

OF SHE WE SING:  
A HEALING RESOURCE FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN VETERANS  
by  
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To my mother, Sadie Juliet Battle (1933-2020)  
who loved God, loved music, loved food, loved family, loved 'going,' loved church, and loved  
*the least of these. Regardless.*

To my sister, Constance Yvonne Battle, M.D. (1955-2020)  
who was my biological big sister, sorority big sister, spiritual big sister, professional big sister,  
and forever *soul* sister.

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## Abstract

An increasing number of African American women veterans who served in the Armed Forces to defend the United States Constitution alongside their counterparts live their post-military lives mired and emotionally immobilized by the spectre of Military Sexual Trauma (MST) and Moral Injury (MI), isolating and silencing themselves from their earthly and spiritual communities. Historically, African American women are survivors, consistently overcoming the constant and persistent challenges faced as members of the lowest caste in America's social hierarchy. As MST and MI victims, are isolating and silencing treatable behaviors for African American women veterans? *Of She We Sing* is about intentionally constructing a beloved Ubuntu-driven (Ubuntu as defined by Archbishop Desmond Tutu) community for African American women veterans victimized by MST and MI who are experiencing isolation and silence. My project offers a healing strategy underpinned by a florilegium playlist that utilizes an evidence-based defusion practice and womanist traditional communalism to positively compel MST/MI African American women veteran victims toward change, flourishing, values, and committed action. Future considerations for community resources will utilize other evidence-based practices to build seven stepping stones to change, i.e., respect, equality, unity, language, self-preservation, grief, and spirituality.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

This research project explores the impact of military sexual trauma (MST) and moral injury (MI) on African American women veterans with the possibility of traditional communalism as a healing resource. A fundamental contention of this project is that MI occurs with every incident of MST. However, although MST is traditionally addressed and treated, MI is not, especially for African American veterans. Without the needed attention to moral repair, African American MST women veterans often choose separatism and isolation. After introducing an overview of my terminology and my womanist moral theological perspective, the chapters continue with (1) military history and military culture, military sexual trauma, and moral injury; (2) the historical overview of Black women amid enslavement, the Civil War, Jim Crow, and Black Lives Matter (#BLM); (3) womanism, womanist biblical interpretation of Naomi and Ruth, constructive reflections of the caveat of separatism, and womanist pedagogy; (4) the beloved community and Ubuntu as model communities; and (5) the projected possibility of a florilegium playlist utilizing the principle of defusion and using traditional communalism as a healing resource.

## *OVERVIEW*

As this paper will pass through the filter of my own experiences, I will begin this project with an overview of my place of employment, veteran referrals to my clinics, my MST/MI, isolation, community, and moral theology. I am a staff chaplain who provides outpatient telehealth chaplaincy to women veterans assigned to the Women's Mental Health Clinic at the Durham Veterans Affairs Health Care Systems (DVHCS). Partnering with institutions, DVHCS is a hub for care, research, training, and growth for 200,000 veterans. DVHCS has its main campus in

Durham, NC, along with ten other locations covering twenty-seven counties within the Mid-Atlantic Region or Veterans Integrated Services Network (VISN) 6. Each year, approximately 3,200 full-time employees serve 70,000 patients (including approximately 7,000 women). On April 19, 2023, DVHCS celebrated an anniversary and existence of seventy years. In 2018, I accepted and completed a second-year residency at the DVHCS. In 2019, I applied and was hired as a staff chaplain at the DVHCS. In April 2024, I will celebrate six years as a chaplain for DVHCS.

As a chaplain, I care for women veterans who have selected a clinical environment of providers and staff who are women only. I receive referrals to provide chaplaincy services individually or in groups for grief, suicide prevention, trauma, spiritual support, and pastoral care. Over the years, 90% of the population referred to me from the Veteran's Women's Health Clinic has been 90% diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)/Military Sexual Trauma (MST), 95% African American, and a 90% history of suicidal/homicidal ideation. I have not received "identified" consults nor provided formal spiritual care for (African American) women veterans with *moral injury* [MI]. 100% of my referrals have been, or are, isolated from the world. They choose to separate themselves physically from the world. Isolation is a challenging area to navigate with veterans. I know because of my incredible losses during the COVID mandatory isolation.

I am a woman. I am a veteran. And I am African American. I experienced MST as a victim of racial discrimination and sexual harassment in the United States Air Force (USAF). I experienced MI from a Caucasian male legal supervisor who refused to recognize or enforce (gender and race) equality within the workplace. After active duty, I experienced MST as a victim of racial discrimination and sexual harassment. Within my current context as the sole DVHCS

African American woman staff chaplain, I am a participant-observer-clinician who continues to use my expertise, experiences, and empathy to provide care and a source of healing for African American MST/ MI women veterans. The current assumption might be that I am assigned African American women veterans because I am African American. However, the fact of the matter is my geographical context for chaplaincy is Durham, North Carolina, which is a very diverse context. The demographic pool of women within the DVHCS, specifically the Women's Health Clinic, who seek care is predominately African American. Providers within this geographical context for this demographic pool are overwhelmingly Caucasian or non-Black. Within my current context, there is a need for more African American staff women chaplains.

Before experiencing the trauma in the USAF and subsequent employment, I was nurtured in a community of women, i.e., mother, sister, grandmother, godmother, and aunts. Whereas I had a father who traveled extensively, a younger brother, and later married a supportive husband, women profoundly shaped me in my youth. My mother gifted me with, and introduced me to, a meaningful world of God, love, hard work, family values, and belief in ultimate good. She loved purely. Received honor humbly. She celebrated community. She was my nurturer and role model. My sister gifted me with womanly companionship. She promoted sage wisdom. She emphasized accountability. She disallowed mediocrity and despised injustice, particularly microaggressions. She blazed my path. I received so much more than I expected from them.

On March 1, 2020, at the beginning of the unprecedented pandemic, my mother died. On October 27, 2020, my sister died. I was alone, spiritually, and physically isolated now without my foundational formative communities. This was the beginning of COVID-19 and quarantine isolation practices. I was miserable, bitter, and broken. Both deaths forced me to seek spiritual meaning similar to what had grounded me in the community I had lost. I sought nurturing and



companionship. My formative community was a knowing, loving, and safe space. I was not rejected when I revealed vulnerabilities or misplaced pride. When broken, they caught my tears. When sad, they honored my laughter. There was trust, integrity, and responsive support. My values remained firm. That community was a place of meaning, improvement, unending optimism, hope, encouragement, and empowerment. My beloved community invited and welcomed me at all times.

After the deaths of my mother and sister in 2020, little did I know I would find my support within a telephonic prayer group, *Breakfast of Champions*, created in 2016.<sup>1</sup> Initially, this group was for “others” -- members of my then-assigned African Methodist Episcopal (AME) church, assistant ministers from my husband’s AME church, and anyone willing to get up at that godly hour. But in 2020, the agenda of devotions, stories, and prayers<sup>2</sup> became *my* transformative community. As the creator-facilitator of this prayer community, I now sat reflectively in my grief as both the recipient and giver of spiritual awakening, renewal, and restoration. I was vulnerable but healing. The time spent sharing and listening within this community was invaluable to me in promoting what Dr. Shelly Rambo describes as trauma, a witnessing of “radical suffering in a middle passage.”<sup>3</sup> My reflective *witness* held sacred a period of silence, an apparent lack of divine

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<sup>1</sup> From 2016 to the present, in the mornings between 5 and 6 a.m., I created and facilitate a prayer group, *Breakfast of Champions*. It initially occurred seven days a week; now, it occurs four days a week.

<sup>2</sup> Now, the agenda includes daily devotions, sacred stories (theistic and non-theistic), biographies, analyses of the fruits of the spirit, Essential 100 biblical encounters, Bible trivia competitions, active listening discussions, the time for acknowledgment by name of special current supplications, and opening/closing prayers.

<sup>3</sup> According to Rambo, *radical suffering* “exposes the impossibility of professing Christian claims of God’s presence and of human goodness” occurring in a middle space and construct of trauma. Rambo defined *radical suffering* as witnessing in an un-theologized site, overshadowed by and blurred by life and death in a space for survival. The lens of trauma emerges to forge and connect healing and redemption. Shelly Rambo, “Spirit and Trauma,” *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 69, no. 1 (December 18, 2014): 7–19, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020964314552625>, 12,16.

presence, and an abundance of human suffering. Within Christian liturgy, this is the sacred witness of ‘Holy Saturday,’ between the cross and resurrection, healing and redemption, and, death and life.<sup>4</sup> The sacred witness of radical suffering must not be overlooked but navigated through the lens of trauma. Given the MI, MST, and the deaths of my loved ones, I had to address my trauma.

I used my moral theology to address my trauma. As an African American woman, my moral theology is defined within two contexts. My [*earthly*] context is attributed to two amazing individuals, my Father and Mother. My *dearest* Father, a struggling insurance agent, tenor singing Army Private, and ultimately, a Historically Black College University (HBCU) Professor, ‘routed’ my journey with an ancestral swagger for excellence over bondage. My *beloved* Mother, a survivor of an unchallenged ‘Jim Crow’ education, a failed marriage, and an unending, radical sacrificial dance, dually ‘routed’ my journey as an extraordinary woman survivor. I engage in my earthly context with gratitude and honor in memory of them and others who struggled against oppression and brokenness to blaze a path for me.

My [*spiritual*] context as a chaplain is to love in the *imago Dei* (image of God) to the *imago Dei* (image of God).<sup>5</sup> It is here I understand I was purposed to love, create, and exist in a community. It is here I find my commitment to providing spiritual care and support for MST/MI victims who isolate themselves spiritually and physically. It is here I embrace Howard Thurman’s context for the ‘religion of Jesus,’ a love-ethic.<sup>6</sup> *In Jesus and the Disinherited*, Howard Thurman responded to a ‘tongue-in-cheek’ inquiry: How do you and others who are similarly situated participate within a religion *with* their oppressors who sold, bought, lynched, raped, devalued, and

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<sup>4</sup> Rambo, “Spirit and Trauma,” 16.

<sup>5</sup> VA Chaplain Application of Carmen Battle to Participate in the Mental Health Integration for Chaplain Services (MHICS) training program.

<sup>6</sup> Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2022), 79.

considered them their chattel?<sup>7</sup> [*emphasis mine*] In his response, Thurman described Jesus' earthly context as a poor Jew within his minority community of Judaism subjected to the Jewish leaders operating by constraints in the Greco-Roman world.<sup>8</sup> Thurman described Judaism as a religious culture that had to operate within dualism, as a power structure beneath a power structure.<sup>9</sup> But when it was time to leave his foundational setting, Jesus left to deliver a message within the political and religious climate of the day. One Sunday early in his itinerant ministry, Jesus returned to his hometown synagogue and shared his *spiritual* context for ministering to the masses. In the synagogue, he unrolled the scroll of the prophet Isaiah and read:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he has anointed me  
to bring good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives  
And recovery of sight to the blind,  
To let the oppressed go free,  
To proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.<sup>10</sup>

Jesus rolled up the scroll and sat down.<sup>11</sup> After a discussion with Jesus in the synagogue, his hometown community became enraged and attempted to push Jesus off a cliff<sup>12</sup> to kill him.

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<sup>7</sup> Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, 4-5.

<sup>8</sup> Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, 4-5,11.

<sup>9</sup> "Judaism was a culture, a civilization, and a religion—a total worldview in which there was no provision for any form of thoroughgoing dualism. The crucial problem of Judaism was to exist as an isolated, autonomous, cultural, religious, and political unit in the midst of the hostile Hellenic world. If there had been sharp lines distinguishing the culture from the religion, or the religion from political autonomy, a compromise could have been worked out. Because the Jews thought that a basic compromise was possible, they sought political annexation to Syria, which would bring them under Roman rule directly and thereby guarantee them, within the framework of Roman policy, religious and cultural autonomy. But this merely aggravated the already tense nationalistic feeling and made a direct, all-out attack against Roman authority inevitable." Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, 10-11.

<sup>10</sup> Lk 4:18-19, New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

<sup>11</sup> Lk 4:20 (NRSV).

<sup>12</sup> Lk 4:29-30 (NRSV).

Jesus embodied love within a community that opposed, disinherited, and finally eliminated him. Jesus gave love within the same community to the oppressed, ignored, broken, poor, and those who needed healing. Jesus promoted his ministry of *the least of these*.<sup>13</sup> Jesus' love-ethic paraphrased the ten commandments: *Love God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind... Then, love your neighbor as yourself*.<sup>14</sup> Love is the “sure artistry and great power”<sup>15</sup> of salvation because it will cross barriers to meet human needs regardless of class, race, and condition.<sup>16</sup> For the MST/MI African American women veterans, the message of love and self-love will move them from their temporary place of separatism and isolation into a community to meet them where they are. I hope this overview and descriptions of my place of employment, veteran referrals to my clinics, my MST/MI, isolation, community, and moral theology provide the contours of what mold my motivations and perspective.

## **I. THE MILITARY, MILITARY SEXUAL TRAUMA, AND MORAL INJURY**

This first chapter aims to provide brief, culturally specific women's military history and define the challenges of MST and MI within the women veteran community. Additional explanations will be provided which underscore the challenges of military sexual trauma (MST) and moral injury (MI). For most people, the United States (US) Military provides an opportunity for economic, social, and educational advancement within a context of universal patriotism, as written by Francis Scott Keyes...“O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave.”<sup>17</sup> For

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<sup>13</sup> “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.” Mt 25:40 (NRSV).

<sup>14</sup> Mt 22:37-39 (NRSV); Mk12:30-31 (NRSV); and Lk 10:27 (NRSV).

<sup>15</sup> Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, 79.

<sup>16</sup> Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, 79.

<sup>17</sup> Francis Scott Key, *The Star Spangled Banner* (MENC: The National Association for Music Education National Anthem Project, 2013).

women, particularly those identified as African American, the U.S. Military is positioned at an intersectionality of racism, sexism, and classism within an unbeloved non-traditional communalism. The military branches include the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, Coast Guard, and Space Force. The U.S. President is the military's Commander-in-Chief, and the Secretary of Defense is his chief advisor for the Department of Defense. Persons<sup>18</sup> who join the military swear to uphold the U.S. Constitution to protect and defend the interests of the United States and its allies. All active duty and reservists are expected to accept their roles under the Constitution until their discharge from service. However, the U.S. military, historically, does not uphold, protect, and defend on behalf of women veterans, particularly African American veterans. Moreover, it has been my experience that American society does not acknowledge or readily project 'thank you for your service' to women veterans, particularly African American veterans.<sup>19</sup> For women veterans, their service remains unrecognized, challenged, and discounted.

