INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION BETWEEN AFRICAN-AMERICAN AND ZIMBABWEAN WOMEN: FOCUSSING ON IDENTITY AND SURVIVAL/LIBERATION

by

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SUMMARY

African-American and Zimbabwean women live and do theology from different cultural and contextual worldviews, although they share the same skin colour. The narrative stories of three Zimbabwean and one African-American Christian women and how they share interculturally the struggle of identity, identity-formation and survival/liberation while maintaining their cultural uniqueness form the basis of this research project. These shared experiences can offer significant contributions to the broader feminist liberation theology. The Christian faith has served as a shared source of sustenance, resilience, healing and renewal as well as a shared source for constructive and affirming identity-formation for Zimbabwean and African-American women. Consequently, building strong relationships that address contextual issues facing women of Africa and the Diaspora, as suggested by this research, offers significant opportunities for eliminating some of the barriers and boundaries that prevent Zimbabwean and African-American women from enjoying the quality of life that God meant for everyone.

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- Daniel, my husband and soul mate, without whom I would have given up. Thanks for the love and supportive way you journeyed with me in my search for identity and liberation.
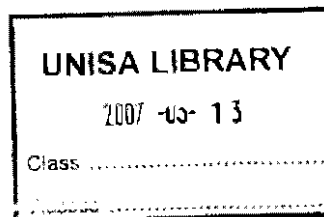
STUDENT DECLARATION

Student Number: 3113 907 8

I declare that **INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION BETWEEN AFRICAN-AMERICAN AND ZIMBABWEAN WOMEN: FOCUSSING ON IDENTITY AND SURVIVAL/LIBERATION** is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

Sign

Sandra Gourdet

Date of Signing   15 Jan 2003

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MOTHER TO SON

Well, son, I'll tell you
Life for me ain't been no crystal stair.
It's had tacks in it,
And splinters,
And boards torn up,
And places with no carpet on the floor—
Bare.
But all the time
I'se been a climbin' on,
And reachin' landin's,
And turnin' corners,
And sometimes goin in the dark
Where there ain't been no light.
So boy, don't you turn back.
Don't you set down on the steps
'Cause you finds it's kinder hard.
Don't you fall now –
For I'se still goin', honey,
I'se still climbin',
And life for me ain't been no crystal stair.

■   *– Langston Hughes*

Whenever any of my siblings or I felt discouraged and ready to abandon a project, our mother would quickly remind us that the word "cannot" is only a figment of the imagination and that as a people we have always overcome difficult obstacles. Life for her had not been a crystal stair and we were not allowed to sit down on the steps because life seemed hard or unfair. Her encouragement strengthened us and we would restart the abandoned project. We sensed that it was our duty to pass that sense of resilience to our progeny to safeguard the rich cultural values and survival instincts she instilled in us.

This was the scene in many African-American families during the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s – my era of childhood and youth. Mothers were seen as powerhouses of strength and they spent time with children – sons and daughters – to help them identify who they are and to give direction. Mothers would often talk with children and pass down valuable family history and life coping skills. Volumes could be written about the advice Black mothers gave to their children on survival.

The pain and suffering of the people were expressed often in the poetry of the blues. Some sang the blues, others like Langston Hughes wrote about the blues. He was the poet of Black people and he was able to express their hopes and dreams, their troubles and struggles, their strengths and weaknesses, their identity as a people, their age old wisdom in a language that spoke to all the people regardless of age, gender and time. Hughes gave hope and a desire to survive and continue to climb even when the landing was not in sight. Those early seeds planted long ago were the beginning of a life long journey for me.

1.1   MOTIVATION FOR THIS STUDY

I travelled to Africa in 1973 as a church worker under the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), one of the mainline churches in the United States and Canada. My first assignment was in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), formerly Zaire, where the Disciples of Christ church had it largest overseas relationship. Subsequent assignments were in Swaziland and Zimbabwe. Little did I know that the initial two years assignment would stretch to more than twenty-five years of service, or that the experiences and realities of the people with whom I came in contact would impact my life as it has done. Little did I know that so many women would leave an indelible mark on me. As women, we lived through many joys and pains in the true sense of the expression. We shared many tears together as well as moments of laughter. Our lives were interwoven and there was a sense of connectedness. The journey together with many African women, as we both struggled for survival/liberation and self-identity, serves as a motivation for writing this project.

My stay with the women of DRC ended without closure when missionary personnel were abruptly evacuated in 1991 at the beginning of the unrest that eventually led to the current civil war in the country. Yet, my mind vividly remembers the many contrasts and similarities in the kaleidoscope of experiences that impacted me while participating and sharing in the realities of everyday life for women in the DRC. The colourful dress wear and the creative beauty of the hairstyles that made Congolese women stand out in a crowd are branded still on my mind. The dignity and pride that identified them left its mark on me. On the other hand, I saw women in the DRC emaciated as a

result of the harsh economic conditions in a once prospering nation. I saw children who continued to suckle their mothers' breast even when it was evident that no milk remained. I remember the rugged life, the difficult farming, and the load of goods on women's head and back. Life definitely was not a crystal stair for them, and yet, women continued to climb in search of a safe landing. They were the ones, who during the week, filled the market place with joy and grateful hearts. They were the ones on Sunday lifting their voices to sing praises. They became symbols of survival and liberation and they encouraged me to continue to climb even when the landing was not in sight.

Many of the women with whom I lived and worked were illiterate, so they were not able to write down their experiences as a legacy to their children. Many did not see their hardships as anything out of the ordinary or see themselves as being like "beast of burden". I saw these things from the outside. However, when I walked alongside them, I saw brave, God-fearing women who were destined to survive. At the same time, I saw how church, state, many men, and even other women perpetuated roles of subservience for women and left them without a voice to speak out on their own.

I often thank God that my life as a missionary has not always been "a crystal stair". And I do not celebrate the hardships I endured to portray an arrogant spirit of self-denial. Nor do I want to imply that I made a full entry into the culture. However, I learned what the adage "walk a mile in my shoes" really meant through my experiences with the women of the DRC. I experienced correcting assignments by candlelight, burning eyes and a smelly body from hours of cooking over firewood. I recollect how it was sometimes necessary to go as far as one could on public transport and continue to walk many more kilometres by foot to a village. The arrival would be a moment of celebration and the gathering around the night fire would soothe away the pains of the day. I experienced the danger of crossing the Congo River in a dug-out canoe to reach the village where fishers lived in houses that were built on stilts for protection. We traveled there so that the women's group could hold a service for a sick member. I saw "the stuff" women were made of as they went about their day-to-day activities. Yet, for me, it was only a minute glimpse in a life that is lived everyday without the same, comfortable haven that I could return to at the end of the day.

Perhaps one of my most profound moments during my time in DRC occurred when my neighbour's

young sister died. When the body arrived, it was taken to the back of the house to be washed and dressed. I joined the wailing mothers and we washed the body together. I do not remember the words of comfort that I offered that were meant to help them through the painful ordeal. I do remember the response of one of the women as she looked me in the eyes, "We will pull together and continue to bury our dead children". At that moment, I knew that our lives were intricately woven together by God's grace in life as well as in death. I knew then that I had become part and parcel of the family. I knew that their struggles and pains were similar to my own. They were willing to pull together to survive and they had invited me along. There was no turning back.

My cross-cultural experiences did not end in the DRC. Additional experiences of bonding with women took place when I arrived in Zimbabwe. One of my first experiences was at the rural mission school where I taught. The first woman I met with whom I formed an intimate relationship was to become my mentor, friend and sister. She led me into the depths of communal living. She helped remove other blinders from my eyes and I was allowed to see the strength, faith and survival of Zimbabwean women on a day to day basis. Jean Mundeta, one of the women interviewed in this research, further helped me understand intercultural relationships and communication as will be shown by her story in Chapter 5.

A memorable experience that I shared with Jean and other Shona women in the Eastern Highlands of Zimbabwe was when I was "bloused" (initiated) as a full member of the Christian Church's women's group at a week-end conference. The meeting started on a Friday evening to culminate on a Sunday morning. I was not convinced that I would stay awake the first night, let alone the second night. I had found the Sunday service at the mission church to be long and boring with a traditional western liturgy and I did not expect this meeting to be different. However, the transformation that I saw within these same Sunday morning church women was astounding. I saw a church alive, filled with the power of God and liberated right before my eyes. It seemed as if culture, church traditions and other forces had suppressed their spirits, and now they were freed. It was later explained to me that the role of church women (and men for that matter) had been identified for them by the early missionaries and their teachings. That identity was not in keeping with anything that the people lived on a day-to-day basis. The weekend conference had the effect of liberating them to express *their own* identity and worship God in *their own* way. This powerful experience fueled by the energy of

the moment did not allow any of us to sleep!

My arrival among the Ndebele women in western Zimbabwe coincided with the church's desire to address the growing AIDS crisis in the country. My welcome to the community was characterised by a series of funerals for family members of my new colleagues and friends. My faith was challenged when I saw women come together, wielding a powerful sword of commitment as they took on the responsibility of caring for orphans in a community home-based programme that was established. The programme was established with zero capital and has expanded within two years into a project with a multi-million dollars annual budget and several branches. The programme was liberational for all of us as each of us discovered a new sense of identity and found wholeness after experiencing so much brokenness. Children were freed to enjoy their childhood and at the same time to draw strength from caring adults in the community. Women discovered that their small efforts could change a family and community. Women experienced a renewed sense of worth in their ability to accomplish important tasks and decision-making. I intensified my own sense of connectedness to others in a global village.

I could not name that experience then or the many others I have encountered most recently in Zimbabwe. This research project has helped me to understand the experiences with Congolese and Zimbabwean women as survival/liberation. There are few written accounts of the life experiences of ordinary African women and women of the African Diaspora. Their stories beg to be told. This research project has motivated me to interpret or rather echo the voices of women with whom I have come in contact and to reflect theologically on our collective experiences. When I look back, I realise that the hardships, the struggles, and the sheer struggle of survival/liberation really connected us and made us one in spite of our differences. Because of my shared experience of struggle with the women of DRC and Zimbabwe, my life was characterized by budding ideas and growth. I hope that this project, which concentrates on Zimbabwean women, will reflect these experiences of survival and liberation, which I have shared with them as well as to reflect my maturity as an intercultural communicator.

1.2   PROBLEM POSING AND THESIS

This research project is an attempt to focus on the following problems:

❖ There is a misconception that because African women and African-American women have the same skin color that they share the same context and worldview. This misconception "covers up" the cultural and contextual differences between them. Also, the intercultural communication within those shared areas that do exist, have not been studied purposefully.

❖ The concerns and experiences of both African women and African-American women have not been properly articulated in liberation theologies. Consequently,

     o Very few stories of their individual struggle and survival/ liberation have been told.

     o Very few stories of intercultural sharing between African and African-American women of this struggle of survival/liberation have been investigated and narrated

     o Very few studies have been made of African-American and African women's sense of identity and identity-formation.

     o Very few studies have been made on how the Christian faith influences identity-formation and how the identities of African-American and African women overlap; and, how the Christian faith has strengthened and inspired African-American and African women in their survival and liberation.

     o Very few studies have been made of the significance of shared experiences of identity and survival/liberation between African-American and African women for the broader feminist liberation theology project.

It is my contention that the common themes of survival/liberation and identity can be used to highlight and study the overlaps in context and the shared struggles of African-American and African women while they each maintain their contextual cultural differences and uniqueness.

Therefore, the two interrelated themes of this research project is that (1) meaningful intercultural communication can take place between Zimbabwean women and African-American women by articulating the struggle for survival/liberation against oppressive forces and (2) that the Christian faith serves as a shared source of sustenance, resilience, healing and renewal as well as a shared

source for constructive and affirming identity-formation.

My approach is to allow the stories of three Zimbabwean women to interact with my journey of faith in order to reflect on the building of intercultural relationships centered around the themes of survival/liberation and identity.

1.3 AIM OF RESEARCH

The following are the aims of this research project:

> The primary aim is to make a contribution to intercultural communication between women of Africa, particularly Zimbabweans, and African-Americans around the common themes of survival/liberation and identity-formation running through our history without imposing our differences of context and worldview on each other. This might enable us to take this thread of survival/liberation forward into the 21st century.

> To contribute to an ongoing dialogue among African-American Feminist/Womanist theologians and African womanist theologians regarding the common themes of women's search for survival/liberation; and regarding the common project of liberation in women's theologies in the USA and in Africa.

> There are many stereotypes that exist causing misunderstandings and false assumptions as the two cultures relate to each other. The aim is to offer insight into the two cultures to help African women and African-American women understand the obstacles or barriers to sincere intercultural communication regarding the shared theme of survival/liberation with the hope of minimizing the stereotypes in order to see the true person.

> This research project is not meant to speak for all African-American or all Zimbabwean women. Hopefully, it will speak to some African women and African-American women. My aim is to show how my context, which is a blend of cultures, is the basis for my observations and that the narratives of the Zimbabwean women that I use as examples interact with and give support to those observations. I hope that by using this intersubjective approach that these observations as well as narratives by Zimbabwean women will be truthful and sensitive enough to allow them, to

some extent, to speak through this research project. Furthermore, it is hoped that the voices of both the researcher and the research subject as they interact can be heard in this intercultural research project.

1.4   METHODOLOGY

Chapter Two details the methodology that I used for this research which I characterise as contemporary feminist ethnography or multi-method. I shall summarise those methods. In the first instance, I look at the importance of oral history as a methodological tool to feminist scholarship and epistemology. Oral history is an important component of some African cultures that has been used to pass on beliefs and values from parents to children for generations in Africa. Even among African-Americans, oral history was an important channel of communication, which in fact, was the only acceptable means of communication in the past since laws prohibited slaves from being taught to read and write. The slavery system permitted unconsciously the cultural transmission of the African traditional emphasis on oration (in Freeman 1994:63). Oral history/oral sources have become important sources for history writing. Many interdisciplinary scholars, (*inter alia* Anderson *et al* 1990:96; Hogan 1995; Nielsen 1990), have endorsed the importance of oral sources and subjective experiences to history writing and research as against the so-called "objective" sources where "masculine biases" lurk "beneath the claims of social science and history to objectivity, universal relevance, and truth" (Anderson *et al* 1990:96). I use it as a way of allowing women to bring their own perspective to research that has long been dominated by masculine as well as colonialist/racist oriented science and objective research.

