BLACK WOMEN EQUITY EDUCATORS' JOURNEY FROM THE LOOPHOLE TO THE HOMEPLACE:

A KWIK! KWAK! APPROACH

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Abstract

Black women engage in equity related roles and responsibilities in K-12 educational institutions in hopes of generating liberatory outcomes for students and staff. This research project explicates the relationship between equity work as care work and the racial and gendered injury it produces for Black women equity educators. I draw on Black feminist thought, endarkened epistemology, Afrocentric thought and a Creative Afro-Feminist Methodology (CAFM) to understand the experiences of Black women equity educators and the mechanisms that support their movement from the loophole of retreat to bell hooks' notion of the homeplace–a place of activism with care. Stories from eight Black women K-12 equity educators were shared through arts-based focus group sessions (one in-person held in October 2024 and one online in January 2025) and hour-long one-on-one interviews. My analysis is largely based on Stephanie Toliver's storywork analysis where three storythreads emerged; Black loss calls for Black women life-making, the rematriation of Afrocentric practices support wellbeing, and Black women K-12 equity educators have complex relationships to racist and gendered tropes. The storythreads also reveal the three stages of awareness that support Black women in moving towards equity work within the shelter of the homeplace; awareness of oppression, awareness of distorted identities, and the awareness of sites of recovery. The recommendations ask for Ministries of Education, school boards, schools, and colleagues, to work alongside Black women educators as sponsors of homeplaces adjacent to or within the institutions that employ them.

Acknowledgements

I dedicate this dissertation to the women in my family who have cared for people (both near and far), the places we call home, and the stories that bring us back. Namely, I would like to thank Ma Bessie, my great-grandmother. Though she is not in the physical world today she has been guiding my hand, my steps, my mind, and my heart throughout my life. She is a co-creator throughout this dissertation and gave me so much strength to keep on going when I thought I could not see my way through. There is a picture of her that sits in front of my computer screen that is a constant reminder of how Black women often move in this world. She is walking a path in the woods. The trees and bushes around her seem to frame and hug her from all sides. She wears a loose simple dress that is held together with a rope tied around her waist in place of a belt. In one hand she carries a long staff for support on the rock and branch fallen path. In the other hand she has a big cutlass—a long thick sword-looking knife that is used to cut down the brush that blocks the path to the garden (the mountain top areas she would go to harvest her root starches like yam, dasheen, and cut down banana trees and sugar cane). This picture holds both vulnerability and strength in it and this is why it stands as a reminder for the ways Black women move in the world. Unfortunately, it is our strength that is highlighted. The staff we need to lean on for support is not always visible but the need for it is there.



Figure 1: Ma Bessie



Figure 2: Emelda Petrolina Bruney

As a 7-year-old new immigrant to Canada I watched my mother, Emelda Petrolina Bruney, spend countless hours a week taking care of the elderly, the young, cleaning the homes of the wealthy, and cooking meals for the privileged. At night she attended school. She carved out weekends for me that were filled

with root beer floats at Baskin Robbins and Saturday nights tending to my hair. I never saw her take time for herself. Yet I never heard my mother complain. I used to say this as a source of pride. I do not see it this way anymore. The reason why my mother never spoke of the strain, abuse, and isolation of the work is because she could not show vulnerability. She had to maintain an air of strength to show she was appreciative and deserving of the opportunity to work in Canada. This dissertation is an effort to return the staff of support to her and all women who are saddled with work without care.

I witnessed equity work without care throughout my teaching career. I watched as women of colour sacrificed leisure, ease, and pleasure to tend to transforming the spaces within schools and school boards. I also dedicate this work to them. In particular this dissertation is dedicated to the 8 participants who joined me on this journey: Audre, Alexis, Marguerite, Ardelia, Zorah, Gloria, Cynthia, and Pauline. In this dissertation you bear the names of Black women like yourself who dared to speak truth to power, embraced vulnerability, and inspired women across space and time. Thank you for trusting me throughout this process. A sincere thanks to Queen, artist extraordinaire, who joined the project with generosity and flexibility. Your work is truly inspiring.

I thank my colleagues Sonia Lewis and Monica Tang and the All About Love group for their friendship throughout the doctoral program. I want to express a big thanks to my dear friend and "podchat" co-host Sonia Martin. You have been walking with me on this journey from the first day. We have shared our thinking, written together, and navigated tricky times. I treasure our friendship. Thank you to Munjeera Phillips who dragged me kicking and screaming to apply for the PhD program. A great many thanks to my Black Womxn PhD group, in particular Patrice Allen, Shaunasea Brown, Debbie Ebanks, Emilie Jabouin, Jordanne Amos, and Catherine Grant-

Wata. When I couldn't find my way, you all picked me up and set me on my feet again. You revived my faith in community.

I want to thank my committee in order of when they joined me on this long journey that began before my entry into the PhD program. This is the true beginning of this project and thinking that supported the dissertation. Dr. Vidya Shah, my co-supervisor who from the very beginning of my graduate studies has been a steadfast support and shown me that academic work is a spiritual pursuit. Dr. Shah has given me opportunities to see the potential within my work and scholarship and for this I am especially grateful. Even though Dr. Shah does not describe herself as an artist, I have always felt seen by her in a way that most artists desire. Dr. Jen Gilbert, my master's supervisor, has been an especially important mentor and guide. Her support has been unwavering and reflective of someone who sees where you are heading even before you can see the way. She was the first one to point me in the direction of doctoral studies. Her constant encouragement and honest feedback with my writing has been especially important to me. Dr. Molade Osibodu's support and early interest in my work validated the often-overlooked parts of my scholarship. She encouraged me to regard my artist-scholarship as something worth developing and showed me the possibilities with artistic research which sent me on a journey that continues to this day. I am so grateful that she joined the committee as my co-supervisor as her encouragement has been instrumental. Dr. Stephanie Fearon's work as an arts-based researcher emboldened me to feel at home in the faculty. Her recent arrival into the faculty signaled for me an entry that was missing but provided a lot of hope. This gave me the reassurance to continue to develop my artistic scholarship steeped in Afro-Caribbean ways of knowing and being. Her support through this dissertation helped me center Afro-

Caribbean/Black women's scholarship. I am grateful to this committee for their ability to push through challenging times all the while reminding me that this path is possible.

Finally, and most importantly, I extend thanks to my four children, Cohen, Kiran, Hannah, and Ella-Shilloh who have watched my life, and more importantly theirs, transform over the last 5 years. I wish for all of you the opportunity to dream again and again.

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Epigraph

"Our language is a system constructed by people constantly needing to insist that we exist, that we are present. Our language devolves from a culture that abhors all abstraction, or anything tending to obscure or delete the fact of the human being who is here and now/the truth of the person who is speaking or listening…The assumption of the presence of life governs all of Black English…every sentence assumes the living and active participation of at least two human beings, the speaker and the listener" (Jordan, 1985, p. 129).

Dear Moun Ki Konnet,

This dissertation is designed as a practice in layering and weaving stories, ideas, and people while taking the form of the storytelling practice of Kwik! Kwak! to address the research question: How do Black women equity educators move from The Loophole of Retreat, a small enclosure of liberation within equity, diversity, and inclusion workspaces, to The Homeplace–a place of activism with care? As a Kwik! Kwak! researcher I draw on collaborative storytelling practices that invite you, the reader, into a form of co-creation with me.

Kwik! Kwak! is a traditional Afro-Caribbean proverbial storytelling practice that values co-creation. Antonia MacDonald-Smythe, a professor of Caribbean women writers and folklore studies reminds us that Kwik! Kwak! is a practice that invites continuous storytelling that produces transformation (2012, p. 2). She explains that this "folkloric tradition…is both a repetition and a metamorphosis" (MacDonald-Smythe, 2012, p. 2). The metamorphosis unfolds as the retelling of the past unfolds—a way of bringing the past, present, and future together. Novelists such as Jamaica Kincaid and Michelle Cliff are just a few Caribbean women who belong to this tradition of storytelling where the past is invoked for the benefit of the community (MacDonald-Smythe, 2012, p. 3). Although my experience with this storytelling tradition is oral in nature the elements are similar. Both written and oral storytelling in this style rely on the participation of the audience.

The storyteller (griot) begins by sending out a call that gathers the community—moun ki konnet. I have decided to refer to people who would typically be called the audience and participants in this research study as moun ki konnet. This translates to "people who know" in Kweyol. In conjuring tradition people say "Black women be knowing" to emphasize the wisdom that comes with their experience. I use this term because the storyteller is aware that people

come to the storytelling with knowledge of their own. Some believe that the Kwik! Kwak! storytellers are the knowledge holders and tellers. I believe that they are the story awakeners. They awaken the knowledge within the moun ki konnet through engagement that honours ways of knowing that are driven with curiosity and creativity. They bring it to the surface for the moun ki konnet to recognize within themselves. Transtemporal co-creation between storytellers of the physical, spiritual worlds and the moun ki konnet is key to knowledge building across time and through community. Through co-creation the community receives important information that supports their construction of survival efforts that is stored and passed on through storytelling.

The late Malidoma Somé often speaks about the role of stories in Indigenous African communities. He explains that stories are rituals that boost the imagination of the community, so they can locate themselves, connect to ancestral knowledge/experience, recognize present day challenges, and support re-envisioning for the future. As Somé (1999) points out "As we enter a story, we are invited to join that which in the story is the closest extension of who we are and the process we are involved with…The healing dimension of this story is the revelation of where one is in the story" (p. 253). I come from this tradition of healing and I am inviting you, moun ki konnet to locate yourselves through the process of storying and storytelling.

In addition to keeping a journal from the age of 9 to writing short stories all throughout my life, I was never aware that the need to story came from an ancestral place. Storying to me had been a private world where I could make sense of the world outside myself. I did not know that my great-grandmother, Ma Bessie, was responsible for telling the stories in our village of MaBouché on the Island of Wai'tukubuli (Dominica). My mother tells me that on my father's side of the family, women were the ones to tell the stories. Stories would be passed down from woman to woman. This meant that if I had not left the island, I might have inherited this role

physically from my great-grandmother.[1] Instead I went through a spiritual process where I was made aware of the call to take up storytelling beyond the private spaces they lived in.

Before I started graduate school, I was in the middle of a storytelling project that explored displacement, voice reclamation and ancestral knowledge. After writing the story I sought out a Kweyol storyteller to perform it. When the storyteller found out that my great-grandmother was the storyteller in our village, she was adamant that I take up my role as a storyteller. I explained that I often stutter, and this prevents me from taking up the role. When I shared this with my mother, she explained that my great-grandmother stuttered severely but still took on her storytelling role. I spent the next year in weekly voice reclamation lessons with a Roy Hart voice coach. This work helped me access my own voice while connecting to the collective energy of the ancestors' voices that I found within me. This is the reason why I regard Ma Bessie as a co-creator with me throughout my life and in this doctoral project. My great-grandmother's role as a griot is an energetic gift that resides within me that I must protect and honour.

I begin my dissertation with stories in a similar way Ma Bessie began hers. To begin these storytelling gatherings, my grandmother had to wait for an invitation from Moon. Moon signaled that stories could begin when she hung full and bright in the sky. The gathering that held the stories began, continued, and ended with various invitations. Moon's full light—the first invitation—haloed the faces and surroundings of those in MaBouché. The second invite was the call that my great-grandmother sent out all around her. She would call "Kwik!" and wait for her sound to be returned to her in the form of "Kwak!" from those that lived around her. She

[1] The stories were what Western Eurocentric societies might consider to be riddles and proverbs. However, the tradition of storying and storytelling did not concern themselves with simply finding the right answer. In fact, most Kwik! Kwak! stories are not posed as questions: they are statements that you answer in a similar way to how a question is stated. You will find an example of Kwik! Kwak! throughout this dissertation.

repeated this call many times until this echolocation practice culminated in a yard full of the sound “Kwak!” People made their way and found a place around her door. They brought with them a desire to collaborate with the sharing of food and stories. The mangoes full of scent that made nostrils bloom and newly roasted sweet cashews would be passed around. I imagine that there must have been some tablet (a sweet treat made with grated coconut-left over from coconut milk, and sugar), and maybe some warm baked bread prepared for the late-night meal many had before bed. I imagine that my great-grandmother sat with her slender frame filling the small doorway. Her skirt must have draped like curtains between her legs that sat wide. Her head was probably tied in the bright plaid tete-cassé she usually wore, and her pipe waiting to be lit swooped from her wrinkled lips. I imagine her striking a match with her hands and lifting the fire to her mouth drawing air through the pipe and into her lungs. I imagine the sweet smoky smell of the pipe and the faces held aglow by Moon doing their own readying and prepping. I imagine the babies big enough to walk, drawing the last of the day’s milk from the deflated breast of their mothers. I imagine children who had not yet settled running, circling the gathering with their teetering steps. I imagine men whose hats still rested on sweat-crusted hair leaning against whatever they could find to hold them.

Everyone receiving the invitation to gather waited for another invitation—the invitation to co-create, which arrived with more practices of echolocation. When no more steps could be heard searching for a place in the yard and bodies were readied, Ma Bessie would call out again with her smoke-filled mouth, “Kwik!” and the yard would bounce, returning the sound back to her, “Kwak!” They would go back and forth several times until she felt she had gained the listeners’ consent to begin and thus gaining their consent to also co-create with her in the ritual

of storying and storytelling. Though Ma Bessie hosted the Kwik! Kwak!, others were invited to share Kwik! Kwak! they knew.

One of my favourite Kwik! Kwak! stories from the small collection I have found echoes this theme of invitation and co-creation. Like most Kwik! Kwak! the response gives you pause and invites wondering. Kwik! Kwak! leaves you with questions and loose connections. You are invited to make connections between two things that appear at first to have little to do with each other. You are forced to engage in the practices that involve your imagination and the locating of ancestral and present-day experiences and knowledge. You are invited to story—to storying. I invite you to engage and co-create below:

Kwik (read)

Kwak (say out loud)

Kwik (read)

Kwak (say out loud)

Kwik (read)

Kwak (say out loud)

Gadé mwen ou tuo mwen ka vini (read) *(Look at me, to you I am coming)*

Kwik (read)

Kwak (say out loud)

Gadé mwen ou tuo mwen ka vini (read) *(Look at me, to you I am coming)*

Lapòt? (say out loud) *(The door)*

Oui! Lapòt! (read) *(Yes! The door)*

The door, a symbol of enclosure and invitation is a great symbol to begin this dissertation, because storying with Kwik! Kwak! is about invitation, gathering, and co-creation.

More than that, storying is also about initiation—initiation into community. Through co-creation, one can enter into the ritual of initiation that storytelling through Kwik! Kwak! offers. By accepting an invitation to join in the echolocation practices of storytelling, a pathway for initiation into community is created. This form of initiation is about receiving the invitation to enter into a community of practice, people, and spirit. I invite you into this journey through my doctoral project and this dissertation that follows this path—from invitation, to co-creation, and finally to initiation into community through the practice of storying and storytelling. As you read you will come across a Kwik! Kwak! as a way to signal both an invitation and an opportunity for co-creation.

Take this invitation to become aware of your engagement as a response to the Kwik! You are invited to respond through wondering and wandering alongside the dissertation as you read to unravel the texts that are layered within. Proverbial storytelling requires call-response practices because they emphasize knowledge sharing and building through participation. The participation comes in the form of curious engagement that often requires creative inquiry. You are invited to wrestle with words, ideas, and forms that are not laid out with the clarity that a strict reliance on knowability brings. Take up your curious nature that drives you through uncertainty and participate in the call. I encourage you to consider your response through embodied (creative) engagement (Shah, 2024 in conversation). This engagement could take the form of doodling, diagraming, journaling or other practices that are familiar to you as you read.

Along the way, you might feel some discomfort with the quantity and variety of stories, theories, scholars, ideas, and methods that I hope will be read as a woven piece of Madras cloth that holds complexity and encourages curiosity. My hope is that you come to regard this layering and weaving as meaning making practices that emphasize connection. More than that, this type

of layering and weaving support us in resisting simplifying Black experiences. Approaching Black life this way demands a gaze that respects that Black life is constantly unfolding rather than captured or known. As a Kweyol woman I grew up seeing the Madras cloth as a symbol of my identity that is made up of many peoples and languages coming together to form something new. In this way the Madras cloth has become another symbol that exemplifies the layering and weaving aesthetic. Madras textiles appear to be plaid, but they do not always repeat in the way plaid does. They are cloths that have intersecting lines, checks, and colours that appear random but beautiful. To the outsider the lines and colours may reveal a chaotic and unruly nature. I hope the layering and weaving that is reminiscent of the Madras cloth support you in maintaining a position of curiosity and creative engagement that does not rely on knowability alone.

Bettina Judd (2023) an artist-scholar who studies gender and sexuality asserts that the structures that are within the form of academic writing are there to meet the needs of an institution that relies heavily on rigor and knowability. “In expository propositional prose we can control the chaos of the world, ordering it with diagrams, outlines, and a concluding chapter so that we are at once comforted in the feeling of having known a thing and having struggled to learn that thing” (Judd, 2023, p. 74). Though I employ diagrams and chapters I want them to be read as an invitation to gather with a community of ideas and people held together with Spirit. Spirit requires a way of being that “honors principles of inter-being and interconnectedness” (Dillard, 2006, p. 77).

My invitation to you is to become curious about the ways ideas, theorists, and theories connect that help us to see our shared role in new world building. I am not devaluing knowability through this dissertation and my doctoral project at large. Through this dissertation I want to make the distinction between knowing as a dynamic, transtemporal and co-creative activity and

knowing as a form of capture—a finite activity. My dissertation is academic work that confronts the preference for knowability while recognizing the work I am doing as spirit work that began with my ancestors. A process that embraces the value for emergent strategies[2] that seek to honour a lineage of ideas while creating the necessary conditions for the evolution of ideas. My dissertation has a life beyond this moment in time, and asks you to lean into your role in supporting the evolution of this life rather than knowing it to the point of death. Pauline Alexis Gumbs, a Black feminist scholar uses knowledge of marine mammals to challenge our reliance on knowability. She argues that knowability has often been a form of social and physical death for Black people. I open the door to the dissertation with her words:

> And all my love to you who preserve the mysteries. Whom the empire of binaries will never define. All of you who love with a depth beyond recognition, nurturing freedom over understandability, valuing life as so much more important than simple comprehension. Thank you. Thank you for loving me without even knowing what on Earth I am. (Gumbs, 2022, p. 110)

Sincerely,

Myrtle Sodhi

[2] adrienne maree brown (2017) is an author and activist that explores emergent strategies that are necessary to create change. She identifies several strategies that are meant to reorient our thinking around change that combines science and creativity. Her attention to biomimicry as models for ways of being together inspires me to approach academic work that emphasises process with a specific attention to relationships that supports liberatory outcomes. For example, brown (2017) draws on the knowledge of mycelium to inspire a renewed focus on the interconnectedness, ferns to emphasize the need to focus on small scale solutions, ants that remind us of the power of collective action, and the wavicle that teaches us to embrace both the process and the outcome (p. 45).

Chapter 1: Kwik! Gadé Mwen *(Look at me)*

The purpose of this doctoral study is to theorize how Black women educators performing equity work can move from the loophole of retreat to the homeplace, a place with activism with care. The dissertation is divided in 3 parts that correspond to the elements of the Kwik! Kwak! storytelling practice:

1. The Invite: "Kwik!: Gadé Mwen (Look at me)", where you the reader are invited to locate yourself within the stories that take place in the Loophole of Retreat (chapter 1), the literature reviews and historical analysis (chapter 2) that trace the relationship between Black women and labour experiences.
2. The Co-Creation: "Kwak", the response to the experiences of the Loophole of Retreat (chapters 3 and 4)—where the theoretical frameworks, methodology, and methods are housed. Chapter 5 continues as a response that is heard through the voices of the moun ki konnet as they take part in the home-raising journey[3]. You will be introduced to the storythreads that reveal the way Black women educators moved from the loophole of "retreat" to the homeplace. In chapter 6 the response continues with the discussion and implications for the three storythreads. This section of the dissertation closes with another response that is heard in chapter 7 with the conjured conversations between Black women scholars and myself where the viability of a homeplace is further examined.

[3] This title takes from the term "barn raising" where a community gathered with various expertise to build a barn as a collective. As most of my knowledge of barn raising comes from the colonial context I use this word to emphasize the collective knowledge building that takes place while being aware that this term is not without complexity and a history of harm where Indigenous land was stolen to make space for the barns that were raised on land that Indigenous people cared for and received care and nourishment from. I seek to offer something different to this notion of *raising* that centers the awareness of harm while constructing practices of care and liberation.

3. The Initiation “Pasé’y *(Pass it on)*” (chapter 8), represent the conclusion that is not an end but a way to pass on the knowledge that has been gathered and shared. The “pass it on” is in the form of recommendations that will inspire change with our “good colleagues” to support the viability of a homeplace.

Kwik (read)

Kwak (say out loud)

Kwik (read)

Kwak (say out loud)

Kwik (read)

Kwak (say out loud)

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Lapòt? (say out loud) *(the door)*

Oui! Lapòt! (read) *(Yes! The door)*

In the first of the stories I will tell, I begin with an invitation. This invitation welcomes you into the practice of storying with me—similar to the ways Ma Bessie invited her community into storying with her. I use the pronoun “you” in the initial story to further support you in locating yourself within the story. (I will switch to first person after that as a way to locate myself in the doctoral project at large.) Locating yourself within this initial story and the ones that follow asks you to be led by curiosity and imagination. I am inviting you to find the ways the story speaks to a present-day phenomenon. Consider the role you are being asked to fill.

What is this role asking of you? It may be challenging if you are not a Black woman to locate yourself in the story below. Your location is still available, however. It is up to you to discover where you are located and how you find that location. Let us begin.

Kwik (read)

Kwak (say out loud)

Kwik (read)

Kwak (say out loud)

Kwik (read)

Kwak (say out loud

The year is 2017. The feeling in the air is hopeful. The board you worked for the past 17 years has decided to address issues of racism and oppression directly. You have just been promoted by your school board into a central staff role that supports this work. This means you will be working with teachers, the administration, and students to create change in schools. When you arrive, no one knows exactly what you do. The mostly white educators and administrators ask you time and time again to explain what your role is. You explain that you work with schools to improve outcomes for middle school students in math and language with an equity lens. You offer your formal job title: Itinerant Student Success Transitions Counsellor. The title is absurd. It says nothing of your actual role. It, in itself, is another barrier. The school board drops a letter and turns your job title into an acronym: you are now an SSTC. Your job title, like yourself, is too much and not enough at the same time. You have lived this paradox of being too much and not enough at the same time, so you know the way. Initially, you avoid the words race, Black, racism and especially systemic racism, because they are too much. Everyone shuffles around you and those words to avoid contact.

Go back now to the first time you met your team—the other SSTCs doing the same work as you but in different schools. When you arrive at your first meeting you notice that most of you are Black and Brown. A stark contrast to the other groups of centralized staff who are mostly white. You soon begin to feel two things at once: gratitude that the board is doing something to address an issue most of you experienced as students and later as educators, but you also feel that this assignment is a target. You begin to feel that you are in the way of what people aim at and want to miss. People want to appear progressive and responsive to the diversity movement, but they also do not want to deal with the "messiness" that accompanies this type of work. The messiness involves a process of self-reflexivity which requires action they may not be ready to take.

Fast forward now to one of your early visits to one of your assigned schools. You are shown to your office directly beside the vice-principal's office. You turn on the computer to print the EQAO data, School Improvement Plans, and other documents the principal has shared with you. You pull out the files that hold the classroom schedules to plan out which classrooms you need to visit and in what order. You begin to arrange the set of files within file folders in the desktop organizer. The vice-principal knocks on your door frame, she says you need to move to another room—this room you are currently in is needed for the psychologist who comes once a week. So, you pack up, follow them down the hall to a back office tucked away from everything and everyone else. You unpack again and prepare to set up the room. After some time, you are interrupted by the familiar knock– the social worker who comes once a week needs the room you are in. This time you are given the option of a storage room that once you enter you are made to move around the big garbage pail that is collecting water from the leaky roof. This space is filled with stacked desks, old textbooks, and other supplies teachers do not want in their

classrooms. You explain to the vice-principal that you cannot work in the room because of the leaky roof. You are directed into your final resting place. A passthrough between two rooms. On each side of the room is a door connecting a classroom to the space. Students frequently walk through. You notice an abundance of textbooks, paper, and garbage left on the shelves and in the cupboards. You are told this is all they have to offer you. The table and chairs are too small—even for the middle-school students you work with. There is no computer, printer, phone, or supplies. The vice-principal mentions that this room is also used as a lunchroom for some staff and that is when you notice the microwave. Once again, you begin to feel that you are in the way of what people aim at and want to miss. You are an inconvenience that people want to get around. Your office space is one of the initial reminders of the inconvenience you, your body and your work represent and the displacement that has marked Black experiences for centuries.

Kwik (read)

Kwak (say out loud)

Kwik (read)

Kwak (say out loud)

Kwik (read)

Kwak (say out loud)

Gadé mwen ou tuo mwen ka vini (read) *(Look at me, to you I am coming)*

Lapòt? (say out loud) *(the door)*

Oui! Lapòt! (read) *(Yes! The door)*

You decide to make things work and get busy getting to know the students and staff. You tread carefully around the words no one wants you to say because you are aware that bringing up certain words will create a barrier that will be difficult to move around. You start to mobilize the

Black students who are feeling alienated and disenfranchised. You begin by building capacity with them to the point where you are finding ways to support them in advocating for their desire to claim an equitable education. You guide them as they work on school wide student led projects. It is announced that the superintendent will be coming to see the work you have been doing with the students. You share the news with the students, and they are both nervous and thrilled. You are too.

During the visit and the event that was the culmination of your work with the students, you notice that the superintendent has not been introduced to you. You notice that the vice-principal has taken a central role in introducing the key people to each other—the students, the guest speaker you arranged, and the superintendent. You are left out completely. Initially you are okay with it because you truly wanted the students to lead—it was your efforts on building capacity that were showing, and you were proud. As you watch group pictures being taken, a student calls out to you to join in. The vice-principal echoes this invitation. You slip away as soon as the pictures are done and start to clean up as you know the bell is about to ring. You know that you and the vice-principal will have to have a conversation, because not once was it mentioned that you were responsible for this work. In the omission, she took possession. You felt your throat itch from the insides and decided to save those thoughts for later.

The following week you ask to meet with the vice-principal. You want to receive acknowledgement that your work was stolen, and your intellectual property ransacked. You invite her into the passthrough office space. You sit across from her, your knees hitting the top of the short table. She sits with her phone in one hand and a Starbucks coffee mug in the other. The lanyard that swung from her neck has settled reluctantly against her as she eases her way onto the too small chair. You feel some satisfaction in her discomfort.

You begin by apologizing for the location which immediately felt ridiculous as she was the one who moved you into this space. While you are speaking, you hear your voice fade as the door on one side opens. A pair of students walk through and head to the other door leaving it open as they settle into the classroom. You reach over and close the door.

You start again, by explaining how upsetting it was that she had taken credit for the work you were doing with the students. You explain that the most challenging part of the situation was that this was equity work done by yourself, a Black woman, that a white person (herself) has taken credit for. You retell the frustration of having to stand by, as you again, witness the theft of your intellectual property when you see pictures have been shared on social media—documenting and advertising the work "we are doing".

While you speak, you search her face for some recognition of the truths you had spoken. You scan the corners of her mouth for some indication of remorse that she must have felt. Without delay her words tumble out towards you in the way you have become too familiar with hearing:

"I learn so much from you".

"This is why I like working with you".

"I've been reading these books about equity".

"I think I mentioned that this is part of my portfolio. I'm trying to move up".

Your teeth scrape against your bottom lip. Your stomach folds into itself and you watch as she looks at her phone and then her watch. She makes the long rise to stand, and you sit looking up from the childlike chair waiting for the corners of her mouth to spill again. Your voice passes through your throat as if passing through a very small straw and a bye presses through. You stroke your throat, and you feel the smooth touch of your skin on the outside and

the sharp needles of pain on the inside. With each stroke of your hand against your throat, you are forced to recall the things you did not say. You remembered that you were hired by a school board to remove barriers of oppression for students, and in the process, you encounter the same barriers you are trying to dismantle.

Kwik (read)

Kwak (say out loud)

Kwik (read)

Kwak (say out loud)

Kwik (read)

Kwak (say out loud)

Gadé mwen ou tuo mwen ka vini (read) *(Look at me, to you I am coming)*

Lapòt? (say out loud) *(the door)*

Oui! Lapòt! (read) *(Yes! The door)*

Five years later, as a doctoral candidate, I again find myself confronted with issues relating to space, belonging, and extractive relationships in equity related work. The experiences of central staff working in an equity focused role shaped my desire to understand the impact of equity related work on Black women educators. As a central staff with an informal equity role attached to my job I saw the ways Black and Brown women experienced harm through this work. I saw how this harm was shaped by spaces that were inadequate in both their ability to generate a feeling of welcome and provide protection. It was the experiences in these spaces that stood as a light in the distance beckoning me forward.

Through the doctoral project, space, belonging, and protection in equity work continued to be a preoccupation of mine. As a result, the space I invited Black women equity educators into

for the in-person focus group session pressed heavily on my mind. Queen, a local artist, secured a glorious space on the campus of Toronto Metropolitan University for us. I had invited Queen to support the project with the portraits that would come from the multi-modal storying the moun ki konnet took part in.

The five moun ki konnet who joined the in-person session spent 4 hours in a focus group where they engaged with various art practices such as digital portraiture, collaging, and gazework. They used these multi-modal storying practices to explore their experiences with equity work. The other three moun ki konnet who joined the online session also engaged in the multi-modal storying that allowed them to share their experiences with equity work as Black women equity educators. There were a total of eight moun ki konnet who were a part of the project.

A significant number of the moun ki konnet worked at the board level in leadership roles where they supported several schools. The others worked as administrators within schools, while a small group worked in classrooms embedding equity informally in their roles within the school. Marguerite is a classroom teacher who worked for a large school board in Ontario. Audre and Ardelia both worked for catholic boards in Ontario. Audre held a classroom role with leadership responsibilities whereas Ardelia held a leadership role outside of the school. Zorah and Gloria worked as central staff for a large school board in Ontario. Alexis, Cynthia, and Pauline were the three online participants. Pauline had extensive experience working in public education as a classroom teacher. At the time of the project she was working in the private sector. Alexis worked for a large school board in a central role. Cynthia did not disclose her current position but spoke about her experiences as a classroom teacher. I felt their stories land in

the spaces they shared between each other amongst my stories and the stories of other Black women doing equity work for school boards.



Figure 3: The Moun Ki Konnet

The moun ki konnet stories became part of the layers of stories that weave together to reveal the experiences of Black women conducting equity work. Though all the women in the project identified as Black my hope is that their experiences and stories will be read through a lens that honours the complexity African diasporic and African women require. A key feature of diasporic studies is to resist binary understandings of the self, culture and knowledge where blackness is only read as the other (Clark, 2009). The late Vévé Clark (2009), was a professor of African studies and coined the term diasporic literacies as an approach to reading and critiquing Black literature. She defined diaspora literacy as "the reader's ability to comprehend the literatures of Africa, Afro-America, and the Caribbean from an informed indigenous perspective" (p. 11). Clark's (2009) diaspora literacy asks readers to read the literature of African

diasporic people through a lens that decenters a Eurocentric framing of Black literature and blackness (p. 11). African people (both from continental Africa and the diaspora) require a way to be read that resists the urge to simplify and essentialize their experiences. I am asking for and maintaining a reading of blackness that subscribes to a diasporic reading. A diasporic reading of blackness is concerned with specificity that demands a close reading of language, culture, and identity (Clark, 2009, p. 11). The moun ki konnets stories and the analysis of the stories will be approached through this type of diasporic reading that acknowledges the various movements that shape their individual and collective experiences in ways that allow them to come together and come apart—this is a key characteristic of the madras textile I spoke of earlier. Though the experiences of the moun ki konnet are shared I want them to be read through a lens that honours complexity and diversity. I want to approach their stories understanding that they need to be read and analyzed in a way that not only looks for what brings them together but also what requires a close reading that reveals what set them apart from each other.

This chapter began with my stories and will move into the stories of women in Canada and their engagement with equity work as well as how they are positioned within labour experiences that strengthen distorted versions of their identities. I invite you to locate yourself again through the practice of storying to further explore the relationship to equity work, the education sector, and Black women's identity. The next story is written in a poetic form in the shape of a box demonstrates how Black women performing equity work become trapped in the loophole of "retreat" through the distortion of their identity. It is a story about an experience I had when I witnessed where a Black equity leader became characterized as the sapphire.

Kwik (read)

Kwak (say out loud)

Kwik (read)

Kwak (say out loud)

Kwik (read)

Kwak (say out loud)

Gadé mwen ou tuo mwen ka vini (read) *(Look at me, to you I am coming)*

Kwik (read)

Kwak (say out loud)

Gadé mwen ou tuo mwen ka vini (read) *(Look at me, to you I am coming)*

Lapòt? (say out loud) *(The door)*

Oui! Lapòt! (read) *(Yes! The door)*

Your phone is a hot stream that you can't lay down:

"We are here to talk about anti-Black racism, but you in your whiteness think that you can tell me what's really going on for Black people?"

She

Kike Ojo-Thompson

Bully

Sapphire

Denigrating

Sapphire

Drove

Him

Beloved

Gifted

Principal

Race Fighter

To Suicide.

Sapphire

A Tragedy

“She

is tart-tongued

And emasculating

One hand

on a hip

Angry Black Woman

And the other

pointing and jabbing

She is a shrill nagger

With irrational states

of anger

Crazy Black Bitch

And

Indignation…

…indignant

And abusive.

Crazy Black Bitch

She is smart tongued

And emasculating

A shrill nagger"[4]

You

are now tasked

With expressing care

And concern

For a tragedy

Whose blame

Is now your own.

The Headlines Mount:

Anti-racism trainer accused of denigrating Toronto principal who died by suicide welcomes review

https://globalnews.ca/news/9863376/anti-racism-trainer-accused-denigrating-toronto-principal/

Sapphire

DEI trainer is hired by Canadian school board to give lectures on 'disrupting racism' despite being accused of driving beloved gay principal to suicide by bullying him for challenging her

https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-12656723/DEI-trainer-Richard-Bilkszto-Canadian-Kike-Ojo-Thompson.html

Sapphire

[4] (Pilgram, 2008)

Principal berated for ‘white supremacy’ sues TDSB over equity training

https://nationalpost.com/opinion/principal-berated-for-white-supremacy-sues-tdsb-over-equity-training

Sapphire

DEI trainers can’t play victim after building careers on race shaming

https://nationalpost.com/opinion/jamie-sarkonak-dei-trainers-cant-play-victim-after-building-careers-on-race-shaming

Sapphire

You had known this was coming. Since your early days of working as an SSTC (Student Success Transitions Counsellor). You had often questioned how safe this work was for the many Black and Brown women who do it. The resistance you met to your work and the care that was missing from your labour both called for a way through with care. With your hand raised you would ask how you should address the harm you encountered through equity work. Sassy Mammy Your wilful hands dropped. Your position in the loophole established. Sassy Mammy Your work is to nurture, raise up, and discipline your own. Sassy Mammy.

“We are here to talk about anti-Black racism, but you in your whiteness you think that you can tell me what's really going on for Black people?”

Your position in the loophole established. Sassy Mammy Your work is to nurture, raise up, and discipline your own. Sassy Mammy.

Passé’y (Pass it on)

Through Kike Ojo Thompson's story it is clear how Black women's activism is labelled as institutional social/house-work in ways that can be operationalized against them. Annette Henry (1992), a Canadian professor whose work explores race, gender, sexuality, and social justice, examines the work that Black women educators perform in a way that is useful to the discussion on identity and liberatory movements. Through her work I understood the motivation to take part in liberatory work despite the backlash that frequently accompanied it. Henry (1992) asserts that classroom activism is a common and long held response that Black women have had to the failures of the system to meet the needs of the Black community (p. 395): "The relationship between classroom teaching, family life, and community service is a symbiotic one. The personal lives of these teachers inform their practice and their classroom experiences and sharpen their understandings of Black children's marginalization in schools" (Henry, 1992, p. 395). This finding in Henry's (1992) work is consistent with Collin's (2022) assertion that activism is a response to Black women close proximity to their community in both a geographical and relational sense (p. 45). Though they may have found a way out of the limiting experiences that are placed upon their communities, their relationships within the community are not forgotten once moving into education whether it is K-12 or post-secondary.

Classroom activism, in my view, is a form of informal equity work that stem from what scholars in the United States and Canada call "othermothering,"[5] "motherwork" and "child shifting" (Gray et al, 2023) practices. When the needs of Black students are not met by the educational system, Black educators expend time and energy in meeting those needs as a form of

[5] Othermothering, motherwork, and child shifting all have roots in Afro-Canadian/Caribbean/American practices where responsibilities relating to childcare were shared. Child shifting relates to the act of sharing child rearing responsibilities by caring for another mother's child when she is unable to (Gray et al., 2023). These concepts relate to the way Black women have brought their collective care practices from places like the Caribbean where women frequently served as "other mothers" to support those in the community who were experiencing challenges around parenting. This provided a way for children to be cared for by several people and did not interfere with the mother-child relationships in the way formal foster care arrangements that we know in North America often do.

service and care to the community (Johnson, 2023). Though Kike Ojo Thompson was not a K-12 educator for the Toronto District School Board her equity work for the board follows the path that is typical for women of colour in these equity leadership roles (Kunreuther and Thomas-Breitfied, 2022). Her leadership through activism was a form of community service that sought to create an awareness of the challenges of staff and students that impacted her wellbeing, reputation and livelihood.

When Black women do the work of the institution, even in the face of promises of liberation, they run the risk of adopting its belief systems related to the role Black women equity educators play. The institution's belief system that downloads onto Black women equity educators relates to three key ideas. The first is related to the common practice where Black women equity educators become problems rather than identifying them (Ahmed, 2017). The second is that the only available roles for Black women to play in society relates to clean up, housework, or care work—all of which fall under the umbrella of transforming work. Finally, the most harmful of all beliefs that Black women equity educators absorb is that their bodies have very little value beyond representation. Black women are regarded as the adage indicates, as people who are "to be seen and not heard". The process where these beliefs become embedded in the minds of Black women can be seen as a way of branding[6] women of colour who do the work that is in the service of the institution. This marking over-identifies Black women educators with institutional ways of being and complicates issues relating to agency and identity.

Equity work presents complexities relating to Black women's identity because they are doing the work of the institution/master by utilizing the master's tools (Lorde, 2007). Equity

[6] I invoke the act of branding to describe both the way organizations, businesses, and institutions use branding to (re)furbish themselves to align with a certain worldview and the way Black bodies and bodies of colour continue to be literally branded as part of a way of designating who their labour and emotions are in service of or belong to. In the end both interpretations of branding relate to a way to signify ownership.

work has been co-opted in many instances as the tool of the master. Audre Lorde famously stated, “this is an old and primary tool of all oppressors to keep the oppressed occupied with the master’s concerns. Now we hear that it is the task of women of color to educate white women—in the face of tremendous resistance—as to our existence, our differences, our relative roles in our joint survival” (Lorde, 2007, p. 113). This represents the unreconciled story that Black women educators must operate within—the awareness that they and equity work are made into tools for the master. How does this work not create a split in identity, in thought, and in one’s soul? We are striving for our liberation while at the same time employed by the master who utilizes our striving for their own purposes and benefits that produces further oppression. There is limited research on Black women, like Kike Ojo Thompson and Black women educators who perform equity work for school boards in what I am naming the loophole of “retreat” even though they contribute largely to the work that is happening both at the school and school board level. The work of this project provided an avenue where Black women are not distracted by the work of the institution but rather are given time and space to tend to work that speaks to their own liberation within a place of care—the homeplace.

Research Question

The experiences I had described in the previous section of this chapter are not in isolation. I am interested in how Black women educators can engage in equity work in Ontario with liberatory outcomes. Therefore, my main research question is: How do Black women equity educators move from the loophole of retreat, a small enclosure of protection with harm, to the homeplace–a place of activism with care? Inspired from the slave narrative of Harriet Jacobs the loophole is a site with limited freedom and protection. Harriet Jacobs, an enslaved woman, described the small space in the slave cabin she hid from her master as a loophole of retreat.

Though separated from her children, she was able to observe them and the family members as they went about their lives (Jacobs, 2020). She was not free to participate openly in community. Rather she had to find spaces of retreat within the grounds of the master's house. Black women equity educators currently work within a loophole design. The work they are doing does not offer them true freedom from domination—rather it offers limited freedom (if any at all). The homeplace, a Buddhist concept introduced to bell hooks (2014) from the late Buddhist monk Thick Nhat Hahn is a site that resists domination while offering care.

The following chapters will provide the theoretical framework that this project is situated within that includes Black feminist thought, endarkened feminist epistemology, and Afrocentric thought. I also briefly introduce Black creative thought—a concept that I began to engage with through this project. The dissertation continues with an application of the Creative Afro-Feminist methodology (CAFM) that integrates Afrocentric, Black feminist, and research creation methodologies. These chapters shape the in-person and online sessions that include the arts-based methods that reveal the storythreads. This segment of the dissertation includes discussions, implications, and recommendations that bring together Black women equity educators and the larger education community to consider a re-envisioning of equity work.

Chapter 2: Literature Review & Historical Analysis of Black Women, Labour & Care Work

Kike Ojo Thompson's work as an equity educator speaks to the formal and informal roles Black women educators take on to transform oppressive systems. These roles often create what is known as a second shift. The term second shift was coined by Arlie Russell Hochschild and Anne Machung (2012), American feminist scholars whose work explores the relationship between labour, gender, and emotions. They explain the situation that women faced through the women's movement when they entered the workforce outside the home. While touching on Hochschild's work bell hooks (2002) explains that the women's movement found "most women were working outside the home but still performing almost all the labor inside the home (childcare, cooking, cleaning, and so on)" (p.47). Similarly, Black educators are part of a liberatory movement which creates additional labour that requires them to be responsible for cleaning up the mess of various institutional forms of oppression in addition to their primary academic roles.

An essential component of the second shift is the way it generates inequality through "inside work" or 'housework". "Housework", in the sense Hochschild and Machung (2012) are using it, speaks to domestic and care work. The housework of equity work represents the removal of oppressive barriers that students and staff come up against. These barriers bring you into close contact with the unpleasant and "dirty" work of oppression. It means getting close to the grime and muck of centuries of oppression. It is the work that most people want to turn away from because it is not only labour intensive, but it also requires that white people come to terms

with their roles as beneficiaries of oppression[7]. Supporting a system in creating emancipatory change where some may not be willing and ready is a type of housework within the institution that is especially challenging. Women of colour are often the ones left to do this type of "housework" that people leave behind for someone else.

Often, the second shift becomes about the amount of labour we take on as much as the kind of labour that is asked of us. The harm Black women experienced post emancipation evolved with the movement away from solely agricultural related work. Black women moved towards domestic labour as they moved into urban communities and eventually worked in the industrial sector during urbanization (Brand, 1991). Previously live-in work required long (often unpredictable hours) and often offered compensation in the form of clothing and lodging (Brand, 1991). Urbanization both in Canada and the US created a shift in the demand for industrial work (Collins 2022, Brand, 1991). The types of labour that opened to Black women saw a further increase during the 1940s due to World War II (Brand, 1991 p. 20-21). Due to shortages in labourers (in jobs that white women typically held) Black women were able to work in non-domestic related work to a greater degree and saw some improvements in their ability to earn more money (Brand, 1991). However wonderful this opportunity may appear, it came with challenges. Black women were often given the most dangerous and precarious jobs with lower pay than their Black male or white women counterparts (Brand, 1991, p. 25).

The post war period brought the inclusion of Black Caribbean women into the Canadian workforce. This filled a significant domestic labour need in Canada. Black women from the Caribbean were only "invited" into this role through the West Indian Domestic Scheme, because

[7] I use the term "beneficiaries of oppression" instead of privilege because I have noticed the term privilege is often used to signal what certain groups of people have gained without any indication of the oppression that was needed to fund the gains. I also observe that people refer to privilege with an air of pride—something that sets them apart rather than something that requires an acknowledgement of debt.

European women did not respond in large enough numbers to the invitation to participate in domestic work (Brand, 1991, p. 27). Black women were not included in the domestic and industrialized sectors because Canada was becoming less racist and sexist. Dionne Brand, a documentarian and poet asserts that the West Indian Domestic Scheme reinforced the stereotypical role of Black women as servants (Brand, 1991). These experiences and attitudes towards Black women created a legacy where extraction and exploitation based on the servitude/enslavement-based tropes that have shaped their labour experiences in the education sector and beyond. Many of the relationships between the work that Black women equity educators performed and the institutions that housed this work come from this legacy of extraction and exploitation based on the Black woman servitude ideology. The harm Black women experience(d) and the source of the harm is situated within the legacy of colonization.

The same pattern of putting Black women in harm's way through the labour they are invited into was felt in my own work experience. I worked as a classroom teacher while I chaired the equity committee and held other responsibilities. During this time, I was arranging our first Indigenous workshop which would stand as an introduction to decolonization work for the school. My responsibilities included finding an Indigenous Elder to guide the process as well as doing all the work that would ensure the learning was respectful and appropriate. I put together supply schedules, produced and sourced the materials for the entire school and coordinated the workshop under the guidance of the Indigenous Elder. All along, I was keeping up with my teaching responsibilities and working on the event on my own time. Earlier I had witnessed a white colleague ask for and receive release time to pull together a small retirement lunch for a staff member. As a result, I asked the principal for release time to work on this project. I was surprised when the principal said she would not give me any release time to work on this day-

long initiative. I do not know how I found the words or the courage, but I responded by pointing out the irony in the situation. I pointed out that I was being treated in an inequitable way while doing equity work. I was exasperated from having to juggle this second shift without proper support. Eventually the principal offered me some time to work on this initiative—the day before the event. I will never forget both the relief and agitation I felt in having to ask for something that should have been built into the framework of what I was doing. The work, which was part of the School Improvement Plan, was always expected to be done outside of the school day. The transforming work that Black women are often asked to do requires taking on uncompensated labour because much of that work is done outside of paid work hours. We are not compensated for this work even though this labour is recognized as necessary for both institutional and personal transformation.

Transforming work often requires that Black women engage in emotional labour through the care work required in equity work. This ultimately leads to neglecting their own care. Hochschild (2012) asserts that care work often involves commodified emotions that white society extracts from the Global South (England, 2005). These emotions of care are largely extended towards white children, the elderly, and society at large. Through a Marxist framing Hochschild articulates this process as an "extraction of raw materials by colonial powers" (England, 2005). The extraction and subsequent commodification are based on gender, race, and socio-economic notions of who receives and extends care. The commodification of emotions requires that workers "sell services" (England, 2005, p. 381). Services can come in the form of demonstrating feelings that speak to care, cheerfulness, and happiness (England, 2005; Hochschild, 2012). Hochschild explains that this can lead to emotional harm in the form of acting (Hochschild, 2012).

Hochschild's research on women who are engaged in care work such as flight attendants and nannies to name a few, uncovers a habit of acting. This acting is necessary because these women often must sacrifice their own relationships with family to provide care for others while maintaining a composure that does not betray their true feelings. Black women equity educators are susceptible to this type of emotional harm because they are required to sell certain types of emotional services and engage in deep acting (England, 2005; Hochschild, 2012). They are required to sell emotions such as love, care, and concern when they must manage the emotions in the room. Equity educators are expected to present as caring, committed, passionate and composed. At times, the equity educator develops emotions that are outside of care and love and must suppress these emotions in order to perform equity work. They must display one type of feeling and suppress another. This type of "feigning and display" (Hochschild, 2012) leads to "emotive dissonance" (Hochschild, 2012). Emotive dissonance causes harm because of the constant work of managing an ambivalent way of being. "When display is required by the job, it is usually feeling that has to change; and when conditions estrange us from our face, they sometimes estrange us from feeling as well" (Hochschild, 2012, p. 90). Being "estranged from our face and feeling" speaks to the disconnect between how Black women equity educators present physically and how they truly feel or want to feel. I say "want to feel" because often we are told how to feel by the institution while we labour. Hochschild argues that the commodification of emotion is the source of a care gap between those that must perform emotional labour and those that are on the receiving end of the labour (England, 2005, p. 382).

I want to borrow from this analysis and explore the ways a care gap is created for Black women educators who engage in equity work, and how this care gap frames equity work within a "loophole of retreat" (Jacobs, 2020). A space for Black women to undertake emancipatory work

within “the master’s house” are frequently the only entry point into changing a reluctant system. These small spaces of activism and resistance more specifically, within the master’s residence can be described as loopholes of retreat where Black women equity educators carve out spaces where they can push for liberation for themselves, students, and other educators. *Applied Critical Leadership: The Im/Possibilities of Leading for Racial Justice in School Districts* (Shah et al., 2022) examines the counter-narratives of six Black and Brown mid-senior level leaders. This study looks at the complexities for leaders who work to create social justice change within the systems that employ them. “Leaders spoke to the choice they made to make the change from within the system… ‘So, you can’t just always be from the outside and trying to push in. You have to find an entry point. And often the entry point is within the existing structure’.” (Shah et al., 2022, p.193). These entry points that are found within the system may involve following procedures that are not in line with their own goals or values at times (Shah et al., 2022). The risks for educators of colour in advocating for their needs and those of their community within the master’s house could open them up to professional and personal challenges if they tried to change a reluctant system without operating through the system (Shah et al., 2022).

These challenges are often characterized as being normative to equity work, thus encouraging the subscription of harmful tropes and stereotypes to Black women’s identity. Black women are expected to bear the weight and challenges that come with changing a system without the consideration for the toll the work takes on their ability to extend and ask for care for themselves. Sojourner Syndrome is a term coined by anthropologist, Leith Mullings (2005) and further examined by Gail Parker, a psychologist and yoga practitioner that demonstrates the way Black women are often asked to be committed to the care of others while neglecting their own care (Parker, 2020). “Sojourner Syndrome is characterized by an obligation to be strong no

matter what; to suppress displays of emotion; to be stoic in the face of physical and emotional pain; to be fiercely independent, not needing anyone, and not asking for help; to succeed no matter what the obstacles or cost to her own health and wellbeing; and to put others' needs before her own" (Parker, 2020, p. 69). Many of us have heard or even used the "Strong Black Woman" trope thinking we are paying a great respect to Black women by acknowledging their strength. This trope is problematic for many reasons, the main issue being that Black women are expected to expend enormous amounts of labour without regard for their own care by themselves or society.

The lack of care towards Black women equity educators by themselves and society are often created when they push for change within a system that is reluctant to change. This dynamic creates the conditions for them to be labelled in harmful ways. Often when Black women work within these loopholes of retreat and try to change a reluctant system, they run the risk of being reduced to one of many tropes (see Figure 2):

> Black women tend to be seen through harmful stereotyping and controlling images such as 'Mule' (bearing the burden of additional workloads) (Collins, 2000), 'Mammy' (motherly, nurturing, yet strong disciplinarians), 'Sapphire' (loud, dramatic), 'Crazy Black Bitch' (angry, aggressive, unstable) and 'Superwoman' (over-achiever, can handle large workloads without complaint) (Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008), which continue to be pervasive in the workplace. (Ramdeo, 2023, p. 5)

In addition to the harmful Strong Black Woman trope that makes it easy to burden Black women with transforming systems, despite the pushback they encounter, these tropes also construct many Black women *as the problem*.

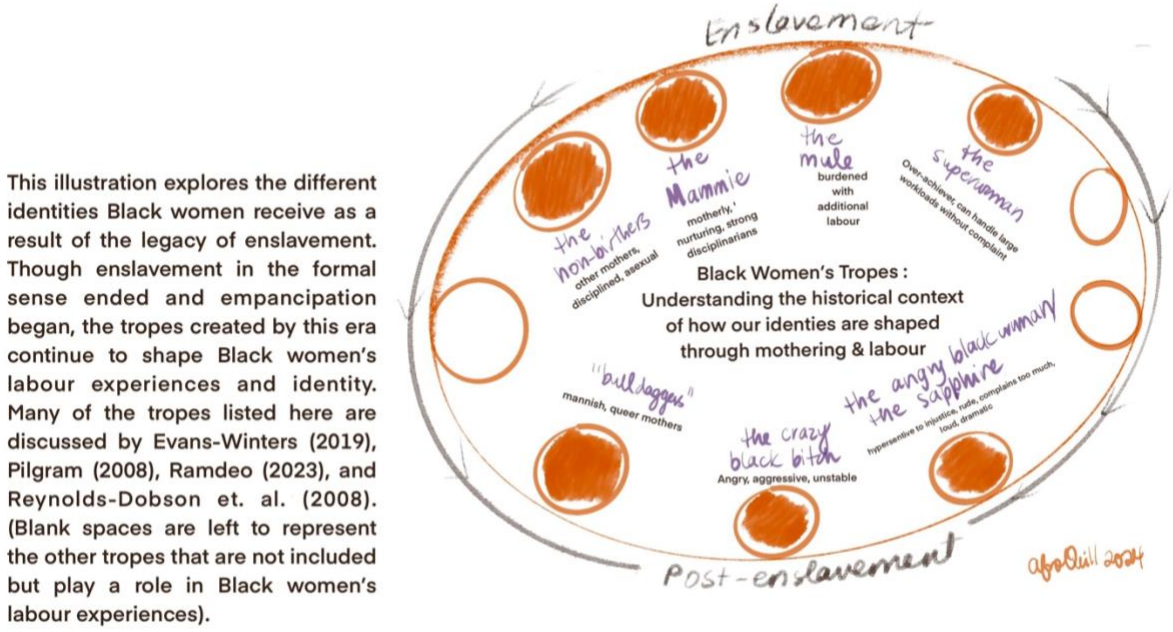


Figure 4: Black Women Identities During Enslavement and Post Enslavement

Ahmed's (2012) ground-breaking work on the affective economy of the feminist killjoy uncovers similar findings. She explains that when women of colour point out a problem they are identified *as* a problem (Ahmed, 2012). She uses a triangulation of phenomenological, feminist, and critical methodological approaches in her book length study, *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life* (Ahmed, 2012). Though this study involves participants in postsecondary education, there are some notable connections that I found to my own experiences as a K-12 educator. For instance, I found that whenever I raised issues relating to racism in the K-6 school I worked in for 17 years, I was labelled as someone who took things too seriously—a Sapphire (See Figure 2). The comments and practices were not the problem–rather, me raising them was what created a problem. Even when diversity work became institutionalized, my colleagues did not want me to point out incidences of racism. Rather they would point out that

the school was inclusive due to the activities that could be identified on the School Improvement Plan.

Using equity initiatives as a cover for racism in schools is one way that Black women educators can feel hindered by the very movement they work within. Ahmed (2012) proposes that diversity work is employed by many institutions and used to absolve institutions rather than implicate them in racial and discriminatory practices. Ahmed (2012) also looks at the ways diversity has been used by institutions to proclaim inclusiveness rather than enact it. This tactic used by institutions creates a frustrating environment for those tasked with transformation work. A symbol she employs to explore the experiences of women of colour diversity workers is the "brick wall" (Ahmed, 2012, pp. 26-27), describing what diversity practitioners come up against as they conduct diversity work within institutions. In analysing the data from her interviews with diversity workers in postsecondary institutions, Ahmed says, "(o)ne expression that came up in a number of my interviews was 'banging your head against a brick wall'. Indeed, this experience of the brick wall was often described as an intrinsic part of diversity work" (Ahmed, 2012, p. 26). Other evocative metaphors or statements include "diversity/institutional plumbers" which she uses to describe the ways diversity workers attend to what is stuck in institutional processes (Ahmed, 2012, p. 32). Black women equity educators experience these walled-in and blocked-up spaces where they are forced to take refuge in loopholes of retreat while trying to bring about liberatory changes.

The origins of the Strong Black Woman trope or Sojourner Syndrome that force Black women equity educators into loopholes of retreat and characterize them as the problem are rooted in representational forms of oppression (Ramdeo, 2023). Black women's identities are largely formed by tropes and stereotypes that de-feminize them (Ramdeo, 2023). Research

conducted with Black women educators from the United States and the United Kingdom emphasize the important role identity plays in examining their labour related experiences (Johnson, 2023; Ramdeo, 2023). Janet Ramdeo, an academic developer whose research focuses on the lived experiences of racialized women in the United Kingdom, explores the ways Black women educators become entangled with the invisibility and visibility paradox. Ramdeo (2023) explains that white men are regarded as the prototype, and Black women who are neither white nor men are considered non-prototypical. The masculine and whiteness are prototypical because of the dominant masculine and white views that permeate societal norms (Ramdeo, 2023). As a result, Black women experience "intersectional invisibility" (Ramdeo, 2023). This type of invisibility is further complicated when Black women are used by the system to stand in as evidence of transformation. Black women then become both visible and invisible. Through Shah's (2022) autoethnographic article, "In/Visible POC: Narratives of a Brown Professor in Teacher Education", she highlights the use of narratives as a way of analyzing how the invisibility and visibility of Brownness is used and misused by educational institutions. Similar to Black educators, the contributions and experiences of Brown educators remain largely ignored by academic institutions (Shah, 2022). It is this tendency to force bodies of colour to navigate visibility and ambiguity that creates challenges for recognizing the work they do. Shah writes:

> I have observed the ways in which my labor is often unnoticed and unaccounted for, sometimes couched as collective or "informal" work…or taking on/being expected to take on a greater portion of "group" work, which requires tremendous, unacknowledged time, labour, and energy. (Shah, 2022, p. 208)

What is significant about the ways whiteness shapes labour for people of colour is how the process of "invisibilization" (Shah, 2022) shapes how people of colour are seen, how they are

able to share their lived experiences and how this inevitably leads to exploitation. The work by people of colour is used to bolster a progressive and transformed image of institutions; however that very work often creates invisibility for the people themselves because of the lack of recognition they receive from the contributions they make.

The women's movement did not address the concerns of Black women sufficiently because of the invisibility of Black women, and thus the contributions they make in society are themselves invisibilised. Black women, unlike white women, have been asked to and forced to engage in labour outside the home from the beginning of the transatlantic slave trade primarily because they are Black and women. It is due to this harmful legacy that they continue to be subjected to and invited into roles that force them into the Mammy or superwoman tropes. The equity role is one such position that employs Black women educators as the Mammy and superwoman.

Due to the Mammy and superwoman tropes, the diversity movement was able to mobilize pre-existing roles for Black women to play in addressing the societal problems created by the transatlantic slave trade and colonization. The diversity movement mobilized these tropes to also position Black women as the social workers that it needed to address inequity and oppression. Black equity educators who are frequently women, are tasked with addressing problems that are both personal and collective in nature, within institutions. Hochschild's (2012) explanation of how women became social workers when they entered the workforce can support our understanding of how Black women continue to be the social workers in Canadian society. Hochschild (2012) points out that the structure of work outside the home was designed for men. Men did not have to consider balancing home and work life because someone (a woman) was taking care of the inside/housework (Hochschild, 2012). "In this arrangement between career and

family, the family was the welfare agency…and women were its social workers" (Hochschild, 2012, p. xiv). Hochschild asks us to consider who takes the place of women as the social workers when women enter the workforce. The answer is still women. They continue to be the social workers for the welfare agency. This is especially true in institutions like education. Social workers are tasked with responding to problems, identifying, and addressing personal issues that have societal impact. Social injustice is left to Black women to address the way the family and housework were left for women to address. In the same way men did not have to contend with balancing work and home life through the women's movement, white people do not have to contend with balancing racial injustice and their careers. Throughout this liberatory movement Black equity workers carry the burden of addressing the problems created by the very source that continues to oppress them. They not only have to contend with entering a working environment built without them in mind—they are also expected to be the social workers who address societal problems the system continues to create.

As a result of the social work Black women are tasked with through the equity and diversity movement, they may be seen through the Sapphire trope. The Sapphire is similar to the Strong Black Woman trope in that Black women are characterized as being angry, loud, and aggressive. The Sapphire trope involves more than unjustified anger it includes a critique of the social justice activism Black women employ.

> The Sapphire's desire to dominate and her hypersensitivity to injustices make her a perpetual complainer, but she does not criticize to improve things; rather, she criticizes because she is unendingly bitter and wishes her unhappiness on others. The Sapphire Caricature is…employed to punish black women who violate the societal norms that encourage them to be passive, servile, non-threatening, and unseen. (Pilgrim, 2008)

Like Ahmed's (2012) feminist killjoy, the Sapphire is seen as someone who is not only against happiness but also someone who is opposite to femininity. The unwillingness to stay small, quiet, and undisruptive stands in great opposition to the way women are invited to move in the world—even when asked to do transforming work. Activism work, transforming work, and social justice work at large, are often framed as acts of complaint. Ahmed (2021) speaks of "complaint biographies" when she explains that when you complain it becomes part of your identity—a story about you that is impossible to shed. Complaints are sticky labels that cannot be removed once applied. The complaint becomes a way women of colour are storied unwittingly by institutions. Through this dissertation I continue to examine the tropes and the characterization of Black women educators as Mammys, Sapphires and problems. This examination makes the case for the necessity for my main research question, how do Black women equity educators move from The Loophole of Retreat, a small enclosure of protection with harm, to The Homeplace–a place of activism with care?

Johnson (2023), a scholar of criminal justice, explains that activism and leadership are not solely based on what Black women actively seek but also what is expected of them. She argues, "there is often an expectation that one is to allocate one's time 'to show commitment and productivity in the service of the university, often at the expense of [one's] health and wellbeing'" (Johnson, 2023, p. 221). This additional labour (that is often harmful) can be seen as another iteration of the second shift and is referred to in the literature as the Black Woman and Nonbinary Tax (Gray, et al., 2023).[8] In examining the equity industrial complex, researchers Gray et al. (2023), whose disciplinary backgrounds include race and gender studies, examine the impact of equity work on Black women as a way for institutions to "restore social and financial

[8] This is the responsibility and additional labour that Black women and non-binary people have to take on simply due to the colour of their skin and their gender (Gray, et al., 2023, p. 267)

gain…while consistently only addressing the lowest hanging fruit, and offering no shifts in the major and pervasive issues of system oppression, especially as they pertain to anti-Blackness" (Gray et al., 2023, p. 263). Even though Gray et al.'s focus is on issues in post-secondary education in the United States, similar patterns emerge when we look at the work of Sara Ahmed in the United Kingdom and scholars in Canada. Even more important parallels can be made with the current state of equity work in K-12 schools as explored by Daniel (2019) and Henry (1992) when they examined classroom activism. Though these practices are often initiated by Black women educators they can become co-opted and misused by the system for its own ends which contributes to oppressive experiences by Black women that result in a care gap within the loophole of retreat their work often resides in.

Exploring the care gap that is created within loopholes of retreat allows us to consider the complexities that are present within the labour experiences for Black women who perform care work. The care gap is often caused by an unfair labour environment that asks things of Black women that it cannot extend towards them. Nash (2024) explains that because the state depends on women to perform care work, they become the "shock absorbers" of society which in turn increases both their need and lack of care (p. 306). The reason why the state and institutions can ask Black women to labour in such an inequitable way (even to this day) is based on the operating system of the state that has been employed since the beginning of colonization. This operating system frequently invites people from the Global South to meet the needs of a largely white population without consideration for the burden of that invitation.