In *Women Veterans and Service Members*, Dr. Sarah Wilson explored the history and challenges for women in the military.<sup>20</sup> Women have served informally in the military since the beginning of our nation in the American Revolution and the Civil War.<sup>21</sup> Some even disguised themselves as men. In 1901, women were permitted to formally serve and were recognized in the

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<sup>18</sup> In 1989 when I joined the United States Air Force (USAF), I took the following Oath of Office. "I, Carmen Jean Battle, having been appointed Second Lieutenant in the United States Air Force, do solemnly swear that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, Foreign and domestic, that I bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that I take this obligation freely, without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion; and that I will well and faithfully discharge the duties of the office upon which I am about to enter. So help me God."

<sup>19</sup> I served as a Judge Advocate General in the USAF for six years. My husband served thirty years in the United States Navy as a submariner, beginning with a tour in Vietnam. He acquired the highest enlisted rank as a Command Master Chief. Whenever the conversation of military service arises, he is acknowledged and applauded as a veteran, and I am not.

<sup>20</sup> Sarah Wilson, "Military Sexual Trauma," *Upstream Suicide Prevention: Demographic Considerations*, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/ccFu-xPsiM>.

<sup>21</sup> Wilson, *Upstream Suicide Prevention*.

Women's Army Corp (WAC), a nursing unit.<sup>22</sup> Over the years, women in the military have had to navigate cultural norms and stereotypes about their gender and the military's underlying question: "Can women perform the job equal to their male counterparts?"<sup>23</sup> This was attributed to a male-dominated population (84% men and 16% women)<sup>24</sup> in the armed forces. Is the wide divide due to inability, or attributable to the later entry of women into the military? The male military members' refusal to evolve past their female stereotypes, the dominant male, the characteristic physical strength of a male, the projections of superiority, the pervasive male role, and the simultaneous male roles as perpetrators/adjudicators of the wrongs against women; are these addressable? The answers have not, and will not, be pursued. Because many of these inquiries are the basis and beginnings of MST and MI.

Within her work, Rambo defined trauma as a quasi-encounter with death.

This encounter is not... a literal death but a way of describing a radical event or events that shatter what one knows about the world and all the familiar ways of operating within it. A basic disconnection occurs from what one knows to be true and safe in the world... The term "survival" captures something of the suspension of life in the aftermath of a traumatic event... Life takes on a fundamentally different definition... that it is life always mixed with death.<sup>25</sup>

There are many layers to peel back for traumas. This chapter now addresses military sexual trauma and moral injury. I contend the first does not occur without the second.

### *Military Sexual Trauma*

According to Wilson, "[a]nother result of cultural norms within the military is high rates of gender discrimination and military sexual trauma (MST)."<sup>26</sup> Women make up 16% of the US armed forces; there are two million women veterans living in the United States and Puerto Rico;

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<sup>22</sup> Wilson, *Upstream Suicide Prevention*.

<sup>23</sup> Wilson, *Upstream Suicide Prevention*.

<sup>24</sup> Wilson, *Upstream Suicide Prevention*.

<sup>25</sup> Rambo, *"Spirit and Trauma,"* 10.

<sup>26</sup> Wilson, *Upstream Suicide Prevention*.

one in four women veterans has experienced MST; and over half of women veterans have reported experiencing MST.<sup>27</sup> Even though the military has made strides to increase reporting of MST, there remain many instances of unreported MST due to retaliation, barriers to promotion, or being labeled a ‘troublemaker’ by the male-dominant culture.<sup>28</sup> According to Wilson, in the aftermath of MST or upon discharge, women veterans experience difficulty with trust, intimacy, shame, irritability, sadness, and [they] may social distance.<sup>29</sup> Note: These are notable emotions and responses of MI. Dr. Wilson stated that polls indicate that 75% of women veterans discount and feel their military service is not recognized or valued in America. As caregivers, Wilson encouraged validation and gratitude to acknowledge and validate women in the military.<sup>30</sup>

In 38 U.S. Code Sec. 1720D, the Department of Veteran Affairs defined military sexual trauma as “physical assault of a sexual nature, battery of a sexual nature, or sexual harassment<sup>31</sup> which occurred while the veteran was serving on active duty or active duty for training.”<sup>32</sup> MST generally includes a *quid pro quo* coercion tactic of “intimidation by one person, usually of higher status, demand[ing] sexual behaviors [of another], making threats, or stalking.”<sup>33</sup> MST may be based upon a hostile work environment, i.e., including but not limited to unwanted sexual comments, advances, and sexually offensive jokes. Also, MST may include complicity within the offense, i.e., assault by a superior officer while subordinates watched without stopping, disclosing,

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<sup>27</sup> Wilson, Upstream Suicide Prevention.

<sup>28</sup> Wilson, Upstream Suicide Prevention.

<sup>29</sup> Wilson, Upstream Suicide Prevention.

<sup>30</sup> Wilson, Upstream Suicide Prevention.

<sup>31</sup> Within the definition, “sexual harassment is further defined as ‘repeated, unsolicited verbal or physical contact of a sexual nature which is threatening in character.’” Shannon K. Barth et al., “Military Sexual Trauma among Recent Veterans,” *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 50, no. 1 (January 2016): 77–86, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amepre.2015.06.012>, 1.

<sup>32</sup> Shannon K. Barth et al., *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 77–86.

<sup>33</sup> Wolff, “Reporting Military Sexual Trauma,” 843.

or speaking against.<sup>34</sup> The *spirit* of the code does not ask for a rating in degrees of cruelty. It does not ask for the gender specifications of the actor and victim. It does not ask for quantity or quality. All experiences are cruel and permanent in the world of the victim. So, what do a brutally beaten active duty military member, a repeatedly raped active duty military member, and a supervisor called ‘Maybelline’ by basic trainees have in common? While said code defined MST within a smorgasbord<sup>35</sup> of ‘sexual’ acts or experiences, there is an underlying outcry and need to understand the common denominator. The common denominator is that the criminally egregious sexual assault is an unexpected and unwelcome occurrence to *all victims*, occurring within the *same* environment *each victim* signed up to protect and defend the constitutional rights of *all*. [*emphasis mine*]

Sadly, statistics<sup>36</sup> reveal MST victims acquiesce to injurious behaviors but face challenges in healing. Not only do they face issues reporting incidents to their superiors, but according to the aforementioned statistical research study,<sup>37</sup> victims suffer from the physical, psychological, and

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<sup>34</sup> Wolff, “Reporting Military Sexual Trauma,” 843-844.

<sup>35</sup> Examples may include but are not limited to first-degree rape, attempted assault, a wolf whistle, a pornographic picture in the work area, a comment a woman’s place is barefoot and pregnant in the home, and touching or caressing of a body part.

<sup>36</sup> While 44% of women will experience sexual trauma over their lifetime, estimates for women in the military are hard to determine. A 2016 study estimates that 17% of women in the United States will be victims of sexual assault in their lifetime, compared to 33% of women in the military. 32% of the rapes in the United States are reported to police. 20% of the rapes are reported to military police. Since 1979, there have been reporting agencies and advocates like the Sexual Assault Prevention Office (SAPRO) and Military Criminal Investigative Organization (MCIO). Still, women victimized by sexual trauma in the military must weigh their careers and safety because the adjudicating officials are *never* entirely removed from the military offenders. [*emphasis mine*] Wolff, “Reporting Military Sexual Trauma,” 840.

<sup>37</sup> Sequelae from various forms of MST can range from physical harm such as sexually transmitted infections, traumatic brain injuries, or unwanted pregnancy. Mental health conditions include post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, substance abuse, and suicidal ideation. Survivors often have psychosocial issues such as difficulties maintaining close relationships, struggles with long-term employment, and poor social integration. Wolff, “Reporting Military Sexual Trauma,” 840.



psychosocial sequela of MST. For purposes of this project, I contend the most damaging is the psychosocial sequelae of poor social integration and, to its extreme, isolation. Tragically, these horrendous acts committed against a non-consenting victim may become logarithmically worsened if the offender(s) memorialize these sexually heinous assaults in a digital format with the threat of or the actual distribution into cyberspace as an additional means of demoralization and silencing of the victim. The result is often a lifetime of guilt, shame, and self-blame, particularly if the MST has been alcohol or drug-facilitated. When I receive a consult for an MST woman victim, they are consistently isolated from both their social and spiritual contexts. Consistently, no psychological screening for or mention of moral injury has been done. Addressing isolation is a key problem for MST and MI victims because it prevents healing and access to a beloved Ubuntu-driven community. Isolation is a challenging roadblock to resilience and flourishing.

The following integrative case provides an example of an African American woman veteran who faced challenges of MST, MI, and isolation.

#### *Integrative Case Example One*

Lock (pseudonym) is a fifty-six-year-old, cisgender, heterosexual, divorced African American female who served less than three years in the Army during the Persian Gulf era. She has two daughters, one son, a grandson, and a four-month-old granddaughter. Lock's non-binary teenage child has bipolar disorder and lives in Lock's home. Her other two children are adults with mental health challenges, and both live outside of Lock's home. Her grandson is autistic and in the custody of her sister and brother-in-law. Lock's diagnoses include chronic post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)/ military sexual trauma (MST), major depressive disorder, and anxiety. In 2021,

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Lock was referred by her primary care provider to chaplain service for spiritual support after a cancer diagnosis and surgery. I inquired regarding her beliefs, spirituality, and religious practices to move toward flourishing. Lock stated, “I believe in God but do not tolerate some of the behaviors practiced in the church. I do pray and journal.” She journals current events for future generations to connect with her and her world. Lock celebrates nature and watches God’s transformative works in her yard. Lock's values include family, honesty, and loyalty. These values are important to her. Lock values her immediate and extended family. She attends and brings food to holiday gatherings with her family. Six months ago, she opened her home to a ‘favorite’ uncle to live with her for a year while he finalized his divorce. She confers with her mother and sisters on hard topics and concerns. She has “good” friends she will help unconditionally but requires reciprocated loyalty. She dislikes hypocrisy due to the importance and her value of honesty.

At the time of the referral, Lock received occupational therapy, and for more than three years, Lock attended a biweekly MST women’s group. (Note: Lock did not share personally in the MST group but listened to the facilitator’s topics and other women’s responses.) During the initial assessment and subsequent sessions, Lock presented her concerns about coping with her post-cancer treatments and recent episodes with a neighbor. She stated, “My (Caucasian) neighbor does not understand who I am and what I will do. He cannot continue to violate me by trespassing onto my property.” On several occasions, Lock noticed the uncharacteristic ease with which her uncle communicated with her neighbor. Lock expressed her desire for respect, equality, safety, and to be heard.

Over the next several months, Lock shared her MST narrative. About twenty-five years ago, while she was in basic training as a young, eighteen-year-old enlisted soldier, Lock was awakened (like so many other young women recruits before her) in the dark of the night by her

'trusted' platoon leader and escorted to her sergeant major's (SGM) barracks. There, her SGM raped her. Upon leaving the room, Lock was threatened by the "waiting" platoon leader, forced to shower, and then escorted back to her bunk. Lying in her bunk, she pondered her brokenness in this new military community. She had been physically, forcefully, and sexually violated. She had lost her innocence. Her platoon leader betrayed her. Her SGM hurt her. She could no longer trust her supervisors. Her dream of a military career was gone. Lock said, "All of this happened before daybreak." Lock was concurrently both MST and MI victim.

Over the next twenty-five years, because of the MST and undiagnosed Moral Injury, Lock sleeps very little and is hypervigilant. She has state-of-the-art cameras, window/door sensors, monitors, and connections to a live response center. She physically gets up every couple of hours and checks the camera footage, windows, and doors. Her curtains remain drawn. She does not trust sleeping or anticipating an unsolicited knock on the door. About a month ago, Lock performed her usual surveillance and saw her next-door neighbor standing at her bedroom window. Alarmed, she notified his supervisor and spoke with him and his wife. Her neighbor is a local fireman. At this session, Lock stated that she was extremely upset, frustrated, irritated, and angry. A few days ago, the same neighbor was on her camera footage riding his bicycle two feet from her bedroom window. Lock exhibited cognitive overload as she faced solutions to another 'bold' trespass of her secure domain by her neighbor. Lock displayed difficulty with emotional regulation. Lock continued to espouse her disbelief, pain, and anger through thoughts of homicide to protect herself within her home. There was negative thinking and a sense of hopelessness as to why she was yet again targeted and bullied as a lone African American female in a predominately white (male) neighborhood. There was indecisiveness toward problem-solving, given her previous solution and the return of the trespasser. At the session, Lock stated, "I was going to call you on the day of the

second trespass but felt I could wait until this session.” Lock demonstrated a pessimistic orientation toward the prospect of re-establishing a neighborly relationship with the occurrence of the second trespass. The combination of all the above factors supports the need for a beloved community as she journeys to find resources for healing.

### *Moral Injury*

Historically,<sup>38</sup> moral injury was defined within the context of the (male) combatant’s experiences of military service and not within the context of the victims of military sexual trauma. Here, in this section of this project, this writer contends that any experience or event of MST falls within the four corners of the definition and framework of moral injury. Also, the suggestions for moral repair for African American women with MST are uncharted and may be a useful building block for healing.

Notably, in the 1990s, writer researchers defined moral injury as “the psychological effects of killing in war and the way combat deeply affects soldiers’ character, sometimes for good and sometimes for ill.”<sup>39</sup> One of the early pioneers of moral injury was Johnathan Shay, who termed the resulting traumatic suffering not as a disorder but as an “injury.”<sup>40</sup> Thus, an injury needs

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<sup>38</sup> “Throughout history, warriors have been confronted with moral and ethical challenges and modern unconventional and guerilla wars amplify these challenges. Potentially morally injurious events, such as perpetrating, failing to prevent, or bearing witness to acts that transgress deeply held moral beliefs and expectations may be deleterious in the long-term, emotionally, psychologically, behaviorally, spiritually, and socially (what we label as moral injury).” Litz, et al., “Moral Injury and Moral Repair in War Veterans: A Preliminary Model and Intervention Strategy,” 696.

<sup>39</sup> Warren Kinghorn, “Combat Trauma and Moral Fragmentation: A Theological Account of Moral Injury,” *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 32, no. 2 (2012): 57–74, <https://doi.org/10.1353/sce.2012.0041>, 60.

