, from the many that existed at that time.

³⁸⁶ See Yamaguchi, *Mary and Martha* 25 & 46 for a fuller analysis of the significance of the act at that time and why male records of the act would undermine women.

³⁸⁷ LeRoy Dais and Sherrie Langton (eds.) 'Basics of Biblical Interpretation' in *Bible Studies for Adults* Vol. 88, Number 4, Fourth Quarter (2003) 75 highlight that the purpose of the story 'lies in the concluding pronouncement, not in details of the narrative itself.'

Nonetheless, despite its liberative portrayal of women in the Bible, the tools of a woman-focused historical imagination are not fully compatible with a WPP approach because it is rooted in positivism and therefore relies heavily on de-personalised and de-contextualised generalisations contained in a range of disciplines from archaeology and historiography to linguistics and sociology.³⁸⁸ Therefore, it is this chapter's intention to present a re-reading of the Mary and Martha stories precisely because they offer plenty of scope for, employing tools of 'experiential' rather than historical imagination, which underpin this Black female hermeneutical process determined to redirect to the centre of biblical discourses, voices and events railroaded to the periphery by traditional and, to a lesser degree, feminist readings.

Why womanist hermeneutical tools?

Womanist theology...critically draws from the many meanings of faith in the lives of black women in order to assess doctrinal and ecclesial constructions and to begin reconstructions that have relevance, meaning, and power in their lives³⁸⁹

Stephanie Mitchem

Principally on grounds of methodology as well as content, detailed in Chapter 1, womanist tools are used in this re-reading of the Mary and Martha texts by British Black women. But also because womanist theology, by freeing Jesus from the chains of patriarchy, White supremacy, privilege class and any other form of oppression,³⁹⁰ supports Black women's instinctive endeavours to centre rather than marginalised voices railroaded by traditional interpretations. As Elaine Foster remarks in her essay on leadership/headship in the BLCs

'...possibilities for change already exist in the language and meanings of women's talks

³⁸⁸ See Yamaguchi, *Mary and Martha*, 9-11 for a definition of historical imagination and an overview of its limitations including its Eurocentric male bourgeois bias.

³⁸⁹ Mitchem, *Introducing Womanist Theology*

³⁹⁰ See Grant's essays, "Womanist Jesus and the Mutual Struggle for Liberation" and "Womanist Theology", for a more detailed description of these aspects of womanist theology.

through creative interpretation of the Bible around the theme of liberation from the persecution, fear and captivity: liberation from sexism.³⁹¹

An observation that is true of the mutual sojourners in this study who have varying degrees, if any formal knowledge of liberation/ womanist theology, yet they manage a re-reading and application that would make any womanist scholar proud. Indeed, as Valentina Alexander observes, womanism evolves quite effortlessly out of the struggles of British Black Christian women to better themselves in a way true to their faith.³⁹²

Before I present how the sojourners and I interpreted the Mary and Martha biblical texts in a meaningful way, true to our experiences of God and the world, in the next section I will explain my use of the story-linking process and my choice of biblical text for this re-reading.

Why the story-linking approach to Bible reading?

More specifically, persons link with Bible stories/texts by using them as a mirror through which they reflect critically on the liberation and vocation they have already found or are still seeking. This linkage helps persons to discern the liberating activity of God and God's call to vocation – living in the image of Christ –in both the biblical and present times.³⁹³

When designing and planning this re-reading process, I looked at various approaches to biblical hermeneutics from the Grammatio-Historical Method of Interpretation championed by LeRoy Dais and Sherrie Langton in their edition of *Bible Studies for Adults: Basics of*

³⁹¹ Elaine Foster, "Women and the Inverted Pyramid of the Black Churches in Britain" in Gita Sahgal and Nira Yuval-Davis, (editors), *Refusing Holy Orders: Women and Fundamentalism in Britain* (London: Virago, 1992) 56

³⁹² Valentina Alexander, "'A mouse in a jungle': The Black Christian woman's experience in the church and society in Britain" in Delia Jarrett-MacAuley (editor), *Reconstructing Womanhood, Reconstructing Feminism: Writings on Black Women* (London, Routledge, 1996) 90

³⁹³ Wimberly, *Soul Stories*, 13

*Biblical Interpretation*³⁹⁴ to Yamaguchi's feminist tool of historical imagination. As well as African biblical and cultural hermeneutics which uses story-telling methods and interpretations to empower women, promoted by Musa W. Dube in the collection of essays she edited called *Other Ways of Reading: African Women and the Bible*.³⁹⁵ In the end I settled for the story-linking Christian pedagogical tools of engagement developed by Wimberly to structure the Bible reading sessions for three key reasons:³⁹⁶

Firstly, as a set of reading strategies it offers practical ways of utilising womanist tools in order to resurrect Black women from the entombment of their experiences of liberation/divine calling /underdevelopment by dominant thought processes and structures. Secondly, it enables dialogue between mutual sojourners regardless of their role in the process so that they can share their multi-dimensional view of liberation and divine calling developed from the inside.³⁹⁷ Finally, its emphasis on 'connectedness rather than separation',³⁹⁸ enables readers/tellers to appreciate the text from the four integrated perspectives of the characters, storytellers, listeners and a centred spirituality³⁹⁹ that is consistent with Black women's epistemologies which validates knowledge with subjective experience.⁴⁰⁰ As well as allow them to pivot continuously perspectives in their reading.

³⁹⁴ Dais and Langton, *Bible Studies for Adults*, 10 give reasons for their preference.

³⁹⁵ Musa W. Dube (editor), *Other Ways of Reading: African Women and the Bible*, (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature and WCC publications, 2001)

³⁹⁶ See Wimberly, *Soul Stories*, 47 where she summarises the four stage process of story-linking.

³⁹⁷ Wimberly, *Soul Stories* 30 '...all of us look upon our own liberation and vocation (as well as blocks to them) from inside the stories we live everyday'

³⁹⁸ Collins, *Black Feminist Thought* 212

³⁹⁹ By centred spirituality I make reference to Lartey, *In Living Colour*, 113, intercultural viewpoint on spirituality as '...the human capacity for relationship with self, others, world, God, and that which transcends sensory experience...'

⁴⁰⁰ Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*; 210, 'Bible tales are often told for the wisdom they express about everyday life, so their interpretation involves no need for scientific historical verification. The narrative method requires that the story is told, not torn apart in analysis...'

Conversely, my restricted use of the story-linking process also highlights the challenges of using story-linking in the African diaspora. Namely, in order for it to resonate powerfully with the listeners and readers in their everyday lives, it needs to be contextualised. In Britain, the dearth of historical records (in memory or documents) of faith stories from the Black British heritage made this challenge very apparent in my initial attempts to fully employ all four phrases of the story-linking process. For example, Grant notes that African American Fanny Lou Hamer's faith story 'inspires us to raise the question, "Equal to whom?"'⁴⁰¹ No doubt the "us" in that statement can resonate with the African Diasporas, wherever they are, but it would be naïve to assume it resonates as strongly in the British context as it does in America, where Black Britons are distanced, by time and place, from the slave conditions experienced by their ancestors. Just in the same way the plight of Gee Walker⁴⁰² will resonate more powerfully in the British context than it will in America.

Bearing the above limitation in mind, this chapter will focus significantly on the actual process (es) of engagement for *both/and*⁴⁰³ reader / writer / storyteller and listener/responder, adapting tried and tested hermeneutical methods of Wimberly to extract the liberation and divine calling requirements of British Black women.

Why the Mary and Martha biblical texts?

The Martha and Mary biblical text Luke 10:38 is the focus for illuminating reading strategies compatible with a WPP and by extension an anti-oppressive inclusive standpoint for this primary reason: With womanist tools it lends itself easily to an excavation process that

⁴⁰¹ Grant, *Womanist Jesus*, 140

⁴⁰² The mother of slain teenager

⁴⁰³ Collins, *Black Feminist Thought* explains this both/ and diunital rather than either/or dichotomous way of thinking.

exposes the vitality of the female characters and their activities and by extension the vitality of British Black women and their activities. However, the female characters were also selected for study because compared with some women in the Bible, Mary and Martha do not fit easily into extreme categories of “harlots” and “virgins”. They are ordinary women whose lives resonated with the realities of the Johannine communities and with whom contemporary British Black women can connect.⁴⁰⁴

Unlike the traditional portrayal of Mary Magdalene and Mary, mother of Jesus, they are, to use the expression of Grace, “*Pink*” and not “Red” or “White”.⁴⁰⁵ That is, they are neither “scarlet” women, nor “pure as the whitest snow” virgins / Mothers, as dominant groups are fond of portraying Black women in the media, church and society at large. Alexander describes this extreme labelling of British Black women in terms of “Sapphire” and “Jemima”⁴⁰⁶ whilst Douglas in *Sexuality and the Black Church* uses “Jezebel” and “Mammy” where in the USA the labels have more meaning.⁴⁰⁷ This is an important consideration for any liberative work wanting to avoid associating Black women with the “superwoman” stereotype promoted by Black men and White feminists in their discourses on racism and sexism.

Section III: The WPP Re-telling and Re-reading of Luke 10: 38-42

Many participants seek spiritual and educational enrichment through their dialogue with the Bible and one another. They want to gain insights, and they seek to free their imaginations in ways that deepen their spiritual lives and their relationships with others.

Anne Streaty Wimberly⁴⁰⁸

⁴⁰⁴ A reasonable assumption made by Yamaguchi, *Mary and Martha*; 114

⁴⁰⁵ The colours are capitalised to stress the political/metaphorical rather than physical/descriptive nature of their use and understanding

⁴⁰⁶ Alexander “A mouse in a jungle”; 85

⁴⁰⁷ Douglas, *Sexuality and the Black Church*, 36-45

⁴⁰⁸ Wimberly, *Soul Stories*, 19

For obvious reasons (time and space) I cannot disclose all that came out of the re-reading of the Lukan text so I will merely present some of the points the re-telling and re-reading raises. Notably the following:

- 1) Black female hermeneutics is expanded by an artistic and spiritual freedom rooted in experience that serves to enhance the readers / listeners understanding of God and relationships as well as the Bible characters.
- 2) Retelling is an explicit and vital feature of this Black female hermeneutic especially as it matures.
- 3) This Black female hermeneutic needs to challenge the unjust portrayal of marginalised characters.
- 4) A pattern of pivoting perspectives / standpoints is revealed by the sojourners' retelling and re-reading / analysis of the text.
- 5) There is a need for these Black women to take action in a way that upholds the values and ethics they share with the characters, each other and God.

A comparison between the two story versions –one authorised and the other validated by British Black women's experience and epistemology, as well as extracts of their analysis illustrates the above points effectively. Since the re-telling and re-reading of the text hinges on the experiences of Black women I will begin by examining the sojourners responses to Phase One of the story-linking process. My intention is to make explicit those aspects of their personal experiences that enabled them to connect with and by extension construct their liberative interpretation of the text. For it is my contention that marginalised readers expand

what they know about Jesus and marginalised characters in the Bible by transposing what they know about themselves in relation to Christ and their experiences in society.⁴⁰⁹

Phase One: Personal experience in relation to God and others

What follows are extracts of the responses I gave and/or received from the sojourners in our 1:1 sessions in answer to the question ‘Who are you in Christ?’ (of which some extracts are in Chapter 2). Here they describe in more detail their relationship with Christ as a consequence of their Christian identity.

Chayil: I’ve been a Christian ... how many years? I’m sorry I can’t remember... One of the things about my relationship with Jesus is that the relationship is ensuring that He is a part of my everyday life, my everyday thinking, my everyday decision making and so forth. So it is not a relationship that is dependent on being in the church. It is very much a relationship that is dependent on *equal* living. That’s probably the best way to describe it. It’s based on love which is something that I think is the absolute foundation. For instance, when I became a Christian one of the major changes / processes I had to go through, was understanding what love is from God’s point of view. Because up to that point I had a warped idea about love, and my spirit was showing me on a daily basis what His love is which is unconditional.

Sam: I have been fighting that all my life, saying to people that I don’t have to go to church to find God, because I find God and goodness and everything else in myself (which I’ve only just learnt) and nature and being good to people, being here with Maxine, that is my God!