The disregard for care for Black women is facilitated by the belief that Black women have no choice but to engage in care related transformation work because it is the path to economic and social liberation. In the context of equity work performed by Black women, the

work then is expected of them as a practice of activism that serves the purpose of their liberation. Therefore, they should expect to "pay" the price for this liberation—even though they did not create the conditions that made the activism and transforming work necessary. This is yet another exchange found in the "conditional hospitality" within equity work. Derrida (2000) posits that hospitality is unconditional (p. 4). Any conditions that are obligatory in nature remove claims to hospitality. Consequently, Black women's invitation in roles and sectors that require transformation as an outcome, are conditional. The current experiences of Black women who perform care related transforming work is born out of this extractive relationship with the state, and the structures and organizations that are connected to it.

This type of invitation that Black women equity educators experience creates a care gap stemming from historical practices in immigration that are situated within a value system of "conditional hospitality" (Derrida, 2000). An exchange between the "master/host" and the "guest" is a key feature of hospitality that is conditional (Derrida, 2000, p. 4). Conditional hospitality in the way I am applying it to equity educators relates to the conditions that are required for Black women to gain access to educational roles. Care-related transforming work is exchanged for access into the education sector. The "master/host" in this respect, benefits significantly through the inclusion of Black women educators in the educational sector. At times this benefit experienced by the "master/host" is significantly greater than what is experienced by the Black women who conduct care related transformation work.

This is part of a larger legacy of extracting care from domestic labourers in exchange for access into Canada and The United States. The invitation of immigrant Black women labourers to Canada is commonly regarded as an example of Canada's values of diversity and multiculturalism. For Black women, the invitation to join Canadian society as early as the 50's

was met with a condition that often required providing care for a mostly white population. The Black women who came under The West Indian Domestic Scheme and other initiatives were required to do care work for at least a year (Henry,1998). Whether it was domestic labour, elder care, or nursing, many of the Black women who immigrated to Canada during that period came to provide care. All the while, these women often left "barrel children" and partners behind. They not only had to neglect their own care, but often could not provide direct care for their own families (Crawford-Brown, 1999). This pattern of neglect towards Black women (and consequently their families) has seen many iterations that are born from a colonial system that disregards the self and family care of Black women while prioritizing white care—revealing the tax Black women must pay for being invited into Canadian society.

Through the limited scholarly research concerning Black women educators in Canada, a similar pattern of "conditional hospitality" is revealed. Funké Aladejebi, a history professor specializing in Black Canadian history (2021) provides a detailed account of Black women in schools in Ontario in her book *Schooling the System: A History of Black Women Teachers*. It is through her research that I first recognized this pattern of "conditional hospitality" in Canadian educational settings, established as long ago as the 1940s, continuing to operate to this day. Black women educators were often offered conditional invites into the system in exchange for work that required they fix the issues that the system experienced. Aladejebi (2021) asserts that they were invited in due to gendered notions relating to care and mothering. These gendered notions relating to care and mothering were emphasized during the 1940s when married women were allowed to enter the teaching profession due to a shortage in teachers created by the growing number of schools (Aladejebi, 2021). Thus begins the pattern of Black women being used by the education system to address problems the system experiences that it creates for itself.

During the 1970s and 1980s, Black women entered leadership roles due to concerns attributed to gender inequalities rather than racial inequalities (Aladejebi, 2021). This is consistent with what was happening in the feminist movement at the time, where the intersection of gender and racial oppression was not wholly considered by white feminism (Aladejebi, 2021). One of the events that occurred that further complicated the experiences of Black women educators seeking leadership roles is the threat they seemingly posed to white women. As Aladejebi (2021) observes, "(s)ome black women who entered positions of additional responsibility were viewed as threats because of their ability to be promoted on the basis of their race and gender" (p. 156). What this phenomenon highlighted was the belief that Black women could not be invited into spaces of leadership without repercussions. The invite into leadership roles came with its own set of payments and conditions. These conditions, that include hostile working environments and isolation, continue in Canadian education systems to this very day.

I encountered this situation when I became the chair for my department. In fact, anytime I took up a leadership role, it was met with hostility, suspicion, and isolation. When I was selected by the principal to be the Ontario Ministry of Education lead for an early math initiative, rather than being given congratulatory messages, I was asked repeatedly by the other staff why I was chosen. When I received various promotions or opportunities there was always a question of whether my race was the determining factor in the selection[9]. My experiences as an educator are clearly aligned with his type of thinking that suggests that I did not deserve the promotions and opportunities I was given—rather it was due solely to my race that I received these opportunities. More importantly it felt as if any promotions I received came with a weight around my neck. The

[9] Recently race-based affirmative action policies regarding admissions into post-secondary institutions in the US have been deemed unconstitutional. This Supreme Court ruling reveals anti-Black sentiments and a subscription to meritocracy since Black people are seen as not earning "their place" in educational institutions through affirmative action.

suspicion that followed me and the lack of support I received made for a very trying working environment. My personal experiences reveal how racist attitudes are connected to the "conditional invite" logics that are still largely at play in the educational sector.

During the 1980s, Black women educators in Canada were brought in by school boards to fill jobs due to teacher shortages, once again, and to resolve tensions that were growing due to the low academic outcomes of Black students (Aladejebi, 2021):

> Presuming recent migrants could better relate to black educators, administrators surmised that black women teachers could bridge the gap between increasing community discontent and ministry mandates as they related to new immigrant groups…Schools recruited black female educators in order to accommodate and contain growing disillusionment among black students in Ontario schools. (Aladejebi, 2021, p. 56)

On its surface, this approach appears to be one that serves the Black community; but in reality, the outcome is one that burdens the community with resolving the racist structural issues that they did not cause. It is also an early example of troubling equity practices in education institutions: an example that places Black women in the all-too-common role of domestic labourer/social worker for boards and ministries, there to clean up their mess.

In the 1990s, the "Equity in School Boards: Guidelines for Policy and Implementation" resource was introduced by the Ontario Ministry of Education due to increased pressure from community groups (Aladejebi, 2021). This policy was part of the province's strategy to create equitable education for students that identified barriers to their success through increased hiring of "racially diverse staff, antiracism advisers, and consultants, and outlined practical ways to implement equitable practices within the classroom" (Aladejebi, 2021, p. 177). This policy, accompanied by a shift from multiculturalism as the dominant educational policy to anti-racist

education as the dominant educational goal, was not a response that demonstrated a change of heart relating to issues of race for Canadians (Aladejebi, 2021). In fact, Aladejebi stresses that "the emergence of antiracist political activity in Canada was something actively resisted by many Canadians" (Aladejebi, 2021, p. 177). It was during this time that I entered the teaching profession. I received a great many offers in my first two days of interviews. It would have been easy to mistake the number of offers I had for employment by schools as an indication of the desire for the transformative impact of more Black teachers. My offers made me feel desired. Later, I realized that this desire came out of a need, on behalf of the school board and provincial government, more than a want. I did not think much about how being needed was not the same as being wanted at the start of my career. Being wanted comes with a privilege that is absent when you are needed. Specifically, being wanted allows you to ask for equality and equity in a way being needed should, but does not. This is similar to the ways that Chinese, Indian, and African laborers were (and continue to be) needed but definitely not wanted in Western countries (Day, 2016). This need had everything to do with me as a body that could absolve administrators of any further responsibility to work towards inclusion and equity. I diversified the staff and that was the extent of the responsibilities (and usefulness) of my body. The invite into my teaching job was to fill a need rather than promote and enact practices of inclusion within practices of liberation.

As a result of entering a system where I was not wanted, I experienced many of the barriers that Aladejebi (2021) notes from the Ontario Alliance of Black School Educators (ONABSE) report on Black educators. Whenever hiring issues came up relating to Black educators, I frequently heard arguments that equity hiring practices, or affirmative action policies, would result in less qualified teachers being hired. Frequently, other educators would

pose a "hypothetical" question that asked whether race should trump qualifications in hiring decisions.[10]

In the 1990s, Stephen Lewis, a former politician and diplomat, conducted a report on race relations in Ontario and recommended numerous actions to address anti-Black racism (Turner Consulting Group, 2015). One of the important recommendations was to monitor employment equity programs and report to community groups on school board anti-racism curricula (Lewis, 1992). Since the publication of Lewis' report, we have not observed very much movement by way of implementing recommendations regarding equity programs. Only three provinces (British Columbia, Ontario, and Nova Scotia) currently (as of 2022) have anti-racism legislation (People for Education, 2023).

Lewis' report is not the only instance where anti-racism work turns out to be more about representation than relationship. Policy/Program Memorandum 119 (2009) was introduced in 1993 to further address and drive the development of antiracism policies in the province of Ontario. Though PPM 119 was created with the purpose of addressing issues of racism and discrimination, school boards were found to focus on multiculturalism rather than anti-racism and anti-discrimination initiatives (Policy/Program Memorandum 119 Education in Ontario: Policy and Program Direction, n.d.). The updated PPM 119 (2009) indicates that "the antiracism and ethnocultural policies contained in No. 119 (1993) went 'beyond a broad focus on multiculturalism and race relations' to focus on identifying and changing institutional policies and procedures, as well as individual behaviours and practices that may be racist in their impact" (Policy/Program Memorandum 119 Education in Ontario: Policy and Program Direction, n.d.,

[10] This highly racist question was asked by people of colour as well as white people. They did not believe the question was insulting because they held a subconscious belief that often the two, Blackness and competence, rarely met.

para 6). Policies that focus on anti-racist work, where relationships between individuals and institutions become subsumed under representation, work for institutions.

In 2021 the Ontario Ministry of Education provided a tool, the Board Improvement and Equity Plan (BIEP), for boards to advance equity initiatives (People for Education, 2023). Since then, "74% of school board websites mentioned racism in their equity and inclusion policies, 40% of publicly funded schools had an anti-racism statement on their website, and 28% had an anti-racism strategy or approach available online" (People for Education, 2023, para 20). As far as the implementation of the Lewis report and PPM 119, it is hard to decipher what effect they had, in terms of the implementation of anti-racist policies and procedures and the improvement of relationships with the community.

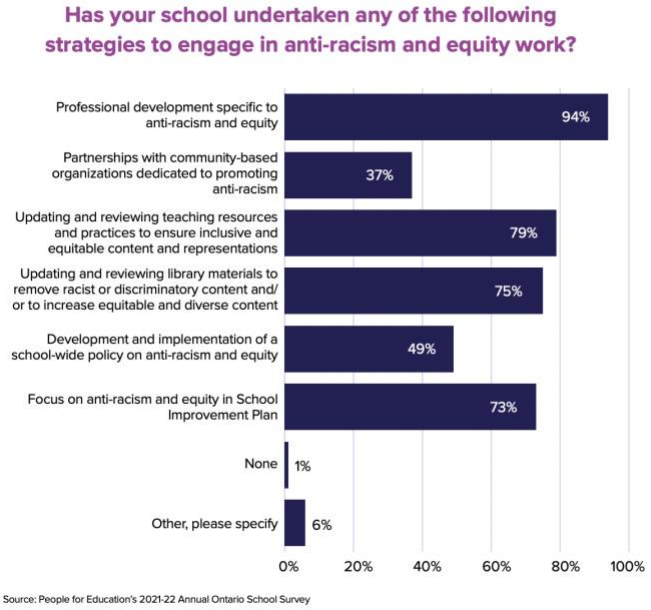
Most of the initiatives that boards undertook are more about what they say they will do, or initiatives that focus on representation rather than relationships. Many of these initiatives maintain racism as "strange"[11] rather than recognizing the ways racism shapes others and their everyday experiences of it. Table 1 from "A Progress Report on Anti-racism Policy Across Canada" from People for Education reveals that the initiative that is the least enacted by the school boards is one that involves direct relationships with the community and second to that is the implementation of school-wide anti-racist policies. Again, the initiative that is least attended to relates to relationships. I would argue that the second least attended to initiative also relates to relationships, because it is about how issues of racism and equity are attended to at the school level. Policies that attend to the school level are about the ways racism and discrimination is treated between staff, parents, students and the administration. The focus on relationships is

[11] This notion of maintaining racism as strange speaks to both magical realism (in a non-literary context) where once something is detached from the familiar it is made strange. Susan Dion's (by way of Higgins et al., 2015) work on the "perfect stranger" theory reveals how white educators maintain a perfect stranger position with Indigenous communities by not focusing on relationship but clinging to representation instead in their classroom practices.

important because it reveals a lack of attention to a component of equity work that contributes to the harmful experiences of Black women educators who perform equity work. If relationships are not an area of focus in equity work then the work becomes about optics rather than impact.

Table 1: Types of Anti-Racism and Equity Strategies used by Ontario Schools, 2021-2022

Figure 3: Types of anti-racism and equity strategies used by Ontario schools, 2021-2022



Source: People for Education's 2021-22 Annual Ontario School Survey

The more recent anti-racism legislation and the BIEP are later iterations of the early diversity movement period in Canadian schools that began in the 1960s. This early period (1960s to 1980s) did not have a formal name then, but the power dynamics that shape it today—of white colonial institutions looking to people of colour to resolve systemic issues rather than addressing racist attitudes and actions born within their institutions—have been around at least since this period, if not earlier. This burden contributes to the Black woman tax that I referenced earlier in this paper. In their landmark report on leaders of colour, Kunreuther and Thomas-Breitfied (2022) found leaders of colour are "...more likely than white leaders to report that they 'often' or 'always' felt challenged by the stress of being called on to push diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) efforts in their organizations…" (p. 9). More concerning still is the way Black women in

equity work are used as a reconstituted version of a domestic worker who provides "emotional labour" for white supervisors. Borrowing from Lorde (2007), Wilson's (2020) examination of equity policies in Ontario schools proposes that equity has become one of the master's tools, insufficient in dismantling the "master's house". Black women equity educators become agents who maintain the status quo and unintentionally perpetuate their own oppression through a system that Ahmed (2012) argues is more interested in cultivating an image of diversity and inclusion, rather than an actual environment of one.

With Black educators, diversity initiatives within and outside of education have made it possible for us to be invited and included in many employment opportunities but that does not equate to our true liberation within these systems. Also, society's views about how we labour have not changed. I often found myself running more projects, programs and committees than most people on staff. Over-productivity is something I have observed in many Black women educators and staff. Doing too much has become doing enough for us. This over productivity is not recognized or compensated. We do our second shifts knowing our race makes it necessary. The second shifts in and of themselves are problematic from an equity standpoint. As Ahmed (2012) explains, "(t)he uneven distribution of responsibility for equality can become a mechanism for reproducing inequality" (p. 91). We eagerly applied for these jobs feeling that finally the work we were already doing was being legitimized and backed by the system. It was not long upon arriving at these roles that Black educators learned the inside work would become another way for inequities to flourish.

Not only does equity work create an uneven distribution of responsibility for Black equity educators, but it also uses the work to refurbish the institution. Audre Lorde's essays are filled with cautionary tales of the way people of colour are used and oppressed by a system that

claims to want to work towards their liberation. I return to Lorde's (2007) essay "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House", she explains how Black women are being used as tools of a patriarchal and racist regime to create change:

> Women of today are still being called upon to stretch across the gap of male ignorance and to educate men as to our existence and our needs. This is an old and primary tool of all oppressors to keep the oppressed occupied with the master's concerns. Now we hear that it is the task of women of Color to educate white women—in the face of tremendous resistance—as to our existence, our differences, our relative roles in our joint survival. (p. 113)

Equity work often becomes another tool of the master. This tool is dangerous and conniving because it positions itself as a liberatory tool when in fact it exposes Black women educators to oppression. Black equity educators are kept busy by focusing on the concerns of their white peers rather than tending to the increasing wounding they encounter through diversity work and a racist system. Sharpe (2018) also warns us of the tendency institutions have towards using practices that appear as liberatory but prove to contribute towards Black suffering. She points out that "...what the state…calls care is often continued violence" (Sharpe, 2018, p.175). Equity work is positioned as an initiative that will help Black people and other marginalized communities. Consequently, Black equity educators are encouraged to apply to many of these diversity posts. But there is a covert demand in this invitation. This invitation carries with it the expectation that you will do the work needed to rescue the institution—even at the cost of your own survival. It relies on the assumption that you will return the favour by refurbishing the institution without raising concerns when the weight of the work becomes too heavy to bear on your own. This form of "conditional hospitality" (Derrida, 2000) reminds Black women

educators that they are invited in but always on the condition that they will offer something in return—more than what their stated responsibilities ask for. The resistance they face is the price they pay for the conditional invite they have been given. The invite, the opening, and the inclusion are all part of the master's tools used to perpetuate colonial violence.

In her essay "T.I.R.E.D.: The Institutional Rhetoric of Equity and Diversity" Simranpreet Kaur Anand (2022), an artist and cultural worker, expands on Ahmed's (2012) connection between institutional diversity, conditional invites, and the process of integration. Both institutions and nations act as hosts that invite people of colour in on the condition that they integrate into their systems, identify with the nation or institution, and bring the image of diversity to the institution and nation (Anand, 2022; Ahmed, 2012). So rather than institutions being committed to antiracism they are more so driven by a desire to employ the "visibility" of people of colour to establish themselves as diverse as a way to claim innocence. This is especially troubling because this is one of the ways equity workers are exposed to harm. We begin first by doubting ourselves and our experiences because institutions self-identify as anti-racist and anti-oppressive through their image of diversity. We are often asked, "are you sure that's what they meant?" or "are you sure you aren't being paranoid?" "Maybe you are too emotional right now"; or "maybe they didn't mean it that way". These statements are used not only to minimize our experiences but to invalidate them and more troubling to allow institutions to claim a position of innocence. Tuck and Yang (2021) use the term "moves to innocence" to describe the actions/claims that settlers make to distance themselves from the oppression that Indigenous communities experienced and continue to experience. Most of these claims are related to proximity to Indigenous ancestry. Diversity movements often use proximity to people of colour to access innocence to absolve themselves from being implicated in racist practices.

Ahmed (2012) speaks to the various ways we end up doing the work of a racist institution by doing diversity work which absolves them of the responsibility of doing real equity work. She asserts that the institution uses policies and documents about diversity work to stand for the work, rather than making sure change is enacted (Ahmed, 2012). The work is positioned similarly to Tuck and Yang's (2021) "moves to innocence"—a way of getting the colonizer "...off the hook from hard unsettling decolonization work" (Tuck & Yang, 2021, p. 4). Current equity movements avoid doing challenging decolonized work by using equity as a screen rather than an intervention. A screen creates a barrier that shields or obscures what is happening behind it while presenting an alternate view. Because equity has become about policies and pronouncements and not about radical liberatory change of the hearts and minds of people, it acts as a screen. The screen supports addressing oppression and social injustice, "slightly" (Ahmed, 2012). An issue is addressed slightly when it does not enact change in a fundamental way and when it does surface work rather than inside (house) work. Slightly addressing an issue relates to using the language that is created around it without that language requiring action. The screen shows how diversity work is weakened when it avoids becoming "housework" by everyone equally. The full engagement of the system in the "housework" of equity supports Black educators' ability to move beyond the refurbishment of the master's house. In describing housework, Ahmed (2017) also draws out this point where work creates change rather than help to maintain the status quo. "Feminist housework does not simply clean and maintain a house. Feminist housework aims to transform the house, to rebuild the master's residence" (Ahmed, 2017, p. 7). It is important to consider the ways institutions of education use equity work by Black educators as a way of refurbishing the master's residence rather than rebuilding it. Black educators' presence within equity work and educational institutions at large leads people to

believe that changes have been made. The dismantling of oppressive practices, and the inner work that the system is required to go through, are avoided and hidden. This is what leaves Black educators exposed to harm, because they unknowingly conduct refurbishing—that stands as a screen in the way of liberation.

Kwik (read)

Kwak (say out loud)

Kwik (read)

Kwak (say out loud)

Kwik (read)

Kwak (say out loud)

Gadé mwen ou tuo mwen ka vini (read) *(Look at me, to you I am coming)*

Kwik (read)

Kwak (say out loud)

Gadé mwen ou tuo mwen ka vini (read) *(Look at me, to you I am coming)*

Lapòt? (say out loud) *(The door)*

Oui! Lapòt! (read) *(Yes! The door)*

In 2017, I visited the continent of Africa for the first time. I visited three countries and with each visit I marked a return of the spirit of my ancestors by entering the doors or passageways of no return. The Kwik! Kwak! that you have encountered as you read this dissertation bears even greater meaning when placed alongside the discussion of the door of no return. I now wonder if this proverbial story is referencing a return that our ancestors were told they would never have. Is this Kwik! Kwak! a type of refusal that I had previously missed? During my 2017 trip I was confronted with doors and passageways in ways that made this Kwik!

Kwak! come alive. Walking through those doors was a physical attempt to reclaim a space with spirit, mind, and body. During these visits, I spent time in the dungeons that held the bodies and still to this day hold the matted down blood, feces, and tissues of my ancestors. Though the brutalities haunt the space I felt my presence in these spaces reclaimed them and transformed them. I not only brought my ancestors back from where they were exiled but I also transformed the space into one of ceremony and healing[12]. My body created a homeplace where there was previously no home or place for the spirit and bodies of my ancestors. I found this embodied homeplace again when I engaged in conversations with Black women who had passed (see chapter 5) to the spirit world. The discussions I held mainly about the viability of homeplaces within institutions was itself a type of homeplace that was accessible across time and place. I began to understand that we have the capacity to create both internal and external homeplaces. Through the interviews and retreat-style sessions I saw the efforts of the moun ki konnet to create homeplaces within themselves to support their survival and wellbeing in educational spaces. The homeplace then is both a spiritual and physical location that we can raise (even in the most devastating of histories) to reclaim our humanity, our freedom, and most importantly our healing. It is a site where rematriation is possible.

Black women educators often work in places where brutalities hide and sometimes flourish in the open. Home-raising efforts outside of these spaces by way of gatherings with affinity groups can help to support returns and reclamations. The tenets of Black feminist epistemologies, Afrocentric thought, endarkened storywork, and Black creative thought addresses the disenfranchisement from a homeplace that is built on ways of knowing supported by remembering with a community of transtemporal co-creators.

[12] I created a short film, The Antidote for the Archive (2022) that explored this process of return as a part of a mourning ritual.

The Conceptual Framework: From Loophole to Homeplace

I turn to bell hooks (2001) and her attention to love as the antidote for domination. I turn to her invitation to reimagine Black life outside of domination and through a framework of care—a component of love. Seeing equity as care work is the invitation of a third shift to emerge from diversity work for Black women. This shift is about turning our attention to relationships between the recipients of care and those extending care. It is also a reminder that our work should not be a barrier to living well. Living well means our employers, communities, the state and our relations accept that there are limits to care work—to all work. They also accept that care work is emotional labour that requires a redress in the form of reprieve, compensation and care. Without the attention to care, Black women equity educators enter work that is confined within the loophole of retreat.

Loopholes of retreat are problematic because they represent spaces that provide liberation within confinement rather than allowing for true transforming spaces. It is a space that puts Black women in a defensive position. The term loophole of retreat in the sense I am using it carries two meanings (see Figure 3). One meaning is based on the medieval understanding of the word. It describes a position where someone defends themselves through a hole in the walled space (Farlex, n.d.). The loophole by nature is not a truly liberatory space because it involves engagement within confinement. The second meaning is similar. It is taken from the slave narrative of Harriet Jacobs that I described earlier in the chapter. She sought reprieve within the walls of confinement. Equity work resembles a loophole of retreat that Black women equity educators are forced to create for themselves for this reason. These loopholes are spaces that they have found within the very structures of education where they attempt to impact practices,

policies, and procedures in ways that create change, while often keeping them separated from experiencing a true space of liberation and transformation.

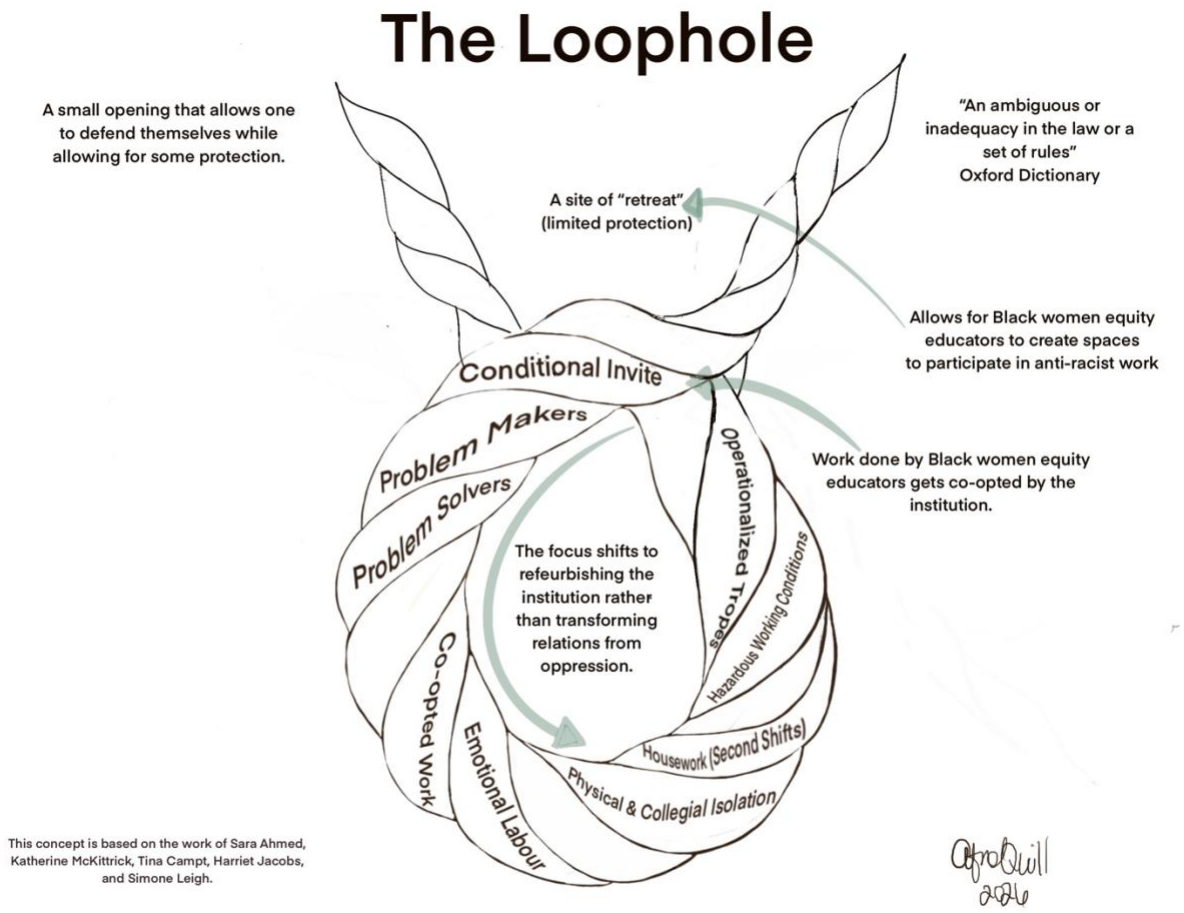


Figure 5: The Loophole

These spaces are not what hooks (2014) calls "homeplaces", where activism, resistance and healing take place. hooks (2014) explains that the homeplace is a refuge for Black families, a place where they can retreat and engage in resistance and activist work. hooks (2014) quotes the late Tibetan Buddhist monk, Thich Nhat Hahn who describes homeplace as a true place of retreat: a "place where people can return to themselves more easily, where the conditions are such that they can heal themselves and recover their wholeness" (p. 385). The home, at times the only place of refuge for Black women, becomes a site to counter the harm they experienced in the outside world. The homeplace, unlike the loophole of retreat, is marked by an emphasis on

healing and care. Black women are often expected to work in conditions that disregard their need for care while these same workplaces ask them to expend care to others. This paradox makes the homeplace a necessary space. In this study, I reclaim and reconceptualize this homeplace that offers Black women equity educators' opportunities for care, resistance, and activism within equity work (see Figure 4).



Figure 6: The Homeplace

The steps on Figure 4 of the homeplace emphasize four offerings of the homeplace. As I looked deeper into bell hooks' (2014) conceptualizing of the homeplace I could see four components of the homeplace emerge. hooks did not explicitly name these four components in this way. I am consolidating and synthesizing hooks' work alongside other Black feminists to co-

create these steps. I refer to these components as steps because they are ways the homeplace is both described and accessed. Domestic acts of care and survival, self-recovery, activism and resistance with care, and knowledge building are ways the homeplace is characterized as a liberatory space. These four steps also provide a recipe so to speak that others can use to co-create a homeplace with other additional features that may be of importance and relevance to their communities. In the end, the homeplace should be characterized as a space where people can resist domination.

The homeplace first situates acts of care and survival within the domestic domain to resist domination. This translates to a space that nourishes the mind, body and spirit through daily acts of care that are found within the home. Acts of care and survival include opportunities to experience nourishment, rest, and ease. hooks (2014) refers to these acts as "the warmth and comfort of shelter, the feeding of our bodies, the nurturing of our souls" (p. 41). Home is marked by acts of nourishment both for the physical and the spiritual needs of the self.

Nash draws connections to hooks' homeplace. "Black domesticity" (Nash, 2024) is rarely regarded in literature or larger conversations as areas of exploration for Black thriving outside of the Black community. In describing Dani McClain's work on Black mothering Nash (2024) says,

> Her attention to the banalities of maternal life reveals the political labor of the Black quotidian because even small actions are about Black survival…it is crucial to guard the 'protected space in our home and in the small orbit in which she moves, an oasis where she as a Black girl can feel free and empowered and dignified.' (p. 312)

bell hooks' (2022; 2014) work on the homeplace is the foundation to what Nash (2024) and McClain (2019) are building on. The homeplace returns the everyday acts of care to a place and people that are continually denied it. Nash (2024) and McClain (2019) speak of literal

homeplaces where domestic acts are regarded as acts of care and survival. It is a way of countering the "legacy of struggle" day by day that make room for what McClain identifies as part of the "political labor of the Black quotidian" (Nash, 2024, p. 312). All three scholars explore the way oppression shapes our identities and everyday experiences while examining space as a location that supports knowledge building around labour, care, and activism. hooks' (2022; 2014) work shows us how examining care can also be about cultivating liberatory spaces. This project builds on McClain, Nash and hooks' work to argue that homeplaces can exist outside of the primary home.

Together these domestic acts invite elements of the second step—self-recovery. This step into the homeplace is an opportunity to reinstate the self in its full humanity. This means that recovering parts of the self that Black women are frequently denied; the privilege of erring without physical and social loss and the privileged of expressing vulnerability as well as strength are key elements of self-recovery. When the homeplace returns dignity and care to Black women it is then that Black women can access self-recovery. hooks explains, "For those who dominate and oppress us benefit most when we have nothing to give our own. When they have so taken from us our dignity our humanness that we have nothing left, no "homeplace" where we can recover ourselves" (hooks, 2014, p. 43). Dignity and care are elements of self-recovery. bell hooks speaks of Black women who spend much of their time in white spaces offering to white families. I speak of Black women equity educators who spend their time in service of white spaces to refurbish it without the same care and dignity offered to them. Self-recovery is an important element of the homeplace that makes it possible to engage in activism and resistance with care.

Self-recovery and resistance are active partners that cannot be estranged from each other in the homeplace. Resistance to Hahn means self-recovery, and the resistance of domination of all kinds (hooks, 2014, p. 43). I appreciate Hanh's emphasis that movements and communities of resistance are properly sheltered under the homeplace because of the ability to support self-recovery. Activism and resistance are important elements of the homeplace, because it is the site that Black women can resist racial and gendered harm. This third step, activism and resistance with care, may be the most central step for Black women equity educators, because it provides a shelter to conduct equity work.

The last step into the homeplace concerns knowledge building. The homeplace is a place that returns care, the self, through acts of resistance and activism. Through this process, knowledge is co-created. This knowledge requires acts of remembering. It concerns remembering the role Black women play in building homeplaces as places of resistance, to represent themselves accurately, while also remembering "the political value of black women's resistance" (hooks, 2014, p. 46). hooks (2014) asserts that Black women's contribution to liberation movements have been overlooked (p. 47). She also asserts that, "Black people began to overlook and devalue the importance of black female labour in teaching critical consciousness in domestic space" (hooks, 2014, p. 47). The homeplace is not only then a place for domestic acts of care and survival, self-recovery, activism and resistance, it is a space for the co-created knowledge building to take place. hooks wants the homeplace to be recognized as a political space that seeks to create change through knowledge building at the same time.

An important component of Black feminist theory that contributes to emancipatory outcomes requires a focus on the how and where of knowledge (McKittrick, 2006). The location of knowledge building can be identified through the places and spaces Black women are often

forced into, and retreat to. Homeplaces can be built collectively and shared collectively in public spaces. Most importantly, it is through these spaces that Black women gather, build collective knowledge, and employ an activist response. The space is an important location of knowledge building, because it facilitates knowledge through the experience of the space.

McKittrick (2006) speaks of the importance of place and space for Black women in ways that are both similar and different to hooks. McKittrick sees geography as a site where Black women create and give meaning to space and part of their "knowledges, negotiations, and experiences" can be explored (McKittrick, 2006, p.x). While hooks looks to the existing spaces that Black women have created for themselves post enslavement (and especially during the civil rights movement) McKittrick looks at the way enslavement revealed fraught relationships to space, oppression, liberation and personhood. McKittrick's analysis of space-making and Black geographies supports Black feminist theory by asserting that Black women are always in the practice of finding spaces of liberation regardless of the oppressive walls that seek to crush them. Harriet Jacobs' "loophole of retreat" that McKittrick describes in *Demonic Grounds* (2006) represents a space that provides refuge but does not allow for open and free participation and connection to community in the way the hooks' homeplace does. I see the homeplace as a kind of third space that leads to transformation:[13] a place to experience praxis where action, reflection, and theorizing take place, a place where Black people can be engaged in resistance work that continues to be necessary.

[13] Edward Soja (2008), a geographer, borrowed the concept of third space from Homi K. Bhabha, a postcolonial theorist to describe a site where the knowable and unimaginable come together.

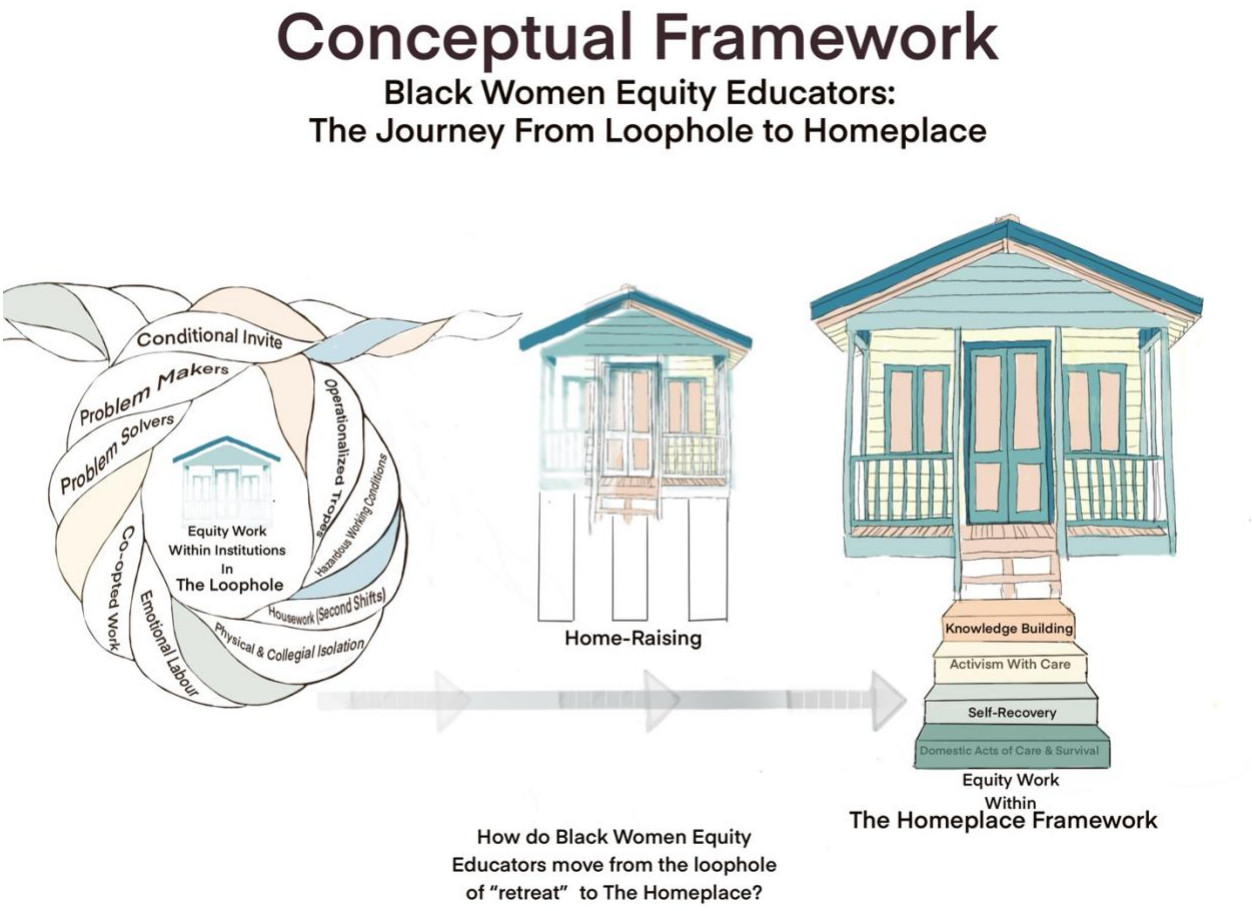


Figure 7: The Conceptual Framework

The homeplace allows Black women equity educators to encounter a world of care, resistance, and activism that takes them from the loophole of retreat as a way to recover themselves in a physical, cultural and spiritual sense. bell hooks' conceptualizing of the homeplace that begins with a journey is in direct relation to the central question of this doctoral project that seeks to examine how Black women equity educators move from the loophole to the homeplace. The journey is a central element of the conceptual framework of the dissertation. The movement from one place to another is not simply a place from harm to care. hooks (2014) describes the initial movement to the homeplace that includes some complexity:

> I remember this journey not just because of the stories I would hear. It was a movement away from the segregated blackness of our community into a poor white neighborhood. I remember the fear, being scared to walk to Baba's (our grandmother's house) because we have to pass that terrifying whiteness—those white faces on the porches staring us down with hate. Even when empty or vacant, those porches seemed to say 'danger', 'you do not belong here'. 'You are not safe'. (hooks, 2014, p. 41)

hooks' segregated community speaks to elements of a loophole because it is surrounded by danger created by white supremacy. The segregated spaces themselves can also be characterized as loopholes because they include feelings of safety surrounded by threats to safety. hooks' movement to the homeplace with her family can be seen in and of itself as a movement of activism and resistance. Free movement between spaces for the Black community has been and continues to be seen as acts of activism and resistance on an institutional, regional, and global level. Movement for the diasporic African community, both historically and currently, is a fraught concept that includes experiences of capture, restrictions, fear, as well as liberation and resistance. I am including the notion of movement within hooks' conceptualizing of the homeplace. This supports understanding how Black women educators move between spaces of limited safety through their engagement with equity work to spaces that are more liberatory in nature.

The homeplace hooks conceptualizes can represent a type of return that has echoes of the Sankofa symbol and Afrocentric notions of movement form one world to another. This Afrocentric interpretation of the homeplace that I am inscribing on hooks' conceptualizing speaks to a return home that could signal a cultural return. Ultimately this journey offers a

feeling of arrival that is a form of return: “Oh! That feeling of safety, or arrival…Such a contrast, that feeling of arrival, of homecoming, this sweetness and the bitterness of the journey that constant reminder of white power and control” (hooks, 1990, p. 41). I cannot help but recall the spirituals sung by the enslaved. These spirituals often speak of a return to home. Home may have meant several things, one of which is a return to the spiritual world to recover parts of the self that the physical world destroyed.

I’m building me a home
I’m building me a home
I’m building me a home
I’m building me a home
This earthly heart
Is gonna soon decay
And the soul gotta have
My Lord, somewhere to stay… (Oral tradition, n.d.)

This second component of the conceptualizing of movement that is echoed in many spirituals speaks to recovery of the self to resist fragmentation. As the Black women educators move from the loophole to the homeplace they are moving towards liberatory futures where extractive relationships that fragment the self are challenged. They are also being challenged to evaluate their relationships to institutions that promise care in policies but offer harm in practice. As they move from the loophole to the homeplace they are also becoming aware of their need for affinity spaces where their dependence on each other for care is strengthened. This form of community integration requires that self-integration—the “recovery of their wholeness” is supported first. The homeplace ultimately leads them to engagement with the wider educational community

where they can build relationships with “good honest colleagues” (Dillard, 2019) that can support them and the work they are doing.

This doctoral study contributes to the field of Black feminist studies relating to labour and care. It provides a way to conceptualize Black women’s relationship to labour specifically in educational spaces. It draws on Black feminist thought and Afrocentric thought and an Afrocentric orientation to research-creation that focuses on storytelling as liberatory. The chapters that follow will create an understanding of the home-raising mechanisms that support Black women educators’ movement from the loophole to homeplace. In Figure 5 the home-raising is empty. It will be revisited later in the dissertation through the moun ki konnet stories and the storythreads. There I will provide more specific descriptions of the home-raising.

Chapter 3: “Kwak!”: Theoretical Framework: Black Feminist Epistemology, Endarkened Epistemology, Afrocentric Thought & Black Creative Thought

I will begin this chapter by outlining the four theoretical frameworks I am bringing together for this doctoral project followed by a more in-depth examination of these frameworks, and how it supports ideas around knowing that ground the doctoral project and dissertation. This chapter brings together three established theoretical frameworks; Patricia Hill Collins’ (2022) Black feminist epistemology, Afrocentric thought, and Cynthia Dillard’s (2012) endarkened epistemology, while adding a fourth theoretical approach I developed with the help of the work of Alice Walker (2023) and Bettina Judd (2023) that I am naming Black creative thought. Black creative thought was developed to build on the work of the other three approaches to highlight specific epistemological considerations for artists and artist scholars. Combined, these theoretical frameworks act as “carriers” (Husséinius et. al. 2016) that transport interconnecting ways of knowing that create an interstitial space. The interstitial space created by these four epistemological frameworks are formed by “textual accumulation” (McKittrick, 2021). This practice of textual accumulation provides a layered and interconnected approach to knowledge that supports answering the question, how do Black women equity educators move from The Loophole of Retreat, a small enclosure of protection with harm, to The Homeplace–a place of activism with care.

This theoretical approach mirrors the belief and values of a knowing through the lens of a spiritual life that is “about commitment to a way of thinking and behaving that honours principles of inter-being and interconnectedness” (Dillard, 2006, p. 77). It is not simply a quadrangulation of theoretical frameworks; rather it is a look into what the interweaving of these frameworks allows to emerge about creative Black woman knowledge production and validation. The overall theoretical approach I am cultivating through the project and the dissertation may

leave some readers overwhelmed but it is a necessary way to approach Black knowing that resists simplification.

I urge readers again to return to the Madras cloth that is not only a symbol of Kweyol heritage but also speaks to how knowledge is shaped and impacted by intersecting approaches and concepts. The origin of the Madras cloth has a history of interweaving across space as it has origins in Chennai, India, was influenced by the plaid Highland tartans brought from British colonization (Thomas, 2023) and traveled to the West coast of Africa, the Caribbean, and the United States through the transatlantic slave trade (Thomas, 2023). Research scholar Maria Thomas describes this seemingly nomadic nature of the Madras cloth as an icon that captures Homi K. Bhabha's concept of hybridity. She explains, "The Madras cloth is studied through the lens of hybridity to determine how it becomes an interstitial space where differing cultures interact and communicate…" (Thomas, 2023, p. 59). An interstitial space is an accurate location to describe the conceptual space created when Black feminist epistemology, Afrocentric thought, endarkened epistemology, and Black creative thought interweave to create a theoretical textile that acknowledges the layering of knowing that resists simplification and values interconnectedness and complexity. What is revealed through the interstitial space more specifically are ways of knowing that center around care, lived experience, memory, transtemporal co-creators, and the interconnected relationship between knowing and doing.

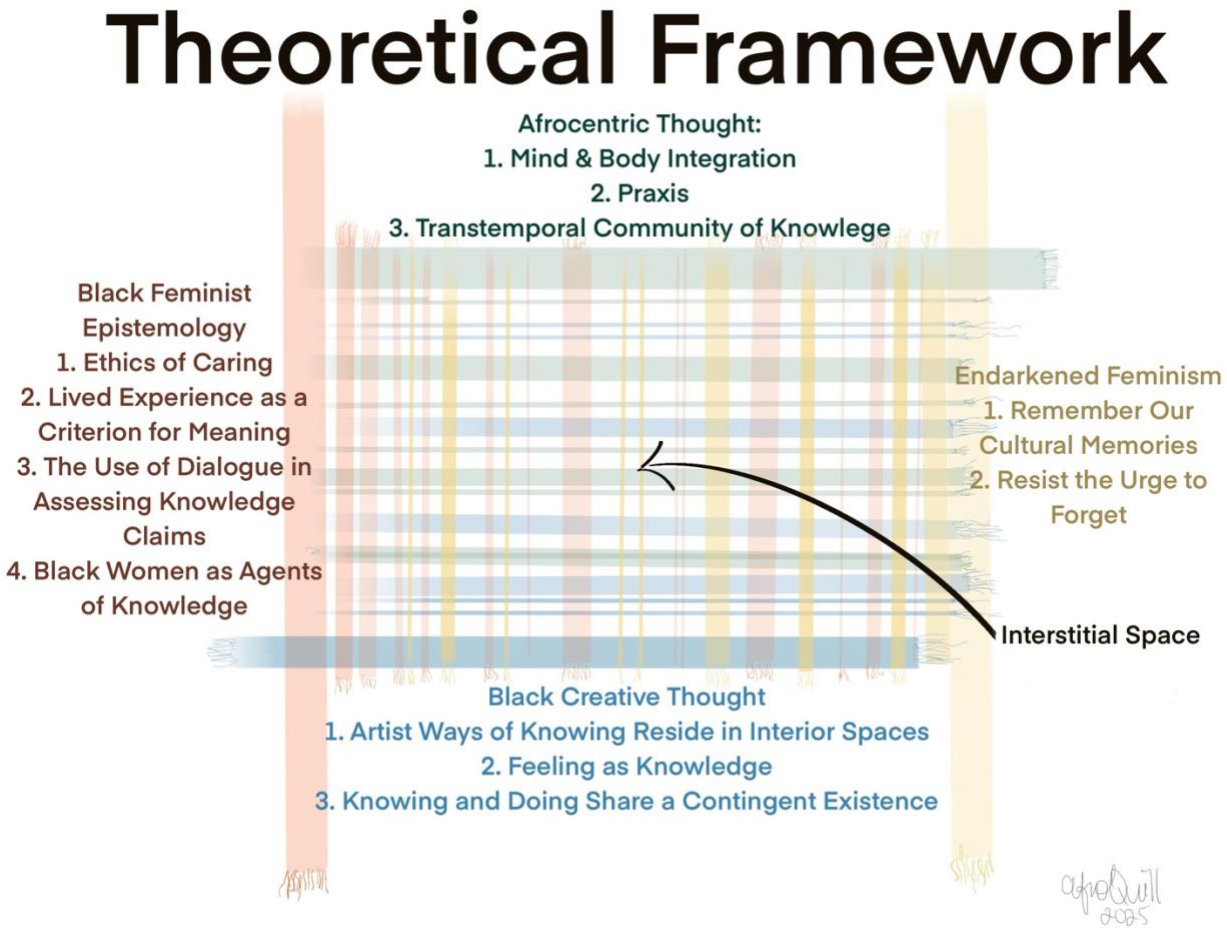


Figure 8: The Theoretical Framework

Black Feminist Epistemology

Black feminist epistemology as articulated by Collins (2022) is part of the larger Black feminist thought framework. Through her book, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, (2022) Collins focuses on themes relating to labour, family, identity, sexuality, motherhood, relationships, and activism. She articulates a Black feminist epistemology that identifies five components. I am drawing on the five elements that act as threads to create the theoretical textile that creates a lens for the project. These threads are:

- The Ethics of Caring

- Lived Experience as a Criterion of Meaning
- The Use of Dialogue in Assessing Knowledge Claims
- Black Women as Agents of Knowledge
- Theory as a Practice in Justice

At the end of this section of the chapter, I will include some connections to bell hooks' thinking on the role of theory and connect it to the project at large and Patricia Hill Collins' Black feminist epistemology.

Exploring Dialectical & Dialogical Relationships to Harm & Care

Before I outline Collin's ethic of caring and the Embodied Ethic of Care Framework I created to think alongside her, it is imperative that Collins' Black feminist epistemology and the ethic of caring thread is situated within a historical analysis of labour for Black women to understand the larger notions of a dialectical and dialogical relationships to care and harm that define so much of our experiences. Because care is interwoven into the other threads and much of Collins' articulation of Black feminist thought, a considerably larger amount of space is set aside to examine Black women's experiences through a theoretical and historical exploration of care.

Black feminist thought (BFT) more broadly articulates what happens as a response to the harm Black women experience in everyday life (Collins, 2022). BFT is concerned with the way Black women come up against a world that is simultaneously sexist and racist and the response that is generated as a result. In this project, I employ this aspect of Black feminist thought by understanding and articulating the relationship between harm and care in Black women educators' everyday experiences and through research approaches.

The relationship between care and harm is a dialectical and dialogical one that also warrants resisting simplification. Nash (2024) asks us to approach care with what she calls "two competing views" (p. 307). Nash (2024) explains, "There is the care that Black and Brown communities offer each other, and there is commodified care or extracted care" (p. 307) which is the source of the harm Black women experience through labour. This doctoral project is doing these two things: exposing the commodified care Black women equity educators provide and demonstrating how this form of labour contributes to harm, which consequently requires a response of care that the community can develop and hold for each other. The recognition for care and the insistence of an ethics of care in Black life research is a direct response to the harm that Black women experienced. As I mentioned earlier in Chapter 1, Black women's relationship to labour, that is often care-based, reveals patterns of harm where Black women, like other women of color, are often called in to perform "emotional labour" where care is required of them but not towards them (Hochschild, 2012, 1979).

Black women must carry the burdens of the state by nursing a malnourished system of education while draining her of what she needs to sustain a life of surviving and thriving for herself and her family. Nash (2024) identifies hooks' homeplace as a response to this harm. She echoes hooks' assertion that the homeplace is a "sanctuary…a private sphere as a site of world making and self-preservation" (Nash, 2024, p. 312). The harm institutions of education conduct through extraction calls for such a response saturated in care and nourishment that value emotions. Hence examining how Black women educators move from a place of harm to a place of care is so important to this doctoral project.

Ethics of Caring & An Embodied Ethic of Care Framework. Collins (2022) highlights the spaces where ethics of caring are found in Black communities. These spaces act as

homeplaces for Black women. She identified mothering, community othermothering, crafting spaces, music and places of worship as spaces where ethics of caring are cultivated and evidenced (Collins, 2022, p. 249). Collins (2022) understands that caring practices (experienced and performed by Black communities) were the ways Black communities sustained themselves. They can be found in the relationship between mother and child where Black women domestic workers imparted knowledge to their children that they gleaned through their exposure to spaces of power (Collins, 2022, p. 249). Another location of ethics of caring is the empathy community othermothers and other community figures exercised that filled in the gaps of care created by oppressive and extractive systems (Collins, 2022, p. 249). Collins (2022) also identifies places of worship as locations that demonstrate ethics of caring. Specifically, Collins referenced the space created for "speaking from the heart" that is often a part of Black religious gatherings where emotions were part of truth telling (Collins, 2022, p. 333). The church services, quilting circles, and music were some of the places where the values of ethics of caring were found. Both quilting circles and music emphasised the value for both individual and collective expression (and participation). From these locations Collins builds an ethics of caring that supports an alternative epistemology that includes the validity of emotions, a value for individual expression and uniqueness, and the important role of empathy. In this way Collins (2022) was trying to establish ethics of caring as a Black way of being and knowing, while revealing the ways that Black people have built knowledge collectively and the way this type of knowledge-building is an act of justice (Collins, 2022; Ford-Smith & Hanson, 2022).

In addition to the three components of Collins' ethic of caring, I have included two necessary components that work together to support my Embodied Ethic of Care Framework



Figure 9: The Embodied Ethic of Care Framework

to name and address the violence Black women educators experienced and the way care needs to be recognized. The embodied ethic of care framework is an essential component of the theoretical approach for this doctoral project. It is a tool that is used to ensure that research relating to Black women addresses key areas relating to care that is so central to Black women's everyday experiences.

The first component I included involves the assertion that an ethic of care must disrupt colonial violence as a way to resist domination. Much of the violence the Black women experienced stemmed from colonial structures that created mechanisms of exploitation. During enslavement these structures historically extracted labour from Black women through physically violent means. The physical torture that Black women experienced during enslavement (and post emancipation) set the groundwork for the legacy of violence that continues today. Research that

explores the lived experiences of Black women needs to be situated within a framework that connects the role of colonial violence in the way knowledge is produced and validated.

The second addition I made to Collins (2022) ethic of caring emphasizes the connection between care, self-integration, and community integration. This segment of the embodied ethics of care framework stresses the importance of both self and community, without prioritizing one over the other. A care ethic framework that addresses the harm Black women educators experience must understand that the alignment of mind, body, and spirit is a form of care that supports unique expression. It is through the unique expression of each member of a community that integration on the community level can take place. This is because each member brings something unique and necessary to the community that then makes the community whole. Collins (2022) does include individual uniqueness as a core value of ethics of caring that is "rooted in a tradition of African humanism, (where) each individual is thought to be a unique expression of a common spirit, power, or energy inherent in all life" (Collins, 2022, p. 334). This is a core understanding of community and self-integration where the individual is recognized as belonging to something that is shared as well as offering a contribution to the common spirit that is unique. Somé (1999) explains the Afrocentric understanding of self and community:

> The urge for community in the West is challenged by the tendency to see community as antithetical…to individuality. Many modern people believe that community absorbs the dignity and integrity of the individual and threatens to kill the much-cherished sense of self…Individuality, not individualism, is the cornerstone of community. Individuality is synonymous with uniqueness. The community loves to see all of its members flourish and function at optimum

> potential. In fact, a community can flourish and survive only when each member flourishes. (Somé, 1999, pp. 91-92)

The emphasis on flourishing both on an individual and community level and the relationship between the two is the reason I felt the need to include a second component to an ethic of care. Caring involves alignment work centered in the body, recognizes colonial structures that make care inaccessible, while valuing individual uniqueness, empathy and emotions.

The integrated self that has alignment with mind, body, and spirit is supported in employing emotions as both a source of knowledge telling and building. During the Enlightenment period, emotion was separated from reason (in conversation, Sarah Barrett, 2022). By linking emotion to truth Collins severs the division between emotion and knowledge. She quotes American playwright, Ntozake Shange to emphasize the artificial separation of emotion from knowledge:

> Our [Western] society allows people to be absolutely neurotic and totally out of touch with their feelings and everyone else's feelings, and yet be very respectable. This to me, is a travesty…I'm trying to change the idea of seeing emotions and intellect as distinct faculties. (Collins, 2022, p. 334)

BFT returns emotions to their rightful place alongside reason to construct knowledge. This return is a practice of care that supports liberatory telling and counteracts the epistemic harm Black women experience. This research project supports this act of justice by creating space (the homeplace) where emotions are recognized as part of truth telling. The theme of emotions as knowledge reveals complexity for Black women equity educators because their work requires "emotional labour".

As I mentioned earlier, emotional labour, as described by Hochschild (2012), requires expending a significant number of emotions in the service of others with very little regard for our own feelings or emotional wellbeing. Black women equity educators are expected to expend significant amounts of emotion towards others, especially while they are asked to downplay their own emotions as a way of appearing "professional". This fragmentation of the self through the denial of emotions is a familiar experience for Black women. Disconnecting from emotion was and continues to be a survival strategy, leading all the way back to the enslavement of African peoples (Parker, 2020). The practice of suppressing or feigning emotions under racial oppression creates "emotional injury" (Parker, 2020). I draw on Saidiya Hartman's (2017) notion of the antidote to harm and assert that *validation* is also the antidote to emotional injury and is one of the central goals of my research and practice for the moun ki konnet.[14] There are both internal and external sources to validation. Internal validation can decrease the need for external validation. Internal validation is especially important because it may not be possible to get external validation from a system that is structured to invalidate Black women (In conversation with Vidya Shah, 2025). The homeplace can offer opportunities to restore internal validation by respecting the rightful place of emotions in expressing the work experiences of Black women equity educators.

When the right to express emotion is returned to Black women, it supports their ability to share their lived experience, which is a form of justice. Honor Ford-Smith (2022), a Caribbean studies scholar, along with Beverley Hanson, a health care aid worker and community organizer, offer an important extension to Hochschild's analysis of care work when they assert that care and

[14] At a talk in 2017 at the Barnard Center for Research on Women, Saidiya Hartman references validation as an antidote for oppression. (*In The Wake: A Salon in Honor of Christina Sharpe | Barnard Center for Research on Women*, 2017)

justice are connected. The focus on care is not simply connected to the work Black women perform, but as a form of justice that validates their ability to express emotion and recognize emotion as part of knowledge construction and truth telling (Collins, 2022). Furthermore, when care is restored as a relational practice rather than a commodity, care becomes an enactment of justice. Care becomes a form of justice because it sets our interactions between each other in a way that honours each other's ability to live well—it speaks to our mutual thriving and integration into the community (Ford-Smith & Hanson, 2022). Our neoliberal society views self-care as competing with the interests of collective care (Ford-Smith & Hanson, 2022). The harm Black women equity educators experience through their work can often be regarded, by the institutions that hire them as their responsibility to resolve, especially if we approach care through a neoliberal lens. When care is positioned as a relational enactment of justice it compels society to be a participant in the enactment of care towards Black women equity educators. Ethics of care is a practice of justice that is necessary for Black women equity educators because their work often involves emotional labour. It is for this reason that my project provided an opportunity for Black women K-12 equity educators to re-envision equity work within an ethic of care framework.

Centering ethics of caring in Black Feminist theoretical frameworks is about recognizing the importance of care as a liberatory practice in research. It is also about returning emotions and care as legitimate partners to knowledge construction within Eurocentric institutions that want to tell us otherwise. More importantly ethics of care are a form of repatriation of African epistemologies: “(E)thics of care”, Clemons (2019) writes, “can bridge the binary breakdown between the intellect and emotion that Eurocentric knowledge values” (p. 4). Ethics of care are

enacted within methods that include narratives and dialogue that validate lived experiences and emotions as valid tools from which we construct knowledge.

Lived Experience as a Criterion of Meaning

In addition to ethics of caring Collins stresses the importance of understanding how knowledge is acquired through lived experience. To ground this key feature of her Black feminist epistemology she identifies two types of knowing; the first is knowledge and the second is wisdom (Collins, 2022). She differentiates the two by asserting that experience is required for wisdom. Collins (2022) explains that wisdom is and has always been essential to Black woman survival. She explains it as the difference between what you think to be true, and what you know to be true (Collins, 2022). Collins (2022) also locates wisdom within and outside written documents and explains that narratives, symbols, and stories are sites where wisdom is housed. She points to Black women like Sojourner Truth who have often leaned on wisdom to create symbolic representations of Black women's experience. She argues that some feminists emphasize the relational aspects of knowledge which supports the ability to develop empathy which supports understanding (Collins, 2022, p 328).

The Use of Dialogue in Assessing Knowledge Claims

The relational aspects of knowledge validation prioritize experience over external observations which in turn creates a humanizing effect (Collins, 2022). The relational aspects are seen through the insistence on recognizing the intertwined role of the listener and the speaker, which further emphasizes the importance of the response as well as the call. This humanizes the listener and the hearer as well as recognizing the collective role of knowledge building and validation. Collins (2022) argues that women and men are socialized differently—men to seek autonomy and women to seek connectedness (Collins, 2022, p. 333). Knowledge claims are

often identified through dialogues rather than in isolation (Collins, 2022p. 333). This explains why women use dialogue to validate knowledge claims (Collins, 2022p. 333).

The participation of the group is essential to the ability to validate knowledge. In this doctoral study the group impromptu call and responses practices were essential to knowledge validation. This research project recognizes the importance of co-creation and the palimpsestic orientation of Black women knowledge production. For this project this means acquiring knowledge or ways of knowing for Black women are connected to values of co-creation over time and with others in their community that supports a movement from the loophole to the homeplace. Kwik! Kwak! is an Afro-Caribbean example of the use of dialogue, and the main reason behind its use to shape this doctoral project and dissertation. In the storythreads I describe in chapter 5 the use of dialogue is emphasized as essential to the awareness that is generated for movement from the loophole to the homeplace to occur.

Black Women as Agents of Knowledge

Through the social movements of the 50s, 60s, and 70s, in the United States, Black women as agents of knowledge held a visible presence (Collins, 2022, p. 338). This meant that Black women reclaimed their voices that their ancestors had lost through the crossing of the transatlantic slave trade. Not only did this enable them to speak for themselves but it allowed them to define themselves—a key response that supported them in challenging knowledge claims that created identities that were mobilized to oppress them (Collins, 2022). At the same time there were domains that set epistemological standards for Black women that either validated their knowledge claims or presented challenges to their validation.

As a result of the empowering effects of the social movements Black women were a part of, they became the main sources of validation for their own knowledge (Collins, 2022). Women,

including members of community organizations and artists (singers, poets, storytellers, and writers) who shared political and intellectual knowledge, were part of this system that facilitated validation work that could shift the false narratives concerning Black women (Collins, 2022). Black women academics also belonged to this group of Black women intellectuals who could validate Black women knowledge claims. Outside of Black women, academia became another who had epistemological standards that Black women must meet (Collins, 2022, p. 340). Collins (2022) explains that Black women academics experience challenges in gaining legitimacy due to their proximity to Eurocentric standards of knowledge by being in the academy. The growing diversity of difference within the Black women's academic sphere also creates complications where knowledge validation is concerned. Collins explains:

> The dilemma facing Black women scholars, in particular, who are engaged in creating Black feminist thought, illustrates difficulties that can accompany grappling with multiple interpretive communities. A knowledge claim that meets the criteria of adequacy for one group and thus is judged to acceptable may not be translatable into the terms of a different group. (Collins, 2022, p. 340-341)

Black women intellectuals are not a monolith, which could create tensions and disagreements between groups (Collins, 2022, p. 340-341). The challenges Black women academics face imposed limits that shape the scope of their projects and the disciplines and approaches they can draw from. This theoretical consideration brings the moun ki konnet and myself into a group of knowledge makers and validators that has a history of tension and possibilities. However, it is important for the theoretical framing of this project that Collins begins with the Black women in the community as the first knowledge makers and validators, as the women in this project belong to this larger legacy of knowledge makers and validators. The placement of community members

at the forefront of Black women knowledge validation practices acts as a compass for this project and dissertation.