<sup>40</sup> Kinghorn, “Combat Trauma and Moral Fragmentation,” 60.

healing. In 2009, Brett Litz defined moral injury empirically as “perpetrating, failing to prevent, bearing witness to or learning about acts that transgress deeply held moral beliefs and expectations.”<sup>41</sup> According to Litz and his progeny, moral injury is “what is witnessed or done shak[ing] military members to their core beliefs about humanity, whereby they develop ‘long-lasting psycho-bio-social impairment.’”<sup>42</sup> For this project, MST operates within the framework and core of moral injury as an injurious event that occurs unexpectedly without welcome, spinning MST victims’ values and beliefs askew and opposing their core foundations and communities of origin. Before the injurious event, MST victims held moral beliefs and expectations of self-worth and dignity. As a result of the MST experience (on any level), the MST victim develops a psychosocial impairment of isolation. The MST victim operates in hopelessness, denial, fear, and anger --alone.

The proposed healing resources for moral repair may be appropriate for the MST victim. One model is a three-step modified psychological-cognitive approach that makes amends for the dissonance between the experience and moral beliefs. The *first step* is connecting with a therapist in a clinical setting. Here, the Veteran with a mental health professional exposes and addresses morally injurious experiences within a controlled environment. According to Kinghorn, Litz, and colleagues, a psychological and cognitive clinical context can not be the sole remedy for moral injury because such a limitation “would be to venture into the ethics of war.”<sup>43</sup> The *second step* is expanding the remedy with a moral expert, i.e., a respectful, non-judgmental chaplain or clergy who can assist in making amends for the morally injurious event and moving the individual

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<sup>41</sup> Brett T. Litz et al., “Moral Injury and Moral Repair in War Veterans: A Preliminary Model and Intervention Strategy,” *Clinical Psychology Review* 29, no. 8 (December 2009): 695–706, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2009.07.003>, 695.

<sup>42</sup> Brett T. Litz et al., “Moral Injury and Moral Repair in War Veterans,” 695.

<sup>43</sup> Kinghorn, “Combat Trauma and Moral Fragmentation,” 67.

towards better living.<sup>44</sup> The *third step* is embracing moral theology embedded in a community that incorporates formal contextual practices with others.<sup>45</sup> In Henri Nouwen's *The Wounded Healer: Ministry in Contemporary Society*, a community heals "not because wounds are cured and pains are alleviated, but because wounds and pains become openings or occasion for a new vision."<sup>46</sup>

For the isolated African American MST veteran victim, utilizing the above steps is recommended. This project focuses on step three, community. Without community, MST victims languish in isolation and hypervigilance without the possibility of movement toward total healing. When clinical providers do not identify moral injury, African American MST Women veterans are overlooked due to their isolation and the lack of connection between moral injury and MST. Yes, sheets over one's head in bed shut out the world defensively but perpetuate the silenced MST victim offensively. Before COVID, U.S. citizens avoided the harmful behavior employed by moral injury by utilizing moral disengagement strategies, i.e., "projected demonization (e.g., blaming veterans for all harm done), projected valorization (e.g. idealizing veterans as (s)heroes), and pathologizing (e.g., diagnosing veterans as "patients with a disorder or "traumatized victim)."<sup>47</sup> With COVID and beyond, isolation has fostered a 'protective vibe' for preventative healing and blocked the needs of a beloved Ubuntu-driven community for MST victims.

The following integrative case provides another example of an African American woman veteran who faced challenges of MST, MI, and isolation.

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<sup>44</sup> Kinghorn, "Combat Trauma and Moral Fragmentation," 61.

<sup>45</sup> Kinghorn, "Combat Trauma and Moral Fragmentation," 59.

<sup>46</sup> Henri Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer: Ministry in Contemporary Society* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1972), 9.

<sup>47</sup> Kinghorn, "Combat Trauma and Moral Fragmentation," 69.

*Integrative Case Example Two*

This was an unscheduled telehealth chaplain visit conducted virtually on Veteran Administration Virtual Connect – Video on Demand (VVC-VOD) within my context as a staff chaplain for the Women’s Health Interdisciplinary Team (WH IDT). DOD is a fifty-eight-year-old divorced African American cis-gendered female who served in the Army during the post-Vietnam era with mental health diagnoses of schizoaffective disorder depressive type, suicidal behavior, suicidal thoughts, borderline personality disorder, military sexual trauma, post-traumatic stress disorder, major depressive disorder, and occupational stress disorder. In November 2019, Dr. CK placed DOD on a six to twelve-month waiting list for Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) and referred her to me for interim chaplain services. (Note: In January 2021, DOD began DBT.) Before this visit, I performed an initial spiritual assessment and screening for integrative needs. Over the next several sessions, DOD shared ‘her story.’ Years ago, she and her spouse were on active duty together. They had two daughters who were toddlers and lived on post. DOD’s spouse was physically and mentally abusive. In one heated fight, she feared for her life. She grabbed her daughters and ran out of the house. She stayed with a neighbor for a few days. DOD’s spouse calmed down, and she returned home. Also, during this same time, DOD discovered that her spouse was unfaithful in their marriage. She went to his commanding officer (CO). DOD told the CO about the abuse and infidelity. She wanted him removed from their post-housing. The CO refused. DOD experienced moral injury because the Intimate Policy Violence (IPV) policy and domestic violence laws require the physical separation of spouses, at a minimum. After DOD contacted his CO, her spouse retaliated and contacted the Army’s Family Protection Office about DOD leaving the home and taking their daughters from the home. DOD was evaluated and placed in a residential mental health facility for an extended period. When she returned home, she isolated within her home and became more withdrawn in the marriage. While on active duty, she vowed

never to confront her spouse or his leadership again. DOD experienced military sexual (discrimination) trauma because his leadership believed her spouse but not her.

After many years, DOD isolates herself in situations when she feels unloved and faces rejection. In her unbeloved community, DOD listens to voices directing her to plan and do self-harm, namely overdosing, hanging, and jumping from heights. These voices continue from childhood. Inquiring about her faith background, DOD stated that she had a faith-based foundation in the church. At her last encounter with organized religion, her now ex-husband was her pastor and abusive husband. Because of recent church hurt and her mental health struggles, she feels unloved by God. As a result, she has isolated herself spiritually from God and physically from others. She has nothing to do with religion and spirituality.

This section provided a brief military history and culture-specific to women veterans, defined and provided the challenges of MST, and defined and provided the challenges of MI. How do traumatized veterans leave isolation? Similar to biblical guidance,<sup>48</sup> I believe a traumatized veteran's exit is not the same as a traumatized veteran's entrance. I believe that for African American women MST and MI victims, isolation must be addressed; military sexual trauma viewed in connection with moral injury; and moral repair issues should not be overlooked. Within a community, African American women veterans could create meaning and seek moral repair for healing through the reconciliation practices of Holy Saturday patience, lament, confession, and forgiveness.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> The Lord shall cause thine enemies who rise against you to be defeated before you; they shall come out against you one way and flee before you seven ways. Dt 28:7 (NSRV)

<sup>49</sup> Kinghorn, "Combat Trauma and Moral Fragmentation," 68.



## II. HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF BLACK WOMEN’S STRUGGLES

As a chaplain, women veterans like Lock and DOD present with difficult issues. Some issues are overtly espoused in narratives, and others are covertly silenced by isolation. Most compelling are women veterans of color and African descent, for I identify with their culture that requires a strong resolve to be heard, and the need to single-handedly *overcome* adversity initiated by the horrors of the diaspora at the intersectionality of racism, sexism, and classicism. This second chapter will provide a historical overview of Black women amid enslavement, the Civil War, Jim Crow, and recent violations of the Black Lives Matter Movement.

Beginning in 1660 and extending into the next 400 years, the diaspora forced millions of African women, men, and children to migrate from their native lands by way of small ships to other parts of the world, including the Americas.<sup>50</sup> Because of the diaspora, there is credible evidence that adults and children of Africa existed in tribes or communities that flourished in Africa. They were healthy women, men, and children with a physical and spiritual existence. The diaspora ended their flourishing in Africa and snuffed out their voices in their new “homes.” They ceased being in the community as Kings, Queens, warriors, hunters, and healers. They acquired chattel status. It was their horrific and unimaginable nightmare that sent them into a non-traditional, unloved community for life. European and local African slave traders overpowered and deceived them. They hustled, hunted, captured, chained, branded, and enslaved African

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<sup>50</sup> Katie G. Cannon, Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot, and Emilie M. Townes, “Surviving the Blight,” essay, in *Katie’s Canon: Womanism and the Soul of the Black Community* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2021), 4.

women, men, and children.<sup>51</sup> The transoceanic journey was called the “Middle Passage”<sup>52</sup> but equally could have been known as both non-traditional communalism and an unbeloved community (non-traditional, unbeloved community). It was a special existence between death and life where “life as it was [could] not be retrieved nor the promise of life ahead envisioned.”<sup>53</sup> Like chattel, they were chained/roped together, unable to relieve themselves privately, menstruate privately, die with dignity, and grieve for losses. Their laments of suffering and shame within this non-traditional, unbeloved community must have been unimaginable to both the captured and the captors. Upon arrival at their new “homes,” all the exported Africans became chattel slaves<sup>54</sup> who further were dehumanized, humiliated, severely beaten, tortured, mutilated, killed, deprived of human rights or legal recourse, lived in misery, kept ignorant, and unable to maintain a recognized family unit or kinship<sup>55</sup> within the similar non-traditional, unbeloved community.

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<sup>51</sup> “Then they were shackled and crammed into the poorly ventilated holds of small ships, with their faces pressed against the backs of those lying in front of them. The treatment was so harsh that one out of every eight Africans died en route. So much wretchedness was never condensed in so little room as in the slave ships.”

<sup>52</sup> Katie G. Cannon, Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot, and Emilie M. Townes, “Surviving the Blight,” essay, in *Katie’s Canon: Womanism and the Soul of the Black Community* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2021), 4.

<sup>53</sup> Rambo, “Spirit and Trauma,” 13.

<sup>54</sup> “The status of chattel—mere property—was permanent, hereditary, and strictly racial. African and African American women, men, and children were reduced to the condition of livestock, and their value was calculated in real estate terms...[and] were presumed to be slaves unless they could establish that they had been legally freed. The legalization of chattel slavery meant that the overwhelming majority of Blacks lived in permanently in subhuman status. No objective circumstance—education, skill, dress, or bearing—could modify this fundamentally racist arrangement. This mode of racial domination meant that as chattel slaves, none of my ancestors were human beings legally, culturally, socially, or politically. They had no socially recognized personhood. Their status in US society was literally as things. The institution of slavery and its corollaries, white supremacy and racial bigotry, excluded Black people from every normal human consideration.”

<sup>55</sup> Katie G. Cannon, Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot, and Emilie M. Townes, “Surviving the Blight,” essay, in *Katie’s Canon: Womanism and the Soul of the Black Community* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2021).

“Being both slave and female, the Black slave women survived wonton misuse and abuse”<sup>56</sup> within their non-traditional, unbeloved community. Black slave women were answerable with their bodies to “stock breeding” with Black men and [rape], sexual whims and advances of the ... white master, his sons, and the overseer.<sup>57</sup> They were answerable with their hearts to partners who were dehumanized, disrespected, beaten, and demoralized in public. They were answerable with their spirits to their children removed too soon from their bosoms and sold away like chattel. They were answerable with faith in spaces demanding their care for the white master, the white mistress, and their white offspring.<sup>58</sup> In some respects, the Black slave women were expected to silently or in isolation, flourish for the non-traditional, unbeloved community that owned them.

The Civil War ended the institution of chattel slavery but not the non-traditional unbeloved community that previously owned them. From the end of the nineteenth century until the 1960s,

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<sup>56</sup> Katie G. Cannon, Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot, and Emilie M. Townes, “The Emergence of Black Feminist Consciousness,” essay, in *Katie’s Canon: Womanism and the Soul of the Black Community* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2021).

<sup>57</sup> Katie G. Cannon, Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot, and Emilie M. Townes, “The Emergence of Black Feminist Consciousness,” essay, in *Katie’s Canon: Womanism and the Soul of the Black Community* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2021).

<sup>58</sup> “Toni Morrison described the moral agency of old Black women reared in the South in this way: “Edging into life from the back door. Becoming. Everybody in the world was in a position to give them orders. White women said, “Do this.” White children said, “Give me that.” White men said, “Come here.” Black men said, “Lay down.” The only people they need not take orders from were black children and each other. But they took all of that and recreated it in their own image. They ran the houses of white people, and knew it. When white men beat their men, they cleaned up the blood and went home to receive abuse from the victim. They beat their children with one hand and stole for them with the other. The hands that felled trees also cut umbilical cords; the hands that wrung the necks of chickens and butchered hogs also nudged African violets into bloom; the arms that loaded sheaves, bales and sacks rocked babies to sleep. They patted biscuits into flaky ovals of innocence—and shrouded the dead. They plowed all day and came home to nestle like plums under the limbs of their men. The legs that straddled a mule’s back were the same ones that straddled their men’s hips. And the difference was all the difference there was.”

Jim Crow laws instituted “a *defacto* social segregation and disenfranchisement of Blacks”<sup>59</sup> because whites were neither ready to accept the emancipation proclamation nor the fact that Blacks were “equal human beings with rights of life, liberty, and property. Institutional slavery ended, but the virulent and intractable hatred that supported it did not.”<sup>60</sup> African Americans were denied the right to vote, access to public facilities, service on juries, or equal treatment under the color of the law. Jim Crow was enforced against African Americans through violence by white supremacist groups.

Jim Crow *ended* with the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which banned discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin. *[emphasis mine]* “While freedom brought new opportunities for black men, for most [Black] women, it augmented old problems. After emancipation, racism and male supremacy continued to intersect patriarchal and capitalist structures in definitive ways”<sup>61</sup> for African American women. As a result, their voices remained excluded. Once again, African American women existed but within a non-traditional, unbeloved community.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, a new outpouring of violence and injustices targeted African Americans within the Black Lives Matter Movement based upon police brutality and “living while Black” in America. Trayvon Martin, George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Sandra Bland, Daunte Wright, and many other victims were murdered without due process

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<sup>59</sup> Katie G. Cannon, Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot, and Emilie M. Townes, “The Emergence of Black Feminist Consciousness,” essay, in *Katie’s Canon: Womanism and the Soul of the Black Community* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2021).