Grace: You see the world in a different way; you see a better way of life. Again, looking to God is so much more empowering because God is His own special value? I always remember that scripture because I always used to look to people too much. I think that once you understand who you are then you don’t look to people. When I say this I am not talking absolutes so there will be times when I still look to people. It is an absolute yes in terms of a spiritual dynamic of how I should think but there are times when we all in life break and we mess up and so on and so forth. But understanding that you don’t look to people you look to God and you are part of the biggest family in the world, which is God’s children and it’s like wow! I think then you need that real peace, and that real peace only coming from your placement in the body of Christ and knowing the word of the body of Christ.

⁴⁰⁹ An observation noted by Black female theologians on both sides of the Atlantic, such as Elaine Foster “Women and the Inverted Pyramid” and Jacquelyn Grant “Womanist Theology: Black Women’s experience”

Rachel: So I try to work [child protection] from a perspective where I want to offer support not coming to point any fingers or run anybody down. I've come to offer support and I think that's about *my* relationship with God and I try to remain *grounded* and I try to remain *on a level* with people; not to *see myself* better than anyone else!

INTERRUPTION FROM ELDEST CHILD

Max: And this is through your relationship with Jesus? Why does that make you think of Jesus?

Rachel: Because that's how He... that's what He was like ain't it? He wasn't really for those who were able (He was for those who were able) to care for themselves but He was more for the vulnerable and the disadvantage and to support them and not to point any fingers. I'm not saying I don't point fingers and all the rest of it but I *try* not to...

Mariet: So my faith with God, my walk with God has always been about being honest enough and upfront, and I think women are like that. Also, know to be inspired by Him. Also, by asking Him, "How do I do that?" "How do I make that real?" Just as Jesus is real in my life and a very, very real presence, how do I present Jesus and Christianity really - what the Christian life is all about as a distinct way of life, and somebody who not only answers them but also understands them. So that's my theology I suppose.

Max: So you know what you're saying about Him being *so real* that is what is important. That is what still staggers me when I talk to some people and they're still keeping away from the *church* because they don't think they *can* ... and the thousand and one things that is wrong with it! And yet I'm trying to say church is not what you should be centred on, it's about building a personal relationship with Christ –and don't forget Christ is the Word as FLESH. Put your FLESH to God's word! Being a Christian is about embodying God's word with your flesh. You cannot do it in anybody else's; you cannot walk in anybody else's shoes...

All responses were in the context of dialogue between me and the sojourners but only the last two extracts makes obvious both sides of the discussion. Even so, what is evident, supports the contention by Black female scholars that Black women's way of knowing and validating what they know is based on experiences that consist of physical and spiritual encounters with Christ; expressed in very real and concrete ways. Whether it's struggling to bring up children without the presence of their fathers, or dealing with injustices in the work place, or narrow mindedness in the church, or simply coping with all the demands that society expects them to meet, they are clear in their belief that Christ is real and is manifested in their daily lives.

Thus God is the loving parent/head teacher/mentor who doesn't expect them to be superwomen and cope with, to use Rachel's expression, 'wearing the trousers and the skirt'. S/He doesn't expect them to do all the fetching and carrying. Instead S/He cares for their every need and insists they rest and be still whilst S/He invigorates them with Her/His loving word. These Black women like other Black women, in the words of Elaine Foster, "'know" that the Gospel speaks consistently to their needs, and have developed ways of interpreting scriptures in relation to their daily lives.'⁴¹⁰ Or in the words of Mariet 'When they [women] come to know Jesus, they come to know Him in a very real and practical way.' Moreover, it is via their experiences that they come to know fully the marginalised characters they encounter in the Bible which the presentation of Phase Two will demonstrate.

Phase Two: The biblical story in relation to our lives

Two versions are presented here to show clearly how in the main Black women's experiential ways of knowing enables them to resurrect the liberating Christ and marginalised biblical women from their entombment by traditional readings.

The Authorised Version

³⁸ As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. ³⁹ She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. ⁴⁰ But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!" ⁴¹ "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, ⁴² but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

Extract taken from Luke 10: 38-42, New International Version Bible (NIV)

⁴¹⁰ Foster "Women and the Inverted Pyramid" 56

The Re-telling in relation to our lives

You have two women. One is very busy and domesticated, typical ‘Type A’⁴¹¹ personality. The other one, Mary, seems to have a different personality. I identified with Martha because Martha is me, really, women who are busy. Women are people who like to make people comfortable. You come to my home I’m going to make sure it is good, that I entertain my guest because that’s my job!

Similarly with Martha; Mary her sister, who has probably helped her on many occasions, but on this occasion she is not helping me. She’s sitting there and I’m getting hot and bothered about the whole thing and Martha is as well. She is getting so steamed up that she’s going to Jesus and saying “Look, would you please tell her to help me.” You can imagine that she is really vexed. “Tell her to help me.” And Jesus says to her, (he didn’t tell her that what she did was wrong, he understood, I’m convinced he understood she had to do what she was doing, she was making him very comfortable as she must have done on various other occasions) “You are worried about too many things and on this occasion, Mary has chosen the better part.”

Re-telling, as told by Mariet

It is clear from the opening of this re-telling that the perspectives of the marginalised characters as well as the marginalised story-teller are integrated in a way that constantly pivots the perspectives. Notice the way the story-teller switches back and forth between tenses and first and second person narration. When she is speaking of Martha she is speaking of herself as she states in her third sentence. This pivoting of perspectives is consistent throughout this story-telling.

Less obvious, but just as crucial to a Black female hermeneutic, is the need for marginalised readers to re-tell the biblical narrative within their own oral traditions. Only with familiarity and practical engagement with the text after re-reading it are they able to articulate their new versions in the way Mariet has done above. The introduction of this re-telling, for example, immediately establishes the passionate use Mariet has made of the cultural and spiritual

⁴¹¹ ‘Type A’ personality my mutual sojourner explained, describes people who are eager to please and preoccupied with success.

freedom permitted by Black hermeneutics in her attempts to gain and give greater insight into the text. However the power of the oral tradition to re-tell in a manner that ‘transcends sensory experience’⁴¹² and reveals God’s liberating presence and activity in these women’s lives⁴¹³ is diluted in the transcription by the obvious lack of conventional grammar and punctuation, but not completely lost.

In the introduction and throughout the re-telling particular attention is given to the spiritual / psychological dimension of the sisters and the story-teller. This story-telling dimension is an important preamble in exposing the deeper and central significance of Jesus’ pronouncement that there are occasions in our daily lives where we need to be still in His presence if we are to grow spiritually. Moreover, unlike the feminist tool of expanded historical imagination, rooted in a positivist epistemology, this sojourner’s expanded imagination uses personal experience to excavate the vitality of the female characters and their activities, and by extension the vitality of British Black women and their activities.

In other words, in this re-telling, like the feminist reading of the text, Jesus is not chastising Martha for not valuing Mary’s equal right to participate in His life in a similar manner as His male disciples. However, neither is He encouraging her to serve Him by trying to meet His physical needs. Rather a Black woman’s experience of having to work as equally hard as her male counterpart and still have women’s work to do, portrays Jesus pronouncing the need for all disciples but especially women to be still and let Him meet their physical and spiritual needs. Through the hermeneutical lens of this Black woman He is not a cruel patriarch; but a loving and caring father that cherishes His children for simply being who they are, and not

⁴¹² Lartey, *In Living Colour*, 113

⁴¹³ Wimberly: *Soul Stories*, 38 uses this description in reference to the potential impact the storied process can have on any participant and not just women as I have used it.

what they can do for others. In this version having your different needs met in a timely fashion, rather than having everyone's needs met in the same way all the time, is the truly liberating message of the gospel that you must apply to your life.

Section IV: The Re-reading in terms of life application

The re-reading of the Mary and Martha text by Black women reveals hermeneutical features consistent with the manner in which they re-tell biblical narratives. More significantly, this study and the dialogue presented below exposes the concrete need for Black women to take action that reflects the deeper understanding they have gleaned from the text, about their relationship with God, self and dialogue with others. It therefore naturally reflects phase four of the story-linking process.

Mariet: For me it's about times in your life when you're always flaked out trying to do so many things. In my life I'm a mother, I work for a charity, I'm a business person, and I do twenty other things, all at the same time, and I'm studying. And there are many women in that same situation. It might not be the replica of mine but they are mothers or they are carers or they have families or they are single women but they are trying to have it all.

You can imagine Martha saying "WHAT DO YOU MEAN IT'S BETTER. I HAVE THE FOOD TO COOK AND THIS IS BETTER THAT SHE IS SITTING ON HER BEHIND DOING NOTHING!"

I suppose without realising (at that time Mary shouldn't have been with the other men she should have been separated off – women in the kitchen and men sitting there) she was right there at the front I imagine, listening to what Jesus had to say. And it must have been a really good message Jesus was preaching that day because Mary sat there and later Jesus justified it, even though hospitality defined a family's reputation, and their family with Mary's contribution had a very good reputation. So Jesus justified Mary's action without necessarily isolating Martha by showing he cared about her running herself ragged with serving and never taking time out to let the relationship grow in stillness and listening.

So for me, Martha and because Mary had chosen the better part at that time, it speaks to me of a time you need to come away from that. All the things that are necessary but you need to step aside and create that oasis for yourself where you can hear:

- Your own heart because how often do you do that.
- From God if you are religious or you believe in a divine being, whom I believe is Jesus Christ. To listen to Him...

“Martha’s Well”⁴¹⁴ for me, is about finding that time for women, regardless of what class, ethnicity, background or social status

Max: I used to like having people round and I would like to do everything – I’d get a buzz that was linked to doing things right –you always give your best and serve yourself last. Eventually however, I noticed that one of the things that frustrated friends of mine was that I was always in the kitchen and apparently not interested in spending time with them like they were interested in spending time with me.

Mariet: You can imagine Jesus explaining to Martha that it won’t be taken from Mary what she has chosen because when you have finished all that and you sit down you have nothing to look on that day. Mary will have found something that is life changing for her- that is a relationship with me and that will never be taken away from her.

Max: That’s the key word – relationship- it made me think about how it must have been for my friend who wanted to spend time with me- it works both ways, not only was Martha not spending quality time with Jesus while He was there, Jesus was not getting quality time with Martha and He’s going to feel the loss more. It’s funny how it took a broken leg and nine months off work before I learnt to be still and learnt what Mary had learnt to do -to find life, to be complete, just by being at the Saviour’s feet.

Conclusion

By bringing to the centre of the hermeneutical circle their experiences as Black women the marginalised women who have joined me on this journey towards a WPP have unearthed voices and events buried by traditional readings or railroaded by unconventional readings that have a different knowledge base. Their knowledge base validates what they know not by notions of objectivity but by subjective experience and dialogue. This epistemological stance allows them to stand in the intersection of different perspectives and subjugated experiences and pivot/ transpose these experiences. They do not simply resist but refuse dominant

⁴¹⁴ Charity founded by the sojourner to provide a place of rejuvenation and rest for busy woman in the heart of a poor inner-city estate. See Chapter 5, 184-188 for more information about the charity.

thought systems that conceal rather than reveal the vitality of marginalised characters in the Bible and in contemporary society. The importance of this study's anti-oppressive approach to hermeneutics is that it has employed womanist theological tools of engagement within the context of an African-American story-linking approach to Christian education. As a result it has allowed a liberative process, that expands our faith understanding with experience to flow unhindered. In the final chapter of this hermeneutical approach to a WPP I will articulate WPP's liberative praxis in terms of its transformative action.

CHAPTER 5

ARRIVING AT A WOMANIST PNEUMATOLOGICAL PEDAGOGY MINISTERIAL SERVICE STATION

Introduction

Maxine I was so surprise that you asked me to participate in this study. I didn't think I was intelligent enough...I don't use big words. I go by my feelings and that's the only thing I can give...That's how I teach people. You don't need a lesson to teach respect and to be caring because you do it in your lesson anyway. I mean there are always examples you can give so the child can visualise what you are saying / teaching.

Samaria⁴¹⁵

In the previous chapter, I outline the new theological thinking to come out of a re-reading of the Bible that takes into account the revelations about the social realities of Black women's existence. Revelations such as those listed here, with regard to their relationships and positions within but not exclusively churches and the education sector:

- Marginalised women in society and in the Bible have had their agency suppressed.
- Black women need to re-read the Bible and analyse it from a liberative perspective employing our *experiential imagination* and a *womanist epistemological* lens which connects our experiences to those of biblical women as well as with significant and collective others.
- It is imperative that we engage in activities that are consistent with the values and ethics we share with the characters, each other and God. Notably, Jesus, and all he stands for, is *real*. Accordingly, we must reveal His presence in all aspects of our daily lives and in our relating to others.