Theory as a Practice in Justice

Collins' (2022) Black feminist epistemology is grounded in the belief that Black women are agents of knowledge. Black women not only create knowledge, but they also use that knowledge to access wisdom through theorizing their experiences. The homeplace creates a space where Black women can return to themselves through theorizing their experiences. hooks' (1994) notion of theory as a liberatory practice explains how operationalizing theory serves as a practice of resistance. bell hooks (1994) returns theorizing to us by asserting that theory is an antidote for the violence we experience as Black women. She does not simply see theory as something that lives in our minds; instead, it is something that we embody. It is something felt in the body and for the body. She explains "I saw in theory then a location for healing" (hooks 1994, p. 59). It is with these ideas, these ways of knowing, that I engage in the practice of theorizing and invited Black women equity educators into this practice that restores a way of being that honours justice rooted in the arts, Afrocentrism and BFT.

Black women equity educators who are part of a liberatory movement (one that ironically creates barriers for their own liberation) benefit from being supported in theorizing as a practice of resistance to the oppression they may encounter because of white supremacy culture in equity work. The practice of inviting self-reflection speaks to hooks' (1994) insistence that the estrangement from theorizing as a practice is a result of the dichotomization of theory and practice. Theory is set aside for certain people to undertake (white, often male, and scholars) while action is set aside for grassroots people to practice (equity deserving groups, and women) (hooks, 1994). The fragmentation of theory from practice is also a fragmentation of the mind

from the body. It is part of the extractive practices through which labour is taken from Black women's bodies while their emotions and thinking about their experience are largely ignored. The lack of opportunities to think deeply (and publicly) about their experiences keeps them from theorizing the phenomena they encounter and as a result contributes to their continued oppression. Consequently, Black women equity educators are prevented from engaging in praxis—a necessary practice of transformation and liberation—when they are not able to theorize their own experiences. Black Feminist Theory speaks to theorizing for Black women as a practice of resistance and justice.

Afrocentric Thought

The need for an Afrocentric framework emerges because of the forced and violent movement of "African ascendent people" (Dillard, 2002, p. 385) across the globe which resulted in the erasure of African ways of being and knowing for diasporic Africans. Afrocentric thought is largely known as a western framework that was introduced by Molefi Kete Asante (1991) who wanted to decenter Eurocentric knowledge in education as a way to center African ways of knowing and being. He recognized that education was a socializing apparatus and saw the centering of Eurocentric ways of knowing as dehumanizing for students (Asante, 1991). Afrocentrism then is a framework that seeks to return what is lost or unjustly decentered.

Though I employ Afrocentric thought and methodology in the doctoral project, diasporic studies invites me to be cautious of the tendency towards essentializing Blackness and Black women knowledge building more specifically. I do however, lean on Asante's (2009) insistence that Afrocentrism's existence is an opportunity for a pathway for diverse ways of knowing and being. In short Afrocentrism resists the supremacy of a single way of knowing. I recognize that Black women subscribe to diverse ways of knowing and being that inform their approaches and

responses to liberation, resistance, and activism. Afrocentric thought is but one framework that can be used to support the resistance efforts of Black women across the globe.

As I explore an area of Afrocentric thought that connects Black women theorizing and self and community integration through praxis I am keenly aware that other pathways exist that can be explored as a way to theorize Black women knowledge building. Praxis can be exercised within an Afrocentric orientation as a practice of liberation and justice as well as within other frameworks.

Integration as an Afrocentric Value

Before I approach the Afrocentric framing of praxis it is important to briefly acknowledge the role of the integrated self and community as the foundational elements and outputs of praxis. Dillard (2012) argues for an endarkened feminist epistemology with one of the main aims being to counter the fragmentation that is often found in Eurocentric thought traditions. Integration is an important component of Afrocentric thought to understand because it supports the wellbeing of the self and community.

Temitope Adefarakan (2018), a professor of Black Canadian studies, explains that a Yoruba worldview of self-integration involves the alignment and engagement of the mind, body, and spirit. All three components are necessary for a fully integrated self to emerge. Within institutions and systems based on Western epistemologies and ontologies, self-integration is not a focus or value:

> Learning is assumed to take place in the mind, which is understood as the seat of intellect, the source of the human capacity to reason. In this elevation of rational thought processes over other ways of learning and knowing, the spirit (or soul) is, more often than not, silenced, dismissed or ignored, while the body is

> habitually rendered invisible as if, in keeping with the Cartesian binary, the mind can exist in the separation from matter. (Adefarakan, 2018, p. 1)

As I explored earlier, issues relating to the body and visibility are complex and necessary issues to explore to combat harmful identity related challenges for Black women. The racialized body is caught in the visibility paradox where the Black body is made hyper-visible and invisible at the same time (Shah, 2022). The mind intentionally is positioned as existing separately from matter to differentiate who can perform certain types of labour. The fragmentation of the self is a common value that places mind work above activities relegated to the body (Adefarakan, 2018). The body is made visible and necessary by institutions when labour is rigorous and taxing. At the same time, the needs and place of spirit are ignored by these very institutions. Equity work is body work because it is physically taxing and because it is concerned with refurbishing the institution using bodies of colour.

The approach to a self that is fragmented leads to a view of Black women as less than human. Black studies and feminist scholar Zakiyyah Iman Jackson (2020) argues that this bifurcation of thought from embodiment has historical roots in Hegel's polarization of race in his theories of transcendence and immanence. Through these arguments, Hegel rendered Black people as non-human:

> For Hegel…'inward freedom' is first attained through opposing one's immediate existence (natural environment) and one's natural existence (animal existence); this opposition then provides the condition of possibility for higher order thinking and self-governance. According to Hegel, one must rise above one's natural/sensuous existence via internal reflection to attain spiritual freedom, and this transcendence then becomes the basis of one's entry into the

> domain of culture and history. Ultimately, Hegel concluded, 'the African' is eternally an 'animal man' because Africans are trapped within immanence, or immediate experience, and are, therefore, unable to achieve transcendence or apprehend transcendent knowledge. (Jackson, 2020, p. 89)

Though it was formed centuries ago, Hegel's master-slave dialectic can be observed through labour division practices today. In order to keep Black people at the level of the non-human and prevent the engagement of transcendence work, the fragmentation of the mind and body was necessary.

Praxis as an Afrocentric Practice in Liberation & Justice

The antidote to the gatekeeping of transcendence work is praxis—the place of true transcendent work[15]. Praxis is a process that involves three stages that include action, reflection, and theorizing. It is through praxis that transformation occurs (Freire,1996). The ability to invoke praxis is truly a practice of liberation and justice because praxis is a part of a process that invites introspection for the purpose of creating transformation. In praxis, the integrated self is necessary because praxis requires the engagement of the body (action), mind (thinking/reflecting), and spirit (theorizing work) (see Figure 8). It is obvious, on the other hand, in the Afrocentric tradition, how body and action and mind and spirit are connected. What is less obvious is the way spirit and theorizing are connected. This connection is important because spirit is an essential component of Afrocentric and Black feminist thought. Soul and spirit work are about transcendence from one world to another. This work requires awareness and consciousness raising activities, as well as activities that take us from one stage of life to another. These ideas are observable in the Sankofa symbol and in the Kôngo Cosmogram that represents the four

[15] In the last 200 years of philosophical thought emerging from the West, scholars did not grant Black people the opportunity to theorize their life.

movements of the sun. The Sankofa symbol derives from the Akan people. It is a symbol that translates to “go back and get it”. The Kôngo Cosmogram comes from the Bântu-Kôngo people and is used to map the physical and spiritual worlds (Fu-Kiau, 2001). Figure 8 shows the way the Sankofa concept aligns with praxis and the process of self and community integration in my project. Figure 9 show more details of the Kôngo concept of the four movements of the sun and Sankofa symbol and how they align.

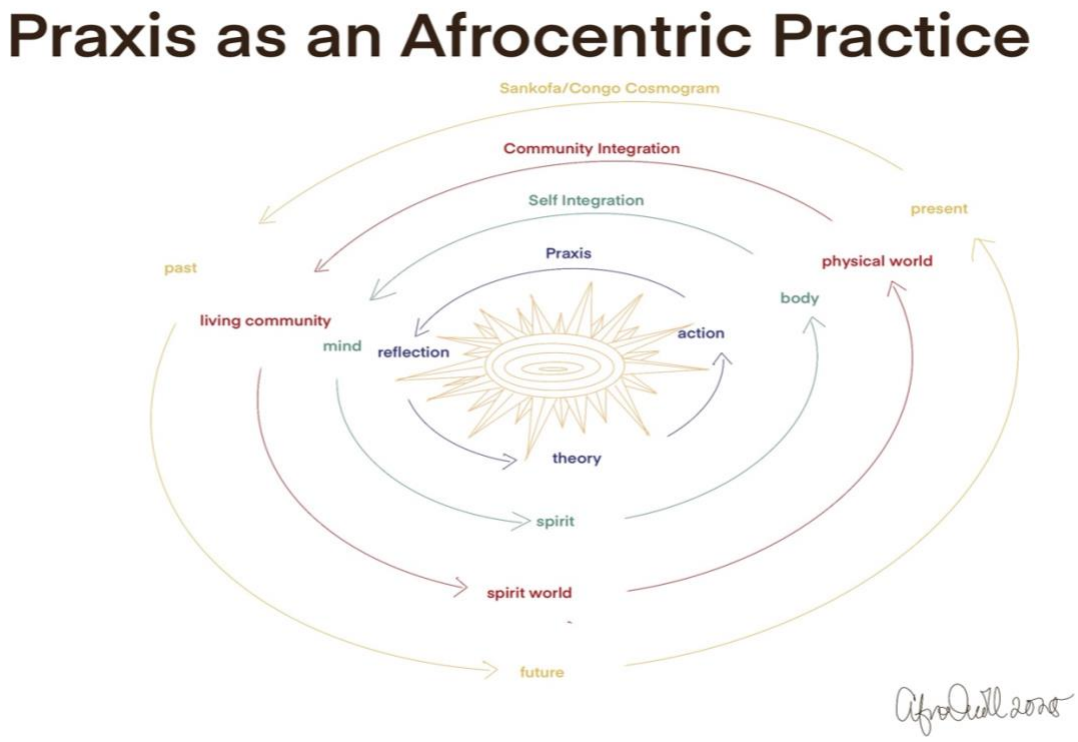


Figure 10: Praxis as an Afrocentric Practice

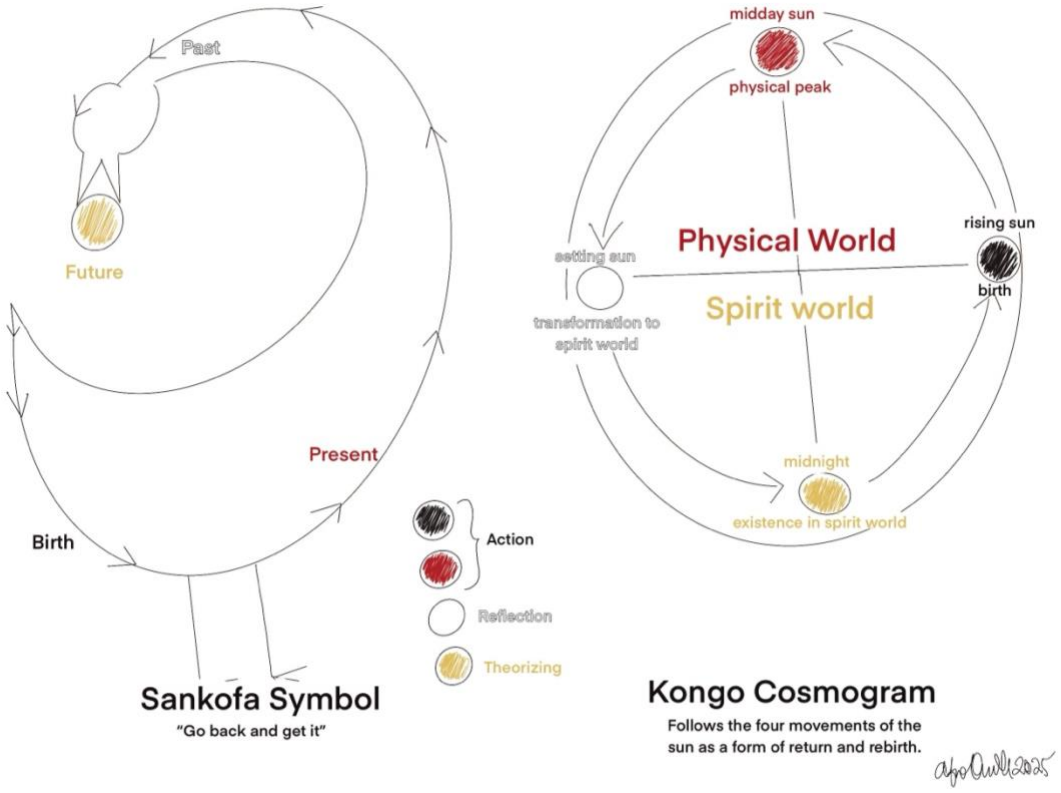


Figure 11: The Connection Between Praxis, the Sankofa Symbol & the Kôngo Cosmogram

The fragmentation of the personal and the theoretical is an important place to consider within research on Black women's experiences in education. In ways that are similar to the role knowledge construction plays in being of service to the community, I conceptualize theory as it can be employed as an antidote to the harm we experience. This returns theory to its true liberatory and justice related nature which is an important component of the theoretical framework.

Endarkened Feminism

Dillard's (2012) endarkened epistemology highlights the necessary role of spirituality—an element that she says connects African and African diasporic people. Spirituality[16] connects

[16] Through thinking alongside scholars such as Somé (1999) and Dillard (2012), I am defining spirituality as practices that increase an awareness of the interconnection of beings, elements, and temporalities. Like Dillard, I believe spirituality involves practices of remembering. I also include practices of conjuring in my understanding of spirituality that I explore further in Chapter 7. Conjuring and remembering are about

Black women to a shared inheritance that they have been estranged from due to colonialism and enslavement (Dillard, 2012). Hence the importance of practices of remembering and the refusal to forget. These practices disrupt European knowledge construction and values that are found in research, teaching, and learning. The very name endarkened feminism speaks against the Enlightenment period where Black ways of knowing were disregarded. Toliver (2022) explains, "using the word 'Endarkened' instead of 'enlightened' was a deliberate and essential choice, as the concept of enlightenment dominating social science research moves against Black cultural ways of being and knowing" (p. xvi). The main work of the endarkened feminist epistemology is to disrupt the supremacy of Eurocentric ways of knowing in educational research.

Dillard (2000) challenges traditional research by presenting six assumptions that include elements of spirituality, as well as feminist psychology, and Black feminist thought as explored by Collins (2022). The six assumptions in Dillard's (2000) endarkened epistemology are:

1. Self-definition forms one's participation and responsibility to one's community
2. Research is both an intellectual and a spiritual pursuit, a pursuit of purpose
3. Only within the context of community does the individual appear…and, through dialogue, continue to become
4. Concrete experiences within everyday life form the criterion of meaning, the "matrix of meaning-making"
5. Knowing and research extend both historically in time and outward to the world: to approach them otherwise is to diminish their cultural and empirical meaningfulness
6. Power relations, manifest as racism, sexism, homophobia, etc., structure gender, race, and other identity relations within the research (pp. 672-677).

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accessing what we know that is not bound in the physical world alone. It also emphasizes a collective knowing and sharing of that knowledge that is not bound by time.

The six assumptions serve three purposes. First they highlight power relations that impact Black women scholars and their research (Dillard, 2000, p. 673). Secondly, they provide guidance for adjudicating committees (Dillard, 2000, p. 673). Lastly, the assumptions challenge the belief that there is one way of conducting educational research (Dillard, 2000, p. 673). Most important to my dissertation, the six assumptions encourage the recovery of ways of knowing that are central to Black women's ways of knowing and being that have been erased, ignored, and forgotten.

Resisting the Urge to Forget

In her book, *Learning to (Re) member the Things We've Learned to Forget* Dillard (2012) begins her discussion on endarkened feminist research with the seductions that "have (been) used to "train (us) away from ourselves" (p. 18). The discussion on seductions is divided into two main seductions: the seduction of theory and the seduction of the material over the spiritual world (Dillard, 2012, pp. 19-23). The first seduction, the seduction and rewards of theory are concerned with the way truth is conceived through the influence of a scientific approach to research. Dillard (2012) explains that "the seduction of science, the seduction of theory as "Truth" as that which is definable, observable, and explainable" (p. 19) leads to specific conclusions about who can research and theorize. Her belief is that "everyone theorizes" (Dillard, 212, p. 18). The idea that theory is meant for an elite few leads us down a path where certain ways of knowing are delegitimized (namely non-Eurocentric approaches). Dillard is arguing that we need to reckon with our notions of what is legitimate and the roots of that conclusion.

The spiritual and nonphysical are often part of what is delegitimized. Which leads us into the second seduction that relates to valuing the material over the spiritual (Dillard, 2012). Because of the science-based research approach that grounds much of research, what is deemed

as truth is often connected to the physical and is favoured over the spiritual. Dillard's (2012) engagement with the concept of spirituality is about an integrated approach to teaching and research that values both the spirit and the physical. Dillard posits that the spiritual is centered on remembering what we have lost and forgotten. Research as a spiritual pursuit recognizes the irresistible desire to forget due to the overemphasis and over valuation of the science-based research approach (Dillard, 2012). What is often publishable ignores spirit and forces researchers to choose certain types of "evidence" over others. This is another way Dillard (2012) says we are enticed to forget (p. 22). When we are enticed to forget the spiritual, we also turn away from ways of knowing that are found in cultural memories that support an integrated way of being. When we begin to remember the things we have been made to forget we engage in praxis. This involves attending to awareness that can support in bringing back ways of knowing. A large part of the doctoral project is about remembering and rematriation practices that support self-recovery for the moun ki konnet. The remembering is part of the awareness that is generated as the moun ki konnet move from the loophole to the homeplace.

Dillard (2012) asserts that remembering is the way back—a way to legitimize cultural ways of knowing that are embodied, spiritual, and unseen (p. 20). Danticat (2004) in Krik Krak tells us that memory is a knowing that satisfies a kind of a search. In the last page of Krik Krak she says, "once you remember you stop looking". What is it that we are looking for—it is not the answer—it is ways of knowing ourselves that are within our cultural practices, beliefs, and spiritual traditions. This is a key tenant of Dillard's endarkened feminist epistemology—resisting the urge to forget and drawing close to remembering. Dillard (2012) and Toni Morrison (2019) remind us that remembering is about bringing the members back together again. The members of

our community that share and create our ways of knowing, which ultimately helps us to recover ourselves—a key feature of the homeplace and storytelling practices.

Danticat's (2004) assertion that remembering creates a ceasing of a search is about a type of reclamation that satisfies a wondering spirit. The spirit is satisfied once it has been brought back into a community that share the knowledge of the people, their practices, and their refusal to be separated from all the members of themselves—the community. Dillard (2012) asks us to resist forgetting to reclaim an inheritance of culture and customs that offer healing through belonging. Danticat (2004) asks us to remember because it is the building material from the past that is used for new world making.

Research is a Spiritual Pursuit

Dillard (2012) describes attending a conference in 2003 at the University of Cape Coast in Ghana. There were people from across the continent and the United States. Dillard shared her dismay at finding the ways we have been taught to forget. "We'd literally been trained away from ourselves. Part of what that meant for me was also the rather blatant absence of any talk of spirituality. The spiritual nature of research, the spiritual outcomes of research, and the influences of the researcher as a spiritual being were unmentioned and unnamed in project after project" (Dillard, 2012, p. 18).

In educational research specifically remembering is about rejecting a positivistic way of knowing and prioritizing a way of knowing that is centered on spirituality (Toliver, 2022, p. xvii). Dillard describes a spiritual life as being "about a commitment to a way of thinking and behaving that honours principles of inter-being and interconnectedness" (Dillard, 2006b, p. 77). Interbeing allows for information to be transmitted and shared communally. More important to Dillard's commitment to a way of knowing that sees sharing lived experience through

storytelling as sacred work. The way research is traditionally approached is different from an endarkened feminist epistemology. Within endarkened epistemology research is seen through a metaphor of research as responsibility, rather than a recipe to fix a problem (Dillard, 2012, p. 61-60). The work of research is regarded as sacred (Dillard, 2012). Approaching research as sacred and through a framing of spirituality means that there is a value for more than the material. There is an emphasis on the interconnectedness between Black women across the globe, the moun ki konnet and the researcher. There is something that is deep within each of us that connects to a large transtemporal community where knowledge and knowing are approached as sacred work (Dillard, 2012, p. 60-61). Dillard explains what is lacking in current approaches to research:

> What is missing is an explicit attention to the epistemologies of Black or endarkened feminism in an interconnected, intersubjective, and transnational way that renders visible the work of research as sacred work, centred in the spiritual notions constructed by Black women on the continent and in the diaspora". (Dillard, 2012, p. 60)

Grounding research in spirituality means that Black women are able to reclaim what has been hidden from them. Which includes their larger community and ways of knowing found within these communities. It is a practice in remembering that takes us beyond the physical because connecting to spirit means we have access to the world of our ancestors. The Kôngo Cosmogram articulates this kind of return to remembering. It is believed that the ancestors return to the spirit world in the same way the sun sets at the end of the day. When they leave the spirit world through the process of physical birth they are meant to carry some knowledge they had gleaned from the spirit world. In short, the return to the past (as in the Sankofa symbol) is a return to non-physical knowledge that will hopefully come to the physical world through birth.

This cycle mirrors the way knowledge and experience are shared as it moves between people of the African continent and diaspora. Dillard explains, "whether in the U.S., Africa, or in the African diaspora, women of African ascent share experiences with some form of oppression…it is some version of our belief in spirit that has allowed us to stand in the face of hostility and degradation…" (Dillard, 2012, p. 60). The belief in spirit speaks to a part of ourselves that is deep within us that connects us not only through our shared oppression but also through our shared response to it—the main one being the act of remembering who we are. There is still an important acknowledgment of the nuances between our experiences and our specific responses—however key to each of them is the awareness that ways of knowing have to reflect what Dillard (2012) calls "the cultural memories of our soul" (p. 24). Dillard (2012) believes that accessing the cultural memories of our soul supports communal ways of knowing.

Black Creative Thought

As I was working on the theoretical framework for this project I found there was a gap in the connections I saw between art, ways of knowing, and knowledge production. I wanted to find a way to express the bridge I saw between the thinking and doing of art. The requirements and shape of the dissertation (and the academy at large) make this quite challenging. There is an expectation to remove art from a theoretical framework and leave it within the margins of a methodological understanding. I spent a great deal of time wrestling with this. I reached out to other artists-scholars like Shaunasea Brown, Emilie Jabouin, and Fatemeh Gharibi to discuss this tension. This was the beginning of approaching a way to think beyond the fragmentation that is prevalent in scholarship that is especially challenging for artist-scholars. I also draw from scholars who engage with Black creative practice such as Nataleah Hunter-Young, Rosalind Hampton, and Naila Keleta-Ma. Though their work may not appear in the reference section of

this dissertation, they have informed my thinking in important ways. Black creative thought as part of a theoretical approach will evolve beyond this project as I think alongside the scholars mentioned above while engaging with artistic research. The next section represents the concepts I pulled together to ground this thinking that I hope to build on throughout my scholarship.

There are two themes that ground the understanding of Black Creative Thought through an onto-epistemological framing:

1. Knowledge is accessed through a transtemporal community of practice
2. Feeling, knowing, and doing share a contingent existence

Together these themes will bridge the theoretical and methodological sections of the dissertation but more importantly begin the work of rethinking artistic scholarship.

Knowledge is Accessed Through a Transtemporal Community of Practice

"I had that wonderful feeling writers get sometimes, not very often, of being with a great many people, ancient spirits, all very happy to see me consulting and acknowledging them, and eager to let me know, through the joy of their presence, that, indeed, I am not alone" (Walker, 2023, p. 14).

A Eurocentric approach to artist-scholarship is focused on futurity whereas an Afrocentric approach carries a transtemporal connection:

> What drives the research-creator in the Eurocentric application is a thirst for new knowledge (Loveless, 2015). What drives the artist in the Indigenous West African sense is connection to community while connecting to the past, present and future. The artist stands at the doors to the past, present and future and must open each gateway through various methods for the health and wellbeing of the community (Somé,1999). (Sodhi, 2024, p. 171)

Similar to a Black feminist epistemology where knowledge is produced relationally—a transtemporal approach to knowledge production and validation is understood to not only

live amongst your community in the physical world but also to your community in the spirit world.

Falola (2023) and Somé (1999) both emphasize the transtemporal aesthetic of art making and artwork. Like storytelling, a common Afrocentric artform, art in general connects past knowledge to support a healthy community in the present and in the future (Falola, 2023; Somé,1999). The artists hold the collective knowledge of the community. They are both a reflection and a generator of medicine for their community. Storytelling is just one of the medicines artists employs to support the wellbeing of the community. Afrocentric scholars see art as ways that support our vision of ourselves and our society while also offering healing and liberation to the spirit, mind and body. Falola (2023), regards the artist as "the sole living product of the various social processes that were witnessed, participated in and contributed to. Through artistry and sculpture the carver becomes an agent of the prevalent social ethos, in the artist's immediate setting and for the entire Yoruba race" (Falola, 2023, p. 209). Falola asserts that the artist is crucial to supporting the collective consciousness of the community. He regards artwork such as carvings, paintings, photographs and textiles as texts that can both reveal and store knowledge (Falola, 2023). The implications that this Afrocentric belief carries are fundamental to the use of storytelling in this dissertation and the research project.

Feeling, Knowing and Doing Share a Contingent Existence

Artist ways of knowing reside in interior spaces (Judd, 2023). These interior spaces include memory, conjuring, and feeling. The theoretical framework ends on this note on purpose. It is a statement about the challenge in removing the enmeshment that exists between knowing and doing. This part of the epistemology serves as a bridge in the way that knowing and doing are connected. In academic papers we are instructed to show a marked separation between

methodology and theory—the doing and knowing. This feels like a knife that cuts at the very way of being that artists embody. So much of the world of the artist is understood as doing. But understanding the interiority of knowing within artists is a first step in understanding that knowing and doing are contingent on each other. This circles back and underscores the Afrocentric thought tenet that values mind and body integration. The desire to fragment knowing from doing, and doing from knowing is as old as colonisation—it is a way to affirm that the body and mind/spirit can be butchered for separate uses. If we return to Collins (2022) we are reminded that the modes of knowing are located in the body (p. 328). This theoretical framework then is trying to introduce another way of conceptualizing knowing through a Black woman's artist way of being that values integration of doing and knowing, mind and body, and the individual and collective.

These concepts of knowing help answer the question of how do Black women equity educators move from the loophole to the homeplace by showing that the movement from a space of confinement to a place of liberation first happens with an integrated form of doing and knowing that takes the form of memory, feeling, and transtemporal collaborative engagement. Understanding that knowing resides first in the interior spaces where memory, feeling, and conjuring of transtemporal co-creators occurs is to understand how we move from "thinking we are free to knowing we are not" (Sojourner Truth by way of Dillard, 2012). It is only then we can become aware of the movements that are required to find ourselves at home.

Kwik (read)

Kwak (say out loud)

Kwik (read)

Kwak (say out loud)

Kwik (read)

Kwak (say out loud)

Gadé mwen ou tuo mwen ka vini (read) *(Look at me, to you I am coming)*

Kwik (read)

Kwak (say out loud)

Gadé mwen ou tuo mwen ka vini (read) *(Look at me, to you I am coming)*

Lapòt? (say out loud) *(the door)*

Oui! Lapòt! (read) *(Yes! The door)*

Chapter 4: Journey to the Homeplace: A Creative Afro-Feminist Methodology

In this chapter, I will outline the Creative Afro-Feminist Methodology (CAFM) (see Table 2) that supports Black women equity educator's movement from the loophole to the homeplace. An important foundation to this methodological approach is the fluidity of their tenets—mirroring the concept of integration rather than fragmentation. This is a theme that flows throughout the entire dissertation and doctoral project. I will explore key tenets of Afrocentric and Black feminist methodologies followed by a description of research-creation and how it applies to this project to create the CAFM. Next, I will explore the two themes and 3 elements from the CAFM and their application to the research design, methods, data collection, analysis, and dissemination. I will embed the descriptions of the methods within the discussion of the three elements of the CAFM. Finally, I will end with an exploration of the storythreads analysis that has roots in Toliver's (2022) storywork analysis.

Black feminist methodology, Afrocentric methodology, and research-creation informed the methodological approach to this doctoral project. Combined, these methodological traditions lend themselves to a qualitative research approach that supports meaning-making and knowledge construction that values sensuous telling of lived experience through multimodal art methods that include gazework, storywork, and digital portraiture. The principles of Afrocentric and Black feminist methodologies are in close alignment because of the emphasis on the interconnectedness between the researcher and the moun ki konnet. Both methodologies have an overall goal of transformation and change. Research-creation emphasizes telling through the arts. The overall goal of research-creation is to bring the arts and scholarly work together while producing new knowledge (see Table 2).

Table 2: The Principles & Overall Goals of Afrocentric, Black Feminist, and Research-Creation Methodologies

The Principles & Overall Goals of Afrocentric, Black Feminist, and Research-Creation Methodologies		
Methodology	Main Principles	Overall Goals
Afrocentric Methodology (Falola, 2022; Reviere, 2001)	Interconnected relationship between researcher and moun ki konnet Value placed on maintaining and developing truth, justice and harmony throughout research (Ma'at)	Knowledge for improvement/transformation (Nommo)
Black Feminist Methodology (Toliver, 2022; Collins, 2022; Clemons, 2019; Patterson et. al., 2016)	Emphasizes the interconnected voices of the moun ki konnet and researcher while leaving room for difference Value knowledge through experience and feeling Value for feeling and telling through storying	Validation of Black women's experience Individual and collective knowledge creation (Disruption of epistemic violence) Truth must be put to action through activism or resistance
Research Creation (Loveless, 2019; Springgay, 2023; O'Neill, 2012; O'Neill, 2010)	Values transdisciplinary approach Sensuous telling & feeling is an important element	Generating knowledge through a pairing of scholarly work and the arts

Afrocentric Methodology

It is crucial to begin by identifying the key components of an Afrocentric methodology. Though there are a wide range of ideas and assumptions about these methodologies I have chosen to focus on the work of Falola (2022), Reviere (2001), Pellerin (2012), and Mazama (2003) when discussing Afrocentric methodologies. After I outline these approaches, I will discuss how they intersect with research-creation. The second part of the chapter will focus on the methods which will be outlined in detail.

Pellerin (2012) identified 7 criteria in Mazama's Afrocentric Methodology:

1) The African experience must guide and inform all inquiry.

2) The spiritual is important and must be given its due place.

3) Immersion in the subject is necessary.

4) Wholism is a must.

5) Intuition is a valid source of information.

6) Not everything that matters is measurable.

7) Knowledge generated must be liberating (p. 27).

I have chosen to focus my attention for the purposes of this study on the following criteria: the importance of the spiritual and the second is the necessity for the liberatory function of research (Mazama, 2003, Pellerin, 2012). These two themes align with Black feminist methodologies that Dillard and Patterson et al draws on in their approach.

The importance of the spiritual as central to Afrocentric methodologies is based on the value of interconnectedness with all beings. It also supports the sixth criterion which says that everything is not measurable. Through this research study the participants used knowledge derived from emotions, a non-quantifiable component, to both express and validate their experiences.

From the research design to the dissemination process the Afrocentric methodological approach emphasizes the idea of interconnected ways of coming to know. The research design situates the project within "historical, social and contemporary experiences of Africana people" (Pellerin, 2013, p. 153) while supporting a view of African people that is wholistic. The observations are not approached from a distance rather they seek to provide understanding and connection (Pellerin, 2013). The data processing stage is also approached differently because of the way the data is transformed. The data is meant to speak to the history, culture, and

experiences (Pellerin, 2013, p. 158). The final stage of the research process relating to the analysis must be committed to going beyond generating new knowledge. This stage must accurately represent the experiences of African people while creating a new narrative that is liberatory and offers agency to the community (Pellerin, 2013, p. 159).

The late Ruth Reviere (2001), a Caribbean physics professor, spoke of this kind of orientation in research related to what it means to be an Afrocentric researcher. Reviere (2001) articulates two main principles that set the foundation for an Afrocentric methodology; Ma'at which speaks to justice, truth and harmony, and Nommo, which translates to the "productive word" (p. 711). The productive word has to do with how the production of knowledge supports transformation for the community (Reviere, 2001). The researcher is a mechanism that supports bringing truth, justice, and harmony to fruition. Reviere (2001) identified five research criteria or what she called "research canons"; ukweli (truth), utulivu (justice), uhaki (harmony), ujamaa (community), and kujitoa (commitment). She intentionally inserted these principles into the Afrocentric methodology to trouble the Eurocentric values of objectivity, reliability, and validity (Reviere, 2001, p. 710). I regard these Afrocentric values as doing something else as well. They remind the researcher that research is co-created because of the emphasis on harmony and community which speaks to the *research with* approach. (I will discuss the research with approach later in the chapter.)

Black Feminist Methodology

A main goal of Black feminist methodology also has justice-oriented aims. Black feminist methodologies are oriented towards empowerment of Black women through research that equips them to counter oppressive forces (Patterson et. al., 2016, p.59). A crucial point in the research process within a Black feminist methodology relates to the data analysis. Some guiding

principles for this part of the project includes a commitment to highlighting lived experiences, making visible multiple truths, while ensuring that opportunities for self-definition and self-determination are created (Patterson et. al., 2016, p. 60). Similar to an Afrocentric methodology, Black feminist methodologies are committed to praxis—closing the divide between theory and action (Patterson, p. 68). Closing the divide between theory and action is accomplished by "putting the information to work" (Patterson et. al., 2016, p. 69; Falola, 2022). To use Alice Walker's words, we must be asking ourselves, "What is the work my soul must do?" (Clemons, 2019, p. 5). The research must serve the community in a meaningful way. I saw evidence of this through the doctoral project when the women asked to gather after the research project was over so they could put what they had gathered to work. They recognized the lack of support they received through equity work and sought to address this gap in care. My role as the Kwik! Kwak! researcher was to continue to support this extension of the project by locating the necessary resources and supports.

Interrogating the positionality of the researcher contributes to more justice aims in the research project. It ensures that the research is focused on justice and liberation for the participants. The positionality of the researcher and the correlated need for a practice of reflexivity are also important components of a Black feminist methodological approach to research (Clemons, 2019, p. 50). The power imbalance that can exist between the researcher and the participants are important considerations for the researcher to keep in mind to ensure the relationship between the researcher and the participants is not extractive.

The entire research process needs to be carefully considered to ensure that the engagement with the participants is respectful and resists exploitation and simplification. From the data collection to the data analysis, the process needs to be empowering to the participants.

Considerations about interviews or "dialogic conversation" as Patterson et. al. (2016) refers to them should honour the time and offer flexibility in the format of the methods. Participants should not feel beholden to a process that is not liberatory and empowering (Clemons, 2019, Patterson et. al., 2016). Coding from a Black feminist methodological standpoint is also shaped by the principles of Afrocentric thought. "Open coding" should be encouraged as it allows the researcher the opportunity to engage with the data before making prior assumptions (Clemons, 2019, p. 6). I took a more extreme version of this approach when I engaged with the data for this project. I allowed myself time with the data to see how the stories spoke to myself and each other. This open method of engaging with data allows the researcher to be guided by intuition which is an important practice in approaching research through spirit—a central element of an endarkened feminist approach to research (Dillard, 2012). The value for the individual and the collective knowledge and experience is also a key feature of Black feminist research approaches and central to my approach for this doctoral project where stories are told and the woven together to form a storying textile.

Another aim of Black feminist methodologies is the role of knowledge in creating a response to the oppression Black women experience. Collins' (2022) discussion on the dialectical relationship that is created by the experience of oppression and the need for activism for Black women is crucial. Patterson et al. (2016) argues that Black feminist methodology is a research process that "guides how the information gleaned is put to work. BFM necessitates that truths made visible by the research process be translated into action, resistance, and/or activism" (Patterson et al., 2016, p. 69). My research with Black women equity educators was put to work through the creation and enactment of an ethic of care framework in equity work. This brought Black women equity educators together to deconstruct, theorize, and re-envision their lives.

Together these components support moving equity work from a loophole of retreat to a homeplace of activism with care.

Research-Creation

Research-creation was introduced in Canada in 2004. Simply defined it combines creative practices and academic research (Springgay, 2022, p. 3; Loveless, 2019). Stephanie Springgay professor and director of the School of the Arts at McMaster University, explores research-creation in her book *Feltness: Research-Creation Socially Engaged Art & Affective Pedagogies* (2022). She asserts that, "research-creation is composed by concepts rather than discrete definitions or procedures…research-creation is not definitive. Rather it is constituted through concepts that are constantly in the making, linking up and problematizing an event" (p. 15). My initial approach to research-creation in this project is based on the idea that inviting Black women into a space where they can explore their identity through their work as Black women equity educators could offer alternative pathways to wellbeing. Research-creation helps myself but more importantly the moun ki konnet explore how they arrived and walked along a pathway.

Another key understanding of research creation comes from Loveless (2020) that insists that research-creation is a practice that begins in the middle of an event. Springgay (2022) explains that "this means that quite often an artist-researcher does not have a clear set of directions or procedures determined prior to beginning an inquiry" (p. 15). Like Springgay, I do not believe that this means you do not come prepared. Rather I invite engagement through various "events" that is responsive to the participants and the thinking and feelings in the room. Springgay (2022) explains that the "porosity of the event is speculative, emergent, and always in movement" (p. 15). In the doctoral project, both in the person and online program the moun ki

konnet would direct the process through their engagement. Even though I had a set of methods laid out—they were always going to bend to the impulse of the moun ki konnet. My typical approach when facilitating a group through research-creation is to allow "porosity" within the design of the session(s). This is primarily because I believe it is important to use sensing mechanisms as the guide for the direction of the session(s). An approach of flexibility and openness is the basis for the practices the moun ki konnet explored in the project. This at times is in direct conflict with the requirements of ethics boards and doctoral programs. As an artist I use sensing mechanisms to choose the direction of an event. This in "real time" practice is not something that can be planned ahead of time.

Another discussion for artist-scholars centers around whether art is a product or a process. At times art is also viewed as mainly an emotive practice rather than an informative process (Djahwasi & Saidon, 2020, p. 295). As I previously outlined in the theoretical framework chapter, I am developing an understanding that does not abide by this fragmented approach. I see another space created beyond these binary understandings of artist-scholarship. I am curious about artistic research where the process and the expression are not required to be separated (if they can be at all) to be understood. The dissertation and this project at large is an experiment in the turn away from fragmentation of the emotive and informative understanding of art.

The tension surrounding art as a process and art as a product is just one of the many tensions that exist within research-creation within the institution. The very presence of research-creation within academia puts pressure on ways of knowing and being that relate to feeling. Loveless (2019) explains that research-creation allows for "sensually attuned modes of inhabiting the university" (p. 3). Creative knowledge production begins with creative beingness

that is saturated in feeling—a way artist live in a world that is often forgotten. In Bettina Judd's book, *Feelin: Creative Practice, Pleasure, and Black Feminist Thought* (2023), she specifically tends to the work of artists as being a part of a feelin world. *Feelin* rather than feeling to Judd is about "a holistic sensory experience as knowledge…it is…a bodily response to an object… feelin brings the subject into active, identity-shaping response …over and beyond that of mere 'understanding'…Feelin is the experience of knowing tinkered with in the process of creation" (Judd, 2023, p. 9). The connections between sensing, feelin/g, knowing, and creative practices can create opportunities for artists and institutions. Which would impact the breadth of scholarship that could generate meaningful conversations concerning knowledge production.

The degree to which new conversations on knowledge production grounded in artistic practice is invited into institutions is continually up for debate. The criss-crossing of disciplines and paradigms (Eurocentric with Afrocentric for an example) could make it a generative space (Springgay, 2022). Research-creation often presents challenges for Black artists and other artists of colour because of the ways it has been instituted. Springgay (2022) agrees with Black feminists and Black artists who have argued that Black communities have been engaging in research-creation before it was institutionalized and has been coopted and commodified through funding agencies and institutions. Springgay asserts that the narratives that shape research-creation often invalidate the work of artists of colour. They encounter difficulty when they "decenter and confront institutional violence and demands of legibility" (Springgay, 2022, p. 18). In this doctoral project I asked you in the opening letter to exercise "depremacy" (Springgay, 2022, p. 18) by refusing to place knowability above curiosity. Springgay (2022) asserts that research-creation forces researchers to confront the limits of knowledge and acknowledge the violence created when Eurocentric legibility is at the center (p. 18).

This doctoral project engages Black form of knowing-being-doing through the use of Afrofuturism and other Afrocentric artforms. Research-creation in this project intersects (at times in uncomfortable ways) the often-misaligned values of the doctoral program, and the desires and needs of the artists (moun ki konnet), and the practices and beliefs of the artist-researchers (Queen and I). Throughout this doctoral project I have struggled to place art practice on the "right side" of knowing and doing. It is an area that will continue to be a point of tension for the dissertation, the project, and my future scholarship. Locating a comfortable place between knowing and doing as a Kwik! Kwak! researcher will continue to leave me with more unknowns and discomfort. This is something I have learned to accept as part of the project rather than avoid. The Creative Afro-Feminist Methodology is a gesturing towards exploring the onto-epistemological concept. The contingent existence between knowing and doing speaks to a paradigm shift away from fragmentation and a shift toward integration and seeing the interconnectedness between people and their reality and how they come to know.

The Creative Afro-Feminist Methodology

The Creative Afro-Feminist Methodology (CAFM) bridges together research-creation, Afrocentric, and Black feminist methodological traditions that value co-creation, care, and integration. These values stem from Afrocentric understandings of spirituality. Dillard and other Afrocentric scholars have included an understanding of the interconnectedness between all beings as a key component of spirituality[17]. The value for interconnectedness between all beings is directly connected to a practice of refusal that is a key theme of CAFM—the refusal of fragmentation. Campt (2019) describes refusal as "using negation as a generative and creative

[17] I emphasize the inclusion of beings from the spirit, ancestral and natural worlds. Though this study does not rest heavily on connections to the natural world it was included to ground both in-person and online focus group sessions.

force of disorderly power to embrace the possibility of living otherwise" (p. 83). The refusal to engage in fragmentation supports an integrated way of living as a practice in recovery. The second theme in the CAFM also concerns integration. The CAFM employs a research with approach because it positions reflexiveness, care, and community as central to the role of the researcher. In addition to these two themes the CAFM has three elements that connect to the four methods in this project. These elements of the CAFM:

1. Recognize the Transformative Role of Rememory Storywork
2. Support Self-Definition & Ethics of Caring Through Gazework
3. Employ "Sensuous Telling Across a Range of Texts

The five methods (rememory storywork, gazework, digital portrait, focus group discussion, and online interviews) are nestled within the discussions on the three elements of the project. I will explore each element as it refers to the project below. Before I discuss the three elements and their correlated methods, I will discuss the two themes (refusal of fragmentation and the role of the researcher) in greater depth.

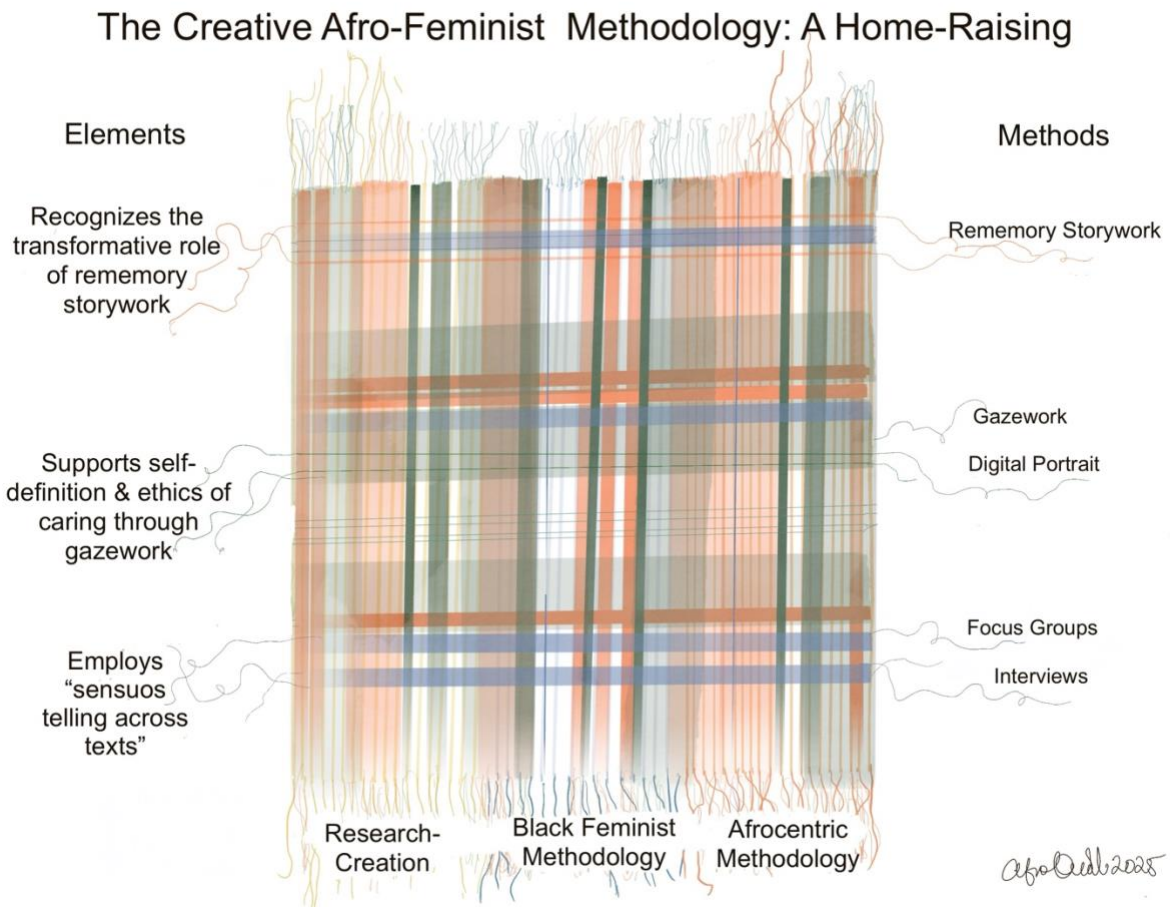


Figure 12: the Creative Afro-Feminist Methodology: A Home-Raising

CAFM Refuses Fragmentation and Reinstates Integration as Part of a Practice in Reviving Cultural Memory

Dillard insists on reinstating belief systems that shape our Afrocentric worldview as a way to recover our social and cultural heritage (Toliver, 2022, p. xviii). One such form of recovery that is part of an African worldview is the value for integration over fragmentation. Fragmentation is evident throughout the academic landscape from the way knowledge is categorized and to the ways knowing and doing are estranged from each other. In this doctoral project I not only merge research with creative practice with the moun ki konnet, but I also merge it within this dissertation itself. The way that stories and images weave within traditional academic writing is an intentional attempt at resisting the fragmentation from art and scholarly

inquiry. Research-creation is exactly that when broken down to its most fundamental elements. It is a merging.

Loveless (2019) stresses that research-creation is a polydisciplinary approach to further emphasize a lack of commitment to a discipline. Beyond disciplinary borders, research-creation from an Afrocentric standpoint can disrupt the borders between worlds. The artist in particular serves as a technology of integration. The artist and the community are interconnected because the artist in many Afrocentric communities not only hold the knowledge and the history of the community, but they also represent the health of the community (Falola, 2023; Somé, 1999). They are a barometer so to speak. "His or her creativity says something about the health of the community. This is because another role of the artist consists in acting as the spiritual fountain of the community (Somé, 1999, p. 98). Somé (1999) asserts that the artist brings the sacred into the world (p. 95). The process integrates the artist within community while emphasizing the interconnectedness between thinking, making, and being. The products that are created by the artists are not the end. The end is the healing impact of the artists creativity to respond to the need for balance and harmony of the community (Somé, 1999). From this Afrocentric standpoint the object is a medicine that is used to respond to the needs of the community. The artist is the midwife in many ways because the artist supports bringing other worlds to the community through the artmaking process. Other worlds could include the spirit world, the natural world, and the world of the ancestors. Connection to these worlds brings about integration for the community.

Integration then in CAFM begins with understanding the relational in creative knowledge production (Judd, 2023). Integration is understood also as the connection between the self and those outside the self. Art making is often associated with having an inward orientation for the

artist. Anything that has this inward orientation can often be mislabeled as negative self-centeredness rather than a way to both tune into self to connect with the other. Like Somé, Judd (2023) resists the Eurocentric orientation of self-centeredness that is found in the critique of artmaking. She says:

> I am proposing that creative knowledge production is so self-centered, a kind of self-centeredness that is transcendent—beyond one self—which would allow for the creation to exist outside of the studio and have others feel it too…'Oneness', Quashie observes, 'is a relations, a habitat that facilitates one's being to all that is around, beyond, within it—a capacious and transcendent inhabiting' Not to be confused with two-ness, seeing oneself through the position or another not individualism, oneness makes possible ways of being that are both connected to a collective and audaciously self-centered. (Judd, 2023, p. 9)

Integration is important to both Afrocentric and Black feminist traditions because of the value for harmony and balanced that is achieved through connection to the self and others. Toliver (2022) uses quilting practices to explain her storywork analysis that values connecting the participants stories to create larger narratives. Toliver (2022), when speaking of analysis in endarkened storywork, notes that storytelling not only elevates participant's voices but emphasizes the ability to thread stories and experiences together to build understanding of the larger connected experiences of Black women (p. xxvi). Similar to the ways Kwik! Kwak! relies on the connection between the storyteller and the storytellers (traditionally thought of as the audience) this research project is reliant on co-creation with the moun ki konnet. CAFM recognizes that storying is about being heard as

well as about joining a chorus of transtemporal voices that work together in a knowledge building, sharing, and employing project.

I reorient research-creation as an approach that provides engagement with trans-temporality over futurity and creative expression over knowability to further stress the co-creative/integrated nature of an Afrocentric orientation to research creation. Much of research and research-creation specifically centers on creating new knowledge rather than approaching knowledge as a transtemporal process of awareness. There is nothing inherently wrong with engaging with the future. However, the focus on futurity over trans-temporalism leads to fragmentation of the self and community rather than integration. From a West African world view trans-temporality is about recognizing the value and existence of communities in the past, present, and future as co-creators in knowledge construction. Communities of the past are the domain of our ancestors who provide knowledge to equip the individual and collective to make decisions that create harmony in the past, present, and future worlds. More specific to this project, the focus on futurity neglects the wisdom that takes place in co-creation with ancestral knowledge. This project employs trans-temporality to approach theorizing and disseminating experience that supports knowledge construction as a practice in integration. Research-creation with an Afrocentric orientation to knowledge construction can support Black women equity educators in re-envisioning equity work by honouring the value of the past, present, and future simultaneously.

CAFM Employs a Research With Approach: The Role of the Researcher is Rooted in Reflexiveness, Care & Community

As a Kwik! Kwak! researcher who employs Afrocentric approaches to methodology, I understand that a reflexive approach is rooted in care for the community because it supports the inclusion of the researcher into the collective consciousness of the community (Falola, 2022)—

another form of integration. This positioning asks for what Falola (2022) calls a practice of "methodological reflexiveness" where researchers are constantly reflecting on how their relationship within the community impacts the people and the research. They are positioned as "researching with" (Tuck by way of Biin, 2021) rather than simply researching on people. Joan Tronto, a feminist scholar, (1994) makes a distinction between caring practices focused on "caring with" rather than "caring for" others. When we care *with* others, we do not presume to know what they need and more importantly we value the interconnectedness of care as a practice. Caring involves sensing mechanisms that get stronger with each encounter with caring. This builds intimacy where information is continually being transmitted between people. Similarly, Falola (2022) advocates for research that is based on researching with communities as active subjects and researchers rather than "on" them as objects. Researching *with* encourages researchers to:

- Interrogate the relationships with moun ki konnet,
- Include our stories alongside the moun ki konnet
- Establish connection to trans-spatial and transtemporal co-creators

This type of research involves continual sensing that supports a reflexivity as part of a process to ensure that the researcher understands and meets the needs of the community.

Research With Interrogates the Relationships With Moun Ki Konnet. It is not enough to simply belong to the same affinity group or share a similar experience to show the relationship between the researcher and the participants in a project that follows the creative Afro-feminist methodology. The researcher cannot take for granted that belonging to a particular group based on race, gender, class, and other identifiers does not call us to examine the areas of difference that exist between us that may call into question our ability to continually investigate

power imbalances. The moun ki konnet in this project largely came from Christian backgrounds. Although this was not one of the identifiers I used in any part of the project the participants voluntarily disclosed the information. Other identifiers such as sexual orientation and gender diversity were largely absent from the discussions in both the interviews and the focus group sessions. One of the challenges in the focus group sessions was understanding my role in reflecting on how to create an affinity space that allows for and calls in difference. Examining my relations to the moun ki konnet required I also examine the differences that may exist between us and between the other moun ki konnet that would require creating space for difference to be shared within the activities.

Another limitation of the CAFM that had a main goal of creating a homeplace was the ability to effectively engage in a *researching with* model that fully supported co-creation with community. During the focus group sessions I felt my desire to steer the conversations and activities in a particular direction that would generate a certain type of engagement conflicted with my desire to approach the research from a participatory action research lens that spoke to true co-creation. At the start of the project, I conceptualized my approach with a participatory action undercurrent. As the project continued, I made the difficult discission to withdraw this undercurrent. To employ a pure participatory action approach through this project in an Afrocentric sense that valued co-creation and harmony I recognized that it would require a process that was more open rather than one that was focused on generating a particular outcome—in this case a journey to a homeplace[18]. I felt the desire to stay on track in order to "complete" the research project conflicted with the goal of establishing a space where the moun ki konnet could steer the ship. The removal of the undercurrent left me feeling a sense of loss

[18] I explore this challenge in more depth in upcoming chapters.

and failure. This was not a complete failure however as the moun ki konnet would freely ask for what they wanted throughout the process. What became clear to me throughout this process is that simply gesturing towards participatory action research raised the awareness that I recognized and reflected often on the importance of relationship between the moun ki konnet and myself.

I engaged in reflexive practices through regular journaling. I kept a journal throughout the process that included wonderings, questions, stories, diagrams, and written reflections. A creative Afrocentric feminist methodology asks the researcher to document the process as part of the reflexive engagement and to engage in a storying with practice that Dillard (2012) considers part of a "research of responsibility" and a—*research with approach*.

Research With Includes the Researcher Stories Alongside Moun Ki Konnet. Collaborative storytelling is one way to disrupt the overemphasis of the dominant voice of the researcher while supporting understanding between moun ki konnet and researcher. The collective voice speaking alongside individual voices becomes the focus. In a project conducted by Patterson et al. (2016) called The Black Women's Gathering Place, the researchers explored ways of communicating where the moun ki konnet shared the telling and asking roles so a co-creative narrative could emerge (Patterson et. al., 2016). The researchers explain: "It was not enough to achieve disruption to simply want to resist traditional practices that position black women beyond knowledge production. However, these challenges encouraged us to reflect on ourselves as participants and researchers, and what we sought to do" (Patterson et. al., 2016, p. 62). This echoes educator and research creation scholar Stephanie Springgay's (2022) discussion of co-creation and the types of questions researchers who are involved in collaborative research ask. She encourages researchers to employ a feminist ethics of care that invites these questions; "How do we come together? How are we in relation? What contaminations are flourishing?

What are not?" (Springgay, 2022, p. 25). The very act of storytelling forces us to pay attention to co-creation in research in ways that regard care through co-creation that we may not be prompted to do so through traditional research methods.

As a Kwik! Kwak! researcher in this doctoral project, I assumed that my co-creation with the moun ki konnet would be an intuitive part of the research project. I soon faced tensions that forced me to engage in Springgay's questioning. One of the contaminations that I found flourishing in the focus group session was my biases about the role of the researcher as someone who is an observer as opposed to one of the moun ki konnet. The storytelling aspect of this project forced these biases to the surface. During the first focus group with the moun ki konnet in Toronto I was surprised at the visceral reaction I had to everyone's stories. During the times moun ki konnet shared their stories I wanted to laugh or cry with them, but I felt I had to be a container for them. I felt I had to be a place where they could set some things down and look at it. As much as I tried to hold this container for the women's stories, I soon realized that what was both meaningful and intuitive to the moun ki konnet required my active co-creation with them. As someone began to share a person across the table nodded and gestured in a way to encourage them. Another person added some affirming words that both revealed her take on the story and encourage the speaker to continue. Before I knew it, we had become a chorus of words, sounds, and gestures that both confirmed the other's experiences and made room for it. This practice in co-creative oral storytelling reminded me that the role of the Kwik! Kwak! researcher is a sensory rich engagement rather than a passive one that simply observes.

It was through Toyosaki's understanding of the post-colonial turn I understood that gesturing towards participatory action research could still offer a way of being in the

practice of co-creating through deep sensing. The emphasis on relationship, harmony and community in research can also be seen as part of what Toyosaki (2017) calls a post-colonial turn in theory and practice about lived experience as a site of knowledge production. This turn involves the return of knowledge construction to communities and a turn to co-creators beyond the walls of academia. Of great importance to this project this turn is situated in a body that approaches co-creation through deep sensing while honouring the integration of the self as part of the research process where the relationship between the subject and object are not fragmented (Toyosaki, 2017, p. 33).

During the focus group and interviews I would often find myself being aware of the connection between the stories the moun ki konnet shared and my story as a Black woman educator. At times the interview felt like an exercise in way finding where the moun ki konnet and I would stumble across each other and move in different directions through the stories that were shared. Falola's (2022) assertion that "(a)utoethnography allows individuals to act as both researcher and subject, instead of restricting the researcher's role to that of an outsider" (p. 25) was particularly relevant in this situation. Toliver (2022) also contributes to this discussion by insisting that research is and can be about storytelling for the researcher and the moun ki konnet by explaining, "researchers are often restricted to gathering stories, not telling them. We are the collectors of tales, charged with the task of stockpiling narratives from our research partners. We don't add our own stories to the work" (Toliver, 2022, p. xv). Through this project it was important to me, as a Kwik! Kwak! researcher to remain curious about the process of conducting research that is oriented towards telling my story alongside the moun ki konnet story-making-telling. I appreciate seeing research as a series of threads that each tell a story that adds to the larger

textual narrative it creates. In this way, Toyosaki's turn reminds us that a turn towards co-creation troubles positivists tendencies concerning truth and prioritizes co-creation, complexity, and relationships.

The elevation of marginalized voices, recognizing the relationship between researcher and moun ki konnet/co-researcher, and larger narratives while centering knowledge production on storying and theorizing experiences are the key markers of the transformational outcome that Black feminist and Afrocentric methodologies offers.

Researching *With* Co-Creators Across Space & Time. In speaking about African American communication scholar Marsha Houston's work with Black women Judd (2023) states, "Marsha Houston notes that Black women's communication with each other across generations and within communities operates on a level with which truth can be found in many voices and held all at once (Judd, 2023, p. 20). M. Jacquie Alexander (2005), a professor emeritus at the Women and Gender Studies Department of the University of Toronto and director of the Tobago Centre, reminds us of the palimpsestic nature of knowledge that helps to create new worlds. Knowledge construction is transtemporal and resists complete erasure. "A framing of time and realities as palimpsestic, or imperfect erasure, signifies the ways current, new ways of being have already been inscribed in earlier positioning" (Okello & Duran, 2021, p. 1). The CAFM approach regards knowledge construction through practices that revere the transtemporal nature of knowledge building that includes co-creators of the past, present and future. It underscores a way of being that recognizes that nothing is new and at the same times demands creation efforts in "new" world building. During the focus group session moun ki konnet were introduced to Afrocentric ways of being and knowing that connected to ancestral knowledge and spirituality. Engaging in this type of knowledge helped moun ki konnet recognize the familiar

etchings that were already written within their thinking on their experiences and their responses to them. Unknowingly they drew from these dormant reservoirs of knowledge and showed great joy when the connection to these ways of being were identified as part of Black discourse and aesthetics. Through these transtemporal practices they were able to recognize patterns of domination and resistance efforts that belonged to a larger legacy of knowing and being that belonged to them.

Storytelling is a practice that supports reclaiming a location of healing sometime found in the past. The homeplace offers a site for reclamation. I am inspired by Indigenous feminist scholars who look at return and refusal as pathways of transformation that is framed as rematriation (Gray, 2022). "Rematriation is an Indigenous feminist paradigm, an embodied praxis of recovery and return, and a sociopolitical mode of resurgence and refusal" (Gray, 2022, p. 1). The homeplace is a location that supports rematriation by being a space that houses Afrocentric ways of being as well as being a place that supports movement towards Afrocentric ways of being.

Afrocentric connections can be applied to the concept of rematriation and homeplace because of the focus on the return. The door of (no) return is a familiar location where newly enslaved Black people were told that once they entered, they would not be able to return to their homeland. It was a site of exile for the mind, body and spirit. Along with this exile, another form of exile existed. The intention was to limit the access to ancestral knowledge through stories from a shared culture and language. Fortunately, the stories have made it across time and place. The door of no return is a site that was reclaimed and repurposed as a door *for* return. In this way Black descendants of enslaved

people across the world entered practices of refusal by denying the colonizers claim of barred re-entry and used this portal for the very thing colonizers designed it to prevent.

The CAFM is an attempt at bringing together the values, practices, and concepts from Afrocentric, Black feminist, and research-creation traditions. The overriding value of integration strings together the value for transtemporal knowledge, co-creation, and embodied practices such as gazework and storywork that involve deep sensing and telling.

Research Design. Connecting stories across time, moun ki konnet, and the researcher is an important component of an CAFM approach. A key beginning of a project design based on Black Feminist theoretical approach requires identifying a benchmark memory through rememory work that exemplifies the moun ki konnet experience. Through the benchmark memory storywork is then employed by both the researcher and the moun ki konnet. The moun ki konnet begins their storywork journey by describing their experiences while the researcher begins their own storying process by documenting through recordings and notes. Storywork in CAFM recognizes storybands (sets of stories) that generate storythreads[19] which are created through the various stories that are generated through the project. The researcher is documenting how they are coming up against the storying of the moun ki konnet and how the moun ki konnet are coming up against the stories of each other. These storythreads implicate the researcher and moun ki konnet in a process that is interconnected and resists notions of objectivity. The researcher, in my case the Kwik! Kwak! researcher, moves fluidly between a process of being a

[19] Storythreads are bands of individual stories that are woven together to create a Madras storying textile where people can examine how stories come together and how they come apart. Similar to Toliver's (2022) quilting analogy story threads honour individual stories on their own while also seeing the value in the way they come together. Toliver is interested in the ancestral knowledge/stories that are revealed through her quilting analogy. I am more interested, for the sake of the Creative Afro-Feminist Methodology, in the ways stories reveal larger narratives. In particular I am interested in the way the weaving of stories makes visible larger historical and national narratives that speak to experiences that are shaped by identity.

story listener and storyteller with the moun ki konnet (Toliver, 2022). Both moun ki konnet and researcher become subjects of the research.