I look at three principle methods of relating oral history: **narratives, communicating shared experiences,** and **interviews.** I contend that **narratives** and **communication of shared experiences** as means of portraying women's experiences are in keeping with African culture. Narrative or storytelling was also an effective communication method used by Jesus. Narratives engage both the heart and the whole person. In Chapter five, I share the stories of three Zimbabwean women. The first woman is of the Shona ethnic group who as a child spent four years in the "bush" away from her family as Zimbabwe struggled for independence. The second narrative is from a Ndebele woman on a journey of identity and survival/liberation amidst poverty. An elderly Ndebele woman of great courage and strength shares her story of faith and survival in the third narrative. I conclude the narratives with my own story.

The communication of *shared experiences* is the second aspect of oral history. After readers have 'heard' the stories of the three Zimbabwean women and my story, I explore the four stories in an attempt to weave together a fabric of our similarities and differences.

The stories of the three Zimbabwean women were recorded during a series of *interviews* with them, the third aspect of oral history. Throughout the interviews, the researcher either made mental notes of conversations or actually wrote down the stories while being told. The stories were told in informal and formal settings.

The second principle method used is **participant – observation and participant research** as outlined by Spradley (1980). I, as researcher, point out that during the many years of living in Africa, with eight of them in Zimbabwe, I have learned not only to observe but also to participate in the lives of women. For the past three years, I have been systematically observing the day-to-day activities of women. My participation has not been for research purposes but has been a natural extension of my sharing with those who have become my extended family.

Finally, I look at five basic epistemological principles generally used in analyzing feminist methodology. These principles consist of the core reasons for feminist research. They are (1) that women and their experiences are at the center of their research; (2) that consciousness-raising should be a central tenet of methodology; (3) that there must be balanced interaction between objectivity and subjectivity; (4) that ethical concerns must be considered in terms of respect and truthfulness towards the research subjects; and (5) that methodology should lead to empowerment and transformation of women's lives/contexts.

The methodological aspects of these women centered experiences are framed within an Afrocentric epistemology of which Patricia Hill-Collins (1990) is a proponent. I am convinced that in spite of the difference in history and context that the African-American culture reflects elements of an African value system. I think that with the different systems of racial domination that Africans, African-Americans and other people of colour have undergone, inter alia, slavery, imperialism, colonialism, apartheid, neo-colonialism, etc., that Black women share a common experience of oppression and domination. Afrocentric values running throughout the narratives, in my opinion, reflect a shared Afrocentric consciousness of people of African descent. As the voices of Christian

African, African-American, and other women of the Diaspora have generally been silenced, I write unabashedly with them in mind as a reminder that we, too, must lift our voices if we are to discover identity and achieve survival/liberation from a liberative Biblical message.

Masenya (1995b:192) articulates a concern of mine in regards to the urgency of a *woman* Afrocentric approach in that not much has been written to address the fact that Black women unlike their white counterparts are not only victims of sexism, but are also subjected to racism and classism. Black men have suffered from many of the same oppressions as Black women but women have been placed in a situation where they have been exploited and oppressed by Black men, white men and women.

It is clear to me that there is much more to feminist research and methodology than I could expound on within the realm of this limited research. I do not claim to have answered all the questions that arise from a study of this nature. I can only hope that this research can lead me, and perhaps others, to more effective methods of making intercultural communication more relevant to the applied methodology of feminist research, as intercultural communication between women from various contexts is so relevant to the present day world and to the feminist liberation project.

1.5   WORKING DEFINITIONS

There are several terms that are used throughout the research. Their meanings are either explicit or understood. I mention them in this section to clarify my perspective.

1.5.1   Culture

Ministering cross-culturally can be a very rewarding experience. It can also be a total disaster for both the communicator and the one who receives the message if mutual sensitivity and mutual understanding are not established. In order to attain effective intercultural communication, one has to understand the meaning of the experience and involvement required. It is my opinion that the foundation of intercultural communication is built on one's understanding of culture.

Perhaps one of the most concise definitions of culture is that of Edward B. Tylor (in Biernatzki 1991:6), the British social anthropologist : "Culture is that complex whole which includes

knowledge, belief, art, moral, law, custom, and many other capabilities and habits acquired by man (sic) as a member of society". Biernatzki (1991:7) adds to this that although culture is a shared set of standards, rules, norms and values by which the members of a society regulate their lives, it exists only in the understandings of individuals.

Reed's (1981:6) definition of culture takes us a bit further. He sees it as representing "the ways of life which different groups of people utilise as they relate to the world around them and to other people" which includes geography, language, technology, economics, social organisation, legal systems, worldview, religion, social change, etc.

As I will be looking at cultural norms of Zimbabwean women and African-American women, I share what the scholar Molefi Kete Asante (1990:4-11) says about African culture. He sees culture as referring to "the sum total of African philosophy, behaviour, ideas and artifacts" representing the "total organization and arrangement of African people's thinking, feeling and acting". He is quick to assert that these actions and ideas may be different within the acceptable range but they still remain within the category of African culture (Asante 1990:6). I agree with his assessment that African culture has gone through many devastating attacks -- *inter alia*, proselytizing Arabs, European merchants, illnesses, and human slavery – and survived. Resistance has not always eliminated evil or even kept it under control. In fact, because of the forces, there has been a weakening of traditional values, and yet, African culture has maintained a "unity of origin as well as a common struggle" (Asante1990: 6). He gives evidence that a cultural relationship between the African continent and the Diaspora is still manifested in many ways – religious rites in Cuba, Brazilian cuisine, music and dance of the Caribbean and America. The significance of these cultural details will be seen within the research as it relates to the interaction of Zimbabwean women and African – American women.

My own understanding of culture as I use it in this research falls in line with the definitions already given. Yet, I will look at culture in terms of women's experiences and women's engendered roles. I think that culture is multifaceted and that it is learned through proverbs, from folktales, legends, stories handed down from parents to children, through art, mass media and the total experiences encountered in life. We often tend to ignore that many of these experiences are transmitted by women.

When it comes to women's experiences and engendered roles, culture has played a very significant role as evidenced by Colleta Chisike (1995) observations of her situation in Zimbabwe: "Because of the historical status accorded to women, many societies expect women to be submissive, obedient to father, brother or husband and his male relatives, sometimes even to her own son". This is done in the name of culture. This is only one example emphasizing the impact of culture on the lives of women, especially African women. Mercy Oduyoye (1995), in her book *Daughters of Anowa: African Women and Patriarchy*, describes culture as it relates to African women as being something that is living and dynamic which is made up of rites and rituals, religious beliefs and symbols that are part of our lives from birth to death. Within the framework of this research, I will look in part at culture and its role in women's identity and survival /liberation.

Cultural hermeneutics play a crucial role in interpreting the liberative message of the Bible for both African and African-American women theologians. Black women are critically rereading these biblical texts and how they interact with culture. And, although the lived experiences of African-American and African women are marred by male biased interpretations of biblical texts, women still cling to the texts and to the God proclaimed in the texts; perhaps as a crutch for their survival (in Masenya 1995a:150). In other words, there is still a critical yet loyal interaction with African culture. Renita J. Weems (in Masenya 1995a:153) highlights the value of "reading biblical texts from an African womanist perspective in that this can help [Black] women to resist those things within their culture and within the biblical texts themselves that are found to be antagonistic to their sense of identity and their basic instincts for survival". Cultural hermeneutics expressed in this sense is very important for this research as women's sense of identity and survival/liberation are key to this study.

1.5.2 Intercultural Communication

It is my conviction that how we communicate our own culture with others and how we receive others' culture are heartbeats of intercultural communication. Melissa Steyn (1993:12) asserts that one comes to the table of intercultural communication with one's cultural identity which must be acknowledged as an important variable.

Intercultural communication can best be understood from Gudykunst and Kim (1984:16) who define it in terms of a "communication phenomena in which participants, different in cultural backgrounds, come into direct or indirect contact with one another". They go further to say that "it presupposes and deals with cultural similarities and differences among the communicators", and that "cultural characteristics of participants are not the central focus of the study" but rather the "communication process between individuals and groups". They feel that the central theme of intercultural communication should be to describe or explain what actually happens when individuals from two different cultures begin to communicate during a period of time (Gudykunst and Kim 1984:20).

Casmir and Asuncion-Lande (in Parry 1994:6) express the view that participants in intercultural communication usually "do not share norms, beliefs, values, and even patterns of thinking and behaviour". They feel that in order for communication to take place that one must assume there is a degree of homogeneity present even though there be a focus on the dissimilitude of the participants.

Based on these definitions, I understand intercultural communication as an opportunity to bridge gaps between African-American and African women (in this case Zimbabwean women). The interest of many African-Americans in African culture is erroneously based on the historical view of an Africa that existed with great empires and kings. Many Africans that I have met have an equal erroneous misconception of life for African-Americans living in America. I think it is very important that these two culturally different, yet in many ways homogeneous, people come together directly or vicariously. Although the dialogue in this research concerns three Zimbabwean women and one African-American, it is my conviction that the exercise will be beneficial to a larger audience. I think that both African-American women and African women will be strengthened by each other's resilience as they struggle within their own context. It is hoped that this research will enable them to understand that identity and self-identification are imperative to survival/liberation and that it is in the interest of both groups to work together. I think that this sense of solidarity can be best initiated within the Christian community. If I am able to make a contribution to a closer, more informed relationship between Zimbabwean and African-American women as a result of this research, then I would have made a contribution to intercultural communication and would have supported our people in the climb toward survival/liberation.

When one considers the intercultural communication of the gospel, one has Jesus as a faithful example and definition. Jesus was God's model for divine love in human interpersonal relationships and communication (Lingenfelter and Mayers 1986:11). Jesus in his encounter with the woman at the well (John 4) provided three elements of a true definition for intercultural communication:

- Acknowledgement (on the part of the dominant one) of the other as a necessity for well-being and even survival of each other.
- Uncritical acceptance of the way of the other as valid.
- Recognition that one has entered someone else's territory (Herrara 1992:177).

This definition presupposes that for effective intercultural communication of the gospel to take place, one must examine oneself and re-examine attitudes and relationships. I understand the essence of intercultural communication of the gospel as being interaction with people with cultural values and lifestyle patterns that are different from my own. I also understand it as being willing to restrain my own culturally conditioned view of the world and being willing to accept another worldview without unfounded judgement, but rather patterned on the divine example of interpersonal human relationships set by Jesus.

My own experiences with intercultural communication of the gospel have been liberational and have contributed to my identity-formation. I have learned that my identity and my survival are dependent on those with whom I live. At the same time, how I have been able to communicate the gospel is visible through what I do and say (or what I do not do or say). This has opened the door for other Christian women to see their destiny as a part of my own.

1.J.4   Missiology

It is my contention that intercultural communication of the gospel, survival/liberation in the lives of Christian Black women and identity-formation in their lives are central missiological issues that can not be ignored. I understand my participation in Christian mission as attempting to embody the teaching and ministry of Jesus Christ in my life in seeking justice, love, wholeness and fullness of life in my own life as well as the lives of those who suffer from lack of them. I see this intercultural communication of the gospel as being accomplished in both word and action that can and should

transcend cultural boundaries. In the context of African and African-American women within the realm of this study, I see missiology and intercultural communication of the gospel as recognising the continual presence of God's liberating power in their struggle for identity and survival/liberation whether in Africa or America. I understand the Old Testament concept of *shalom* as missiological in that *shalom* "entails peace and justice, healed relations between individual people, between people in the broader society, between people and God, as well as peace between humankind and nature" (Van Schalkwyk 1999:9). Healing is a very important aspect of *shalom* and missiology and these narratives will show how our faith played an incredible role as we struggled to overcome the ills we faced through our interdependent relations with other women and men.

I refer to Kritzinger's (1989:5) basic premises of mission and missiology where in the first instance "mission should not be understood merely as conversion of individuals or the planting of the church". When I look at the struggle of African women and other women of African descent in the world, both historically and at present, I see a need to beseech God's presence in bringing about liberation and transformation. And, although I appreciate that Black women throughout history have made significant unrecognised contributions to church planting, my focus does not lie in conversion or transformation for the purpose of church planting. I am concerned with African and African-American women participating in the *missio-Dei* in the broadest sense of *shalom*. I would hope that this study can be an instrument of conversion where women can participate in the intercultural communication of the gospel; where women can move from mere survival to a good quality of life; where women move from being identified to self-identification or identity-formation which are missiological issues in the lives of the women discussed in this research.

Survival/liberation must also be viewed as a goal of Christian mission or missiology. Christian mission must be "a continuing experience of being set free from whatever makes life less human" (Kritzinger 1989:5). Historically, for African and African-American women, life has been less human for many reasons, *inter alia*, culture, religion, racism, classism, sexism. The continual need for liberation is evident in that the list has grown longer with AIDS, economic injustice, land reform, war, ethnic clashes, and inadequate health care faced by women today.

It is imperative that mission and biblical hermeneutics be contextual and relevant to African and African-American women in order to provide healing and restore wholeness. Isabel Mukonyora

(1993:200) looking at the situation in Zimbabwe is quick to point out that the Christian Church founded on the Bible has not always given full consideration to the religious aspirations of womanhood despite claims of universality. Christian mission must be relevant in such a way that people on the margins are able to discern God's will in their context today. I accept that given the description of Christian mission that the task for African and African-American women will not be easy. However, missiology has to be a continual process toward intercultural communication of the gospel, survival/liberation and identity-formation.

1.5.5   Identity

Identity is one of the themes used throughout the research as it relates to African and African-American women and their survival/liberation. In simple terms, I use identity to answer the question, *"Who am I?"* I am cognisant that identity cannot be determined in such a simplistic manner nor is it answered independently of social requirements. Who I am is both *who I say I am* and *who society allows me to be.* In general terms, the women in this research, although not at the bottom of the economic ladder themselves, do represent women who are identified as Black, poor and male dominated. I also think that one of our commonalties is that struggles and hardships have served as the background for our sense of identity and the impetus for becoming more resilient.

I, who have served as an intercultural missionary for many years, understand my identity as being not only as an "identity-in-process" but also as liminal identity (Tsolidis 1993:6; Van Schalkwyk 2000a:193-199). I am constantly aware of the fact that it is a day-to-day journey for me to find my identity. The journey is never complete. In fact, this search for one's identity is also the case with most people and identities. Perhaps one of the advantages that I hold by being regularly exposed to intercultural communication is understanding the pains and joys of crossing over and identifying with others who have a different culture, language and worldview.