⁴¹⁵ Dialogue session with me September 2011

- Marginalised women, like us, need time to rest from the physical demands of the world by taking time for spiritual renewal and growth so that we are equipped for ministerial service as modelled by Christ's godly leadership.

The revolutionary impact of taking time to rest and renew is often lost on many of us who cannot appreciate reflection as action. A phenomenon highlighted by Bess B. Johnson of The Mud Flower Collective who observes that people are not 'used to assuming that, in doing the work of sitting around talking or writing, we are actually doing the work of justice or contributing anything whatsoever to anyone's well-being, except our own in only the most superficial and short-lived sense.'⁴¹⁶ This is certainly the case in traditional interpretations of Mary's action in Luke 10:38-42, and in Judas's criticism of her washing Jesus' feet with very expensive oil. It is most definitely the case in contemporary Britain when one considers as Heidi Safia Mirza does, that discourses define in very masculinist terms acts of revolutionary change.⁴¹⁷

However, the great value Christ places on revitalising weary travellers is symbolised by His affirmation of Mary's act of devotion at His feet. As well as His pronouncement to Simon-Peter, that to refuse His foot washing is to refuse His salvation. Service is the essence of godly leadership and the model of discipleship and evangelism He requires of us, for it involves accepting God's grace and building an intimate relationship with Him. Besides, He is the only one who can provide us with sustenance through service, never vice versa, so it is imperative that we take time out to be still and know that He is Lord!⁴¹⁸

⁴¹⁶The Mud Flower Collective, *God's Fierce Whimsy*; 22

⁴¹⁷Mirza, *Black women in education*, 272

⁴¹⁸Psalm 46: 10

This last chapter, bar the conclusion, presents in the form of case studies the arrival of the sojourners, including me at *both* a pneumatological *and* a pedagogical place of service. A ministerial place of service towards whole and lasting freedom in Christ, I call a Womanist Pneumatological Pedagogy (WPP). Since all the case studies presented model reflection on experience as transformative action, the arrangement of the chapter depicts a different aspect of the hermeneutical circle. As such, the first case study expresses in very concrete terms Samaria's *revolutionary experience* of conceptual labour as liberative praxis. The next two case studies, demonstrates the importance of multi-dimensional and scriptural analyses in shaping change through the transformative action of BLESS Teachers (Grace, Chayil and I) and Martha's Well (Mariet) respectively. The final case study is an example of liberative praxis revealed in this thesis –the articulation of a WPP.

Case Study I: Samaria's Gardening Services - Nourishment for the soul, mind, and body

As the quote heading this chapter, reveals viewing research as praxis has not always been first in any of our minds but especially Samaria because she lacks the academic qualifications and accompanying jargon that authorises academic activities / individualistic praxis. Given the hegemonic dualistic conception of praxis within Western thinking and practice, this understanding is rather predictable. Even so, equipped with an alternative epistemology that understands the integral and relational aspects of liberative praxis means none of the sojourners separate feelings / thinking from actions. Indeed, being open about our feelings / thinking and acting consistently on them gives our work more credibility and validation than academic qualifications because as The Mud Flower Collective articulate so well:

The brain is in the body. Thinking is bound up organically in feeling and sensation, just as life of the thinker is involved, inextricably, in the lives of those who comprise

her social world. We do not think only in the head or feel simply in the heart any more than we work merely on our own apart from the lives of others.⁴¹⁹

Samaria's work as a community artist demonstrates very well her growth in this diurnal thinking and doing, as indicated by her poem showcased in full below.⁴²⁰

GOD'S MAGNIFICENT GARDEN	Lines
MY MOTHER SHE WAS LIKE	1
A BEAUTIFUL AND RARE EXQUISITE FLOWER	2
SHE WAS CULTIVATED AND NURTURED IN	3
GOD'S OWN "MAGNIFICENT GARDEN"	4
AND TENDED BY HIS OWN "MAGICAL MYSTICAL" HANDS	5
HE PLANTED HER IN WISDOM RESILIENCE	6
COMPASSION AND UNDERSTANDING	7
HE WATERED HER DAILY WITH "COURAGE.... STRENGTH"	8
"SENSITIVITY AND INNER BEAUTY	9
LOVE AND KINDNESS WAS THE SAP "SURGING" THROUGH THE	10
VEINS IN MAMA'S LEAVES	11
HE SHOWERED HER WITH "MAGNETISM AND STYLE"	12
AND THE "GLOW OF HER OUTER BEAUTY"	13
FINALLY HE LOVINGLY FED MY MAMA WITH	14
AN "ABUNDANCE" OF MATERNAL INSTINCTS	15
STRENGTH OF CHARACTER STRENGTH OF MIND AND BODY	16
HE KNEW MY MAMA WAS SPECIAL HE KNEW MY MAMA	17
HAD A HARD ROAD AHEAD AND HE KNEW MY MAMA HAD TO BE	18
"EXTRA STRONG"	19
AS HE WATCHED MY BEAUTIFUL MAMA GROW.... BLOSSOM	20
BLOOM AND FLOURISH UNDER HIS TENDER LOVING CARE	21
HE WAS HAPPY AND PLEASED AND "EXTREMELY PROUD"	22
HE STOOD BACK AND ADMIRER HE WAS WELL.... "WELL SATISFIED"	23
THEN HE DID THE MOST WONDERFUL..... THE MOST "FANTASTIC"	24
YET TOTALLY TOTALLY "SURPRISING THING"	25
HE GAVE HIS PRECIOUS UNIQUE "EQUISITE FLOWER"	26
TO HER FIRST BORN YES TO "HER FIRST BORN"	27
LUCK, LUCKY LUCKY, LUCKY.... "ME"	28

Written and deeply felt by her daughter
Samaria 10th March 2003....."Mother's Day"⁴²¹

Samaria's poetic voice, which is a performing rather than written art, reveals the vision to be a blessed child of God because we are 'fearfully and wonderfully made'⁴²² (lines 3 – 13); and the power to become resilient and thrive as a loving, caring and wise individual, in difficult

⁴¹⁹ The Mud Flower Collective, *God's Fierce Whimsy*; 22

⁴²⁰ An abridged version appears in Chapter 2, 108

⁴²¹ Samaria, *God's Magnificent Garden*, (Birmingham, unpublished, 2003)

⁴²² Psalm 46:10 New International Version (NIV)

circumstances (lines 14 -21). Unlike the work of other sojourners case studied in this chapter, Samaria's actions are not part of any organisational network. Nor are her actions entrenched in the traditions of doing outreach work in the BMCs. Instead, embedded in the very essence of a creative spirit and cultural heritage Samaria's agency is part of the legacy Black women have handed down to their daughters, granddaughters, sisters and nieces. This tradition of creativity Alice Walker explains is the essence of what has allowed Black women to thrive not merely to survive, generation after generation:

The artist that was and is my mother showed itself to me only after many years... my mother adorned with flowers whatever shabby house we were forced to live in.... A garden so brilliant with life and creativity, that to this day people drive by our house in Georgia-perfect strangers and imperfect strangers- and ask to stand or walk among my mother's art.

I notice that it is only when my mother is working in her flowers that she is radiant, almost to the point of being invisible – except as Creator: hand and eye. She is involved in work her soul must have. Ordering the universe in the image of her personal conception of Beauty.

Her face, as she prepares the Art that is her gift, is a legacy of respect she leaves to me, possibilities –and the will to grasp them.⁴²³

This is certainly true of Samaria, who is no stranger to hardship and heartbreak as the extract from 'Too Steep' a 'Mountain to Climb' reveals:

"Take this upstairs my darling" mama would say	13
Take this plate these letters clean sheets & towels, she said it every day	14
She wanted 2 Retaliate Wanted 2 stamp her feet and shout	15
He's got legs hands and feet mummy why don't you just 'kick him out'	16
But she always 'Stayed Silent' mama expected her 'To be Good'	17
And she was Mama's 'Little Princess' & would help the best way she Could	18
She knew her mama loved her she could see it in her mama's smile	19
If only mummy wouldn't send her 'upstairs' even only for 'a while'	20
But Mama didn't know what happened to her 'Up There'	21
She didn't know how she hated it in the 'Devil Domain – 'upstairs'	22
She knew she had to 'Tell Someone' to make this nightmares 'Go Away'	23
She couldn't tell mummy & daddy this nightmare she just 'couldn't share'	24
She had No one to Turn to Would anyone even 'believe her'	25
There was No one to Protect her so Deflated she 'climbs the stairs'	26

⁴²³ Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, (London: The Women's Press Ltd., 1984) 241-242

I Must Be Strong I must be Brave she told her ‘pounding heart’	27
She was nearly six she was a ‘Big Girl’ now She took a deep breath	28
And continued to that Dreaded Room ‘Once More’	29
The corridor was “oh so dark” light shone from the bottom of his door	30
A strip of light that told her he was Home Waiting Anticipating	31
‘Ready and Waiting to Pounce’	32

Statistics show that approximately 20% of women have been sexually abused before they reach adulthood⁴²⁴ and in most cases, by someone they know, including family members! Among the sojourners, I know the statistics are higher but only Samaria has had the courage to speak out and act on the issue, full on.

Words cannot express enough the admiration I have, and we should all have for the courage and strength shown by women like Samaria. The abused, are often overwhelmed with feelings of shame compounded by others making them feel ashamed and guilty for what happened to them. That they are effectively muzzled, and left too paralysed to act to protect themselves much less report their abusers. Indeed, so durable and effective are these feelings in silencing the abused that websites, aimed at helping and supporting adults who were abused as children, reassure them that they are not alone, it is safe to talk. As well as remind them that they are not to blame for what has happened to them. The welcome page of Survivors in Transition (SiT) for example states:

‘A very safe welcome to Survivors in Transition. You are not alone.

We understand how much courage it has taken to access our website, with this in mind we have tried our best to make it as safe, useful and supportive for you as possible.

You've made a big step in your healing and towards breaking free from your abuse by just being here.

⁴²⁴For statistical data by National Society for the Protection of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) see Sandra Thomas, “Silent Shame”, 161 in Doreen McCalla, *Unsung Heroes in the Church: Singing the Praises of Black Women Now!*, Bloomington, Indiana: Author House, 2007)158-180

You really are an inspiration - you are breaking the silence and remember - it is NOT your shame.⁴²⁵

Samaria as a child and young woman was no exception, as indicated in lines 24 to 26 of 'Too Steep' a 'Mountain to Climb' she was silenced by her abuse. However, the poem, written many years after she left home and after many years of therapy, represents the transformative work her soul needs to thrive – ordering the community / society to reflect and protect the beautiful innocence of a child. So it is a poem, along with her other poems, that represents a giant milestone in her journey towards a place of healing, blossoming and justice; for it represents her ability to speak out and her desire to enable as well as bring others (abused or not) along with her which this longer extract from it reveals:

Suffice to say her experience still haunts her but Love & Therapy made Her	50
Compassionate Loving Wiser & Stronger	51
She was determined it 'wouldn't' ruin her life, Cause her pain any longer	52
But for many the nightmare continues using drugs & alcohol to help	53
Numb the Pain But of course the Wounds & Memories 'Remain'	54
We are the adults, It is up to us to Protect and be Proactive in seeking out These	55
dregs of Society and this 'Cancerous Wicked Evil Crime'	56
It's a sin towards our children To sit back and watch is so 'Neglectful' so We	57
"Fail them" "Every Single time"	58
Any type of Abuse is EVIL We all know it's a Cowardly Diabolical Act	59
Against our vulnerable children "Lock them up throw away the keys"	60
Our children are far more important and that is a definite Fact	61
These 'Twisted Sad Individuals' they can't or will never change	62
Until their 'dying day' They'll remain 'Unfulfilled and Deranged'	63
Some say it is a Silent crime Yes Silent & Extremely Deadly Shame	64
If necessary we will Fight and Shout 'Inform and Educate'	65
Knowledge is Power, To Protect is our Goal. No Cowardly Wolf will be	66
Hovering at 'Our Gate'	67
We have to be Upfront and Vigilant Outspoken and Attentive.	68
Repercussions of Abuse is a Life Sentence of Trauma & Negativeness	69
Their innocence Eagerly 'Taken' Leaving Suffering & a Jumbled MESS'	70
Be Supportive & Encouraging to all Children Regardless of colour Or age	71
It doesn't matter if they're 'Yours or not' We are all singing from the 'Same	72
Page'	73