In addition to storythreads I invite moun ki konnet to engage in gazework where they consider four different gazes that speak to how they were seen and how they wanted to be seen. Using their storythreads and the gazework exploration they collaborate with Queen to create an AR portrait that further explores their experience. They work through affirmations and statements that come from their rememory storywork and gazework to collaborate on the portrait with the artist. After the focus group session the moun ki konnet are invited to meet with the researcher for an hour-long interview. These interviews are recorded and give the moun ki konnet an opportunity to do two things; first the moun ki konnet reflect on their experience engaging in the storywork and gazework segment of the project, secondly, they can add to their initial storying. The researcher continues their own storying process with the use of the information from the interviews. This storying process culminates into the storying that is included in the findings and throughout the dissertation. The findings are represented through a weaving of the story-threads of the moun ki konnet' experiences and the researcher's experiences[20].

Storythread Analysis. The analytical framework for the CAFM is inspired from Toliver's (2022) storywork analysis approach. In Toliver's (2022) book length study, Recovering Black Storytelling in Qualitative Research: Endarkened Storywork, she engages in co-researching with Black girls that involves speculative fiction where they are encouraged to

[20] The Creative Afro-Feminist Methodology supports disseminating the knowledge built by the moun ki konnet in a way that brings the larger community together. This can take the shape of an "homeplace exhibition". The homeplace exhibition allows moun ki konnet to tell their stories a third time through their portraits. Guests can be invited that include leaders, community members, colleagues, family and friends. This storytelling practice is an exercise in activism with care and creates a type of homeplace that moun ki konnet create and inhabit with the larger community.

reclaim their past and engage in counter storytelling. Toliver (2022) emphasized the importance of following the storythreads by staying with the data for long periods of time, finding connections between the participants stories, while also "maintaining the individual stories" (p. xxvii). I listened to the recordings of the moun ki konnet in both the retreat style session and the interviews as well as reading their reflections in the digital portrait booklets Queen led them through. I took time to consider the contradictions that emerged between them as well as the ways their stories were mirrors to each other.

In addition to considering the way stories come up against each other, Toliver's (2022) storywork analysis asks us to employ listening and sensing practices. Listening is a key feature of storytelling practices and Toliver's storywork analysis. "When centering community storytellers, she (Parker Rhodes) asks readers to listen to the storyteller's voice—the rhythms, tone, cadence, and emotion in their speech" (p. xxviii). Through the analysis I first found I had to listened for how moun ki konnet stories aligned and intersected. This was partially led by intuition which required deep listening. The researcher must listen for what is being felt as much as what is being said. Listening also took the shape of a practice intending to intuition. The inclusion of intuition as a necessary practice became an important addition to the storythread analysis that began to develop through this project. Attending to intuition could also connect to Toliver's insistence that we have encoded cultural knowledge that we can employ through analysis. Intuition can be how (cultural) knowledge can be transferred—it serves as an energetic frequency that facilitates the transporting of knowledge. Without explicit oral and written evidence in what moun ki konnet wanted to communicate I had to trust my intuition when I felt that their story was calling me to attend to something beyond the written and spoken word. This

practice counters Eurocentric notions of knowing and knowledge sharing. It requires developing sensing mechanisms that are tuned with intimate contact with others. [21]

Through this process I started to see the importance of connecting stories to national and historical narratives—much of which center around identity. I also discovered that the interweaving of stories created an interstitial space. This led to the foundation for what I realized I was developing through engaging with the stories—a storythread analysis. Similar to a storywork analysis that asks these key questions:

1. What happens when stories come up with each other?
2. What do stories reveal when they come away from each other?
3. How do the stories of the participants connect to her own?
4. How do the participant's stories connect to national experiences of Black women?

A storythread analysis asks this additional question:

5. What happens to the in-between spaces that stories create when they intersect?

These questions helped me to identify four key features associated with storying spaces: aligning, intersecting, interstitialating, weaving, and securing the edges.

Aligning: To begin the analysis of the stories, I listened for the moun ki konnet individual stories and noticed that there were band of stories that aligned with each other. They were heard parallel to each other. The aligned stories were seen as moving together consistently. They have relative positions. The stories do not intersect but they moved together in the same direction. For an example moun ki konnet quotes like, "It's never enough", "The expectations

[21] Kriti Sharma's (2015) book, Interdependence: Biology and Beyond revisited and reoriented a concept called signal transduction. This concept speaks to the way organisms develop better sensing mechanisms through increased contact. This could explain why the in-person gathering offered moun ki konnet a greater sense of connection to the project, each other, and myself as the researcher.

are at a different level for Black women", and "My job had to be more than that" are aligned because they speak to similar experiences about Black women teacher workload.

Intersecting: Left on their own quotes like the ones above could lend themselves to thematic analysis. What makes them work differently are what the ways stories that intersect (stories that meet at certain points but are moving in different directions from other bands of stories) say together (see Table 3). For an example, the quotes, "It's never enough", "The expectations are at a different level for Black women", and "My job had to be more than that" intersect with another band of aligned quotes like, "they don't realize I'm a token", and "I'm an Aunty Tom".

"Interstitialating22": Together the intersecting storybands create an interstitial storying space that highlights and complicates the relationship between tropes and labour. The aligned stories and the intersecting stories create interstitial storying spaces that act as in-between stories that often reveal complexity. This practice in textual accumulation results in storythreads (findings).

Weaving: With the focus on identity in my project, it became evident that the moun ki konnet stories were connecting to larger narratives that ultimately were woven into a storythread textile that resists simplification. Toliver did something similar by "follow(ing) the research threads connecting the girls' experiences to the larger quilt that is Black life" (p. xxix). She was interested in examining that collective consciousness that travelled across time (p. xxix). Toliver (2022) explains:

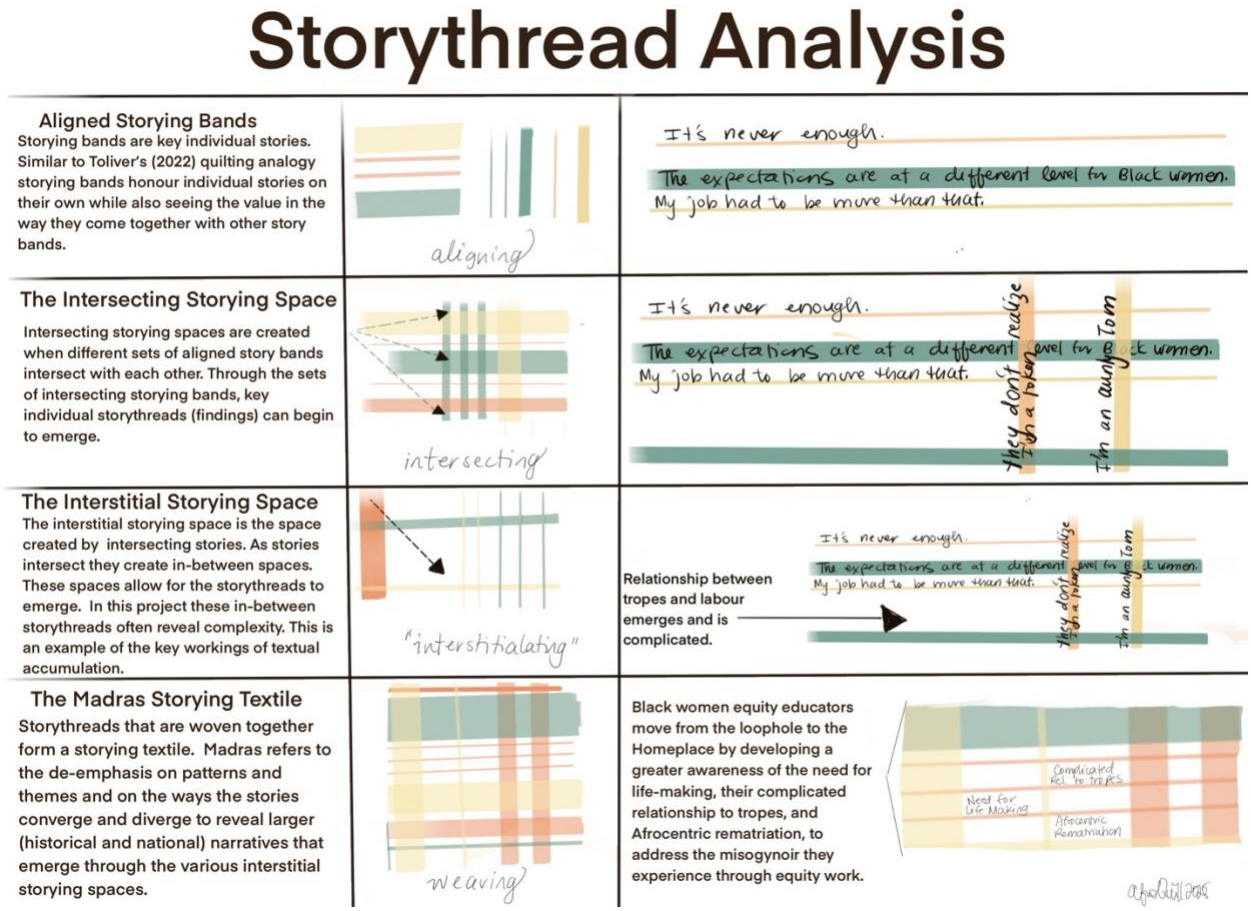
> The hope and experiences of Black people are transferred across time and space through a connected link that combines Black pasts, presents, and futures. Thus,

[22] I am adjusting the word interstitial which is an adjective to interstitialating to create a verb that indicate that storying spaces are generative active spaces.

> the method I needed to analyze this data was not new, as Black people have passed down from generation to generation. I just needed to reconnect to the transhistoric feedback loop and rely on historical methods to better understand the contemporary stories of Black girls. The quilting methods of my ancestors influenced my data analysis in real time. (p. xxix)

The trans-temporal aesthetic found in Toliver's storywork analysis and my storythread analysis is a necessary element to understanding Black women's experience within their own community and outside of it. This was the result of watching what happens when stories come up against and away from each other that created a type of weaving. This type of weaving of stories created a textile (much like the Madras cloth textiles) that would reveal a much larger narrative.

Table 3: Storythread Analysis



Securing the edges: Once the aligning, intersecting, interstitialating, and weaving components are complete in the analysis the Kwik! Kwak! storying researcher secures the stories by telling their own story. Securing the edges is an important post production step for weaving. If the edges are not held together with knots, sewing, or other methods the threads will come loose and away from each other. It will be harder to read the elements of the textile as a cohesive piece with individual parts. All that will be seen are the individual threads and maybe some loosely held together patterns. The historical context, the movement of the stories between each other, and storythreads will struggle to be visible. The Kwik! Kwak! storying researcher's story acts a thread that brings the stories together so they can be shared. All researchers are telling a story through their research. Making this (often hidden) component of the work of researchers is important to resist the temptation assume that researchers can stand outside of the research process and supports understanding the researching *with* components of the CAFM.

Methods

> "Writing about my experiences through storytelling provided me with space to reconcile past trauma; bring closure to situations; understand how my past, present, and future selves are always in conversation with one another" (Baker-Bell, 2017, p. 532).

Recruitment. After I had created the promotion flyer for the project, I posted it on LinkedIn and Instagram. In the promotional material I explained that I was looking for Black women educators who perform either informal or formal equity work for schools and school boards. I reached out to some teacher groups on social media to ask for permission to post the flyer in their group chat—they said no. LinkedIn yielded the most results. I received 14 registrants but only 8 moun ki konnet attended the sessions. When the time came to fill out the consent forms in advance of the session the number of moun ki konnet almost dropped by half. I

explained the consent forms further during the sessions and let moun ki konnet know that they can withdraw at any time. After that time 1 moun ki konnet withdrew their participation.

Moun ki konnet. There were 8 moun ki konnet who identified as Black women and participated in either the online or in-person sessions. Seven of those moun ki konnet agreed to be interviewed after the focus groups. Moun ki konnet engaged in the interviews within 30 days of the sessions. Six out of the eight moun ki konnet worked as central staff for school boards in Ontario. The other two worked as classroom teachers. Data was intentionally not collected around number of years they were employed by the board to further protect their identity. Three moun ki konnet joined the online session while five moun ki konnet joined the in-person session.

Preparation. In this section of this chapter, I will describe the preparation required and intention behind the methods that took place in the online session in February 2025 and the in-person session in Toronto in the fall of 2024.[23] It was important for me to consider how knowledge is created and what it means to be in a community of practice where Black women's knowledge is centered. Just as important was the process of including Black women educators in this community. Like the Kwik! Kwak! gatherings that my great-grandmother, Ma Bessie, hosted, this project created a space for Afrocentric ways of knowing. Creating a space for Afrocentric storying where knowledge could be shared, held, and passed on was central to this process.

To prepare for the methods I would use in this doctoral research project I developed a reading, writing, and illustrating practice to support my thinking around what it means to embrace practices that center around memory, the arts, and connecting to the legacy of co-created knowledge building that Black women have shared that has now become the palimpsest

[23] The in-person session took place in October 2024 while the online session took place in January 2025. One moun ki konnet joined the in-person session remotely due to unforeseen circumstances.

that I am inscribing on. This mostly daily practice involved reading from Black feminists in the early hours of the morning. The books that were a part of this almost year long process to prepare for the methods included *How We Write Now* (2024) by Jennifer C. Nash, *Feelin* (2023) by Bettina Judd, *Undrowned* (2020) by Alexis Pauline Gumbs, *A Black Gaze* (2021) by Tina Campt, and *Learning to (Re)member the Things We've Learned to Forget* (2012) by Cynthia B. Dillard. All of these books gave me the confidence to regard my ideas around memory, art, self-recovery, and Black feminist epistemological traditions with confidence. An especially important practice due to the constant messaging I received within and outside the institution about the validity and necessity of Black feminism and the arts.

To prepare for the methods conceptualization and planning, I carved out time for a Black feminist devotional space. In religious traditions a devotional practice is one that connects religious teachings to daily practices. In my own spiritual understanding of devotional practice, it is about strengthening the connection between Black feminist teachings on my daily walk with this project and the moun ki konnet. I also created a desktop alter that sat directly between my keyboard and the computer monitor. This altar included a picture of Ma Bessie holding a cutlass in one hand and a staff in the other (see Figure 11). Across the back of where Ma Bessie's picture stood was a family tree that I had printed that included the names of all the known ancestors on both my mother's and father's side. Directly in front of both images was a desk plate that read, "YAAASSS KWEEN!" (see Figure 11). To either side of the desktop altar I had placed stones that signified abundance and ease. Setting up an altar as part of a spiritual practice for this dissertation is about recognizing the connection between knowledge systems of the past and present that were upheld by Black women and that will contribute to the work the moun ki

konnet and myself will add to. It is about recognizing that we have already established practices for coming to know that is deserving of the affirmation “YAAASSS KWEEN!”.

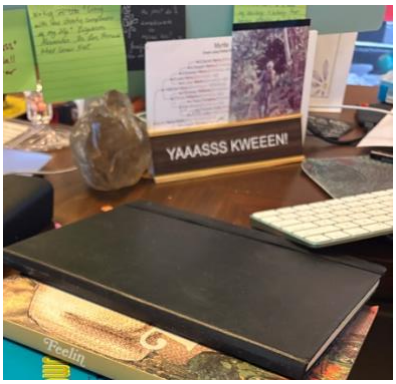


Figure 13: Devotional Practice 1

Each morning, I would read a passage from one of the texts I named above. I was careful to avoid simply consuming the text and wanted instead to be *with* them. Being with the text meant that I would take my time with the words, the images, and the feeling world I felt them calling me to. Sometimes that meant I would read one or two pages. Sometimes it meant I would read a chapter. There were no expectations at the onset. Rather there was openness at what I might discover or connect to.

After reading the text I would turn to my journal to write and illustrate (see Figures 12-17). Usually, I would have a thought or idea that I wanted to untangle and would approach my writing practice to untangle the thoughts and many connections that were brought to me through the engagement with the texts. The illustrations helped me to draw out what I felt I could not communicate in words at first. The illustrations were also useful for helping me to organize the connections I saw between concepts and people. All the diagrams in this dissertation, the theoretical and methodological frameworks, and my larger ideas around knowledge creation and building were born from these pages.

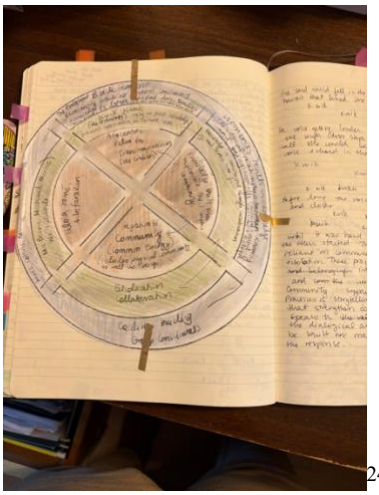
[24]

Figure 14: Devotional Practice 2

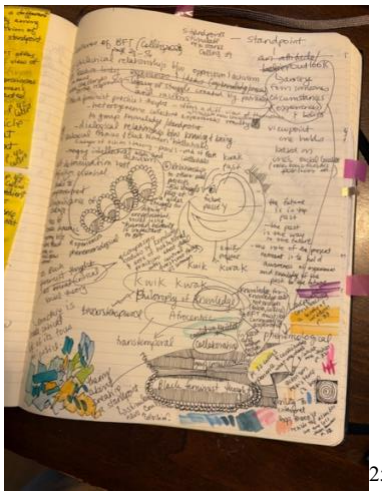
[25]

Figure 15: Devotional Practice 3

[24] Exploring the connections between knowing through Black feminist, Kwik! Kwak! and Afrocentric
[25] Continuing to think about how people come to know with an approach that is based in Black feminist, Afrocentric, storytelling tenets.

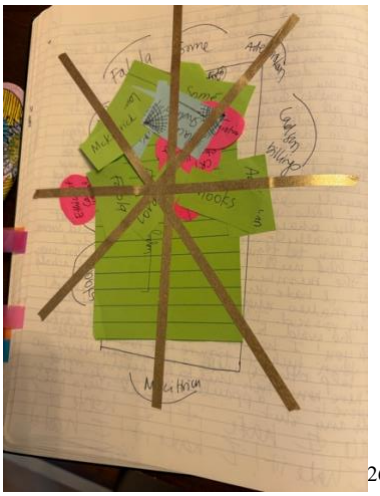
[26]

Figure 16: Devotional Practice 4

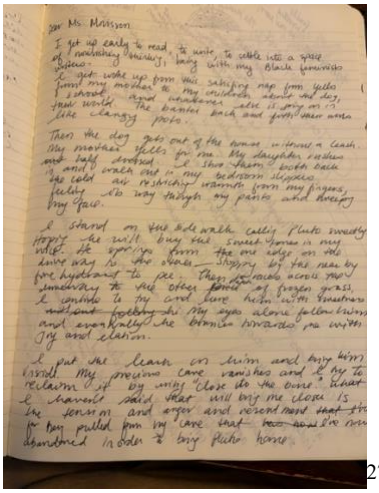
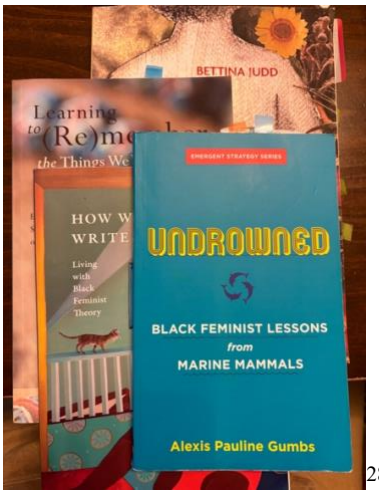
[27]

Figure 17: Devotional Practice 5

[26] Dream House table where I play with the position of Black feminists, Afrocentric, and diversity scholars beside each other at a dinner table. I asked questions about what would one scholar have to say to another and how comfortable do certain scholars sit together and why?

[27] Journal response to Jennifer C. Nash's text on "staying close to the bone".



[28]

Figure 18: Devotional Practice 6

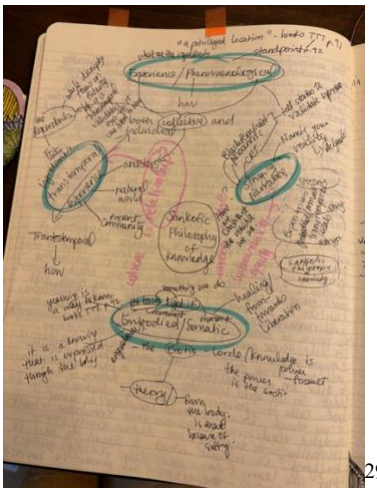

[29]

Figure 19: Devotional Practice 7

To prepare for the methods I spent time journaling about knowing. I identified ways of knowing through my Black feminist devotional time that related to experience, storying, and the embodied. I also recognized that moun ki konnet need to be aware of the transtemporal elements in knowing. This was about knowing with others over time. The methods were designed with

[28] My devotional set for a meditative practice with Black feminists that center on feeling, memory, art, and storying
[29] Early thinking around what a philosophy of knowledge that embraces art, Black feminist thought, and Afrocentric knowledge

this in mind. Even though moun ki konnet would be sharing their individual stories I wanted to approach storying as a practice we engage past, present, and future with both during the home-raising and through the dissertation. I also wanted to establish a storytelling practice that considered co-creation during the home-raising and through the dissertation as well.

The design of the in-person (Toronto) and the online retreat-style gatherings includes five methods that are stretched over three stages (see Figure 18). The stages of this journey include the loophole, the home-raising, and the homeplace. The first four methods (rememory storywork, gazework, digital portrait making, and the focus group) took place in-person for the first cohort. The second cohort was completely online. Each moun ki konnet was given a notebook that had blank pages, The Making of the Woke Sapphire chart (see Figure 19), and a diagram of the gaze matrix (see Figure 20), and the embodied ethic of care framework (see Figure 7). All the interviews took place online.

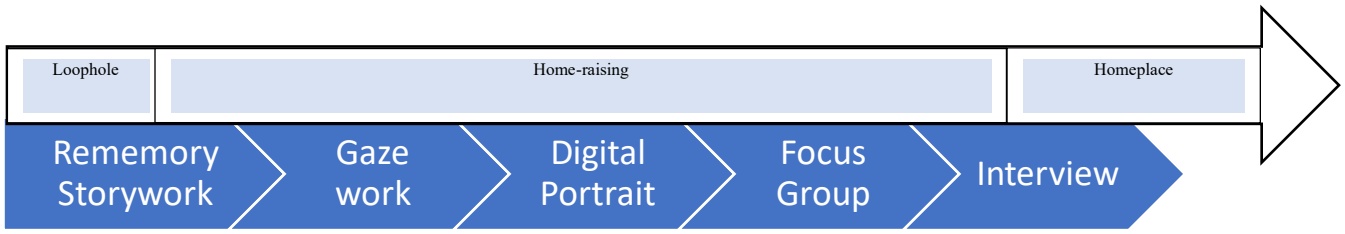


Figure 20: The Stages & Methods of the Loophole to Homeplace Journey

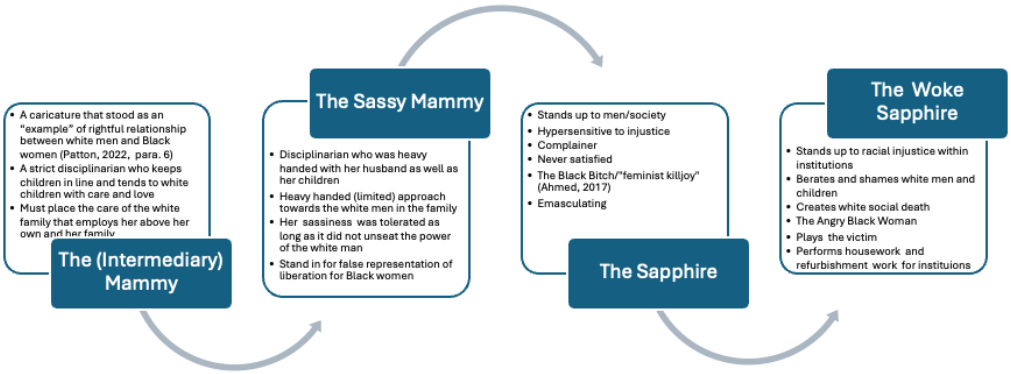


Figure 21: The Making of the Woke Sapphire

Procedure. In this section of the chapter, I will go into detail describing the five methods I employed through the project in both the online and in-person retreat style sessions in the order they occurred:

Rememory Storywork

Gazework

Focus Group

Digital Portrait

Interview

The sessions were referred to as a retreat style session because of the strong focus on ease, pleasure, and recovery. I wanted to create an oasis at the end of the day where the moun ki konnet could take what they needed and be tended to with care. The sessions were recorded and transcribed**.**

CAFM Recognizes the Transformative Role of Rememory Storywork. Afrocentric thought and Black feminist thought both emphasize the importance of embodied approaches to

liberation and wellbeing. Storytelling through multi-modal art practices are embodied practices that support wellbeing. CRT employs storytelling as a method because of the potential for storytelling to transform society and bring about legal change (Ladson-Billings, 2020). The slave narratives are an early example of how storytelling was used to compel white society to care about the concerns of the enslaved enough to create change for them. This long-held practice has been effective for Black people (though not always effective in persuading a dominant white society connected to liberalism to create change at the risk of losing their own privileges). Richard Delgado (by way of Ladson-Billings, 2020), a founder of critical race theory and legal scholar explains that "stories provide the necessary context for understanding, feeling, and interpreting. The ahistorical and acontextual nature of much law and other 'science' renders the voices of dispossessed and marginalized group members mute" (p. 13). Delgado (Ladson-Billings, 2020) further explains the importance of using 'voice' and 'naming your reality." Naming your reality is important because it helps to counter the messages people of colour have internalized, it provides the oppressor an opportunity to see their actions as oppressive, and lastly provides a view of the world that counters ethnocentrism (Ladson-Billings, 2020).[30]

Storytelling is essential to Black Feminist approaches because of the potential for liberatory change that moves Black women from people who are seen but not heard to people who are made visible through their words. In this way storying becomes a key practice of justice for Black women equity educators. Storytelling, oral storytelling in particular, are types of representative data that "…serve as social artifacts that contribute to the connections black

[30] Ladson-Billings (2020) cautions against assuming the liberatory potential of the use of ideas and strategies from education that are meant to impact the lives of people of colour, because these strategies, when institutionalized, end up serving the interests of white people. Again, the same pattern I have emphasized before emerges—showing the tendency for liberatory movements to benefit white people and the institutions they create.

women make across the stories we share" (Patterson, p. 60). In the project this is a key feature of the retreat style focus group sessions. Participants engaged in multiple ways telling their stories first to themselves and then to the larger group. Through the sharing of stories during the session they were able to make connections with each other's stories, reflect on their experiences, and consider how their experiences are connected to larger narratives.

I draw on Black feminist ideas about the role of remembering and telling and connect these practices to ways of accessing our stories through the body (Morrison, 2004). Morrison (2019) contends that memory is more reliable than historical records because historical records falsely assume complete knowability whereas memory can fill in the spaces historical records leave behind. She further explains that there is tension between remembering, knowing, and not knowing (Morrison, 2019). This tension is a generative space because it prevents us from coming to early conclusions and maintains curiosity as a driver for knowledge. Dillard (2012) asserts that "our memories are based in a sense of connective and collective time, from which we both recognize our identities and from which we can also transform those identities" (p. 8). Memories have the potential to create transformation on a personal and community level and bare transtemporal possibilities for knowledge creation and change. Dillard (2012) asks qualitative researchers to consider the potentialities of memory work in research for the mind, body and spirit. Dillard (2012) brilliantly asserts that forgetting is irresistible for Black women because it was a practice of survival from the brutalities we suffered which created fragmentation of the mind, body, and spirit. So, remembering is an act of justice—another form of return that counters the colonial violence we experienced through our ancestors and through our current experiences.

Acts of remembering are also about *re*turning to a process of understanding the self by theorizing experiences within the research process that offers liberation. The process of theorizing lived experience, as I discussed in the Theoretical Framework chapter, reminds us of the empowering capabilities of theorizing our own lives. Ethno-mimesis is a rememory practice of resistance that prevents our thinking about our experiences from receding into "institutional folds" (Ahmed, 2012). I use Maggie O'Neill's (2010) term "ethno-mimesis" which is an arts-based practice that combines participatory action research with ethnographic research. O'Neill's work is focused on the interaction of criminology, critical feminist theory, and arts-based methodologies. She describes ethno-mimesis as several things, including a practice, a theoretical construct, a process, and a methodology, in researching culture through the arts (O'Neill, 2012, p. 47). She explains that ethno-mimesis is a useful tool for transformation because it provides room to address complex societal issues (O'Neill, 2012). The use of art in this process is a further turn—a return to the body and the knowledge it communicates through sensing. The methods that I outline later on in the chapter are methods that arise from and occur within the body. While autoethnographic research allows moun ki konnet the opportunity to fight and write from within their institution (Toyosaki, 2017) ethno-mimesis is about other turns—a turn towards agency for the research moun ki konnet, a turn towards the body as a source of knowledge and expertise, a turn towards being in a community where storytelling is both an individual and shared experience for researcher, co-researcher/moun ki konnet, and the community, and a turn towards Afrocentric ways of knowing and being that lead to transformation.

Supporting moun ki konnet in the *re*turn to valuing their lived experience to create change is at the center of this type of methodological approach because of the connection to public scholarship. In O'Neill's (2012) research relating to unhoused people, sex workers, and asylum seekers, she advocates for methods that support public scholarship because of its ability to go beyond academic audiences. Again, an aim of this project was to disturb how scholarship is conventionally undertaken through arts-based methods. Scholarship is usually reserved for those in "higher"/post-secondary education, with K-12 educators commonly left out of this work. Public scholarship is about directing attention to social issues to engage those outside of academia: this project disrupts this division by placing scholarship directly in the hands of K-12 educators. Ethno-mimesis is an intervention that works towards this disruption by returning the power of the gaze back to Black women and supporting their self-research and theorizing practices that can produce information meaningful to them to support the home-raising work that is essential to transformation. Moun ki konnet access agency in becoming researchers and tellers of their own stories through ethno-mimesis. O'Neill focuses on research for the benefit of the community. Her primary question is how research in the social sciences produces "purposeful knowledge"/praxis– knowledge that will spur social change (O'Neill, 2012). O'Neill (2012) explains, "indeed, through art works-performing arts/live arts, painting, poetry, literature, photography—we can get in touch with our 'realities', our social worlds and the lived experiences of others, in ways which demand critical reflection…" (p. 158).

O'Neill reshapes the use of the word mimesis to mean sensuous knowing instead of mimicry (O'Neill, 2010). Sensuous telling and knowing are accessed by sharing lived experiences through the arts to produce change. "(E)thno-mimesis", she writes,

"foregrounds the transformative role and capacity of art and emphasizes the importance of biography (life-story) as critical theory in practice/praxis" (O'Neill, 2010). In this doctoral project the moun ki konnet engaged in ethno-mimesis by using digital portraiture that included collages and storytelling to share their lived experiences. One key component in ethno-mimesis is giving participants the agency to share their stories in ways that is accessible and empowering to them. Many of the in-person moun ki konnet chose oral storytelling as a way to share their experiences. This oral storytelling that incites sensuous telling is further discussed in chapter 5.

Storytelling becomes revisiting events to affirm the knowledge and truth they offer to connect to self and community (Toliver, 2022). In addition to emphasizing the interconnectedness of stories that are told between researcher and co-researcher, Toliver (2022), connects storytelling to something more than reflecting what happened. "Thus, stories are more than just basic commentary… Ultimately, the Black narrative tradition imbues truth in the tale, as Black storytellers draw from history, real-life experience, personal feeling, and imagination to create intricate testimonies for their listeners to witness" (Toliver, 2022, p. 507). The moun ki konnet in the project did not allow any room for me to view their stories as commentaries. They appeared to be well versed in this type of witnessing that included affirmation. At times I felt as if I was in a church where testifying, witnessing, crying, laughing, clapping and shouting were all part of the soundscape. Collins (2022) would attribute this to call-and-response practices that are so essential to a Black discourse. She explains:

> Composed of spontaneous verbal and nonverbal interaction between speaker and listener in which all the speaker's statements, or 'calls', are punctuated by

> expressions, or 'responses', from the listener, this Black discourse mode pervades African-American culture. The fundamental requirement of this interactive network is active participation of all individuals. For ideas to be tested and validated, everyone in the group must participate. (Collins, 2022, p. 331)

To resist the stories that are shared simply becoming commentaries, I allowed the container I was carrying to hold all of our stories—including mine. I also allowed for the exchange of words and reassurances that were necessary to encourage the moun ki konnet to continue to also find a space in the container. This is the way praxis shows up in research-creation that is routed in Afrocentric and Black feminist methodologies—new knowledge must lead to transformation for the moun ki konnet and that begins with using storytelling as a way to validate experience and truth.

Part of transformation that leads to new world building project includes developing practices of resistance that counter domination. Drawing from Fanon's work on patterns of resistance, Cynthia Suarez (2018), a leader in the non-profit world, explores power and domination. She explains the three components to resisting the oppressive forces that shape our identity that I argue are part of home-raising practices that support new world creation. For domination to lose its impact and effect people must first recognize the signs of patterns of domination (Suarez, 2018, p. 21). Recognizing the signs of patterns of domination is a transtemporal practice where structures of meaning and their relationship to power are examined through time (Suarez, 2018, p. 20). Secondly, deconstruction needs to take place where an understanding of the relationships between narratives and power is explored (Suarez, 2018, p. 20). Lastly, the reconstruction phase demands an emphasis on

telling a new story that emphasizes mutuality (Suarez, 2018, p. 20). The moun ki konnet in this project engaged in all three components of the pattern to resistance as part of home-raising practices. Recognizing patterns of harm that result from domination, deconstructing the use of power and its role in creating harmful narratives, and reconstructing new realities are all home-raising activities that the moun ki konnet engaged in to re-envision equity work for educators that are part of praxis.

Rememory Storywork. Moun ki konnet were guided through rememory storywork practices. In the first stage of the journey, the loophole, the moun ki konnet explored their current working conditions to reveal the emotional labour they expend within equity work through rememory storywork. As they employed rememory storywork they recognized the narratives that have shaped their experiences.

First, the Black women educators were invited to participate in storying by creating a timeline that represented their career in education. They were invited to place a dot along this line to represent a benchmark memory. A benchmark memory is a key memory that can support exploring a larger experience. It is part of a larger practice within narrative beginnings that belongs to narrative inquiry research methods (in conversation with Eliza Pinnegar, 2023). Moun ki konnet were encouraged to fill in details regarding this event. They would use this diagram to speak to their experiences during the focus group sessions and online interviews I conducted later on.

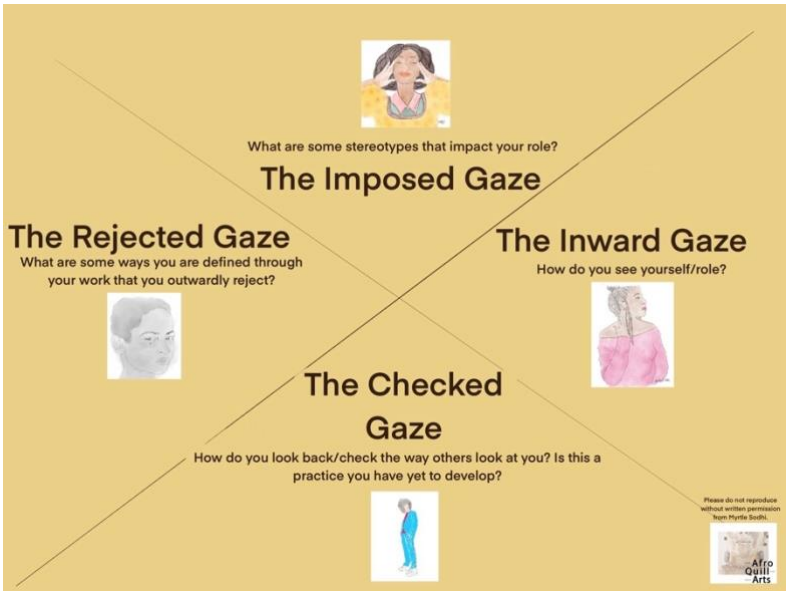


Figure 22: The Gaze Matrix

CAFM Supports Self-Definition & Ethics of Caring Through Gazework. The second part of the Creative Afro-Feminist Methodology makes a connection between an Afrocentric approach to research-creation and the possibilities it provides in exploring identity and theorizing of the self as part of ethics of caring. I will lay out some liberatory pathways for Black women by first exploring identity and then by examining the liberatory importance of theorizing regarding identity in home-raising practices that support the construction of the homeplace. These ideas that I will lay out are largely categorized as "gazework". Similar to Sharpe's (2016) "wake work", where focus is given to care to support survival (Nash, 2024, p. 308), "gazework" pays attention to the ways Black women's identities impact their liberation and thriving by inviting them to explore how they are seen and how that visibility affirms or disrupts their opportunities for care. Black women's identities are often shaped through their relationship to labour, which can have serious impacts on how they are seen and how they in turn begin to perceive themselves. I conceptualize gazework as an Afrocentric autoethnographic practice because of the opportunities it provides to examine self and culture through the media and historical

narratives—which is rooted in Afrocentric art practices. Falola (2023) explains, "an autoethnography must not only present a story; it must also bridge that story and its contributions to cultural understanding" (p. 29). Afrocentric storytelling traditions do just that. They center storying on its ability to boost the community understanding of the self and society, which supports self and community integration (Somé, 1999)—an important theme of CAFM.

Tina Campt's (2021) book *Black Gaze: Artists Changing How We See*, explores the elements of gaze in Black artists' work. She highlights Deanna Lawson's photography to explore how Lawson uses images that gaze back. Lawson's use of portraiture displaces the traditional power imbalance of the gaze that was focused on the audience and returns it to the subject (Campt, 2021). "They are photographs that invert the normal rules of spectatorship and spectacularity. Rather than scrutinizing them, they scrutinize us, and we are captured in an inscrutable and inscrutably powerful Black gaze" (Campt, 2021, p. 36). I was struck by the importance of portraiture in being a practice of care that restores what is traditionally lost to the subject. Consequently, the counter gaze as well as the inward gaze was central to the gaze work the moun ki konnet took part in the project. It was through Campt's work that I developed the gaze matrix to explore the different gazes that support Black women educator's thinking about their experiences.

Gazework. During the second stage, the home-raising, the moun ki konnet deconstructed and theorized their experiences as it connected to their identity (gazework) using the Gaze Matrix (see Figure 20) and The Making of the Woke Sapphire (see Figure 19). Each moun ki konnet used the Gaze Matrix to examine how and who has shaped their identity/ies as well as what identities have been aligned, rejected, checked, and imposed. Through this tool the moun ki konnet explored four questions:

1. What are some ways you are defined through your work that you outwardly reject?
2. How do you look back/check the way others look at you? Is this a practice you have yet to develop?
3. What are some stereotypes that impact your role?
4. How do you see yourself/your role?

Moun ki konnet were asked to make connections about their identity and the kinds of labour they have been invited into through the diversity movement in Canadian schools. By doing this they symbolically turn their backs on the outward gaze and center the gaze within themselves (see Figure 21). This symbolic space is characterized by the centering of the moun ki konnet gaze that pushes the other gazes from the middle. This represents a safer space where the process for theorizing their identities can take place. In the previous matrix the triangles pointed towards the center as if to pierce the inner space that the self should occupy. In Figure 21 the gaze matrix takes on an almost inverted shape as the points that once met at the center are pushed back. At this stage they are invited to reflect using this prompt—How do I redefine my identity, work, and lived experience when my gaze is centered? This questioning helps moun ki konnet move closer towards the homeplace because it supports the re-envisioning of the space as one that supports self-recovery.

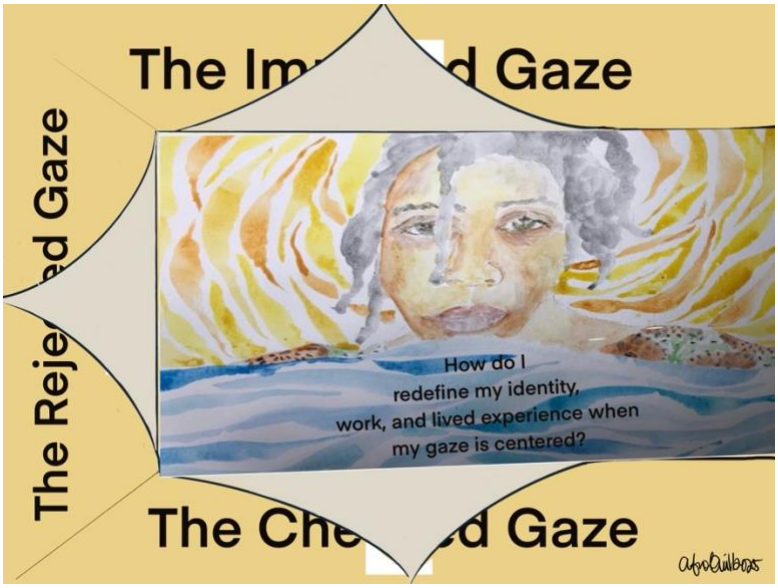


Figure 23: The Inverted Gaze Matrix

The Gaze matrix is a visual tool that speaks to a method that brings social science research, wellbeing, and arts practice together. Susan Hogan, a professor of cultural studies and art therapy, and Sarah Pink, a social scientist and ethnographer (2012) assert that the social sciences focus on "understanding people's interior thoughts, [while art practices] have the potential to make critical interventions" (p. 230). Hogan and Pink assert feminist art therapy offers a pathway to "ethnographic knowing" (2012). I broaden this assertion with the application of Black feminist methodology and the use of emotions as valid forms of knowing. Black feminist methodology considers research methods that not only present avenues for activism but also offer pathways to healing the intersecting racial and gendered wounds Black women suffer (Collins, 2022, Patterson et. al., 2016). The gaze matrix allowed the moun ki konnet to engage in auto-ethnographic knowing that supports wellbeing because of the elements of empowerment and ensuring that space is created for silenced voices (Patterson, 2016). The gaze matrix facilitates making room for the silenced voices by offering an opportunity for Black women to

gaze back—a form of talking back to people, systems, and institutions that have contributed to their experience (Campt, 2021).

Digital Portrait. Following the gaze matrix moun ki konnet were ready to begin working on their digital portrait with Queen[31]. I met Queen a few years prior to the project. Queen is the co-lead of Oddside Arts—an arts organization that merges art, technology, and wellness through Afrofuturist art. I met them first through their artwork that I would see in various locations in Toronto. Queen invited me to submit artwork to a few of their exhibits that focused on Afrocentric ways of knowing and being. I appreciated the focus on wellbeing and Indigenous African knowledge in Queen and Oddside Arts' work, and knew it would be a great fit for the project. I approached Queen about supporting the project with the digital portraits after seeing a series of digital portraits they had used using AR elements.

Queen was a crucial part of the arts-based methods not only because of the expertise they brought to the project but also because of their interest in learning and working together with myself and the moun ki konnet. They were deeply interested in transforming work. They shared their work with the women in the group and showed them the ways AR and digital art can be used as a way to re-imagine and recover the self. This gave moun ki konnet an idea of what their portraits, and ultimately what they could be. Both the online and in-person moun ki konnet used a photo of themselves and the prompts they responded to in the digital booklet Queen provided to generate an image. The prompts that would support them in reflecting their past experiences and their future in equity work included:

1. Reflect on the ways you have been denied opportunities to express your full identity and experiences.

[31] https://www.queenkukoyi.com/

2. How has your identity been shaped by resistance, retreat, or survival?
3. How does an art practice rooted in the Sankofa symbol and Kôngo Cosmogram support your re-envisioning of equity work?
4. How do you envision a future where you are fully seen, heard, and valued?
5. Write down 3-5 affirmations that reflect your strength, vision, and vulnerability.

Before moun ki konnet engaged with the prompts, they were able to learn about the Sankofa symbol and the Kôngo Cosmogram. This introduction situated the concepts related to transtemporal co-creation, knowledge building, and self and community integration. They engaged in theorizing practices using the Indigenous African symbols[32] to embed these experiences within a larger self-theorizing practice. Queen also invited them to include a photo and a collage of images in the booklet to support them in creating the AR portraits. Once the moun ki konnet filled out the booklet Queen and I met to discuss the images and statements to explore symbols that represented what was shared. Queen then worked on the AR digital portraits on their own over a 5-month period.

The digital portrait an introduced transtemporal and Afrofuturist[33] aesthetic by way of introducing the Sankofa symbol and Kôngo Cosmology to support moun ki konnet in recovering a past (African Indigenous knowledge) to reimagine their role in equity work in the future.

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[32] The elements of the Sankofa symbol and the Kôngo Cosmogram are important transtemporal elements that support blending concepts of the self and experience over time. Toliver (2022) in her explanation of "Afrofuturist technologies" as an element that can be found in the everyday life of Black people says, "In this way, literacy, spirituality, language trickery, coding, communal connection, intergenerational links, dance, hope, imagination, and joy can all be classified as technologies of freedom, as Afrocenturist practices" (Toliver, 2022, p. xxii).

[33] Afrofuturist approaches allow the co-researchers to use past, present, and future as a way to engage in re-envisioning work that supports their thriving. Researcher and arts and cultural producer Claire Sivier describes the transtemporal and transdisciplinary nature of Afrofuturism:

> 'It is non-linear, fluid and feminist; it uses the black imagination to consider mysticism, metaphysics, identity and liberation; and, despite offering black folks a way to see ourselves in a better future, Afrofuturism blends the future, the past and the present'. What she (Womack) highlights here is that Afrofuturism seeks to disrupt the present moment by using references of the past to envision the future, and its infinite possibilities of exploration, compelled by those who imagine. (Sivier, 2020, p. 15).

Toliver (2022) sees Afrofuturism as a technology that can incorporate cosmology, literature, and concepts across disciplines to support self-recovery and "elevate positive realities that exist in the present, and create new possibilities for the future" (p. xxi).

CAFM Employs "Sensuous Telling Across a Range of Texts"34 to Stay "Close to the Bone." The final element of the CAFM is the use of a range of texts together to support storytelling. These texts could include photos, archival records, written texts, videos, painting and drawing. The list of texts I just provided is not exhaustive because the texts should be representative of the people and the study that is undertaken. In a CAFM a variety of texts are used to offer protection through opacity and resist simplification while getting "close to the bone". Nash (2024) describes staying close to the bone this way:

> Staying at the bone relies on memory and archives, both of which are seductive and imperfect, both of which offer clarity and opacity simultaneously. Writing that stays at the bone always brushes up against the limits of what can be known and name, even if it might not name—or recognize—those limits. What's more: it is not possible to always be at the bone, to stay there: It is exhausting. It is relentless. It is a form of exposure that can feel both exhilarating and devastating. (Nash, 2024, p. 31)

Nash is speaking about loss and the possibilities and challenges with getting close to the loss. Many of the moun ki konnet shared with great difficulty the loss and heartbreak they endured conducting equity work. Most of the participants found sharing their stories healing and others found it liberating. However, the pain with which they communicated their experiences was undeniable. Ethno-mimesis is about getting close to the loss, so it

[34] This subtitle was inspired by Katherine McKittrick (2022): "Black people have always used interdisciplinary methodologies to explain, explore and story the world…because thinking, writing, imagining across a range of texts, disciplines, histories, and genres unsettle dismal and insular racial logics" (p. 5).

supports liberation and change. It is a practice using artforms that allow you to tell your story by first getting close to it so you can access the senses of feel, touch, smell, taste, and hearing to find a path to recovery. That recovery may come from indirect/direct action against oppressive forces.

A CAFM supports opacity due to the range of texts used. In this project the moun ki konnet used collaging, written text, diagramming, digital portraiture, and oral storytelling to share their experiences with equity work—a practice of textual accumulation. The main goal of this approach in CAFM is to resist simplification while offering protection for the participants. The overlapping of texts offered a complex view of their experiences and offered them privacy. They could use collaging to show a range of emotions that were at times contradictory and opaque all at once. Sometimes they did not share the meanings of certain texts but were able to express the feeling behind them through their use. This was a practice in protecting their vulnerability while allowing them the experience of getting close to the bone. Staying close to the bone through textual accumulation was examined through the focus group discussions and interviews. It was in the focus group discussion and the interviews where participants were able to consolidate their knowing through sensuous telling.

Focus Group Discussion. At the end of the retreat-style session moun ki konnet engaged in the focus group drawing on their responses from the survey to discuss their experiences through each stage. They were invited to come together at a round table at the front for the in-person session. The on-line group was invited to unmute. Both groups were invited to share their responses to the following questions:

1. How did the rememory practices support the process of uncovering and elevating the lived experiences of Black women equity educators such as yourself?

2. What did you discover about your role in equity work through the rememory process?
3. What did you identify during the Gaze matrix about your experience and the harm you experienced as a K-12 Black women equity educator?
4. How does an Afrocentric framing of your identity/experiences/role support your theorizing/understanding about your experiences?
5. How does your engagement with equity work impact your professional goals, wellbeing, and relationships within and outside of the school system?

I took observation notes during the focus group sessions that followed each activity and audio recorded the in-person session[35] and video recorder the online session.

Online Interviews. After the retreat-style sessions, I conducted one-hour long interviews with each moun ki konnet. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. I also took notes to record what I observed and felt through/with the moun ki konnet that transcripts alone could not capture. The interviews were optional with a few moun ki konnet opting out. The questions I asked included the same questions that were asked in the focus group session:

1. How did the rememory practices support the process of uncovering and elevating the lived experiences of Black women equity educators such as yourself?
2. What did you discover about your role in equity work through the rememory process?
3. What did you identify during the Gaze matrix about your experience and the harm you experienced as a K-12 Black women equity educator?

[35] During the in-person session in Toronto one moun ki konnet joined online.

4. How does an Afrocentric framing of your identity/experiences/role support your theorizing/understanding about your experiences?
5. How does your engagement with equity work impact your professional goals, wellbeing, and relationships within and outside of the school system?

I gave the moun ki konnet the ability to decide which questions they wanted to address. During the interview I followed the trail the moun ki konnet laid down by listening to the places they wanted to linger in their storying. At times moun ki konnet showed great enthusiasm and excitement about a particular question. It was as if they had been waiting to discuss the contents of the question within the privacy of the one and one interviews. Because these questions had been covered over several activities, I felt that I could spend more time on the questions that the moun ki konnet showed a stronger interest in focusing on during the interviews.

Storythreads: Data Analysis. The process for data analysis for the project included two components that helped to shape a storythread analysis. These components included Toliver's storywork analysis and the use of intuition. As someone who is a visual thinker, I intuitively drew to materials that are useful for organizing ideas and thoughts. I like to see how elements of stories come up against each other, weave in and out of each other, and leave spaces between each other. To support this process, I employed sticky notes in various colours and shapes to sort the data. I have used this technique before in this project when I was working on organizing the key threads in the theoretical framework. Due to the large number of scholars I drew from, I created a visual tool that would help me examine the ways scholars would be in conversation with each other. I created a table where I sat the scholars beside each other to examine the ways their ideas connected or disconnected (See Figure 22). As I moved the seating arrangements, I notice new conversations emerging and at times friction and gaps between their ideas. Quite

some time after I created this tool, I realized I had not included Ma Bessie at this table. I recognized my barnacle-like association with who I invite into certain conversations. Even though Ma Bessie guides my work, I become accustomed to the exclusion of scholars like her who are outside of the academic fold. This is still an area of growth for me—to prioritize my ancestral knowledge system over western institutional knowledge systems.

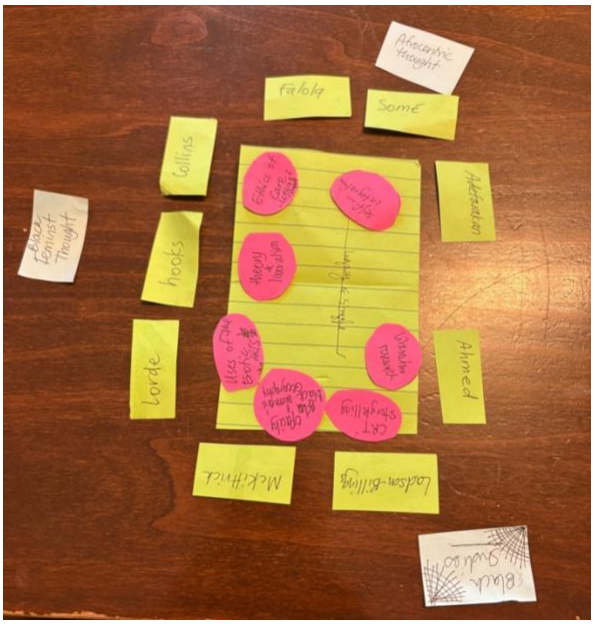

Figure 24: The Scholars at the Table

Similar to the table setting activity, I examined the gaps and connectedness between storybands (highlights of stories moun ki konnet shared) by re-familiarizing myself with the individual stories. I listened to the recording of both the in-person and online focus group sessions, one-on-one interviews, and revisited the survey responses multiple times. Before I began identifying and recording the storybands, I used what could be called an inductive approach to data analysis where I was guided by curiosity through observing how the storybands came apart as well as how they came together. I did not set out with a set of themes or patterns when I was locating the storybands. Rather I relied on the reading and re-reading of the transcripts from the interviews, surveys, and retreat style focus groups to highlight points of

connection and disconnection. The reading and re-reading allowed storybands to emerge. I quickly wrote down the storybands and noticed that they were speaking to each other—not because they were similar necessarily but also because they added complexity to the issue they highlighted. As I revisited these components of the project, I started to record the storybands on sticky notes to identify key elements of what moun ki konnet shared. This prompted me to use different colour sticky notes to group the storybands. As I recorded key storybands I saw connections develop between them. From a thematic analysis approach this could be identified as patterns. However, I was looking for connections that did not solely speak to patterns. I wanted to see how the storybands interacted with each other and what this interaction created as a narrative of its own. I was looking for the ways the storybands moved together—how they aligned. This storythread analysis, like Toliver's (2022) storywork analysis, is not necessarily concerned with identifying themes, as is with the practice in thematic analysis, rather it is about exploring the relationship between the stories.

As I continued to explore the relationships between the stories, I saw the ways the storybands intersected with other storybands. The space they left within these intersections allowed an overall narrative to emerge that spoke to the constant negotiation and need of the homeplace. These intersecting spaces created the storythreads. I saw the misogynoir they described as part of their working conditions which often led to actions that sought to create some form of protection. I noted the compromises they made and the desires they expressed to create spaces of activism and resistance with less exposure to harm.

During the one-on-one interviews I shared these storythreads with the moun ki konnet to see how the storythreads aligned or misaligned with their experience of the sessions. I revisited the interviews once they were all completed to listen for additional storythreads that might affirm

or contradict the ones that were previously generated. The storythreads related to working conditions, personal and professional outcomes, and tropes related to equity work for Black women K-12 equity educators continued to hold. However, I found additional storythreads from the interviews that connected to the importance of Afrocentric knowledge.

As I continued to look at the storythreads I could see three specific experiences emerge that connected to the negotiation of the homeplace. The first storythread indicated that Black women educator's relationship to tropes revealed compromises they were forced to make. I then found two more—the desire for both Black life-making and Afrocentric vindication practices. Together these three storythreads included narratives that related to tropes, working conditions, and personal and professional outcomes. Even though I found these three significant storythreads I continued to return to the focus group discussions for confirmation. That is when I observed the shape of the storythreads that often-included call and response elements. This reaffirmed my conclusion that storying is an appropriate and relevant method for exploring the experiences of Black women educators.

As I connected all the storythreads that were generated from the data analysis I was able to look at the interstitial space that was created. There was a story emerging within the spaces generated through the intersecting storythreads generated from the storybands. This created a Madras storying textile. The Madras storying textile revealed that Black women equity educators' awareness of misogynoir in equity work created movement to the homeplace. The need for a space to recover themselves, such as a homeplace, could address this phenomenon to help bring about change in equity work.

Chapter 5: The Home-raising Experience: Discovering Storythreads

In this chapter I elevate the women's experiences through sharing the details of the retreat style session, often deferring to their own storying. This is the story of how the project brought moun ki konnet from across the GTA together to both explore the creation of the homeplace and the possibilities for it moving forward. In this research the moun ki konnet stories were a part of self-recovery practices they took part in. It was left to them to tell how much or little of their stories they wanted. Some moun ki konnet chose to go deep with certain elements of their stories and keep other parts to themselves. Others chose to keep most of the stories to themselves but shared through the interviews and the group discussions what came through for them.

This chapter focuses more on their individual storybands –highlighting the individual experiences they came to the project with. I describe the retreat style session in story form and include the key storythreads. In this chapter, I also map each moun ki konnet movement from the loophole of retreat to the homeplace through the storythreads they highlight in their storying. As they accessed their stories, their awareness increased and drove them towards the homeplace. We witness their first steps towards the homeplace through their increased awareness of the loophole of "retreat". The stories also uncover their movement to the homeplace by revealing the attempts at (re)presenting themselves amid complex representations. Then they respond to their experiences of social death and physical harm by reimagining and making life. The next movement sees them engaging in the process of rematriation as a wellbeing practice. As a Kwik! Kwak! researcher in the project, I saw my role as threading the stories of the moun ki konnet together so it could be told as one story that highlights individual experiences—an Afrocentric Black feminist practice of holding both the collective and the individual together. In my telling I hope to share what they felt needed to be heard while protecting the elements that offered them

self-recovery with opacity. I will move back and forth between the in-person and online sessions as I move from the beginning to the end of the retreat style session. At times this means between the in-person and online sessions to provide a view that could be comparative in nature to help further explore the challenges and opportunities for a spiritual and physical location for home-raising work. (I will explore the way their stories come into contact with each other to create a dialogue in Chapter 6.)

Kwak (say out loud)

Kwik (read)

Kwak (say out loud)

Gadé mwen ou tuo mwen ka vini (read) *(Look at me, to you I am coming)*

Kwik (read)

Kwak (say out loud)

Gadé mwen ou tuo mwen ka vini (read) *(Look at me, to you I am coming)*

Lapòt? (say out loud) *(the door)*

Oui! Lapòt! (read) *(Yes! The door)*

October 2024: Arrival

The physical space Queen secured for the focus group sessions spoke to the kind of space the women in the project could find relief, recovery, and ease. When I walked through the space, a few hours before the moun ki konnet arrived, I imagined them, all Black women K-12 equity educators walking through the doors with a sense of arrival that bell hooks spoke of in the chapter "Homeplace" in Yearning (1990). In *Yearning* (1990) hooks speaks of the everyday, space, and beauty through the experiences with her grandmother:

> Baba, made this house living space. She was certain that the way we lived was shaped by objects, the way we looked at them, the way they were placed around

> us. She was certain that we were shaped by space. From her I learn about aesthetics, the yearning for beauty that she tells me is the predicament of heart that makes our passion real…Her house is a place where I am learning to look at things, where I am learning how to belong in space. In rooms full of objects, crowded with things, I am learning to recognize myself. She hands me a mirror, showing me how to look… Surrounded by fields of tobacco, the leaves braided like hair, dried and hung, circles and circles of smoke fill the air. We string red peppers fiery hot, with thread that will not be seen. They will hang in front of a lace curtain to catch the sun. Look, she tells me, what the light does to color! Do you believe that space can give life, or take it away, that space has power. (p. 103)?

The questions that hooks' (1990) grandmother poses, "Do you believe that space can give life, or take it away?" (p. 103) is a question that I answer with a confident "Yes!" due to my experiences I described in chapter 1. I felt the power of space to take life away during my central role. Most of the women who held the same role as me during that time were given spaces to work that were an afterthought. The spaces were often filled with unwanted items or were placed in areas that made doing the job challenging. I anticipated that this may be true for the moun ki konnet as well.

It was important to me for this reason that space was considered with great attention and care right from the start. When I watched the women arrive, I notice that their quiet voices betrayed some hesitation. The high ceilings and the generous windows caused me to wonder if this was too much space. I hoped that the space invited a feeling of being able to "fill in" rather than being overwhelmed.

The first two moun ki konnet that arrived in the in-person session, Zorah and Gloria, were experienced educators who worked for a large school board in an urban setting. They held central roles rather than classroom roles. This meant that they support the board in carrying out initiatives at the school or district level. [36] After they greeted us, Zorah and Gloria found two

[36] To protect the identity of the moun ki konnet I have decided not to include information such as years of experience, titles, ages, the school boards they worked for, and even the subjects/grades they taught. Most of the

seats that were closest to the doorway and settled in. They smiled to Queen and myself while they continued to converse quietly with each other. Next, Audre, a high school educator from another large school board arrived. She walked towards us with purpose and a comforting confidence. Audre's steps were full of energy and her eyes smiled widely as she found space opposite to Zorah and Gloria. Another moun ki konnet, Marguerite, another high school teacher who also had a leadership role, followed behind her. Marguerite's steps were cautious and focused. She appeared to be deep in thought as soon as she took her seat. Marguerite's mind seemed to be focused on something pressing. We waited for the other moun ki konnet, Ardelia, another central staff in a large school board, and soon learned that she wanted to join through Zoom instead, as she could not make it into the city. As Queen and I went about making the arrangements to set up a Zoom connection, the room came alive in a gentle way. Marguerite continued to sit with a look of intense thought. I poked my head up every now and then to check on the moun ki konnet.

October 2024 & January 2025: Opening Activity & Introduction

After the moun ki konnet had found their seats, I showed them to the side of the room where the big arched windows were. There, on the long tables that stretched the length of the room, I had placed care packages for each moun ki konnet. There were stones, in a small bag with an Afrocentric print, candy, a journal with some of the images I would share and some blank pages for note taking and story writing, and a gift card to thank them for their participation. After they had settled into their chosen spaces in the room, I asked them to each share a land acknowledgement that was specific to where they live and a brief sentence

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moun ki konnet held roles that would make it easy to identify them. The absence of this content is not meant to treat all Black women alike but rather as a practice in opacity that is used to protect their identities. This will be especially important as they share their stories in upcoming chapters which include details that if paired with some of their identifying information could make it easy to identify them.

recognizing where their lineage stems from. A second prompt they were given as they introduced themselves was to consider what they would like to let go and what they would like to hold on to using beautiful stones and a wooden bowl of water to ground the ritual. Marguerite who I described earlier as entering the space with a heaviness spoke first: "I'm hoping to let go of some of the pain of my experience. Okay, so I apologize if I use this as a therapy session. Something to hold on to is hope." Others nodded around the room. There was a brief pause and then Audre spoke:

> "I'm originally from (redacted). I live by myself, and I'm Christian, and…I really take pride in the work that I do. I utilize anti-racist practices, and I really believe in CRP strategies. And I see the impact it has on my students. And I also know I would have had a better educational experience in the K-12 spaces if I had it myself. So, I think that's what I'm holding on to. I want to hold on to my why--which is how to dismantle Eurocentric views and change the narrative in my classrooms and really center the voice of Black and Indigenous students. And I want to let go of –how folks (people in my board) see me. I know they think I'm acceptable or not acceptable in terms of that…I want to let go (of)...maybe I'm not doing enough or advocating the right way. I want to come to peace with what I'm doing—its working and its good enough.