Over the years, others have defined the role(s) of African and African-American women. This has had both a negative and positive effect. In either case, it has not been the actual voice of women themselves. One of the basic tenets of this research is that when women are allowed to speak for themselves, they can contribute to their own self-identification rather than being constantly identified by others. It is when they dare to speak for themselves that they find the strength to resist

an imposed identity. They are no longer victims but survivors. The ideas and actions of a self-defined, articulate African or African-American woman are essential to survival and liberation.

As the issue of identity is very important to this research, I shall make note of some of the terms that I use throughout the research. I use the term "African-American" when speaking of women of African descent in the United States. I am aware that in many circles in the USA that the term excludes women of the Diaspora who identify with or who are identified by their cultural ties to other countries in North and South America or the Caribbean. Many Haitians, Jamaicans, Cubans, etc., for example, are not necessarily recognised as African-Americans either by choice or design. I also understand that there is a risk in using the term "African-American". On one hand, it appears to ignore Africa's importance as a continent of more than fifty countries of great diversity and on the other hand, there is a sense of American hegemony or perceived superiority. However, at a personal level, it is descriptive of who I have become over the years – a product of America and Africa.

I use the term "Black(s)" when referring to Africans, African-Americans and those of the Diaspora in a general sense. It is also used to make a distinction between white Africans of European descent and indigenous Africans. I do not use the term "black" which I see as an impersonal and questionable adjective to describe race that has no real value in "identifying" people. I recognise that the term "Black" is used in the United Kingdom to include other "Third World" peoples (Asians, Latino/as, Arab), which is not the case in the United States where these ethnic groups would be considered "people of colour" (Davies 1994:9).

The term "womanist " will be used throughout this project in reference to both African and African-American women rather than "feminist". Modiapoane J. Masenya (1995a:149) describes Black women in South Africa as having survived exploitation, invisibility and socio-economic conditions. Despite pervasive, daunting obstacles and oppression, these women remain brave and they are not crushed. For me, this describes the essence of the term "womanist" first coined by Alice Walker and defined in Williams (1993:243) referring to "outrageous, audacious, courageous or willful behaviour" and "committed to survival and wholeness of entire people – male and female". It further refers to those who appreciate and prefer women's culture, emotional flexibility and

strength. So, I do not use the term in comparison to African-American women or to create an American hegemony. Nor do I use it to minimize the contributions of African women theology. I use it with great respect to show the strength of African and African-American women and their resilience to survive. The semantics of what is politically and socially acceptable is an indication of the identity crisis confronting us as people. It is also an indication of the pressure on Black women to identify themselves.

1.5.6 Survival/Liberation

In formulating my understanding of the meaning of survival/liberation, I have been influenced by Delores Williams' (1993) use of the term in her book *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk*. She looks at survival/liberation as being associated with developing an appropriate "quality of life" for women. All of the societal problems facing women today, *inter alia*, poverty, economic exploitation, rape, homelessness, etc. tend to place women, according to Williams, in a wilderness experience equal to that of Hagar. God gives women, as God did with Hagar, the survival skills to make a better life out of their situation.

In her book *Survival and Liberation*, Carroll A. Watkins Ali (1999) looks at survival and liberation from the African-American context. She sees survival as "the ability of African-Americans (1) to resist systematic oppression and genocide and (2) to recover the self, which entails a psychological recovery from the abuse and dehumanization of political oppression and exploitation as well as recovery of African heritage, culture and values..." (Ali 1999:2). Liberation, in her view, is the total freedom from all kinds of oppression. Secondly, she sees liberation as the ability of African-Americans to determine their own identities, as well as to engage in the transformation of the dominant oppressive culture through political resistance. I would add that the transformation should not be limited to political resistance, but by any means at hand, whether economic, judicial, social, etc. (Ali 1999). This idea of transformation is expanded in section 4.3.

I accept the definitions given by both women and think that when placed in the African context, the basic principles are the same. Beverley Haddad (1997:2), who writes from a South African perspective rightly states that "a quality of life" ethic is a priority for South African women and that issues of survival must impact on the daily lives of the majority of our sisters. It is also my opinion that survival/liberation are interrelated and that they form a continuum where survival is necessary

before one can move on to being liberated. I find that African-American and Zimbabwean women represent a disproportionate number of women sharing the common dilemma of being Black, female and economically oppressed. Women will need to understand how to cope with these conditions, how to survive, and how to move towards liberation.

In brief, I understand survival as resisting oppression and dehumanization and rediscovering the African values that sustained women of African origins as a people over many difficult years. It is about plain day-to-day economic problems and survival. It is about being in the wilderness and getting out. It is about climbing stairs even when the light ahead is faint.

Liberation means participating in the process of changing the dominant oppressive culture to obtain self-determination and freedom from oppression. This participation can be speaking out vocally, through writings, through advocacy, etc. It is about walking forward in the wilderness without turning back even when it necessitates being in the dark without light.

1.6   EXPOSITION OF CONTENTS OF DISSERTATION

This research project has been divided into six chapters:

CHAPTER 1:   **INTRODUCTION.** This has been dealt with in the preceding pages.

CHAPTER 2:   **METHODOLOGY**

In this chapter, I give detailed information on the methodology that I used to carry out the research and analysis. A short summary of the methods used is included in section 1.4 of the introductory chapter

CHAPTER 3:   **CONTEXT AND WORLDVIEW OF AFRICAN AND AFRICAN-AMERICAN WOMEN**

This chapter is devoted to the experiences, identities, contexts and worldviews of African-American and African (Zimbabwean) women. I first look at the African perspective and then the African-

American perspective. When looking at the African worldview, I also discuss the influence of modernity, colonialism and post colonialism on the African worldviews.

After dealing with contexts and worldviews, I take a closer look at how I understand identity and identification within the context of African and African-American women-centered experiences followed by a look at survival/liberation. This is intended to give focus to the related experiences in the narratives. It also places a focus on the exploration at the end of the three narratives where I look at my own identity, cultural history and how I crossed borders between different groups of people. Hereby, I hope, that I will contribute towards the creation of a secure, affirming space from which the Zimbabwean women are allowed to tell their stories. More importantly, I would hope that this allows me to intuitively "walk in the shoes" of the other women and relate to their stories in a way that will reflect their inner experiences truthfully and respectfully while benefiting other women.

CHAPTER 4:   MISSIOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

In this chapter, I consider important missiological reflections that should be considered in Womanist Theology. I look at how we can dare dream of the *shalom* and quality of life that God intended for God's people. There is a Biblical basis for identity and survival/liberation that encourages women to reach their full potential and I look at how women can identify with the liberating Christ. This helps women to move from a mentality of inferiority to personal transformation of their lives. At the same time, I contend that the church also must submit to re-evangelisation as it has contributed to the oppression of women by perpetuating all the "isms" of society – colonialism, sexism, racism, capitalism, etc. It is when we see women attaining self-identity and the church being re-evangelised that we can hope for a transformation of society where intercultural communication of the gospel can take place; and where intercultural communication between African and African-American women become meaningful.

CHAPTER 5   NARRATIVE STORIES – YOUR STORY IS MY STORY

I interviewed three women for this research, one Shona and two Ndebele. They each had incredibly compelling and beautiful stories of their struggles towards self-identify as well as their struggle with survival/liberation. At the end of their three stories I share my own story followed by a

comparative exploration of the four stories. The sharing of experiences during the interview process was very meaningful for each of us. We learned how little effort we make to bring about intercultural communication and how little one understands people from other cultures. I have used great care to capture the deep emotions expressed during the interviews by the women as well as myself. We all learned. I hope that these faith stories of identity and survival/liberation can be an inspiration to others.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

CHAPTER 2:   METHODOLOGY

While doing research for this project, I became acutely aware of the limited research material articulating the voice of African and African-American women identifying who we are and where we are in the struggle for survival and liberation. I have come to realize that often a silence among African and African-American women has been perpetuated because the majority of women are not part of the power structure or intellectual elite. They have not been given a platform to express their feelings and opinions freely, although women have much to offer to research.

Researchers face the painful reality that if women's experiences are to be recognized and accepted among scholars, certain literary and academic tools must be employed to give credibility to their voice and to their work. This is a difficulty that has often prohibited women from speaking in their own voices. Science as a way of "knowing" has dominated modern research even though, as observed by Joyce Nielsen (1990:2), that "scientific method is not the ultimate test of knowledge or basis for claims of truth".

As an African-American, I wish for my research to discuss the identity and survival/liberation of African and African-American women in terms of Afrocentricity (Collins 1990:6). In other words, I place women of Africa and African descent and their experiences, values and ideals at the centre of this discussion surrounding identity and liberation/survival. Even after many centuries in the Diaspora, deep-rooted threads of African culture are still part of the heartbeat of African-Americans.

Women of Africa and African descent have had to struggle for survival in all that concerns the basis of life. Because of historical, political and economic reasons, these women have not had a chance to articulate a self-defined standpoint that gives value to Afro-centric feminist thought. Survival for most African-Americans (and African women for that matter), as pointed out by Patricia Collins (1990:6), has been an awesome responsibility that most women "have had few opportunities to do intellectual work as it has been traditionally defined". By placing the experiences and ideas of African-American and African women at the centre of my exploration, it is hoped that I will

contribute to an Afro-centric vision of feminist discussion on core themes like identity and survival. It is also hoped that by using an Afro-centric world view that the research helps some African-Americans and some Zimbabweans find an emancipatory stance to help them reach self-definition and encourage interdependence in the common struggle to communicate the Gospel love.

I wish for my research to be accessible to more than a select few intellectuals. I would not have done justice to the women – both African and African-American – with whom I have been in contact for many years and who have touched my life if I were to write about their ideas and they not be able to read and understand. My basic epistemologies or theories of knowledge will be multi-methodological or contemporary feminist ethnographic so that I am able to capture some of the complex ideas of everyday life for women in Zimbabwe even though much of the academic vocabulary of these theories may not be explicitly stated. I have attempted to be consistent with goals outlined by Shulamit Reinharz (1992:51) in using contemporary feminist ethnography: (1) "to document the lives and activities of women, (2) to understand the experience of women from their own point of view, and (3) to conceptualise women's behaviour as an expression of social contexts".

Some of the key elements of my methodology are stated below.

2.1   ORAL HISTORY

The use of oral history as a methodological tool is woven into the fabric of this work. Anderson, Armitage, Jack and Wittner (1990:96) see oral history as "a basic tool in our efforts to incorporate the previously overlooked lives, activities and feelings of women into our understanding of the past and the present". I share their sentiment that when women are allowed to speak for themselves new doors are opened that allow better understanding of the feelings, experiences and realities with which they are faced, thus calling established theories into question.

Anderson *et al* (1990:96) emphasize the importance of oral history to feminist scholarship and epistemology because "women's perspectives were not absent simply as a result of oversight but had been suppressed, trivalised, ignored, or reduced to the status of gossip and folk wisdom by dominant research traditions institutionalized in academic settings and in scientific disciplines". Giving women a chance to speak for themselves helps to correct some distortions and masculine biases. An advantage of oral history in contrast to traditional historical sources is that it allows "questions

about feelings, attitudes, values, and meaning" and the opportunity to ask people directly whereas the historical preference interprets meaning from activities and facts. Anderson et al (1990:102) substantiate my personal belief that oral history can be a very positive and renewing experience for women in that it allows them not only to share their experiences but to reflect on the meaning of those experiences. I also share Reinharz's (1992:135) sentiment that "[f]eminist oral history acknowledges the value of women's lives. It encourages identification among women through the recognition of common experience". There are three methods or approaches that I have used which make the use of oral history an effective tool: Narrative, Shared Experiences and Interviews.

2.1.1   *Narrative*

Narrative or story-telling, in my opinion, is a natural component of oral history and culture. Jesus used it not only as a method of teaching but it was also part of the Jewish culture. Zimbabwe, as is the case with many other African cultures, continue to use story-telling to express many life experiences. And, when relating to women's experiences, one finds narratives to be healing and "medicines or soul vitamins" as in the words of Lidia Curti (1998:x).

In his book *Story Telling: Imagination and Faith*, William J Bausch (1999:25-27) makes two relevant points on narrative as a methodology. He is of the opinion that stories allow people to tell where they are and what they are repressing. "Story revisits an old situation in a new way. Story … helps the person to go back, not to change an unchangeable situation, but to reinterpret it creatively" (Bausch 1999:25).

The second point that he makes is that women bring a proper balance to religious education through their voices, writings and approach to life, and this done principally through the sharing of their stories. "The revival of storytelling may well be the novel use of the feminine side by a church which has, at this point in history exhausted its masculine side" (Bausch 1999:27).

Bausch's thoughts help to substantiate my use of narrative in this research. Women can offer gifts to the church by sharing their experiences through narrative. Perhaps one of the most meaningful of these gifts is reviving a liberating teaching method used so effectively by Jesus.

James Cone (in Villa-Vicencio 1997:31) expresses the sentiment that sharing our stories with one another helps "to transcend the boundaries of our past and reach toward a shared future". I agree

with Cone (in Villa-Vicencio 1997:31) that by "telling each other's stories we transcend our differences, gain an understanding of each other and accomplish inclusive nation building".

2.1.2 Shared Experiences

The shared experience of the researcher and Zimbabwean women in their quest for survival/liberation and identity is the hermeneutical key guiding this research. The interpretive, or hermeneutic tradition as viewed by Nielsen (1990:7) is "a theory and method of interpreting meaningful human action" and argues that "limiting research to observable human action misses the most important part of the story". As a researcher, I also recognise that by using shared experiences that I become the "researched" as well. As a womanist theologian, I find myself being what Van Schalkwyk (2000b:3) terms as "both subjectively involved in the life experiences of women and committed to the causes of various forms or women's liberation". Van Schalkwyk (2000b:23) continues with a very pertinent assessment that characterises my research in that "feminist researchers recognise the formation of knowledge in the subjective and intersubjective realms of women's lives and their struggles for various forms of liberation, and they use women's experience as the main source for the formation of their scientific knowledge". This method of reflecting on the struggles and faith that empower us as women is essentially a journey resulting in my own experience of survival, liberation, identity and how that journey interacts with the experience of Zimbabwean women who, through their everyday activities of survival, are 'doing theology'. Patty Lather (in van Schalkwyk 2000b:24-25) would perhaps call this interaction "reciprocal dialogue through which the researcher and the research subject enter into interactive, reciprocal self disclosure" where in some ways I have found freedom by trying to understand the lives of the Zimbabwean women in my research. Virginia Fabella and Mercy Amba Oduyoye (1988:xi) observe that 'doing theology' means for most women, especially in Africa, a dialogue of life which forms part of our daily experience". It is very important, in my opinion, to identify the experiences and realities of women both as researchers and subject of research as the main source of feminist/womanist theologies.