⁴²⁵ <http://www.survivorsintransition.co.uk/resources/who-can-i-talk-to-about-my-abuse-women/>

Evil is out there We can't watch them everyday All we can do is Guide	74
And 'pave the way'	75
Children are a Blessing they should be Loved Treasured and Nurtured	76
'Everyday'. They are not here to be "Used Damaged and Abused" There is	77
simply 'No Excuse'	78
When you look into a child's face & eyes and see the 'Innocence' within	79
Doesn't it make your heart 'smile' doesn't it make your heart 'sing'	80
You may call me 'Idealistic' ... but I'm just being a 'Realist'	81
These Perverts do not see Innocence in a pure angelic 'natural way'	82
Innocence creates a compulsion to corrupt they are weak minded and	83
So Twisted they can't See or Act in any other way	84
They haven't common decency They don't deserve any Loyalty	85
So If you know one ... just pick up the phone!	86
These Devils have no conscience They should never be 'protected'	87
Coz they Will NEVER leave our children ALONE	88
They are 'Inadequate Dangerous Cowardly Souls'	89
Bullies who Prey on the Weak Innocent and Helpless coz they haven't the	90
Strength for The 'Able' & 'Strong' We'll fight them 'All day Long'	91
The Children are Our First Priority The Future is Dependant on them	92
Failure to Protect Care and Love them means Society the Community	93
Therefore 'Us' who 'Loses out in the end'	94
So We will Give them the Courage and Self Confidence to 'Be Strong'	95
The Self Worth to 'Speak Out' The Self Esteem to 'Name and Shame'	96
It's our Loving Duty we Owe it to All Our children	97
Only Then can This Evil BE TAMED!!	98
Written by Samaria and Dedicated 'To All who have Suffered'	99

Samaria through her Art takes people to a place I call a WPP for three main reasons. Firstly, it is here that she centres the experiences of marginalised Black women, which are examples of thriving not merely surviving in adverse circumstances. In lines 50-52 of the above poem she asserts a new identity that is not defined by the abuse but rather who she is in Christ. In another poem entitled "Black Woman"..." "Warrior Princess", she celebrates and parades her new identity triumphantly:

I AM A BLACK WOMAN A NUBIAN WOMAN	1
AN AFRICAN WOMAN	2
LIKE SO MANY OF MY BLACK RESOURCEFUL	3
HARDWORKING AND OVERWORKED SISTERS	4
I AM BEAUTIFUL IN MIND AND BODY	5
AND I AM 'COLOURFUL 'TALENTED' AND BOLD'	6
I ENDEVOUR TO CARRY MYSELF	7
WITH DIGNITY.... ELEGANCE AND GRACE	
I AM A COURAGEOUS FEMALE WARRIOR	

I FIGHT INJUSTICE.... PREJUDICE AND HYPOCRISY	8
I AM PROUD OF MY HERITAGE... MY HISTORY... MY PEOPLE.... MY COLOUR	9
I REVEL IN MY BLACKNESS	10
BECAUSE SOCIETY DOES NOT VALUE ITS TRUE WORTH	11

Secondly, it is here that she and they experience spiritual renewal and connectedness. Many adults who were abused as children struggle to love their inner child. Kate Swift, for instance, on her ‘survivors’ website writes:

One of my biggest struggles in therapy was learning to listen to and accept my inner child. Everyone has an inner child whether he or she is wounded or healthy. I spent so long hating mine and blaming her, I was so angry with her that it took me a long time to be able to look her in the face...also I was so scared of the pain I would see in her face...that is why most of my art therapy and clay pieces you will notice do not have features just blank faces.⁴²⁶

Yet Samaria, constantly asserts the physical and spiritual beauty of children and Black women like herself, who have internalised the distorted perceptions of their existence by the powerful. She turns these ashes on their character into pearls and reminds them that they are valuable creations who are worthy to be respected, cherished and admired by everyone. Not only through her poetry does Samaria achieve this, but also in her portraits of Black women and children who have their key traits –



internal as well as external- painstakingly yet vividly depicted for the viewer to revel in and admire.

Furthermore, in her abstract geometrical pieces, like the canvas presented on the left, Samaria manages to convey the integral and relational aspects of people’s material and spiritual lives.

⁴²⁶ Kate Swift, <http://www.thistangledweb.co.uk/poetry/inner-child/>

Lastly, it is travelling along the road to this place I call a WPP that she and they can befriend and mentor each other as well as create a community that acts for justice and the betterment of everyone. She is able to do this because she uses simple images and plain language to get her message across. In ‘Too Steep’... ‘a ‘Mountain to Climb’ the message is very clear:

But for many the nightmare continues using drugs & alcohol to help
Numb the Pain But of course the Wounds & Memories ‘Remain’
We are the adults It is up to us to Protect and be Pro active in seeking out These dregs
of Society and this ‘Cancerous Wicked Evil Crime’
It’s a sin towards our children To sit back and watch is so ‘Neglectful’ so We “Fail
them” “Every Single time”

As she explained to me in 2005:

‘I don’t want any child to go through what I went through. Feeling like you’re horrible because horrible things happen to you when really it is horrible people taking advantage of the gullible and weak. They take our innocence and take advantage of us...It’s the weak and powerful taking advantage of the weak and powerless. That’s the worst kind to be- weak and powerful!’⁴²⁷

Perhaps more importantly she succeeds because she shares knowledge that is rooted in concrete experience. In this way, she reassures her audience that she understands, that she cares and that she is wisely handing down an inheritance of reliance on God, resilience to prosper and respect for all that is sacred about life. For example in the poem entitled “‘Black Woman’...” ‘Warrior Princess’” Samaria writes:

“Black Woman”...”Warrior Princess”

BECAUSE ‘STRONG WOMEN’ ARE THE ‘BACKBONE’ OF ‘EVERY’FAMILY	1
AND WOMEN ARE WORTH ‘MUCH MORE’ THAN MEN AND SOCIETY “SAY WE	2
ARE”	3
SO “SISTERS” KEEP “STRIVING” ‘STAY FOCUSED’ AND CONTINUE TO ‘AIM	4
HIGH’	5
BECAUSE ‘WITHOUT’ YOUR ‘STRENGTH’.....’YOUR LOVED ONES’	6
WILL “CRUMBLE.... WITHER” “FALL.....AND DIE”	7
SO A “STANDING OVATION” TO THE “AMAZING WOMEN” “OF THE WORLD”	8
THE “RESPECT, LOVE AND ADULATION”..... YOU CRAVE	9
IS “NOW GIVEN”..... AND “YOU” CERTAINLY ‘DESERVE’ THEM... ‘ALL’	10
GOD KNEW ‘EXACTLY’ WHAT HE WAS ‘DOING’	11

⁴²⁷ Dialogue session with me in September 2011

Thus, through the arts that are her gifts –poetry, paintings and gardening- Samaria is able to rise above her pain and despair and centre, celebrate and set free the God-given creative spirit within her and of generations of Black women. In her words:

My poems are more teaching the children, the young girls / young mothers on how to value themselves and not give up their bodies' sensuality, sexuality so easily – you know... I have to make sure it's easy to understand by children as well as adults... they have to get it first time. I feel like a messenger. I have to get the message across...⁴²⁸

Her theological pedagogy, therefore, like the other sojourners, reflects an emphasis on the nurturing of spiritual and emotional intelligence (wisdom /the soul/creative spirit) through the imparting of personalised skills, experience and knowledge validation. As seen in “God’s Magnificent Garden” and “Black Woman”...”Warrior Princess” which she does mainly through the depiction of ordinary women. Like her late mother, achieving extraordinary things in difficult circumstances because of their great resilience and greater faith in God. She also achieves this through the transformation of the environment around her with celebratory portraits of Black women and their families; colourful, vibrant abstract paintings, and like Alice Walker’s mother, a garden adorned with many, many welcoming flowers.

Regardless of the form, Samaria’s artwork is consistent with the WPP values and ethics of caring and accountability that they radiate. Consequently, Samaria manages to open doors for an ongoing, intimate relationship and dialogue with God, self and other marginalised people because her work revolves around the spiritual renewal and well-being of believers and non-believers. As this extract from our interview in September 2011 illustrates:

⁴²⁸ Dialogue session with me in August 2005

Sam: A friend phoned me up and she was really down but by the time I had finished with her she was fine. She's been comparing herself to other people who can give their children what they want. I told her "What you've given your child (not financially) is more than others could give because she's given him...done it alone.

We think of things not the way society tells us to. You have to look at what Jesus did, He was humble not like the celebrities. If I was a millionaire the amount of people I would help I wouldn't be a millionaire for long. If the money was distributed properly, because there is enough for everybody but the rich hold onto it. If the world was fair but they're [the rich and powerful] not fair and we're not struggling to change things. Look at EK's mom she only wants an apology⁴²⁹ so it will continue but the law needs to change to protect our children.

Max: You're right. But for that to happen everybody needs to know they are somebody because I believe they treat people as nobodies because deep down they believe they are a nobody; so they try and feel like somebody by putting someone else down.

Sam: They don't know they can be somebody because it's harder to be somebody in this world we live in.

Moreover, the effectiveness of her agency to transform lives for the better has been borne out by my own family. My mother's copy of the 'Black Woman' poem given to her by Samaria, until her death last year, had pride and place in her living room alongside her portrait and a poster of famous Black sheroes like Amy Garvey and Angela Davis. The joy, nourishment and healing Samaria's art provides was evident when she read 'God's Magnificent Garden' at my son's dedication with her eyes fixed on my dying mother. During the reading my mother's face lit up with a light I can only describe as grace mixed with a knowing respect; and after the service, she expressed a feeling of being well satisfied with her life. Within eight weeks, my mother was dead.

Samaria's garden, like 'our mothers' gardens', is the flow of material and spiritual resources through the conduit of poetry and creativity, which supports N. Lynne Westfield's thesis that

⁴²⁹ EK is her goddaughter's mom, whose fifteen and eight year old daughters were mistakenly arrested by the police on suspicion of carrying firearms. Their excuse for the arrest was because the eldest daughter looked like the suspect and was carrying a bag!

the agency of Black women has more to do with thriving than merely surviving.⁴³⁰ In other words, Samaria in the cultural tradition of Black women, engages in ‘practices that heal and renew individually and communally’⁴³¹ thereby ‘revealing and experiencing the sacramentality of life’⁴³². Notably, the passed down tradition, from mother to daughter and grand-daughter and sister, of seeing ‘one’s self in a positive light while the world around would say the opposite’⁴³³ A self-defining and medicinal process that is often manifested in the creative expressions of song, and its sister the poetic voice.

Poetry is natural medicine; it is like homeopathic tincture derived from the stuff of life itself- *your experience*. Poems distil experience into the essentials. Our personal experiences touch the common ground we share with others. The exciting part of this process is that poetry used in this healing way helps people integrate the disparate, even fragmented parts of their life. Poetic essences of sound, metaphor, image, feeling and rhythm act as remedies that can elegantly strengthen our whole system- physical, mental and spiritual.