Gloria took it from there and introduced herself as well as explaining what she wanted to let go of and hold on to.

> When I think of myself, my connection to the land, I always look back to my family…The things that I definitely want to let go of is the feeling that things have to be perfect. Everything has to go just so. And I'm struggling with playing

things back in my mind and realizing that there's other people who have a part as well.

As the time went on I could feel the energy build. I could feel the ease that was needed to allow connection and flow moving in the rooms filling the high spaces. Zorah started to share and as she shared, her words were met with tears.

I'm Zorah…I know this was like a terrible time. But one of the things about the pandemic was, I kind of felt like. I had a moment to... I sat outside on my deck. I actually did not kill my plants. I actually, for the first time gardened, and even though my daughter didn't necessarily like all the tomatoes, she found such joy. And being able to harvest it, plant and watch something grow, and it really made me feel much more connected being by the water. It was just a time in my family, to just reconnect and center and focus. I know we all lost, or at some point we all have lost someone…

Part of my learning journey, in connecting to Afrocentric and indigenous ways is understanding the impact of water, and that ability to let go, and the ability to understand how powerful it is that's so common. So that's where I'm sitting.

Something I'm hoping to let go, which we all kind of touched on is that (idea of being) perfect. The work can be daunting too. But you want to do justice. You want to be in a position to lead and learn at the same time. But understanding that you are enough and that you're learning, you are able to fail and get back up again is something that I'm teaching my own daughter. It's okay to fail. We learn from that. Mistakes are okay…(The)... feeling of failing that child or, failing that educator, or, failing that school community, rest heavily on our jobs

> as Black educators and Black women in spaces. So that's something I was hoping to kind of mitigate a little bit today.
>
> Something I'm holding on to is the hope that my child, my daughter, will be.. will love the skin that she is wearing, be accepted for the beautiful Black woman she is (sobbing). That's what I'm holding on to. I want her to be surrounded by this energy I feel today. I just want her to feel like she's… empowered and loved...She's picked up so much more than I could ever imagine, and I know it's because she sees our faces in spaces…I'm sorry I got a little emotional (crying). I just want her to understand that there is love, empowerment—all of the things...

Throughout the time Zorah spoke, she cried openly, often apologizing. I tried to offer reassurances that her tears were both welcome and necessary. The rest of the room ushered reassurances around Zorah. Gloria, who was sitting beside her shared a warm comforting smile to ease whatever discomfort was still there.

January 2025

Opening Activity. The arrival of the online group did not mirror the in-person gatherings. I had 7 moun ki konnet who indicated that they would come to the session. When I opened the Zoom room, only 4 moun ki konnet were present; Alexis, Cynthia, and another moun ki konnet who later withdrew her participation[37]. Cynthia, who was joining from her car, said she was delayed in traffic. I encouraged her to prioritize her safety. She said she would stay on until she arrived at home. Queen was also present for this session.

[37] Alexis, another moun ki konnet who was supposed to be present but was not later explained that she had the times mixed up. We agreed to schedule an interview at a later date. She also wanted to participate in the portrait exercise, so her image was given to Queen a couple of weeks after our interview.

By the time we were ready to start, most moun ki konnet who came in the room turned off their camera. I encouraged them to show up in a way that felt right for them. I could feel them trying hard to leave the rush of the day behind with difficulty. Pauline was one of the few that turned her camera on. She was seated in what looked like a bright private office space in her home. She would apologize from time to time about her son's need for her. She would turn the camera off and attend to him. I tried my best to reassure her that her son was not an interruption. But I felt this tug coming through the screen (a tug we all shared)—the desire to be fully present in both spaces.

As the availability of moun ki konnet presented itself at the start of the evening I started to consider the limited time that the moun ki konnet in the project have to tend to themselves. They were either meeting between and within other pressing responsibilities or had to cancel altogether. I too felt the pressure to make sure that I was not asking too much of the moun ki konnet time. It was scheduled during the week in the evening when I knew most of the moun ki konnet would be coming home from work. There was a hesitation to meet on weekends because they identified that as being a time they needed. I could not help but compare the pressure of time and how it showed up differently for the moun ki konnet in the online space and those in-person. The in-person session felt more relaxed where the moun ki konnet were more willing to engage with Queen, myself and the other moun ki konnet in the room.

After everyone had settled into the Zoom space we, moved on to the water and stone activity that asked what they were going to hold on to and what they would release through the session. The water and stone exercise had me doing most of the talking and explaining with very little interactions from the moun ki konnet. I felt the rush of my voice

and later wondered if the rush of my voice signaled a lack of time for theirs. Because the on-line session was only 2 hours in comparison to the 4 hours for the in-person session, the rush of time was ever present in my mind. I was worried about asking too much of their time which created a feeling of a lack of time. The moun ki konnet did not share with the group what they were holding on to and letting go. I wondered if this was because they did not feel a sense of connection with each other and myself enough to share in such a vulnerable way. In contrast, the in-person moun ki konnet arrived with time to move about the room and chat with each other briefly before the session began. The online group did not have the opportunity to connect with each other before the start.

Rememory Storywork: Benchmark Memory (Online and In-person)

After the moun ki konnet went through the water and stone opening activity, we moved into identifying a benchmark memory to begin telling their stories. This was a key moment that exemplified their experiences as equity educators. Pauline opened the discussion by telling her story which centered around what pushed her out of the roles she held.

> I think something that I never quite thought about, but when I started to plot, my career line was…the word that comes to mind is running. So… my first…teaching career began in (redacted). And then I remember I was very intentional. Like I, I would always kind of early on in my career…I kind of would say like whenever I got this gut feeling that it's time to leave the school, I would always kind of get like this inner voice that would say OK, this is the year…So I think a couple of years into my first placement…I kind of knew I was going to apply out. Even though there were opportunities to stay and advance in the school, I still followed my intuition, and I moved on to a different school. But

> when I think about my why for each move… I had reached the max capacity for opportunity in that space, or this space was not conducive to me doing the work in the way in which I want to do it…I will say, my first few years as a teacher, my advocacy wasn't, it was always very vocal, but it wasn't very direct, right? Like still kind of working through…how am I going to navigate these, you know, predominantly white teaching spaces?
>
> But I would say by the time I moved to my second school, I was very clear about what I was observing, how I was naming it, how it was supporting learners. And though I did experience anti-Black racism in my first school (I stayed). I guess because I had some administrator support who grew to be like one of my closest friends in the school with me…There was usually either an incident or a feeling that would cause me to leave. I guess if I could describe it, I just felt like the space couldn't hold me or wasn't conducive to my growth or like the way I wanted to be a teacher, the way I wanted to be an educator. So, I would make the choice to leave or felt forced to leave or look for another opportunity.

Pauline's story revealed the need for rememory storywork. Revisiting stories held some answers for Pauline and the other moun ki konnet about what keeps Black women in the loophole. The lack of awareness produces an inability to move beyond the loophole. This lack of awareness kept Pauline moving from school to school. The increase in awareness supported Pauline in naming the experiences of anti-Black racism that shaped the challenging environment she worked within. Revisiting the stories allowed her access to movement from the loophole to the homeplace.

Pauline's story highlights the ever present and inescapable experience of anti-Black racism that becomes dormant memories over time. Cynthia, too, identified with the inability to name her prior experience, which allowed for the memory to be dormant. She also identified another common memory that may go dormant, that were identified by both the in-person and online groups. This is the experience of navigating perceptions around competency. The moun ki konnet must navigate rungs of competency that stretched between being good enough (safe) and too good (threatening). When Cynthia shared, she spoke to this complication around competency amongst other experiences of anti-Black racism. She started by echoing the feeling in the room that I had observed regarding time. She was still in her car as she was parked waiting for her daughter:

> I'm wearing a number of hats this evening, but I wanted to commit to this time as I signed up for and I'm happy to be here…And a lot of the kind of events that I thought about were more early on in my career experiences that I had that were not so positive, but that I didn't really understand how to navigate because at that time, equity wasn't, was well in my board, which is (redacted). I got hired in as a contract teacher in (redacted). But at that time there was a lot of like the kind of (place) where we are right now. Where there's a lot of backup when it comes to equity. It was a bad word. And so I didn't really have the language that I have now and understanding the experience and know what was happening. But definitely, you know, little microaggressions or, you know, feeling like I could be good at my job because I had to be good, but not too good that it would intimidate others...And at that time, not being able to speak up because I was just happy to be there. Like I was just happy to have (redacted). I was just really happy to have a contract. I spent a lot of time as a supply at that time. It was kind of

> harder to get a job if you didn't know anyone. And just a, a lot of like invisibility. And it's just that invisibility.…or people like you're in sitting in a staff room 'cause that's the only place. Obviously, you're going to eat your lunch and, you know, hearing conversations that are racist and offensive, but it's, again, it's like you're not even there. So yeah. So those are some of the experiences that kind of came to mind that I really, I guess, pushed aside over time, you know, you forget certain things.

As we continued with exploring benchmark memories, I noticed that one memory from one participant would activate another. Beyond that, the permission to invite emotions as part of truth telling also helped to activate memories. Dillard's (2012) insistence on remembering the things we have been made to forget surfaced again and again through the sharing of the stories. The memories were there, but they were dormant until there was a kind of activation device that gave them permission to be brought to the surface. Audre's, an in-person moun ki konnet, memory was activated by Zorah's benchmark memory of being silenced and paralyzed by restricting their access to their anger. Audre shared how the invitation to see emotion as a form of knowledge supported her in accessing a benchmark memory. Audre also shared how conflicted she felt as a former student of the board who became a teacher for the same board. What she once looked at with innocence was tarnished due to the incidents of anti-Black racism that were publicized about her board. She explained:

> I was thinking about … one moment where it's like a loss of innocence for me. There's like three things. So, the first one I remember it was (in) January, my first, no, my second year teaching. I'm in the middle of basketball practice, and someone comes up to me and says, what are you doing for Black history month?' And well, at the time

I didn't have the language. My thing is, I never have the language, but I have the feeling. So, when you said emotions are knowledge. I was like, yes,…. But now, with my learning, I understand like that doesn't just fall on me right? So, there's that moment and then another. Another loss of innocence was when my board… and I knew anti-Black racism existed because I'm Black. Seeing the experiences of my peers, (sighed deeply). But something hit me when it came across the news like a couple of times. It's like the first time you see, like for me, like I saw my board like boom! you know. For me it was like that was like a huge loss of innocence, because for me I became a teacher because the teachers in high school. They were awesome, right? But then when you look at it from another lens like. I had this other lens right? Again…this loss of innocence. That was just like, wow, this place is super shady. Yeah. So that was tough. And then it's interesting to see my journey now in terms of how I show up for my Black students, knowing, like the pain that can come from human experiences that way.

Ardelia entered the conversation through Audre's benchmark memory—showing the echolocation practices that emerge organically within storytelling.

Can I add to that? So, for me, my journey. I think just being a product of your board. I am too right in the sense that I was in the (redacted) Board. (Redacted), to be exact, I work with students. I sent my children to that board, one who graduated, and one who is in elementary school. And now I'm a teacher. I think that's where I'm trying to focus my own growth and my own knowledge. I don't identify as being a Catholic at this stage of my life, but I grew up in the Catholic school system. You know what? You have a trust…There's a propaganda. That's kind of sent to you, and you're taught, and a lot of the Black teachers go back to the Catholic school, because, for whatever reason to get, you

know, for me. It was something about faith, and being able to pray in the morning, and all of that, and as you're growing there is a conflict, a conflict with how do you show up as a Black person? Because my biggest issue right now is all them onward Christian soldiers (speaking of Catholic educators). They walk in Catholicism but they're harming us, and they're harming our children. And they use Catholicism to validate how they think, how they are, and just how they navigate the system. And usually, they're not the nice people.

As we moved away from the benchmark memory activity and prepared for the gazework, I thanked the moun ki konnet for their vulnerability and openness that still provided some opacity for them. Throughout the shares I noticed that the women only shared through a veil of opacity. Even though they cried through each other's memories, they still held identifying elements of their stories close. Later, when we moved into the online interviews, I noticed that this still held true for the most part. Participants were careful to not name names, workplaces, and particulars about the events that harmed them. Many participants had not shared these experiences with strangers before, and I wondered if this is what made the need for opacity so important. Throughout their rememory storytelling I wondered if time was also an issue. I wondered if given more time if they would feel and respond differently. I wondered what would have happened if I had spent more time following the direction their stories took us in.

Gazework

When most of the moun ki konnet had shared their benchmark stories I placed the gaze matrix (see Figure 20) I had developed on the screen for both in-person and online moun ki konnet. Both online and in-person groups had a chance to explore the gaze matrix before they

applied it to their experiences. They also had a copy of the gaze matrix in their journals they received so they could write directly on it or beside it. I explained the four sections of the gaze matrix and asked the moun ki konnet to use it to reflect on how they are seen by others, how they see themselves, and how they engage with gazes that are contrary to how they see themselves. I then presented The Making of the Woke Sapphire (see Figure 19) to connect how the gazes are rooted in tropes and how this impacts how Black Women equity educators see themselves and are seen. These activities were done in preparation for the digital portrait segment with Queen.

Digital Portrait

Following the engagement with the Making of the Woke Sapphire image (see Figure 19), Queen introduced their practice and connected it to the Creative Afro-Feminist Methodology I had created. Prior to the sessions, Queen and I held meetings together where I shared Afrocentric frameworks of knowing and being such as the Sankofa and Kôngo Cosmogram I was using to ground the methods and the overall methodology. Queen was able to share their Afro-futurism art practice and find ways to connect it to the digital portrait activity. We were in a co-creative space of learning and teaching where we both left the project with a broader knowledge of the role of an Afrocentric approach to arts research. Because of the co-creation it was important for Queen to introduce and situate their work. Queen described their Afrofuturist practice to the moun ki konnet in this way:

> So Afrofuturism is a big thing in my work, even if it doesn't show up physically as a spaceship or the Galaxy in the background. Because that's not always what Afrofuturism is as a practice and praxis visually. A lot of people, that's kind of what we go to. And we think about things like Wakanda and Black Panther as the visual mode of Afrofuturism, but it's steeped in many different things and

> themes that show up actually in Black Panther. And so, I used it as a creative tool to imagine all alternative realities, kind of like transform my story, transform how pain shows up in my body. And I want my work to be a space where we can reshape what it looks like to be Black, to be femme.
>
> I'll tell you a little bit about my art practice. And my art practice is based, on something called noetic sciences…It's something that I've been practicing for a long time…Noetic science is just another way of talking about spiritual capacities for healing that blends intuition inside physical awareness in an intellectual platform, so to speak. And then I explore alchemy and transmutation. Drawing from the spiritual in exchange with like the speculative processes of transformation and Black identities...

Queen's articulation of their identity and how it connects to their Afrofuturist practice was an important starting point for the digital portrait component of the session. Queen also spoke about the use of AI in their work and how they would be utilizing that and AR (augmented reality) through the digital portraits:

> And so, this experience I'm going to take you through is called Afrofuturist self-reclamation. This experience I'm going to do with you is rooted in Afrofuturism and African indigenous symbols and Black feminist practices. And I really want us to focus on introspection or self-reflection, you know, to gain a deeper awareness of our thoughts and our feelings. And what we're going to do is we're going to do that through affirmation-based questioning. And we're going to have a bit of a collaborative dialogue about like our identities. We are going to create visual representations of that journey from (the loophole of) retreat to the homeplace. And then I'm going to take you into a

> little bit of some AI and AR using ChatGPT. I know that's like a big curse word for a lot of teachers and professors and students, but I personally, even as a scholar, I love ChatGPT in my art practice and also as a personal assistant.

Acknowledging the challenges educators had with using AI in this project was an important part of the discussion. I was grateful that Queen took some time to acknowledge that AI is a complex place for educators. Queen continued to describe the process that included the use of two Afrocentric concepts—the Sankofa symbol and the Kôngo Cosmogram and how they related to the digital portrait practice. Following the exploration of the Afrocentric concepts, Queen began to introduce the programs they would be using to create the digital portraits.

> So I use an app called Artivive, which I'll be doing with your final pieces to add this more immersive experience to the artwork we're going to create together. I also use it for like programming stuff like that because it's one of the most accessible apps we can use.

Next, Queen took the moun ki konnet through the prompts that would guide the digital portrait activity. Part of re-presenting themselves in the way they want to be seen involved creating collages of images that spoke to who they are and how they are reclaiming knowledge and visions. The moun ki konnet also responded to these questions by recording them in an online booklet that Queen would later use to create their portraits:

1. Reflect on the ways you have been denied opportunities to express your full identity and experiences.
2. How has your identity been shaped by resistance, retreat, or survival?
3. How does an art practice rooted in the Sankofa symbol and Kôngo Cosmogram support your re-envisioning of equity work?
4. How do you envision a future where you are fully seen, heard, and valued?

5. Write down 3-5 affirmations that reflect your strength, vision, and vulnerability.

Throughout these activities the moun ki konnet were engaged for the most part. I noticed that Marguerite, an in-person attendee, was not filling in her booklet. However, she was engaging with the material through thinking. She appeared to be deep in thought while wrestling with something. I was curious about what was holding her attention and the reason why she had not engaged with the booklet. I decided not to intervene and continued to listen to Queen.

The online moun ki konnet were invited to use the Magic Media Canva (an app that can generate different images using AI) to support the moun ki konnet in exploring the ways their benchmark memory stories, their gazework, and The Making of the Woke Sapphire connected to tell their stories. Both Queen and I thought it would be an easier way to work through and explain how they would generate images for the portrait they would work on with them because of the lack of time we had with this group. With the in-person group, Queen had the time to expose moun ki konnet to the software they would be using to generate the AR images that would come from their engagement with the prompts. Due to the limited time, we chose to use a platform that was accessible to most moun ki konnet to illustrate the use of AI and AR. They entered words that they gleaned from their engagement with the benchmark memory, gaze matrix, and The Making of the Woke Sapphire segments into the Canva app image generator. I could not see the words they used but later they shared the images that were generated. Queen would also offer the moun ki konnet support to make sure their prompts and words would be effective in generating an image that represented what they explored earlier in the session. As moun ki konnet worked on their images I could feel their engagement through the questions they were asking Queen and myself. This type of engagement with how they wanted to represent themselves brought with it a breeze of lightness that flowed between our screens. Queen also

spoke about how to change the mood of an image and use descriptive language that would be more accurate as AI tends to generate images that fit a certain prototype. The AI generated digital portrait activity offered moun ki konnet the opportunity to explore the experience of self-representation. It was an opportunity to reintroduce and (re)present themselves.

To show their journey from the loophole to the homeplace through the engagement with the digital portrait prompts, the rememory storywork, and gaze matrix practices, I created maps for each moun ki konnet. These became the beginning of storythreads that I will explore in greater detail in the second segment of this chapter. I chose to use this format after revisiting the moun ki konnet responses and their collages. As I revisited their responses over and over again, I noticed that I could see their movement from the loophole to home-raising that would support a movement to the homeplace. All the moun ki konnet expressed this movement in a spiritual sense. Their responses revealed that it was a growing awareness that created the movement. As they became aware of their position in the loophole, they identified a need for something that was safer, more life-giving, and that could support their (re)presenting of themselves. Through an increased awareness of their working conditions within the loophole, moun ki konnet were able to gain the confidence to renew their presentation of themselves. I am referring to this process as (re)presenting—a key component of the movement from the loophole to the homeplace. Because the homeplace confines Black women and their work by operationalizing tropes—Black women recognized the necessity of presenting themselves in identity affirming ways.

I will share each moun ki konnet map and their collage of images that also speak to their growing awareness. The collages and the maps are not complete representations of their awareness and everything they experienced. They are a snapshot and should be read

that way. This is an important reminder for myself as a Kwik! Kwak! researcher. Even though it was not my intention or interest, I still had to resist the urge to believe that I could capture Black woman life through these methods. I had to be continually reminded to leave room for the unknown. In the maps, a step or a section of rope may be blank. That was to acknowledge that there is still so much we do not know about the women, loophole, home-raising, and the homeplace. Room has to be left for what has yet to be revealed/what will not unfold or be revealed.

Zorah's Journey. Zorah was often quiet throughout the in-person session. At times she would share with Gloria who was seated beside her. Throughout the digital portrait activity Gloria and Zorah continued to converse with each other. The emotion filled responses Zorah gave when she was sharing her benchmark memory appeared to have created some ease for Zorah. She appeared more relaxed. Through what she shared from the rememory storywork, gazework, and digital portrait practices Zorah described an experience of equity work within her school board that was characterized by survival, relational tensions, and struggles relating to accurate identity affirmation. Zorah's awareness of the importance of the expression of her emotions and the accurate reading of it through the use of art highlighted her ability to reaffirm her identity. At the same time, she came to understand the relationship between survival and purpose to support her home-raising work.

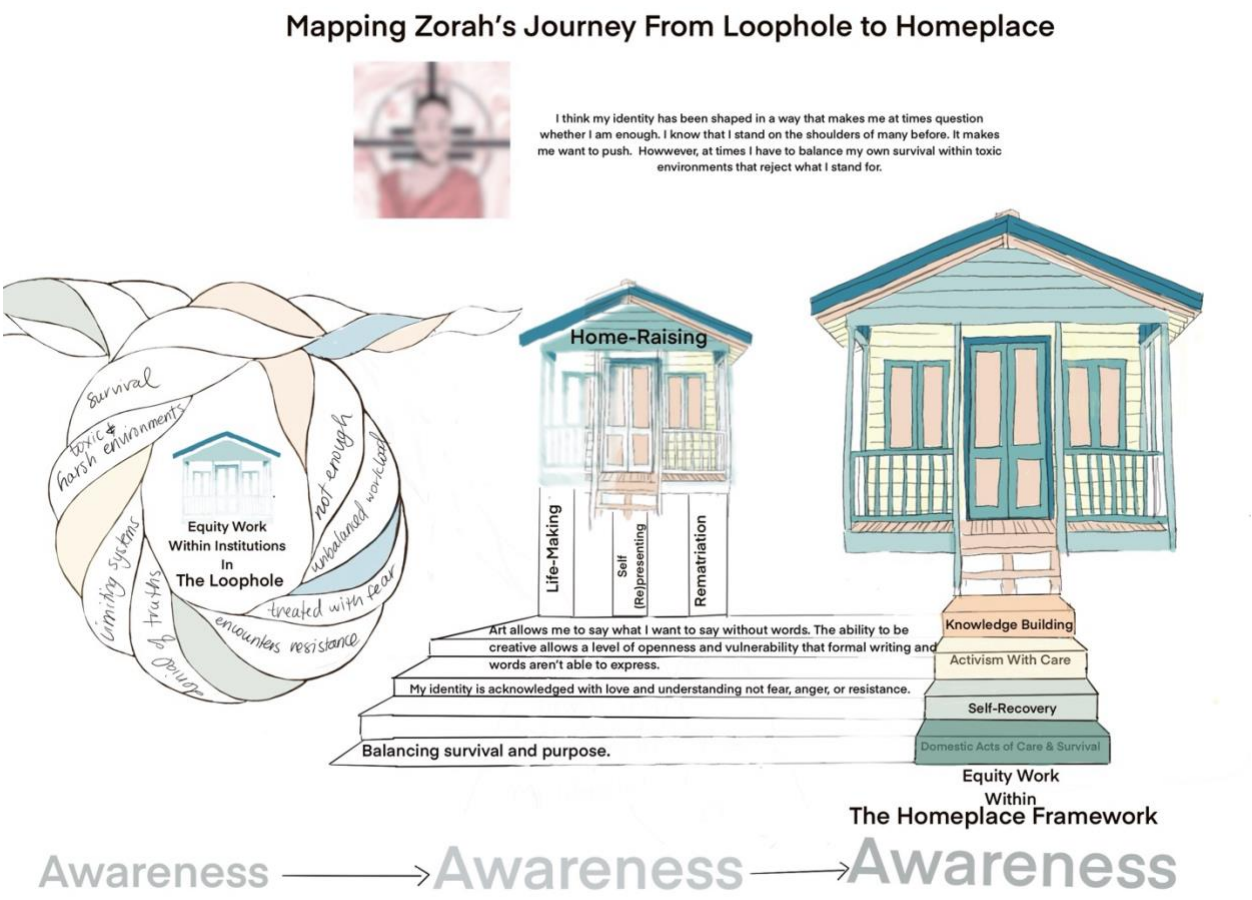

Figure 25: Mapping Zorah's Journey from Loophole to Homeplace

Zorah's collage below further emphasizes how art allows her to put into words what was difficult to express. She used images that spoke heavily of the importance of the relational to her wellbeing—specifically family relationships. Images of the ankh image speaks to life giving and life in general. She also included other Afrocentric imagery that spoke to survival, strength, and pride. Zorah's collage was vibrant. The text that Zorah used to describe her values, identity, and hopes showed a woman who valued her identity as both a woman of beauty, strength, pride, and resilience. Her affirmation, "I am enough as I am" captured Zorah's need to be affirmed as she is.

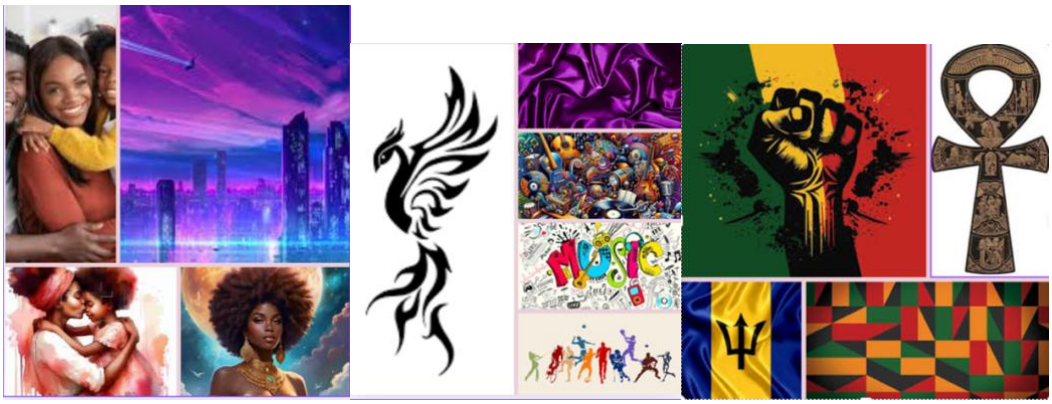

Figure 26: Zorah's Collage

Audre's Journey. Audrey's journey showed a path that was centered on the role her African roots played in supporting her awareness of the safer spaces she needed and the unsafe spaces she currently resided in. Her awareness for peace, rest and artistic expression supported her movement from the loophole to home-raising efforts that would lead to the homeplace. She had very strong feelings about the space that equity work is housed in and how that created opportunities for a disruption of her peace and misrepresentation of her identity.

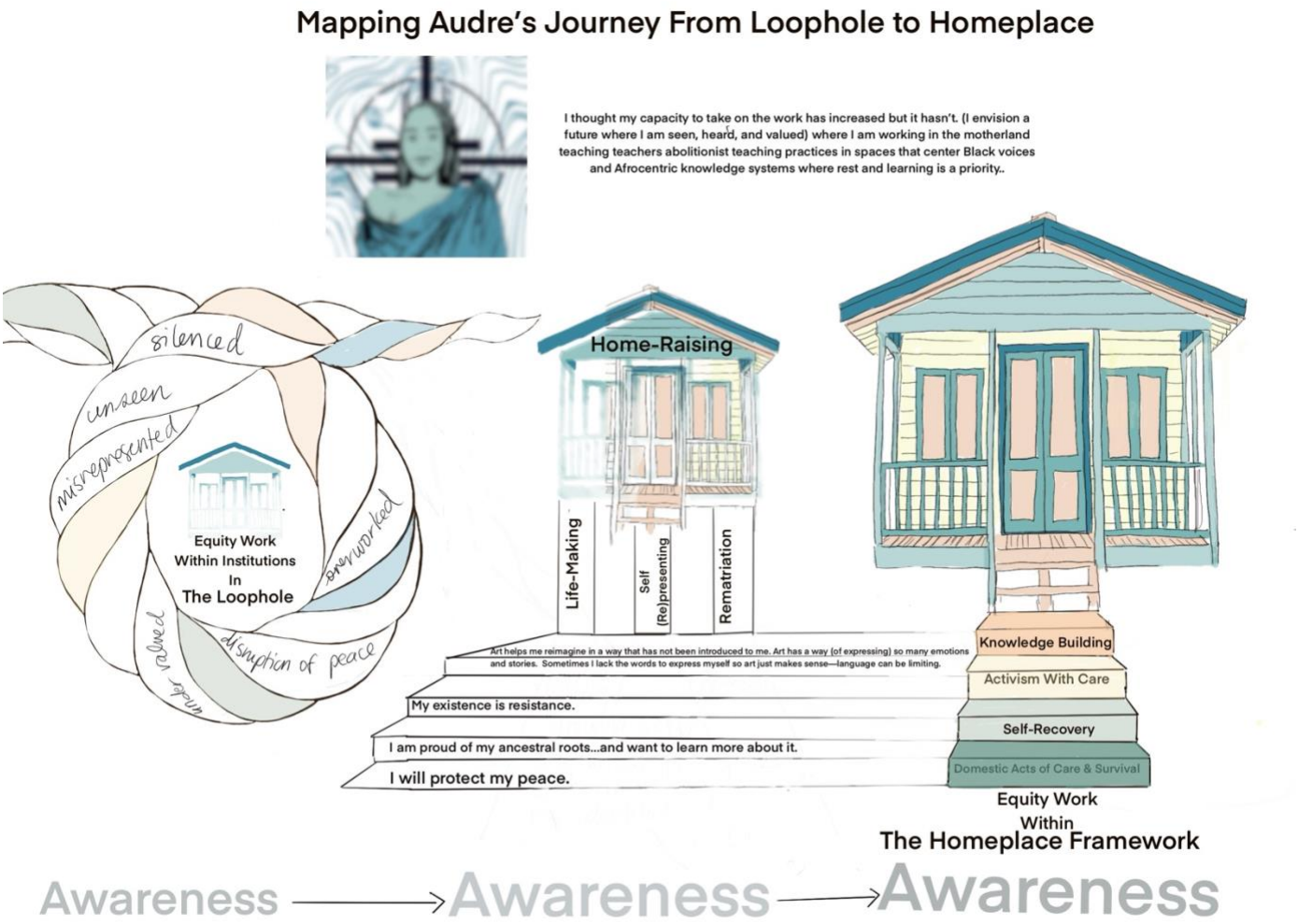

Figure 27: Mapping Audre's Journey from Loophole to Homeplace

Audre's collage emphasized a journey to the homeplace that centered on life-making that were supported by values for freedom, Afrocentric knowledge and identity, spirituality, and rest. Audre's affirming statement reflected the awareness that acknowledging the value of the self is a way to combat the harm that is experienced by saying, "My existence is resistance".



Figure 28: Audre's Collage

Marguerite's Journey. Marguerite's journey was facilitated by an increasing awareness of the experiences of the social and physical death that characterized her experiences with equity work within a large school board. She was able to chart movements to the homeplace as she became aware of the need to leave a toxic environment while holding on to Afrocentric knowledge systems to support her wellbeing efforts. Life making was significant to Marguerite because of the threat to physical and mental safety the work environment generated.

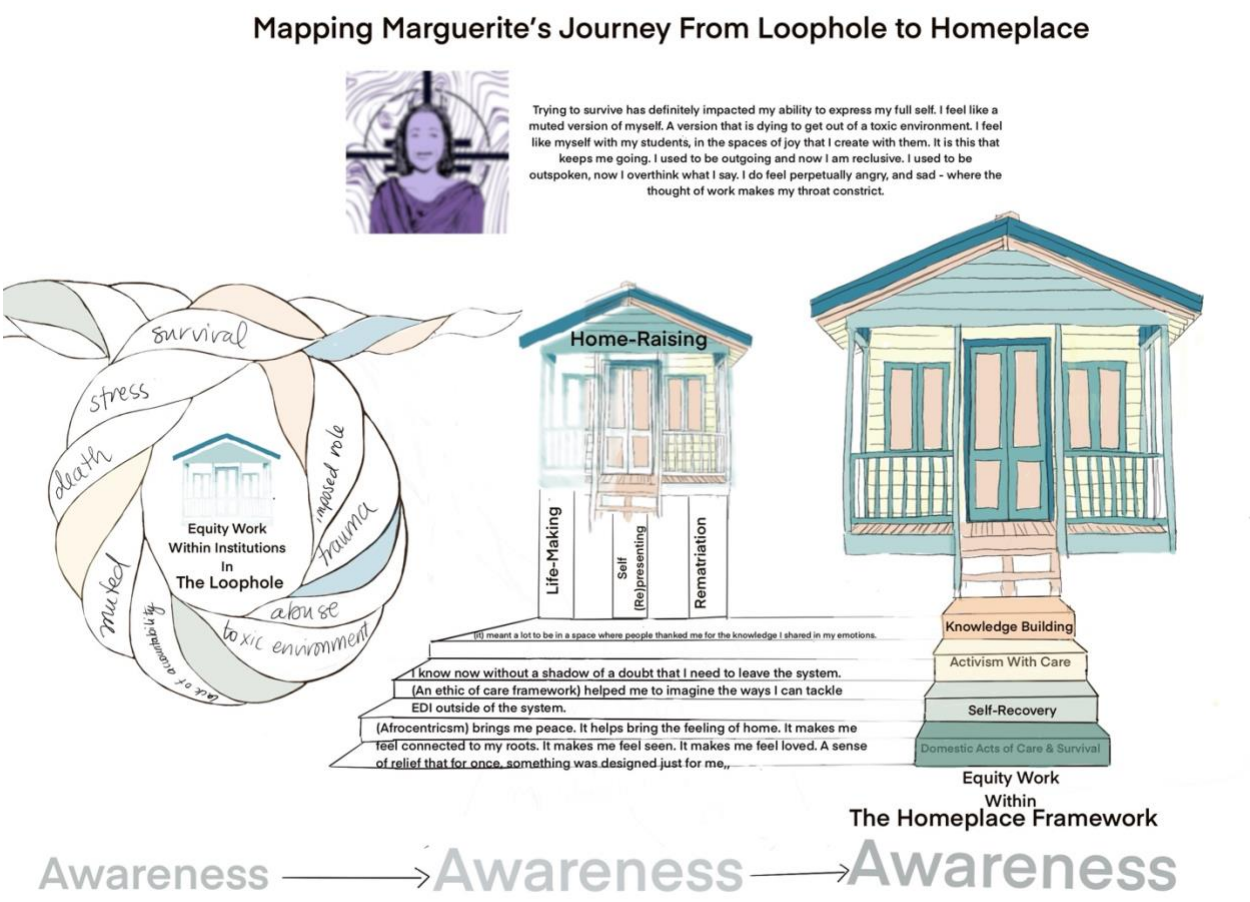

Figure 29: Mapping Marguerite's Journey from Loophole to Homeplace

Marguerite's movement from the loophole to the homeplace held insights into the world Marguerite was eager to embrace. This movement was facilitated by an awareness of beauty within herself and her culture. Her desire for ease and leisure supported life-making. The desire for life making is a direct response to the threat to physical and mental safety in her equity work. Her journey was punctuated by the affirmation, "I am perfectly and beautifully made".



Figure 30: Marguerite's Collage

Gloria's Journey. Gloria's journey to the homeplace required home-raising efforts that recognized the significant impact of the harm caused by identity that is distorted or misread by others. Her awareness of the challenges equity work creates between how you see your identity and how it is perceived by others created the movement towards the homeplace. Gloria identified the need for a community that accurately reflects and perceives her identity. This would reflect an environment that supports activism with care—a key step towards the homeplace.

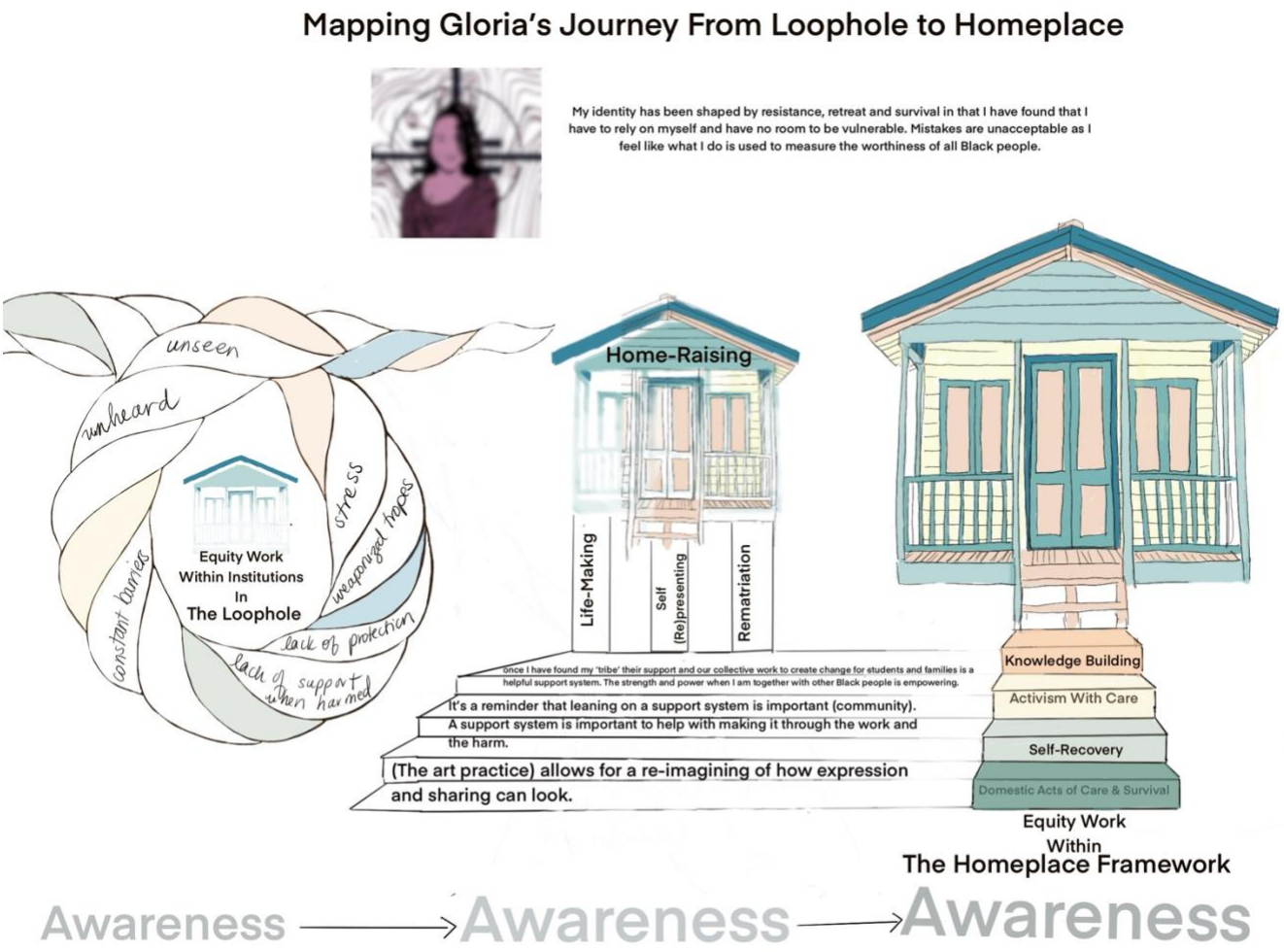

Figure 31: Mapping Gloria's Journey from Loophole to Homeplace

Gloria's collage also reflected the current struggle with being properly reflected and consequently supported in equity workplaces. Within the images, Gloria identified an awareness that reflected how she is seen, the urge to flee due to the harm she experienced, as well as the

strength and beauty she can see in herself. The images of children that reflected various emotions may point us towards an awareness of goals and challenges within the equity role held by Black women. All of this helped Gloria to identify an affirming statement that proclaims, “Know your worth”.



Figure 32: Gloria's Collage

Ardelia’s Journey. The awareness of the social and especially physical harm that Ardelia experienced through equity work shaped her identity formation and health. Survival of the work environment was another element of the awareness she developed that helped her identify the need to create new visions of herself that were life-sustaining thus making her aware of the life making practices that could support her. Her Afrocentric framing of the self was also reflected in the movement from the loophole to the homeplace.

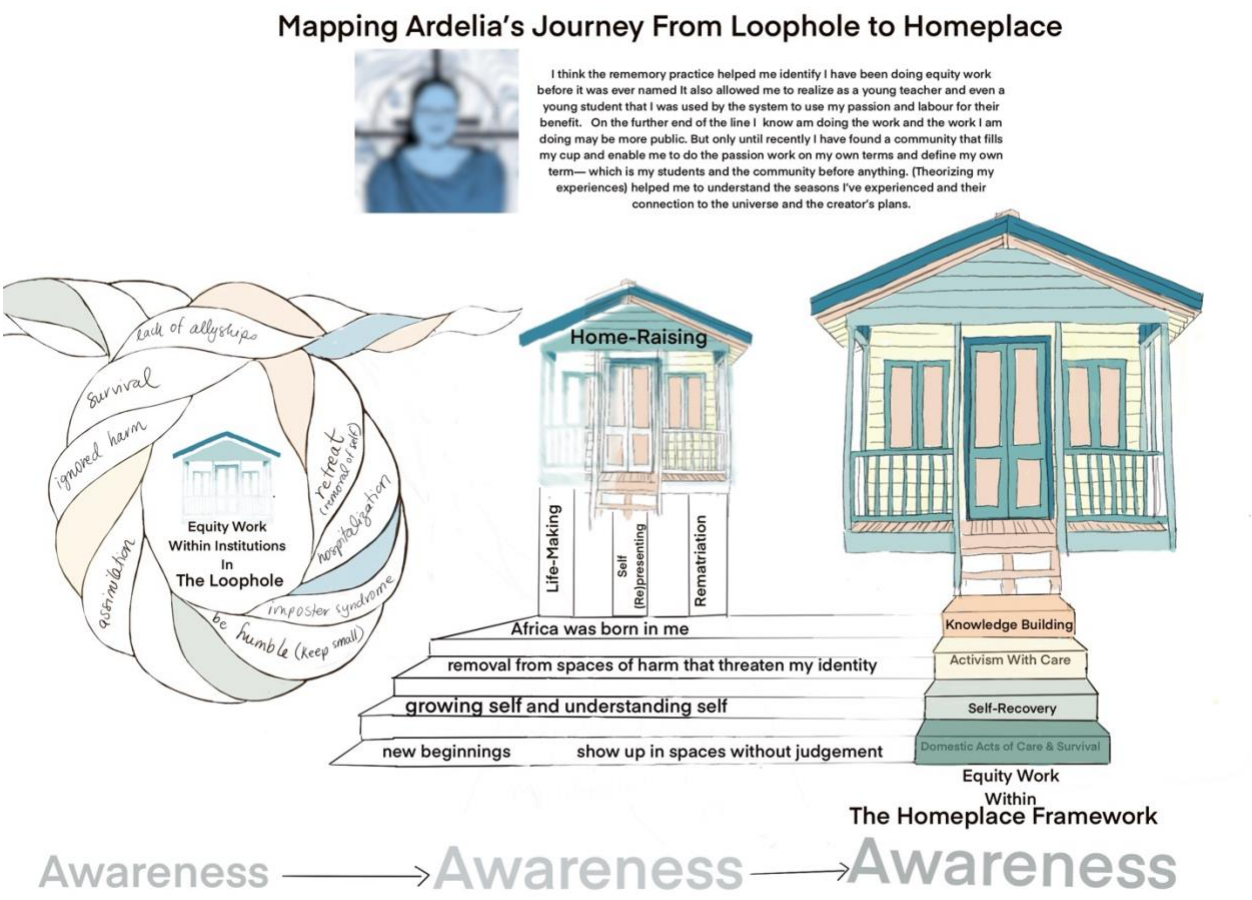

Figure 33: Mapping Ardelia's Journey from Loophole to Homeplace



Figure 34: Ardelia's Collage

Ardelia's affirming statement, "I am enough just as I am" reflects efforts to reinstate a sense of self that resists being shaped by work that supports isolation, feelings of not being good enough, and staying small.

Alexis' Journey. Alexis identified the journey to the homeplace as a true retreat. A place to recover and affirm her agency to respond to the harm she experiences through her work. The movement from the loophole to the homeplace was facilitated by the recognition of the restrictive environment she worked within. This awareness allowed Alexis to recognize the demanding labour she was asked to perform which led to a desire for life making that centered around ease.

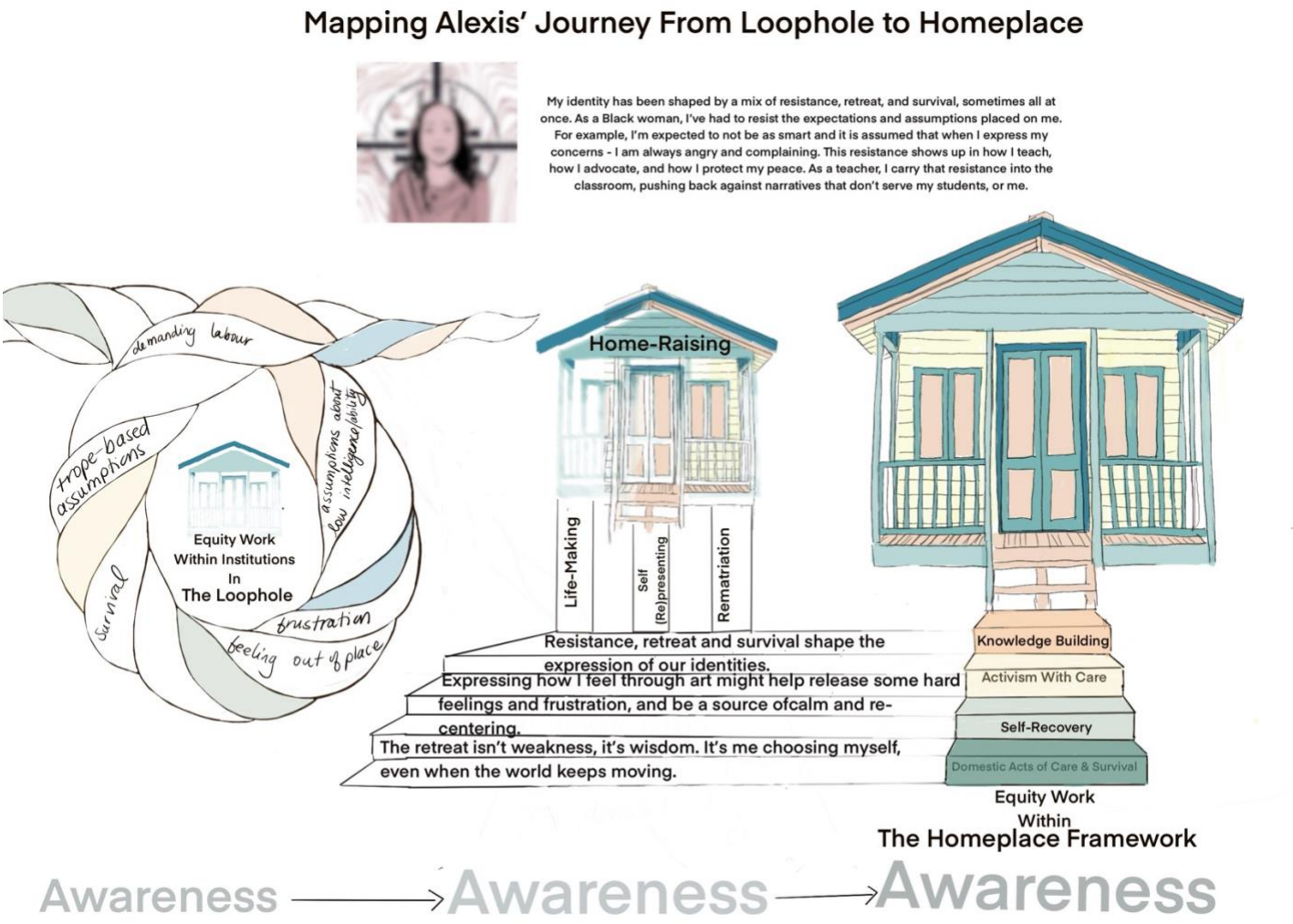

Figure 35: Mapping Alexis' Journey form Loophole to Homeplace

Alexis' affirming statement, "I am worthy of peace and rest" echoed other moun ki konnet insistence of being seen beyond a narrative of demanding labour. Alexis' movement from the loophole to the homeplace was supported by an awareness of the relationship between labour, identity, and wellbeing.[38]

Pauline's Journey. Pauline was one of the moun ki konnet in the online group who were heavily engaged in the digital portrait making. She was the only one who shared their AI

[38] Alexis did not have a collage to share.

generated image and the notes they used to create it (See Figure 33). Before creating a prompt for the Magic Media Canva app image generator, Pauline first reflected on her experience as an equity educator and her relationship to resistance, survival, and retreat:

> I have been advocating for myself and others since childhood. Survival has looked like leaving people, spaces and places. Resistance looks like rest and retreating. Finding identity affirming spaces has helped reshape my identity. I envision a future where I am free to use my voice as I see fit. My future looks like being valued for being and not doing. The future is freedom and comfort in the spaces that are most important to me.

Pauline's reflection echoed the story she had shared earlier about the pushout she experienced in the various schools she worked in. After she had entered a sentence in the AI generated image maker that included references to swimming, love, faith, and freedom amongst others an image was generated. Her image (see Figure 33) echoed the desire for freedom and joy.



Figure 36: Pauline's AI Generated Image

Pauline's journey reveals that the movement from the loophole to the homeplace required revisiting events of the past and increasing greater awareness of how those events reveal the relationship between her equity work, her identity as a "problem fixer" and how this impacted

her relationships with other educators. As a result of revisiting these experiences, Pauline was able to move towards the homeplace supported by the recognition that she needed an affirming space that saw her value as a being and not simply a "fixer".

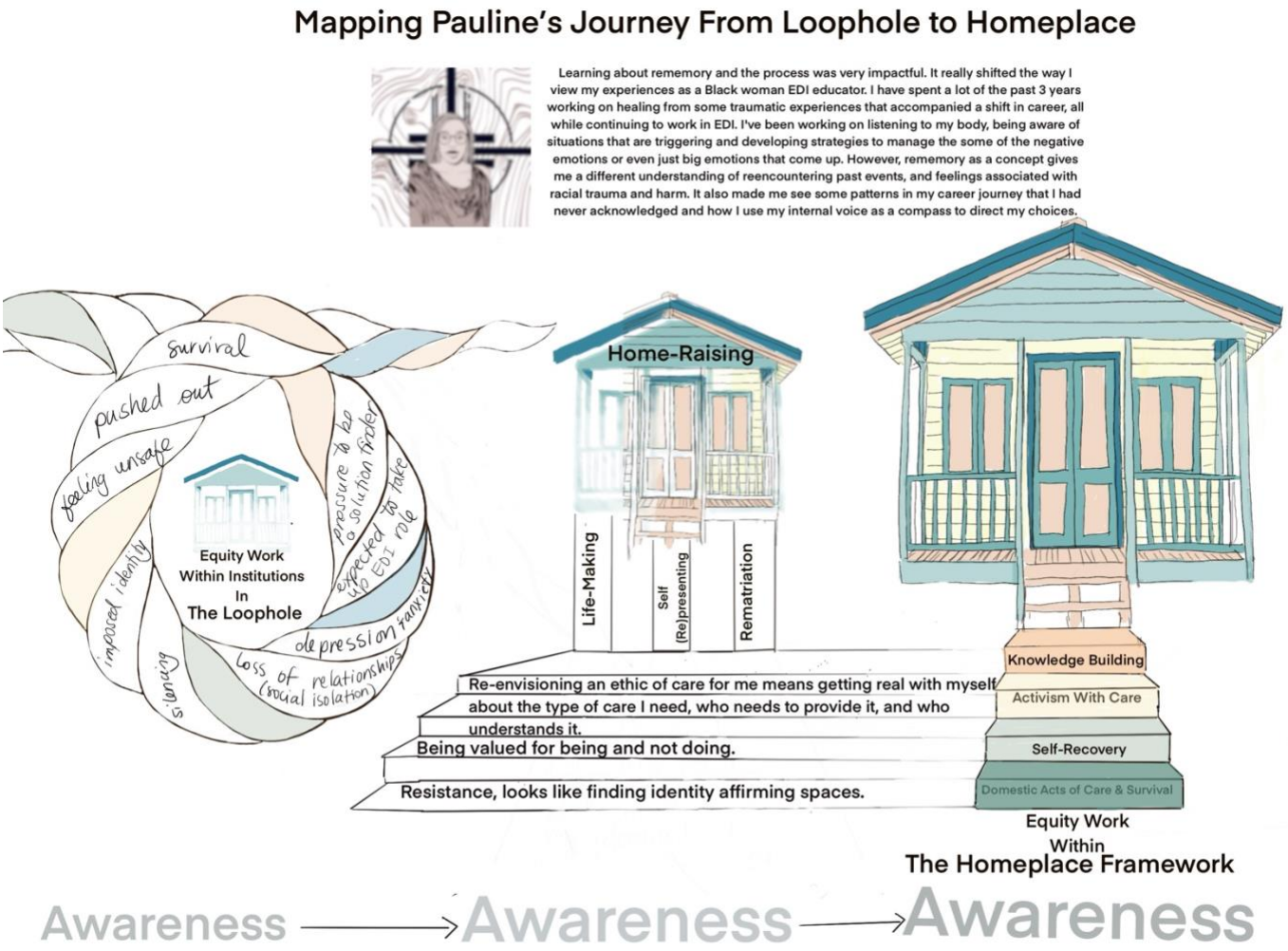

Figure 37: Mapping Pauline's Journey from Loophole to Homeplace

Pauline's affirmation reflected a desire to (re)present herself in a way that she could reclaim her voice and her identity and relationship to equity work. She states, "I envision a future where I am free to use my voice as I see fit". [39]

October 2024: Dinner

[39] Pauline did not have a collage to share.

After the moun ki konnet in the in-person session had gone through their digital portrait practice with Queen, dinner was delivered. The room came alive in a new way as the food was carried in and the smell followed it. I laid out the different meal options at the back of the room where the tall windows stood. Most of the meal consisted of rice and peas and curry goat. There was a vegetarian option with chickpeas and rice and peas. For dessert the women had red velvet cake and fruit. Fruit juices and water was also offered. As the women came up to get their food their faces brightened and the tension with which they shared their stories seemed to lift. They sat comfortably around the room engaging in conversations with each other that held occasional bursts of laughter. You could tell from their expressions that the food was a welcomed pause and a reminder of the necessity for nourishment and pleasure.

What the women described both in the structured storying activities and in their casual conversations that spilled into breaks and dinner brought me back to my own experiences and the doubt that accompanied them. Like me, these women feel comforted (in the midst of heartbreak) in hearing each other's stories because it served as validation to their experience. Hearing each other's stories created a dialogue between the stories—a way to confirm that the stories had not only been heard but had been verified as truth. As I listened, I wondered if the moun ki konnet also felt a sense of relief that their experience was not something they had imagined or were "making a big deal over". There was a real sense that these experiences were, unfortunately, recognizable. They shared feelings of being on the outside in spaces that were allegedly carved out for them. They shared the troubled relationships with a staff largely shaped by a culture of white supremacy. They shared the burden of carrying change on their backs to a reluctant system while feeling the need to carry a countenance of duty and even joy.

October 2024: Focus Group Discussion

After dinner we moved into the focus discussion part of the evening[40]. By this time there was a comradery that developed between people that had only met only 3 hours earlier. We moved to the front of the room now where the screen that Ardelia was projected on was. Even though Ardelia could not join us in person I wanted to make sure she felt that she was an important part of the group. Before meeting at the round table, moun ki konnet were invited to fill out the online survey where they reflected on the rememory storywork, gaze matrix, and digital portrait activities. The questions were as follows:

1. How did the rememory practices support the process of uncovering and elevating the lived experiences of Black women equity educators such as yourself?
2. What did you discover about your role in equity work through the rememory process?
3. What did you identify during the Gaze matrix about your experience and the harm you experienced as a K-12 Black woman equity educator?
4. How does an Afrocentric framing of your identity/experiences/role support your theorizing/understanding about your experiences?
5. How does your engagement with equity work impact your professional goals, wellbeing, and relationships within and outside of the school system?

[40] The online moun ki konnet were also guided through the same questions on Zoom. There was not enough time for the moun ki konnet to share their responses on the Zoom platform. I reminded moun ki konnet that they could fill out their responses in the survey and once they booked their interviews, I would go over the question again during the interviews. Pauline was the only moun ki konnet in the online group scheduled an interview.

As they sat at the front of the room, they not only revisited the activities, but they revisited the telling of their stories. This time they vocalized a range of feelings and expressions. I came prepared to guide the discussion at this intimate setting where we all sat almost shoulder to shoulder with everyone only to find out they had different ideas. As one person would start with their story and break down in tears, another person would come through with words, gestures or vocalizations that signaled they had not only witnessed this telling, but they found it to be true and significant. I resisted the urge to direct the conversation and watched as it created a cacophony of emotions, truth, and wisdom. No longer was I worried about arriving at the homeplace and wondering how to get us all there—I was faced with the realization that the women in the group knew the way and their trust in each other and their (often hidden/dormant) ways of knowing acted as a way finder for them. Below I share some of this way finding practice by providing a snapshot of the focus group discussion:

Marguerite: What I wrote for inward *(in speaking about the inward gaze on the gaze matrix) w*as weak, inefficacious, role model, resilient.

Moun Ki Konnet: Hmmmm. Hmmmmm.

Marguerite: I think I'm still trying to work through the emotions for that of doing this.

(Marguerite begins to sob.)

Marguerite: Sorry.

Moun Ki Konnet: This is the space for that.

Moun Ki Konnet: Don’t apologize.

Moun Ki Konnet: It’s Okay.

Marguerite: Oh yeah. Its’s okay (Trying to convince herself that it is okay as she continues to cry.)

Marguerite continues to cry as she speaks. The soothing echoes from the moun ki konnet surrounds her.

Marguerite: I want for the record like, and I know I said it already. But Gloria was such a power strength for me last year. She has no idea she was a godsend, honestly.

Moun Ki Konnet: Hmmm. Mmmmmm (They continue throughout Marguerite share to offer vocalizations of encouragement.)

Marguerite: (Continues telling her story all the while sobbing openly.) I, you know, when you kind of talk about a loss of innocence, it's like I entered this job really thinking that I could be myself, and you know, teach kids (redacted). And I realized that my job had to be so much more than that. It feels like I walked into it. It's not what I planned, and I never could have predicted like this would be the situation that I would have walked into. I was really naive to like the issues in the system. I would say that my own education experience, did not prepare me to be an educator,

Moun Ki Konnet: Hmmm. Mmmmmm

Marguerite: Because I'm realizing how much, perhaps, the adults that I looked up to masked, how it was for themselves.

Moun Ki Konnet: Hmmm. Mmmmmm

Marguerite: The way that I am probably for my own students. So, when I'm like in this equity role, I feel weak and I feel inefficacious.

As Marguerite explains the weight of the work that is causing her to mask the suffering. The moun ki konnet continue to encourage ger along with vocalizations.

Moun Ki Konnet: Hmmm. Mmmmmm: (You can hear continued hmmms and mmmmmms amongst snaps from the rest of the group.)

Ardelia speaks from the Zoom connection. As she begins to speak she too begins to cry. The moun ki konnet encourage her to cry

Moun Ki Konnet: Cry.

Moun Ki Konnet: Yeah.

Moun Ki Konnet: I cry all the time.

Moun Ki Konnet: I even cry in meetings.

Ardelia continues through the tears.

Ardelia: I am a storyteller. I give my story to a lot of people, and I realize that my stories are gifts. So, when doing equity work. I've made the decision that not everyone's gonna get my story because getting my story is not to entertain you.

Moun Ki Konnet: Yeah

Ardelia: Audre told me about this, and I'm so grateful to her and the women that are surrounded around each other. I've experienced a lot of harm. Oh, my gosh! And from the building! To think about our parents and what we've been taught. We've always been taught the humility. Keep going. Keep waiting.

Moun Ki Konnet: Yeah.

Moun Ki Konnet: Mmmmmm

Marguerite: and after COVID my body gave out. They have, like my daughter has to call an ambulance and (redacted). I don't even know what happened. I don't even know it was during COVID. I don't know if what's happening to me.

Ardelia: And I think what I've learned from these young people and accept it, and I receive it is I am not good to anybody if I am not good to myself.

Moun Ki Konnet: Ase!

Moun Ki Konnet: Hmmm. Mmmmmm

Marguerite: We know this all here at this table, there's a burden that comes with being a Black teacher.

Moun Ki Konnet: Hmmm. Mmmmmm

Moun Ki Konnet: Yep!

Marguerite: Speak to other racialized people about it, because sometimes they're the ones that cause the most harm.

(The table erupts in slaps to the table, foot stomps to the floor, and laughter that comes after a hard cry.)

Marguerite: Don't be ashamed of your emotions.

Marguerite: Don't be ashamed to say no.

Moun Ki Konnet: mmmmm

Audre: But they know what they do better. Can I add to that real quick, Ardelia? I'm like, really big on self-care like…these white people are trying to fucking kill us, and I will not die. No, I will not die! I'm not gonna die.!

Moun Ki Konnet: Mmmmm! Laughter! Mmmm! Laughter! Laughter that gets louder and louder.

Moun Ki Konnet: Snaps. Snaps. Snaps. Laughter. Hmmmm.

Audre: Listen. I'm not saying it's easy, but I know and like I said, I struggle because it's like it's like this, right? You take it in. And I thought my capacity was this. Sometimes it's shrinking. So, I'm trying to figure out the balance with that. But coming at things like this is like phenomenal connecting with especially Black women. It's so empowering because I am one like one local Black teacher out out of a staff of a 176, almost 3,000 students. It's crazy!

Ardelia: I'm just gonna hop in and piggyback off of that. It just. I'm thinking of our department. I'm thinking of myself like you. The ambulance came for me at my house during the pandemic, and I think it takes something like that to wake you up that you have to take care of self. Or else. There's so many of our loved ones who didn't make it, and we wonder how much stress they carried, how much they placed on themselves, and how much they hid from us, we internalize a lot. There's things that we silence ourselves. There's certain things that when we're even engaging in conversation the tears come because for all the things that you don't say, how much do you hold in your heart? Right? So, these are the things…

Audre: I like that, she said, I will not die!

Moun Ki Konnet: Hmmm! (They shout in agreement.) Yes!

Audre: I love that because it's so true like it's so real…

Zorah: I'm sitting here and I'm holding a lot. Because obviously, you all know how this started for me, it was from my experiences. But then, I think, Gloria, you were the one who said it or no. Maybe it was you during who said something about like. Oh, other people! No, with you other people are, have experienced this, and I feel like I'm sitting around. How many of us went by ambulance? Come on, come on, and it's Gloria. The last time was the day before our colleague (redacted) passed, (redacted), and I was at the hospital for 12 hours, and she made me leave. She's like, go now, and I and I left, and I was at the hospital for 12 hours, and then he passed the next day. So it is that piece that we, as Black folks, need to remind each other like even a tad. Just an acknowledgement.