Careful attention has been given to the intersubjective approach of shared experiences so that the voices of Zimbabweans will be heard and not overshadowed by my own voice. I have been careful not to succumb to what Marla N. Powers (in Reinharz 1992:120) describes in biting tones as "the

tendency of U.S. feminists to project their experience on to women in other societies". I will use the stories of three Zimbabwean women – both Shona and Ndebele and through their voices, I hope to share the experiences of Zimbabwean women knowing that these three cannot speak for all Zimbabwean women. In a country of diverse ethnic groups, educational and social backgrounds, it would be very presumptuous to generalize the life of all Zimbabweans based on the experiences of three women. Yet, I think the life experiences of these women can serve as a microcosm of the intricate, complex, realities facing many women in Zimbabwe.

These stories by no means represent a definitive description of the more than six million women in Zimbabwe or even within a certain region. These are stories, experiences and ideas of three women with whom I can identify and with whom I have been in contact sharing similarities and differences to my own story. Presenting a comparison of themes at the end of Chapter 5 is not an attempt to interpret the experiences of my culture or privileges as an outsider. It is hoped that this will be understood as intercultural communication between one African-American woman and three Zimbabwean women. Although partly a personal odyssey of self-definition, survival and liberation, it is mostly a glimpse into the struggle, survival and liberation of my Zimbabwean sisters with whom I identify on a day-to-day basis. It is an account of how these women are shaped by the main activities, experiences and values of the culture in which they find their identity.

Certainly, the scope of the research will not allow me to share the many voices heard over the years nor do I want to follow an erroneous tendency of choosing a selected few Black women to represent all Black women. Consequently, I hope it is understood that as only three voices are highlighted in this work, much intellectual creativity remains among the majority of Zimbabwean women who have not been heard.

2.1.3   *Interviews*

The use of interview is an effective tool for transmitting oral history and culture. It offers "researchers access to people's ideas, thoughts, and memories in their own words rather than in the words of the researcher" (Reinharz 1992:19). When women are allowed to share their stories orally rather than confining them to written discourse, one finds that women have a lot to say and to contribute to the understanding of women on diverse subjects. Interviews allow women to share

what they do, what they did about certain experiences and give those experiences personal meaning rather than having 'experts' explain what they did or thought. This is particularly important as confirmed by Reinharz (1992:19) for the study of women because in this way learning from women is an "antidote to centuries of ignoring women's ideas altogether or having men speak for women". Oral history and interviews are not to be seen as an ultimate process. This opinion is substantiated by Anderson *et al* (1990:95-112), who feel as I do that interviews and oral history do not give a complete picture. Interviews certainly leave room for more questions and the need for exploring other methods to give a deeper assessment of women or an interviewee.

Although I see oral history and interviews as effective measures of women's experiences, I recognize that the downside of this approach is the individual perspective. In other words, one must keep in mind that the use of an interview to extract accurate or relevant data has to be put in context. The question that comes into focus for me is how does one use information gathered from a singular person and make a statement on the general state of women within a community or culture? I thus understand it as an important way of putting the information in context to serve as a basis of research. I make no claim to have answered this question by my approach. It is likely that my work will raise more questions than it answers. Yet, I feel that even with individual opinions, much can be learned about women's experiences.

The importance of oral history cannot be overstated. Within patriarchal societies like the ones in which both Zimbabwean and African-American women find themselves, it must be recognized that "maleness" sets the standard of thought and action. Westkott (1990:87) observes that

> Social and political constraints customarily have limited women's freedom, this in order to adapt to society while retaining their psychological integrity, women must simultaneously conform to and oppose the conditions that limit their freedom.

Essentially, Westkott is affirming that what women think will not necessarily be evidenced by what they do or how they act given the limitations placed on them by society.

My approach was to ask the interviewees general questions about family composition (parents, siblings, etc.), where they grew up, went to school, etc. I then asked open-ended questions to hear what they had to say in their own terms about identity, their struggles and how they have managed

to survive under difficult circumstances. It was important for me to keep in mind that occasionally some of the actions or responses given may not have necessarily reflected their real feelings and thoughts at the moment of the interview. For example, on one occasion when speaking of a certain incident with her husband, one lady later came back and gave an answer totally contrary to the original response, perhaps thinking the answer would be misinterpreted. From a historical perspective, I realize this is often used as a 'survival technique', that is, to say what one thinks the listener wants to hear. Consequently, in order to interpret human action in a meaningful way, I knew that I would need to look at the broader picture surrounding the action as well as to understand the meaning as defined by the subject of research.

I am reminded of men bragging of their wives 'who love to cook and entertain guests' even if that means standing many hours over huge black pots on a wood fire smiling as if this is exactly where they want to be and what they want to do. For African-American women, the scenario is not too different. Their symbol of 'contentment in the kitchen' is an obese, char-coal black, smiling woman called 'auntie' pictured on a box of hotcake mix. In an interview, one must listen very carefully to be sure that the spoken message and the action are consistent. Oral history as a methodology is a valuable measure of women's experiences and perspectives. However, I found it could not be used on its own to capture a full picture of women's experiences.

Pamela Cotterill (1992:594-595) cites several feminist writers/researchers who advocate the use of a "participatory model" that can be used for interviews in that it encourages "non-hierarchical, non-manipulative research relationships which have the potential to overcome the separation between the researcher and the researched". She asserts that many feminists agree, "the best way to find out about women's lives is to make interviewing an interactive experience" (Cotterill 1992:594). There are at least two ways that this interaction can be achieved in interviews. Hilary Graham (in Cotterill 1992:594) suggests that "'surveying through stories' is a useful way to encourage respondent-generated accounts of their lives". This is the approach I find most helpful as one gains a wealth of knowledge when listening to women's stories. Secondly, Ann Oakley (in Cotterill 1992:594) is an advocate of 'reciprocity' where the interviewer invests her own personal identity in the research relationship by answering respondents questions, sharing knowledge and experience and giving support when asked.

I have used both forms of interaction as basic methods of interviewing. In the first instance, I allowed my interviewees to give an account of their own lives, by encouraging them to narrate their own stories. There were times when an interview turned into shallow discussion, but encouraging women to share their stories was very rewarding. I was also aware that as researcher, my own personality played a determining role that affected the outcome of the interview. I was aware that if I wanted the interviewee to share her story on her own terms, I had to be careful in posing my questions with clarity and elicit a response. And, on the other hand, I invested a great deal of my own identity in the research relationship by developing an intimacy based on sharing mutual knowledge, experience, and support.

There are two issues raised by Cotterill (1992:594-595) that are pertinent to these two models discussed. In the first instance, Ann Oakley and Janet Finch (in Cotterill 1992: 594-595) are in agreement that "intimate, non-hierarchical relationships between feminist researchers and their female informants are best achieved by appealing to their common experience as women." While this appears to be a valid assumption on the surface, there are other elements to consider. Although I, as an African-American woman, share many similar experiences with Zimbabwean women, gender did not necessarily bring about a sense of intimacy and non-hierarchy. In my case, it was necessary to remember that culture, presumed financial and social status were potential barriers to intercultural communication and interaction. I could not ignore that although I had spent most of my adult life in Africa, I was still a product of one of the wealthy western nations and that my status as an "outsider" was still a factor. Second, Cotterill (1992:594) points outs Oakley's claim that "reciprocity can lead to intimacy and long-term friendship with interviewees". Cotterill is of the opinion that it would be more practical for women researchers to distinguish between friendship and friendliness and not feel that the research relationship has failed if only friendliness later is achieved.

While I would normally agree with these opinions, I found that it was necessary to take a different approach than that of Cotterill and Oakley. In my case, the friendship and intimacy were established before the interviews took place because "gender" was not a determining factor and because the culture, especially that of the Ndebele, was generally closed to outsiders. It was because of the friendship that these women felt free to share their stories with me. I was not viewed as a spy trying

to penetrate closed doors. Had it not been for the established friendship and sense of 'sharedness', constructive data would not have emerged.

Denise Segura (in Reinharz 1992:26) suggests that women who have reasons to be reluctant to being interviewed, are more "comfortable talking with someone known. The quality of the interview data and their reliability are enhanced when researcher is knowledgeable and integrated into the community under study". I was able to interview people who are friends because I was willing to make a personal investment in the process of intercultural communication. I was able to offer a sympathetic ear and allow them to share their own stories of pain and triumph at a pace established by them. Out of friendship, they removed some of the boundaries that allowed me to cross over and obtain a deeper understanding of their lives. For example, I could not assume that I understood what it meant to be a cattle herder unless invited to understand a part of a culture that was so unfamiliar to me. Because of the friendship, women knew that I had no intentions of exploiting them or using them for my own personal gain – an academic degree at their expense, even though they knew of other researchers who had done this. Consequently, I agree with Janet Finch (in Cotterill 1992:595) that the downside of encouraging friendship is a moral issue that has the potential to exploit women in order to gain resource material. This issue will be given more consideration later when dealing with ethics in section 2.4.4.

2.2 PARTICIPANT – OBSERVATION

The second major method I have used is participant-observation (Spradley 1980). For almost thirty years, I have tried to be a keen observer of the everyday activities and actions of African women. For the past eight years, I have been immersed in the ordinary activities of women in Zimbabwe. That immersion has helped me to relate in a very tangible way to the various aspects of the life lived by Zimbabwean women. For example, I have been able to relate intuitively to their experiences by attempting to walk in their shoes trying to understand their struggles. That experience has been essential in narrating the experiences of the women. As a result of being with women from all walks of life – professional women in the classroom, women who care for orphans and their own children, women who operate income-generating projects, women who care for parishioners, those who sit and chat around open fires, or women engaging in other scholarly and non-scholarly activities, I have been able to observe them in tangible ways.

As a researcher, I am aware of the need not to ignore the line between academic scholarship and everyday actions. Reinharz (1992:67) reminds us that the methodological literature on participant-observation is divided among those who advocate closeness and those who advocate distance between researcher and persons studied. Respectful distance is thought to be necessary to prevent the researcher from 'going native' or losing his/her identity whereas closeness is thought to help promote understanding. I realize the importance of separating the researcher from the subject in order to maintain objectivity and to produce a credible intellectual work. At the same time, I agree with Anderson et al (1990:99) that the intersubjective approach offers a unique opportunity to test and verify research data produced by traditional methods by asking people directly rather than interpreting what is presented as objective facts. It helps researchers to uncover aspects of social life from a new vantage point that were invisible or interpreted. Additionally, feminist intersubjectivity to research provides "exemplars that concretely and specifically illustrate the weaknesses of explanation produced by traditional social scientists and at the same time provides alternatives to those explanations" (Nielsen 1990:118). It was sometimes difficult to separate the woman researcher that I am from the woman researched that I am also. Yet, objectivity, as much as possible, is woven into the work, particularly as it relates to theorizing the personal daily activities of women and my relationship with them.

Scholarly theory has given me clearer insight into the lives of women and the concrete, practical experiences have allowed me the chance for self-reflection and further self-identification. The two together – scholarly theory and participation – have added depth to my own growth and has enriched this attempt to link Zimbabwean and African-American women together.

2.3   PRINCIPLES OF FEMINIST METHODOLOGY

There were several principles of feminist methodology that I focused on during my research. Judith A. Cook and Mary Margaret Fonow (1992:72-80) elaborate on five basic epistemological principles that are generally used in analyzing feminist methodology.

2.3.1 *Significance of Gender and Gender Asymmetry*

One is reminded of the importance of placing women at the center of research where men have always dominated the stage and set the criteria. The point has been made that it is important to understand the "common experiences of women researchers and women subjects in a society characterized by a marked degree of gender asymmetry enabling the feminist researcher to bring women's realities into sharper focus" (Cook and Fonow 1990:73). My research is rooted in experiences of African and African-American women and those experiences are at the center of analysis. Although, I cannot totally escape white feminist ideas or male dominated research method, my research has a bias towards women of colour. This analysis is done from their respective contexts after having lived in the shadow of others both in America and Africa.

2.3.2 *Consciousness-raising*

Consciousness-raising in research can be very powerful. As mentioned earlier, it is my hope that this project proves to be well-researched and serves as a voice for women that can be understood and used by women. By raising their consciousness, there can be positive change in how women are perceived. This change can work counter to male domination that is currently prevalent. I do not wish to be seen as a spokesperson for African and African-American women for we must learn to speak for ourselves. I am simply one voice interacting with others. It is my hope that the consciousness-raising that I have attempted to bring to this research will help to clarify survival and liberation as well as to help many discover their identity.

I have tried to show that consciousness-raising acts as a central tenet of feminist methodology as indicated by Cook and Fonow (1990:75) in that

> (a) a researcher's feminist consciousness can serve as a source of knowledge and can give insight into gender asymmetry and its management in social life; (b) consciousness-raising techniques can be used to elicit data from respondents and provide a context in which to examine women's worlds; and (c) the process of conscientisation combines conscious-raising and social change through encouraging politicization and activism on the part of research subjects.

It is my opinion that these elements are best seen through intercultural communication. My own experiences of survival and liberation help me to understand the plight of many women in Africa and around the world. That serves as a source of knowledge for me and allows me to gain valuable insight into gender asymmetry and understanding of the everyday struggle of women. The use of interviews and the sharing of stories in this research have allowed women to articulate their concerns and consider self-examination and social change. For my part, I feel that this has led me to be a better person. If during the process, others have also become conscious of their situation and options for change, then consciousness-raising has taken place and there is hope for growth and change. The power of knowledge can be transforming. If this is the case and this research generates information that can be used to create alternatives to oppression, then a major part of the research objectives would have been achieved.