<sup>60</sup> Katie G. Cannon, Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot, and Emilie M. Townes, “The Emergence of Black Feminist Consciousness,” essay, in *Katie’s Canon: Womanism and the Soul of the Black Community* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2021).

<sup>61</sup> Katie G. Cannon, Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot, and Emilie M. Townes, “The Emergence of Black Feminist Consciousness,” essay, in *Katie’s Canon: Womanism and the Soul of the Black Community* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2021).

of the law, their right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness denied. This section provided a historical overview of Black women amid enslavement, the Civil War, Jim Crow, and the Black Lives Matter Movement.

### III. WOMANISM

Women like Lock and DOD, who are isolated, exist as *separatists* within the literary caveat of Alice Walker's vibrant four-part definition of "womanish."<sup>62</sup> This third chapter aims to define womanism, provide a womanist biblical interpretation of Naomi and Ruth, identify constructive reflections on the caveat of separatism, and provide womanist pedagogy. *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose*, Walker provided a descriptive definition of womanism: "... articulation of the subjective, communal, self-loving, and critical aspects of black women's culture..."<sup>63</sup> Womanism is the movement. Metaphorically, Walker's definition of womanist appears as an exquisite fabric woven in communal experiences or as a singular stitch when health concerns are present.

When woven as exquisite fabric, womanists are unapologetically committed, connected, responsible, and loving women survivors of color (for themselves and others). Their dance is based upon intersectionality with racism, sexism, and other forms of oppression.<sup>64</sup> Womanists' ethical reflection provides descriptive foundations that lead to analytical constructs for the eradication of oppression in the lives of Black people and, by extension, the rest of humanity and creation." The work of women ethicists like Dr. Stacey Floyd-Thomas encourages "celebrating tenets, resources,

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<sup>62</sup> Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers's Gardens: Womanist Prose*, (San Diego: Harvest/HBJ Book, 1983) xi.

<sup>63</sup> Stacey M. Floyd-Thomas, *Mining the Motherlode: Methods in Womanist Ethics* (Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 2006), 7.

<sup>64</sup> Floyd-Thomas, *Mining the Motherlode: Methods in Womanist Ethics*, 7.

and methods of a womanist Christian social ethics.”<sup>65</sup> In this section, I aim to discuss Walker’s four-part literary context of womanism, Floyd-Thomas’ expanded ethicist reflection of womanism, i.e., radical subjectivity, traditional communalism, redemptive self-love, critical engagement,<sup>66</sup> and a biblical context of womanism.

First, Walker defined *womanish* as not “frivolous, irresponsible, or not serious.” She is just the opposite of “girlish.” She is “womanish.” Walker explained womanish as a “black feminist or feminist of color...[who is] outrageous, audacious, courageous, or wilful...”<sup>67</sup> She identifies with “acting grown.” What does that look like? She wants to know, do, be, and acquire more depth. Womanish means “[r]esponsible. In charge. *Serious*.”<sup>68</sup> Floyd-Thomas described the first tenet of womanish as radical subjectivity because “a womanist claims her agency and has a subjective view... she is not a victim of circumstances but rather is a responsible, serious, and in-charge woman.”<sup>69</sup> Radical subjectivity explains the “nature vs. nurture,” “mother-wit,” and “mentoring and maturation” that allow the moral formation of a black woman-child’s intergenerational rite of passage.<sup>70</sup> These are more than survival lessons but moral lessons to claim one’s agency “to subvert the triple jeopardy of racism, sexism, and classicism.”<sup>71</sup> Within the lessons, change is inevitable. The prayer request within Reinhold Niebuhr’s Serenity Prayer is “to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.”<sup>72</sup> In her prayer for serenity, Angela Davis expands radical subjectivity for

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<sup>65</sup> Floyd-Thomas, *Mining the Motherlode*, 7.

<sup>66</sup> Floyd-Thomas, *Mining the Motherlode*, 8-11.

<sup>67</sup> Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers’s Gardens*, xi.

<sup>68</sup> Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers’s Gardens*, xi.

<sup>69</sup> Floyd-Thomas, *Mining the Motherlode*, 8-9.

<sup>70</sup> Floyd-Thomas, *Mining the Motherlode*, 8.

<sup>71</sup> Floyd-Thomas, *Mining the Motherlode*, 8.

<sup>72</sup> Serenity Prayer – “Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can and the wisdom to know the difference.” Reinhold Niebuhr (1892-1971)

womanists: “I am no longer accepting the things I cannot change. I am changing the things I cannot accept.”<sup>73</sup> Radical subjectivity refuses the permanency of isolation, silencing, dumbing down, or shutting out.

Second, Walker defined the operational perspective of the womanist’s view: “Appreciates and prefers women’s culture...emotional flexibility...and women’s strength.”<sup>74</sup> A womanist is culturally capable, knowing black history and culture. “Loves men...committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female.”<sup>75</sup> A womanist includes individual narratives of women, women’s gifts, women’s identities, and commitment to the survival of the people as “traditional universalist...and traditionally capable.”<sup>76</sup> Floyd-Thomas described this section as traditional communalism. She explained this tenet as specific to a womanist’s formative identity: “how black folk manage to undo the historically constructed-racist-sexist-classist-heterosexist ideologies...that discount the variations of their humanity...that have deprived them as traditionally capable... as well as traditionally universalists...”<sup>77</sup> In the lecture “Womanist Ethics: Identity Formation as a Spiritual Discipline,” Floyd-Thomas defined traditional communalism as “takes into account the various gifts, identities, and concerns of Black people in general in order to use every resource available to strengthen the community as a whole.”<sup>78</sup> Floyd-Thomas said,

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<sup>73</sup> Stacey Floyd-Thomas, “Womanist Ethics: Identity Formation As a Spiritual Discipline,” VDS Doctor of Ministry Program Video 49-51, 2022, <https://vanderbilt.app.box.com/file866953937402?>

<sup>74</sup> Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers’s Gardens*, xi.

<sup>75</sup> Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers’s Gardens*, xi.

<sup>76</sup> Traditionally universalist, as in ‘Mama, why are we brown, pink, and yellow, and our cousins are white, beige, and black?’ Ans.: ‘Well you know the colored race is just like a flower garden, with every color flower represented.’ Traditionally capable, as in: ‘Mama, I’m walking to Canad and I’m taking you and a bunch of other slaves with me.’ Reply: ‘It wouldn’t be the first time.’ Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers’s Gardens*, xi.

<sup>77</sup> Floyd-Thomas, *Mining the Motherlode*, 9.

<sup>78</sup> Floyd-Thomas, “Womanist Ethics.”

“It is here that Walker provides Black women’s epistemology – how Black women know; Black women’s ontology—how Black women live out their being black women; and black women’s phenomenology—how they experience it,” i.e., traditional universalism and being traditionally capable.<sup>79</sup>

Here, it is important to note the (dis)appearance and the silent grace given to a separatist, those like Lock and DOD, who have taken an emergent bystander’s role and are isolated as womanists due to health conditions. Here, we find the subject of this project, isolated MST/MI African American women veterans. There is no traditional communalism for them. They bear medical diagnoses, medical disparities, and often missed moral repair (no ‘charted’ MI). There is no celebration of cultural history, personal gifts, concerns for the community, traditional universalism, or being traditionally capable. MST/MI African American women have been discharged from active duty and indeed appear as veterans for chaplain services, broken mentally and physically with guilt, hopelessness, shame, depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation. They choose to be isolated without community.

Separatism resides behind a firm roadblock that prevents flourishing. Many underlying reasons exist for such a roadblock. Alice Walker’s caveat within the unapologetic womanish definition suggests not “[c]ommitted to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female.”<sup>80</sup> Another reason is separatism for “health’s sake.”<sup>81</sup> Walker suggested this reason as an exception to womanism and offered the occurrence as “periodically.” But three things are quite clear about this separatism: there is a roadblock, the result of separation is isolation, there is no community, and the occurrence *may not* be permanent. With separatism established, the question

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<sup>79</sup> Floyd-Thomas, “Womanist Ethics.”

<sup>80</sup> Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers’s Gardens*, xi.

<sup>81</sup> Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers’s Gardens*, xi.



becomes whether one who is isolated can flourish without returning to community. The answer for isolated African American women veterans with military sexual trauma and moral injury is uncharted.

Third, Walker says, a womanist knows loves, i.e., “..loves music, loves the moon...loves the folk, loves herself. Regardless.”<sup>82</sup> Floyd-Thomas calls this redemptive self-love. She attributed the section as a clarion call to dehumanizing stereotypes and “demystifying the perceptions of black women’s bodies, ways, and loves as vile.”<sup>83</sup> It tells someone that they are made in the *imago Dei*.<sup>84</sup> Floyd-Thomas attributed and reaffirmed Michele Jacques, who stated,<sup>85</sup> “Walker’s call to love herself ‘regardless’ is one of the most foundationally holistic and revolutionary political actions African-American women can take, a call that is the hallmark of the womanist tradition.”<sup>86</sup>

Fourth, Walker defined the relationship between womanists and feminists. Yes, purple and lavender are relative colors but purple is a deeper shade of lavender. Yes, womanists and feminists have a similar cause for gender rights, but within the womanism movement for equality, womanists dive deeper for equality. Womanism must deconstruct racism, classicism, *and* sexism. Here, Floyd-Thomas provides challenges and introduces the fourth tenet, critical engagement. She stated that critical engagement “obliges Black women to critically engage their world at the intersection of their oppression”<sup>87</sup> for true liberation to exist, that “necessitates no compromise, mortgage, or trade-off...to struggle ceaselessly to the fullest extent in search of freedom, justice, and equality.”<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers’s Gardens*, xii.

<sup>83</sup> Floyd-Thomas, *Mining the Motherlode*, 10.

<sup>84</sup> Floyd-Thomas, “Womanist Ethics.”

<sup>85</sup> Floyd-Thomas, *Mining the Motherlode*, 10.

<sup>86</sup> Floyd-Thomas, *Mining the Motherlode*, 10.

<sup>87</sup> Floyd-Thomas, “Womanist Ethics.”

<sup>88</sup> Floyd-Thomas, *Mining the Motherlode*, 11.

The following is a biblical example of a womanist's critical engagement and feminist interpretation of the Book of Ruth. In "Two Women in a Man's World," feminist Phyllis Trible described the book of Ruth within four scenes intersecting in a man's world. Trible begins, "A man's world tells a woman's story."<sup>89</sup> The aged Naomi and youthful Ruth are characters within a misogynistic community looking at alternatives to living in a man's world. Trible's account identified Naomi within the misogynistic context of being destroyed as a female due to the underlying sexual discrimination of the day.<sup>90</sup> Having to face the deaths of all the menfolk in the family, Naomi's whole world capsized because of the cultural practice of patriarchy. A man's voice was only recognized as the status and progress to exist within the community. All of her men were dead. The only voices left were hers and her two Moabite daughters-in-law. As a result, Naomi is accompanied to Bethel by one of her Moabite daughters-in-law. On the journey, Naomi isolates herself in silence from Ruth, her loyal daughter-in-law.<sup>91</sup>

Womanist Renita Weems goes deeper than Tribles' description of Naomi in a man's world. In "Blessed Be the Tie that Binds" in *Just a Sister Away: A Womanist Vision of Women's Relationships in the Bible*, Weems acknowledged the male-dominated world *and* concentrated on the amazing friendship and experiences between two women, Naomi and Ruth. She described their

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<sup>89</sup> Phyllis Trible, "Two Women in a Man's World: A Reading of the Book of Ruth," *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 59, no. 3 (1976): 251–79. 251.

<sup>90</sup> The narration focuses entirely upon her but avoids her name. "The woman," it says, "was bereft of her two children and her husband (vs. 5) From wife to widow, from mother to no-mother, this female is stripped of all identity. The security of husband and children, which a male-dominated culture affords its women, is hers no longer. The definition of worth, by which it values the female, applies to her no more. The blessings of old age, which gives through progeny, are no longer. Stranger in a foreign land, this woman is a victim of death—and of life." Trible, "Two Women in a Man's World," 253.

<sup>91</sup>Trible, "Two Women in a Man's World," 257.

intersectionality as a bond transcending the social indicators of “age, nationality, and religion.”<sup>92</sup> According to Weems, Ruth’s pledge<sup>93</sup> to friendship was so uncompromising that it was embarrassing.<sup>94</sup> Ruth’s pledge to Naomi is forever. The underlying commandments of such a friendship are (1) Be a sister to a friend and (2) Be persistent and intentional about the friendship.<sup>95</sup> Weems adds and places emphasis on the unique relationship created by these two widows. It is the establishment of a soul sisterhood. Both need healing. Both are processing spiritual injuries, i.e., relationship, material, intrapsychic, role, and systemic losses. The story of Naomi and Ruth becomes more than a happy ending.<sup>96</sup> It is about “faithfulness, devotion, commitment, and stubborn loyalty—the stuff that good relationships are made of.”<sup>97</sup> It is about two women's shared good and bad experiences, committed lifelong friendships, and their connection to a silent but present God. Their friendship did not end with Ruth’s good fortune of marriage to a prosperous Boaz and the birth of her son, Obed, but lasted until death do they part.

Intersectionality is important for the critical engagement of one’s story and context. Involving intersectionality can answer questions – Can a binary’s world tell a non-binary’s story? Can a heterosexual’s world tell a queer’s story? Can a civilian’s world tell a veteran’s story? Can a feminist’s world tell a womanist’s story? The results may be a lighter shade, a slanted worldview,

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<sup>92</sup>Renita J. Weems, *Just a Sister Away: A Womanist Vision of Women’s Relationships in the Bible* (San Diego, CA: LuraMedia, 1988), 25.

<sup>93</sup>Ruth said, “Do not press me to leave you or turn back from following you! Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; Your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die, I will die—there will I be buried. May the Lord do thus and so to me, and more as well, if even death parts me from you!” Ru 1:16-17 (NRSV).

<sup>94</sup>Weems, *Just a Sister Away*, 28.

<sup>95</sup>Weems, *Just a Sister Away*, 30.

<sup>96</sup>Boaz marries Ruth. Boaz is the designated kinsman redeemer for Naomi’s spouse’s lineage. The lineage will continue because the child is born to Ruth and Boaz. His name is Obed. He is the grandfather of King David. Jesus is born in the lineage of King David. Ruth is named within the lineage of Jesus. Ru 4:13-22 (NRSV).