The moun ki konnet stories continued to volley between the edges of the round table. Their voices grew at times and other times settled into sighs and deep empathetic listening. The ethno-mimesis practices came through in natural ways that I could not have predicted but only

hoped for. They validated each other's truth through the use of dialogue in a way that felt intuitive yet surprising. Surprising because I did not have to invite it or call it into the practice. In fact, I decided to keep myself from jumping in too often. I could see my desire to jump in was to maintain the parameters of the project and steer the conversation. But I remembered that this too was like a jazz band where each member had their time to join in that would maintain the energetic flow of the piece of music. My part in that was to become aware of how to join in rather than conduct the piece of music—a key realization for this Kwik! Kwak! researcher. My thoughts and senses could not help but being returned to the energetic flow created by the women in the room. Audre brought the reminder about the importance of life making again.

Audre: Those voices, those shoulders that she will stand on like are such amazing like, I will not die.

The echolocations of the moun ki konnet followed.

Moun Ki Konnet: Hmmm.

Moun Ki Konnet: I will not die!

Moun Ki Konnet: Yesss!

Moun Ki Konnet: (Shouts of agreement!)

Chapter 6: Discussion: Return to the Door Through Storythreads

As a Kwik! Kwak! storyteller researcher part of my role is to honour storying technologies that support engagement with the collective knowledge of the community. I could not think of a better way to show this storytelling way finding that took the women from the loophole to the homeplace other than putting threads of their stories (storybands) in conversation with each other that is held within the tradition of Kwik! Kwak! that invites a form of echolocation. Each storyband is included in the call and response form using short alternating phrases. Together these storybands work to reveal storythreads. The storythreads are what most researchers would refer to as findings—the movement to the homeplace.

The woven storythreads and the interstitial spaces between them create a Madras storying textile. A Madras storying textile is the interweaving of the storythreads together that offer a way to examine the experiences of women in this project through a lens of complexity. This is, again, a way to connect the stories together and include them in the storytelling tradition of Kwik! Kwak! that emphasizes interconnectedness and co-creation. This chapter will explore the storythreads, their implications, and the Madras storying textile from the arts-based methods and interviews in both the in-person and online sessions that I list below:

Storythread 1: Black loss in equity work demands Black women life-making.

Storythread 2: Black women equity educators have complex relationships with tropes.

Storythread 3: The homeplace is a site of Afrocentric rematriation.

Together the storythreads work to create the Madras storying textile that answers the question: How do Black women equity educators move from the loophole of retreat to the homeplace? The Madras storying textile reveals that the awareness of misogynoir in equity work necessitates the movement to the homeplace. To support this answer, I will refer to key texts that I referenced in

the literature review in chapter 2 that gave a historical analysis of Black women and labour with a focus on care. I revisit bell hooks, adding this time the notion of making life sweet as a response to the hard labour environments the participants identified. Dillard joins the conversation and I extend her contribution to the community of support moun ki konnet requires from their colleagues. Finally, I return to Aladejebi's historical account of the isolation and fragmentation Black women educators suffered due to a lack of true solidarity amongst their peers and how this is seen today within the stories of the moun ki konnet.

Kwik (read)

Kwak (say out loud)

Kwik (read)

Kwak (say out loud)

Kwik (read)

Kwak (say out loud)

Gadé mwen ou tuo mwen ka vini (read) *(Look at me, to you I am coming)*

Kwik (read)

Kwak (say out loud)

Gadé mwen ou tuo mwen ka vini (read) *(Look at me, to you I am coming)*

Lapòt? (say out loud) *(The door)*

Oui! Lapòt! (read) *(Yes! The door)*

Storythread 1: Black Loss in Equity Work Demands Black Women Life-Making

The working conditions in equity work impacts Black women's health negatively. These experiences create the conditions that disenfranchise Black women from educational institutions and threaten their social and physical lives that creates Black loss. Black women educators

identify Black spaces as sites of life making that are essential to their survival and more importantly their thriving.

Gadé mwen ou tuo mwen ka vini (Look at me, to you I am coming):

Kwik!

"I will not die!"

Kwik!

"I am being filled and being healed".

Kwik!

"Ay! Ay!"

Kwik!

"I will not die!"

Kwik!

"When you talk about a loss of innocence, I entered this job really thinking that I could be myself and teach kids (redacted). And I realized that my job had to be so much more than that. I was really naive to the issues in the system. I would say that my own education experience, did not prepare me to be an educator."

Kwik!

"I will not die!"

Kwik!

"I am being filled and being healed".

Kwik!

"Ay! Ay!"

Kwik!

“I will not die!”

Kwik!

“Because I think I might have been the youngest person there, I felt like I was looking into my future. I was just looking at those that have been in education for longer than me, who have been assuming the roles that I have now, and it showed me what my future would look like if I didn't make a change now. Not to sound like bleak, but honestly, I did really finally kind of come to terms where it could be death. Honestly, I think it was hearing about the hospitalizations, understanding the psychological (issues) that I have found myself (in). The fact that I haven't actually really created proper social networks to insulate myself so that I do feel recharged doing this work. And I, I saw that if I continue to do this without a support system, if I continue to just do it in general, I just felt like I could potentially like not be alive anymore”.

Kwik!

“I will not die!”

Kwik!

“I am being filled and being healed”.

Kwik!

“Ay! Ay!”

Kwik!

“I will not die!”

Kwik!

“We've always been taught the humility. Keep going. Keep waiting…and after COVID my body gave out. My daughter had to call an ambulance. I don't even know what happened, but I know I

was picking up a lot. All I hear at this table is there's a burden that comes with being a Black teacher."

Kwik!

"I will not die!"

Kwik!

"I am being filled and being healed".

Kwik!

"Ay! Ay!"

Kwik!

"I will not die!"

Kwik!

"So, there's that moment and then another loss of innocence was when my board—I knew anti-Black racism existed because I'm Black, and seeing the experiences of my peers, but something hit me when it came across the news like a couple of times. It's like I saw my board like boom! For me it was a huge loss of innocence, because I became a teacher because of the teachers in high school. They were awesome, right?"

Kwik!

"I will not die!"

Kwik!

"I am being filled and being healed".

Kwik!

"Ay! Ay!"

Kwik!

“I will not die!”

Kwik!

“I'm like, really big on self-care. Yes, I travel. I was in (redacted). I'm out. Here I go. I swim. I'm totally real with them. Look, you guys are getting the best of me, but I can't do it all the time. But I feel like these white people are trying to fucking kill us—and I will not die. No, I will not die. I'm not gonna die. Can you imagine I'm trying to plan stuff for my BSA (Black Student Association) and running around? These white teachers are chilling. Some of them are on Facebook marketplace. And sometimes you put this expectation—especially, I'll say, as Black women educators. I think it's a different level for us. No shade. I think it's a different level for us—the expectations.”

Kwik!

“I will not die!”

Kwik!

“I am being filled and being healed”.

Kwik!

“Ay! Ay!”

Kwik!

“I will not die!”

Kwik!

“I don't know if I'm like being a good advocate because I protected my peace. No, I'm not gonna die! I'm not gonna die! Racism is a mental health crisis. It's a health crisis. And we have downplayed this to such a big degree. The amount of Black people that are dying from like

random causes that we can't really explain. Stomach gut issues, that I see all are part of it, you know."

Kwik!

"I will not die!"

Kwik!

"I am being filled and being healed".

Kwik!

"Ay! Ay!"

Kwik!

"I will not die!"

Kwik!

"Choosing to leave or leaving is a major part of my rememory. I always have an internal voice saying it is time to go. Time to go was usually motivated by feeling blocked in some way. Leaving was directly related to racism…I felt like I wasn't able to stay and be healthy there."

Kwik!

"I will not die!"

Kwik!

"I am being filled and being healed".

Kwik!

"Ay! Ay!"

Kwik!

"I will not die!"

Kwik!

“There's so many of our loved ones who didn't make it, and we wonder how much stress they carried, how much they placed on themselves, and how much they hid …we internalize a lot. There's things that we silence ourselves. There's certain things that when we're even engaging in conversation the tears come because for all the things that you don't say, how much do you hold in your heart? Right?”

Kwik!

“I will not die!”

Kwik!

“I am being filled and being healed”.

Kwik!

“Ay! Ay!”

Kwik!

“I will not die!”

Kwik!

After moun ki konnet had spent the evening recording their experiences in their journals and met at the round table near the front of the room for the focus group discussion, I became aware of two things. First, I became aware of the loss that the women experienced on both an emotional and physical level. Secondly, I became aware of the impact of oral storytelling on their wellbeing.

As the roundtable discussion continued a moun ki konnet shared that her inward gaze revealed she saw herself as inadequate. As she described the stressors of her work that contributed to this feeling, she burst into tears and sobbed heavily. The women that sat around the table offered supportive glances, vocalizations, and their attention. They responded to her as

a way to build her up. I watched as another woman share her experiences with another staff member and repeated a phrase she had said to herself many times, “I will not die!” The woman who was still crying lifted her head as she heard the phrase. Then another group member added the “Ay! Ay!” in the way it is often said in Afro-diasporic communities when something needs to be emphasized. The whole group erupted into chants that went between “I will not die” and “Ay! Ay!”.

The storytelling that began in their journals found their way to their oral voices through the use of emotions. At this point the online moun ki konnet joined in and said being in the space that supports telling of our stories helped her “be filled and healed”. This became another proclamation that others repeated. The room echoed with “I am being filled and being healed” and “I will not die” and “Ay! Ay!” In this way the women were engaged in dialogue that were the building materials for a homeplace where they could look at their loss while insisting on life-making.

Implications for Storythread 1: Black Loss in Equity Work Demands Black Women Life-Making Spaces Where They Can Re-Envision Their Relationship to Equity Work, Colleagues, and Joy

Sitting at the round table hearing the Black women equity educators express their desire to live as a form of resistance against the harm they experience helped me understand what I had been reading in the literature about leadership and school level pushout of Black women in educational institutions. When the moun ki konnet proclaimed, “I will not die!” they were resisting not only a pushout from the system but a pushout from life as well. These echolocations were a sounding cry for the demand for Black women life-making. The insistence on not succumbing to loss of life and wellbeing was an insistence for life-making. Hearing the desire to be “filled and healed” also spoke to life-making as an essential consideration in Black women’s labour

experiences. Work needs to allow for life-making elements which mostly center on communal care. Work needs to allow for opportunities to be affirmed and heard through oral storytelling as a way to support living well. Life-making and living well are all important elements of the homeplace.

The homeplace is both what is created through the implementation of life-making values and the place to enact practices that support these values. Black women life-making involves intentionally curating life that is desirable and necessary for Black women to live in their fullness. Black women life-making values connection, ease, pleasure, joy, and care. The necessity for Black women life-making came from the experiences of the Black women equity educators that were marked by social and physical loss. Most of the women who participated in the project revealed that they had experienced physical and mental health harm as a result of the equity work they were engaged in. Some women described being admitted to emergency rooms, others described being pushed to take leaves of absences due to the mental distress they suffered. In order to counter the social, emotional, and physical loss a life-making component of the homeplace is necessary.

Understanding the drive (and invitation) towards activism-oriented roles for Black women in educational institutions is a first step in supporting Black women life-making. As a tutorial leader for teacher candidates in pre-service education, I routinely ask the students about their motivation for teaching. Every time I have asked this question, most Black students (many of whom are women), explain that their decision to become a teacher is primarily an attempt to redress the harm they (and their larger community) have experienced or witnessed through the system[41]. It appears that Black women educators carry a type of "soul wound" (Menakem, 2017)

[41] Some non-Black students express similar reasons-most that I have asked do not. They will instead describe a passion for a particular subject or reflect on a positive experience with being taught. One of the moun ki konnet in

that they have inherited as part of their identity as Black educators. Resmaa Menakem, author of *My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies* (2017), introduces the concept of the "soul wound". Menakem (2017) describes the soul wound as the intergenerational transmission of trauma that happens in these ways:

- Through families in which one family member abuses or mistreats another,
- Through unsafe or abusive systems, structures, institutions, and/or cultural norms,
- Through our genes. Recent work in human genetics suggests that trauma is passed on in our DNA expression, through the biochemistry of the human egg, sperm, and womb. (p. 10)

The soul wound that Black women equity educators carry connects most directly with institutions, systems, cultural norms and trauma that is passed down. Menakem (2017) sees the soul wound as contributing to a form of "traumatic retention" and explains, "When this happens repeatedly over time, the trauma response can look like part of the person's personality…When this same strategy gets internalized and passed down over generations within a particular group, it can start to look like culture" (p. 9). When the Black women educators in the project shared their motivation for engaging in equity work, it spoke to the "soul wound". Through equity work, the Black women in the group were not only trying to address their own personal wounds but they were keenly aware that their work involved intergenerational harm that had been passed down in systems of education. It is not just about the individual harm they are trying to redress, it is about a collective and inherited wounding that Black women are responding to. The trauma response is different than our common understanding of flight, fight, freeze, trauma responses. It

our study explained that she chose teaching as a profession because of teachers she had—most of this was around the teachers she had shielding her from racial harm that was around her. The soul wound may not be directly experienced—it can simply be an awareness that this suffering is meant for people that look and sound like you. It still makes you feel like a target.

is closest to the fight response, however. Knowing the system and society will not save them, Black women know they have to save themselves. They can unknowingly take on the Strong Black Woman trope as a response (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009). This may look like an unwavering commitment to equity work despite the risks to personal physical and social loss.

Is the interest in equity work part of a type of trauma response that Black women have adopted as part of their professional identity? Equity work under this framing becomes work that Black women are burdened with (through an inherited/shared response), rather than work they choose freely. Returning to Aladejebi's (2021) historical overview of Black women educators in Canada, I see an emphasis on activism in stories the women shared stretching as far back as the 1980s. An activism response is a just response for the racial and gendered harm Black women and their community has suffered through the system. I am in no way trying to erase the reality that racial and gendered harm needs a response. However, the implications of this research project, revealed through the storythreads, is that Black women equity educators are saddled with this burden whether they have formal or informal equity roles from the beginning of their journey into education. This leads me to ask, what would Black women life-making in educational spaces look like without the centrifugal pull of the soul wound?

To answer this question, I begin with bell hooks' (2002) assertion that the Buddhist concept of "right livelihood" is necessary for Black women's labour experiences. Black women life-making values work that is not primarily shaped by inherited and experienced soul wounds. It is leaning into vocational life through an aesthetic of ease. Ease does not speak to something that is approached because it is easy. Rather it speaks to labour that is not overly burdensome. bell hooks (2014) in speaking about "aesthetic inheritances" that are evident in quilting practices she observed in her grandmother says, "these rural black women knew nothing of female

passivity. Constantly active, they were workers—black women with sharp tongues, strong arms, heavy hands, with too much labor and too little time. There was always work to be done, space had to be made for stillness, for quiet and concentration. Quilting was a way to 'calm the heart' and 'ease the mind.'" (hooks, 2014, p. 117). I am not suggesting that Black women educators take up quilting or even another art practice. I am asserting that Black women life-making requires an aesthetic of ease. I recall the storythread of a moun ki konnet that I shared in chapter 5 where they observed watching a white teacher scrolling through Facebook Marketplace as they were juggling demanding equity related responsibilities. The heavy labour that Black women are invited into leaves little room for life making in the institutions they labour for. This moun ki konnet was asking the question that I posed earlier—what would Black women life-making in educational spaces look like without the centrifugal pull of the soul wound?

The movement away from an exploitative relationship with work and a movement towards "right livelihood" provides an answer to the above question. bell hooks describes a philosophy of work that kept Black women bound to exploitive relationships to work. "A philosophy of work that emphasizes commitment to any task was useful to black people living in a racist society that for so many years made only certain jobs…available to us" (hooks, 2014, p. 30). Though hooks is referencing mainly service jobs in this quote, I see a correlation between these jobs and the current iteration of *service* jobs in the equity and diversity sector. The current iteration of equity related jobs asks for a similar devotion to service jobs that attempt to repair an unjust system. To counter the focus on service jobs, hooks asks us to consider "right livelihood" as a necessary component to work for Black women. "Learning how to think about work and our job choices from the standpoint of 'right livelihood' enhances black female wellbeing (because)

our self-recovery is fundamentally linked to experiencing that quality of 'work that makes life sweet'" (hooks, 2014, p. 32).

There is something within me that stirs with tension when I consider that educational work for Black women equity educators can have a component of sweetness. It does not sit comfortably because it goes against everything I have been made to believe about work and especially work as a Black woman educator. Somewhere in the recesses of my mind, I hear a voice that says work and sweetness do not belong with Black womanhood. bell hooks explains that "we are only able to make lifestyle choices that enhance wellbeing and reduce or eliminate debilitating stress if we believe we deserve to live well. Most black women do not have this sense of 'entitlement'. We are not raised to believe that living well is our birthright. Yet it is. We have to claim this birthright" (hooks, 2005, pp. 44-45). With hooks' urging I move towards the concept of "work that makes life sweet" because I know it is a just response to the harm that Black women equity educators in this project identified. The women associated death and other forms of loss with their work. The absence of sweetness, joy, and pleasure were deeply felt in their stories.

To consider work for Black women that makes life sweet, I invited women into a space that prioritized their wellbeing in work, and the women expressed relief through laughter and tears. The attention to food, beauty, and ease supported them in nurturing the places within them that had suffered loss. As a result, I found that the homeplace is a space to deal with the tension felt from Black women educators that supports moving towards "work that makes life sweet" and supports wellbeing as a component of Black women life-making. bell hooks describes the homeplace as "a special domain, not as property, but as places where all that truly mattered in life took place—the warmth and comfort of shelter, the feeding of our bodies, the nurturing of

our souls" (hooks, 2014, p. 41). Through the project I see the necessity for inviting women into this special domain. Their response to this introduction into the homeplace was to ask for more.

My hesitation to focus on "making " is matched with my hesitation to explore joy as a resistance response and part of Black woman life-making as I find it is often explored in ways that are neither sustainable nor realistic. Much on the discourse of Black joy focuses on an outward defiance that almost seems as though one is playing a part (a solo act) that does not engage the co-constructed reality of a situation. Consequently, I move towards notions of joy as an aesthetic of the homeplace that supports Black woman life-making through a more complex lens that understands that joy is co-constructed. Dillard (2019) looks at joy from an endarkened feminist perspective that draws from Alice Walker and other Black feminist and womanists who believe "joy is a vital and necessary part of our resistance" (Dillard, 2019, p.112). Dillard (2019), in looking at joy, acknowledges the burden of racism and the struggle for liberation that threatens to "steal our joy" (p. 113) and sees joy as a space of healing (Dillard, 2019, p.112). Dillard (2019) identifies three main elements of joy. She shares, "we feel joy when we feel visible and heard, we feel joy when we feel respected, we feel joy when we feel whole—when we feel our fullness" (p. 113). Being seen, heard and respected involve the actions of others. Joy is a co-constructed experience through this understanding. This stands in opposition to what is popularized as Black joy that says joy is constructed without requiring anything outside oneself. In fact, the assertion that joy is solely constructed could further reinforce the Strong Black Woman trope. The homeplace is a site that can offer Black women the space to create experiences where they feel heard, seen and recognized in their fullness-a space of self-recovery through their connection to others.

To further emphasize the co-construction element to joy, Dillard (2019) also speaks about the role of colleagues and their relationships to both Black women in general and Black women joy—which is an important element of Black woman life-making. Dillard (2019) asks for "good honest colleagues who are comfortable enough with their own constructions of their own humanity to respect (hers). Who are not scared of talking about the ways that racism, or sexism, or homophobia shape our decisions about policies and programs within education" (p. 114). What Dillard asks of the "good honest colleagues" is essential to homeplaces that may exist within or be adjacent to educational institutions. Another ask that Dillard (2019) makes of our "good honest colleague" brings us back to the role of Black women as activist within systems of education. She asks the "good honest colleagues" to understand that "we do not separate our 'academic' work from the rest of our life's work" (Dillard, 2019, p. 114). I may appear to contradict myself by including the ask that Black women colleagues understand the interconnectedness of our personal and professional lives as an element of Black woman life-making while asserting that Black women need to be unburden with activism work. Dillard (2019) asks our "good honest colleagues" to be aware of this burden. This is one step closer to recognizing that the burden is not ours to carry alone.

Our colleagues can understand the burdensome nature of equity work we are faced with. As a response they can support Black women educators in creating a new vision for work that can hold ease through a shared responsibility of transforming work—an important value of Black woman life-making within the homeplace. As one moun ki konnet said: "I try to bring them from this idea of allyship to co-conspiratorship (redacted). And it's the same kind of thing when you're moving through these spaces". The role that colleagues play in supporting the recovery of the self for Black women equity educators is important. By understanding the burden

Black women are saddled with and the difficulty in untangling their personal and professional lives, colleagues can support Black women life-making by supporting Black women in prioritizing the self—rather than prioritizing the refurbishment of the system. Once recovery of self begins, then reinstating truth within the self can take place. This is where silencing through tropes and fear of being "troped" can be addressed. (I will address this later in the chapter.)

As I discussed earlier in the dissertation a focus on the self is interpreted in Western institutions as a selfish act. Somé (1999) reminded us that individuality and individualism are not the same thing. Individuality is engaged in an unbreakable connection to community. Each member is recognized in their full humanity and shares a role in the healthy constitution of the community. When one of the moun ki konnet struggled to accept her vulnerability in the face of an oppressive environment because she felt the pressure to be strong, we see the underlying shame that restricts Black women from accessing their full humanity. It was the other Black women around her that affirmed her place and supported her recovery of self by reminding her that her life is necessary with the phrase, "I will not die". They were participating in Black women life-making that supports the recovery of the self in an intuitive, communal, and healing way.

Kwik (read)

Kwak (say out loud)

Kwik (read)

Kwak (say out loud)

Kwik (read)

Kwak (say out loud)

Gadé mwen ou tuo mwen ka vini (read) *(Look at me, to you I am coming)*

Kwik (read)

Kwak (say out loud)

Gadé mwen ou tuo mwen ka vini (read) *(Look at me, to you I am coming)*

Lapòt? (say out loud) *(The door)*

Oui! Lapòt! (read) *(Yes! The door)*

I had been working at the school for almost 17 years. I watched staff have children and heard about the same children graduating high school. I also watched as staff come and go. I watched as my awareness of the racial and gendered harm increase, my invitations into the life of the school with the staff decreased. I poured my time into working on projects with the parents and the students. Running nutrition nights, Black history month clubs, mindfulness clubs, and equity-based initiatives that were part of the School Improvement Plan became a way to be a part of the life of the school while staying on the outside. I watched as my invitations to staff functions vanished. Speaking up when I saw racial and gendered injustice was the reason for the silence and exclusion.

Audre, one of the moun ki konnet of the project expressed a similar experience. They felt they had truly become part of the community of the school and looked to their white colleagues as friends. As their experiences unfolded within the school and the larger discourse on anti-racism became more prominent, the lack of solidarity within their relationships became visible.

As I was working on the dissertation, I went back to texts that I included in the literature review. I was curious to find if the women that Dionne Brand and Funké Aladejebi included in their historical books about labour in Canada for Black women spoke about life-making. I flipped through the stories of women from 1900s to the 1980s trying to find a door that would open to them with warmth and ease. I read their stories again to find similar experiences of

exclusion. One woman, Harriet Williams, a teacher in Toronto in the 1960s shares the struggles of developing friendships with white women in her school:

> [Colleague says], 'they're going to a nightclub and they're all saying you shouldn't come.' I said, 'why they don't think I drink and dance too?" She said, "Well, you know how it is. They don't want you because you are coloured." I said, 'Well, no problem, I'll go home.' So, the rest of the staff went off to some nightclub, and they ate and drank until morning and I went home. That didn't bother me. You see things like that don't bother me [because] I knew the situation with the colour prejudice. I knew it, so things like that didn't upset me or anything. (Aladejebi, 2021, p. 88)

When I read this, I immediately recalled a similar experience with my colleagues. Every year the school staff held a staff gathering at one of the homes of the staff. I had held a few of these gatherings myself when I was trying desperately to blend in. Several years later I happened to hear that the annual gathering was held at a staff member's home. I was surprised that I not only did not know about it, but I was not invited. When I asked a colleague why the invitation was not extended to me the response was, "We knew you wouldn't come anyway". Harriet William's exclusion occurred 40 years before mine. The difference that marks our experience and exclusion from life-making experiences at the school was the exclusion in the 1960s was loud whereas the exclusion in my time, the early 2000s was quiet. It was loud in the 1960s because it was vocalized. Harriet Williams was told clearly the reason for your exclusion was based on race, whereas the exclusion Audre and I felt, though based on race, was not explicitly named.

Aladejebi (2021) recognizes that often white colleagues are not using their positions as members of the dominant group to improve the lives of their colleagues, rather they are willing to risk their relationships with Black women and show solidarity with their racial group (p. 89).

What Harriet's story does is remind us of the role of the white woman in Black woman life-making within the school building. It is a recognition that white women in places of education need to use their social power to create an environment that supports making work sweet. If white women were unable to cross the racial lines necessary to support Black women in the workplace, Aladejebi (2021) says that the onus often rested on Black women to overcome these hurdles. "Given the materiality of institutional racism in the workplace, the burden and onus was placed on black women teachers to build alliances and shed their fears and mistrust of white colleagues for the sake of professionalism, white female educators did not have the same obligation to connect to black educators, on account of their privilege positions based on their race" (p. 90).

Though Aladejebi does not make recommendations towards life-making in her book, her work emphasizes the lack of focus on the relational aspects of educational life for Black women educators. She argues throughout the book about the failings of policies that are implemented due to community pressure/refurbishment. These educational policies fail to address the relational aspects of anti-racist work. In chapter 2 the literature review was pebbled with instances where approaches to anti-racism work lacked a focus on relationships with the community and within the school. This presents an opportunity to focus on cross-racial relationship building (as part of policy making) to address the physical and social loss Black women educators experience.

I return to the quote by the moun ki konnet: "I try to bring them from this idea of allyship to co-conspiratorship (redacted). And it's the same kind of thing when you're moving through these spaces". What Black women are looking for within educational spaces as evidence of the

willingness to invite life-making is relationships that are marked by solidarity. Shah and Peek (2020) explore what solidary looks like in cross-racial relationships:

> What distinguishes an ally from an accomplice is the willingness to take direct action in disrupting White supremacy, informed and coordinated by Black, Brown, and Indigenous folks, and with an understanding that our liberation is bound together. These conceptions of solidarity presume a shared and unequal stake in liberation and the physical, economic, and material risks of fighting racial injustice. (p. 44)

Life-making within institutions that asks Black women to conduct equity work require a co-conspired effort with white people who often benefit from their position within the dominant group. What often holds them back is the willingness to break solidarity with the dominant group which has its own set of consequences. This is the direct action that is often needed but challenging to find.

I have identified 2 components of Black women life-making that can be supported within the homeplace. The first one recognizes the need to address the "soul wound" that so much of equity work is a response to. This leads us to recognizing the need to a "right livelihood" involving values of sweetness. Lastly, recognizing the role of white colleagues as co-conspirators is another foundational element that supports life-making in the homeplace that may be adjacent to or within the institution.

Storythread 2: Black Women Equity Educators Have a Complex Relationship to Tropes

The Black women equity educators identified four tropes, the Safe Negro, the Strong Black Woman, Angry Black Woman, and Uncle/Aunty Tom, that characterized how they were treated/seen by their colleagues. Although this echoed the Mammy and Sapphire tropes (see Figure 19) I explored earlier in the theoretical framework, they identified the Safe Negro, the

Strong Black Woman, Angry Black Woman and Uncle/Aunty Tom tropes on their own. What I was surprised to learn was that some of the women were themselves engaging with these tropes rather than simply resisting them. I saw these as compromises the women have been taught to make. The awareness of their complex relationships to tropes is another way they were able to move from the loophole to the homeplace. They examined the compromises they were forced to make due to racial and gendered harm through practices of re-presenting.

Gadé mwen ou tuo mwen ka vini (Look at me, to you I am coming)

Kwik!

"They don't realize I'm a token!"

Kwik!

"I started as digestible and accommodating".

Kwik!

"I called these people my work family".

Kwik!

"I saw my board--boom! This place is super shady".

Kwik!

"They don't realize I'm a token!"

Kwik!

"I think I've changed. Not, in a good way. I've matured. I've grown as a Black educator…as an advocate. I'm more aware. And one of the 2 words that I put down on that linear line was. I started as digestible and accommodating. And now. With my awareness. I'm not as digestible, and so even how I navigate the space with my colleagues. It is not the same. As a young person I called those people like my work family, right? And now that I'm 48. And with the experiences

that I've experienced, they are not my family at all. And it's kind of sad, because I put trust in them, you know and these are people that I've been invited to their weddings or their children's christenings, but I also realized, I've probably been one of their only Black friends. They don't even realize I'm a token."

Kwik!

"They don't realize I'm a token!"

Kwik!

"I started as digestible and accommodating".

Kwik!

"I called these people my work family".

Kwik!

"I saw my board--boom! This place is super shady".

Kwik!

"They don't realize I'm a token!"

Kwik!

"And sometimes even right now, as I'm crying, and even on this journey there are moments for people, and I know well-meaning saying, you need to have tough skin. I think I've been really sitting with that comment lately. Tough skin for what? Yeah, to endure what? So, because I cried, because this weighs me down because I can't just continue to go in this building and see the way that things are and not say anything like I need to have tough skin, like is that the problem? But I look at my mom, and I look at my grandmother, and I know that they're strong strong women who just don't take things laying down, and therefore in my spirit. I know that I can't. I wish I could, because it makes my life easier, but I can't."

Kwik!

“They don’t realize I’m a token!”

Kwik!

“I started as digestible and accommodating”.

Kwik!

“I called these people my work family”.

Kwik!

“I saw my board--boom! This place is super shady”.

Kwik!

“They don’t realize I’m a token!”

Kwik! “So, when I think about that, I think how often in a staff room or in a space, even in the building you are. We are silenced, and it's almost like we're watching something bad happen to us. And yet we're paralyzed with the inability to say it without that trope of being angry without that misunderstanding and the way in which our emotions come out at that moment. There's so many pieces that resonated with me when I thought about what you shared about being in that box. Essentially, you kind of like almost position yourself in between the box when to be silent, and when to be heard, and when not to be viewed as a threat.”

Kwik!

“They don’t realize I’m a token!”

Kwik!

“I started as digestible and accommodating”.

Kwik!

“I called these people my work family”.

Kwik!

“I saw my board--boom! This place is super shady”.

Kwik!

“They don’t realize I’m a token!”

Kwik!

“There are three things: so, the first one I remember, it was January, my second year teaching. I'm in the middle of basketball practice and someone comes up to me and says, what are you doing for Black history month? And well, at the time. I didn't have the language, you know. But now, with my learning, I understand that doesn't just fall on me, right? But then when you look at it from another lens like, wow, this place is super shady.”

Kwik!

“They don’t realize I’m a token!”

Kwik!

“I started as digestible and accommodating”.

Kwik!

“I called these people my work family”.

Kwik!

“I saw my board--boom! This place is super shady”.

Kwik!

“They don’t realize I’m a token!”

Kwik!

“I hate feeling like I'm an Aunt/Uncle Tom. I know, because I said I'm visible and I for so long didn't disrupt, you know what I mean? And I disrupt in a way that protects my peace, right?

Instead, I either like take a step back or I question. Well, sometimes I felt I'm not doing enough. I'm digestible for the right person. You feel a lot of pressure because you know, you need to make sure you're doing well and for the people that are coming after you. But you're doing so much. You're already doing a lot, but like I said two things could be true. It's never enough for white folks. It's never enough for Black folks. It's enough when it gets to that point where I just miss, not harming myself. I do as much as I can until I get to that point of feeling like I could put myself under some sort of harm. Maybe I'm an Uncle Tom, maybe I'm not doing enough".

Kwik!

"They don't realize I'm a token!"

Kwik!

"I started as digestible and accommodating".

Kwik!

"I called these people my work family".

Kwik!

"I saw my board--boom! This place is super shady".

Kwik!

"They don't realize I'm a token!"

Kwik!

During the focus group discussion moun ki konnet spent a great deal of time exploring their identities. They used The Making of the Woke Sapphire (See Figure 19) to anchor their discussion. One moun ki konnet shared that many Black colleagues had told her she had to toughen up and be strong. She felt bad for not being able to do this despite the example left by her mother and grandmother. As she described the stressors at failing to be strong, she burst into

tears and sobbed heavily. Even though this moun ki konnet did not name the Strong Black Woman trope it was clear that she was struggling with the internalization of this trope. She resented having to be strong to overcome the challenges created by an oppressive system while also admiring the legacy of strength that was upheld by her mother and grandmother to fight similar systems of oppression. Her experience represents a particular conundrum many Black women face when they come up against racial and gendered harm.

The gazework the sessions offered were met with a particular type of heaviness that was held by the moun ki konnet for each other because of the burden created by the racial and gendered harm they experienced. Exploring the ways they see themselves set against the way the larger educational community sees them brought up the feelings of fear and being misunderstood as a result of stereotypes they identified. Cynthia, Audre, Marguerite, and Zorah's stories shared a theme related to the pressure of being seen as being good enough and doing enough that was more connected to Black women's identity about work and how Black women's work is perceived. The women in the group grew to regard their experiences with equity related work as a trap for themselves, further exemplifying the loophole experience. This awareness produced a movement that some women identified as another form of retreat away from the loophole and others identified as part of a retreat to what could be called the homeplace. Moun ki konnet felt a desire to both take up and put down the Strong Black Woman trope due to their exposure to harm. They also felt limited in their ability to express dissatisfaction or speak up due to the Angry Black Woman trope. They recognized that any attempts to voice concerns would be met with accusations that their tone was threatening. These tropes intentionally are created to work together to both silence and burden Black women. It is not surprising that these tropes evolve from the Mammy and Sapphire tropes that both carry with it silencing strategies. The Mammy is

silenced because she cannot complain about the heavy labour constraints she works within while the Sapphire is silenced because her words are seen as emasculating and threatening. Consequently, Black women at times operate within the tropes because it is one of the few roles they are able to operate within without causing further harm to themselves.

Another way of understanding how these tropes are operationalized by the moun ki konnet is to understand the safety they offer. Though limited, this safety can provide a loophole of retreat. The Safe Negro and Aunty/Uncle Tom trope are another iteration of the Mammy trope because they provide a small space where Black people can be a part of the larger society with limited protection. One of the moun ki konnet calls this "protecting her peace". She indicated that she would keep quiet, giving the impression that she was going along with the status quo as a way to protect herself from the negative experiences she would face if she were to raise any kind of opposition. Black women educators are assessed based on their "tone of voice, facial expressions, body language, and dress in the classroom" (Wallace et al., 2012, p. 423). What prevents them from shaking the tropes loose is the threat that more damaging tropes will be used against them that will further alienate them from the system. They are aware that the wrong tone, the slightest suggestion at strength and confidence can be used to threaten their voices and keep them quiet. This encourages self-policing of Black women which in effect facilitates their silencing.

The loophole is a site that affords self-silencing while also being the location where most of the moun ki konnet led professional development at the school or board level. Most moun ki konnet shared that they had to limit some of what they said though the equity work they conducted was often requested by the board and the school. They initially saw these opportunities as pathways to liberatory outcomes for staff and students but quickly learned they

were loopholes. Some moun ki konnet learned to use those loopholes to affect what change they could by employing one of the tropes. One of the moun ki konnet described how she operationalized the Safe Negro trope in her role this way:

> I've always been the Safe Negro. Although I speak and I advocate, and I've always been (like that). It's been a part of my DNA to be an advocate for my community and embrace my blackness. I did it in a way that was accommodating to those who wanted to be educated, and I still do even me being in the union space. And I'm like the VP of (redacted). I'm on the (redacted) Board for (redacted), and have done AQ courses and things like that, and Equity lead. So, I think the reason why they felt comfortable with me, being in that space is because I made them feel comfortable listening to the information. And they may have underestimated what I brought to the table.

The key tropes that moun ki konnet identified and at times operationalized (The Safe Negro, Aunty/Uncle Tom, The Strong Black Woman, and the Angry Black woman) created discomfort for me. I could not just point to their experiences and identify the tropes that were placed on them. Deeper work had to be done to understand why moun ki konnet chose to willingly employ the tropes. These are not conversations the moun ki konnet could have within most educational communities. This examination required a site specifically build to unpack and address the ways they were pushed to employ tropes that were created to be weaponized against them.

Implications for Storythread 2: Black Women Equity Educators Have a Complex Relationship to Tropes that Call for Identity Affirming Spaces

The homeplace offers Black women equity educators a space where they can tend to the past through rematriation practices as well as enact practices of care and resistance. Resistance practices are not free from complexity. bell hooks (2012) explores the complex relationship

Black women have to tropes when she describes the different relationships young girls and women have to the Sapphire trope:

> Grown black women had a different response to Sapphire; they identified with her frustrations and her woes. They resented the way she was mocked. They resented the way these screen images could assault black womanhood, could name us bitches, nags. And in opposition they claimed Sapphire as their own, as the symbol of that angry part of themselves white folks and black men could not even begin to understand. (hooks, 2012, p. 120)

What I thought was a contradiction in terms of the Black women educator's endorsement of tropes may be something different. Psychoanalysts explain that stereotype endorsement are best understood as a duality rather than a dichotomy (Hall et. al., 2025). The stereotypes like the Strong Black Woman are a single entity that have interconnected components (Hall et al., 2025 p. 3). What was even more shocking to me was when I found research that suggests that at times the endorsement of tropes and stereotypes can lead to enhanced self-esteem if the trope has a value that supports Black women in fighting back and feeling empowered (Hall et al., 2025, p. 4). This does not mean that the women do not recognize the harmful nature of these tropes—they are quite aware of it (Hall et al., 2025 p. 4). Rather, they decided to focus on the "positive" attributes in the trope that would serve as a source of empowerment. "Even when they are aware of the negative stigma attached to the schema, participants still indicated that being seen as a SBW (Strong Black Woman) was important to their identity" (Hall et al., 2025 p. 4). Collins, (2022) presents a similar argument. She explains that Black women may inhabit the tropes, particularly the Mammy trope when it is tied to her employability (Collins, 2022, p. 97). However, the attributes of the trope do not follow her into her home*(place)* and neighbourhood

because she fears passing on the harmful messaging of the trope to her children (Collins, 2022, 1997). At the heart of employing the tropes is the issue of economics. This is an important consideration for institutions who purport a desire to part ways with colonial ways of being that generated these tropes.

I could understand how the moun ki konnet in my project also found value in identifying with the Strong Black Woman trope because there is some value in being seen as strong, though it is ultimately burdensome. What I could not immediately reconcile is their willingness to take on other tropes (like the Aunty and Uncle Tom trope and the Safe Negro trope) that did not have a clear redeeming quality. As I revisited the quotes where the women in the project stated their relationships to the tropes, I began to discover that the women endorsed the identity as a form of protection to show that they were non-threatening and would go along with the status quo. Though the tropes were negative, the women recognized that the tropes had some value for engaging with the dominant culture and used this to their advantage. The women in my project and Black women in the study conducted by Hall et. al., 2025 use tropes as protection by either operationalizing the quality in the trope that empowers them so they could fight back or a quality that offers protection by finding ways to shield themselves from the harsh gaze of the outside world. Either way, the Black women are seen choosing the lesser harm as no harm free option was available.

The moun ki konnet in this doctoral study rejected the Angry Black woman trope because of the risk to harm they would experience. The Safe Negro and the Aunty and Uncle Tom trope allowed the women to circumvent the superwoman aesthetic applied to most Black women. Because these tropes stressed loyalty and compliance more than strength, they allowed Black women who employed them to resist being overburdened with work that would bring harm to

their wellbeing. Hall et al (2025) still linked these types of identity endorsements with psychological distress. Though the tropes and stereotypes in certain situations helped Black women maintain a part of their wellbeing they still experienced misogynoir.

At times the moun ki konnet saw the topes as a shield that not only provided protection but offered opacity. This opacity obscured the work that they were doing to change the system. It obscured it by making it mailable for a system resistant to change. The subject of the complex relationship to tropes calls us back to what Shah et al. (2022) identified as entry points those educational leaders of colour identified to change the system. The leaders like the moun ki konnet were aware that changing the system required a quiet entry that did not put themselves or their agendas at risk. A quiet entry into creating transformation in this sense is seen through adopting characteristics of tropes that are non-threatening. They provide a shield that acts as both a protection and a screen. The screen keeps the work of the moun ki konnet out of the view by not calling attention to behaviours that the institution deems as threatening. This subversive way that educational leaders who conduct transforming work are forced into can keep them within the loophole. The complex relationship to tropes revealed that the loophole can be a chosen space that offers some (though limited) forms of protection.

The Mammy and Sapphire tropes that I identified in the earlier chapters were not named by the women. These tropes have gone underground by name but the connections to the tropes the women named revealed that they are still operationalized in systems of education. The Mammy trope resembles the Safe Negro and the Aunty and Uncle Tom tropes. Though in reality the Mammy was not as compliant as she was depicted in media, she was shown to be loyal and a sellout to her people. She was depicted as a figure that was reliable to the white home that she

worked within, and their care was her top priority. Loyalty, reliability, and compliant attributes all define the Mammy trope, the Safe Negro and the Uncle Tom tropes.

The Sapphire trope was not named by the moun ki konnet in the project either because they were unfamiliar with her. However, the Sapphire trope is an early iteration of the Angry Black woman trope that the moun ki konnet wanted to avoid being associated with. As I mentioned before, the Sapphire trope drew from a television series that featured a Black woman who was always angry and never satisfied. She was particularly challenging towards Black men. Today people refer to the trope simply as the Angry Black Woman. The women in the project did not want to be seen as an Angry Black Woman because of her overly aggressive and emasculating features. Embodying these tropes in a system of education that has proved to be racist and sexist would bring on too much attention and harm rather than protection. Overall protection was a key motivator for Black women in deciding which tropes to employ and which tropes to disregard.

The homeplace offers Black women a space to recover themselves by giving them an environment where they can take pride in both their gender and Blackness while finding protection and care. “This Black womanness pride is integral for Black women’s successful navigation of academic and other professional environments, where their identities are often not affirmed, but stigmatized” (Hall et al., 2025 p. 4). The homeplace is a Black woman affirming space that offers protection while Black women navigate and negotiate their identity. This can lead to greater wellbeing and the development of other coping strategies (Hall et al., 2025 p. 4). During the focus group when moun ki konnet shared their difficulty with maintaining the Strong Black Woman trope, the other moun ki konnet met her words with an emphasis on strength. Initially I felt that this was not allowing the moun ki konnet to experience and acknowledge her

vulnerability. After exploring the complex relationships to tropes that these women have, I realize this was a coping mechanism that they employed in a safe place. It was safe to garner and yearn for strength because the women in the space also made room for the tears and vulnerability. This allowed the moun ki konnet to recover herself in the fullness of her humanity. This is at the heart of what the homeplace offers.

Another offering that the homeplace provides is a space where Black women can be invited to unfold and affirm their full humanity by releasing the perfectionist standard that is put on them and their work. Black women are not afforded the opportunity to err whether it is work or in the personal realm. They are heavily scrutinized (Durr & Harvey Wingfield, 2011). Tropes like the Strong Black Woman trope dehumanizes Black women because of the exceptionalist narrative attached to it. Black women are expected to overcome hardship, overlook neglect, and not develop any displeasure or make mistakes. The simple act of being human and displaying vulnerability, imperfection, and error is frowned upon because it either draws attention to their circumstances or to their humanity (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009, p. 42). Consequently, Black women are characterized as both less than human and more than human to justify their exploitation (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009, p. 28). Ramdeo's (2023) assertion that Black women suffer from a form of invisibility and high visibility because of their neither woman nor man status coupled with Jackson's (2020) assertion of the non-human status of Black folk are understood more clearly through this storythread concerning tropes. The relationship to perfectionism haunts Black women work in education. If they err-there is justification for claiming their non-human status which leads them to fall prey to the perfectionist's pitfall. There does not seem to be a way out of this loophole. The homeplace as an offering of the reprieve

from the non-human/super(woman)human contradiction can accommodate a recovery of self that returns Black women educators to the fullness of their humanity.

Storythread 3: The Homeplace is a Site of Afrocentric Rematriation

Black women educators saw the homeplace as a site that supports the rematriation of Afrocentric ways of being and knowing that restores/establishes relationships with ancestral knowledge, affinity groups, and the larger community.

Gadé mwen ou tuo mwen ka vini (read) *(Look at me, to you I am coming)*

Kwik!

Me and my ancestry.

Kwik!

But like, what is it?

Kwik!

Rooting myself in the knowledge of my people.

Kwik!

Me and my ancestry.

Kwik!

But like, what is it?

Kwik!

Connection and belonging.

Kwik!

"Learning about Afrocentric ways of knowing and just being I guess reintroduced to it connected with me and my ancestry to Ghana. I knew…the importance of water and storytelling even when we are looking at the Adinkra symbols like the Sankofa symbols, but I haven't had the

opportunity to implement them in my own life…learning that there are Afrocentric ways of learning (and) relearning and having access to these types of teaching encourages me to investigate more about it."

Kwik!

Me and my ancestry.

Kwik!

But like, what is it?

Kwik!

Rooting myself in the knowledge of my people.

Kwik!

Me and my ancestry.

Kwik!

But like, what is it?

Kwik!

Connection and belonging.

Kwik!

"I think a lot of people talk a lot about African spirituality, but I've never had the learning. There's a lot of learning about indigenous (ways of being). When I come to these workshops people are like, oh, we need to tap into African ways of knowing. But, what is it? I know what it is through talking to my parents and my family, and there's books, but it'd be neat to be a part of a workshop. So, I really appreciate it. I shared there the Kôngo Cosmogram and it is going backwards. It makes sense. I love the visuals, like the gears, like I love all that stuff—that was sick".

Kwik

Me and my ancestry.

Kwik

But like, what is it?

Kwik

Rooting myself in the knowledge of my people.

Kwik!

Me and my ancestry.

Kwik!

But like, what is it?

Kwik!

Connection and belonging.

Kwik!

"The Kôngo Cosmogram. I have that for me. This speaks to me a lot right now. So even the decision to go back to school and do my masters. I do think the incident that happened last year was my push, and I say that to this. Really, I love it, I love it. Afro(centrism) is…about me rooting myself in the knowledge of my people…Its, bringing me closer to my ancestors. Like honestly just being community…I'm so grateful. Thought that I could be in a space with Black intellectuals. Yeah, and always being told that I was never good enough to be that. I bring that to my children, and I teach this Black voices course. I'm playing my role to continue this legacy so they can understand who they are. So, they can be part of the diaspora and understand their power. So it's the community… the Afrocentric stuff reminded (me) of (my) belonging….yeah…. yeah, connection, belonging, yeah".

Kwik

Me and my ancestry.

Kwik

But like, what is it?

Kwik

Rooting myself in the knowledge of my people.

Kwik!

Me and my ancestry.

Kwik!

But like, what is it?

Kwik!

Connection and belonging.

Kwik!

What surprised me about this awareness and appreciation for Afrocentric spirituality was these were comments made from some Black women whose parents were born in African countries—who seemed to have direct access to this knowledge. I assumed that those who would benefit and appreciate this type of insertion were those who, due to the transatlantic slave trade, were cut off from it. I recognized that being on this side of the Atlantic Ocean exposes people of African descent to erasure from Indigenous African ways of knowing and being regardless of their diasporic journey. An Afrocentric feminist approach offers movement from the loophole to the homeplace by awakening ways of knowing that were dormant. Dillard's (2012) insistence on resisting the urge to forget in order to engage with cultural memories aligned with this storythread. The awakening of African Indigenous knowledge is part of a path that leads to a homeplace of more than one kind: The homeplace as a refuge from racial and gendered injury

that is prevalent in equity work and a homeplace as a site of return to Afrocentric knowledge that also supports wellbeing. The path to homeplace is varied and not all moun ki konnet may find restoration in Afrocentric ways of knowing. However, this is one path that is valued by the moun ki konnet in the project.

I am looking at the way Afrocentric knowledge was received in the project as belonging to a vindicationist tradition. Ta-Nehisi Coates, an author and activist describes a vindicationist tradition as the efforts of *"*Black people who sought to reclaim the very history weaponized against them and turn it back against their tormentors" (Coates, 2024, p. 28). Sociologist and anthropologist, St Clair Drake coined the term vindicationist as a way to speak about practices that counter the subordination of African knowledge systems. Frequently this was done through the veneration of Black pharos and African kingdoms (Coates, 2024, p. 28). I am more interested in the veneration of Black and African spirituality, ways of knowing and being and what it offers Black women (and Black people at large) in terms of a possible antidote to the violence they experience in institutions. This vindication work is about validating Afrocentric ways of knowing and being that we already know in embodied ways such as storytelling, bearing witness, and validating truth through emotion. It returns Afrocentric ways of knowing and being as practices for our renewal and locates us within a tradition that we were estranged from.

The placement of beautiful Afrocentric items and storytelling was part of vindication work. They were able to learn about and utilize an Afrocentric practice to share their experiences. In this way the space was the beginning of creating a "radical political dimension" (that reclaimed practices that they were disenfranchised from through the ongoing effects of colonization) to support their movement from the loophole. hooks (1990) explains, "The task of making homeplace was not simply a matter of Black women providing service; it was about the

construction of a safe place where Black people could affirm one another and by so doing heal many of the wounds inflicted by racist domination" (p. 42). Vindication work is an important part of healing these wounds because of its ability to raise the awareness of the need to create a connection to people, places, and practices that Black people were estranged from. Countering the effects of the estrangement from these people, places, and practices creates a movement from the loophole.

I also came to understand the role the affirmation of Afrocentric ways of knowing had on how the stories or information was shared. I had given each moun ki konnet time to answer the questions we would discuss in the focus group discussions on their own. When I read through their responses, they provided information, but I noted that the information lacked the deep sensing and feeling that I found they expressed in the focus group discussions at the round table. When the moun ki konnet gathered at a round table at the front of the room the room came alive with laughter, tears, loud uncontrollable sobs, collective humming, clapping, and church like oratory-style sharing and witnessing. What I learned from this experience was the importance oral storytelling for both the storyteller and listener to express deep sensing and feeling. The exchanges in nods, glances, sounds were about showing support and supported a form of Afrocentric collaborative storytelling that many moun ki konnet had experiences with but did not connect to Afrocentric ways of knowing and being.

The power of oral storytelling in the focus group sessions is part of the concept of Nommo, "the magic power of the word, (it) was believed necessary to actualize life" (Smitherman, 1986, p. 78). In this way Nommo, which also signifies truth emphasises the way life is created from words but more specifically the life in words. The words not only bring life to words, but they create new worlds (Smitherman, 1986, p. 78). "So strong is the African belief

in the power and absolute necessity of Nommo that all craftsmanship must be accompanied by speech" (Smitherman, 1986, p. 78). It was the spoken word that brought the moun ki konnet experiences to life. They instinctually created a series of texts that offered them a new world that they were determined to create. You hear and feel this new world being born through their spoken words:

Kwik

Me and my ancestry.

Kwik

But like, what is it?

Kwik

Rooting myself in the knowledge of my people.

Kwik

Me and my ancestry.

Kwik

But like, what is it?

Kwik

Connection and belonging.

Implications for Storythread 3: The Homeplace Serves as a Site of Rematriation Where Black Women's Empowerment is Generated Through Greater Access to Afrocentric Ways of Being

Afrocentric ways of being recognize the role of the (transtemporal) community in restoring and sustaining Black joy and sweetness through a centrifugal pull that runs counter to the soul wound. The centrifugal pull carries with it soul wisdom[42] (in conversation with Vidya

[42] The concept of a centrifugal pull as soul wisdom that calls Black women both to the center of themselves and the center of Afrocentric knowing is connected to the Bântu-Kôngo idea of returning to the center of the self as a way to align with the vital force (Fu-Kiau, 2001). The vital force is cyclical in nature as human beings go through birth, living, and death. Everything in life mirrors this cycle (Fu-Kiau, 2001). It is ultimately a form of return. When death

Shah, 2025). This pull (force) is supported within both community in the physical world and the spirit world. It represents, in respect to this project, the flow of an energetic frequency filled with wisdom that Black women can access as a practice in rematriation.

Rematriation is a feminist concept that acknowledges the feminine energy that is needed to restore the self and community. I am using the term rematriation recognizing that it was coined by Lee Maracle, a Stó:lō thought leader, over 20 years ago. "Maracle did not explicitly or comprehensively flesh out the term…but it is implied that she identified rematriation as an indigenous feminist concept with decolonial aims…It is about 'reinstating respect and support for women'" (Gary, 2022, p.3). The term does not have one specific definition according to Gary. However, it is generally understood as a form of return that is Indigenous and feminist in nature. This return is usually associated with a return of Indigenous heritage to recover concepts of ownership, control, and nationhood (Gary, 2022). Rematriation also concerns the matrilineal kinship structures (Gary, 2022) and the hereditary rights that flow through women.

As a woman who comes from a family where the role of the griot was handed down through the matrilineal line, I understand both the experience of losing access to this role and what it means to reclaim it. When Ma Bessie passed, the storytelling tradition seemed to have left with her. But through a process I described in an earlier chapter, I was able to reclaim this role. Ma Bessie's role as a storyteller was not simply to provide entertainment to the community. The griot provides a way for the community to recover their past through storytelling. This is a type of leadership position that is about a return and recovery. It is also part of some Indigenous West African traditions that honours the role of women. [43] Similarly, this project was about

occurs spirit is able to glean from the spirit world what it needs to support in the rebirth (Fu-Kiau, 2001, p. 35). This cyclical process reinforces the Sankofic concept of going back and getting it—the notion of transtemporal knowledge sharing.

[43] In the Dagara community women were equally involved in leadership councils (Some, 1997, p. 88).

reinstating respect for Black women's ways of knowing and being that is rooted in Afrocentric epistemologies, ontologies, and cosmologies. Reinstating women (and gender diverse people) within roles of power and leadership alongside men supports balance and harmony (Somé, 1999, p. 88). It is also about reclaiming a space both physical (within education) and consciously that makes ways for African Indigenous ways of knowing that support agency and liberation for Black women. The homeplace, a Black woman space, created through this project is a space built on the awareness that Black women need spaces where they can access the centrifugal pull of soul wisdom that supports their empowerment.

Many of the moun ki konnet felt that the Afrocentric ways of knowing and being that were introduced in the project represented a form of return that empowered them. The alienation from Afrocentric ways of knowing and being was an experience identified by all the moun ki konnet in the one-on-one interviews and focus group discussions. As a result, the Kwik! Kwak! takes on new meaning here:

Gadé mwen ou tuo mwen ka vini (read) *(Look at me, to you I am coming)*

Lapòt? (say out loud) *(The door)*

Oui! Lapòt! (read) *(Yes! The door)*

They articulated very clearly that the Afrocentric knowledge that they engaged in through storytelling presented opportunities for recovery through a return. It represents another door of return that is on this side of the Atlantic Ocean. Dionne Brand captures the complexities in a return in her book, *A Map of the Door of No Return* (2011). She begins by drawing a connection to the Door of No Return as (collective) consciousness of Black people while also describing the door as "an absence" (Brand, 2011, p. 25):

> A thing in fact which we do not know about, a place we do not know. Yet it exists as the ground we walk. Every gesture our bodies make somehow gestures toward this door. What interests me primarily is probing the Door of no Return as consciousness. The door casts a haunting spell on personal and collective consciousness in the diaspora…One enters a room and history follows; one enters a room and history proceeds. History is already seated in the chair in the empty room when one arrives. (Brand, 2011, p. 25)

The Sankofic aesthetic Brand attributes to The Door of No Return is meant to represent the omnipresent nature of knowing. The omnipresent nature of knowing is what creates the Door of Return as it signifies the omnipresent nature of spirit that is with us even when we do not see it. The women in the project were unaware of the Afrocentric ways of knowing and being they already knew in embodied ways through storytelling, bearing witness, and echolocation practices passed on by their individual families and communities. They also had a desire for a return—a kind of haunting that existed within their bodies— "every gesture our bodies make somehow gestures towards this door" (Brand, 2011, p. 25). Afrocentric ways of knowing and being follow and haunt us—reveal themselves in our consciousness. In the same way that the Door of No Return created a haunting due to an absence, the Door of Return creates a haunting—a type of knowing that lingers around us without our constant awareness of it.

The homeplace can also be understood as a Door of Return where ancestral knowledge offers opportunities to generate an integrative self-rather than a self that is fragmented. This could look like an over emphasis or connection to the body and a negation of spirit/mind—a prime opportunity to exploit the body. It could also present as an equally harmful dynamic when the mind is valued above the body. Fragmentation was a theme that moun ki konnet identified as

an experience they had while conducting equity work. Moun ki konnet were cut off from colleagues, ease, and a sense of belonging to the larger system. I observed this phenomenon in the project when Black women's labour in equity work was prioritized over their wellbeing. The introduction to Afrocentrism facilitated a return to the fullness of the self. One moun ki konnet described it in this way, "Afrocentric stuff reminded (me) of (my) belonging….yeah…. yeah, connection, belonging". The connection and sense of belonging Afrocentrism offered was in contrast to the disenfranchisement and disconnection experienced by the moun ki konnet. For these moun ki konnet the inclusion of Afrocentrism in the project provided a weaving of the self into a larger community textile. It did not erase or solve every problem, rather it offered a bridge to healing for the self within community.

The concept of rematriation also involves a transtemporal understanding of knowledge. The Sankofa symbol invites recovering ancestral knowledge to support understanding of the present to reimagine the future—rematriation of Afrocentric ways of being support self-recovery in a similar way. Accessing ancestral knowledge recovers part of the self that is stored in the past and present for the future. The homeplace acts as a place that can hold this process while also increasing the awareness and practices that are recovered.

While the homeplace is the location, rememory is the practice that supports co-created knowledge building that includes ancestral knowledge as well as the knowledge the women were building together. This dissertation began as an exploration of the experiences of Black women K-12 educators conducting equity work. The implications that developed alongside the focus of an Afrocentric rematriation relied heavily on ideas of a ghosted knowledge and knowing. I found that explorations of Black women, labour, care, and harm ultimately engages conceptualizations on a philosophy of knowledge that is supported through co-created storytelling centered on

rememory, and knowledge building across time and people. This dissertation, the research project, all the conversations, readings, and auxiliary activities that came from my interest in Black women experiences began with a practice in rememory. A practice that validates the memory as the site for knowledge building, knowledge mobilization, and knowledge validation. From the beginning it has been Toni Morrison with her suggestion that memory acts as a "fleshy ghost" (ThamesTv, 2019) that gave me permission to consider memory as a valid part of a methodology that I have developed through this project—the CAFM. It is memory that connects knowledge over time and most importantly with transtemporal co-creators that has embolden my "comrade relationship with spirit" (ThamesTv, 2019). Toni Morrison describes the way she has been made to distrust this source of knowledge derived from memory and the way Beloved returned it to her:

> My whole education was to make sure I didn't believe things like that, and I dismissed all sorts of things that where indigenous to my family, superstition, and you know the discredited information, the discredited ways of knowing, the discredited people always had. When I began to write that was the place I had to go. That's where the information was. That's where the images were. That's where the languages, the colour came in these tales, folktales, attitudes, the normal, easy acceptance of signs." (ThamesTv, 2019)

Toni Morrison is referencing the ways of knowing her ancestors used that they carried with them across the Atlantic Ocean and the ways these sources of knowledge are found in memories that are both ghostly (hidden to some degree) and visible. This dissertation, and the doctoral project at large, contribute to the field of study that emboldens Black women scholars and Black women educators to house their work within a site (the homeplace) both spiritually and personally,

individually and collectively. This is part of a vindicationist tradition where we reclaim and utilize ways of knowing that are often discredited. I hope Black women in education will be able to walk with trust, relationship with spirit, intuition, and rememory. Not just our own individual memories but the memories that are stored in our bodies, gifted to us from our ancestors. This project matters because it validates Black feminist research that believes that ghostly knowledge is an etching in the palimpsest (Okello & Duran, 2021) that Black women have carved in each other's memories for time eternal. This dissertation then is another etching that I hope will be written on, carved on by others as a way of not only indicating our existence but emboldening others to write from a location where spirit, Indigenous knowledge, and relationship across time dwell.

The table below includes a highlight of the storythreads and provides a summary of the practical and theoretical implications that are generated from them. The practical implications that I outlined above provide a path to self-recovery for the moun ki konnet while the theoretical implications expose connections to current and future research that would support further movement towards the homeplace.

Table 4: The Madras Storying Textile, Storythreads, & Implications

The Madras Storying Textile, Storythreads, & Implications				
Madras storying textile	**Storythreads**	**Quotes**	**Practical Implications**	**Theoretical Implications**
Madras storying textile: Awareness of misogynoir in equity work generates the movement from the loophole to the homeplace.	Storythread 1: The movement from the loophole to the homeplace requires Black women life-making.	"Honestly, I think it was hearing about the hospitalizations, understanding the psychological (issues) that I have found myself (in). The fact that I haven't actually really created proper social networks to insulate myself...I saw that if I continue to do this without a support system…I could	An emphasis on right livelihood, co-constructed joy, and supportive collegial relationships support Black woman life-making in the homeplace.	Through this project the homeplace is revisited as a site that is constructed by women for women that address the misogynoir they experience with transtemporal inhabitants that support wellbeing.

		potentially like not be alive anymore".		
	Storythread 2: The movement from the loophole to the homeplace reveals Black women's desire to self (re)present and acknowledge complex relationships to tropes.	"I hate feeling like I'm an Aunt/Uncle Tom. I know, because I said I'm visible and I for so long didn't disrupt, you know what I mean? I'm digestible for the right person. I do as much as I can until I get to that point of feeling like I could put myself under some sort of harm. "	Black women equity educators have a complex relationship to tropes that call for identity affirming spaces. What are the conditions that are needed to disrupt the operationalization of tropes used against and by Black women in educational spaces?	This project asks for a nuanced understanding regarding the relationship between identity and tropes in educational roles for Black women that affirm their right to live in their full humanity dislodging them from the burden of perfectionism, the Black woman tax, and emotional labour.
	Storythread 3: Afrocentric rematriation as a form of self-recovery supports the movement from the loophole to the homeplace.	"The Kôngo Cosmogram. I have that for me. This speaks to me a lot right now. Afro(centrism) is…about me rooting myself in the knowledge of my people. So it's the community… the Afrocentric stuff reminded (me) of (my) belonging….yeah…. yeah, connection, belonging, yeah".	The homeplace serves as a site of rematriation where Black women's empowerment is generated through greater access to Afrocentric ways of being.	The findings suggest that awareness of Afrocentric thought supports wellbeing outcomes for Black women educators.