2.3.3   *Empowerment And Transformation*

It is my belief that knowledge can play a transforming role in the lives of people and can bring about empowerment. I do not know if this research can help with intercommunication between Zimbabwean women and African-American women in their struggle for survival/liberation and identity-formation. It is my hope that it can lead to further discussion on the future of African and African-American women in their day-to-day struggles of survival. I do know that this research challenged me to listen carefully to the stories of these three women. By doing so, I was able to discern "moments of transformation or liberation in [their lives]" and recognised how the turning point served as pivots in their growth and development as women (Van Schalkywk 2000b:29). Those moments of transformation helped me to focus on my own life and how I have grown enabling me to find identity and liberation.

2.3.4   *Objectivity – Subjectivity*

On the subject of objectivity and subjectivity, Cook and Fonow (1990:75-77) point out that the normative structure of science adheres strictly to objectivity and the rigid dichotomy between the researcher and the researched. Researchers tend to distance themselves from the subject of research to maintain a scholarly balance. It is my opinion that this balance is maintained by a dominance of men in academic research where a male scientific culture has been developed. Maria Mies (in Cook and Fonow 1990:76) has coined the phrase "conscious partiality" that indicates the researcher's

understanding of her connectedness to the experiences of the research subject through partial identification which is in contrast to "spectator knowledge" which emphasizes neutrality and indifference toward subjects' lives. This connectedness has helped me as researcher to reconcile the subjectivity and objectivity necessary in my research. I maintained my role as researcher by relating my experiences with those of Zimbabwean women which allowed for subjectivity but at the same time a degree of scholarly objectivity. One of the ways that I reconciled this dichotomy has been to insert myself in the text by using "I", "we", and "our" instead of the more formal and distant terms "they" and "one". Patricia Collins (1990:xiv)) asserts that there is a "both/and conceptual stance" in Black Feminist thought. I would agree with her that this stance "allowed me to be both objective and subjective, to possess both an Afrocentric and a feminist consciousness" and to be both an insider and outsider of the Zimbabwean culture (Collins 1990:xiv).

2.3.5   Ethical Concerns

Cook and Fanow (1990:77-78) take note of ethical questions in feminist theology that recognises the oppression of women within society. The use of language is a fundamental way of perpetuating this oppression in society.   I make a conscious effort in my writing and speech to avoid terms or styles that are offensive or those that continue to perpetuate oppression, for example, the use of the generic masculine pronouns.

Cook and Fanow (1990:78) also raise the ethical question of intervening in the lives of the subjects and feel that since much of feminist politics involves the personal and intimate lives of women and men, any intervention risks the possibility of disrupting relationships that are personally satisfying to the participants and perhaps materially necessary for survival.   In my approach, I have not deliberately sought to intervene in the lives of those I have sought to understand.   By allowing the women to share their own stories, avenues were opened for them to take note of their own need for self-identity and survival/liberation.

Gathering information and then sharing it with the subject of research is an important ethical issue. I have not intentionally misused any information shared with me by the subject, nor have I withheld any information concerning the research process and the goals of the research. To avoid feelings of being used for experiments, I have shared drafts with those interviewed. They have a right to know

what I am writing and how it is being used as well as an ethical right to know that this is not just a research paper, but rather a commitment to deepening the intercultural relationship between us.

CONCLUSION

In the preceding pages, I have looked at methods I used while conducting my research. I have included oral history in relation to the use of shared experiences, narrative and interviews. I have also looked at participant-observation and how over the years I have actively observed and participated in the lives of the women being researched. These methods have been in keeping with several principles of feminist methodology that are part of an Afro-centric epistemology articulated by Patricia Collins-Hill (1990).

As researcher, I have come to understand that no one method is adequate to truly describe women's experiences and the potential of these experiences to the research process. And I, as a woman and a researcher, certainly do not pretend to understand the many complexities and ramifications of women's experiences. Although, I have a grasp of the experiences of life as an African-American woman living and working with Zimbabwean women, I came to this research not knowing all the methods to use for effective intercultural communication. However, I have discovered that a key thread running throughout this research is that any method must show what has been taken for granted about women's lives and allow them a chance to speak for themselves on their own terms.

At the end of the day, I, as researcher, must be prepared to accept full responsibility for any inaccuracies, any insensitivity or anything that does not portray the realities of women. The objective of any method is not to distort but to share some of the struggles and experiences in order to explore their meaning for larger issues of cross-culture living and ministry. If that is the case, finding an appropriate method to accomplish this will be worth the risk.

CHAPTER 3:   CONTEXT AND WORLDVIEW OF AFRICAN AND AFRICAN-AMERICAN WOMEN

3.1   AFRICAN WORLDVIEW

There is a plurality of identities in Africa which were not recognised by the colonialists when drawing boundary lines between countries. Consequently, one finds people of the same ethnic background living in different countries. People tend to be more influenced by the context in which they actually live rather than their ethnic origin. So, when looking at African cultures or African worldviews one must not exhort one country or one ethnic group as representing the worldview of the continent. One must also bear in mind that Christianity is not the only form of religion on the continent or within a given country. One finds every denomination of the Christian faith imaginable working alongside Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism and African religions. These religions and culture affect the African worldview as well.

Africa has her own approach to the physical and metaphysical world. It would be presumptuous to assume that one can give inclusive information on what it means to be African or expound on the impact of African Traditional Religion. However, there are some salient features of what it means to be "African" of which many African theologians pay attention. They are mentioned only as guidelines and are not exhaustive in scope.

3.1.1   Belief in God

One major element common to African cultures is the belief in a Supreme Being who is real. Whether that Being is called Mwari, Nkulunkulu, Njakomba, Nzambi or God, the presence of a Supreme Being is felt and recognised in the lives of people; God is a Creator; God is responsible for origins, nature and humanity (Idowu 1973; Nyamiti 1987). God is One, the only God of the whole universe according to Idowu (1973:161) who also states that this particular concept of God is very important in the African worldview if one is to understand the African attitude to life and personal relations. People may live far apart, have different life styles, different skin colour, and different cultural beliefs. Yet they are all one, created by one God. I agree with John Pobee (1996:22) in that

Africans seem unable to explain life without reference to what is religious and spiritual. Mowbray O'Rorke (in Pobee 1996:23), the Anglican bishop of Accra from 1919-1923, acknowledged that missionary methods largely ignored this spirituality, which was condemned as darkness, when they called on Africans to make a complete break with their past in every respect. It is Pobee's (1996:23) contention that "*homo africanus* cannot be satisfied with a purely materialistic and secular worldview."

3.1.2 Africans are Hman Beings

At the heart of the gospel and culture debate in Africa is a search for an African identity which is human alongside other human identities (Pobee 1996:22). I am of the same opinion as Pobee in that there is a crisis everywhere today as to what it is to be human; and that the anthropological quest as nuanced by African identity and Christ, is crucial for this debate. The modern scientific era is bringing about a complete transformation in the lives of people both scientifically and spiritually. The holistic approach that is characteristic of African life is being emphasised to a large extent. For some people, especially from the western world, it is becoming clear that although Africa has presumably not contributed much to the scientific world, her contribution to humanity in the midst of technological advances has been tremendous. With a strong emphasis on human relations and intense personalisation, Africa's contribution is vital. The African philosophy of *ubuntu* (enshrined in the Xhosa proverb *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* or "a person is a person through persons") "affirms an organic wholeness of humanity, a wholeness realized in and through other people" (Villa-Vicencio 1997: 32). This does not ignore the downside of African *ubuntu* where there are patriarchal societal and power systems, or where there is abuse of political power in contemporary Africa. However, the positive contributions should be seen as a bid to make connections because we are all intertwined with each other.

3.1.3 Community

In Africa, there is a strong sense of community where a person finds his or her being and its meaning. People are individuals only as parts that make the whole. There is a strong concept of interdependence in contrast to the individualism of western culture. Relationships are very important. Pobee (1996:23) affirms what I have witnessed in that "the African cannot think of being saved alone; he or she must be saved with the community, for they are together". This is also true of blessings in the African context which are often considered as having been endowed with

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children, food and health. These blessings have value when they are shared by the entire family, rather than as an individual. Pobee (1996:23) continues by highlighting that "this African understanding of the human being as a social being has significant implications for the very individualistic terms in which the message of the gospel is often framed". Yet, if the gospel is to address the hopes and fears of the African, it is imperative to face issues like the massive poverty, unemployment and other social ills that plague African people as a whole that can reduce their blessings, their healing, and sense of community. One should also note that the African community consists not only of the living, but also the dead or those called the living dead and those yet to be born (Pobee 1996:23). This is an important concept in the African culture that is often misunderstood by those outside of Africa.

3.1.4 Holism

Another way of looking at African worldview is in holistic terms. Pobee (1996:23) points out that many Africans believe that the

> material and spiritual are held together as two inter-related aspects of reality, as are the individual and the community. Social and political matters are as important as religious and spiritual concerns. Africans tend not to be satisfied simply with a culture of intellectualism; the work of the mind must be accompanied by emotion and feeling.

An African worldview emphasizes personal involvement in order to imbibe beliefs and ideas. This concept is in contrast to objectivity as advocated by the western world where, for example, mental digestion of biblical knowledge once or twice a week at church is ideal. A belief in Africa is that the whole human being must be involved in feeling and thinking everyday of the week.

In a discussion of holism, one should also look at medicine, which is essentially restoring and preserving health. It is both curative and preventive. Pobee (1996: 24) observes that in the ancient world, medicine was associated with religion in that the divine healer through the medium of a priest actually executed the treatment. In some African cultures, according to Idowu (1973:201), European medicine was often believed to be inadequate as it was unconsecrated. Divine and ancestral sanctions were necessary before and during the preparation and application of medicine. Faith was, and still is, the key in the practice of medicine in my opinion. Goba (1978:162) comments on this aspect of wholeness by pointing out that in African Initiated Churches, and to a

lesser extent in mainline churches, that healing is more concerned with restoring wholeness to those who are sick in "body and mind'. He also includes the kind of sickness that is looked upon as ancestral punishment.

Traditional medicine and healing are not to be ignored. Therapeutic methods, states Oosthuizen (1991:45), used by diviners to treat diseases are gaining more and more support and some diviners are doing a good job in alleviating psychological disturbances. The traditional healer/diviner tends to adopt a holistic approach to his/her practice understanding that his/her role is not limited to just healing. S/He must act as a family consultant in consulting with family, special friends or the group to get enough information to successfully treat the sick person. Many of the healer's activities are psycho-therapeutic providing warmth, empathy, and genuineness in order to restore confidence. This is often seen as being in contrast to a cold clinical western approach. The diviner takes on many of the roles that have been divided and carved into small units of specialization in the western world. It is not surprising to observe among some traditional Africans a diviner who acts as the physician, psychiatrist, as well as the social worker (Oosthuizen 1991:45).

3.1.5 Concept of Time

"Time is money" is a western modern linear maxim that has now entered the vocabulary and way of life of many people. For the modern world, progress is based on making the best of time. Modern secularized people are generally tense and always planning for the future with little time to exist in the present and really enjoy it. The present time for them, observes Oosthuizen (1991:41), is simply the gateway to their "utopian future". Oosthuizen (1991:43) notes that for the traditional African, time is two dimensional and cyclical -- the present and a long past with the past being the focal point of life. It is in the past that one finds one's orientation, one's roots, one's identity, and one's security. The past, continues Oosthuizen (1991:43, is a world of ancestors from which one finds direction and the future is a short period not expressed further than a few months.

The cyclical concept of time is closer to reality and is embedded in traditional thinking in Africa and should be given close attention. With the coming of Christianity and its focus on the future, Oosthuizen (1991) reminds us that human beings' daily lives have been separated from religion. Based on personal observations and readings, I think Oosthuizen (1991:43) is correct to point out

that separating religion from one's daily personal needs has been a traumatic experience in Africa and caused the proliferation of the indigenous churches that look back to the Bible to give value to their lives in the context of the present living. Their emphasis is not on the future that offers 'a land of milk and honey'. Rather their concentration is on the well-being of people in the here and now. The mystery of what has happened is perhaps more important to the African in contrast to the western modernised concept of what is yet to happen.

In conclusion, the African worldview has a lot to contribute to humanity and should not be ignored under the pretext that 'nothing good comes out of Africa'. It has offered a lot to African-Americans in their need to re-define their identity after being robbed of their dignity through slavery. In section 3.3, one will observe that some of the values included within the African-American culture is a carry over of this strong African influence.

3.2   AFRICAN WOMEN'S CONTEXT

After giving a general overview of the African worldview, I propose to highlight issues that may affect the worldview of African Christian women and the context in which they do theology.

Women in Zimbabwe, as is the case in many African nations, form the majority population and the majority to suffer from exploitation, abuse and invisibility. Musimbi Kanyoro (1997:178) describes the African woman's context in terms of "global gender injustices". Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza (1997:1-2) has coined the expression *kyriarchy* to replace the widely used expression "patriarchal/patriarchy". Patriarchy is thought of as "global male domination of all women equally" whereas *kyriachy* is seen as a "system of domination and subordination, profit and exploitation" where there is "the rule of the lord/master/father/husband over those subordinated or dependent on him" and where women's status is not only in terms of gender but also in terms of class, race, country or religion of the men to whom they 'belong' (Fiorenza 1997:2).

Many African women theologians, *inter alia* Phiri (1997:68), Oduyoye (1998), Kanyoro 1996:5), would agree that culture and religion are the contextual basis for doing African women's theology. Although global sisterhood is linked by a common theme of patriarchy or male domination, the situation in Africa calls for a different contextual analysis. Religion and culture can no longer be

overlooked, for to do so, as Phiri (1997:68) observes, is to hinder the participation of women in their own development. One can not ignore the impact of culture and religion on women's struggle for self-identity and survival/liberation.

Much of the research done by African women themselves emphasising the context in which they do theology has been done through the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians who concentrate their efforts in three major areas as noted by Phiri (1997:71), specifically roles and images of women in relation to men in African culture; the interaction between African culture and Christianity and the impact on women; and cultural hermeneutics or reading the Bible through the eyes of African women. I will take a brief look at these as well as postmodern issues affecting the context in which African women must do theology.