John Fox⁴³⁴

Samaria’s is both a recipient and contributor to this heritage of medicinal creativity. Moreover, her fashion designs, poetry, batiks and paintings over the years have constantly enabled many muzzled and mutilated Black women to know what they were never intended to know; what it feels like to have your creative spirit unleashed and re-membered, and what it is to be fearfully and wonderfully made – cherished! In short, Samaria’ agency demonstrates the resilience to thrive in adversity; a virtue and a standpoint many desire for the marginalised, such as SiT whose website displays inspirational quotes like this one:

"Where there were wounds, Only scars remain. Where there are scars, New flesh appears." –Unknown⁴³⁵

⁴³⁰ N Lynne Westfield, *Dear Sisters: A Womanist Practice of Hospitality* (Cleveland, Ohio The Pilgrim Press, 2001), 3

⁴³¹ Westfield, *Dear Sisters*, 3

⁴³² Westfield, *Dear Sisters*, 4

⁴³³ Westfield, *Dear Sisters*, 8

⁴³⁴ John Fox, *Poetic Medicine* (New York: Jeremy P Tarcher/Putnam, 1997), 3, cited in Westfield, *Dear Sisters*,

28

⁴³⁵ <http://www.survivorsintransition.co.uk/> homepage

Case Study II: BLESS Teachers' Service - Partnerships for renewing the school body, spirit,
and mind

Can I be Pink? ⁴³⁶	1
	2
Can I be Pink?	3
Do I have to be White or Red?	4
Can I be Pink instead?	5
My own unique shade and tone	6
That's instantly recognised as my own.	7
Don't you think that's better instead of seeing Red?	8
Scarlet Red, like a fever	9
That burns you up and leaves you for dead.	10
Paints the town a dangerous Red.	11
The air polluted with fear, desire and dread!	12
Your body consumed for a price	13
And your soul and spirit demise...	14
	15
	16
Is that wise?	17
Surely, light Red, dark Red,	18
Red light isn't right	19
For a life meant to be whole, lasting, and free.	20
	21
So can I be Pink?	22
I don't want to be Red or White.	23
Pink's just right.	24
My own unique shade and tone	25
That's instantly recognised as my own.	26
Don't you think that's right?	27
Not wanting to be seen in White.	28
It's too pale,	29
It's too heavy to reflect the spectrum of colour that radiates from my heart!	30
Blinding White, like pre-nuptial gowns, cocaine lines	31
That hides the truth from innocent minds.	32
That puts a secular canopy around secrets and lies.	33
	34
Is that wise?	35
When your soul and spirit demise.	36
Surely, that White, like Klan men, should fill you with dread instead!	37
For life's meant to be, whole, lasting and free.	38
	39
You know what	40
I've had a good think...	41
And I'm going to be Pink!	42
My own unique shade and tone	43

⁴³⁶ Maxine Howell, *Can I Be Pink?* Unpublished, (Birmingham, 2003)

How is BLESS Teachers an example of multi-dimensional analysis that leads to transformative action?

BLESS Teachers, was initiated by me in 2000 when I made an appeal to Black teachers to meet and discuss our experiences and needs. As mentioned in Chapter 2, BLESS Teachers was a desperate attempt to make sense of a world that was not making any sense within the analytical paradigm Grace and I were familiar with, Black consciousness. As the poem above reveals, through the metaphor of the colour pink, the appeal was really a distress call to find others who would dare to assert an identity that challenged the myth of White supremacy embedded in notions of purity and righteousness together with its flipside, the controlling portrayals Black womanhood as “scarlet” (Jezebels) or virgin white (Jemimas) women.⁴³⁷ Others, like a recent service user, who shared the analytical process she went through to understand why someone as unique as her was experiencing persecution.

BLESS Teachers engages micro in relation to macro analysis through dialogue

Forming BLESS Teachers therefore, is a proactive response to the experiences of confusion and social exclusion Grace and I and others have endured, which leaves us feeling violated, isolated and desolated yet determined to struggle through the anger, pain and despair to be true to our God, our “selves”, and our community. A response that signifies the start of our journey towards a WPP, because it engaged us in holistic multi-dimensional, intersectional analyses, which not only identifies the tradition of Black women as the real movers and shakers within the African Diaspora communities but exposes the roots of our oppression too.

⁴³⁷ See Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, and Alexander, *Mouse in the jungle*

As the aforementioned service user explained, her experiences of bullying by a White male head teacher since 2011 has forced her to consider the interlocking structures of inequality and difference. In her words:

Black women have six buttons to press (White women have three) and getting the right combination that helps you to understand your experiences is...My mother instilled in me that race is just skin deep so when I found myself in this crisis I questioned whether I was too bubbly, reticent etcetera. The last button “is it because I’m Black”. In fact, it was the union representative who brought that up and thankfully, at that stage I could say no, because he’d started to pick on other members of staff. I looked at people he’d selected as his favourites and the qualities / criteria about them: Young, ambitious, chirpy and unquestioning...Those of us he’s picked on, what he doesn’t like is that we all have excellent relationships with the parents and he doesn’t want us to have that familiarity. The others have a professional guard.⁴³⁸

For instance, within six months of its formation, BLESS Teachers obtained funding for training in areas of counselling, mentoring and advocacy work. In our dialogue sessions initially, we had identified the neglect in these areas by established community groups and had offered reasons for this being the case. Namely, as detailed in earlier chapters, lacking the holistic ethics of caring and personal accountability, concern within most community organisations is with the young alone. Indeed, as the quote immediately above reveals, expressions of caring and personal accountability are abhorrent to some mainstream custodians of our schools. Like the head teacher mentioned, they actively, if not subconsciously, will go out of their way to suppress these ethics. Accordingly, the Black community groups, paralleling the dominant perspective, do not offer their services to Black teachers and other adult educators as a way of alleviating the negative impact of institutional racism.⁴³⁹

⁴³⁸ Dialogue session held between Service User 1 and me in July 2012.

⁴³⁹ See Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 for details.

Grounded in the wisdom of first-hand experience, and being true to our Black female Christian consciousness that creates an alternative route for teaching and learning, BLESS Teachers seeks to bridge the gap. By receiving suitable training in order to provide a service of care in times, both of self-actualisation and of crises, we provide support for Black educators. Even the name BLESS Teachers is coined to *both* sustain the struggle for self-actualisation *and* defy the common held notions about academic success that associate Black people with failure. So right from the early days of its conception BLESS Teachers was a manifestation of a WPP that has become more refined but never completely obtained. That is, driven by our faith in God to change things for good, characteristic of a WPP, we centred our experiences as Christian Black female teachers and educators, whilst simultaneously being concerned with the socio-political wholeness of the communities we reside.

Accordingly, we sourced and received Christian-centred basic counselling skills from a Black female Christian Aid activist and youth worker. Our mentoring training was provided by KWAME (Knowledge, Wisdom, Awareness, Mentoring and Experience)⁴⁴⁰, an Afro-centric organisation who model their approach on the role of the “Madahba” who traditionally facilitated the rite of passage from childhood and adolescence into early adulthood. A description of the Madahba’s role taken from their promotional leaflet is presented:

The Madahba’s role is to help youngsters realise their God-given potential by acting as role models, providing positive presence and offering the young person Hope, Encouragement, Advice, and a sense of Direction and Support [HEAD Support].

Whilst a social justice organisation, chaired by Gus John, and directed by Gerry German, the Communities Empowerment Network (CEN), provides our advocacy training and support. The CEN provides advocates for young people excluded from school and supports

⁴⁴⁰ Once again, this is a pseudonym to maintain confidentiality.

‘progressive teachers [Black and White] in schools who build relationships with young people’ and as in my case, Black teachers who are also excluded from schools.

The training, delivered in such a way that we engage in dialogue with our trainers, has led to the mutual exchange of wisdom regarding the realities of our socio-political context. The head of the KWAME, a mentoring organisation for boys of African descent, has shared strategies and tactics for increasing the scale of vulnerability Black parents, particularly single mothers, are perceived to have by education institutions, so they can become better advocates for their children. In exchange, we have exposed the structural vulnerability and epistemological strength of Black teachers. More importantly, we have exposed the folly within the tradition of the community of not promoting the recruitment and retention of Black teachers who are committed to the whole and lasting freedom of our nation. If for no other reason than that, unlike focusing on the betterment of our youth in isolation of teachers and our alternative routes for teaching and learning, it will tackle structural inequalities manifested in schools dominated by White headship and a Eurocentric masculinist epistemology at staffing and pupil levels, in a deep and far-reaching way.

BLESS Teachers understands the personal in relation to the communal

Uncharacteristic of a WPP however, in the early days we did not pursue both the deconstruction of the oppressive practices and structural inequalities that we encounter in order to construct a new theological paradigm. Paradoxically a development that is both surprising and not surprising given the acute cognitive dissonance Grace and I have experienced. On the one hand, surprising because of our status as intelligent teachers working in an environment where the task of raising standards is usually attributed to White sourced

creativity and measurable outcomes should make the process of ‘conscientization’⁴⁴¹ as natural as breathing is to survival. On the other hand, not surprising because the potent sense of self-identity Grace and I possessed, like many other users, was founded on shaky ground. In order to feel good about ourselves, we were dependent on the recognition of our ability to raise educational standards, through an indigenous pedagogy that nurtures the creative spirit and not just the academic. To feel affirmed that we are good teachers.

In the words of another of our service users, ‘as a Black woman working harder than my White counterpart, not leaving work until the caretaker jangled her keys, doesn’t feel wrong. That is o.k. because I know then they [those in headship] can recognise I am a good teacher and that feels right!’⁴⁴² Yet as analysed in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3, these sites are too narcissistic to affirm and validate our activities and by extension our identities. Thus, we end up with, in the words of the same service user, ‘the hardest pill to swallow, them [senior leaders] telling me NO to being a good teacher, NO to NPQH training and it’s based on the fact that “I don’t like you” rather than you’re inadequate as shown in the data. That’s what I find maddening!’⁴⁴³

Grace and I, like the service user quoted, were too naïve and too burnt out at the time to engage in anything other than survival tactics. After all, we are not “super” women in a community of “super” people but with time and space, we have become womanists in our thinking and acting, as evidenced in our growth within months of leaving The Shallow Whale and establishing BLESS Teachers. In one of our mentoring training sessions, given by the mentoring organisation, KWAME in 2001, Grace raised the point that as a Diaspora

⁴⁴¹ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*

⁴⁴² Expressed by Service User 2, October 2012

⁴⁴³ Dialogue session with me in October 2012

community we are all experiencing some degree of cognitive dissonance, which after fifty years of settlement in this country we are still struggling to manage. For example, African-Caribbean pupils are socialised not to look an adult directly in the eye when they are talking to them as a mark of respect. Yet, when they do this in school, the custodians of the dominant culture who believe the opposite is true, perceive them as being insolent.⁴⁴⁴

Clearly, strengthened by the camaraderie and security of BLESS Teachers which provides a safe space essential for liberative praxis mentioned in Chapter 1, Grace, and as a result of connected knowing, Chayil and I among others now appreciate that cognitive dissonance is not just an individual and acute phenomenon as it was in our particular cases. We have found the time and space for womanist analysis that is deeper, broader and goes beyond the need to survive. Hence, within the school context the hostility from Black parents and pupils towards Black school staff and vice versa, we believe, is evidence of the chronic cognitive dissonance affecting our community. Gus John's observations regarding Black managers and service users, in his book entitled, *Taking a Stand: Gus John Speaks on education, race, social action and civil unrest 1980 -2005*, supports this notion as the following extract illustrates:

For one thing, we live in a society that automatically validates white people and that is still not accustomed to having black people occupy certain positions as a matter of routine. Black service users are not used to having black managers occupy such positions, either. Indeed the experience some black parents have had of the British schooling system lead them to have high expectations of black school managers, not least in the direction of putting things right and doing their best for them, as parents, and by their children. Sadly, those expectations are not always matched by guaranteed engagement with and support for those black managers... If in relation to any or all of the above scenarios, the fact that the manager is black is not seen to make a difference, it would be very surprising indeed if that person were to manage to keep faith with themselves and their personal values, let alone with students and parents. Wearing or pretending to wear a 'white mask' while inhabiting a black skin under such conditions is a recipe for ontological dissonance and mental illness.⁴⁴⁵

⁴⁴⁴Benoit Monin, "Cognitive Dissonance", 599.

⁴⁴⁵John, *Taking a Stand*, 280

BLESS Teachers understands to love ourselves regardless

Thus, both our personal and political understanding of suppression allows us to address cognitive dissonance in our relating with others. Driven by an ethic of caring and an ethic of personal accountability, we *all* hope (although we did not articulate this in 2000) that we can lessen or curtail the level of cognitive or ontological dissonance educators are suffering from as individuals. Chiefly by knowing our ‘selves’ in relation to the collective and by extension, by knowing we are not mad. Even if our service users/members are not experiencing acute cognitive dissonance or social exclusion these ethics of caring and accountability are what binds us all at BLESS Teachers, and are vital to our success. Successes like the recent service users who both thanked me for dialoguing with them in a way that showed them both they are not alone, and affirmed they were not going mad. As one related to me ‘everyday life can consume you but when you share you concerns it makes me realise I’m not going mad...The way I was feeling I could have spoken to you all night because you made me realise it’s part of the course but you can learn from each other. I’m really grateful for that.’⁴⁴⁶

BLESS Teachers is grateful for that space too, as a place to love ourselves regardless. When we started BLESS Teacher, Chayil, for instance, was enjoying her role as a primary teacher managing Science but she was and is just as committed as we were, and are to the serve and receive service. Even when one of her colleagues who attended the first meeting with her concluded that I had a “chip on my shoulder” and never returned, Chayil felt in her spirit that she needed to support me. More recently, those same ethics of caring and accountability has led Chayil in her new role as a Deputy Head Teacher to remove a Black teacher from her post

⁴⁴⁶ Dialogue session with me, October 2012

because of the lack of care and hostility she showed towards her pupils. Apart from her continued long absences from work, Chayil was particularly moved to remove this teacher when one of her pupils wailed in despair 'I don't know what I can do to please her'. Even so, Chayil continues to offer support to this teacher in dealing with her issues.