Figure 38: Madras Storying Textile

Madras Storying Textile: The Awareness of Misogynoir in Equity Work Necessitates the Movement to the Homeplace

The awareness of the threat to Black life, the need for rematriation of Afrocentric ways of knowing and being, and re-presenting practices created a pathway to the homeplace for the moun ki konnet. The negotiation of the homeplace requires making decisions, compromises and at times demands. All three strands addressed one of these strategies to work together to create a Madras storying textile that reveals how misogynoir in equity work demands the negotiation of the homeplace. The attempts to insist on Black women life-making for moun ki konnet (storythread 1), the desire to connect to rematriation practices (storythread 2), and the complex relationship the moun ki konnet are in with harmful tropes (storythread 3) all point to the

attempts and need for a place to recover themselves. The homeplace, though not without challenges, can offer Black women educators a space to be “healed and filled”. During the in-person focus group sessions I saw how the moun ki konnet went about to create their own homeplace. When the large group discussion took place near the end of the session, I observed how they started employing home-raising practices within the homeplace I had hosted. Their home-raising was created through their call and response type storying. The words were the cornerstones for what they would later go to establish as a place to care for themselves and each other. As a result of the research project the moun ki konnet set out to create a social group where they met to continue exploring their relationships to identity, equity work, and Black life-making. One moun ki konnet explained:

> You’ve provided a space that was very intentionally designed for us and for healing and for introspection. I honestly feel like rejuvenated again, and hopeful of being able to create a network outside of the system that will allow us to continue to do the things that we feel called to do. So, it's gratitude. I think part of what I would like from the group is to also support each other in these types of endeavors because they're for us. So, if we can support, I think we should find a way to do it.

The moun ki konnet were not concerned with how they were going to construct this homeplace. They knew they had a desire for a space to recover themselves and had intuitively gone about designing it. I had no idea what these homeplaces would look like and realized that my conceptualizing of the homeplace along with bell hooks was going to require flexibility and openness to what may unfold through the hands of the women who had decided to meet their own needs.

Limitations

As a qualitative research project, time is needed to fully explore the experiences of the women in the project. The time factor was especially challenging for online attendees. I initially wanted to hold 3 sessions that spanned a weekend. Would be moun ki konnet explained that this was a time commitment that would take away from their down time from their already challenging jobs. I agreed to host the focus group sessions over a 4-hour period that included dinner. Though this timeframe respected the moun ki konnet' time constraints, it limited the time that was needed to support the development of an ethic of care framework and strategies for implementation within equity work policies across Ontario and possibly Canada. This was an early goal of the project that had to be modified and left for a time beyond the doctoral project. The online session saw even more of a time restraint. Holding an online session on a weeknight for four hours was not sustainable or desirable for the moun ki konnet. Consequently, the session was reduced to two hours. As I explained earlier, this shaped the participation of the moun ki konnet in significant ways.

Another limitation of the project was the lack of representation of Black women from diverse backgrounds regarding faith traditions. All of the moun ki konnet who assigned a faith tradition as part of their identity identified as Christians[44]. This may have an impact on the readiness with which moun ki konnet engaged with the spiritual element found in Afrocentric rituals and traditions. Consequently, there was not any information that would help us understand the role of spirituality in the project for those who do not belong to a particular faith/spiritual tradition. Because of the relationship between colonization and Christianity, especially with the

[44] This is a complex statement to make considering that Christianity (in the past and currently) demonizes African traditional religions. However, the recent popularization of womanist theory, which at times upholds Christian beliefs alongside African traditional belief systems may have altered this perception.

rise of Christian nationalists, this is an important theme to explore further because of the complexity it presents to Black women. Some of the moun ki konnet stated the reliance on their Christian faith and some taught in Catholic schools the issue of how faith is used as a cover came up briefly. A further examination of the relationship between spirituality, faith, and education may be useful for uncovering further barriers to wellbeing and self-recovery that can be achieved under the cover of a homeplace.

There were also no moun ki konnet who identified themselves as gender diverse. This left me wondering how that would impact the storythread that emphasized the operationalization of tropes by the moun ki konnet. Misogynoir was a central theme that the tropes illuminated. I am left wondering how these tropes further present complexities for gender diverse educators. This would be another gap that calls for future research.

Finally, a possible limitation of the study is the possibility that harm may continue within the homeplace—especially when harming may be a familiar experience and response. hook's asks for compassion to be present in the midst of healing as a way to reconciliation with those that have wounded us (hooks, 2005, p. 129) is a way to address the harm that might follow moun ki konnet into the homeplace.

In *Sisters of the Yam* (2005) hooks speaks of the need to forgive as a pathway to healing and reconciliation that has echoes of Freire and Buddhist peace activist Thich Nhat Hanh. This is a difficult read for me as it seems to let the abusers of Black women off the hook. When I apply these steps to reconciliation within a homeplace context it is then I can see the value of hook's argument that forgiveness and compassion are necessary to healing because they facilitate pathways to relationship and an awareness of connection. More importantly hooks argues that, "our capacity to forgive always allows us to be in touch with our own agency [that is the power

to act on our own behalf to change a situation]. Enslaved black people clearly understood the need to remain in touch with all those aspects of the self that enabled them to experience agency. Without agency we collapse into passivity, inertia, depression, and despair" (hooks, 2005, p. 128).

Ultimately hooks is arguing that a lack of compassion and thus forgiveness creates pathway to death for community. She identifies that a lack of compassion is connected to competitiveness amongst people even those within the same cultural group and says it produces individualism "that are life-threatening to black people because we need an ethic of communalism to live with dignity and integrity" (hooks, 2005, p. 131). The goal and purpose of the homeplace is a place of communalism. A place that self-recovery leads to integration within community. A place to work out bitterness, anger, wounding that we suffer from the outside world and with each other. Therefore, in practicing forgiveness is a way to deal with the external wounding we suffer, we are building the homeplace where we can carry that structure of being in relationship through forgiveness that we can apply to our relationships within our affinity groups. The homeplace is a shelter from the wounding we suffer but if we do not apply certain values as we move into the homeplace it will become another place of disintegration where harm is rampant that will replicate the oppressive forces we are trying to escape from in the first place.

Of course, hook's words are not only influenced by Freire and Hanh, but they are also rooted in Afrocentric understandings of community and community integration. For an example, the concept of ubuntu, a Bantu African concept, is not just about a beingness with and through others it is also about an understanding of the restorative justice that is necessary that will have implications for the future and address the wrongs of the past (Chigumadzi, 2023 p. 30). "When you commit a wrong, you do not simply commit a wrong against umuntu, you commit a wrong

against those who come before them, those who come with them and those who come after them" (p. 30). In speaking about reparations for African Indigenous communities, Panashe Chigumadzi (2023), a South African author, states that injustice and the response has a transtemporal impact. The homeplace as a spiritual place can be regarded as a place where some of the harm Black women endure at the hands of those within and outside their community are reconciled as a way to address the harm of the past and create opportunities for justice for the future. What does justice look like in the homeplace? It looks like addressing the wounding of the past by recognizing its root but not being attached it. It looks like being free from it enough to plant medicines of justice that will be needed for the future in terms of how we love and come into conflict in the future. The homeplace becomes a greenhouse where we can sow seeds that support us in not being a product of the roots of the violence we suffered but guardians of medicine that will be needed to address the sprouts of these very roots that we have seemed to cut off. Like a tree that has been cut down but still bears sprouts from its trunk the wounding we suffered from the violent workplace engagements needs medicine to prevent further growth within the homeplace.

Chapter 7: Conjured Conversations with bell hooks, Toni Morrison, and Ma Bessie[45]

After I had completed the initial analysis of the storythreads I felt an urge to converse with women who had passed into the spirit world but have been walking with me throughout this journey. I felt they had something to say about the homeplace and Black woman knowing. I call this section conjured conversations because it is a conversation through spirit—a way to feel through others like hooks, Morrison, and Ma Bessie. I intentionally use the word conjured because that is a way of knowing, connecting, and creating that as an Afro-Caribbean woman I have heard and known (and sometimes feared) happening around and within me. It is a word I use as a re-matriation of spiritual practices to vindicate our role as transtemporal co-creators with spirit. "These relationships speak to a relationship to the divine that we have inherited from West African ancestors who believed that the spirit world will always give us signs if we only pay attention to it. And in Black women's communities inherited from their conjured foremothers is often captured by the phrase—'Black women be knowing'" (Stewart, 2025, p. 298). The connection between the homeplace and practices of conjuring is also closely related. The spaces where Black women created medicines, nourishment, and pleasure for themselves and their community is also part of a larger conjuring tradition that extends to creating connections across space and time. African diaspora historians and Black feminist scholars Kinitra Brooks, Kameelah Martin, and Lakisha Simmons created a concept and project called Conjure Feminism that explores conjuring practices that are based on both Afrocentric and Christian practices. They articulated conjuring as a practice that is transformative. They describe the term conjure feminism by explaining:

[45] I suggest that you listen to this section of the chapter rather than read it if you can. It is the spirit with which it was written—to be heard.

> Conjure Feminism became a way to think specifically about the enduring histories of Black women's knowledge production that began with the lessons we learned at our grandmothers' kitchen tables and are woven into the fabric of Black women's writing practices: motherwit, root medicine, food as ancestral memory, mothering, and spirit work. We also wanted to highlight the importance of specific places Black women have claimed as their domain within their homes, their gardens, and their kitchens, and how such spaces were empowered not only by their knowledge, but also by that of their foremothers. We wanted a phrase that captured and privileged this inherited wisdom; a concept that highlighted Black embodied theories of being and a Black womanist sense of space, time, and ethics. Conjure Feminism did that work for us. (Brooks et.al., 2021, p. 452)

We have always known that we can enter practices where we engage with spirit—with those that passed over into the spirit world. We conjure to call them back, create a return for them that is full of respect, *goodness* and love. The colonizers tried to make our ability to access the spirit world an evil practice, but I engage with accessing the spirit world as part of a practice of re-matriation. I consider conjured conversations with Black women who have passed to the spirit world as part of a practice that supports the palimpsest tradition that is a key feature of Black feminist knowing (Okello & Duran, 2021).

I approached these conversations with care and respect and would only engage when I felt the presence of these women. When I felt their presence, I would engage in speaking with and through them recording it in text as I went along. To be very clear, these conversations are not made-up conversations. They are a way I engaged with each woman through an invitation I extended. I did not plan or know what I was going to say or share ahead of time. The words and

events unfolded in the same way you will read them. They are not revised in any way. They are experienced through a knowing that does not rely on complete understanding but knowing through feeling and sensing each other. Feeling for each other in the fog. Trusting the other in the fog. Finding our way together. I hope you will engage in this chapter with this reverence—reading it as if you are being invited into a gathering of sacred company.

I did not set out with a list of women I wanted to engage in conversation with. They found me as much as I found them. It is no surprise that bell hooks entered the conversation first as she is the one who gifted me the concept of the homeplace as a Black woman's space. Toni Morrison seems to be an odd figure here as I do not mention her throughout a lot of the dissertation. However, she also came to me bearing gifts in the form of spirit and rememory work—a way to "go back and get it"[46]. I identify rememory work with a Sankofic tradition that is consistent with a palimpsest tradition that recognizes the transtemporal nature of knowledge. More than that Ms. Morrison has been a steady interlocutor. I journaled through most of my doctoral project with Ms. Morrison. She helped me to consider the ways my role as a Black woman, single mother, scholar, artist, and writer were all sacred spaces that needed protecting. She is the one who showed me how to write around the mess that is sometimes plentiful in the life of a single mother/academic/artist. Finally, Ma Bessie gifted me the storytelling role. It is through her that I found my way to storying the world around me. It is through her that I understand that the academic space is another space that meets me at the front door of my home where other invited guests join.

This chapter speaks to a larger need that I recognized through the doctoral project. Through the focus groups and the interviews, I understood the importance of a community that

[46] "Go back and get it" is associated with the meaning behind the Sankofa symbol from the Akan people of Ghana.

includes elders, peers, and transtemporal co-creators for Black women educators. This diverse community was necessary to support their ability to make sense of the troublesome world they live in and to meet the need for connection and belonging that these co-creations offer. I share these conversations with you and invite you into this practice of meaning making with transtemporal co-creators that is so central to Black women ways of survival and thriving. Enter as an honoured guest into this community.

Location: Grand Bay, Waitukubuli (Dominica)

Setting: Two women sit at the porch of a house made of concrete. The house is painted blue with peach coloured trim that outlines it. The ocean is roaring ahead of them. The sun has already risen but it is not quite high in the sky. Behind and around the house the mountains rise and fall with their thick coat of green marking where the sky begins, and the earth takes over. As they sit on chairs made of wood and woven vetiver grass, they take sips of squash—a drink made of freshly squeezed lemons, oranges, grapefruit and limes with a splash of Angostura bitters and spoonfuls of sugar.

Myrtle: I hope you don't mind. But I wanted to talk with you a bit. To continue to think more about the idea of homeplace.

bell hooks: I'm realizing that life is marked by many kinds of returns. Both in the physical world and in the spiritual one. So, I am happy to return here to visit with you.

Myrtle: I wasn't sure how to invite you into a conversation with me without ritual or anything extraordinary. Would you be annoyed or startled? I took a chance and I hope it works out to bring you here.

bell hooks: Believe me I get many kinds of invitations. They no longer startle me. It is a great relief to be in so many places with so many people all at once. Returning to a beingness that recognizes it is energy that can be shared infinitely is wild. I don't often use that word, but it is truly wild to be here.

Myrtle: How do we describe to the readers where we are? I wondered where on earth could we meet that would make sense. I had to bring you to the place that comes closest to home for the conversation.

bell hooks: I have to say. I am at a loss for words really. To be invited to the physical world to a place that both feels like paradise and forgotten at the same time. (hooks scans the sea in front of her and the mountains that wrap around her. Her face is serious, and her eyebrows seem to come together just a little.)

Myrtle: That is exactly how I'm thinking about it. When I think of home there must be a great big ocean in front of me and great rising mountains behind and around me. It does speak to paradise and a forgotten place like you said. But forgotten not because it is lost but because someone has set it down and closed the door on it.

bell hooks: So, you are thinking that home is the place we set down eventually and move away from? Or could it be a place we return to forget another place?

Myrtle: I need some time with that. Maybe I will return to it later on in our talk. But for now, I think because as an immigrant I have this place that we are right now as my imagined home. But when I leave Canada (which is where I live) to come here (Dominica)—a place I had left permanently I am not sure if I have a true home. Which place is the place I am returning to or forgetting? I feel like I am between them both. Now I don't feel like I am making any sense. Basically, what I wanted to know or return to is your idea of home as a place you return to. A place you abandon other places for. Especially places of violence.

bell hooks: Yes, this I think is the start to understanding home. I describe home in *Yearning* as a place of beauty and joy—where women could return to themselves. Though I know that home is also a place of struggle for some women.

Myrtle: Or possibly a place that offers both…

bell hooks': Both yes. Of course, home cannot have a single face or feeling.

Myrtle: Well, that is the thing I am wondering. Because I sought out to create what you call a homeplace. You describe the feeling of walking to your grandmother's house and the tension and hostility you had to walk through to get there. So, in this way the homeplace is a place of escape—a retreat maybe?

bell hooks: Yes, the arrival felt like something we accomplished. Returning home did not always feel like a sure thing. It was a place you were always trying to get back to.

Myrtle: What exactly are we trying to get back to other than beauty and safety? Because if it is just that, can't we create the homeplace elsewhere? What I mean is can't we have satellites of homeplaces? Or is the homeplace a single place that we must make a pilgrimage to?

bell hooks: I'm thinking about your question and wondering about a few things…when I wrote the chapter "Homeplace: A Site of Resistance" in *Yearning*, I was really thinking about the place most Black women could have for themselves. I don't think satellites of homeplaces are possible for most Black women and especially not back then. I mean maybe the church could be such a place—but where else would they be able to plant these homeplaces?

Myrtle: Well, if you are writing about times like the civil rights movement—a time I believe we are reliving in many ways it may be difficult. But I'm speaking of another time maybe—a time that I can call the now, you might call the future, and the readers might call the past. But let us continue to call it another time where Black women are working within institutions in what you and Arlie Hochschild may call the outside world.

bell hooks: You are bringing everybody out today! Black women were always forced onto the outside world. That is something I think I wanted to express more clearly. That we have always

been in the institutions—maybe we cared for buildings and people rather than do the kind of work the women you are referring to do. But we have always been here.

Myrtle: Yes, we have always been here on the outside for sure! But I think now the white subjugation that you spoke of in *Yearning* that restricted the opportunities for Black people to claim an actual home is something that we have for the most part countered—we can further counter this by creating homeplaces on the outside as well…places where we can actively challenge the harm, we experience within the institutions we work within.[47]

bell hooks: So, hold on a minute here. Are you saying that we can create homeplaces within "the master's house"? I wonder what Audre would say about that! (hooks chuckles and leans her had back. Her round cheeks glow with laughter.)

Myrtle: Now *you* are inviting everybody! I do think Audre has something to say about that. She argues against doing the master's work inside the master's house because it will benefit the master—but I think I am asking for something else…I want a *place* in the master's house for Black women in education. I think we have moved far along enough to be able to claim these places and set them up as satellite homeplaces.

bell hooks: This is where you lose me a bit—just a bit. I don't think Audre would agree with you on that because the master just would not allow it. You are going to replicate the Sassy Mammy

[47] This conversation took place before the formal removal and destabilization of equity and diversity movements in the United States in 2025. Due to the sacred nature of this conversation, I did not update any of the sections to reflect this change. What I hope this conversation brings to light is the assumptions I made about the stability of diversity initiatives which adds another layer of complexity to the location of homeplaces.

kind of arrangement. The Master will tolerate this homeplace—but with limits and this I believe undoes the homeplace eventually. I mean you argue on one hand that equity work is built within a loophole of retreat because it is work that master makes room for. I don't see how your conceptualizing of the homeplace is any different.

(Myrtle gives hooks a surprised look. Her mouth remains open for some time and slowly closes as hooks begins to speak.)

bell hooks: Don't be surprised that I know your work. When you move to the other side and become aware that you and everything else is pure energy you realize how much more accessible everything—including information or I guess knowledge becomes. I know your work—especially since you've made it part of mine.

(Both women sit silently looking out at the ocean in front of them. bell hooks still has a smile on her face that cause her cheeks to round. She has curiosity in her eyes and begins to speak again.)

bell hooks: Why do you believe that this is even possible? This homeplace within the master's house? What makes you believe that?

(Myrtle doesn't move. Her expression is unreadable. She continues sitting with this question and refuses to abandon it even though it leaves her speechless for a minute.)

bell hooks: Maybe you have to believe it! (hooks almost sighs as she says this.)

(Myrtle continues to sit with the thought searching for some answer.)

bell hooks: Why would you want to set up shop in the master's house anyway? (bell hooks says this almost as a whisper. She dusts imaginary dust from her lap and looks further out into the ocean.)

Myrtle: Maybe because I want it. I know it sounds strange to say this. I want it—we want it. And we both need it and deserve it.

(bell hooks' mouth turns down at each side and her eyes and eyebrows raise as a response.)

Myrtle: I know it makes me sound like a toddler—but there it is. It is the only reason I can give you. And maybe to add to that is the belief that it is possible. Somewhere inside of me I have hope. I mean when we really think about it the homeplace on this side of the Atlantic is always within the master's domain.

bell hooks: ohhh kaaay…(hook's nods her head slowly.) Maybe…just for a little bit we can go there—in the direction of your homeplace…even if it is just to imagine another way to be. (hooks continues nodding her head slowly and eventually leans it to one side away from Myrtle giving her the opportunity to both look at her and look at the ocean. Myrtle continues to gaze ahead while a sheepish feeling floods her. She feels her wanting sounds pathetic…weak…trivial even.)

bell hooks: So, let's put that bit of the conversation on the shelf for a bit and return to the larger conversation.

(hooks for the first time touches Myrtle. Her hand rests on Myrtle's hands. Myrtle looks at hooks' hand and a smile appears across her face. She can feel hooks' hand, but it is a feeling with a touch that brings knowing with it too. hooks smiles as if she recognizes the look on Myrtle's face. The women sit like this for some time—faces and feet facing the sea and their backs and shoulders wrapped in mountains. This moment of silence holds so much. There is so much to be said, asked, and shared.)

Myrtle: I can't remember where we are to be honest. I feel a little lost.

bell hooks: We are right here at the homeplace. A place for loud talk, getting caught up on each other's lives, and that sort of thing.

Myrtle: I felt a tension when I attempted to create a homeplace in my project. And maybe this is another place that my conceptualizing of your homeplace separates from your ideas a bit.

bell hooks: ohhhh okkkay. (hooks says this slowly, nodding with each word. She allows a slight smile to form and waits for more.)

Myrtle: I was trying to create a space in a university that I could mold into a homeplace. And I did this online too. I wanted to test the limits and opportunities of a homeplace.

bell hooks: What did you find?

Myrtle: I found that I was successful in creating a place where, like you and the women you speak about, could really arrive at something. The space in the university setting had grand windows that were almost floor to ceiling. The ceiling was quite high with those loft type windows. This allowed a significant amount of light to stream into the space. The space was very open and comfortable. I had taken care to add beauty that would be both new and recognizable to the space. I brought beautiful sunflowers, stones, crystals, wooden pieces, a colorful Afrocentric tablecloth. I wanted to bring a bit of the beauty of home into this large space. And when the women arrived they grew smiles, laughter and also tears. The tears were a mixture of grief and gratitude. This is the point of the tension.

bell hooks: Sounds good to me so far.

Myrtle: Well like the women in your story these women too had to walk through "terrifying whiteness" in order to make it to my homeplace in the university. They wanted to come in, take a breath, converse, and eat well—which we did.

bell hooks: I'm not sure I see the problem here.

Myrtle: What I wanted to do was meet the objectives of the gathering which was a research design that I had to prove would work. So, I watched as they came in full of the desire to talk and I felt like I was the sails holding them back forcing them on this trajectory. I felt this tension all the way through. Then eventually it burst. When we gathered at the round table to discuss the focus group questions with 15 minutes remaining—I was worried about honouring their time as we say in these spaces. But that is when the sails were blown away. They burst into stories, laughter, tears, and even some rhythmic chanting. Their words, tears, and laughter sounded like a score of music. They bounced back and forth. So, I wondered if a structured design like mine could really support a homeplace. Because it seemed that all the details I had put in to create a homeplace were not what really created it.

bell hooks: And what about the online group? Did that feel the same? I mean, was the same tension there?

Myrtle: Well, it was even more restricted because instead of 4 hours we had only 2 hours together. So, I felt like I didn't know the moun ki konnet by the end and they did not know each other. My sails were intact but that was because there was not much stirring between them.

bell hooks: I think it is time to bring Audre back in here again. I can't help but imagine that the sails were really your institutional requirements imposing on the women and the space. Not to be a "I told you so" because that isn't the point—I just don't believe you can build this home within the master's house. It was not so much the university setting that was the problem. The limits of the homeplace were the imposing institutional processes that follow your work and inform it.

(Myrtle sat with her hand raised to her lips. Her knuckles ran over the ridges of her mouth as she is known to do when wrestling with something.)

Myrtle: Maybe I was able to create a homeplace after all—more so in the in-person gathering. I believe actually it was the women that created it. My plan, activities, etc… were appreciated by them but the truth is they would have created this space without it. I know that does not do much for my work in terms of showing I have a formula that works. But what I got from that experience was that the women just wanted an inviting space, with a host who knew them, cared that they were there, and they took care of the rest. They not only shared their stories after the session time was up and encouraged and affirmed each other. They conspired together right there and then to gather again and again. They noted the inequity of male educators already having a well-established and supported group while they carry so much of the burden of white oppression and are not afforded the time and space. So, they conspired together and insisted on meeting their own needs.

bell hooks: They showed you didn't they? *They* built their homeplace. This is nothing new. They will build it because it is what they have always done to survive. That knowledge is in their bones.

(Myrtle sat in silence again. A question kept filling her thoughts. She was afraid to ask it because it might shake her work from the foundation it rested on. She knew that regardless of what it might allow to come undone she had to ask it.)

Myrtle: So, what…is…the value…in my role or this project then? (Her words poured out slowly almost one at a time.)

(hooks sat in her own silence continuing to look in front of her at the sea. Her eyes seemed to follow something out there. Something at a distance. Myrtle tried to find what had captured hooks' attention but all she saw was wave after wave and shards of light after shards of light on the ocean in front of them.)

bell hooks: Is that important?

Myrtle: Yes. (Myrtle answered this faster than she wanted.) After all, what is the point of all of this? (Her knuckles met her lips again and passed over them repeatedly. She did not know where to go from here.)

bell hooks: Aren't you a storyteller? Isn't that what the women in your family do?

(Myrtle did not know how to proceed with this information. On one hand she could easily make the connection but on the other she found tension again.)

Myrtle: The thing is…(She began and then paused.)

bell hooks: The thing is…(hooks nodded and waved her hand in a way to encourage Myrtle to keep on speaking.)

Myrtle: My great-grandmother Ma Bessie was a homeplace builder of sorts I guess. But the difference between her role as a griot and my role as someone who was trying to construct the homeplace was why we did it. She did it because she had to. It was in her bones. I created a homeplace because I had to…(Myrtle's words trailed off as if she stopped to pick something else up.)

(Neither hooks no Myrtle said anymore. They knew that the question didn't need to be answered. It was already known.)

bell hooks: (hooks began to speak at a slow and steady pace.) "It is no accident that this homeplace, as fragile and as transitional as it may be, a makeshift shed, a small bit of earth where one rests, is always subject to violation and destruction. For when a people no longer have the space to construct a homeplace, we cannot build a meaningful community of resistance". It's on page 47 in Yearning.

Myrtle: I remember that part. I even put a star beside it. (Myrtle said this was a slight smile. Her lips pressed together a little tighter in the way they do when she has faced some truth or found some lost thing.)

bell hooks: You lost the homeplace once…not because you left this place…but because it became devalued. Other places of knowledge took over and replaced it. So, the stories stopped. Who told the stories after Ma Bessie? Did your grandmother? (Myrtle shook her head no.) The Kwik! Kwak! gatherings were not just a time for Ma Bessie to share the stories, it was also a time for people to return to themselves. A time to nourish themselves by the beautiful moonlight, with some delicious food, laughter, tears all held by an art we carried with us from the other side of this ocean. It was a form of community resistance that was located at the weathered wooden doorstep of your great-grandmother's yard. The Kwik! Kwak! gathering is your homeplace. You have had it all along. And your role has not changed. The value of it has to be recognizable to you, that's all.

(Myrtle feels her stomach swell as if something was being born inside of her. She only had the courage to whisper as she spoke.)

Myrtle: Thank you.

(The conversation ended in the way it began with little fan fair. It felt like what people call a soft opening and closing. There was not a defined moment measured by time but a blurring of time and place.)

(A few weeks later, Myrtle is sitting at her desk in her home office. There is a window at her back and two on either side of her shoulders. In front of her is a door that leads to the rest of the

house. Her home office is positioned at the front of the house away from the spaces the other five people in her home occupy. This space that almost seems to be jettisoned out of her home is her place of recovery. A place where she not only comes back to herself but a place to gather with herself and the people that make up *her* people—her ancestors, the photos of Black women who she frequently turns to and draws to recover parts of herself.)

A picture of Toni Morrison painted in the pop art style is pinned to the wall behind her. She is pinned close to similar prints of Audre Lorde and Maya Angelou. The hooks and Hurston prints will arrive shortly to join this gathering. Myrtle removes the picture of Toni Morrison and places it in front of her on her desk.

Today is an especially hard day. A day where she tires from fighting for her children and herself in a system that is eager to spit both of them out. Morrison is the one Myrtle draws close to when she wrestles with these experiences. Morrison's eyes in the image do not look out at Myrtle instead she looks to the right—looking for something. And then she begins to speak.)

Toni Morrison: I was waiting for you. I wondered why after all this time of you writing to me in that journal of yours you haven't brought me into this conversation.

(Myrtle sits with her head tilted to one side and takes a deep inhale through her nose. Her lips press tightly together, and she sits deeper into her chair.)

Myrtle: I think it is because I mainly draw close to you when my work and family life collide. When I'm trying to work something out in those worlds. I used to always ask how you did it—you worked as an editor, writer, professor, and you, like me, were a single mom. I thought maybe you had something to say about how to move through academic life.

Toni Morrison: Not necessarily about your academic work though. (Morrison leans her head in the direction of Myrtle as if to put a period at the end of the sentence physically.)

Myrtle: Well until today I didn't really see how they connected. I feel bad for what must seem like an exclusion. I made a commitment to read all that you have written and spoken over the next 4 years and there are times where I can't move through some of your texts. I realize with your work especially work like Beloved and Paradise it would take several readings to grasp the stories in a way that felt like I knew them. I've read Beloved twice now and finally it is a part of my soul.

Toni Morrison: The whole book or a particular part?

Myrtle: Of course, it has to be "You, your best thing Sethe. You are." Those lines nourish and feed me in a way I have yet been able to accurately describe. Whenever I say those words it feels like a balm I am applying to an old stubborn wound. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie says that "grief is a stubborn reality that refuses to budge" and so I am so grateful for the medicine in the form of these words.

(Morrison opens her mouth slightly and curls her tongue in the way she does when she is in agreement with something or considering the truth in something.)

Toni Morrison: Uhhh huuuugh. (She continues to nod)

Myrtle: I think so much of the need for those lines comes from a place that stretched decades where I felt as a student, as an educator, as an academic that the institution was my best thing. That I owed allegiance to the institution. I owed it something for returning a part of myself to me.

Toni Morrison: And that is why you gave it so much of yourself?

Myrtle: It almost became a place where I housed my sense of worth or worthlessness.

Toni Morrison: Woooh! (Morrison slapped her hand into her lap. Myrtle could not tell if this was a release that affirmed or frightened her.) The institution became the house where your sense of worth was housed. Woooh! (Morrison shook her head back and forth slowly.) So, this is why you were willing to die to it. Pin yourself to it.

(Myrtle sat as she listened to Morrison send her words back to her.)

Myrtle: I think that is because I grew up with this feeling that what we had whether it was back home or in our settlements we made in this country was never enough. Well never enough to

them. When I was at home I ate the most wonderful food. I remember one Christmas we had snails, and I cherished the salty sea taste. It gave me another hit of what I considered my real home.

Toni Morrison: You know I like a good spread. Nothing makes you feel welcomed in a space like a great meal that takes you back somewhere you may have set aside for where you thought you had to be.

Myrtle: I read one of your speeches where you talked about writing around a mess your son had made on your notepad where you were writing. (Morrison nodded and smiled again.) It reminded me of the time that I went for one of my first runs while training for a marathon. I fell on the sidewalk and sat on the ground stunned asking myself what to do now—as if I had never fallen and gotten up before. I realized that I could just get up and keep on going. That falling didn't need to be my whole existence. Your continuing to write around your son's spit up also reminded me of Audre's words about getting distracted with the master's work—and I think you spoke about this distraction too. That has been what education both as a student and an educator has felt like. It feels like I get stuck at looking at the mess or falling down (being kicked down really) and I forget I can get up and go home. I forget I can create another world outside of this mess.

Toni Morrison: I have a feeling that bell is going to show up right about now.

(They both laugh with no sound and rest on a smile.)

Myrtle: Yes…of course. Because her homeplace is a reminder I could literally pick myself up and go home—be at home even after the racial injury I suffered as a student. I could not control the injury, but I could return to the balm.

(They both turn to each other and laugh while pointing at each other as they said the following words.)

Toni Morrison and Myrtle: You, your best thing Sethe. You are. (They settle into little puddles of laughter that splatter into soft landings around them.)

Myrtle: I think this is what I realized about the homeplace. (Morrison points to Myrtle with a nod and smiles broadly. Myrtle returns the gesture with a smile, nod and point of her own.) And maybe what I was trying to explain to Ms. hooks. I think it is possible to create homeplaces within the institution. For me a homeplace was my classroom. I did not create this space with comfortable furniture or the décor overload I see now on Pinterest and Instagram. I created with a feeling that you can be nourished (there was always food in my classroom), you could create beauty, and you could come back to yourself again and again. It was a humanizing and healing space for both me and my students. While taking on leadership roles that involved equity work, I faced a lot of racial and gendered injury by the staff. I stopped eating in the staffroom and spent my lunches in my classroom. I ate my food from back home (away from the critiquing senses of staff). I hosted Black students in clubs that I ran. I even danced!

Toni Morrison: So, you're saying you created a homeplace on the inside?

Myrtle: Most of the women in my project did this naturally without knowing. Whether it was creating a club to allow students to come back to themselves or a group for women like themselves who found themselves isolated by racial and gendered injury they were able to create pockets where homeplaces could be constructed.

Toni Morrison: I am not sure what I can say about that.

Myrtle: In the novels I've read written by you the home is not treated as much of a retreat like hooks'. There seems to be a continuum between you, Lorde, and hooks. On one end is hooks where the homeplace is a retreat, in the middle is your treatment of the homeplace as both refuge and a place littered with violence and abuse, and Lorde where the homeplace if it is under the master's domain is a trap—what I like to refer to as a loophole.

Toni Morrison: I haven't thought about my treatment of home that way…(Before Morrison finishes Myrtle jumps in.)

Myrtle: In the novel *Home* the whole story is centered on returning home to find self and connection to heal from wounds inflicted by outside forces. But I guess also inflicted by those on the inside too because Frank Money keeps recalling the feeling of home with his grandmother and the hatred that the family was met with. Most of the times your novel treats home as a troubled place.

Toni Morrison: Well, that is because it is. No amount of beauty by way of art, food, and connection can erase the brutality that often plays out in the home. I mean hooks also talks about this in a way in *all about love.*

(Myrtle reaches for the book which is just to her right on her desk. She flips through the book and lands on page 9 that is underlined with a pencil. She begins to read it out loud.)

Myrtle: "So that just as we would cling to the notion that those who hurt us as children loved us, we try to rationalize being hurt by other adults by insisting that they love us."

Toni Morrison: That's hooks for you—she brings us back to our childhood. I mean we are nurtured in the very way that can sustain the society that is dependent on our being nurtured in a deprived way. We end up constantly yearning for something we are told we had but never really. We are in the process of going back home all the time acting with some kind of amnesia. Not remembering that yes, we may be able to recover some of our selves, but few ever make it all the way there.

Myrtle: Creating a homeplace itself is troubled…I'm beginning to see that. But maybe it is this selective amnesia, but I believe there is potential in that location for restoration.

Toni Morrison: The question for me is why?

Myrtle: That reminds me of the question someone on my committee asked me, “why is education the grounds that liberation is fought for so strong and hard in the Black community when education is so oppressive for so many?” I answer this by saying it is the location we have been made to believe that we can gain liberation through. So, it is clinging to the notion that those who built the structures that hurt us make us comfortable with being hurt by systems that insist they care and love us. (Myrtle looks up at the ceiling as if receiving something from above.) Thank you Ms. hooks. Thank you!

Toni Morrison: Things are just falling from above for you! But we still have not settled on the question of why? Why not focus on strengthening homeplaces in the homes and spaces that belong to Black folk? Why push for a space within the institutions if you know that those structures were built to hurt you and tell you it is love?

Myrtle: Christina Sharpe I think says something like “what the state calls care is usually continued violence”. So, I can see why insisting on a homeplace within institutions can be seen as exposing ourselves to continued violence. I can definitely see the potential for harm. That is why I insist on an approach that honours ethics of caring involving any work from Black women educators and especially those doing equity related work.

Myrtle: It is completely okay that this framing of the homeplace I am trying to advocate for is troubled. McKittrick, is here for all that.

Toni Morrison: For all what? For the troubled spaces that Black women create something out of? For the generative quality of Black women's spaces? Hmmm…(Morrison closes her eyes slowly, draws some breath and slightly tilts her head away from Myrtle. She neither gives a hint at agreement or disagreement. She allows what is said to hover between them a bit.)

Myrtle: I don't know if McKittrick is calling the space generative. I think she is drawing attention to what she calls the projections of "not quiteness" of the space and Black women. She calls attention to the spaces as "garretings". I think what is more important is McKittrick draws out the complexities of the "loophole or retreat" that hold liberation and captivity in the same space. So, my conceptualizing of the homeplace is an attempt to acknowledge this tendency and address it with activism approached with care. After my conversation with hooks, I do recognize that the homeplace within the master's domain (which is sprawling to say the least) can still accompany harm when attempts at liberatory futures are made through activism. The difference between the loophole and the homeplace is that the homeplace insists on an approach with care. We are able to come down from the garret and negotiate space—even if it is in the face of oppressive forces. I also concede that the spaces will always be seen with an element of "not quiteness" because of McKittrick's reminder that liberation for Black women is always complex. "Not quiteness" for different reasons than what McKittrick speaks of. "Not quiteness" because it will never be a completely liberated space because of where it is housed and the relationship Black women have to these spaces. These spaces remind me that what we need is a way to look back at spaces and opportunities we are given for "our liberation" by institutions that are known to favor our silence and servitude.

Toni Morrison: That was a mouthful! I have to tell you I didn't know how you were going to come through that one. It seemed as if you were lost for a moment. But I see where you are going. I see the way. I'm starting to see the difference between the loophole and the homeplace, but what I am seeing is that Black women who labour for institutions that were founded on colonial logics will always have one foot stuck in the loophole. I do not believe they will ever completely be able to shake that place from their feet. The institution will not let them. But on the other side they have the homeplace that they are facing…stepping into and maybe that is the complexity McKittrick speaks in the direction of.

(Myrtle glances again at the picture of Morrison on her desk. She notes again Morrison's eyes that look to the right and on the opposite side is that ruled yellow note pad. There is no spit up from her son that the writing must make its way around. There is only space. A full lined yellow writing pad of space.)

(The next day Myrtle sits at her desk again. This time she feels a desire to talk about art. She sits waiting for someone to join her—someone from that wall of images that includes hooks, Morrison, Angelou, and Lorde. She thinks maybe it is Lorde that is coming through. But no one comes. She sighs and waits because she could feel the presence of someone but can't tell who it is.

After a few minutes she glances down at the picture of Ma Bessie holding a cutlass in one hand and staff in the other. In the photo Ma Bessie is walking in what looks like a forest. She has her head wrapped in a loose tete cassé. She has a loose dress on that is layered with a shirt

underneath. There is a rope that is tied around her waist. Her shoulders are raised in the usual way and her lips are pressed tight together. Around her are thick trees, brush and large rocks. There is a small path for one that she is following. She doesn't look at the camera, but she acknowledges it somehow. Myrtle now knows it is Ma Bessie that is trying to come through. They sit for some time waiting for the other to start. Most of the time they communicate through silence. They share a kind of knowing that does not require speaking. It is a knowing that belongs to the energetic frequency of Spirit. This knowing comes with a weight that Myrtle does not want to put down but doesn't know how to hold either. She continues to wait for Ma Bessie.)

Ma Bessie: You know when you were a child, I could never get enough time with you. Your grandmothers, your father, his sisters, and a whole group of other people were always taking you here and there. Sometimes one was combing your hair for a second time that day. Other times your father had you dressed in one of his t-shirts so you could paint with him without soiling your clothes. And of course, Popot—that grandmother of yours was always feeding you some broth with those big pieces of ground provisions. I always told her all you need is a little cush cush—but no she had to give you those big pieces of dasheen, yam, and long green banana. So, I could never get close—but I watched you. Always watched you because I knew who you were.

(Myrtle's tears gather at the rim of her eyes.)

Myrtle: Yesterday, I was thinking about the fact that I don't have any memories of you interacting with me—like speaking to me and that sort of thing. I can remember who you are. I can remember you always being there but it would appear that we didn't have a relationship. I

thought that was strange seeing how close you were to my father. But my mother told me that you were a quiet person who kept mostly to yourself. Who didn't always have much to say. I wondered if that was because of your stutter, or because you were tired from all you had seen.

Ma Bessie: Maybe it was both.

Myrtle: I remember when I went back to Dominica 2 years ago with this strong desire to make salt. During the pandemic I saw this woman making salt in the US and knew I had to make it too. But the desire became an obsession. It wasn't that I just wanted to make salt—I wanted to bathe in salt, consume it in large quantities, make heaps and heaps of it. Almost every day for 2 years I thought about making salt. I could not understand the obsession. Then when I arrived in Dominica I saw Joy, my cousin—your great-granddaughter by the road in town. After we greeted each other, I told her I was going to Grand Bay to go by the sea to make salt. I will never forget the look on her face.

(Ma Bessie laughed and Myrtle could see all the spaces where teeth should have been. Ma Bessie's curved hand met the knobby ball of her knee, and she nodded slowly while a smile grew on her face.)

Ma Bessie: Did she tell you that I was the salt maker for the village—that I made salt from that very sea?

Myrtle: She did.

Ma Bessie: Bondye! (Ma Bessie slaps her knee again with the same hand.)

Myrtle: I find it interesting now that you made salt and you were also the storyteller. Knowing that salt is a healing agent makes this something that I want to think about a little more.

Ma Bessie: And what about Kwik! Kwak!—what you call storytelling.

Myrtle: You don't call it that too? They are stories that you are telling right?

Ma Bessie: Maybe it does not matter what we call them.

(Myrtle and Ma Bessie allow a cloud of silence to sit with them again. Neither feeling rushed to speak. The silence between them is a familiar way of being together that has its own exchange. An exchange that cannot be translated—because it can only be shared with Spirit.)

Myrtle: Probably not. But yes Kwik! Kwak! They are healing too aren't they? That is why you told them.

Ma Bessie: Then I told them because that is what I had to do. It is like that feeling you had—what you call the desire. I knew I had to tell them and that was that.

Myrtle: Your mother, Ma Cuffy, she taught them to you.

Ma Bessie: Her father.

(Myrtle looked surprised.)

Myrtle: I thought the stories were passed down from the women.

Ma Bessie: Something like that. Remember my grandfather, Papa Cuffy- Fredrick as people called him sometimes, came from across that ocean. He came with a whole other language in his mouth. He was only a boy. Bound up on an old ship that could barely make the passage from across the ocean. But he arrived with a mouth full of words and he gave them to me. He told me the words over and over until my own mouth was full of them. Others had the words too. So they were not strange to me. Over time those words found our language, and we rolled them together to make Kwik! Kwak! There were many of us who were given the mouth full of words from our grandparents. But Papa Cuffy, he told me I had to share the words on every full moon. And so you know the rest.

Myrtle: I have so many questions about the words. But as I am hearing this, I can't help but feel that Papa Cuffy carried more than words in his mouth.

Ma Bessie: Of course, many people carried what they could. Some had beans or rice in their hair. Others had what you call art in their hands and eyes. Some had wind in their hands and feet. They carried it while bound with chains in a ship that could barely hold them. Do you know why

Papa Cuffy landed here? It was because the British stopped the ship. Slavery was abolished by the British and if they couldn't have slaves, they made sure no one else could. They say that when that ship was stopped by the British it was headed for Brazil. But they had no idea how that ship made it there. It was in a mess. It barely made it to Dominica. Papa Cuffy would have died in that ship if the British didn't stop it. Anyway, they arrived with the wind, the beans, the words and nothing else. They arrived with feet that found the earth with each beat of a drum. They arrived with beans that made meals that stretched. They arrived with carvings in their minds that would later find wood. They arrived with words in their mouth. So many words.

(Myrtle sat back in her chair trying to imagine the scene that her great-great-great-great grandfather's eyes must have met. The chaos of chains, illness, fear, relief, hunger, and imagination. All released on the shores of Dominica.)

Ma Bessie: (Ma Bessie was seeing something that Myrtle wanted desperately to see. So, Myrtle sat quietly letting her speak.) That is what he gave me. The words. He knew I had trouble with the words, but he still gave them to me and made sure I did not forget them.

Myrtle: I can't help but think that each of those people on that ship carried home with them all the way across the ocean.

Ma Bessie: What a way to carry your home—in your mouth, your feet, your hands…your eyes.

Myrtle: What a way to carry your home. In a ship full of all the things we are made to fear. But he carried it anyway—because…like I've been hearing from anyone it is the way we know to survive. I wonder if he told himself these stories on the ship over and over again.

Ma Bessie: Who really knows how you survive that kind of evil.

Myrtle: I keep facing this thing over and over through these conversations I keep having with you and my other people who have passed.

Ma Bessie: What is that you are facing?

Myrtle: This idea that the space we take up or take us up are often what academics like to call fraught. They are unsettling. I've been trying to re-create what is called a homeplace—a place to come back to ourselves. I think the Kwik! Kwak! gatherings were like these spaces.

(Ma Bessie nods, waiting to hear more from Myrtle.)

Myrtle: It seems like the only reason we need a homeplace is because the outside world is so brutal. It requires an escape.

Ma Bessie: That is one way to look at it I suppose.

Myrtle: What I mean is there would not be a need for a homeplace without the brutality in the world. I can't help but think that before enslavement the beauty, retreat, and returning to self was in the physical space outside the home. But once the outside physical space became unsafe the home became essential. I think now my thinking of the homeplace is about returning to each other as well as ourselves. Creating a space that is not just for those who rise and sleep there but a place for a collective return. And maybe that is why it is important for the insistence on a homeplace within the institution—like the way Papa Cuffy carried the words in his mouth in that ship filled with a world of evil and brutality. I think we have to insist on bringing home everywhere we go. It is how we were made to survive. So maybe Toni Morrison is right, one foot will always be in the loophole while the other is in the homeplace. But I see it slightly different—the back foot is constantly kicking the loophole trying to free itself from it while the front holds the body in place offering a place to anchor—to hold.

(Myrtle turns with an ease and swiftness. Ma Bessie watches her go into another world. Myrtle pulls a book from the shelf that is to her right. The book has a picture on the front of what looks like broken pieces of wood suspended from a ceiling. The title, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* is in black text below the image. In red the words Christina Sharpe force its way in front of the title. Myrtle opens the book to the table of contents. There she finds what she is looking for—Chapter Three: The Hold page 68. She flips to the page not knowing what she will find. This is how she works. It is not about having a clear picture of what she is looking for. It is as if she is moving with someone else with a presence that knows beyond her. A presence that asks for her trust and her willingness to follow the continuous unfolding. She turns to page 68 and begins to

read the quote that hangs above the chapter title. She has to read it several times because it does not ring as something recognizable to her.

She reads it again and again. She drops her eyes further down and reads the paragraph below, "One cannot read the words of the second stanza of the first poem of Dionne Brand's Thirsty (published in 2022, one year after A Map to the Door of No Return), encounter her declaration of doorways, and not think of those door(s) of no return all along the West Coast of Africa". Myrtle brings her eyes to the top of the page again to reread the poem for what feels like a tenth time:

> let me declare doorways,
> corners, pursuit, let me say
> standing here in eyelashes, in
> invisible breasts, in the shrinking lake
> in the tiny shops of untrue recollections,
> *the brittle gnawed life we live,*
> *I am held, and held*
> —Dionne brand, Thirsty (emphasis mine).

A knowing settles around her. She feels a band of pressure around her head that is without pain or discomfort. She becomes aware again that she is not alone. That Ma Bessie is there watching and waiting. In a low and slow-paced tone Ma Bessie begins to speak.

Ma Bessie: Kwik

Myrtle: Kwak

Ma Bessie: Kwik (She raises her voice a little louder)

Myrtle: Kwak (Myrtle raises her voice just a little louder to match the energy of Ma Bessie.)

Ma Bessie: Gadé mwen ou tuo mwen ka vini

Myrtle: Lapòt?

Ma Bessie: Oui! Lapòt!

A few weeks later Myrtle is sitting again in her office. This time the Sun has a few more hours to wake. She is seated at her desk working on the theoretical framework she is fine tuning. Earlier conversations about the viability of a homeplace within the institution come back to her. She had spent the better part of yesterday discussing the connection between affinity spaces and the homeplace on a project she was supporting with Dr. Vidya Shah. Since that conversation she wondered if her project and the dissertation could stand. Everyone kept sending Lorde's (2007) words back to her, "The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house" (p.110). She feels the homeplace falling away from her and the project on the whole.

While sitting at her desk she feels a warmth at her back and through her hands. She feels compelled to turn around. There on her corkboard are images of the four sponsors of her work: Audre Lorde, Maya Angelou, Toni Morrison, and bell hooks. It is hooks who is looking at her. Her round afro meets her hand that is resting under her chin. Her slight smile and eyes full of tenderness and warmth are hard to ignore. She pulls the image from the cork board and rests it on her desk in front of her. She knows bell hooks has something to offer and her body warms with the awareness of her presence.

bell hooks: This is not exactly the warmest of places.

Myrtle: Winter and I aren't friends and that little heater over there is constantly going. But this room is a sacred space of mine. It houses all my paintings; my ancestors also have a space over there by the window and Ma Bessie is currently in front of my screen. Behind her is the family tree that connects me to her and my other ancestors. It's a real gathering place this home office. It is my sanctuary and of course now that I think of it—it is a homeplace. My homeplace.

bell hooks: I get the feeling this idea of your homeplace has never come to you before.

(Myrtle turns her mouth downward and gives a micro nod.)

Myrtle: It is strange that I have spent all this time writing and reading about the homeplace and never thought to consider my home and my home office in particular as a homeplace.

bell hooks: I wonder why that is.

Myrtle: Now that I think about it I thought of the homeplace as a place I had to create with some intentionality around it being a homeplace before it could be one. It first had to be defined in my mind and then constructed. But now that I think back to Yearning and what you said in there about the homeplace it was something that evolved into a sanctuary. Not something that was designated.

bell hooks: I am trying to parse out the difference between the evolution of a space and the designation of a space and whether or not that changes things. (hooks looks at Myrtle with the same smile she greeted her with. Myrtle wasn't sure if she should explore this and if exploring it would turn up anything. She had felt this fear all throughout the dissertation that if she followed a thought all the way she may not find her way back to her ideas. She was afraid that the thought would take her beyond her ideas and land her nowhere.)

Myrtle: It's funny that we are starting off here…well maybe funny isn't the word. It is necessary maybe. Because I felt really cut off from the homeplace as a possibility for the moun ki konnet in my project. The focus group sessions I created were supposed to create a homeplace for them to think through their experiences and plan…what I had not considered is that the gathering that came out of that focus group session was another evidence of the homeplace being constructed—a natural evolution for the women.

bell hooks: Where was this gathering?

Myrtle: It was held in a condominium party room near the water. The artist I invited into the project lives in the condominium and offered up the space.

bell hooks: So, you didn't consider that gathering to be part of the homeplace? I wonder why? It seems closer to what I wrote about than the space you used at the university. What was it about the space that did not make you associate it with the homeplace?

Myrtle: I'm really not sure.

bell hooks: Describe the gathering to me a bit more.

Myrtle: During the focus group session, the women said they wanted to meet this way again. They told me that there are very few spaces where they come together as Black women educators to share their experiences, cry, laugh, eat and so on. I was thrilled to hear this and saw an opportunity to support them. I felt as a researcher I was extracting quite a bit from them for my benefit and I felt like supporting them in this ask would level things a bit more.

(bell hooks nodded and made small gestures to encourage Myrtle to continue.)

Myrtle: So, Queen, the local artist we worked with through the project said she could offer her condominium party room. The space was beautiful. It felt like home. There was a large dining table at one end of the room. A large kitchen was placed at another end. I had brought suya—

Nigerian barbeque and some drinks. In the center of the space was a very comfortable sitting area with sofas, chairs, that we used as our space to talk as a large group and also engage in side conversations with those sitting close. One of the most beautiful parts was the large balcony that faced the lake. It was a beautiful night.

bell hooks: I really don't know what to say to you, because I can't understand how you did not consider *this* space as a homeplace. I wonder what was it about your doctoral work, your thinking, and maybe your experience that never allowed you to consider that a homeplace was generated from your work? (hooks chuckled to herself and then glanced back at Myrtle and this time she laughed loudly.)

Myrtle: I am as surprised as you are to be honest. After our first conversation, and then the conversation I had with Toni Morrison I really didn't think I would have much to say or that you would even visit me again. I thought I had misplaced or misunderstood the homeplace. I kept coming back to the chapter in Yearning—reading it multiple times to see if there was something I was missing, something I had left out.

bell hooks: And…

Myrtle: And nothing. Each time I read it I fell more and more in love with the idea of the homeplace but also felt it falling away. It is not until this morning that I was able to recognize the homeplace as a place I created in my home and that was created within the project. I really don't know why I was so blind to both.

bell hooks: Maybe you are used to recognizing the value in space that is not created by you or your community. That sounds a bit harsh—but I think it is common. We wait for something outside ourselves to legitimize something that we have always grown and nurtured. I think this is what we have been taught to do by institutions—especially in education. And maybe because my books and my words have become part of the institution in some way the ideas that I speak about risk becoming part of…

Myrtle: …the institutional fold.

bell hooks: I was not going to put it quite like that.

Myrtle: That is a Sara Ahmed thing…she says that the institution ends up instituting pretty much whatever is in its path—even diversity work.

bell hooks: I was going to say that the ideas I speak about in my books and my talks risk becoming part of academia and not belonging to the community even though it is in the community that I experienced it.

Myrtle: Why do I feel like we are coming back to Audre again?

bell hooks: Because we can't get away from the master…the master is about ownership, and he will even make us believe that what we create for ourselves belong to them so much so that we

might not even recognize it as ours to begin with. I think this is what happened to you in your search for the homeplace. The homeplace is our thing, our space…and because it became part of the requirements for your doctoral work you lost it to the master. But thank goodness for those women who showed you. They showed you that they can and will take it back. They will keep creating the homeplace—just give them a taste and they will yearn for it because it is part of who they have always been.

(Myrtle sat at her desk with her hand under her chin—mirroring the pose hooks holds in the image. She breathes deeply and releases the air. Both women sit in quiet for a bit and allow what needs to sit with them some space to rest.)

A few weeks later Myrtle is in her office. This time she is on a Zoom call and sees in the reflection of her wall of images at her back. She notices something is out of place and reaches for the image that is dangling from one pin rather than two. She swivels back and reaches for that dangling edge and lifts it and pins it again to the corkboard. When she turns around, she notices that the corner has again unhinged itself from the pin. She fixes it again and as she turns around for a second time the same thing happens again. This time she unpins the other corner and sets the image on her desk. The image is of bell hooks. Myrtle feels the warmth from the image that signals an invitation to come through. But she has quite a few tasks to complete. She promises to come back to hooks in a few minutes.

The image of bell hooks sits on her desk for a while. Days and weeks pass. At times Myrtle reaches for the image in front of her. She knows that hooks is trying to reach her but

deadlines, mothering demands, and sometimes exhaustion keeps her away. At one point Myrtle pins the image back on the board behind her. She hopes that hooks will call her again.

Myrtle is sitting at her desk again, weeks after hooks' image first sat on her desk. She feels her body warm and reaches for hooks' images again. This time she sits it on her desk and sets a small lit candle in front of it. She feels uncertainty about whether or not hooks will join her. She refers back to her notes she made from her last meeting with her supervisor. In it there are directions she jotted down to ask bell hooks questions about the homeplace as a transient place. There are also questions about whether the homeplace can be a spiritual and personal space. Does it require a gathering of people in a physical space?

Myrtle's chest feels tight as if tangled in many knots. She had never approached any of her conjured conversations in this way. Typically, the women come through when they have something to say, and a conversation flows without any pre-planning or readied questions. This is how she has understood spirit to move. She continues to wait for hooks to say something—to point her in a direction. She feels hooks is there because she can feel her gaze and her presence. But hooks is quiet and does not say anything. Her presence is all she would offer in this moment. Myrtle thinks back to the last time hooks called on her and she set her image on her desk. She regrets getting busy with work that possibly could have waited. She feels regret at this missed opportunity to connect. But she knows that she has to approach spirit with openness and lightness. Heaviness coming from doubt, fear, and worry do not allow space for spirit to speak.

After some time, the knots in her chest begin to ease and all that is left is a small feeling of pressure in the middle of her chest. It feels as though someone is gently using their index finger to press lightly on the center of her chest. Soon that feeling too eases.

hooks: It was hard.

Myrtle: What was hard? Coming through?

hooks: Yes. (hooks sighs just the slightest.)

Myrtle: I'm sorry for taking your time for granted and not taking the time when I should have to be in conversation with you.

hooks: I know.

Myrtle: I almost lost faith there. I was struggling this morning to insert direction into these conversations. I feel that the institution is trying to institute this—to borrow from Ahmed again. This experience, this relationship between you, the other women who have come through and myself—that is what I feel is being instituted. I struggle to explain how this works. The gathering with spirit—how it is not for me to direct but to follow the unfolding of things before me through relationship with spirit. But this just does not translate well in

an academic space that wants a dissertation that will provide directions on how to arrive where I have ended up.

(A pause rests between them. It feels like there is not much to say. But at the same time the pause is offering something. This something is not tangible. It does not yet have a name. It is just there resting between them. After some time, Myrtle notices that the small candle that sits in front of hooks' image is struggling to keep its flame. The flame is weak. It is so small it looks as if it will go out at any minute. Myrtle almost holds her breath hoping that it won't. She feels the flame is somehow connected to hooks' presence even though she has never lit a candle before to communicate with her. The pause continues to settle deeper between them. Neither hooks nor Myrtle is speaking. They rest with the pause and wait.)

hooks: That was not that bad was it?
Myrtle: To wait? Is that what you mean? (Myrtle begins to feel hooks' presence spread in the form of a knowing.)

hooks: Yes that. It requires some discipline. Some courage even to be able to struggle with what you and Sara call the instituting.

Myrtle: It's mainly Sara who says this. I am just borrowing. (The slightest smile appears at the corners of Myrtle's mouth)

hooks: (She tilts her head as she says this and like she has done many times before dusts imaginary dust from her lap.) You know what I mean. Wow. We are always so careful with ownership in academia, aren't we? And there is good reason for it. But sometimes it clouds the fact that this is shared knowledge. All knowledge is. We are all borrowing it from time to time. I borrow from Thich Nhat Hahn concerning the homeplace. And I'm sure he borrowed from someone else, maybe even centuries before. In a way I guess this deals with the question your supervisor wanted to ask me. We can check that one off. (hooks leans forward slightly rocking herself back and forth as her mouth curls and presses together in the center in the way she does when she is about to laugh but does not.)

Myrtle: I guess it does. It occurred to me this morning that these conversations are a homeplace for me.

hooks: Is that so? How?

Myrtle: Well, it is a way to return to the part of myself that I have to abandon in my daily life when I work. What I mean is that it is the side of myself that is not accepted—talking with spirit? In a dissertation? Ha! I do in the back of my mind worry about the rejection I will get from the academic community. The dismissing looks. The disapproval and the reminder of the words spoken by two professors—one who said Black feminism is not a real thing and the other who said your work was not that rigorous. It is these people that will scan their eyes on this work looking for things like this conversation to dismiss it.

hooks: Do you really care though? You kind of strike me as a quiet rebel.

Myrtle: Well, that is true and also something I am becoming weary of. In a conversation with my supervisor yesterday I was reminded of the difficulty in this journey—just existing in this academic space as a Black woman. In our conversation I was reminded of professors that I have come up against who haven't wanted to see me and my work as anything that warrants engagement. I started in that moment to fight familiar thoughts about whether it is my fault that I come up against so much resistance. It is much easier to rest that there.

hooks: To rest the blame of the resistance you come up against on yourself? I'm sure Ahmed has something different to say about that. How can you blame yourself solely for the response others have towards you and your work? How does that even happen? Do white women in the same academic space do this? (hooks shakes her head in a way to answer her own question.)

(Myrtle wants to say no they don't but there is doubt there too. It is so hard to see the resistance she comes up against as something that is not a solely personal experience. Part of the reason for this is the unending nature of this experience that makes you doubt the experience.)

Myrtle: I find that is something hard to answer. I often doubt myself more when I come up against unfair, unjust, or harmful treatment. I think you spoke about this in All About Love

when you were describing your experiences growing up. Or maybe it was in another text. But I remember that you had something to say about this experience.

hooks: Yes, I think it was in both texts that you are referring to.

(Myrtle turns behind her to pull out Teaching to Transgress and All About Love. She knows that Teaching to Transgress is not where this found but doubts herself and searches there anyway. hooks waits, silently, without correcting Myrtle. She finally turns to All About Love and sees a familiar passage underline on page 9. She reads it.)

Myrtle: "So that just as we would cling to the notion that those who hurt us as children loved us, we try to rationalize being hurt by other adults by insisting that they love us."

hooks: (hooks Smiles slightly not because she is happy but because she is pleased.) This is the second time this passage has come up in these conversations. I think this came up in the conversation you were having with Toni.

Myrtle: Yes, I think you are right. It does not surprise me that it is here again. I don't think I quite got it the first time. I see clearly for once that the institutions I have labored for are always acting as parents who know best through their strict and rigorous disciplining of us unruly academics, educators and so on. And we recognize their power—their infantilizing of us accepts this punishment insisting that it is love. When I was a kid, my mother used to beat me with a belt. Huge welts would crisscross my body. I would feel the burn for days.

The thing is I never hated my mother for this. I still don't. When I had my first son my mother apologized to me for this and explained that she was riddled with fear as a single mother in a new country raising her child on her own and did what she thought was best based on her upbringing. She expressed her sadness at this and recognized it as abuse. She apologized to me sincerely. Instead of us falling into an embrace I pushed her away before there could be one. This destabilizing move in our relationship did not bring me comfort. It brought uneasiness because I did not know what to do with a mother who was sorry, she punished me so severely. I only knew how to accept the punishment as love and guidance rather than harm.

(Myrtle took a deep breath several times to allow the memory space to move. hooks sat waiting for Myrtle to continue.)

Myrtle: And I guess this brings up several problems. One is the harm we experience by our own community even though we love each other. This harm is modeled for us from institutions that are part of the legacy of colonial harm that has been handed down over time. We learn to not only live with this but to enact this harm to each other. This can be the problem with the homeplace. You describe the homeplace in a way that does not acknowledge or address this harm from within, and I guess maybe now that I think of it might be more of a spiritual place that Thich Nhat Hahn describes. I'm not sure now.

hooks: Is this on the list of questions that your supervisor had?

Myrtle: Something like that. It is part of the conversation we are having about spaces—resisting simplifying them. She likes to remind me that we are people who are harmed and harming and so the spaces I am creating and describing need to be cognizant of that. I think this comes from Prentis Hemphill. But this is something my PhD supervisor, Vidya Shah, says frequently.

hooks: I was waiting for you to properly introduce her. (hooks laughs again but this time it is more audible.)

Myrtle: I think it is difficult to hold this harmed and harming conversation in affinity spaces. Because people come to affinity spaces as a way of rejecting harm.

hooks: Well, if you are talking about the homeplace as an affinity space I like to think of it as more of a place to recover self not simply reject the other. And is part of recovering self not also part of recovering all parts of self. The self that is hurting and the self that hurts others. Often, they are part of the same story. I think we just explored that with your lengthy discussion above. How violence has been handed down from imperialism, colonialism, and now through institutionalization, or instituting as your friend Ahmed would say. So, Vidya is right to constantly remind you that this is part of the homeplace—it is part of healing. I mean I start All About Love this way. I begin with resisting my family's insistence on love through measures of harm.

Myrtle: I think part of the difficulty is that we may recognize the other in ourselves. The colonizers within ourselves. The imperialists within ourselves. How we mine each other, harvest the goods we want from each other, without much thought to the ruin it has caused.