One must keep in mind an essential premise expressed by Kanyoro (1996:6) who states that to understand the African context, one must understand that "religion is not usually separated from other aspects of life. Theology for us is life, it is life as we live it, life as we experience it" in every activity carried out on a day to day basis. I think she is on target by pointing out that there is a very thin line that separates culture and religion in the lives of African women. The challenge before African women is to continue impacting cultural hermeneutics realising that scripture is used to justify the marginalisation of women.

3.2.1   Roles And Images Of Women

Phiri (1997:71) feels that rituals are a very important component of African culture and religion and that they are generally more favourable to men than women. Pregnancy, and all that is associated with it, e.g. birthing, naming of child, pre and post natal care, is viewed by Phiri (1997:71) as a ritual of great significance in Africa. Much emphasis is placed on a woman's ability to bear children and pregnancy is treated with respect. "Women are seen as sacred vessels of life and, in most African societies, giving birth is a spiritual experience" (Phiri 1997:71). So, women welcome their role as mothers of the community and fear when they are unable to have children.

The question of identity and survival/liberation in terms of women's roles come into play as well. When the focal point becomes a woman's ability to reproduce, then the role and image of the woman are distorted. Her identity is no longer based on who she is in the community, but rather,

on what she can produce for the community. She is often thought of or seen as invisible because her very being is identified by males. The use of the term "Mr and Mrs X" is an example that is so common that one does not question the usage. The woman is generally defined or identified in relationship to her husband (or father). Or, a woman's identity is wrapped up in the child's identity. She becomes "the mother of x" and her own personal identity is lost, diminished or equated to that of the child. An interesting form of greeting to a man in Zimbabwe is *Banjani abantwana?* meaning "How are your children?" understood to mean the children and the wife inclusive.

Many African women, based on my observation, find it very difficult to function properly in the community if they are barren. Much of the woman's identity is lost because she can not be known as "the mother of Y" which culturally means that her role or identity as "the wife of Mr X" is also threatened. The story of Sarah and Hagar holds a special attraction for Zimbabwean women because they understand the dynamics involved. If survival/liberation has anything to do with quality of life, Zimbabwean women understand the threat of a poor quality of life if they are barren. It means there are no children or family to take care of them when they are old. It means that the woman may have to accept a polygamous marriage. Roles and images of women are definitely a contextual issue for African women.

3.2.2   African Culture and Christianity

The interaction between African culture and Christianity impacts women in Africa and particularly in Zimbabwe. While the church has given attention to issues of race, class and culture, it is often lacking in its response to gender. Women make up the majority of church congregations but very few occupy leadership roles. One questions whether the church can preach liberation and, at the same time, it oppresses women.

Women are said to be the strength of the church in terms of work/commitment and majority membership. Yet, in terms of leadership positions, women are the minority and consequently become silent pillars of the church. Exclusion based on gender is also prevalent in economics, development, marriage, politics, cultural practices, and other instances where the humanity or sexuality of women is called into question (Kretzschmar 1995:151). Yet, one expects the church to be a voice for the voiceless and to call for justice for all of God's creation. One does not expect the church to perpetuate injustice and suffering. Although there are many churches that openly

embrace ordained women and women theologians in leadership roles in the church, there are still those who quote from First Corinthians 14 verses 33-35 where women are relegated to silence and must ask their husbands about church matters at home. And while there has been some progress in receiving women ministers in Zimbabwe, there is still division among women themselves on whether women should be ordained and what that role should be. Will women use their training effectively to be a voice piece for women? Are women being prepared effectively for ministerial service that addresses the needs of women? These are some of the serious questions that women are asking as they try to find their place within society and within the church.

3.2.3   Cultural Hermeneutics

Cultural hermeneutics is important as women search for their identity and meaning in the church. It is true that because of poor educational facilities and the cultural bias against girls receiving an education, many Black women in Africa are illiterate and have only oral knowledge of the Bible. In spite of this, many women are beginning to understand that Scriptures do not just fall from heaven and those scriptures were written and interpreted by men according to custom and tradition from a masculine perspective. Even the language that was used was patriarchal and meant to reinforce existing stereotypes (Bloch 2001:25). God, over the years, has even been portrayed or thought of as being only male and this affects how women have interpreted scriptures. As Mary Daly (in Mandew 1991:120) puts it, "God is considered to be male and if God is male, then male is God". Yet, we know that African and African-American women are keen to understand biblical stories in their own context. Renita J. Weems (1988:viii) says "If you are like myself, you have heard and read about many of the women in the Bible all your life, and you have often wondered whether there might not be another way of understanding their stories". Masenya (1995a:153) concurs with Weems in that when reading biblical texts from an African womanist perspective, Black women are enabled to "resist those things within their culture and within the biblical texts themselves that are found to be antagonistic to their sense of identity and their basic instincts for survival". Cultural hermeneutics is very important to the study of women doing theology. For African and African-American Christian women, I am convinced like Kanyoro (2001:107-108) that an essential element of biblical cultural hermeneutics is not looking for biblical characters who can serve as role models. Rather, it is looking for that which can change behaviour. For example, for Africans reading the story of Sarah and Hagar, it is not a question of who is right and who is wrong in the cultural context. The

question is what can be put in place to break the cycle of violence against women and what measure can be taken for both men and women to work together bringing about the wholeness and healing that are at risk because of culture. This is a clear indication that there is a deep felt need not only among African-American womanists but also among African womanists to reread and consequently reinterpret and re-appropriate the story of the Bible for women's struggle against domination.

3.2.4   Postmodern and Post-colonial Context

Any discussion of context that impacts the identity of African women and their struggle for liberation would have to give voice to concerns of the post-modern era. This is an era where globalisation is viewed by many in so-called 'developing countries' as the idolatry of the economic market because profits, money and accumulation of wealth have become the 'gods' of the world at the expense of people. This is an era where in spite of great accomplishments in science and technology the world's poor are getting poorer, the majority of whom are women of colour, and the rich are getting richer. It is an era where epidemics and pandemics threaten to decimate entire generations.

In Zimbabwe, women are faced with mounting poverty as the political and economic systems retrogress. Already at the bottom of the scale, women are disadvantaged not only in their lives from day-to-day but also in their vision for the future. It is, indeed, a struggle for survival given the level of poverty that continues to prevent them from advancing. A 2001 report in the *Financial Gazette*, a weekly Zimbabwean newspaper, stated that 76% of the Zimbabwean population live below the poverty line. With all givens in place, it is not difficult to discern that women are the most affected.

HIV/AIDS is the scourge that affects women and children in astounding proportion all over the world, and particularly in Africa. In Zimbabwe alone, year 2000 statistics report that one fourth of the population between ages 15-49 are HIV positive and this is on the increase. Not only are women prime carriers of the virus due to their lack of control over their own bodies and sexuality, but they are also the ones who must care for the sick and dying. Their strength and resilience as they struggle in the face of the overwhelming nature of the tasks to be carried out are phenomenal.

Women in Africa must also struggle for their identity and survival in the midst of violence in all forms. There are ethnic conflicts, wars, crime and even societal breakdown where the future

becomes bleak and uncertain. Zimbabwe is currently participating in the Congo War to the detriment of the country of Zimbabwe and her people. Healthcare services, education, and developmental projects all suffer because of the staggering amounts of money diverted to fight the war. One can imagine what this does for services hitherto provided for women and children. At the same time there is growing political unrest in the country and an apparent lack of democracy crippling the efforts of many to survive.

Women's groups in Zimbabwe complain that in spite of some effort by government to address gender inequality, this continues to be an area of concern. Women are placed in positions of lower status where their God given gifts are often ignored or under-utilised. One can see this in land reform in Zimbabwe. Many women fought in the liberation war side by side with men from 1967 – 1980 and were promised land in return for their service. The war ended over 20 years ago and women are still struggling for their share of the land and recognition as valiant war veterans. They struggle for survival in a patriarchal society after a war where their contributions have been ignored.

The Zimbabwe government says that women can apply for land on an equal footing as men, but loan facilities are not readily available for women in order to develop the land if it is accorded to women. Less than a quarter of a century has elapsed since the war, yet the legacy of the vicious colonial system is still visible and is fresh in the minds of the people. Colonialism in its ancient form has passed away, but the best land is still in the hands of the minority white population and a minority Black elite. Economically, women must struggle to make ends meet because they are without a solid financial basis from the colonial era up to today.

The attention of African theologians – both men and women – must relate to or highlight women's concerns and experiences as women see them today. Oduyoye (1994:167) sums it up, "Our context – oppression, poverty and impoverishment, marginalisation from the global technological culture, exploitation that results from unjust global trade and economic arrangements – is a significant area for African theologians, including both men and women".

3.3 AMERICAN AND AFRICAN-AMERICAN WORLDVIEW

After more than 200 years of acculturation and assimilation into the American culture, there is no

longer a pure 'African' culture among African-Americans although there is still a close affinity to Africa. African-Americans and others in the African Diaspora have adopted from the dominant culture many of the values, attitudes, customs, and beliefs as the worldview lens through which they observe, participate and evaluate others. I limit my discussion to African-Americans living in the USA realising that others in the African Diaspora have their own unique way of looking at life that is not necessarily in keeping with culture in the USA. I want to highlight some aspects of the American worldview influencing African-Americans. In section 3.4, I take a closer look at the African-American context.

3.3.1   Individualism

Individualism is one of the most frequently quoted characteristics of the American worldview. This is in stark contrast to the African view of community. Americans' identity is wrapped around the "I, me, mine" attitude and "we are independent and can do it alone". African-Americans, in my opinion, are deeply influenced by this attitude that has, in one sense, contributed to their survival and resilience as a people. They have had to prove themselves as individuals independent of the dominant culture in order to fight a repressive system.   In a different sense, 'family' has always been a source of strength within the African-American community. It has always been believed that "family went beyond bloodlines, and community was the core, the very substance of human existence" (Sobonfu Some 1999:86). The importance of the extended family and community has helped sustain African-Americans. With modernisation, integration, assimilation and education, the trend has changed, in my opinion, and the individualistic attitude has contributed to the breakdown of the African-American family. There is, however, still a strong sense of extended family in many southern American states. This is particularly true in rural areas where everyone from the same community is often referred to as "Auntie", "Uncle", or "Cousin (Cuz)". Children address their age mates as "sister", "sis", "brother", "bro". In some ways, African-American life is still reflected in the African worldview of "I am because we are" rather than in the Cartesian view of "I think, therefore I am" (Comas-Diaz and Greene 1994:13).

3.3.2   Materialism

Many people would agree with Samovar's (1997:63) assessment that materialism is "an integral part of [American] life where it is almost a right to be materially well-off and physically comfortable and

Americans often judge others by material possession". America is one of the richest and most prosperous nations in the world and African-Americans have made tremendous economic progress since their forcible delivery to the USA during the era of slavery. Some have moved up the economic ladder and are among the elite and "nouveaux riche". The level of education and sheer hard work have made this possible. Exceptional examples can be cited, but the truth is that African-Americans generally are still at the bottom of the ladder and there is still a high 'drop-out' tendency among male youths. The great 'American Dream' of a big house with two cars in a plush suburb has not been realised by the majority of African-Americans. Women are generally affected the most, especially many African-American female-headed families (Billingsley 1992:49). It is at this level that women are identified with disdain as 'poor' and 'woman'.

3.3.3   Equality

Americans also tend to pride themselves on a sense of equality. Samovar (1997:63) describes Americans as a people who believe that everyone has the right to succeed in life and that government, through laws and educational opportunities, should ensure that right. There is also an American tendency of identifying 'self' on a first name basis to show how all are equal regardless of title, class, and education. However, African-Americans have not always followed this tendency. I write from the prospective of an African-American growing up in southern USA where the use of first name is not usual, yet the trend is noticeably changing. Children in southern USA have been taught that it is disrespectful to refer to an adult (black or white) by his/her first name. Obviously, years ago, it was an obligation rather than simple courtesy to address whites as 'Mr' or 'Mrs' or 'Sir' or 'Madam' given the context fifty years ago. Yet, even today among southern African-Americans, titles of respect are generally used when addressing adults.

African-Americans continue to fight to be part of this American dream of equality. The classic *Animal Farm* written by George Orwell (1951) reminds us that all the animals are equal but some are more equal than others. Equality does not exist in America at the same level. Laws regulating the right to quality education for all people were passed in the 1950s. In southern USA, as African-Americans integrated schools and public places, whites were facilitated with loans in order to move to other suburbs beyond the financial reach of the Black population. Less that ten years after integration started, urban schools were again predominantly one race – this time African-American –

and tax benefits meant to upgrade these urban African-American schools were diverted to the already financially wealthy suburban white schools.

Another deviation from this general worldview of equality can be seen in the "11:00 Sunday morning worship" which is still the most segregated hour in US religious life. Minorities were not allowed in many white churches. Consequently, many ethnic groups have opted not to join the dominate culture in worship in order to maintain their own context of worship and celebrate the Lord in ways best known to them. This is true for the African-American form of worship emanating from slavery and the passage over. The music, for example, is animated and reminiscent of the African 'call and response' musical style.

It has been within the church that African Americans have been able to find a spiritual identity. Even if it seems that the world fails to treat African-Americans equally as precious beings in God's sight, many people have found comfort and identity in the church. The church is where there is a sense of a just God who allows the rain and the sunshine to fall on all equally.

3.3.4   Science and Technology

According to Samovar (1997:63), Americans hold science in great awe believing that it represents a major tool for understanding and improving life. The notion has a profound effect on the rest of the world, particularly on the African continent. Americans have indeed excelled in science and technology and one should not minimise their importance to all aspect of life – health, education, economy, social concerns, etc. Many African-Americans have benefited tremendously from science and technology in terms of quality of life. However, this is still a dream, rather than a reality, for most of us. The inaccessibility of science and technology in the so-called "developing world" has deprived many more of the life that God intended for all God's creation. This lack of quality of life has been exacerbated by many of the negative aspects of globalisation. In fact, I totally agree with Reinharz (1992) that the very term "development" reeks of western superiority and exploitation while at the same time ignores the connotation of "child-rearing" which hinders a relationship of equals; the metaphors of growth, benevolence, nurturing, and natural change that underlie this term make it very difficult for healthy relations.

3.3.5 Work and Leisure

Samovar (1997:64) contends that Americans value work. One often hears an American asking, "What do you do?" confirming that "doing work" is a desired expenditure of energy and avenue to recognition of money or power. The American culture is indeed more concerned with "doing" rather than the "being" that is characteristic of many African cultures. This helps one to understand the American attitude of being charitable and freely giving assistance to those who deserve assistance and at the same time look down with intolerance on those who appear to be physically able by American standards but who do not work.