<sup>97</sup>Weems, *Just a Sister Away*, 33.

opposites, or dismissed as an error. For a Caucasian military Veteran woman, intersectionality occurs as the social indicator of sexism. For an African American woman Veteran, intersectionality occurs as the social indicator of racism, sexism, and classism. There is always an automatic need to go deeper than a feminist for the African American woman. For example, in the Book of Ruth, misogyny is the hatred of women. On all accounts, the perpetrator is a male. In Tribble and Weems' translations, misogyny occurred as a challenge to the survival of both women. But Moya Bailey goes deeper to define another term particular to African American women. The term "misogynoir" (pronounced mi-soj-uhn-nwar) refers to the hatred of black women.<sup>98</sup> The perpetrators can be males and non-black women.

For them, and without warning, African American women veterans enter the military for the same reason as their counterparts, for advancement. Each branch was wrapped in a specific mission and plenty of core values. Little did the isolated African American woman veteran know that donning the same uniform, excelling in the same training, maintaining the same protocol and discipline, or receiving stellar performance appraisals would never eliminate the misogynous image in the minds of their perpetrators. Most, if not all, would never have believed that such a misogynous image would overpower their contributions to the loyal service to their country. Within their loyal service, they are subjected to unsolicited sexual assault, harassment, and moral injury due to their misogynistic images. What are possible solutions? Floyd-Thomas suggests redemptive self-love. Bell Hooks suggests inquiring about "what type of images subvert, pose

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<sup>98</sup> Misogynoir is a term I created in 2008 to describe the anti-Black racist misogyny that Black women experience, particularly in US visual and digital culture...The term is a portmanteau of "misogyny," the hatred of women, and "noir," the French word for "black," which also carries a specific meaning in film and other media...the term "film noir" in 1946 to describe the gritty, cynical, and initially American movies with unusually cruel themes for the time. Moya Bailey, *Misogynoir Transformed: Black Women's Digital Resistance* (New York: New York University Press, 2022). 1.

critical alternatives, transform our world views, and move us away from dualistic thinking about good and bad.”<sup>99</sup> These solutions are needed and must be reachable for African American women veterans.

### *Womanist Theological Pedagogy*

Dr. Katie Cannon addressed Walker’s womanism and suggested a theological pedagogy, identifying the strongholds that inhibit a womanist community from flourishing. Cannon pointed to spaces where African American women were locked out but now seek to enter.<sup>100</sup> This is similar to placement under a bell jar with all that is oppressive on the interior and all that is hopeful on its exterior.<sup>101</sup> Once identified, Cannon’s pedagogical process required “debunking, unmasking, and disentangling the ideologies, theologies, and systems of value operative in [our] ... society.”<sup>102</sup> This process is called liberation ethics, and it is imperative in “becom[ing] responsible decision-makers who envision structural and systemic alternatives that embrace the well-being of all.”<sup>103</sup> As a result, Cannon ‘raised the floor’<sup>104</sup> to flourishing. In her lecture,

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<sup>99</sup> Bailey, *Misogynoir Transformed*, 1-2.

<sup>100</sup> Katie G. Cannon, Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot, and Emilie M. Townes, “15 Metalogues and Dialogues: Teaching the Womanist Idea,” essay, in *Katie’s Canon: Womanism and the Soul of the Black Community* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2021), 192.

<sup>101</sup> In her lecture, Dr. Floyd-Thomas utilized a metaphor from her childhood. Her Nana used a bell jar for preserving and protecting pound cakes inside from the harmful elements outside. Floyd-Thomas, “Womanist Ethics: Identity Formation As a Spiritual Discipline.”

The separatist exists in an inverted protective bell jar of oppression, i.e., racism, sexism, classism, heterosexism, and misogynoir; needing every ‘hopeful’ thing on the outside of the bell jar. Similarly, MST/MI African American women veterans are situated under an inverted bell jar with trauma and violated values intentionally isolating from the world outside the bell jar, specifically traditional communalism.

<sup>102</sup> Katie G. Cannon, Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot, and Emilie M. Townes, “15 Metalogues and Dialogues: Teaching the Womanist Idea,” essay, in *Katie’s Canon: Womanism and the Soul of the Black Community* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2021).

<sup>103</sup> Cannon et al., “15 Metalogues and Dialogues,” 195.

<sup>104</sup> In her lecture, Dr. Floyd Thomas quoted Jackie Grant, “It is not separatist in the aims of justice but it is actually intentional integrationists because when you lift up the floor everything gets lifted.

Floyd-Thomas provided focus and strategy on where to begin with the isolated African American MI/MST women veteran. Liberation ethics allows resistance to conditions that thwart life,<sup>105</sup> allowing an arrival at a new doing, knowing, and being, i.e., phenomenology, epistemology, and ontology of womanist ethics.<sup>106</sup> For Integrative Chaplaincy, Floyd-Thomas gives the clarion call: “If you ever have the inclination to know what love, justice, or healing should look like, start at the bottom. Start with those who have been marginalized, who have been silenced, who have been shut out.”<sup>107</sup> Those are the African American MI/MST women veterans who are isolated.

I care for a young African American veteran who has been silenced, shut out, and who is angry in isolation. Within three years, she was raped on active duty, raped by a ‘trusted’ employer after being medically discharged from active duty, and mad at God for the death of her mother. She questioned the lack of due process or unaddressed moral injury at each event. She has tried to re-enter employment, good mental health, financial security, and stable relationships but was unsuccessful. She has faced tests of love, tests of hate, tests of fear, tests of shame, and tests of death. She is at the crossroads of violence and non-violence, namely, suicide or life. She is isolated physically with social anxiety and does not have the wherewith to face or remain on any virtual camera. If a provider can survive the initial hazing on or off camera, the veteran has the reputation of continuing to attack providers and criticizing their care for her. She severely verbally abuses them to the point of tears or *mandatory* professional recusal. At an approved external provider’s

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When [women ethicists] lift up the floor everything else gets lifted.” Floyd-Thomas, “Womanist Ethics: Identity Formation As a Spiritual Discipline.”

<sup>105</sup> Cannon et al., “15 Metalogues and Dialogues,” 195.

<sup>106</sup> Cannon et al., “15 Metalogues and Dialogues,” 195.

<sup>107</sup> Floyd-Thomas, “Womanist Ethics.”

initial session and during her routine hazing, the provider abruptly ended the session and his future care, stating, “Have a good life!”

Remaining as one of her providers is not for the faint of heart. I know because I am a wounded survivor. Initially, I thought women providers of color were untargeted, but I learned differently. Recently, the veteran pushed a reputed brown woman psychiatrist to the point of professional recusal. The psychiatrist inadvertently misread their last scheduled appointment. The provider was very late but *very* apologetic. The veteran cursed her harshly and refused to accept the apology, pointing to previous examples when the veteran was late to their sessions or refused to appear/remain on camera, and said provider canceled their session and recused herself of continued care.

I have wondered why I remain the last ‘standing’ provider, why my presence has been sought out by incoming and outgoing providers when their care is questioned, or why I have been able to see the vulnerable, tender side of the volcano. I can only discern a spiritual intersectionality of critical engagement with my care that resembled her deceased mother’s care and a need for spiritual support to move toward redemption, reconciliation, and participation (again) in a community for justice and mercy. You see, this veteran is a single parent, and her only barrier to suicide is her 17-year-old daughter.<sup>108</sup> This section defined womanism, provided a womanist biblical interpretation of Naomi and Ruth, identified constructive reflections on the caveat of separatism, provided womanist pedagogy, and used an illustrative case scenario.

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<sup>108</sup> Her daughter is academically gifted. She is ranked in the top three in the 11<sup>th</sup> grade. Unfortunately, she will leave her mother’s nest for college in 2025.

#### IV. COMMUNITY

This fourth chapter will provide the theology of community, the beloved community model, the Ubuntu model, and my community model as suggested communities for a possible healing resource for African-American MST/MI women veterans.

##### *Theology of Community*

In Genesis, God's presence created a community. God (and the community) existed before there “was.” God worked singularly or in the community. God created a single existence and a community existence. When God created singularly, God told the singular to multiply in the community. The community *without* became the community abundant: created light for the day, darkness for the night, created sky, land, grass, trees, stars, sun, moon, and living creatures for the creation community. [*emphasis mine*] Indicative of the ultimate abundance occurred when God created *Adham* in God’s image. *Adham*, generic for humankind, was an earth creature (made from the earth) and characterized an androgynous representation of two sexes, male and female.<sup>109</sup> Thus, God created the first flourishing community within six days and evaluated the community on all levels as ‘good.’ God created humanity in *imago Dei*, in God’s image, in a beautifully ‘good’ context. On the seventh day, God *ended* the work of creation and rested. On the seventh day, the day of completion, God (and the community) is there whenever a community exists.

After the seventh day, God instructed the creation community on how to flourish with God remaining as part of the creation community. Creating a community allowed a loving God to have a loving relationship with the created community, especially *Adham*. Reflecting on the love within

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<sup>109</sup> Phyllis Trible, “Not a Jot Not a Tittle: Genesis 2-3 after 20 Years,” essay, in *Eve and Adam: Jewish, Christian and Muslim Readings on Genesis and Gender* (Indiana University Press, 1995), 101–6. 102



this first community, God encouraged peace. The peace connection was both physical and spiritual. As earth creatures, *Adham* must have known a peaceful understanding of ‘being.’ As *imago Dei* creatures, *Adham* must have known a spiritual awakening of God’s existential love as Creator. The created community expressed gratitude and worship to God as Creator. The expression created a community expansive for all creation.

But *Adham* was disobedient and fell. *Adham* was outside the presence of both God and the intimate creation community, both spiritually and physically.<sup>110</sup> *Adham* ate the forbidden fruit. In *Womanist Midrash*, Wilda Gafney asked the underlying ‘forbidden’ question: “[H]ow [does] humanity... keep the commandments of God?” Her suggested answer: “[O]ne will not eat fruit from a tree that one does not touch.”<sup>111</sup> Consequently, *Adham* was punished for disobedience and banished from God’s direct presence in the creation community. God dispenses the consequences of disobedience to each: God provided the first *Adham* a labor-dominant punishment, the second *Adham* a painful child-bearing subservient punishment, and the serpent an apparent restricted lowly physical existence. Now, separatism appeared. Before the long walk out of the garden and before God kills to clothe *Adham*, God indicated that separatism may not be permanent. In Genesis 3:15,<sup>112</sup> a reconciling, redemptive God adds a caveat to the dispensation for the woman and the serpent. God adds a future messianic rematch. The second *Adham*’s seed, not from the first

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<sup>110</sup> [God] drove out the man; and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim, and a sword flaming and turning to guard the way to the tree of life. Gn 3:24 (NSRV).

<sup>111</sup> “[T]he principle of building fences around the commandments or individual instructions, consisting of developing a teaching that will enable the community to easily fulfill the specific *torah*. To wit, one will not eat fruit from a tree that one does not touch. In this reading of the story, the woman offers the first (proto-) rabbinic teaching in the newly created world.” Wilda C. Gafney, *Womanist Midrash: A Reintroduction to the Women of the Torah and the Throne*. (Westminster, John Knox Press, 2017), 23.

<sup>112</sup> “...I will put enmity between you [serpent] and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will strike your head and you will strike his heel.” Gn 3:15 (NRSV).

*Adham*, will overpower and crush the serpent. At that time, the direct relationship with God will be restored.<sup>113</sup> Even though *Adhams'* separatism from God outside the creation community begins with drama when a jealous 'evil' son murders an obedient 'good' son,<sup>114</sup> there is a promised hope of redemptive love.

Over the millennium, the creation account has been exegeted with recurring overtones of male supremacy and female subordination. Feminist Phyllis Tribble encourages one to read the Genesis story responsibly, acknowledging that a flourishing community existed within the first six days without patriarchal intent. God rested in approval on the seventh day.<sup>115</sup> Period. Over the millennium, the creation account has been interpreted to assume that God created a Caucasian *Adham* and not a 'brown or black' *Adham*. Womanist Katie Cannon read scripture responsibly and debunked this interpretation as a convenient social construct to justify slavery and validate Black people as chattel, inferior, and not human.<sup>116</sup>

God fulfilled the messianic promise. God sent Jesus to the world because God remained in love with *Adham*.<sup>117</sup> In the Gospels, Jesus' presence created community. He spoke about community membership, isolation, accountability, and reconciliation. Jesus said community membership was not about being superior or 'stage front and center' but being humble, pure, and

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<sup>113</sup> It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, while the sun's light failed; and the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." Having said this, he breathed his last. Lk 23:44-46 (NRSV).

<sup>114</sup> Gn 4:1-8 (NRSV).

<sup>115</sup> Tribble, "Not a Jot Not a Title: Genesis 2-3 after 20 Years," essay, in *Eve and Adam: Jewish, Christian and Muslim Readings on Genesis and Gender*, 101.

<sup>116</sup> Katie G. Cannon, Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot, and Emilie M. Townes, "Slave Ideology and Biblical Interpretation," essay, in *Katie's Canon: Womanism and the Soul of the Black Community* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2021), 167.

<sup>117</sup> For God so loved the world, that he gave his only son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Jn 3:16 (NRSV).

innocent. Jesus encouraged extreme reconciliation in the community. Jesus said that when one wanders, separates, or isolates from the community, every ‘one’ is important enough to be found, heard, and celebrated in the community. [*emphasis mine*] In Luke 15, Jesus taught three (parables) metaphors: (1) It’s like a group of one hundred sheep, and one sheep leaves the sheepfold. The ‘good’ accountable shepherd will leave the ninety-nine on the mountain to bring the ‘one’ back to the community. Then, the same shepherd will call together his friends and neighbors to celebrate in the community for the reconciliation. Jesus said the shepherd has more authority to rejoice over the ‘one’ [minority] found than the ninety-nine [majority] who never left the community.<sup>118</sup> (2) It’s like an accountable woman with ten silver coins but losing one. When the woman discovers her loss, she lights a candle and sweeps the house until she finds the coin. The woman will call together her friends and neighbors to celebrate in the community for reconciliation.<sup>119</sup> (3) It’s like a son who demanded and received his inheritance from his father. The son then goes to a far country and wastes all that he had ‘living it up.’ He finally comes to himself facing a famine, a job as a field hand, and no food but the pig’s food. The son returns home to ask for forgiveness and a servant’s position. His father sees him from afar, runs to him, and kisses him. His father shouts the reconciliation to the servants and community, “Bring a robe, a ring, and kill the fatted calf. Let us eat and be merry! For my son was lost but now is found.”<sup>120</sup> Jesus framed the theology of community within a spiritual dimension and earthly context. In a spiritual context, when two or three are gathered together and pray, God will act!<sup>121</sup> In an earthly context, when two or three are

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<sup>118</sup> Lk 15:4-7 (NRSV).