BLESS Teachers continues the tradition of Black Christian women's activism within a womanist political consciousness

Today, I find myself working in a school that recognises my ability to help marginalised pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties fulfil their potential. Yet, once alerted to the plight of the two teachers referred to earlier, I went out of my way to offer our services and successfully minimised the negative effects of social exclusion and cognitive dissonance has had on these Christian teachers. Services, which recognise that the root of our success lays in the communal ability to convert adverse circumstances so they are compatible with God's plans for us to prosper and come to no harm, to have a vision and see it realised.⁴⁴⁷ As argued by Gus John, adverse conditions that predispose Black people to ontological dissonance and mental health issues as well as social exclusion. Notably, conditions of hostility, and contradictory beliefs and values embodied in the relationships, often as the subordinate, we have with others. Our mission statement presented below articulates how we aim to transform those conditions:

Mission statement

The aims of BLESS Teachers are as follows:

⁴⁴⁷ Jeremiah 29: 11 New International Version (NIV)

- 1. Promote justice and equality within the education sector.**
- 2. Aid development of a (political) Black leadership and participation at all levels through:**
 - **Empowering community educators, such as Black teachers, parents, adult and peer mentors, etcetera; as well as assisting mainstream agencies/providers within the locality to work effectively with the community.**
 - **Encouraging community involvement in all aspects of the working environment inside the education sector.**
- 3. Encourage Black educational achievement through networking, seminars, training and research.**
- 4. Promote personal and social enrichment of members and users of BLESS Teachers.**

Thus within months of my initial appeal, BLESS Teachers was established as an organisation for change based on liberative analysis, with Chayil and Grace as Vice Chair and Social Secretary respectively, and me as Chair. Even though we never again attracted the same numbers, as we did in that first meeting (approximately nine community educators, three males and six females) we had a core group of five women who all turned out to be born again Christians. With the benefit of hindsight it is evident from the dynamics of our core membership (the sojourners), our mission statement and the training we have received that the three main ways for tackling cognitive dissonance identified by psychologists like Eddie Harmon-Jones and Judson Mills, BLESS Teachers have incorporated intuitively.⁴⁴⁸ They are:

- Increase the importance of compatible beliefs (consonant cognitions) and avoid information that is likely to increase the dissonance.
- Reduce the prominence of the conflicting belief (dissonant cognitions).

⁴⁴⁸ Eddie Harmon-Jones and Judson Mills, "An Introduction to Cognitive Dissonance and Theory and an Overview of Current Perspectives on the Theory", in Eddie Harmon-Jones and Judson Mills (editors), *Cognitive Dissonance: Progress on a pivotal theory in social psychology* (Washington DC and London: American Psychological Association, 1999) 4

- Convert the incompatible belief so that it is in harmony with other beliefs or behaviors.’

Unlike many other educational support services, we make explicit our belief that Black educators can, must and do make a constructive difference.⁴⁴⁹ For far too long ‘Black’ has been synonymous with underachievement and cultural deficiency within the education setting about pupils and their parents but also Black teachers. Yet, despite the fact that the lack of promotion of Black teachers is, as reported in The Times Educational Supplement, a blatant example of institutionalised racism⁴⁵⁰ there has been little outcry from the very sections outraged by the underachievement of pupils and the lowly portrayal of parents. This omission reveals the short-sightedness of their mentoring strategy for challenging and overcoming educational injustices, which includes the social exclusion of Black teachers within schools that are increasingly becoming Black majority schools in terms of pupil rather than staff numbers.

Case Study III: Martha’s Well, The Refreshing Service- Place for body, mind, and soul

“The Vision To Be...The Power To Become”⁴⁵¹

How is “Martha’s Well” an example of transformative action derived from scriptural analysis?

The above quote is the strapline for Martha’s Well, a mentoring, training and general empowerment network for marginalised women, envisioned and directed by Mariet since 2006. Clearly inspired by the Mary and Martha text detailed in the previous chapter, it

⁴⁴⁹ John, *Taking a Stand*, 280 is the only educator and activist who I know makes explicit his belief that ‘*the blackness of black staff, especially leaders and managers, must be seen to make a difference.*’

⁴⁵⁰ Althalie Matthews, “Minorities ‘robbed of promotion chances’” article in the *Times Educational Supplement* (TES publication, September 14, 2001) 3

⁴⁵¹ Martha’s Well (pseudonym) website

recognises the power of women to transform the realities of their lives by renewing / educating their mind, body and spirit. In a very pragmatic, personal and relational way that characterises womanists' discourses on social change. A Christian approach to activism in the tradition of Black women's leadership, Martha's Well entrenches Mariet's womanist values and ethics into the very structures and social fabric of the church and its community. This is evident from the description of the organisation found on Martha's Well's website, presented below:

'Martha's Well is a community based organisation that is centred on the health and well-being of women and their families and is inclusive of all races, backgrounds and potential.'

Our Board of Directors work to establish:

- **A community where young children and teens are nurtured and provided opportunities to learn develop and grow to their fullest potential.**
- **A community where women are empowered to channel their creative talents and skills to create their own economic opportunities to improve the quality of their lives.**
- **A community where women and their families are whole, healed and well.**

All our Directors are committed to our local communities and work hard to achieve our objectives.

Martha's Well website⁴⁵²

Mariet's work and that of her board members and volunteers reflects the common struggle for educational inclusion spearheaded by Black women but not by the route usually heralded by scholars – supplementary schooling or nursery provision – but through mentoring and befriending. This route reflects the renewed theological pedagogy (at the heart of this research) she has created to meet her particular circumstances and experiences. Unlike the conservative and quite formal interface of the supplementary

⁴⁵² Since Martha's well is a pseudonym I cannot reference the actual website.

school model described by Mirza, this mentoring and befriending approach challenges both the business like relationships in mainstream schooling. It also challenges the ‘unnatural’ evangelism and discipleship of many churches that do not focus on continuing the intimate relationship / friendship forged with the people they help to accept Jesus as their Lord and saviour. Thus, like the foremother Esme Lancaster described in Alexander’s article, Mariet’s influence...has been evident in the structures of the church itself and in areas revolving around the spiritual growth and wellbeing of the believers.’⁴⁵³

The Board’s emphasis on (and therefore Mariet’s influence on the organisation) the transfer of emotional and spiritual capital / intelligence as opposed to the mere transmission of de-personalised skills and knowledge is borne out by its mentoring program Speak Out Sisters (SOS):

The 'Speak out Sisters' (SOS) Personal Development Programme is an 8 week course that aims to improve the expectations, achievements and life choices of young women from 13 - 17 years, especially those who may have under achieved in the past. We empower girls to make positive changes in their lives during the lifetime of the course. SOS uses interactive group work, challenging activities, mentoring and peer mentoring to do this.

SOS is flexible and adaptable and can be used to fit the needs of all young women regardless of background, ethnicity and culture. As well as the 8 week programme, we can also deliver tailored one day courses.

All SOS staff and mentors are trained and competent professionals and will work with you to ensure that you achieve the best outcomes for your participants.

Martha’s Well website

⁴⁵³ Alexander, “‘A Mouse in the jungle,’ 92

When asked in one of our interviews to describe one of SOS' most significant successes Mariet explained how she with the help of a friend sponsored a youth to go to the States one summer, as part of a Gifted and Talented opportunity the school wanted her to attend. That young woman is now studying at Cambridge University. The achievements of the young women in SOS clearly shows how Mariet and her volunteers as 'transformative agents',⁴⁵⁴ have opened up radical possibilities for their community which mainstream schools couldn't do and/or follow through because they lack the material and spiritual resources. By going on to Cambridge, this youth's betterment opens up possibilities for the betterment of her community renown for turning out school-girl mothers not Cambridge graduates. I know the impact my university place had on this community over twenty years ago—because it is the very same community Martha's Well works in today. Moreover, they have opened up possibilities for themselves as this extract from a local newspaper cited on their webpage reveals:

'A SMALL Birmingham charity is set to expand after a massive windfall from an undercover benefactor. The project Speak out Sisters (SOS) is £25,000 richer thanks to a business woman. She spent 10 days in the deprived inner-city area of Queenscroft, Birmingham for the Channel 4 series The Secret Millionaire...

After helping out at SOS, Miss Y said: "Empowering young women is what I'm all about and this organisation is such a valuable cause." She was in tears as she handed over the cheque to SOS founder Mariet, telling her: "You are such an inspiration."

Mariet said: "It was such a surprise to get the cheque from Miss Y, we had no idea she was a millionaire... We were down to our last £300 but her donation and support has made such a huge difference. Now we can think big and look to the future. We are expanding and putting the project in schools."⁴⁵⁵

Yet like BLESS Teachers Mariet's organisation does not neglect the educators but connects the prosperity of the mentors with the mentees. Her commitment to a womanist epistemology

⁴⁵⁴ Coined by Heidi Safia Mirza, *Race, Gender and Educational Desire*, 101

⁴⁵⁵ Martha's Well website for confidentiality reasons, pseudonyms are used and therefore this location cannot be accessed.

ensures Mariet does not separate her thinking from her theological pedagogy and vice versa. As she states, we rarely stop to listen to God in the stillness S/He offers and as such frequently fail to recognise S/He not only answers but also wants to lighten our burdens, not add to them. This year in faith, Mariet as the main mover and shaker of Martha's Well, has taken time out from organising further mentoring programmes so that she can accept the freedom Christ offers from the busyness of life and community action. For she recognises the connections between her well-being and the women she supports, and the implications for whole and lasting change led by the Spirit of God.

Case Study IV: WPP Services – Providing conceptual refreshments for liberative praxis

Arriving at a WPP has meant in theory and in practice that the sojourners and I recognise our 'reflection/action' pursuits as liberative not individualistic praxis. That is, praxis that is done collaboratively, integrally and relationally to self, others and God. Rather than in the mind of a sole researcher operating within a dualistic conception of praxis in which theory and action, are split moments or endeavours this journey towards a WPP demonstrates a liberative praxis. Functioning from a womanist epistemology, I believe thinking is an integral part of acting and vice versa. It is therefore important in a thesis about liberative action informed by liberative thinking to make clear that this intellectual and spiritual journey towards conceiving and articulating a WPP is liberative praxis. Thus, if in this study, the lines between theory and practice appear blurred to the reader that is because there are no lines. Theory and practice are inextricably connected within a WPP, as are emotions and intellect. Consequently, the reader (and for that matter the writer) can be forgiven if when reading the chapter predominantly concerned with social analysis (Chapter 3) or scriptural analysis (Chapter 4) they believe they are reading a chapter about transformative action which is the main task of this one.

Conversely, if when reading this chapter they believe they are reading a chapter overly concerned with theory at the expense of action they can equally be forgiven.

This work demands that the reader renews their mind and accepts a different way of thinking, doing and knowing than many of us are familiar within the academy. How else can the reader appreciate Samaria's statement that she teaches by her feelings and not grand theories / "big words"? How else can the reader possibly appreciate that Samaria's statement epitomises what it means to arrive at the new theological pedagogy I label a WPP? Moreover, the sojourners and I engage in holistic thinking / doing. That is, to paraphrase The Mud Flower Collective, we think in what we do and feel, not just in our heads; we feel in what we do and think, not just in our hearts. Certainly, that is why constructing a new theology that places a high value on conceptual labour in its celebration of Black female agency is so transformative.