The reward of hard work for Americans is leisure. Americans look forward to their annual holiday (from two weeks to two months) as a reward for the work done during the year. Ironically, from my own observation, the reward of hard work as far as African-Americans are concerned is "more hard work" simply to survive.

3.3.6 Progress and Change

Another aspect of the American worldview in Samovar (1997:63) is that of progress and change. Americans place great importance on changing or improving oneself with assistance of self-help gurus, to changing where one lives at a faster rate than any other people in the world. This is permissible for a nation. The concern in Africa, for example, is the American concept of being 'the watchdog of the world' and changing those who do not agree with them. There is also a sense that Americans expect everyone to progress and change at the same speed and same manner even though the resources are not the same. Strongly associated with this is the American culture of violence that grips America. The American culture has been built on a notion of violence as seen in the media. Many examples can be cited from the taking of land by force from Native Americans, to the war of independence, to the Civil War, Korean War, Desert Storm and Afghanistan and Iraq today. Guns are so much a part of the American life that the use of guns is written in the American constitution (Samovar 1997:113). African-Americans have adopted this notion and the violence in their communities is of great concern.

3.3.7 Competition

Americans are encouraged to be competitive whether in the job market, home, schools, church and

all aspects of life (Samovar 1997:65). Americans, in general, tend to rank, grade, classify and evaluate in comparison to other nations and each other. Therefore, someone is always at the bottom and others at the top. Blacks and other minorities tend to take the bottom positions. The American structure is, in fact, like a pyramid where the poor, the minorities, and others on the margin are at the base of the pyramid while the privileged few are at the summit. This competitive nature acts contrary to the humanness and respect of life in African culture.

3.4   AFRICAN-AMERICAN CONTEXT

3.4.1   Historical Perspective

As is the case with their African sisters, African-American women constitute more than fifty percent of the Black community and more than seventy per cent of the Black church (Grant 1995:332; Comas-Diaz and Greene 1994:10). Yet, the context in which African and African-American women live and do theology is different although they share the same skin colour. The African context as mentioned earlier in this chapter is rooted in African culture and religion that are difficult to separate (Phiri 1997:68). Any authentic liberation theology must address both racism and sexism among African-Americans which have had profound and complex effects on the realities of African-American women. Research done by Jacquelyne Jackson (in Grant 1995:330) reveals that when one compares Black males and white males and females to Black women, one finds that Black women constitute the most disadvantaged group in the United States. This is evidenced "especially by their largely unenviable educational, occupational, employment, and income levels, and availability of marital partners" (in Grant 1995:330).

African-Americans, unlike other immigrants to the American soil seeking a better life and working conditions, came against their will as property with no legal or human rights. During the passage, many lost their lives. Those who survived lost their community of origin, language and even freedom. Even after the official abolition of slavery, the institutional racism that prevailed was systematically legalised and is still in many spheres of life even today. For the African-American woman, the situation was worse. She was not only property but she was used as a breeder of additional property.

Racism has been used by the dominant culture to denigrate and exploit African-Americans by perpetuating the myths about their supposedly inferiority to whites. For example, African-Americans are characterised as lacking emotional control and sexual restraint, being of lower intelligence than white counterparts, and harbouring violent tendencies (Comas-Diaz and Greene 1994:12). Such devaluation of a person makes it difficult to have a positive ethnic identity.

Although racism is central to understanding the context of African-American women, sexism cannot be overlooked as both have seriously affected African-American women's self-image or sense of identity and ability to survive. And, the African-American woman's context cannot be understood in isolation from that of African-American men. The family is the focal point for understanding the context. Andrew Billingsley (1992:18) contends that given the complexity and diversity of African-American families, there is not a simple context in which women live. One must keep in mind Billingsley's (1992:18) assertion that African-American family life includes "two parent families, single parent families and no parent families. It includes upper-income as well as middle and low income families. It embraces highly achieving families as well as marginal and troubled families". African-American women are either affected by or fit into these categories. I, however, speak of the African-American woman's context in a general sense and not that of a specific group of African-American women.

Racism was inherently rooted in the oppression faced by African-American men and women when brought to the shores of America. Over the years, racism has been more of an issue than sexism. In fact, at the height of the Women's Liberation Movement in the 60s and 70s, African-American women kept quiet so as not to distract from the African-American community in its struggle against racism. Besides, many African-American women felt that many of the issues being addressed by white women were not relevant to the problems and struggles of the African-American community or to them as women (Ali 1999:24; Cone 1985:131)

As one moved from the slave culture to the modern era, a dualism between African-American men and women emerged. This means, points out Jacquelyn Grant (1995:322) that "[black] males have gradually increased their power and participation in the male-dominated society, while [black] females have continued to endure the stereotypes and oppression of an earlier period". This suggests why womanist theology emerged in such a dynamic way as African-American men either

"by self-appointment or by sinecure of a male-dominated society,......have deemed it proper to speak for the entire black community, male and female" (Grant 1995:322). In this manner, African-American men have accepted the patriarchal structures of the white society as normative for the African-American community. It is painful for African-American women to hear African-American men speak against racism perpetuated by whites at the same time to hear them speak of the woman's place in similar oppressive tones.

Although there has been much progress made by African-American women since the 70s, "the past has fundamentally shaped and molded the present" (Ali 1999:25). Essentially, racism has undermined the progress of African-Americans who have not been able to overcome the systematic racism in place in America. African-Americans live under what Ali (1999:25) terms as *genocidal poverty* where the effects of poverty, *inter alia* malnutrition, poor health care, homicide, fratricide, suicide, and substance abuse, are responsible for the growing death rate in African–American communities. African-Americans have never been privileged to obtain a financial basis that will serve to change or improve their lives. This is partly because African-Americans went from unpaid slavery to underpaid employment or unemployment. Nor have African Americans been able to obtain any of the financial inheritance enjoyed by whites that should have filtered down to descendants of freed slaves. Ali (1999:29-30) aptly articulates the sentiment of many African-Americans as she notes three major reasons based on racial discrimination preventing African-American from achieving economic success. In summary, she notes first that there is a lower rate of upward mobility among African-Americans, especially in the faster growing sectors that require technical knowledge. Second, she points out that when there is need to reduce the number of workers because of technological advancements, African-Americans are generally the first to be affected. The third factor is the discriminatory practices in the financial institutions where loans are made. The rejection rate is much higher than that with whites; and, property owned by African-Americans is generally valued much lower than in White communities. There is clearly a correlation between the labour and financial markets mentioned with that of the high incidence of crime and violence in African-American communities.

3.4.2   Contemporary African-American Woman's Perspective

African-American women are directly affected by the state of affairs among African-American

males. How African-American women fare in society economically is directly related to the status of African-American men. Studies have shown that African-American women are the most impoverished group of adults in America (Ali 1999:35). Females because of the high rate of absenteeism of African-American males for various reasons head many homes, *inter alia*, incarceration, high mortality, unemployment or underemployment, and substance abuse.

There is an acute and overt lack of interest on the part of the American society to address the socioeconomic problems, caused by government policies that specifically affect the African-American community. There are glaring disparities that exist within the American society where the general populace of the community suffers. An example is that of African-American males where one in every four is affected by the criminal justice system (Ali 1999:30; Billingsley 1992:62).

I agree with Grant (1995:324) that the self-image of African-American women has greatly suffered under racism and sexism and that the African-American community and church have helped to perpetuate stereotypes, racism and sexism that are all part of the African-American woman's context. African-American women must continue to be freed of stereotypes for example that define beauty based on white women's physical attributes – 'long, silky, blond hair' or 'tall and slender' in contrast to Black women having 'short kinky hair' or being 'big and charcoal black'. It is the goal of the Black liberation struggle to change radically "the socio-economic and political conditions of Black people by inculcating self-love, self-control, self-reliance, and political power" (Grant 1995:324).

3.5   IDENTITY

There are multiple factors determining one's identity. Because of the limited scope of this thesis, I shall only look at cultural/social, religious and ethnic identities as determinants of who we are and where we go. These factors are also essential to determine our strength and sense of survival, how we cope with oppression and domination, power and powerlessness. We are born in a given culture, in a given environment to a given family and each contributes to who we are and what we can become. As we are looking at identity from a Christian perspective, we must not ignore our identity as sons and daughters of God in our search to be more like Jesus Christ.

To identify effectively with other cultures, one must have a clear concept of self-identity. It is then that one is able to relate to a common struggle of survival and liberation. There appears to be some truth in Steyn's (1994:22) assessment that if people have high self-esteem, are comfortable with themselves and their sense of identity that these people cope better with intercultural communication. It is only by being deeply rooted in our own cultures, will we as African-American or Zimbabwean women be able to adopt to the culture of the other. For me, this aspect of identity is important to this research. If I am rooted in the African-American culture; if I am able to accept it with its good and evil; if I am sure of my identity within it, then I can accept myself as the "other" in the Zimbabwean culture. I am able to accept the values and merits of another culture or another way of understanding religion.

Both African and African-American women have known oppression in many forms – rooted in slavery and all that it implied for African-American women and rooted in colonialism, culture and religion for African women. In both cases, systems were in place that even if women were successful, often their success was undermined to such an extent that even Black men often became resentful and enacted oppressive actions upon their Black women.

For African and African American women, the experience of being a woman is so tied up with our ethnic and racial status that it is virtually impossible for us to self-identify primarily as women. Many women like Hill-Collins, bell hooks and Angela Davis (in Tsolidis 1993) examine the interdependency of forces on identity rather than a single factor.

I wish to briefly highlight three areas that I see as being crucial to understanding African and African-American women in their quest for identity: (a) Social/Culture, (b) Church/Religion, and (c) Ethnicity.

3.5.1   Social/Culture

De Lauretis (in Tsolidis 1993:6) and Comas-Diaz and Greene (1994:4) understand identity as multiple and shifting, and that it is constructed by individuals within the meanings or context available to them at a particular point in history and is not static. When one carefully looks at the situation of Black women today one needs to understand that the dominant mainstream culture placed a lot of contradictory expectations on both African and African-American women. Black

women often find themselves "in circumstances that require them to be strong, resilient, instrumental, and self-affirming in order to survive, yet cultural norms frequently define '*normal*' women as weak, fragile, vulnerable, submissive and oppressed" (Comas-Diaz & Greene 1994:xv).

This same image of Zimbabwean women is confirmed by Rudo Gaidzanwa (1985:11) who states that "as wives, women are expected to behave in comforting, non-aggressive and nurturing ways. They are there to make life manageable for husbands and children". Speaking from a Zimbabwean perspective, Gaidzanwa (1985:11) further affirms that if women are "childless, domineering or assertive, unfaithful and insubordinate, [they] are despised and socially disapproved". As women struggle with this dichotomy, it becomes apparent that there is a great need for healing and justice, both in the community and the church, for them to find their identity.

Although many factors are involved in determining one's identity, much of an individual's sense of self-identity is tied to one's culture so much that when asked by someone of another culture about identity, the individual will often state first his/her nationality, culture or sub-culture. A natural result of this cultural self-identification is ethnocentrism or the tendency to evaluate everything in terms of one's own culture. This in itself can be one of the greatest barriers to intercultural communication. An objective of this research is to show that intercultural communication can be facilitated in spite of cultural differences. The Zimbabwean women who narrate stories in Chapter 5 will highlight some of the cultural themes that have made them who they are today. They will articulate how they have refused to be defined as non-entities or failures in their communities for aiming higher than what is expected of a woman. From their experiences and my own, one will see how cultural boundaries can be crossed.

This leads to another aspect of socialisation and culture. A person's identity is associated with one's roles and with the need to fulfill the ongoing expectations that others have of us. Edet and Ekeya (1988:7) are clear in their understanding that a woman's identity was traditionally that of wife and mother and that she was known by her relationship either to the children or husband. African women have been traditionally assigned to roles of housewives and mothers at home and property of the father or husband. The girl child was identified by her father until she married and then identified by her husband -- a simple transfer of power from one male to another, an act sanctioned by the community and later the church. Missionary schooling and the emphasis placed on gender

role expectations helped to shape the identity of the women in Africa. Women were expected to be submissive.

Colonialism, racism and political forces also have significantly influenced how women have been identified. Nor can one ignore how the usage of colonial languages played a role in the definition and naming of Black women. In Africa as well as in America, the colonial language was used as a tool to suppress women and perpetuate the definition of women as ignorant and unintelligent. Others have always defined Black women, whether in America or Africa. Often, they are simply identified as being wife or mother. Haddad (2000a:253) points out that African women view their motherhood role positively and as a key to their sense of worth; "the home affirms African women's identity as nurturers and caregivers which brings dignity and is life giving". This may describe African-American women as well. I think that the large number of single mothers in the United States tends to show motherhood is not necessarily attached to one's worth as wife, but rather, that motherhood may be a problematic aspect of a woman's life.

3.5.2   Church/Religion

For many African and African-American women, roots in the church shape our strongest sense of identity as Christians. Generally, women have been given supportive roles in the church rather than leadership roles. In my opinion, the life of Jesus Christ is exemplary of how we should look at religious identity as it relates to intercultural communication. Jesus identified with his Jewish culture very much, and yet, he was required to move beyond the fence to encompass everything that affects life. Identity has much to do with gender, class, race, political, economic and social conditions in which we find ourselves. So any discussion of identity must recognise the Old Testament concept of *shalom* as defined by Van Schalkwyk (1999:8) as "the holistic concept of healing-liberation-justice-peace in the Kingdom of God" as this concept relates to the socio-political and economic well-being of women and men. This understanding of *shalom* must address the ministry that Jesus advocated in Luke 4:18. It must also address the idea of solidarity where, as womanists or feminists, we commit ourselves to the survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female (Collins 1990:38).