<sup>119</sup> Lk 15:8-10 (NRSV).

<sup>120</sup> Lk 15:11-24 (NRSV).

<sup>121</sup> Mt 18:19 (NRSV).

together, Jesus is in the community,<sup>122</sup> and the *[one]* must re-enter the community membership.  
*[emphasis mine]*

### *Beloved Community*

In 1913, Harvard philosophy professor Josiah Royce looked at twentieth-century society and developed the concept of a “beloved community.” He said, “[m]y life means nothing, either theoretically or practically, unless I am a member of a community.”<sup>123</sup> Royce saw community beyond a static daily experience but “as a perfect unity...joined in one divine chorus.”<sup>124</sup> It “shimmers with liberal hopes of human progress and perfectability.”<sup>125</sup> According to Royce, the beloved community had several connections: *loyalty, agapic love, practical faith, and contempt for evil.*<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Mt 18:20 (NRSV).

<sup>123</sup> Susan Pollak, “The Idea of the Beloved Community: The Creative Friendship of Martin Luther King Jr and Thich Nhat Hanh,” *Psychology Today*, 2023, 1.

<sup>124</sup> Charles Marsh, *The Beloved Community How Faith Shapes Social Justice, from the Civil Rights Movement to Today* (New York: Basic Books, 2005), 49.

<sup>125</sup> Marsh, *The Beloved Community How Faith Shapes Social Justice, from the Civil Rights Movement to Today*, 49.

<sup>126</sup> (1) *loyalty*: the willing and thoroughgoing devotion of self to a cause, when the cause is something which unites many selves in one, and which is, therefore, the interest of a community; (2) *agape love*: the requirement to use all fitting means – example, precept, kindness, non-resistance, heroism, patience, courage, strenuousness—all means that tend to make the neighbor...one of the lovers. Only in this way can the love for the community be truly shown...to make that love maximally inclusive so that all might partake in turn of the love of and by that community.

(3) *practical faith*: the community is a unit which has a value which is superior to all the values and interests of detached individuals... Thus, none are to be excluded from this ideal community, and none are to be left behind.

(4) *contempt for evil*: Royce’s beloved community is inspired by a divine contempt for the powers of evil...the contempt is for evil rather than for those who commit it. Gary Herstein, “The Roycean Roots of the Beloved Community,” *The Pluralist* 4, no. 2 (June 2009): 91–107, <https://doi.org/10.1353/plu.0.0013>, 92.

For many, Royce's communities shimmered with textbook hope of religious ethics and human progress, potentially towards the American dream. For those subjected to Jim Crow and inequality, 'loyalty' was not the answer. I remember my mother's matter-of-fact but softened tone when sharing her experience in the community of entering through the back door to take lessons from her white piano teacher. She learned to play the classics proficiently but at what expense of her spiritual self-worth. Martin Luther King, Jr (MLK) embraced the beloved community but was not willing to remain loyal to the Jim Crow practices within the community. How would anyone eliminate such an ugly 'bird?' Or can you? MLK's choices were either violence or non-violence. His clinical spiritual trials were tests of love, tests of hate, tests of fear, tests of shame, and his ultimate tragic death.

Martin Luther King used the Roycean concept of a beloved community throughout the Civil Rights Movement. The Civil Rights Movement's beloved community emphasized equality, love, and justice. He, too, envisioned where all people of all races, nationalities, and creeds come together in a beloved community that "rotates around two principal axis: (1) The beloved community as an embodiment of agapeic love and (2) the beloved community as the embodiment of the moral laws."<sup>127</sup> King recognized a need for a *spiritual movement* toward redemption, reconciliation, justice, and mercy. In 1956, in "Facing the Challenge of a New Age," Martin Luther King Jr. said, "It was this type of spirit and this type of love that transformed opposers into friends. It was this kind of understanding and goodwill that transformed the deep gloom of the old age into the exuberant gladness of the new age. It was this love which dispel[led] fear and brought about

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<sup>127</sup> Gary Herstein, "The Roycean Roots of the Beloved Community," 92.

the miracles [of justice].”<sup>128</sup> In his preeminent speech, “I Have a Dream,” MLK described this beloved community. He said, “I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character.”<sup>129</sup> Not surprisingly, others<sup>130</sup> have been applauded who followed the path of MLK in a spiritually beloved community.

### *Ubuntu*

Ubuntu is a ‘specialty’ community *within* the beloved community. Ubuntu is the African concept of community that focuses “on the integrity of creation and the habitual recalling of our image of God ...in the midst of human conflict.”<sup>131</sup> Ubuntu expresses that “*imago Dei* theology better determines humanity because racial ideology inevitably leads to the use of power,”<sup>132</sup> and “the oppressor makes the claim to tell you who you are.”<sup>133</sup> Archbishop Desmond Tutu’s “Ubuntu theology beg[an] with God’s creation of humans as finite creatures made for the infinite.”<sup>134</sup> It is here that Tutu’s ubuntu theology “seeks to restore the oppressor’s humanity by releasing and enabling the oppressed to see their oppressors as peers under God.”<sup>135</sup> Ubuntu expresses

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<sup>128</sup> “Facing the Challenge of a New Age,” address delivered at ..., accessed April 3, 2024, [http://okra.stanford.edu/transcription/document\\_images/Vol03Scans/451\\_3-Dec-1956\\_Facing%20the%20Challenge%20of%20a%20New%20Age.pdf](http://okra.stanford.edu/transcription/document_images/Vol03Scans/451_3-Dec-1956_Facing%20the%20Challenge%20of%20a%20New%20Age.pdf).

<sup>129</sup> “Read Martin Luther King Jr.’s ‘I Have a Dream’ Speech in Its Entirety,” NPR, January 16, 2023, <https://www.npr.org/2010/01/18/122701268/i-have-a-dream-speech-in-its-entirety>.

<sup>130</sup> Clarence Jordan of “The God-Movement” In Southeast Georgia, Fannie Lou Hamer of the “New Kingdom in Mississippi,” John Perkins of the “Quiet Revolution” of Christian community building, Mark Gornik of “the *Shalom* of the City.” Marsh, *The Beloved Community How Faith Shapes Social Justice, from the Civil Rights Movement to Today*, 206.

<sup>131</sup> Michael Battle, *Reconciliation: The Ubuntu Theology of Desmond Tutu* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 1997), 5.

<sup>132</sup> Battle, *Reconciliation: The Ubuntu Theology of Desmond Tutu*, 5.

<sup>133</sup> Battle, *Reconciliation: The Ubuntu Theology of Desmond Tutu*, 5.

<sup>134</sup> Battle, *Reconciliation: The Ubuntu Theology of Desmond Tutu*, 5.

<sup>135</sup> Battle, *Reconciliation: The Ubuntu Theology of Desmond Tutu*, 5.

“mutuality, has hospitality,...an open and welcoming attitude that is willing to share, to be generous and caring, ... a person who proves to be a neighbor to strangers and welcomes them as friends.”<sup>136</sup> “We need other human beings in order to be human. We are made for togetherness, we are made for family for fellowship, to exist in a tender network of interdependence.”<sup>137</sup> But its opponent, Apartheid, fueled by secular prosperity and a materialistic understanding of human identity, expresses what Lewis Baldwin describes as “social evil and theological heresy”<sup>138</sup>... the very antithesis of the beloved community ideal.”<sup>139</sup>

Tutu’s theology suggests that “the only way to make another person’s determination of who one is make sense and remain properly intelligible to the two persons is to appeal to that

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<sup>136</sup> “In an address at Morehouse Medical School, Tutu described Ubuntu: as hospitality, as an open and welcoming attitude that is willing to share, to be generous and caring, ... as a person who proves to be a neighbor to strangers and welcomes them as friends. Ubuntu rests on the knowledge that human existence is inextricably bound up with God’s creation and that a solitary human being is a contradiction in terms.– I need other persons to become a person myself.” Battle, *Reconciliation: The Ubuntu Theology of Desmond Tutu*, 65.

<sup>137</sup> “We say a person is a person through other persons. We don’t come fully formed into the world. We learn how to think, how to walk, how to speak, how to behave, indeed, how to be human from other human beings. We need other human beings in order to be human. We are made for togetherness, we are made for family for fellowship, to exist in a tender network of interdependence. That is why apartheid, and all racism are so fundamentally evil for they declare we are made for separation, for enmity, for alienation, for apartness... This is how you have ubuntu—you care, you are hospitable, you’re gentle, you’re compassionate and concerned... Go forth to make the world a better place for you can make a difference. The task is daunting, of course, but it is our necessary struggle.” Battle *Reconciliation: The Ubuntu Theology of Desmond Tutu*, 65-66.

<sup>138</sup> Apartheid constitutes both social evil and theological heresy because it denies at least four basic principles that formed the core of King’s concept of community: (1) the impartiality of God in creating and dealing with human beings; (2) a sacramentalistic idea of the cosmos as echoed by the psalmist, “the earth is the Lord’s, and the fullness thereof\_\_ the world, and they that dwell therein;” (3) a belief in the dignity and worth of all human personality; and (4) a solidaristic view of society and the world, which holds that each person is a distinct ontological entity who finds growth, fulfillment, and purpose through personal and social relationships based on the agape love ethic. Lewis V. Baldwin, *Toward the Beloved Community: Martin Luther King Jr. and South Africa* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 1995), 2.

<sup>139</sup> Baldwin, *Toward the Beloved Community*, 2.

which is beyond both of them.”<sup>140</sup> I am because we are, and because we are, you are.<sup>141</sup> Archbishop Desmond Tutu approached the community, specifically apartheid, and the healing community process, through a lens of forgiveness. In his book, *No Future Without Forgiveness*, the Archbishop described the atrocities he gathered as Chair of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings to offer amnesty in exchange for testimonies of full disclosure from those committing atrocities. He said, “Forgiveness gives people resilience, enabling them to survive and emerge still human despite all efforts to dehumanize them.”<sup>142</sup> The Archbishop offered the basis of this lived theology as God’s sense of humor and God’s unchanging and unchangeable love. He says of God’s humor, “Look at South Africa. They had a nightmare called apartheid. It has ended.

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<sup>140</sup> Battle, *Reconciliation: The Ubuntu Theology of Desmond Tutu*, 43.

<sup>141</sup> Battle, *Reconciliation: The Ubuntu Theology of Desmond Tutu*, 64.

<sup>142</sup> Atrocities from the period of acquired apartheid power in 1948 under the color of law to uproot, intimidate, tear gas, attack with police dogs, ban, imprison, torture, sentenced to death, drive into exile, kill, rage war on people “created in God’s image whose crime was to be black.” Forgiveness gives people resilience, enabling them to survive and emerge still human despite all efforts to dehumanize them. Archbishop Tutu reasoned that the hearings offer of conditional amnesty was consistent with the “*African Weltanschauung* or a ‘world view’ known as *ubuntu*. *Ubuntu* is very difficult to render into a Western language. It speaks of the very essence of being human. When we want to give high praise to someone we say, ‘*Yu, u nobuntu*.’ ‘Hey, he or she has *ubuntu*.’ This means they are generous, hospitable, friendly, caring and compassionate. They share what they have. It also means my humanity is caught up, is inextricably bound up, in theirs. We belong in a bundle of life. We say, ‘a person is a person through other people.’ It is not ‘I think therefore I am.’ It is rather: ‘I am human because I belong.’ I participate, I share. A person with *ubuntu* is open and available to others, affirming of others, does not feel threatened that others are able and good; for he or she has a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole and is diminished when others are humiliated or diminished, when others are tortured or oppressed, or treated as if they were less than who they are. Harmony, friendliness, community are great goods. Social harmony is for us the *summum bonum*—the greatest good. To forgive is not just to be altruistic. It is the best form of self-interest. What dehumanizes you, inexorably dehumanizes me. Forgiveness gives people resilience, enabling them to survive and emerge still human despite all efforts to dehumanize them... *Ubuntu* means that in a real sense even the supporters of apartheid were victims of the vicious system which they implanted and which they supported so enthusiastically.” Desmond Tutu, *No Future without Forgiveness* (London: Rider, 2000), 17, 34-35.



Northern Ireland (or wherever), your nightmare will end too.”<sup>143</sup> “God wants us to succeed, not for our glory and aggrandizement but for the sake of God’s world.”<sup>144</sup>

Archbishop Tutu continued, “God does not give up on anyone, for God loved us from all eternity, God loves us now, and God will always love us, all of us, good and bad, forever and ever.”<sup>145</sup> The Archbishop says, “[W]hat makes a community a community or a people for better or worse is *true forgiveness* that deals with all of the past to make the future possible.”<sup>146</sup>

I believe Ubuntu happened to Viola Davis. In “Coming into Me,” chapter fourteen of her autobiography and biography *Finding Me*, Davis describes desperately losing her natural acting gift attending Julliard, studying within an oppressive Eurocentric pedagogy of acting,<sup>147</sup> but *finding me* when traveling with a small group to Gambia. She experienced Africa, “God’s playground,”<sup>148</sup> as a beloved community and returned to reconcile Julliard as her Ubuntu

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<sup>143</sup> “Who in their right mind could ever imagined that South Africa to be an example of anything but awfulness...[but] God wanted to point to us as a beacon of hope, a possible paradigm, and to say, ‘Look at South Africa. They had a nightmare called apartheid. It has ended. Northern Ireland (or wherever), your nightmare will end too. They had a problem regarded as intractable. They are resolving it. No problem anywhere can ever again be considered to be intractable. There is hope for you too.’...God wants us to succeed, not for our glory and aggrandizement but for the sake of God’s world. God wants to show that there is life after conflict and repression—that because of forgiveness, there is a future. Tutu, *No Future without Forgiveness*, 229-230.

<sup>144</sup> Tutu, *No Future without Forgiveness*, 229-230.

<sup>145</sup> Tutu, *No Future without Forgiveness*, 75.

<sup>146</sup> Tutu, *No Future without Forgiveness*, 226-227.

<sup>147</sup> Viola Davis, *Finding Me* (London: Coronet Books, 2022), 162, 165.