The controlling images of the Black superwoman or Aunt Jemima stereotypes and their role in perpetuating the subordinated positions of Black women highlights how the task of revitalising your mind, body and spirit is truly revolutionary. Black women are often, like Martha, the woman / mistress of their houses. Like Martha, they have been socialised to meet the physical, spiritual and psycho-emotional needs of their family / community, and God has equipped them to do so:

It's a disease of women; it's one of our biggest things. We will always take on more because we have the capacity to do it because we are multi-taskers. That is how God has made us. We can do twenty things at the same time with no effort at all. ⁴⁵⁶

⁴⁵⁶ Biblical hermeneutics analysis interview between Mariet and me, March 2006,

Moreover, as Mariet points out, women like Martha and herself, generally want and try to do everything, for the simple but complicated reason that their identity is entrenched in hospitality and the home:

because her [their] whole kudos is wrapped up in what she is [they are] producing. As women do, because if I give you some food that's wrapped up in me, I'm going to put it on the best plate, I'm going to put a little doily there, I'm going to make it look good. Come round for Sunday dinner, tablecloth, because that's me. I'm trying to give you an impression of what I am because that's what my identity is wrapped up in.⁴⁵⁷

Caught up in the 'busyness' of life, which society demands in order to exploit our labour, ensures that Black women often, like Martha fail to sit still and receive the service of the Word from /communion with Christ that is essential to a whole and lasting life.

Furthermore, as Grace states emphatically:

...we misappropriate "faith without works is dead". The full translation⁴⁵⁸ tells us God has my back and because of the relationship I have with Him, I'll put things into practice... love people is the work, yet Sunday is the busiest day of the week. Why, when it is our day of rest?⁴⁵⁹

Ironically, Grace explains, rushing around trying to serve Her/Him means the evidence / work of His anointing "peace that surpasses all understanding" eludes us. What's more, it indicates we have not accepted His/Her grace and as a result, we fail to build a deep and meaningful relationship with God, self and others.

Thus, I stipulate arriving at a WPP reflects a synchronised transformation of one's mind and life, which embodies theological research as praxis. Embarking on this journey towards a WPP and acting on the new theology it has constructed by withdrawing ourselves periodically from necessary physical labour in favour of essential conceptual labour is our liberative

⁴⁵⁷ Biblical hermeneutics analysis interview between Mariet and me, March 2006.

⁴⁵⁸ See James 2: 8- 17

⁴⁵⁹ Social analysis interview with Grace, 29 July 2011

praxis. Liberative because our intellectual praxis gives us the precious space and time we need to connect with God, our self and others. In the words of Mariet:

Scriptures says about being still. It's so difficult in this world as a woman to be still. I've been on the go all day. The only time I've been still has been sitting here talking to you. Martha's Well for me,...is about finding that time for women, regardless of what class, ethnicity, background or social status. It's about being in a place where you can stop. It's not necessarily religious, in the sense that I'm trying to preach a message to them and tell them about Jesus. What I'm saying is stop, just STOP for a while and listen... and amazing things happen in *stillness* whether you believe in God or not.

Praxis, because it transforms our lives not just those we minister to as the articulations of Grace below illustrates.

Empowerment is a key theme to my educational practice: Pupil Voice to Independent Learning (PVIL)⁴⁶⁰ and achievement. I thrive when working with the so-called 'right-offs'. It is my faith in God that affords me the strength and the vision to want to work with the broken and the disaffected. I'm not perfect, but I thank the Lord that he has given me a heart for the disaffected, whether they come in the shape of an adult, or a desperate child.⁴⁶¹

You know you have arrived at a WPP when by fuel of the Holy Spirit you embody the ethics of caring and accountability in your quest for liberation and vocation, regardless of the costs to your social advancement! Most significantly, your discipleship and evangelism ultimately are grounded in a new theology, which is concerned with continually building intimate relationships with God, self and others without dispensing of those crucial times to be still and receive real sustenance from God. An achievement, the following extract from Chayil's personal journey celebrates:

It's been quite a significant journey actually. I do feel I hear from God in terms of whispering, whatever experiences I've had or have and I do feel I can just chat to God, whether it is in the car, whether it is in the bath, whether it is just chilling out at home... I use *writing* a lot – I love to write to God and expect answers back; which I get quite a lot, and that's part of my journey. It's amazing when you look back and

⁴⁶⁰ PVIL is the name Grace has given to her particular intervention with disaffected youth.

⁴⁶¹ Email correspondence October 2012

think WOW we do hear from God...some of them, a lot of them are *prophetic* so at the time you think OK, but then you look back and you think Wow how precise was that... So ultimately the biggest thing that has come out of it, considering I grew up in church, was that God's *real*. The relationship with God is as real as a relationship with friends or more real than with my family and so forth. And I'd say it is far more *intimate* because of what God has taken me through right at the beginning of my **relationship** with Christ. Because the barriers are not there I was then able to become *very open* and therefore able to have a more intimate relationship with God.

Now as a *married* couple the dynamics have changed again because we are both dependent on God. In fact, it gets to the point where, when there are conflicts we both recognise there is a direct relationship, in terms of: Are we praying? Are we bringing God into the marriage? When we bring God into our marriage that's when it has been completely positive. When we *think* we are bringing God into our marriage, that's when there are problems. I could even create a chronological map because, for us, it's that precise. Our relationship with God is personal...

Summary

The 'womanistization' of social transformation

According to the characteristics of a WPP, the services of Samaria's Garden, BLESS

Teachers, Martha's Well and this theological journey all recognise the importance of sending out a message to everyone that Black women are valued members of the community. Outside of the established system, in the tradition of Black women's activism, but with womanist intentions, we mentor each other and others. In this way, we maintain freedom to change conflicting beliefs about nurturing so that they are compatible with our ethic of holistic caring and spirit-led pedagogy. A process I call 'womanistization' because like 'conscientization',⁴⁶² it involves social analysis from the perspective of the marginalised but through the lens of a womanist theological epistemology. For our purposes this process spells out that we as a Black community -*teacher*, parent and pupil- have the resources and expertise needed to

⁴⁶² Freire, *Pedagogy of the oppressed*

enable all teachers to deliver an inclusive and empowering curriculum and pedagogy that can and do make a constructive difference to the lives of everyone involved.

Furthermore, this womanistization has manifested itself, over the years, in the changes in the way the sojourners operate to challenge many dominant beliefs about organisation and faith in radical action. As part of our journey towards a WPP for example, Samaria and Rachel have never operated as part of any institution. Despite establishing a formal structure at the turn of the century, with elected offices, monthly meetings, membership cards and a business account BLESS Teachers have not met formally in years. Like many other Black women who have tried to participate in traditional styled political activities, we found our members struggling to attend meetings due to the demands of raising children, running a home and in most cases having to work long hours.⁴⁶³ For those of us who could make the meetings it was disheartening to find the same faces attending who met each other on a regularly basis anyway. Likewise, as pointed out earlier, Martha's Well as temporarily ceased to operate as a formal organisation so that Mariet can replenish her own spiritual well.

Apart from addressing logistical or personal issues, the decision to cease conventional ways of working also reflects our spirit-led theological pedagogy and womanist epistemology. We know that building relationships, based on mutual respect and trust, are essential to the outworking of our faith and the delivery of our mission statements. Formal meetings or activities are not conducive to sustaining our kind of activism. We are also conscious of the fact that the skills we have acquired from the training sessions alongside the wisdom we share

⁴⁶³ Julia Sudbury, "'We don't make tea': redefining political activism", in *Black Success in the UK: Essays in Racial and Ethnic Studies*, edited by Doreen McCalla (Birmingham: DMee: Vision Learning Ltd, 2003) 50-84, highlights the obstacles Black and Asian women encounter when trying participate in conventional political organisations such as those listed here. See 53 especially.

and the knowledge we validate are best utilised in our day-to-day activities which do not require formal meetings to facilitate. Lastly, we are conscious of the fact that as leaders we will burn out quite easily if we try to carry on as we started. Since physical burnout is indicative of spiritual burnout, we know this is not an option for us as Christian activists imbued with a renewed theology that prioritises meaningful relationships over tasks.

Our working definition of social action therefore reflects the holistic views of political involvement held by the Black and Asian women Julia Sudbury interviewed. As one of her interviewee states:

I think that politics for Black women is an everyday event, because we're always out here struggling and to actually struggle with your children and to get through the system is a political kind of thing.⁴⁶⁴

Alekri, African, African Caribbean organisation

Consequently, I do not believe that the absence of meeting formally means BLESS Teachers or Martha's Well have lost the need for collective action because our praxis depends on dialogue and a collective consciousness for its validation and implementation. Indeed, like the work of Samaria, we are able to build the relationships we need to transform the whole person and by extension the family, community and society without formal structures. All we need to do is focus on continuing our journeys towards a WPP!

⁴⁶⁴ Sudbury, *'other kinds of dreams'*, 55

CONCLUSION

FREEDOM IS A JOURNEY TOWARDS A WOMANIST PNEUMATOLOGICAL PEDAGOGY

A WPP is to change as pink is to red and white⁴⁶⁵

My personal experience of the education system as a learner and educator, like that of my sojourners, has made me suspicious of arguments and portrayals of poor, Black people, especially those raised in single female headed households, as underachievers. This in turn has led to an interest in ‘knocking these stereo-types on the head’ by excelling academically and continuing the tradition of ‘raising the race’. For Grace, Samaria and me, Black consciousness as a critical lens appeared to satisfy this interest. After all, it revealed to us that fabricated notions of White supremacy alongside Black inferiority perpetuate myths about Black people including underachievement which effectively reduces Black people to the status of non-persons. It explained the use of divide and rule tactics around colour and shades of colour as an effective way to render Black people impotent.

Its explanation is still pertinent forty years after Black consciousness was articulated. Today consumed by divisive issues around colour and assimilation Black people are unable to benefit from the strength collective action brings to the struggle against structural inequalities in the labour market and other political spheres of influence. In this way White hegemony secures its privileges. Although in this postmodern world with all its global markets and socio-political complexities it is more obvious that the issues are more than skin deep. Yet, without a doubt in 1997 when my personal journey towards a WPP began, these revelations

⁴⁶⁵ Inspired by part 4 of the womanist definition in Walker, *In Search of our Mothers' Gardens*; xii

were empowering for all the sojourners and me, and to some extent this is still the case. As I have shown in this presentation of a new theological paradigm, along with the varied routes Black people have travelled in British society there are some common roots that map and shape our lives in this country that we should not neglect in our thinking and doing.

Certainly, a journey towards a WPP involves appreciating the dialectic tension between the routes and the roots, particularly regarding the alternative pedagogical routes alongside the educational roots of success Black women have created and nurtured to bring about social change. Accordingly, I have argued that the solution to oppression presented by popular Black consciousness is too crude. Simply becoming more aware of your worth and power as a Black human being will not necessarily lead to the freeing of your mind much less your body. The cognitive dissonance Grace and I experienced, came out of a naïve and one-dimensional understanding of Black consciousness. This led us to believe that radical Blacks and progressive Whites who are willing to acknowledge the worth of Black people will support conscious Black females in the struggle for the liberation of our communities, which is clearly not true. What is probably true is Victor Anderson's critique of conceived Blackness, which makes a totality of Black life and experience, as a mirror of the very exclusionary and essentializing practices liberationists are trying to dismantle.

Ontological Blackness or any other category that makes a totality of experience is not an option for our times. The vast and varied situational contexts that shape the politics of difference means abandoning subjective standpoints is equally not an option for our times. Especially, if like the sojourners you are a Black woman located on the socio-political map at

the point where a multitude of interlocking power domains cross. What is needed, are critical spaces and intersectional analysis of our particular location in order for us to re-locate from the margins into the centre where we can be heard, affirmed and learn from mutuality in our relating with others. We can only do that for ourselves in relation to particular people.

As I can only speak for myself and my particular location, I have within these limits, demonstrated in this thesis that, whether secular or Christian, Black consciousness as an analytical tool for liberation is too crude to truly explain the complexities of life for Black people. Particularly for women like the sojourners who are passionate about justice and freedom for everyone because they are committed to fulfilling their potential because of whom they are in Christ. As Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 illustrate, the journey to freedom cannot go simply via the Black and White dual carriage way. It leads to no end of confusion and collision, experienced as heightened cognitive dissonance and unsustainable social change.