(Myrtle wants to keep conversing with hooks but she knows once again the demands of family that cling and clamor for her outside her office door can't wait any longer. She wants so much to stay here—to be in this company of women like hooks that offer guidance and nurturing—that offer a way to return to self. She does not want to leave the safety and warmth of this space. She does not want to go into the space out there that does not offer this, but she knows it is her reality. She must find a way to take this space with her. Maybe if it is just in her mind.)

(Both women say goodbye. Myrtle shares her gratitude for hooks' patience and devotion. She prepares to blow out the candle, but when she reaches it to her mouth the candle extinguishes on its own. She smiles and shakes her head at the same time with equal parts belief and disbelief and leaves her office.)

Kwik (read)

Kwak (say out loud)

Kwik (read)

Kwak (say out loud)

Kwik (read)

Kwak (say out loud)

Gadé mwen ou tuo mwen ka vini (read) *(Look at me, to you I am coming)*

Kwik (read)

Kwak (say out loud)

Gadé mwen ou tuo mwen ka vini (read) *(Look at me, to you I am coming)*

Lapòt? (say out loud) *(The door)*

Oui! Lapòt! (read) *(Yes! The door)*

The conjured conversations with Ma Bessie, Toni Morrison, and bell hooks exposed the tensions inherent in creating homeplaces within institutions for Black women. Through the conversations I not only conjured the meeting between the women, but I also conjured wisdom about the homeplace. I start with Ma Bessie's concept of the homeplace as an inheritance of knowledge through storytelling. Toni Morrison's insistence on the homeplace as a fraught space that can never be completely free from the master follows. Lastly, I explore bell hooks' homeplace and the various shapes it takes.

The wisdom I conjured from Ma Bessie emphasized that the homeplace is a spiritual place that is accessed through a lineage. Ma Bessie saw the homeplace as spiritual technology more than a place. It can be transported across oceans and find a haven within our bodies only to be recovered at another time. This means that the homeplace is transient and can appear dormant. I think back to the moun ki konnet in the project who accessed the homeplace when they told their stories using a call and response storytelling technology that was dormant in their lives but was revived through the act of storying. The homeplace is an inherited spiritual place where knowledge can easily be transferred to support preservation of life. Audre's words, "I will not die!" are emblematic of the life-giving element of the homeplace that itself will not die under colonisation and enslavement. There is an ancestral energetic frequency that the homeplace is

accessed through that is kept alive. We recover ourselves through accessing the knowledge and wisdom found in stories and the arts more broadly.

Another understanding of the homeplace that I conjured drew from the conversation with bell hooks. She understood that the homeplace within institutions will continue to act as a loophole of retreat. She insisted on understanding the homeplace more broadly as being associated with a variety of spaces. What was important to her was our ability to recognize the homeplace without looking for confirmation or validation from the institution. Collins (2022) reminds us of the complex relationship to validation within academic institutions that Black women have. So, insisting on the homeplace within the site of an institution can make creating and identifying the homeplace challenging. Academia and institutions more broadly may have conflicting standards about what is considered a homeplace—hence the important value of self-definition (Collins, 2022). Often contorting the self to adjust to the standards of the institution can create conflicting identity formation. “In an attempt to minimize the differences between the cultural context of African American communities and the expectations of the mainstream social institutions, some women dichotomize their behaviour and become two different people” (Collins, 20222, p. 340). Though Collins is talking about validating knowledge claims within academia, I think this line of reasoning applies to the challenges of trying to fit a Black woman space into the institution. As Collins further explains, any attempt will come at a cost—the cost is usually to Black women’s wellbeing and knowledge systems (Collins, 2022).

I conjured another key element in hooks’ struggle with the concept of the homeplace within institutions. Black women often wait for their sites of knowledge to be legitimized through the institution. Because we are looking for validation from an outsider with a set of values that are different to our own, we may fail to realize the homeplace when it does appear—

more importantly we may fail to recognize the value of the homeplace even when we are in the presence of one. Dillard (2012) insists on resisting the urge to forget because forgetting estranges us from our cultural memories which influence our ways of knowing and being (p. 26). It was not until I engaged in these conversations that I realized that I had access to several homeplaces both physical and spiritual to draw from. Conjuring brought the knowledge back to me. The conjured conversations served as another way to consider the possibility of the homeplace within and outside of institutions for Black women equity educators.

Chapter 8: The Initiation: "Pasé'y: Recommendations & Conclusion

While I was writing the conclusion I asked my mother this question, "What happens when the Kwik! Kwak! is over? What happens next?" What she shared with me was more about the ways the Kwik! Kwak! is shaped by an invitation and initiation—a way to *pasé'y* (pass it along). She explained:

> The storyteller creates a circle, and they begin with their Kwik! Kwak! and the person who responds to it responds also with their Kwik! Kwak! So, it would go like this, Kwik! Kwak! Glo doubout (water that stands or standing water). Someone would respond with un can (cane) and they would then share their own Kwik! Kwak! It would continue and continue around the circle. The storyteller would wait to make sure there were no more Kwik! Kwak! and would say 'Kwik! Kwak! la fini!' and that would be the end of that night until the next time. (In conversation with Emelda Petrolina Bruney, 2025)

I share this story because it resonates with something about Kwik! Kwak! that helped with my conceptualizing of the homeplace that had come through in the conversations with Ma Bessie, bell hooks, Toni Morrison, and the moun ki konnet. I gained a greater understanding about the way the homeplace is a location for stories that support understanding of our environment and our ability to make meaning together. Most importantly the Kwik! Kwak! reminded me that the homeplace is a place marked by hospitality and engagement—an invitation in communion with people and practices that support our recovery of ourselves and the larger community. It requires a physical space where each individual can contribute and engage in self-recovery practices while also contributing to the collective consciousness of a community that transcends time and

place. This chapter then stands as an invitation for the larger community to consider their contribution to the physical and spiritual homeplace for Black women equity educators.

As we move through this chapter it will become clearer that the homeplace is a co-constructed place that invites various people to do their part to "keep the house clean"[48]. It is an invitation into being with Black women educators differently—a way that reconceptualizes what it means to be in solidarity and what it means to belong to a shared inheritance and lineage. I utilize the concept of ubuntu to explore this concept of a shared lineage. I then place a call (Kwik!) to institutions to examine their role in homeplace construction and support followed by a call to the colleagues. This section of the chapter culminates in a letter to Black women equity educators that asks them to consider care across five levels of influence. The rest of the chapter concludes with a revisit to the conceptual framework that includes a discussion on naming the three movements to the internal and external homeplace and culminates with an updated conceptual framework.

From You to Ubuntu

During the summer of 2020, during the first summer of COVID 19 I was asked to lead a weekly book club for the Calm app. Calm is a mindfulness app that offers a range of experiences to support wellbeing. The book that was chosen for the group was, *The Inner Work of Racial Justice: Healing Ourselves and Transforming Our Communities Through Mindfulness* by law professor and mindfulness advocate Rhonda V. Magee (2019). As a long time, meditation practitioner and fresh off a challenging year of racial and gendered harm from my central role as an SSTC I was yearning for something that would reaffirm my sense of belonging and offer healing to my bruised spirit. That year I became a certified mindfulness coach and was about to

[48] This is a West African saying in the Dagara community that emphasizes the collaborative effort to maintain the health of the community.

start a training focused on somatic practices. I was learning a lot about the physical toll of racial and gendered harm and was eager to find ways to redress this harm. I was angry and disillusioned. I was angry at my board, the superintendents I worked with, the complicit staff in the two schools I was trying to support and people who belonged to the long list of staff who had added to my pain and suffering over the years. Little did I know that this book club would have other plans for my anger.

The first session of the book club was nerve racking. Not only was I second guessing my role in facilitating the book club I was meeting a new group of people for the first time. We met on Zoom during people's lunch break. Almost all the participants were from the United States and nearly everyone was white. As I went through the slide deck and the listed activities that went with the chapters of the book, I came across chapter 4. I had decided to lead the group in an exercise found in the book. This was a mindfulness practice that required the group to reflect on our shared human inheritance. As I read the prompts to the attendees on the Zoom call I felt discomfort. I was fighting each line:

> On an in-breath, begin deepening awareness of who you really are.
>
> Call to mind your connection to your parents, and through them, as best you can, your grandparents, and the great-grandparents whose names you know or do not know. And so on. (Magee, 2019, p. 60)

I continued to read the passage that asked the attendees to consider the details of their ancestors—the places they called home, the languages they spoke, and consider the areas in the memory that were unknown. I continued to guide the attendees along with the next set of prompts:

> Consider the fact that every person in that community is a member of a broad, rich lineage within human history. And see how those differences pale in comparison to the things the communities' members share in common.
>
> Take a moment to consider the ways that different histories reflect common experience as human beings.
>
> Think of the peace and cooperation that silently exist in your community, to whatever degree they exist, and the ways in which your life has benefited from thousands of moments of participating in a community that practices "getting along."
>
> Now breathe in and out, feeling the deeper ground of your existence, and that which you share with us, with the rest of the world. Allow the awareness of your common humanity to infuse your sense of your place in the world in this very moment.
>
> On the next in-breath, call to mind what you know about some one particular aspect of your lineage, and on the next out-breath, release what you know, and sense into the common experience of breathing that all human beings share.
>
> (Magee, 2019, p. 60)

It was in this moment that I became aware of the work I needed to do to bring healing to the racial injury that I had suffered as the result of my engagement with equity work. Was I being asked to set aside difference—a difference that gave me a cherished identity that was a cause for my pain was also the source of my pride. Was I really being asked to lay that aside in order to connect to the larger common experience? I was troubled by this ask for some time. And I would be for quite some time after the book club. What I came to question that day was further troubled

by the focus group session where the women in the group shared their common experiences of pain and mistreatment by a system and white people for the most part.

In reflecting on the moun ki konnet and their experience with community I realized I had to also broaden my concept of community—even my transtemporal community. In broadening the concept of who is included in the community of the moun ki konnet I had to first examine difference to answer the question—who is not? How would this reorientation to community reshape their experience? Audre Lorde (2007) in speaking of difference explains that the way we approach difference is connected to the need for one group to justify domination over another group. Maintaining the dominance relies on the distortion of that difference and our inability to recognize the distortion. Our response to the difference then is met with a response that either requires we ignore, copy or destroy the difference (Lorde, 2007, p. 115). Lorde (2007) invites white women—to see Black women "as whole people in our actual complexities—as individuals, as women, as human—rather than as one of those problematic but familiar stereotypes provided in this society in place of genuine images of Black women" (p. 118). She resents not being seen in her full complexity and humanity as a Black woman. She feels she is only ever viewed as a one-dimensional figure—either woman, Black, a lesbian, a feminist—never the whole.

Lorde's request for complexity over simplicity is what prompted me to return to the practice in Magee's (2019) book. The two align because they appear to be asking different things but in fact are asking the same. The mindfulness practice from Magee (2019) starts from a place of difference—the language, location, and customs that shape our culture is the starting point. The practice moves away from difference towards what is shared. The further back we go the more the lineage blurs the difference. Lorde is asking the opposite. She is asking to white women

to resist the blur, so we may be seen in the complex detail that we are. The details that we ultimately share with each other—which in the end create a point of connection between us. The difference is articulated so meticulously that Black women's humanity is visible to white women.

Shah and Peek (2020) also discuss the dehumanizing nature of whiteness through the fragmentation from white people from the rest of humanity. They assert that whiteness dehumanizes white people because white people spend enormous amounts of time and energy on identifying and claiming difference (Shah and Peek 2020, p. 47-48). The urge to maintain difference is what ultimately challenges efforts at engaging in conflict that could allow for connection (Shah and Peek 2020, p 49). Shah and Peek (2020), Magee (2019), and Lorde (2007) are not asking for an erasure of difference. Rather they are asking for more complexity around difference to the point where connection is found. This, in the end, is what takes us from you to ubuntu.

I want to revisit ubuntu again, this time to further emphasize the role of ubuntu in self and community integration across space and time when we do. Ubuntu is a challenging concept to explain. It is often misunderstood and is virtually impossible to translate in English. It is about a way of being that is transtemporal in nature. It truly troubles concepts of beingness, time, and individualism. Chigumadzi (2023) attempts to explain the concept of ubuntu. She states:

> Ubuntu's dynamic conception of umuntu, is of a social being who is always becoming through their community of people, abantu. This is why abantu say 'ningenze umuntu ebantwini', you…have made me a person among people. Ubuntu, therefore, holds that in constantly becoming 'umuntu ebantwini', a person among people, one must continually uphold the personhood of others.

> Failure to uphold the personhood of another results in social death, so that we might declare awuyena muntu, you are not a person. (Chigumadzi, 2023, p. 29)

The concept of constantly becoming through the community means that we have a responsibility to uphold the livingness of each other. The moun ki konnet spoke frequently about incidents of social and physical harm. So much so that the women had to proclaim their desire to live—a practice of nommo. Ubuntu exposes how we are implicated in the livingness and becoming of the other. This is what a complex orientation to difference offers. A way to both see the self and see each other through the self at the same time. Our identity that carries notions of difference and connection is affirmed through each other. The identity is further reinforced or destroyed through the distortion or accurate representation and expression. This is the reason why tropes are life taking. They are a distortion of the difference that separates you from ubuntu.

Community is often seen as an aim of education. A way to live as ubuntu. Through the stories shared in this dissertation the notion of school as bearing an aim to create community is troubled. The moun ki konnets words meet us again:

Kwik!

"I will not die!"

Kwik!

"I am being filled and being healed".

Kwik!

"Ay! Ay!"

Kwik!

"I will not die!"

Kwik!

“They don’t realize I’m a token!”

Kwik!

“I started as digestible and accommodating”.

Kwik!

“I called these people my work family”.

Kwik!

“I saw my board--boom! This place is super shady”.

Kwik!

“They don’t realize I’m a token!”

Kwik!

Me and my ancestry.

Kwik!

But like, what is it?

Kwik!

Rooting myself in the knowledge of my people.

Kwik!

Me and my ancestry.

Kwik!

But like, what is it?

Kwik!

Connection and belonging.

Kwik!

When the three sets of storybands are woven together it is clear to see the journey to disconnection that is shaped by difference. The journey begins with life reclamation, continues to be distorted difference, and finally arrives at a remedy found in belonging. Through ubuntu we understand the lifegiving attribute that belonging holds. Ubuntu reminds us that we are implicated in the suffering and the joy of each other. We have a shared responsibility to address both in the lives of our communities. These words are beautiful to say but what do they mean for the people who return to the buildings littered with broken connections and to colleagues who may find comfort in maintaining the marks of difference? More importantly what can we ask of these colleagues if we dared to? What can we ask of institutions who make equity work necessary?

The Work of Institutions: Use "Difference as a Springboard for Creating Change"

The homeplace being a distinct Black space requires sponsorship by the institution for there to be meaningful change. The homeplace is not only meant to serve as a feel-good space that has no other impact beyond the walls of the space. It is meant to be a site of activism to gain greater ease and liberation with the institution that creates the conditions for the harm[49]. The two must exist hand in hand—an affinity space that centers care and pleasure while also asking for change on the outside. hooks reminds us that the homeplace "was about the construction of a safe place where black people could affirm one another and by so doing heal many of the wounds inflicted by racist domination" (hooks, 2014, p. 42) while insisting on changing the systems that oppress them through activism. Similarly, Hall et al., (2025) recommends a focus on

[49] "As the employer, the school board has the overarching responsibility to provide safe and healthy workplaces. The school board has extensive responsibilities with respect to safe schools under the *Education Act* and with respect to worker health and safety under the OHSA. Safe and healthy working and learning conditions are good for everyone in the school community" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2024). In the same way that health and safety standards are the responsibility of the school principal and the board at large, physical/emotional injury due to unsafe working conditions in equity work need a redress that is endorsed and protected by the schools and school boards.

Black woman wellbeing that shifts institutional processes. “To simply understand the barriers Black women encounter in universities is not sufficient. There must be personal, instructional, and system commitment to recruitment, retention, and supporting Black women to thrive” (Halls et al., 2025 p. 9).

I propose we ask institutions to consider two forms of support; the first is informational in nature and the second is relational. First, institutions need to provide information that not only addresses the racism in the buildings but supports educators in knowing how to walk together as they navigate difference. Lorde (2007) urges us to consider how to use difference as a “springboard for creating change” (p. 115). Secondly, institutions should focus on the relational aspects of creating change with equity work performed by Black women. They should consider engaging with difference in ways that are relational. Anti-racist work in schools is focused on identifying the problem of racism and then creating a series of action points that signify its end. The trouble with that is most people do not believe this is entirely possible because of the overwhelming feeling that addressing difference produces. There is a lack of focus regarding anti-racism work that supports engaging with conflict directly for this reason. Shah and Peek (2020) assert that whiteness prevents us from engaging in conflict because it risks exposing either of lack information or removes us from the identity of innocence. What is needed is the support for people to learn how to engage in conflict that can support change. I fear there may be serious limits to this work because institutions are ill equipped to address conflict due to their risk-adverse orientation.

Learning the skill of using difference to create change even with the risk of conflict is important work. As a trained mediator that worked with community groups and legal cases for the province, I have been able to use the fundamental principles and practices I gained from that

experience to navigate challenging teaching and learning experiences. In the early 2000s there was a strong push provincially for conflict resolution. The conflict resolution push took a hold in various sectors including family law and school anti-bullying programs. Surprisingly it never took hold as part of the culture in schools in an application to teachers and other school staff. Mediators were called in to teach conflict resolution skills to students to prevent bullying and isolation. I was not aware of its use for teacher integration.

From my conflict resolution training and work I learned that there were 4 components of a conflict resolution process; the opening that included introductions, storytelling (where each side gets to share their story), identifying each other's interests, and brainstorming solutions in a collaborative manner. The middle sections of the process are two practices that have stayed with me 25 years later. Allowing people to tell their story uninterrupted and asking questions only for clarification not fact checking are powerful tools. I found that when most people felt they had been heard in an intimate way—a process that involves close listening without judgement—they were much more at ease. This is a great opportunity to attend to the second important component—identifying the interests of the other. Again, intimate listening is necessary here. When the non-speaker is listening, they are trying to identify what the central message that the other person is trying to communicate to them is. What is it that the person really wants the other to understand? The other shows understanding by speaking in a mirroring way. The speech is all about checking to make sure their understanding is correct. This supports the speaker in eventually being able to offer the same to the other. I am not advocating that institutions implement conflict resolution programs per se, what I am asking for is to consider ways to shift the culture in schooling that sees conflict as an indication of weakness or a threat and rather view it as a transformative tool. This of course requires that institutions provide opportunities for staff

to develop these skills alongside anti-racism work to learn how to support relationships that include "good colleagues" in schools and boards.

Learning how to approach equity work in a way that emphasizes identifying the other's interest and encouraging storytelling could support creating change. Conflict is not seen as a threat to the social order rather it is an indicator that an opportunity for growth has arrived. The culture within institutions of education needs to shift from one of fear of conflict to one that engages in conflict and difference. The focus on fear is damage centered because it focuses on the problem whereas the focus on difference engagement is generative because it counters avoidant behaviour.

The Work of the "Good Colleague"

School Boards, Ministries of Education, and schools that employ Black women educators to conduct equity work can support workplaces by creating programs that offer built in support that are similar to mentorship programs. The workplaces where Black women are employed to perform equity work need to invest in learning that focuses on changing the culture of equity work to remove the risks that include Black social, physical, mental, and emotional loss as well as professional loss. This research has examined in detail the risk to physical and social harm that impact Black women conducting equity work. A just response from colleagues and the institutions involves a focus on the relational.

Katherine Espinoza, a professor of education, and Theresa Garfield, a professor of special education shared their journey with mentorship in their article, "'It's Me, Do You Have a Second?': How Testimonios and Personal Narratives of Mentorship and Friendship Help a Tenure-Track Latina Navigate the Academy" (2023). They stressed a reciprocal orientation to mentorship where each member can learn from the other. The model that Espinoza and Garfield

propose is meant to support “workplace integration” (Xu et. al., 2024). Workplace integration is a lens that focuses on how an individual feels about coworkers within their organization when their workplace is marked by homophily (Xu et. al., 2024). Homophily is described when people prefer interacting with others with similar traits and attributes because of the lower likelihood of conflict and discomfort (Bryne, 1971 by way of Xu et. al., 2024 p. 1158). The fear of conflict again is the mechanism that maintains difference and prevents integration.

The women in this doctoral project clearly articulated a desire to improve their relations with their white colleagues. They felt similar to Harriet Williams in the 1960s that white women were not willing to cross racial borders to stand with them. They sensed that white women’s allegiance to each other prevented them from being co-conspirators. They felt their colleagues were acting as allies which they felt were ineffective because there was very little direct action involved. The relational ask involves moving from allyship to co-conspirator to sponsor along the solidarity line. The ally is a friend—a person that might listen and offer support with listening and offering advice. The co-conspirator is someone who may stand alongside you in the face of misogynoir. The sponsor is someone who does the hard work of identifying barriers and supports and engages in direct action to either secure the access or remove the barrier. What differentiates the three in my conceptualization of the terms is the level of risk to their own social (and at times economical) security. The sponsor must be in a position to tolerate this type of risk. This may seem like a lot to ask. However, we have to remember that the moun ki konnet are being asked to absorb the same types of risk. Though the moun ki konnet in the project asked for co-conspirators over allyship I wanted to introduce a third option to improve the level of solidarity offered.

For moun ki konnet to recover themselves and be seen in the fullness of their humanity they require a space to work from that has colleagues who take the role of a care sponsor. A care sponsor is a person who facilitates the resources, access, and support needed to bring about a result for another that facilitates care within the work environment. The care sponsor is a person who is not conflict or risk adverse which supports them in being able to engage in direct action. The role of the care sponsor in mitigating some of these challenges moves beyond traditional roles of mentorship and moves towards a form of advocacy.

Dear Black Women Equity Educators,

This dissertation is a mirror for you that can hopefully create awareness about the journey you too have been on. In this awareness you can identify a community of practice that includes colleagues, sponsors, Black women both in the spirit and the physical world that can walk alongside you. This letter is to remind you of the movements you can make towards a homeplace that supports your recovery in co-creation with others.

To support a movement towards the homeplace within institutional spaces an assessment of care across domains is necessary. I began working on a care assessment tool during 2022 when I wrote the proposal to the doctoral project. The tool was inspired from Callwood et. al.'s, (2022) diagram, Traits of Inclusive SciComm across multiple spheres of influence. I appreciated the way the diagram illustrated the role of various domains in embedding inclusive practices. I created a Care Across Levels of Influence tool for Black women educators. This tool serves as a guide to help assess care practices within the domain of the self, affinity groups, colleagues, institutions, and society at large (see Figure 36).

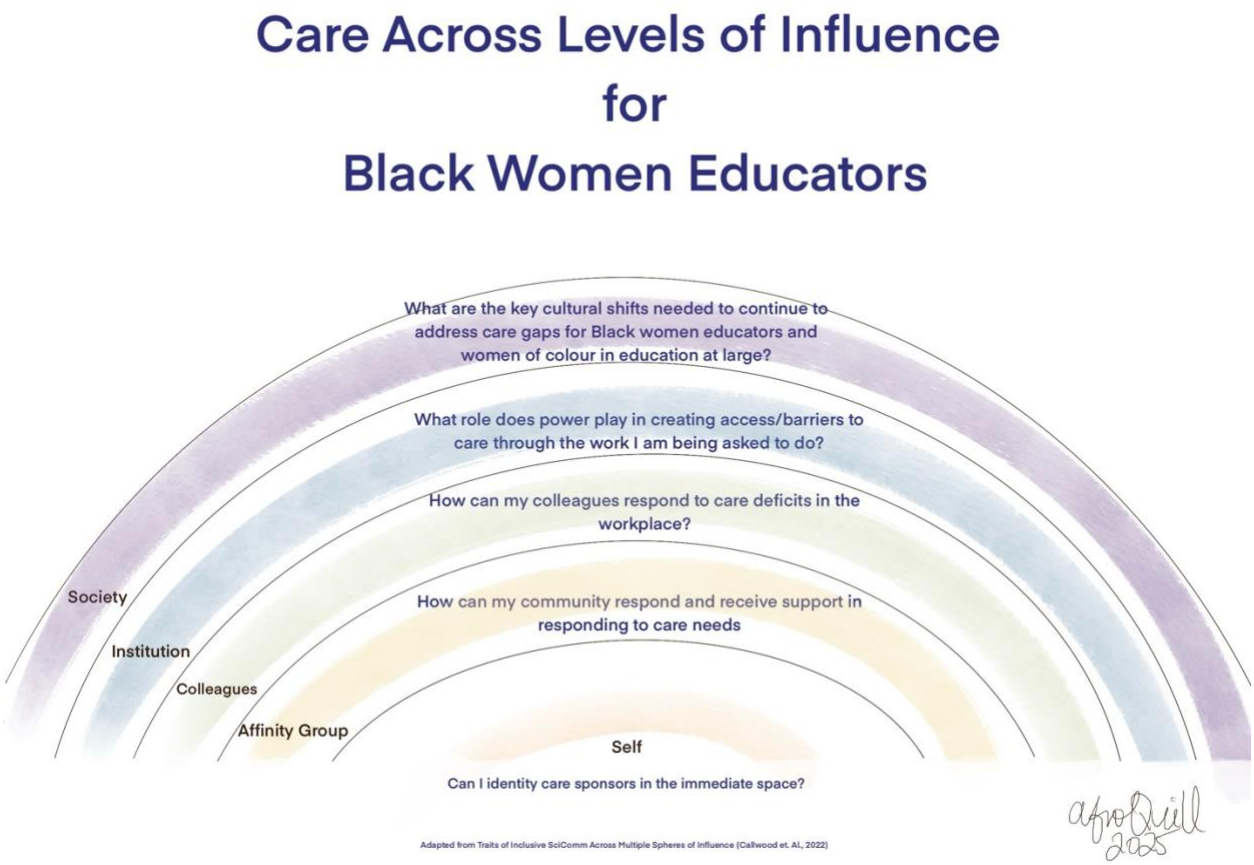

Figure 39: Care Across Levels of Influence for Black Women Educators

The first domain invites Black women educators like yourself to ask themselves to identify care sponsors in their immediate working environment. You may begin by asking yourself the following question: Can I identify care sponsors in the immediate spaces I work within? The next domain is the domain of the affinity groups you may belong to. If you are not part of the affinity spaces this will help you locate a care gap that you might want to consider receiving support for. The question regarding the affinity group is: How can our communities receive support in responding to care needs in equity work? The affinity space might also consider the question for the next two domains to help them clearly articulate their needs. The domain of the colleagues is next. The question that is part of the care assessment regarding the

colleagues is: How can colleagues respond to care deficits in the workplace? Care deficits are found in areas within policy, practice, relations, workplace culture, and the education space that could create care gaps for Black women educators. The next two domains are questions Black women like yourself, and your affinity groups can ask institutions and society more broadly. The first of these two is the question for the institutions that ask Black women educators to engage in equity work. You can ask: What role does power play in creating access/barriers to care through the work I am being asked to do? Finally, the last question asks you to reflect on the cultural shifts needed: What are the key cultural shifts needed to *continue* to address care gaps for Black women educators and women of colour in education at large? The continue is stressed here because production of identity and culture is in constant motion. Black women need to continue to interrogate the way their identity is shaped through and within cultural narratives. This doctoral project has always held a quiet wish that the work of this project would eventually serve as an invitation that extends to other women to assess the cultural influences that may be harmful to their work environment. It is part of the pasé'y —passing it on.

This assessment tool is one of several steps in supporting Black women educators in creating homeplaces within institutions where you can engage in life making, cultural rematriation, and self-representation that is affirming. The questions are a guide that will help you identify your needs while engaging in conversations that will support your movement towards the homeplace.

Sincerely,

Myrtle Sodhi

Initial Conceptual Framework of the Movement from Loophole to Homeplace

My initial conceptual framework identifies three spaces that define equity work for Black women educators—2 main sites and a transitionary site. The main sites are the Loophole and the Homeplace. The transitionary site, the Home-Raising, is more about the practices that bridge the two spaces. Fearon (2024) and McKittrick (2006) discuss space-making and how it reveals the protective knowledge building and world making desires of Black women. Fearon (2024) states, "space-making reflects Black mothers' ability to disrupt and reinvent both public and private spaces for contemplation and refuge from anti-Blackness" (p. 487). The homeplace in this context does just that. The mere possibility of it as a site that moves away from misogynoir disrupts the space that exposes Black women equity educators to harm.

What was clear through the conjured conversations and the engagement with the practices in the retreat style focus group sessions were the ways the awareness of the homeplace can be easily obscured because the loophole was obscured. The awareness drives both what they need to do to leave the loophole and what they need to do to recognize the possibility of the homeplace and their ability to construct it. To start, moun ki konnet must be given space and time to reflect on their experiences. Many of the participants admitted to burying experiences to survive the harm that was directed towards them through equity work. Awareness is a key element that facilitates the movement to the homeplace thus making awareness a key change making mechanism.

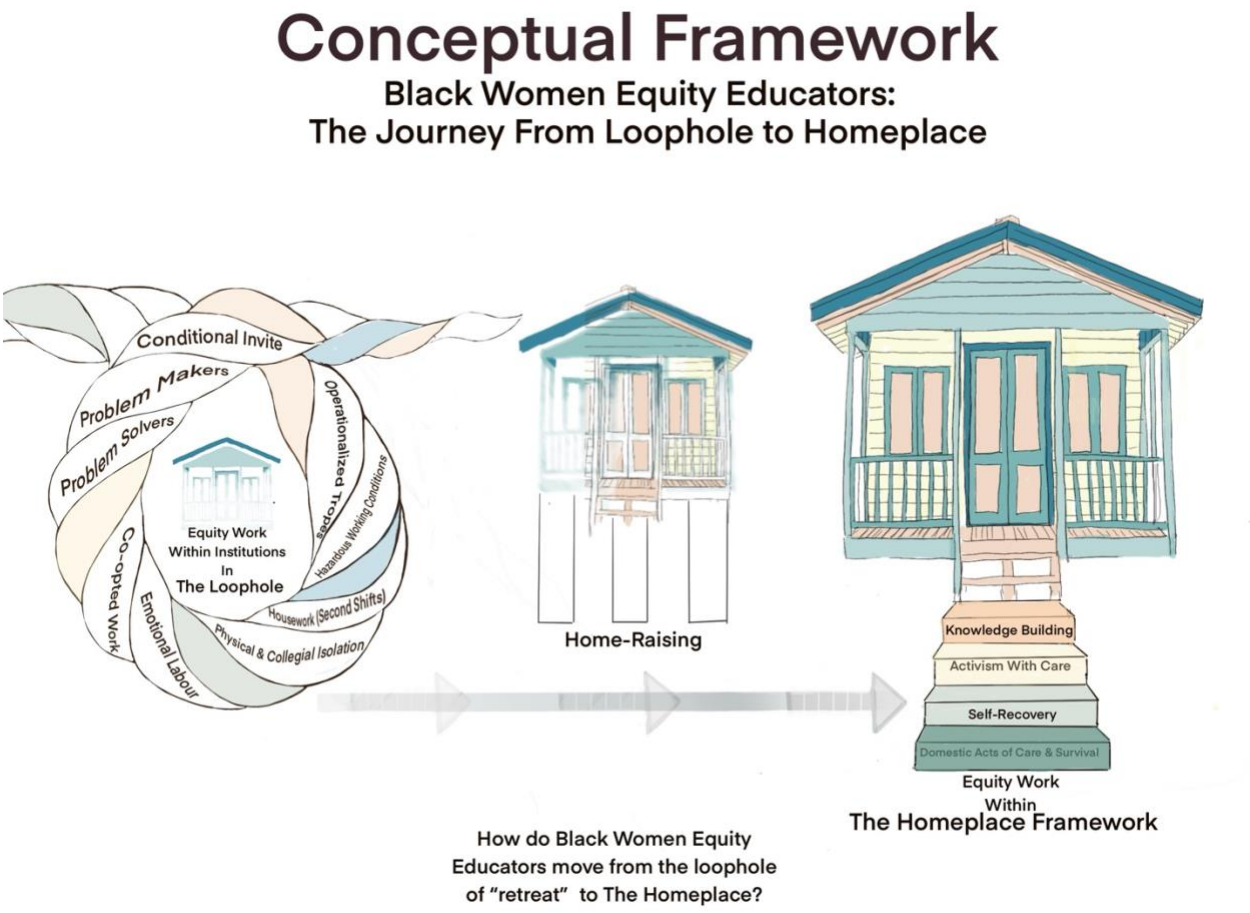

Figure 40: Original Conceptual Framework

The Updated Conceptual Framework

The updated conceptual framework (see Figure 38) reflects the cause for the movement from the loophole to the homeplace. As I engaged further with the interviews, focus group sessions, the online survey, and the workbooks I realized that there were three stages of awareness that developed. These three stages of awareness created the movements towards the homeplace. As I explored the awareness that led to the movements, I also began to see a correlation between Fanon's patterns of resistance and Dillard's ideas on forgetting and (re)membering.

The first stage involved moun ki konnet becoming aware of the configurations of their working conditions that aligned with the loophole. They accessed events and feelings that they

had been seduced into forgetting. Dillard (2012) reminds us that this is a form of oppression—a way to keep us away from life giving and sustaining ways of being and knowing. This represents the first stage of Fanon's patterns of resistance—sign reading. Sign reading occurs when people are able to identify patterns of oppression and the "symbols of dominant power" which are often invisible (Suarez, 2018, p. 20). For the moun ki konnet these were related to being able to recognize how their work was shaped by power dynamics that created oppressive environments. Once they were able to see this alignment, they developed a desire to name the oppressive experiences and identify a need for another location to support their work. The practice of forgetting was replaced with accessing memories that connected their past experiences to their present situation and feelings.

Another movement generated from awareness was the arrival at the home-raising. This was the beginning of construction of another site that was more liberating and healing. Accessing memories helped moun ki konnet become aware of the distorted identities used against them (even by themselves). This is part of Fanon's second pattern of resistance—deconstruction. As memories are accessed that concern distorted identities the moun ki konnet began to understand how the signs of power they identified earlier shaped harmful identities that were used to further oppress them. They accessed this awareness through their collaborative storytelling that happened during the focus group discussion and more notably during their digital portraiture engagement with Queen. The engagement with the booklet was part of the artmaking where they could see the inner workings of harmful narratives.

The last stage that facilitated the move to the homeplace was the awareness that there were alternative sites to conduct equity work. This supported (re)membering practices that includes what Dillard names as cultural memories that offer transtemporal connections which

ultimately result in “bringing the members of ourselves back together again” (Dillard, 2012). Cultural memories have a transformative effect—“they influence our ways of knowing (epistemology) and our ways of being (culture) in what we call the present” (Dillard, 2012, p. 26). This is consistent with Fanon’s reconstruction phase where the signs are restructured to create a different reality (Suarez, 2018, p. 21). The three components to resisting the oppressive forces that shape our identity; recognizing the signs of the patterns of domination, understanding the relationships between narratives and power, and telling a new story are all represented in the movements the women made.

As an attempt to better understand the movement from homeplace to loophole I returned to the moun ki konnet individual loophole to homeplace maps. I merged their maps and found that an iteration of an internal homeplace was needed. For the collective physical homeplace to be established they had to move towards and construct an internal spiritual homeplace as well. When I revisited the affirmations they created, I realized that they all spoke to internal home-raising efforts. Many of the moun ki konnet saw the activities they were invited into as supporting an internal home-raising within the larger homeplace that included the other moun ki konnet. They were able to use these practices to support private reflection and co-created storying engagement with the other moun ki konnet. This internal home-raising generated through their gazework and subsequent digital portrait revealed beliefs grounding in resisting forgetting to support creating a new reality. The affirmations included these statements, “I am enough”, “My existence is resistance”, “I am perfectly made”, “Know your worth”, “I am worthy of peace and rest”, and “I envision a future where I am free to use my voice as I see fit”. I read these affirmations as part of the third element of resisting domination—telling a new story that emphasizes mutuality (Suarez, 2018). Telling a new story establishes balance when the power

imbalance produces extractive relationships. The new story re-establishes their needs, interests, and values as being on par with the larger community. The moun ki konnet affirmations circumvented repeating the old story and inverted the messaging. Rather than exclaiming I am oppressed, they exclaimed I am deserving of being heard, valued as I am, and given rest from burdensome labour. This is a definite practice in self-recovery, a key step towards both the internal and external homeplace.

The updated conceptual framework shows the correlation between the three storythreads that emerged and the movements to the internal and external homeplaces. The first storythread that calls for life-making redresses the physical and social harm the moun ki konnet became aware of as they resisted forgetting. The second storythread energized the movement from loophole to homeplace because of the desire the moun ki konnet had to (re)present themselves. In order to (re)present themselves the moun ki konnet engaged in deconstruction as a practice in resistance. Through the arts-based methods they were able to better understand the connection to the way their identity was used to speak to diversity but not equity—a pattern of tolerance that is linked to patterns of domination (Suarez, 2018, pp. 17). Finally, the third storythread validated the need for the life-giving element of an Afrocentric rematriation—offering another strong motivator to construct the homeplace and a form of reconstruction that impacts their ways of being and knowing. The awareness they developed as they moved through all three locations, (the loophole, the home-raising, the homeplace) created a just/counter response to the oppression they experienced.

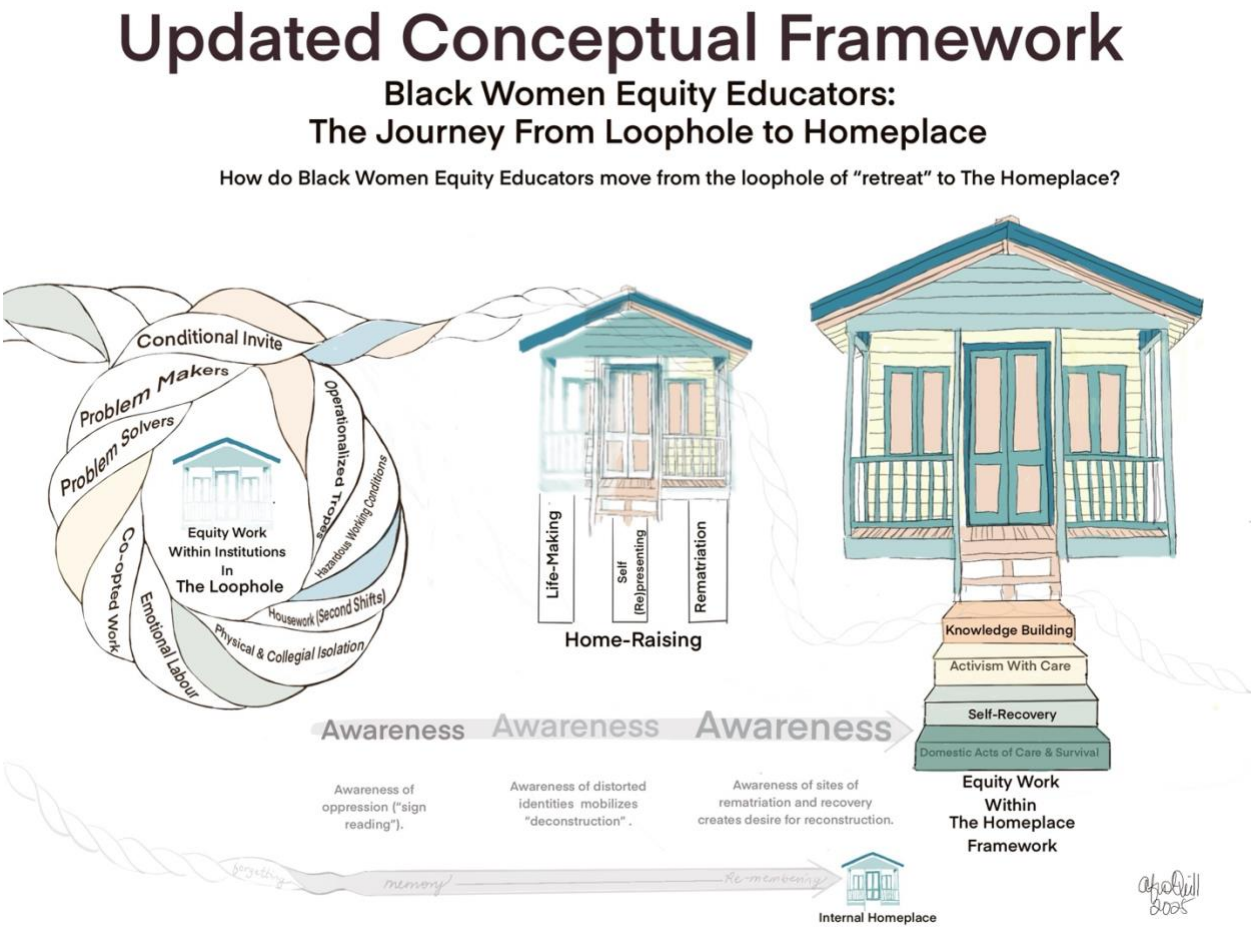

Figure 41: Updated Conceptual Framework

Though the construction of the homeplace through the project supported the moun ki konnet in moving from the loophole, there are limitations to the ways the homeplace can be operationalized within or adjacent to educational institutions that were built on colonial logics. In the updated conceptual framework (see Figure 38) you can see a faint drawing of a rope stemming from the loophole that continues through the home-raising and into the homeplace for both the internal homeplace and external homeplace. At times the rope from the loophole is hardly visible. This is to mark the presence of colonial logics that will follow the women wherever they go. Some of this presence will be felt and some will continue to operate underground. The colonial ways of being will impact the relationships the women have with each other even under the roof of the homeplace. Under this framing, and in general, the

homeplace cannot escape complexity and harm. It is not a space for everyone, it cannot address every situation and is not a space in which everyone's needs can be sure to be met. Like all responses to harm, the homeplace can reflect the needs and identities within people who also bring their own ways of harming. Despite this challenge the homeplace is a suitable place to confront these truths about how we can replicate the harm we have experienced. The homeplace offers an affinity space where recovery of the individual and collective self for Black women can be addressed.

The homeplace as a site of rematriation for Black women equity educators reunites Black women with Indigenous knowledge. The homeplace also rematriates the ways of holding and sharing knowledge that is transtemporal in nature which validates their ways of knowing that they may have been led to distrust or diminish. Finally, the homeplace as a site of rematriation invites Black women to be a part of a tradition of text and meaning making that is palimpsest in nature. What is significant about these iterations of the homeplace that unfolded throughout the project and with the conjured conversations with my transtemporal co-creators is the recognition of the homeplace as a physical and spiritual place as well as a place that exists within internal and external places.

Conclusion

In this doctoral project I applied key tenets of Black feminist, Afrocentric, and research-creation approaches to support Black women equity educators' movement from The Loophole of Retreat, a small enclosure of freedom with harm, to The Homeplace–a place of activism with care. As a result, these three storythreads emerged; Black loss in equity work demands Black women life-making, Black women equity educators have complex relationships to the operationalization of tropes in equity work, and the homeplace can be a site for rematriation.

The findings from this doctoral project highlight the exposure to harm and the need for sites of care that support Black woman life-making for Black women educators. The Madras storying textile generated from this study contributes to the emerging literature on the impact of misogynoir on Black women's equity related labour experiences and the necessity of sites of recovery that can inform ongoing Afro-feminist theorizing in research.

This doctoral project also supported the construction of homeplaces within and adjacent to institutions for Black women conducting equity work. The storythreads highlighted the need to utilize difference to create change, the value of belonging to a shared lineage, and understanding the role of the good honest colleague and institutions in supporting Black women equity educators in life making, rematriation, and (re)presenting. The three storythreads call attention for more research that examines the labour experiences of Black women K-12 educators. In the past couple of years there have been mass exits or pushouts of women in equity related roles as well as an increase in anti-equity rhetoric which puts women doing the work at greater risks (The Black Women's Institute for Health, 2025). The potential for psychological distress due to misogynoir experienced by the women in equity related work is troubling. The recent report, Voices Unheard: Healthcare barriers and the lived experience of Black women in Canada (2025) by The Black Women's Institute for Health uncovered a concerning finding. They reported that 48% of their respondents had experienced push out or were forced to leave their workplace due to discrimination, lack of support or bias (The Black Women's Institute for Health, 2025, p. 5). What I found even more concerning was that most respondents belonged to the education sector. This recent report points to an area of research that my doctoral project also points to—the correlation between Black women's wellbeing and their employment experiences in educational spaces.

This doctoral study revealed the ways equity work creates physical, social and mental Black loss and the roles tropes play in as a limited protection and injury for Black women. The use of tropes as a site of protection should alarm educational leaders and call them to sponsor homeplaces that offer sites of self-recovery where Black women can be seen, heard, and witnessed in the fullness of their humanity. The role of Afrocentric ways of knowing and being in recovering the self is another area that warrants attention from educational institutions. This study also highlighted areas of neglect and oversight by institutions of education engaged in equity work that create harmful experiences for Black women due to the gendered and racial oppression that are a direct result of the work they are asked to perform.

Epilogue

Kwik! (read)

Kwak! (say out loud)

Gadé mwen ou tuo mwen ka vini (read) *(Look at me, to you I am coming)*

Lapòt? (say out loud) *(The door)*

Oui! Lapòt! (read) *(Yes! The door)*

The Door of Return opens to a walled room in transition. The roar of the ocean is heard with each opening. A room that was once tucked away below and opposite the master's quarters. This is the room where he once stood gazing at the hard stoned floor below him. His eyes no longer scan the floor looking for another woman that he could dehumanize and objectify. Instead, the door opens to a room full of breezy windows that catch the scenes of life-making as it continues to catch the roar of the Atlantic Ocean from behind. The mix of the roar of the water from behind and the sounds of life-making in front is a space that echoes with violent and benevolent sounds—a place where the spirits of the once chained women found a place to settle. In front of them through the windows full of breeze they can see women tending to each other by the braiding of their hair. They can see women sitting side by side exchanging the stories of the day. They see women returning from the market with baskets that earlier caused the shapes of their backs to alter now walking with ease in their steps. They see women sharing the weight of heavy loads by each pair holding on to a side of the load—each one finding a way to transform the lives of each other through daily acts of survival. The door continues to swing behind them with the breeze from the water pushing it back and forth.

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Glossary of Terms

Benchmark Memory: A key memory that can support exploring a larger experience. It is part of a larger practice within narrative beginnings that belongs to narrative inquiry research method (In conversation with Eliza Pinnegar, 2023**)**.

Griot: An African concept that relates to a person in the community that holds the cultural lineage of the community. They are tasked with protecting and passing on the knowledge that is often held in songs, dance, music, storytelling and other artforms.

Homeplace: A Black woman space bell hooks developed that stemmed from the work of Tibetan Buddhist monk, Thich Nhat Hahn who describes homeplace as a true place of retreat.

Home-raising: Focus group practices that included rememory work, storytelling, and identity affirming activities that support the creation of the homeplace in the research project.

Intersecting Storying Space: Intersecting storying spaces are created when differing key storythreads intersect. They are bands of key individual stories (findings) that can be woven together to examine how stories come together and how they come apart.

Interstitial Storying Space: This is a term influenced by Homie K. Bhabha's hybridity concept as explored by Maria Thomas (2023). It represents the space created between stories—a space where they do not intersect or come together but create space for a coming together of different ideas.

Kwik! Kwak!: An Afro-Caribbean call and response storytelling practice. The storytelling practice involves sharing stories repeatedly to create a place for them amongst the people. The storyteller needs the audience to participate in the storytelling and will frequently rely on their encouragement and participation to keep the story going. The stories and even the pronunciation of the practice varies from island to island.

Kwik! Kwak! Researcher: A researcher that insists on recognizing, recording, and sharing the storying of both the researcher and the participants. They connect the stories through the various stages of the research project. The Kwik! Kwak! researcher engages with rememory and conjuring practices where (community) scholars of the spirit world are engaged. The Kwik! Kwak! researcher values curiosity, imagination, and creativity over capturing knowledge, and transtemporal engagement over a focus on futurity.

Loophole of Retreat: A small enclosure of protection that an enslaved woman, Harriet Jacobs created to hide from her master that did not allow her to stand upright.

Madras Storying Textile: Storythreads that are woven together form a storying textile. Madras refers to the de-emphasis on patterns and themes and on the ways the stories converge and diverge to reveal larger historical and national narratives.

Moun Ki Konnet: To honour the ways of knowing the participants come to the project with I wanted to call them something other than participants. I also use this term more broadly to describe anyone who is interacting with Kwik! Kwak! and Kwik! Kwak! storytelling research.

Spirituality: Through thinking alongside scholars like Somé (1999) and Dillard (2012), I am defining spirituality as ways of knowing and being that increase an awareness of the interconnection of beings, elements, and temporalities. Like Dillard, I believe spirituality involves practices of remembering. I also include practices of conjuring in my understanding of spirituality that I explore further in Chapter 7. Conjuring is about accessing what we know and seek to connect with that is not bound in the physical world alone. It also emphasizes a collective knowing and sharing of that knowledge that is not bound by time.

Storybands: Storybands are key individual stories. Similar to Toliver's (2022) quilting analogy storybands honour individual stories on their own while also seeing the value in the way they come together with other story bands.

Storythreads: Storythreads are bands of key individual (findings) stories that can be woven together to create a Madras storying textile where people can examine how stories come together and how they come apart. Storythreads can also be read on their own. Similar to Toliver's (2022) quilting analogy storythreads honour individual stories on their own while also seeing the value in the way they come together. Toliver is interested in the ancestral knowledge/stories that are revealed through her quilting analogy. I am more interested in the ways stories reveal larger narratives. In particular I am interested in the way the weaving of stories makes visible larger historical and national narratives (Madras storying textiles) that speak to experiences that are shaped largely by identity.

Appendices

Participant Registration Form

Please complete the form to sign up to participate in the Black Women K-12 equity Educator: From Loophole to Homeplace research project. This project is for Black women educators only.

This project:

- Examines the lived experiences of Black Women educators through their involvement in equity, diversity, and inclusion work
- Explores Black women's role in equity in K-12 schools and school boards
- Uncovers the informal and formal roles Black women educators play in the diversity movement
- Considers the harm they experience through equity work
- Employs Afrocentric and Black feminist thought
- Utilizes arts-based and embodiment methods to uncover the experiences of Black Women K-12 equity educators

* Indicates required question

Email:*

First & Last Name*

Pronouns

Which city do you live in/near?*
Toronto
Edmonton (Online)
Halifax (Online)
Other:

Does your role encompass some form of equity work:*
Yes
No
I'm not sure

What type of formal (assigned & compensated) or informal (volunteered/told & non-compensated) equity work do you?*

Is there anything else that is important to know about you?*

Please use this space to ask any questions you may have:*

Thank You!
Thanks so much for taking the time to fill out the registration form. I will be in touch with you over the next two weeks. Don't forget to press submit to complete the registration process.

Informed Consent Form Template

Date:

Study Name: Black Women EDI Educators: From Loophole to Homeplace

Researcher: Myrtle Sodhi, Full-time PhD Candidate, Faculty of Education, York University
Graduate Supervisor: Dr. Vidya Shah

Purpose of the Research:

The Black Women EDI Educators: From Loophole to Homeplace project seeks to better understand the "emotional labour" that Black women EDI (equity, diversity, inclusion) educators are expected to perform through a retreat-style gathering. In addition to the gathering participants across Canada will be invited to complete a survey that asks them to describe their experiences as EDI educators. The project will support Black women educators in exploring the impact of the EDI movement on their personal and professional lives. This project aims to provide a new ethic of care based on Afrocentric and Black feminist thought.

This research is urgently needed due to the (mis)use of EDI to address racism and oppression within the education sector. Very little research is conducted with Black K-12 EDI educators whose diversity work is often connected to their classroom work or other central roles. This is a concerning trend that places additional labour on educators who are already burdened with the violent effects of white supremacy and racism.

This project:

- Examines the lived experiences of Black Women educators through their involvement in equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) work
- Explores Black women's role in EDI in K-12 schools and school boards
- Uncovers the informal and formal roles Black women educators play in the diversity movement
- Considers the harm they experience through EDI work
- Employs Afrocentric and Black feminist thought
- Utilizes arts-based and embodiment methods to uncover the experiences of Black Women K-12 EDI educators

The research will be reported in a dissertation that includes a written component as well as an exhibit where educators, educational leaders, and the community will be invited.

What You Will Be Asked to Do in the Research:

Data Collection: Retreat Style Sessions:

Participants will be invited to a one day (4 hours maximum) retreat-style gathering in Toronto. This retreat-style gathering will include three art activities as well as small group focused discussions in which you will be invited to share your experiences as a K-12 EDI educator. Dinner will be provided for in-person attendees. All supplies will be provided for all attendees. There will be 3 focused discussions, 1 hour (60 min) each with 3-4 participants per group. You will be asked to complete a short survey (20 minutes) prior to each focused discussion. The survey will be completed individually and the discussion that follows will utilize the same questions. Participants will receive a 25.00 honorarium in the form of a gift card for their participation in the retreat-style session and observational meeting.

Data Collection: Observational Meetings: Participants will be asked to participate in up to two (2) observational meetings with the student researcher. You will be invited to set up a meeting no more than 30 days after the retreat-style session. Meetings will take place via Zoom or in person at a
location convenient for you. Meetings will be no more than one hour (60 minutes) long. In the meetings, you will be asked to undertake your creative practice and to reflect on how you approach this practice as a mode of knowledge making.

Data Collection: Canada Wide Survey: (Participants who do not participate in the retreat-style gathering are invited to participate in the Canada Wide survey)
Black women EDI educators from across Canada will be invited to participate in a Canada wide survey that asks about the emotional labour involved in their work. This survey will not ask for or collect any identifying information. The survey will contain 10 multiple choice questions that will take 5-10 minutes to complete. There will be a 15.00 honorarium in the form of a gift card.

Risks and Discomforts:
There is minimal risk that may occur as a result of this study. The social and psychological risks are made possible through the sharing of lived experiences, opinions, and perspectives during large group and focus group sessions. During the group sessions you will be given multiple opportunities to participate in activities that ask you describe (using various arts-based methods) your experiences working as a Black woman EDI K-12 educator. This could pose a psychological or social risk due to the inability to ensure privacy and confidentiality amongst the group. Psychological and social risks are possible if participants share stories, perspectives or opinions in focus groups that they later come to regret or that result in differences of opinion. Other group members will hear and see your experiences as you discuss or express them using various arts-based methods. Please feel free to decline to answer any questions that create discomfort. You can withdraw from any part of the project or the entire project at any time without penalty. During the sessions you will be given time to assess whether you want to participate in various discussions or activities based on your comfort level prior to engaging in the activities.

To mitigate risks and maximize participant safety, participants will be asked to initial below if they agree to confidentiality among participants. The recording of focus groups and note-taking will not be associated with identifying information. Participants will be asked to initial below indicating their comfort with focus group meetings being audio-recorded. A copy of the focus

group questions will be sent to you in advance so you can make an informed decision about your participation. Participants will be recorded as they engage in activities. Photos and video recordings will be taken of participants and their artmaking and discussions. These photos, videos, and audio recording are to support the storying process that the student researcher will be embarked on that will be a part of the exhibit. Participants faces, identifying features, and names will not be used in this storying process. The videos, photos, and audios are to support the student researcher with writing the story of the process and what was achieved through the process. At any point, participants may choose not to participate, to withhold information or consent, or to withdraw from the group process at any time without penalty.

Benefits of the Research and Benefits to You:
Participants will work with Black Canadian women artists through three art projects where they will learn artistic practices that support the sharing of their lived experiences. They will also be invited to join a coalition where participants will work together to propose an ethic of care framework that will be applied to EDI work across Canada.

Participants will receive a $25.00 gift card in addition to a retreat-style session featuring art and embodied practices led by local artists that will support them as a K-12 equity educator. Dinner and snacks will be served for in-person attendees.

Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal: Your participation in the study is completely voluntary and you may choose to stop participating in the research component of the workshop at any time. Your decision not to volunteer, to stop participating, or to refuse to answer particular questions will not influence the nature of the ongoing relationship you may have with the student researcher or other participants in the study, or your relationship with York University, either now, or in the future. In the event you withdraw from the study, all associated data collected will be immediately destroyed wherever possible.

Confidentiality:
Unless you choose otherwise all information you supply during the research will be held in confidence and unless you specifically indicate your consent, your name will not appear in any report or publication of the research. All forms and notes will use pseudonyms to support your anonymity. The student researcher will keep a link that identifies you to your coded information, but this link will be kept secure and available only to the student researcher. Any information that can identify you will remain confidential. Confidentiality will be provided to the fullest extent possible by law

During one segment of the session you will be creating a digital portrait. This portrait may make it easier for people to identify you depending on the elements you choose that may or may not reveal your appearance. You will get the opportunity to decide how closely you would like the portrait to resemble you.

The nature of the focus group prevents complete confidentiality, although we will maintain confidentiality as best as possible (with people outside of your focus group). Participants will be

requested to respect the privacy of fellow participants. The artists that will lead the art sessions will also sign a confidentiality agreement.

Recordings (audio/video/photography) will be saved in a password protected file to the student researcher's local computer, not the cloud-based service. Please note that it is the expectation that participants agree not to make any unauthorized recordings (video, audio, photographs) of the content of a meeting or data collection session. All focus group data will be digitally recorded, transcribed, coded, and analyzed. Focus group data will be secured (electronically on the Student researcher's password protected One Drive Cloud) and kept under lock and key (researcher's notes) for 3 years following the completion of the study at which point it will be erased and destroyed. The student research will be the only one to have access to this information. The computers containing research data will be kept away from public areas. Computer passwords will be used on data files and computers will be equipped with firewalls and anti-virus software. All data will not be used for purposes other than those intended by this research. An integrative art exhibit will be held as a result of the data generated from the project. This will include audio, visual, and performative elements. The artwork generated will be kept in a secure office after the "From Loophole to Homeplace" exhibit for use in conferences and future exhibits exploring similar lines of inquiry. Such projects will still undergo ethics review by the HPRC, our institutional REB. Any secondary use of anonymized data by the research team will be treated with the same degree of confidentiality and anonymity as in the in the original research project. Confidentiality will be provided to the fullest extent possible by law.

Online Surveys

The student researcher acknowledges that the host of the online survey (e.g., Qualtrics, Survey Monkey, Google Forms etc.) may automatically collect participant data without their knowledge (i.e., IP addresses.) Although this information may be provided or made accessible to the student researcher, it will not be used or saved without participant's consent on the student researcher's system. Online platforms (i.e. Google Forms, Survey Monkey, Qualtrics) may allow the student researcher to capture and access additional information about each respondent over and above what they provide in the online survey. Because this project employs e-based collection techniques, data may be subject to access by third parties as a result of various security legislation now in place in many countries and thus the confidentiality and privacy of data cannot be guaranteed during web-based transmission.

Video/Audio Conferencing:

This study will use ZOOM to collect data, which is an externally hosted cloud-based service. When information is transmitted over the internet privacy cannot be guaranteed. There is always a risk your responses may be intercepted by a third party (e.g., government agencies, hackers). Further, while York University researchers will not collect or use IP addresses or other information which could link your participation to your computer or electronic devices without informing you, there is a small risk with any platform such as this of data that is collected on external servers falling outside the control of the research team. If you are concerned about this, I would be happy to make alternative arrangements (where possible) for you to participate, perhaps via telephone. Please contact myrtlehs@yorku.ca for further information.

Questions About the Research? If you have questions about the research in general or about your role in the study, please feel free to contact the student researcher by e-mail myrtlehs@yorku.ca. You may also contact my graduate supervisor, Dr. Vidya Shah, vidshah@edu.yorku.ca, Faculty of Education, York University, 221 Winters College, 4700 Keele Street Toronto ON, Canada M3J 1P3.

This research has received ethics review and approval by the Delegated Ethics Review Committee, which is delegated authority to review research ethics protocols by the Human Participants Review Sub-authority to review research ethics protocols by the Human Participants Review Sub-Committee, York University's Ethics guidelines. If you have any questions about this process, or about your rights as a participant in the study, please contact the Director for the Office of Research Ethics, Kaneff Tower, York University (ore@yorku.ca).

Legal Rights and Signatures:

I *(fill in your name here)*, consent to participate in Black Women EDI Educators: From Loophole to Homeplace conducted by Myrtle Sodhi. I have understood the nature of this project and wish to participate. I am not waiving any of my legal rights by signing this form. My signature below indicates my consent.

Signature _____ **Date** _____
Participant

Signature _____ **Date** _____
Student Researcher

Additional consent (where applicable)

1. **Audio recording**

I consent to the audio-recording of my interview(s). ☐ N ☐ Y

2. **Video recording**

I _____ consent to the use of images of me (including video and other moving images), my environment and property in the following ways (please check all that apply):

In academic articles	☐	N	☐	Y
In print, digital and slide form	☐	N	☐	Y
In academic presentations	☐	N	☐	Y
In media	☐	N	☐	Y
In thesis materials	☐	N	☐	Y

3. Photographs

I _____ consent to the use of images of me, my environment and property in the following ways (please check all that apply):

In academic articles	☐	N	☐	Y
In print, digital and slide form	☐	N	☐	Y
In academic presentations	☐	N	☐	Y
In media	☐	N	☐	Y
In thesis materials	☐	N	☐	Y

4. Consent to waive anonymity

I,_____, consent to the use of my name in the publications arising from this research.

☐N ☐Y

5. Consent to use of quotes

I consent to the use of quotations in any final reports/ publications of the research.

☐N ☐Y

6. Confidentiality among participants

I will not share any information that other participants, the student researcher, or the local artists share (in any form) beyond the sessions. ☐N ☐Y

Black Women EDI Educators: From Loophole to Homeplace Focus Group Form
Take some quiet time to reflect on the questions below. There are no right or wrong ways to respond to the questions.

* Indicates required question

1. Name *

Rememory Storywork: “Returning to the Place of Forgetting" (p. 59 Judd)

2. How did the rememory practices support the process of uncovering and elevating the lived experiences of Black women EDI educators such as yourself?

3. What did I discover about my role in equity work through the rememory process?

4. What needs did I identify during the mapping journey exercise that were not met?

The Gaze Matrix: The Gaze Matrix helps us explore our identity and experiences and how it relates to our work.

5. What did I discover through the Gaze Matrix about my experience and the harm I experienced as a K-12 Black women EDI educator?

6. How do staff, schools, and school boards address/contribute to the harm I experienced?

7. The harm I experienced has received care and attention from:

Check all that apply.

	Always	Most of the time	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Myself	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
School Admin	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
School Staff	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Board	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Ministry of Ed	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Row 6	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

8. How does this harm impact my professional goals, wellbeing and relationships within and outside of the school system?

Digital Portrait:

9. How does theorizing my experiences change/impact my next moves as a K-12 Black woman EDI Educator?

10. How does an Afrocentric framing of my identity/experiences/role support my theorizing about my experiences?

Ethic of Care

11. How do you re-envision your role and work through an ethic of care framework?

How would the enactment of this framework create a different vision of EDI work?

12. What are the essential elements of an ethic of care framework that would be applicable to your work?

13. Please select a date and time for the follow up interview: *

Mark only one oval.

- October 8th 5:00
- October 8th 6:00
- October 15th 5:00
- October 15th 6:00
- October 22nd 5:00
- October 22nd 6:00
- October 29th 5:00
- October 29th 6:00
- I am not available for an interview at this time.