<sup>148</sup> The group traveled to “Gambia, West Africa studying the Wolof, Jola, Mandinka, and SouSou tribes.”

The Mandinka tribal men played “djembe drums, the talking drums...sound imitate speech.” The Mandinka women danced the lingen imitating birds in flight. They danced for hours. They would ululate or ‘wail’ with tired feet and sing a song over and over - “I did not come here for food. My stomach is full. I did not come here for food. I came for much more than that.” ---Mandinka Ritual Song.

Viola attended and described a baby naming ceremony. Because of infant mortality, the practice is to wait seven days. When she arrived, women sat around the compound waiting for the parents. The women were breastfeeding. “When the parents arrived, women put their babies aside, their breasts in their wraps, turned the bowls over, picked up two sticks, and began to drum in unison.

community. Thus, this was the beginning of Davis' evident, remarkable, highly acclaimed acting career.

### *My Community*

On December 12, 1963, Michael Battle, my youngest sibling was born. Thirty years later December 12, 1993, Michael was ordained an elder by Archbishop Desmond Tutu at St George's Cathedral, Cape Town, South Africa. Truly, this was a cataclysmic celebratory occasion. This was my first trip to Africa. But what I realize now, I experienced Ubuntu. My family was present. My biological family and family of origin were present together.

My divorced parents were present. My father was sick but was so proud. I remember driving my father and sister on the beautiful African roads, laughing hysterically at the conjured-up dishes of roadkill ala carte. (*You had to be there!*) My Father would live 11 years after the celebration and speak often about South Africa. My sister sat with me while Mpho (Tutu's daughter) braided my hair. (*She would later braid my sister's hair, too!*) My sister was building

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With honor. With a sisterhood that went deep." Viola called this experience "*auteur...art.*" She discerned the lack of connection in Julliard's academic approach to shift humanity or capture art's power to heal the soul.

At a wrestling match, Viola experienced the Wolof tribe perform the turtle dance. "The women would bend over with their butts toward the man and twist, shake, and move at a rapid speed accompanied by not only drums but balafons which were xylophones and koras which were guitars."

Mandinka women performed as comedians. "These women were actually infertile." As comedians, the women were laughing and made funny faces and then they would play drums loud but not well." They sang the Mandinka Ritual Song, and passed a calabash with mush. "The intent was to make as much noise so God can hear you in heaven and pour down a blessing...They were trying to wake God up."

Davis noticed there was an "equivalent of every "classical" instrument known... predating any European instrument." Viola noticed the "technical proficiency attached to drumming, dance, music and storytelling." Viola Davis, *Finding Me* (London: Coronet Books, 2022), 157, 166-175.

her new physician's building and was concerned about being absent onsite. She reluctantly decided to make the trip, and I am grateful she did. My sister and I would fight breast cancer. I was diagnosed in 2004. She was misdiagnosed in 2010 and died in 2020. My Mother was present. She was energetic, independent, and, at times, hard to locate. I remember her buying everyone's tickets (forcing us) to attend a production of Gian Carlo Menotti's *Amahl and the Night Visitors*, a story about a crippled boy's solution for an appropriate gift to give Jesus. He decided on the gift of his crutch. Upon his decision and gift, he is healed and walks unaided. The story ends with his preparation to journey with the three kings to present his crutch. In 2007, our AME church rented a historically African American high school (now gentrified as a junior high school) and produced Menotti's *Amahl and the Night Visitors* in my mother's honor. After many years of dialysis, my mother would lose her independence, and I would be her primary caregiver. She would continue to play the organ at our AME church for over 40 years. She died in 2020.

I remember vividly family in my midst. Then and now, I realized Ubuntu in a beloved South African community. On December 12, 1993, when the organist played a lofty traditional (maybe something like Widor's *Toccata*) prelude processional and postlude recessional in St George's, I remember hearing at the same time and for the first time *ululation*. It was like a spiritual tribal battle cry, but it was more. It was a victorious announcement. It was a meeting and announcement of who I am. It was acknowledging the results of an ugly diaspora in a girl raised in Raleigh, North Carolina, by struggling parents with unique siblings meeting the customs and people of Africa. All present represented Ubuntu within a beloved community. It was an exclamation of blessed celebration and triumphant discovery. I was home, and I brought 'my people' together. It was Ubuntu: I am because you are.<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> See Appendix C – *Photographs of My Community*, 62.

## V. FLORILEGIUM PLAYLIST: A HEALING RESOURCE USING DEFUSION AND TRADITIONAL COMMUNALISM

Isolation is a stay of movement and a stay of motivation. This concluding fifth chapter will provide a suggested healing resource using defusion and traditional communalism within the context of a florilegium<sup>150</sup> playlist<sup>151</sup> for the isolated MST/MI African American women veteran. “Boots on the ground” metaphorically is an unapologetic explosion of movement on the ground with intentionality to accomplish a purpose and share a message. The strategic suggestion for the healing practice of African American veterans isolated due to MST and MI is to put boots on the ground. Move. Motivate. Message. At its inception, ‘boots’ employ a collective movement of boots – a stance. This movement initiates the motivational message of purpose and the beginning of the journey to dismantle the outer limits of isolation. What motivates boots on the ground? What fuels an uncharacteristic stance? It is in the message. There are many examples of such messages. Historically, in 490 BC, legend has it that Greek messenger Pheidippides put boots on the ground for 25 miles running from Marathon to Athens to share the joyful message of a Persian victory with comrades. “We Won! He was excited and wanted everyone to know. As a result of his joyful message (and if the legend is correct), Pheidippides’ boots on the ground spiraled into a continued practice of the present-day marathon.

Another story is told about the first Easter Sunday morning. There were women all named Mary who went to perform ritualistic duties for an acclaimed but dead messiah (intentionally not

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<sup>150</sup> Professor George Schmidt, my esteemed 3rd semester VDU faculty advisor, provided the concept of a florilegium. He described a florilegium as a Latin word for gathering a bouquet. It is used metaphorically here as a collection of reflective music of gifted artists and musicians.

<sup>151</sup> See Appendix B – *Of She We Sing Playlist* [with hyperlink](#), 61.

capitalized) who caused and continued to cause much controversy. There was so much controversy about him that his tomb was posthumously guarded and sealed with a stone. The Marys did not have boots on the ground to dismantle the controversy or move the stone. They were disappointed and grief-stricken because the Jews crucified Jesus. Ironically, the Marys went to the tomb with spices, oils, and mechanical mandates dictated by their Jewish culture and religion. Upon arrival and with amazement, they found an empty tomb and a risen Messiah (reverently now capitalized) who told them to tell others of their discovery. They were “afraid yet filled with joy”<sup>152</sup> and put their boots on the ground to share their joyful message with others. “He has Risen!”

Yet another story<sup>153</sup> is about a little four-year-old cowpoke who wanted more freedom on a snowy day and less adult authority in her life that prohibited her snowy play. Consequently, she ran away from home, finding snowy play, cleverly outwitting rescue, and thwarting parental authority. Her message: “I can Play!” Sitting in the police precinct some hours later, surrounded by milk, cookies, and lollipops, she happily shared the rest of her message, “I put my boots on backward!”<sup>154</sup>

Likewise, in Alice Walker’s *Color Purple*, some critics of Walker say that each character’s ending message was backward and should have put boots on the ground to message the injustices of the time. Lindsey Tucker’s journal article “Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple*: Emergent Woman, Emergent Text”<sup>155</sup> disagreed and found each character putting boots on the ground with messages of change in their circumstances. In particular, Celie, the main character and narrator, had a

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<sup>152</sup> Mt 28:8 (NRSV).

<sup>153</sup> James C. Wade, *The Secret Chamber: A Daily Devotional Guide* (Memphis, TN: African Methodist Episcopal Church, 2017), 8.

<sup>154</sup> Wade, *The Secret Chamber*, 8.

<sup>155</sup> Lindsey Tucker, “Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple*: Emergent Woman, Emergent Text,” in *Black American Literature Forum*, Vol. 22 (1988): 81-95, URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2904151>.

creative message of change. First, Celie read Nettie's hidden letters, and then she left Albert to start a business in Memphis. Her message: "I'm here!" Second, Celie talks to God throughout *The Color Purple*. Significantly, she not only shares her experiences as a Black woman but shows the reader her established relationship as a Black woman with God. However, her most transformative message was a spiritual liberation, addressing her final letters to her sister and not God, whereby she puts boots on the ground, restating Shug's transformative message about divinity:

My first step from the old white man was trees. Then air. Then birds. Then other people...I think it pisses God off if you walk by the color purple in a field somewhere and don't notice it.<sup>156</sup>

*Of She We Sing* strategically suggests boots on the ground using songs in the airwaves to stand, move, and motivate isolating African American women veterans toward flourishing. The message is: Hope in suffering. Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) was developed with this message in mind and will be beneficial for African American MST/MI women veterans who are isolated. Jason Nieuwsma summarizes the ACT model in three words: "hold and move."<sup>157</sup> ACT is "used to encourage clients to "hold" their experiences, whatever those may be--joy, frustration, anxiety, pleasure, or sadness---and to "move" forward in the direction of their values."<sup>158</sup> Defusion<sup>159</sup> is an ACT core process that will be used for the African American MST/MI

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<sup>156</sup>Alice Walker, *The Color Purple* (Orlando etc.: Harcourt, 2005), 195-196.

<sup>157</sup>Jason A. Nieuwsma, "Empirical Foundations for Integrating Religious and Spiritual Practices with Psychotherapy," essay, in *Act for Clergy and Pastoral Counselors: Using Acceptance and Commitment Therapy to Bridge Psychological and Spiritual Care* (Oakland: New Harbinger Publications, 2016), 4.

<sup>158</sup>Nieuwsma, "Empirical Foundations for Integrating Religious and Spiritual Practices with Psychotherapy," 4.

<sup>159</sup>"Defusion is important to acceptance because it allows acceptance of two quite different things. First, you come to accept the world as it is, was, or might be. Second, by noticing that thoughts and images about the world are not the world itself—by defusing—you can also accept those thoughts and images as simply thoughts and images." Nieuwsma, *Act for Clergy and Pastoral Counselors*, 100.

veteran in isolation. Defusion is “the use of function-altering cues to help clients notice verbal categorization, prediction, and evaluation as an ongoing automatic process, instead of simply interacting with the world structured by such verbal events without the awareness of this process.”<sup>160</sup> Defusion allows one to “notice” the thinking process and to create space for nonjudgment of [self] without verbal dominance. For example, “to say that a coward dies a thousand deaths while a brave person dies but one is to say that a “brave person” notices that thoughts about dying are not dying itself.”<sup>161</sup>

Utilizing the process of defusion within the community will provide healing. Listening to the messages of other African American women singing about their experiences and their spiritual relationship with God will be a healing resource. First, invitations will be sent to appropriate veterans. This will be the first opportunity for a stance, boots on the ground. Second, by accepting the invitation, the veteran will establish a place where they will experience the thoughts and images in their minds. At first, without realizing it, the veteran will establish a place of traditional communalism. At that moment, they step out of isolation! Third, the florilegium playlist will be played to support noticing within the thinking process without judgment. See Appendix B.<sup>162</sup> Each

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<sup>160</sup> Jason A. Nieuwsma et al, “Bridging Act and Spiritual Care,” essay, in *Act for Clergy and Pastoral Counselors: Using Acceptance and Commitment Therapy to Bridge* (Oakland: New Harbinger Publications, 2016), 49.

<sup>161</sup> Hank Robb, “Opening Up: Acceptance & Defusion,” essay, in *Act for Clergy and Pastoral Counselors: Using Acceptance and Commitment Therapy to Bridge* (Oakland: New Harbinger Publications, 2016), 100.

<sup>162</sup> The attached playlist includes different genre of African American women artists (with the exception of three). Some may have the same topical message but within a different context. For example, Aretha Franklin sings “Ain’t No Way,” written by her sister Carolyn Franklin. The lyrics are assertive to prevent heartbreak, “Ain’t no way for me to love you,” with an ultimatum, “if you don’t love me.” On the other hand, Donny Hathaway (male artist) sings the entire selection of “For All We Know” except for the soothing final four notes/words “We Know-ooh-ooh” sung by Roberta Flack. Flack’s notes do not indicate an ultimatum. Their duet suggests an acceptance of future heartbreak, i.e., “For all we know, we may never meet again...I’ll hold out

song will be prompted by an introduction within the context specific to the performer's biography, the lyrics, and relevant events at the time of the recording. The veteran will be asked to remain open and not be swayed by the graphics of any song video but to notice mindfully, finding meaning in the lyrics and context without judgment. The complete playlist will be presented without discussion. Finally, after completing the florilegium playlist, the veteran will anonymously answer three questions about one of the selections. Their answers will be handed in, redirected, and redistributed for another to read. After the reading, the womanist's serenity prayer will be recited. Veterans will be dismissed. More sessions will be scheduled. More florilegium playlists will be created and presented. More and more opportunities for traditional communalism.

This project presented an overview of my terminology and my womanist moral theological perspective. In five chapters, I have discussed (1) military history, military culture, military sexual trauma, and moral injury; (2) the historical overview of Black women amid enslavement, the Civil War, Jim Crow, and the Black Lives Matter Movement; (3) womanism, womanist biblical interpretation of Naomi and Ruth, constructive reflections of the caveat of separatism, and womanist pedagogy; (4) the beloved community, Ubuntu, and my community as model communities; and (5) the projected possibility of a florilegium playlist utilizing the principle of defusion and using traditional communalism as a healing resource.

In conclusion, the florilegium is the beginning process of traditional communalism with two assumptions. First, isolation is actually dissolved. African American women veterans will return to an awareness that their lives are inextricably bound together and trauma can not be

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my hand, and my heart will be in it. For all we know.” See Appendix B – Of She We Sing Playlist.



isolated within a person. For all womanists and according to Walker<sup>163</sup> and Floyd-Thomas,<sup>164</sup> traditional communalism is concerned with everyone in the community. It is an opportunity for achievement, celebration, and flourishing for the community at large. Separatism and isolation may occur temporarily but not for a lifetime. Rambo puts it this way, “[t]rauma becomes not a detour on the map of faith but rather a significant reworking of the entire map.”<sup>165</sup> Second, the sacred witness of radical suffering in the middle passage will be discovered. The healing process for MST and MI African American women veterans is uncharted. Healing resources have not been provided to the combination of MST and MI for African American women veterans in isolation. The reality is that the challenge of the combination will not go away. The realities are that the experiences of MST and MI will leave life hanging in the balance and survival a necessity. However, isolation is not the solution because “trauma is not just solely in the event but instead encompasses the return of that event, the ways in which the event is not concluded.”<sup>166</sup> It will return if the combination of MST and MI is not fully processed. At that time, this is when the African American MST/ MI women veterans turn within to a middle passage, the space between radical suffering and celebrating gifts, beauty, talents, redemptive self-love, change, and divine purpose. The middle is where life before the trauma cannot be retrieved, and the promise of life ahead is not acquired. Both overshadow the middle. The solution is the discerning middle: the place where the MST and MI African American women veterans can account for what remains. The middle is a place of healing. The middle is a place of *ululation*: “I am loved, I love, and I love me, *Regardless!* [Walker’s<sup>167</sup> and my emphasis]

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<sup>163</sup> Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers’s Gardens*, xi.