Conversely, a Black subjectivity as hooks and Anderson both acknowledge can be the platform for revolutionary thinking, or the process of raising consciousness around the intersecting mechanisms and processes that conceal the complexities of social reality for Black people. A process for African-Caribbean women in Britain I have labelled womanistization because it involves a commitment *both* to centre the spiritual and material experiences of Black women *and* a corresponding renewing of the mind and radical action in its pursuit of socio-political wholeness and freedom. Not surprisingly, it was at The Shallow Whale where Grace and I had a profound spiritual experience or ‘metanoia’ that triggered our

womanistization. But as the other sojourners demonstrate, both suffering and compassion in any guise can be the catalyst for liberative praxis. Indeed our image of a God who loves us intimately like a mother and father loves a child, makes this type of faith in action imperative. Without it, I contend, you behave callously like the characters in the Good Samaritan parable, or frantically like Martha, but either way you do not build intimacy with God and humans.

By centring our experiences of faith, success and inequality in our intersectional analyses we have been able to identify new forms of divisive strategies and tactics that sees our agency ignored and our people oppressed. Namely, the myth of underachievement made glaringly obvious by our own successes and the genius / God given potential we see in all people including our own youth. Yet like colour, and shades of colour, academic performance in terms of measurable outcomes is the new weapon forged against humanity. Ironically, reactionary attempts to tackle Black underachievement at the expense of dealing with structural inequalities expressed in the prevalence of White-led but Black majority schools, and the poor recruitment and retention of Black educators, many of our community organisations are serving to perpetuate not undermine notions of Black failure and White supremacy.

In this study, therefore I have identified the elements of a Spirit-led pedagogy that is concerned with the immeasurable outcomes of the Holy Spirit championed by Black Christian women imbued with a womanist epistemology and faith in a loving God who lives amongst us, today and tomorrow. I call it a Womanist Pneumatological Pedagogy defined by what it does rather than what it claims to be about. Yet, as painstakingly detailed in Chapter 1, and

practised throughout this thesis, reflecting and acting accordingly are inseparable to the journey towards a WPP. It is hoped that presenting this theological journey in this manner will disseminate the liberative praxis that drives it, so that others will create a critical space where they can journey towards a pneumatological pedagogy that has their situated knowledge and epistemology at its heart. At that point it is hoped that we can participate as candid but mutual sojourners regardless of colour, gender, class or sexuality in the greater struggle to claim back our humanity. I will certainly continue on that journey.

The degree to which others will act on their suspicions, however, and think through the real causes of their confinement / for their achievements, in an attempt to reassess their existence so that they can give it meaning depends on the extent to which they are journeying towards complete liberation; and fulfilling God's calling for themselves and for others. As well as the extent to which they are hindered along the way. For the reader of this study, only you know the intensity of the actions you are prepared to take with regards to your own praxis, but as my Auntie Claudette says 'If you know better, then you av fe do better.' Whether you do or do not join me on this journey towards a place where we are all free to be different yet affirmed, heard and included, to repeat my late mother's saying, 'Yuh caan't se yuh never know!'

APPENDIX I: THE QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear Respondent,

RE: Teaching and Learning Survey

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this teaching and learning survey. I am a part-time PhD student at the University of Birmingham in the Dept. of Theology and Religion, supervised by Professor Martin Stringer. The findings of this survey will be analysed as part of my research, celebrating and articulating the teaching and learning values and approaches of marginalized sections of society, particularly regarding the balance between measurable (test results / performance reviews) and immeasurable (spiritual, social and emotional aspects) indicators of achievement and success.

Whether or not you consider yourself a teacher / learner / member of a marginalized group is not an issue. *All* responses are valuable sources of comparison and contrast with mainstream perspectives on teaching and learning, and will be treated as such. Indeed, if you have anything you would like to share which is not addressed in the questionnaire please include it in your response.

Furthermore, all responses will be treated in the strictest confidence with every attempt made to keep your anonymity. Moreover, if you indicate that you are happy for me to contact you, you will be consulted throughout the writing up process to scrutinise and if necessary edit your contribution, although you will not be obliged to contribute more than you feel able to do.

Finally, please do not hesitate to contact me if you would prefer a 1:1 interview or have any queries or comments to make about the survey or the research, on [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Thank you once again for agreeing to participate in this survey and I eagerly await your response.

Yours sincerely,

Maxine Howell

Teaching and Learning Survey

All responses are treated in the strictest confidence and you are free not to answer any questions or to change your answers at a later date provided you supply your contact details on this questionnaire.

Section 1: Background Information

1. Are you Male
 Female

2. Are you Under 25
 25 – 29
 30 – 39
 40 – 49
 50 – 59
 Over 60

3. Are you a member of a Black and minority ethnic group?

No

Yes – please specify _____

4. Were you born in another country?

No

Yes – please specify country and year immigrated

5. Were your parents / grandparents born in another country?

No

Yes – please specify country and date immigrated

6. Do you have a religious background?

No

Yes- Please specify denomination and commitment.

7. Where do you live? –please specify city and area _____

8. Do you

Own your home

Rent your home

Live with your parents

Other – please specify _____

9. How many people in your household? Please specify adults and dependants

10. Is your household income

Under £12,000

£12,000 to £19,000

£19,000 to £30,000

£30,000 to £40,000

£40,000 to £50,000

£50,000 to £100,000

Above £100,000

11. What is your occupation? _____

12. What experience and qualifications do you need for this occupation?

13. What experience and qualifications do you have not listed above?

14. How would you describe your family background

Two parent family

Single parent headed by father

Single parent headed by mother

Extended family (grand-parents etc. living with you)

Other - please specify _____

15. What are/ were your parents' occupations? _____

What experience and qualifications do/ did they need for this/these

occupation(s)? _____

16. What experience and qualifications did they have not listed above?

17. Any other information you want to share about your background please state it here. You may go on to another sheet.

Note teaching and learning is not restricted to professional practice but is viewed in the broadest sense. For example parents teaching their children, continuing professional development training, learning a new skill or hobby etcetera.

- a) Good teaching comes from good learning
- b) Your choice is to become a wise learner or refuse to learn and become a foolish failure
- c) It is important to keep God's commandments in your heart by teaching your children as part of daily living.
- d) A half truth is a whole lie
- e) You should gently instruct those who oppose your teaching.
- f) Children should be taught as part of daily living.
- g) Religion is an integral part of my life.
- h) I am more concerned about understanding, commitment and wholeness than tests, league tables and OFSTED
- i) I model my teaching style on Jesus even if it challenges the views of those in authority over me.
- j) Women should be silent in the church and not permitted to teach men.

Courteous patient gentle strict

[illegible]

4. What qualities within yourself, home, school and community do you believe are responsible for your achievements?

5. Which learning experiences have shaped your views on teaching the most? Give details such as recalling a specific teacher who encouraged you at school/college/university

6. How important is it to learn through observing others? Explain

7. Who is/are your role model(s)? Why?

8. To what extent are self-control, wisdom and discernment important to your teaching, learning and general living including religious/ spiritual life? Give illustrations

9. How important is it to tell learners the truth even if it will hurt them? Why?

10. In your experience what allows religion / faith to be an integral part of life? Give illustrations

11. In your opinion, who should be primarily responsible for teaching children and young people about faith? The Religious leaders / faith schools / family. Give reasons for your answer.

12. What are your concerns and how are they reflected in your views on teaching? E.g. you are concerned that the rights of children are respected. E.g. you are concerned that people can see God in a teacher's / your behaviour?

13. What are the debates you get involved in at work? Do they involve education or religion? Give illustrations. Or do you avoid debates? If so give reasons.

Section 3 – Other Information

14. When you attended school did you regularly complete your homework?
Give reasons.

15. What type of secondary school did you attend?

Comprehensive
Grammar School
Fee Paying Faith School
Grant Maintained
Academy
Independent
Public
Voluntary Aided –please specify religion e.g. RC

Other – please specify _____

16. What qualifications did you obtain at the end of your secondary education?

17. What qualifications have you obtained since then?

18. What extra-curricular activities did you participate in, including faith activities like church youth groups?

19. Do you know / understand the chain of events which made the presence of Black people in this country inevitable? Give details.

20. To whom do you consider yourself accountable?

Thank you for participating in this survey. If you would like to be consulted further about your responses and / or this research in general, please leave you contact information below.

Signed _____ Date _____

APPENDIX II: BREAKDOWN OF RESEARCH SAMPLE

Table I: Breakdown of sojourners

Pseudonym	Ethnicity	Nationality	Sex	Age Range During the Course of the Interviews	Social Class Grouping NS-SEC	Employment
Grace	Black British Caribbean	British	Female	24-36	2	Head of Inclusion-Secondary School
Rachel	Black British Caribbean	British	Female	33-40	2	Social Worker-Child Protection
Chayil	Black British Caribbean	British	Female	38-45	2	Deputy Head-Primary school
Mariet	Black British Caribbean	British	Female	44-50	1	PCT Commissioner
Samaria	Black Caribbean	Jamaican / British	Female	44- 51	8	Long-Term unemployed artist
Maxine*	Black Caribbean	British	Female	39-46	2	Special Needs Teacher

*Not a pseudonym

Table II: Breakdown of questionnaire respondents

Identifier	Ethnicity	Nationality	Sex	Age	Social Class Grouping NS-SEC	Employment
Pastor V*	White British	British	Female	59	1	Pastor (Pentecostal)
Teacher V	White British	British/Israeli	Female	50	2	Special Needs Teacher
Consultant W	White British	British	Female	41	1	Self-employed Research Consultant
Pastor X*	Black Caribbean / British	Guyanese/British	Male	45	1	Pastor (Pentecostal)
Pastor E	Black Caribbean	Jamaican/ British	Male	46	1	Pastor (7 TH Day Adventist)
Consultant Y	Black British	British	Male	46	1	Self-employed Educational Consultant
Teacher Y	Black British	British	Male	34	2	Secondary School Teacher
Parent X*	Black British / Caribbean	British / Jamaican	Female	36	1	Home educator/ Professional Engineer
Miss X*	Black British	British	Female	45	1	Head of a Supplementary School
Mrs Y	Black British	British	Female	43	2	Housing Officer

* Respondents who also participated in a follow-up interview

Table III: Breakdown of additional interview participants

Identifier	Ethnicity	Nationality	Sex	Age	Social Class Grouping NS-SEC	Employment
Director X	White British/ Welsh	British	Male	70+	1	Charitable Director
Service User 1	Black British	British	Female	49	2	Primary School Teacher
Service User 2	Black British	British	Female	37	2	Primary School Assistant Head Teacher

Table IV: Breakdown of significant individuals

Identifier	Ethnicity	Nationality	Sex	Age	Social Class Grouping NS-SEC	Employment
Pastor Y	Black British	British	Male	40-50	1	Bishop (Pentecostal)
EC	Black Caribbean	Jamaican/British	Female	50-60	2	Home School Liaison Officer
LC	White British	British	Female	30-40	2	Key Stage 2 Coordinator
SC	White British	British	Male	40-50	1	Head Teacher – Primary School
HN	Black Caribbean	British	Male	20-30	Don't Know	Don't Know

Table V: Breakdown of significant organisations

Identifier	Ethnicity of Organisers	Clients' Ethnicity	Clients' Sex	Clients' Age	Employment / Business
BLESS Teachers	Black British/Caribbean	Black British/Caribbean	Female / Male	20-50	Non-profit making Black - led educational support service
Martha's Well	Mixed: White/Black Caribbean /African/Asian	Mixed White/Black Caribbean /African/Asian	Female	13+	Charity - women's well-being
Speak Out Sisters (SOS)	Mixed: White/Black Caribbean /African/Asian	Mixed White/Black Caribbean /African/Asian	Female	13-18	Mentoring wing of above charity
The Shallow Whale Primary School	Majority White leadership(83%) & class teachers (69%) and a few Asian (19%) and African-Caribbean (12%) class teachers	Majority Asian (Indian & Pakistani) followed by Black Caribbean then a few White pupils	Female / Male	3-11	State education
Black Lads Succeed (BLS)	Black Caribbean/African men and women	Black Caribbean/African	Male	18 and under	Mentoring franchise for young men and boys
Empowerment Network For Communities (ENC)	Mixed: White/Black Caribbean /African	Black Caribbean/African and Mixed	Female /Male	5+ (includes parents and their children)	Charity – education advocacy group for the socially excluded
Kwame	Black British /Caribbean/African		Male	18 and under	Charity – mentoring for boys of African descent

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