<sup>164</sup> Floyd-Thomas, *Mining the Motherlode*, 5, 9.

<sup>165</sup> Rambo, “Spirit and Trauma,” 15.

<sup>166</sup> Rambo, “Spirit and Trauma,” 13.

<sup>167</sup> Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers’s Gardens*, xi-xii.

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## APPENDIX

### *Appendix A – Seven Stones Group Curriculum*

*Of She We Sing* will strategically create a group curriculum for a beloved Ubuntu-driven community of African American women veterans utilizing the following seven stones:

#### *RESPECT*

This stone represents the beloved Ubuntu-driven community rules of engagement, i.e. titles, topics, communication, etc. Women veterans will reconcile their military requirement of respect to the respect needed in the beloved Ubuntu-driven community. Respect will incorporate (1) the historic Civil Rights “Respect” released and composed by Otis Redding but sung and spelled out R-E-S-P-E-C-T by Aretha Franklin for the curriculum’s emphasis of engagement; (2) Acceptance Commitment Therapy (ACT) within the hexaflex principles of mindfulness, acceptance, defusion, self-as-context, values, and committed action; (3) the group will engage in a meaningful acrostic exercise to incorporate the letters R-E-S-P-E-C-T for tools of engagement; and (4) In Play, respect will be explored in a game of “Cynthia Says” (not Simon Says).

#### *EQUALITY*

This stone must be explored within the beloved Ubuntu-driven community. During the Jim Crow era, the words “Separate but equal” had historic reverberations for Blacks. The situations portrayed were separate but never equal, i.e., water fountains, public facilities, resources, services, education, civil rights, and living areas. In a community, can one exist separately? In the world, can one isolate or be isolated and expect equality? Or be silenced and yet have a voice? The response from a beloved Ubuntu-driven community is “No.” In a shared community, one would

acknowledge an equality of authority, an equality to access property and resources, an equality to speak, an equality to exist together, an equality to be heard, an equality to share in conversations, and an equality to connect with another. The group resource of “active listening” would provide an ongoing tool for equality within a beloved Ubuntu-driven community. The group would benefit from using active listening and storytelling. An example would be John Steptoe’s African tale, *Mufaro’s Beautiful Daughters*.<sup>168</sup>

### UNITY

This stone must be explored within the beloved Ubuntu-driven community. Can a group identify similarities that will cause a connection? Is this enough to bring unity? There will be several similarities before the first meeting, i.e., gender, race, military service, and veteran status. Here, a guided mindfulness journaling practice<sup>169</sup> may begin the connections for unity. In Play, unity may be explored by pairing with another participant walking backward or catching someone who is falling backward.

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<sup>168</sup> Mufaro’s Beautiful Daughters is a timeless story inspired by a traditional African folktale. Mufaro was a happy man who had two very beautiful daughters. Nyasha is kind and considerate, but everyone—except Mufaro—knows that Manyara is selfish and bad-tempered. When the Great King decides to marry and he invites ‘the Most Worthy and Beautiful Daughters of the Land’ to appear before him. Mufaro declares proudly that only the Great King can choose between Nyasha and Manyara. Who will the king choose? John Steptoe, *Mufaro’s Beautiful Daughters: An African Tale*, (New York: Amistad 1987).

<sup>169</sup> I would create a fill in the blanks mindfulness exercise with a subsequent group reading and discussion. “When I woke in the morning, I discovered I was \_\_\_\_\_ and I felt \_\_\_\_\_. I found a mirror and saw the color of my skin. My skin reminded me of \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_. I put the mirror down and thought I heard *Reveille*. I said, \_\_\_\_\_ and began to \_\_\_\_\_. Then I thought, “I am a veteran, a \_\_\_\_\_, and today, I can \_\_\_\_\_.”

*LANGUAGE*

This stone must be explored within the beloved Ubuntu-driven community. In my project, “Of She We Sing,” separatism for health reasons is the roadblock and exception that prevents flourishing as a womanist in Alice Walker’s definition.<sup>170</sup> According to Dr Stephanie Budwey’s journal article “What We Think is New is in Fact Old,” appropriate language must acknowledge inclusivity and expansivity within individual settings and corporate communities to avoid separatism prohibiting flourishing.<sup>171</sup> This stone will explore Walker’s actual language used to define womanist, the rule, not the exception:

- (1) not girlish, i.e., frivolous, irresponsible, not serious;
- (2) a deeper shade of feminism: A black feminist or feminist of color or Womanist is to feminist as

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<sup>170</sup> 1. **Womanist.** From womanish. (Opp. Of ‘girlish,’ i.e., frivolous, irresponsible, not serious). A black feminist or feminist of color. From the black folk expression of mothers to female children, ‘You acting womanish,’ i.e., like a woman. Usually referring to outrageous, audacious, courageous, or willful behavior. Wanting to know more and in greater depth than is considered ‘good’ for one. Interested in grown up doings. Acting grown up. Being grown up. Interchangeable with another black folk expression: ‘You trying to be grown.’ Responsible. In charge. Serious. 2. Also: A woman who loves other women, sexually and/or nonsexually. Appreciates and prefers women’s culture, women’s emotional flexibility (values tears as natural counterbalance of laughter) and women’s strength. Sometimes loves individual men, sexually and/or nonsexually. Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female. **Not a separatist, except periodically for health sake.** Traditionally universalist, as in: ‘Mama, why are we brown, pink, and yellow, and our cousins are white, beige, and black?’ Ans.: ‘Well, you know the colored race is just like a flower garden, with every color flower represented.’ Traditionally capable, as in: ‘Mama, I’m walking to Canada and taking you and a bunch of other slaves with me.’ Reply: ‘It wouldn’t be the first time.’ 3. a womanist loves music. loves dance. loves the moon. Loves the spirit. Loves love and food and roundness. Loves struggle. Loves the folk. Loves herself. Regardless. 4. Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender. Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers’s Gardens*, xi, xii.

<sup>171</sup> Stephanie A. Budwey, “What We Think Is New is in Fact Very Old” In *Spirit and Truth: a Vision of Episcopal Worship*, (Nashville: EBSCO Publishing, 2023), 66.

purple is to lavender; (3) [E]xpression of mothers to female children, ‘You acting womanish,’ i.e. like a woman; (4) outrageous, audacious, courageous or willful behavior; (5) Grown: wanting to know more and in greater depth than is considered ‘good’ for one. Interested in grown up doings. Acting grown up. Being grown up. Interchangeable with another black folk expression: ‘You trying to be grown.’ Responsible. In charge. Serious; (5) A woman who loves other women, sexually and/or nonsexually; (6) Appreciates and prefers women’s culture; (7) [Appreciates] women’s emotional flexibility (values tears as natural counterbalance of laughter) (8) [Appreciates] women’s strength; (9) Sometimes loves individual men, sexually and/or nonsexually; (10) Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female. (11) Traditionally a universalist, as in: ‘Mama, why are we brown, pink, and yellow, and our cousins are white, beige, and black?’ Ans.: ‘Well, you know the colored race is just like a flower garden, with every color flower represented.’ (12) Traditionally capable, as in: ‘Mama, I’m walking to Canada and taking you and a bunch of other slaves with me.’ Reply: ‘It wouldn’t be the first time.’ (13) Loves music; (14) Loves dance; (15) Loves the moon; (16) Loves the spirit; (17) Loves love and food and roundness; (18) Loves struggle; (19) Loves the folk; (20) Loves herself. Regardless.” (Walker 1984)

### *SELF-PRESERVATION*

This stone must be explored within the beloved Ubuntu-driven community. This stone encompasses all the elements of wholeness and physical existence. The proper care of the body, mind, and soul. Women are caregivers but fail at being care receivers. In the womanist definition, the caveat of health was used to excuse an individual as a womanist. A good example is found in the self-care of a well-known celebrity icon, Oprah Winfrey. In “Making the



Connection,” Oprah journals her lifelong struggle with food. She documented how she would eat enormous amounts and would seek correction in countless diet (schemes) plans.<sup>172</sup>

Finally, she said,

I realized... I was trying to fill something deeper, something unconscious, there was something other than being hungry that made me want to eat. The fact I was lonely, somewhat depressed and having a hard time adjusting to a new job never entered my mind. The important part is to understand that it's not as much about the weight as it is about making the connection. This means looking after yourself every day and putting forth your best efforts to love yourself enough to do what's best for you.<sup>173</sup>

In Acceptance Commitment Therapy (ACT), this building stone will be explored (1) within the hexaflex principles of mindfulness meditation practices of “Don’t Do What You Say,” “Passengers on the Bus,” “Leaves Floating Downstream,” “Eating an Apple,” “Hands as Thoughts,” and “Mindful Walking,”<sup>174</sup> and (2) gratitude practices of gratitude journaling, writing mantras or affirmations, and (3) an “Entreat Me Not to Leave You” litany. “Entreat me not to leave you... Where you go, I will go... Your people will be my people”<sup>175</sup> were Ruth’s words to Naomi. The culminating litany would be a summary and finale of the group to reinforce all the building stones and one’s commitment to the beloved Ubuntu-driven community.

### *GRIEF*

This stone must be explored within the beloved Ubuntu-driven community regarding the narratives of MST and MI of African American women veterans. There are six fundamental losses:

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<sup>172</sup> Bob Greene and Oprah Winfrey, *Make the Connection: Ten Steps to a Better Body and a Better Life*, (New York: Hyperion 1996)

<sup>173</sup> Bob Green: *Make the Corrections*.

<sup>174</sup> Jill A. Stoddard and Niloofar Afari, *The Big Book of Of Act Metaphors: A Practitioner’s Guide to Experiential Exercises & Metaphors in Acceptance & Commitment Therapy*, (Oakland: New Harbinger, 2014), 54, 68, 75, 80.

<sup>175</sup> Ruth 1:16.

functional, relational, intrapsychic, material, systemic, and role. Understanding and finding meaning together within a beloved Ubuntu-driven community will foster empathy. (1) Create and share loss timelines to provide a connection within a “Holy Saturday” experience and foster movement toward resilience. (2) In Acceptance Commitment Therapy (ACT), this building stone will be explored within the hexaflex principles of self-as-context and defusion utilizing exercises “Writing an Autobiography” and “Blowing Bubbles.”<sup>176</sup> (3) In Play, grief may be explored through a game of “Hide and Seek.” (4) In Role Playing, directed re-enactment and scripting of an important event.

### *SPIRITUALITY*

This stone must be explored within the beloved Ubuntu-driven community regarding the narratives of MST and MI of African American women veterans. Spirituality connects with an individual’s inner compass and spiritual strength to embody the breath. The beloved Ubuntu-driven community invites and welcomes the spirituality of African American women veterans. It invites the presence and makes the statement to the oppressors MST and MI: “I am because we are, and because we are, you are.” Here, I have been moved by a peer’s work on a spiritual timeline project<sup>177</sup> and would investigate extending this resource to a collaborative individual/group spiritual timeline within the beloved Ubuntu-driven community, including a progression initiated from the diaspora’s holding dungeons for captives underneath the singing chapels of their captors, the middle passage, chattel slavery, Jim Crow, Civil Rights, and concluding personalized lifelines as ululations of the journey.

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<sup>176</sup> Jill A. Stoddard, *The Big Book of Metaphors*, 98, 136-137.

<sup>177</sup> In semester one, Chaplain Cynthia Walker proposed a DMin research project to assist veterans in creating a timeline as part of their spiritual support and spiritual exploration.

*Appendix B – Of She We Sing Playlist*

1. Yolanda Adams - “Even Me”
2. Nina Simone - “Feeling Good”
3. Donny Hathaway and Roberta Flack - “For All We Know”
4. Whitney Houston - “I Will Always Love You”
5. Aretha Franklin (Carolyn Franklin) - “Ain’t No Way”
6. Billie Holiday - “Strange Fruit”
7. Cynthia Erivo & Jennifer Hudson - “The Color Purple”
8. Oprah Winfrey’s Legends Ball
9. Marian Anderson’s Lincoln Memorial Concert
10. Tems - “Not An Angel”
11. Pharrell Williams & Voices of Fire - “JOY”
12. Jacob Collier, Yebba, John Legend & Tori Kelly - “Bridge Over Troubled Water”
13. Kathy Taylor - “The Corinthian Song”
14. Beyonce & Rumi Carter - “Protector”
15. Callie Day - “Hear My Prayer”

Appendix C –Photographs of My Community

<Battle>



**Figure 4. Michael's Ordination.** Pictured are Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Michael Battle at his ordination and 30th Birthday at St. George's Cathedral in Cape Town, South Africa on December 12, 1993.



**Figure 2. Mpho (Tutu's daughter) braiding my hair at BishopsCourt! Ouch!**Photo taken few days before Dec 12, 1993



**Figure 3. Queen Mother and the King!** Yes, that's my Mom with one of the three kings after Cape Town's production of Menotti's Amahl and the Night Visitors. It looks like they were great royals! We were all there in attendance! Photo taken around December 12, 1993.



**Figure 1. My Biological Family.** (L - R) Lois Williams (Auntie), Dr Lorenzo Battle III (Father), Dr Michael Battle (Brother), Sadie Juliet Battle (Mother), Me, Dr Constance Battle (Sister). St George's Cathedral, Cape Town, South Africa on December 12, 1993. (Michael's Ordination and 30th Birthday)



**Figure 5. Ululations! With my new African Sisters!** Celebration after Michael Battle's Ordination. Photo taken on December 12, 1993.



**Figure 6. General Colin Powell and Me!** Photo taken at Pope Air Force Base in 1995.



**Figure 7. Connie and I with the Arch!** Photo taken at BishopsCourt around December 12, 1993.