3.5.3   Ethnicity

I think it is essential for African and African-American women to give expression to their identity based on ethnicity. For African-American women there have always been questions about the

validity or meaning of their African heritage. There are scholars who feel that the African heritage was lost during slavery whereas others feel that traces of the African heritage did survive and goes back into ancient Africa and the rise of civilization (Billingsley 1992: 83-84). Although there are similarities, African and African-American women cope with identity and identity-formation in different ways. For African-Americans, one cannot talk about identity without emphasizing gender and race and being part of an ethnic minority in a dominant culture. Being 'Black' or 'African-American' carries with it a sense of being 'somebody'. It must offer a positive connotation that removes any feeling of inferiority or of being a 'lesser child of God'. The population in the USA today is shifting numerically from 'white' to 'people of colour'. This does not imply that 'people of colour' have gained the necessary cultural or economic power to overshadow the predominant culture. Their influence is expected to alter the socio-political fabric of the American society as their spirituality, religion and culture gain prominence.

For the African woman, culture and religion are given precedence in a discussion of identity. Zimbabwean women have had to struggle with racial identity in view of colonialism and the minority white population having political, social and economic control of the country before independence which set standards of identity. Following independence, vestiges of colonialism remained and it is still a major task to bring about healing and self-assertion. Of major concern is the existing animosity between the dominant Shona group and the Ndebele minority that must be addressed by encouraging national unity to minimize any possibility of ethnic conflicts.

3.6   IDENTIFICATION

Given the different context and worldview in which African and African-American women live today, one must consider what it means for women to identify with each other cross culturally. Specifically, one question is why should I as an African-American be concerned about identification with Zimbabwean women? If we know where we have come from, it is easy to know where we are going. Our identification with others from other cultures or traditions will not be threatened. This attitude has allowed me to listen to stories of faith of African women whose culture and religion have greatly shaped not only their identity but also their approach to survival and liberation.

Madge Karecki (1999:38) sees identification as developing relationships and creating bonds which often happens when we orient ourselves toward people resulting in a feeling of emotional

association. In this process of identification, bonding between people takes place and this bonding builds up a sense of solidarity or togetherness with others.

Luzbetak (1988:218-219) believes that "the starting point for any form of identification with people from another culture is self-knowledge" and that we must know "who we are and what our core values are before we can appreciate and respect the values of others". He goes on to say that the essence of identity and identification is something deep and authentic allowing for an experience of oneness (Luzbetak 1988:219).

The process of identity-formation is a continual process. My identification with people of other cultures has played a pivotal role in my own identity-formation. This outward-moving development of identity after reaching adulthood was sometimes easy because of skin colour and by knowing what it means to be 'Black' and 'woman'. These experiences were gained from growing up in a racist context. The experiences helped me to discover my worth and strength as an individual. My liminality which is characterised by the ability to identify with the struggle of African women and African-American women has allowed me to cross many boundaries and reach a deep sense of 'self' and a comfortable intercultural relationship with other women of colour. Perhaps sharing of these personal experiences can be helpful to Zimbabwean women in doing theology in their context. People are not bound by boundaries, but are able to crossover when they participate in each other's cultural repertoires. Perhaps the greatest satisfaction of being able to 'cross over' has been to understand the real human needs we all face as well as to participate in the religious struggles of my sisters as they search for 'selfhood'. Being able to identify with them has meant that it is no longer a *mission* to be *like them* or *accepted completely by them* but rather to be able to walk with them in their struggle for survival. This awareness of being different and the respect for the other person help to shape the message that I seek to portray in my life. I try to allow Christ to be part of my life in order for the gospel of Christ to get to others. Being able to cross borders and identify with African women has meant, says Sister Joan Kirby (1988:149), being "moved through love for the poor and oppressed to take our place with those who don't belong, who are rejected by power because we are regarded as weak". This does not imply that we will always agree or that there is total acceptance. It does imply, however, that "we all draw from the deepest and most life-giving sources and that we share everyone's concern for the future of humanity" (Kirby 1988:149). As Christian women, we seek identification to communicate the gospel and use Jesus as our model of inspiration. That

identification, in my opinion, is important and contributes to survival/liberation both for the person who achieves identification and of those with whom the identification process takes place.

In the process of identity formation, we as women learn to move towards an understanding of how our personal lives have been shaped and moulded by systems including race, gender, culture and social life. It is a long and difficult road but it is enriching when one is able to discover one's worth, one's independence, one's value. Equally important is being able to discover self, communicate with others and challenge the negative notions that the world has of Black women.

3.7   SURVIVAL/LIBERATION

After looking at context, worldview and identity, the questions that come to mind are "How do Zimbabwean and African-American women find the resilience to survive? How do we as Christian women seek liberation or quality of life? How can we complement each other in the struggle to survive? In the quest for identity it is observed that "a person's self-identity is seen in terms of his or her perceived connectedness with significant others, for example, family, who both constitute and validate the individual's sense of self-hood" (Mpofu 1994:342). This connectedness with others, in my opinion, is also important for one's survival/liberation. I also believe that the interrelation between survival and liberation is a continuum where survival is necessary in the first instance in order for us to move toward liberation. However, there is still no real separation between survival, which as Delores Williams (1993) would say, "making a way out of no way", and liberation which are seen as wholeness and wellness in the sense of *shalom*.

Keeping in mind the context in which African and African-American women seek to do theology, it seems clear that resilience has been a necessary asset for Black women. Some scholars (Oduyoye 1994; Collins 1990; Comas-Diaz and Greene 1994) attribute this resilience to spiritual faith, family, and the supportive strength of other women. Although this is not an exhaustive list of attributes, I think they are major components of survival/liberation and identity that I found in the stories told by the women in Chapter 5. One can clearly see these attributes as women carry out the roles assigned to them in daily life. Going outside of these roles is a sign of rebellion against the dictates of 'culture'. However, when women do decide to challenge them, there is a turning point leading to transformation. Often this is painful, but this transformation leads to *shalom* healing and liberation (Van Schalkwyk 1999). I shall look at these attributes.

3.7.1   *Spiritual Faith*

In Africa, where women's roles are principally defined by culture and religion, women will often suppress their individual interests for the survival of the unit (Oduyoye 1994:173). An example of this can be seen with widow rites, where women are ready to submit to difficult circumstances beyond their own control in order to save the integrity or honour of the family unit.

In Zimbabwe, the struggle for survival seems even more poignant with the current economic and political situation in the country. Poverty continues to be one of the principal causes of concern and the test of women's survival/liberation skills. It is mostly women who must bear the largest burden as they generally earn less and have the worse jobs as compared to men. It follows that women would have the least access to a health care system which, in Zimbabwe is deteriorating and is no longer able to provide much more than basic care. Yet, women continue to struggle daily convinced that these problems are a test of their faith, and that God will help them overcome the difficulties.

When we look to African-American women to understand survival/liberation we often turn to Delores Williams' (1993) pivotal study *Sisters in the Wilderness* where she emphasises survival/liberation as a way of theologising the faith experience of African-American women. Marie Keane (1998:132) reminds us that it was the practical biblical faith that was the guiding force for Black women; it was this faith that supported them in "their struggle for better educational opportunities, better working conditions and better housing for their families". The term "womanist", according to Keane (1998:132), used by many African-Americans is suggestive of survival in that it means a girl who is "courageous, outrageous and willful", which are necessary tools to survive.

Although I have highlighted the negative role of the church in its subordination of women, the church has also played a positive role in women's survival. Black people, and particularly Black women, have been able to survive the day to day struggles because of their church experiences and nurturing. In spite of difficulties, many Black women will readily admit how communicating with God on their terms has been instrumental in surviving the pressures of society. This special communication with God based on a strong faith helps them to survive and seek liberation in a church that is often articulated in male language suggesting that the church is with males, by males,

and for males and where women are given limited access.

3.7.2 Family

The role of family as a unit is essential to issues of protection and survival of women. According to Oduyoye (1994:172), whether born in matriarchal or patriarchal families, women are expected to use their strength, their resilience to protect and to build up the family. At the same time, women must be prepared for the destruction of anything detrimental to the life of the community. Women learned to survive even under the most atrocious means and even jeopardised their lives for the well-being of the family and community. They survive even when they have not been given the mechanisms to bring about a hopeful change for the community despite the fact that they are also held accountable for the ills of society. In some cases, women have exercised their strength, their potential, their identity by displaying better strategies, by negotiations, and standing up to men at home and in the community (Myrick 1995:16). In other words, women show a preparedness to survive by engaging in different methods. Beverley Haddad (1997:2) sees the necessity of foregrounding issues of survival in the "'en-gendering of theology projects' so that a *quality of life* ethic that leads to collective action becomes a priority for ...women doing theology." I agree with her that if our theology has no impact on the daily lives of the majority of our sisters, where wholeness and healing become a necessity, then what is the point? Women in Zimbabwe communities attest to this grassroots level of survival theology, by using various means to survive and improve the quality of life of their family .

Boyd-Franklin (in Comas-Diaz and Greene 1994:14) observes that "strong kinship bonds are perhaps the most enduring legacy of African heritage" where "family constitutes an important survival mechanism for African-American women". In addition to this, Greene (1994:14) argues that "African-American mothers are charged with the task of teaching their children mechanisms of mastery over racism" – a survival skill which I support. I started this project with a poem by Langston Hughes to emphasize the impact mothers have on their children. I have used poems to open other chapters to capture that affirmation of mothers in teaching their children and other women vital survival skills.

Over the years, the family has been a source of strength for the survival of a people. This sense of

family is thought to be, within the black community, a carry-over from the African culture. Susan L. Taylor (1999:83) reminds us that "in Africa and throughout the Diaspora -- from the Caribbean to Canada, from Great Britain to Brazil -- the sustaining power behind our habit of surviving has been our faith in God and our deep loyalty to the clan". Fidelity to family and community must come first. Emphasis is placed on the family because women and men of colour share common life experiences of "racism, identity conflict, oppression, colonialism, cultural adaptation" and hostile living environments which tend "to create a tenacious bond between men and women of color -- a bond crucial to their survival" (Comas-Diaz and Greene 1994:9).

3.7.3   Other Women

Other women provide support mechanisms for survival. Based on my personal experiences in the Black community, I agree with Collins (1990) and Myers and Joseph (in Collins 1990) that "as mothers, daughters, sisters and friends to one another, African-American women affirm one another". They are correct to believe that many Black women have empowered their daughters (and their sons) and other women by passing on everyday survival knowledge. This affirmation of the other's humanity and place in the community has been done through daily conversations, through music, through poetry, proverbs and other means.

It is true that women are often their own enemy and will often do things to keep other women from succeeding. At the same time, in my opinion, the one person most capable of understanding the pains of Black women is another Black woman. And, if we as Black women -- African, African-American, and the Diaspora -- do not listen to the pains or cries of one another, then who will do it for us? How will we discover or accept our right to self-identity?

3.7.4   Conclusion

Williams (1993) is clear in her assessment of the situation for African and African-American women who live in a context of economic, social, and political strife in a hostile environment. "The greatest truth of Black women's survival and quality of life struggle is that they have worked without hesitation and with all the energy they could muster. They depended upon their strength and upon each other. But in the final analysis, the message is clear: they trusted the end to God" (Williams 1993:239). This is a profound statement of Black women's resilience and commitment to fulfill their

roles as caregiver, nurturer and provider so that their children and family may live. In the process, as Haddad (2000a:339) points out, these women find dignity and a sense of identity for themselves while giving hope to others. They find power in their faith.

CHAPTER 4:   MISSIOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

As African-American and Zimbabwean women continue to address their need for self-identification and liberation/survival, there are missiological implications that they and the church should consider. What is the mission of the church in relationship to Black feminists/ womanist theology? How can Black women find identity and survival/ liberation within the framework of the mission of the church? Both identity and liberation should be central concerns of the Christian faith and participation within both should be clear attributes of womanist missiology. For a long time, white men and women, and Black men have been considered 'the doers' of mission and Black women have generally been the recipients even to the point of having their stories told by others.

As Black women continue to assert themselves in search of their identity and in their struggle for survival/liberation, the words of Motlhabi (in Kritzinger 1989:137) on what is needed in the Black church within South Africa can easily be applied to the missiology of 'womanist' theology in America and Zimbabwe: "We need a personal, psychological liberation from ourselves and what enslaves us; a social, political and economic liberation in relation to our fellow men (*sic*) ....and a religious liberation in relation to God." As Black women, I think, that in order to reach our full potential and self-identity we need to be freed from ourselves and whatever enslaves us. In many cases, that imprisonment is culture, patriarchy, classism, racism, politics, economics and other ills of society. It is when we are freed from that which hinders our progress that we can dare dream of the *shalom* experience that God intended for the whole community.

It is my opinion that a commitment to identity and to the struggle for survival/liberation are vital parts of the faith where there is a continual search to discern God's will and God's presence. I also contend that 'womanist' theology sees survival/liberation as holistic with a mission to the whole life, affecting the whole person and society, and therefore, to the self-concept and identity of a person as part of the holistic *shalom* for which we are searching. And, although African-American women may have been influenced by the individualism that dominates western theology, this concept is not acceptable by womanist/feminist theology on the whole. And this individualism is certainly not acceptable among Black women in Zimbabwe. We must continue to see ourselves as participants

together in a human struggle of liberation.

As Black women in struggle for identity and survival/liberation, there is need to look at certain liberating aspects of the mission of 'womanist' and Black Feminist theology. There are three major areas where I think that Black women can find the concepts of identity and liberation expressing the mission of the church: (a) Christology or its biblical basis, (b) re-evangelisation and (c) societal transformation.

4.1 BIBLICAL BASIS

The quest for identity and good quality of life are biblical. Theologians refer to both the Old and New Testaments in search of a basic understanding of Christ's mission. A primary concern of womanist/feminist theology is that of recognising Jesus Christ in the midst of our oppression. Who is this man called Jesus and how does he relate to womanist theology in the midst of oppressive forces? If we are to understand the mission of the church according to Black women, we must have a personal encounter with Jesus and understand his holistic approach to liberation.

4.1.1 Identity and Jesus

Jesus Christ identified with the least of the people throughout his earthly mission. Jesus saw women, who were indeed counted among the least, in ways that the status quo never managed to see. He restored their dignity of well-being. Jesus understood the plight of women and was ready to empower them so that they could struggle for their liberation. This can be seen in the story of the woman who had been suffering for eighteen years (Luke 13:10-13) who was freed, liberated from her infirmity and made whole. He healed her, blessed her and returned her to her community. He saw women as persons and was prepared to break with cultural taboos to reach out to them. I think that in each case, Jesus' greatest act of empowerment was restoring self-love and self-affirmation to those whom he touched. For without self-love and self-affirmation, we cannot effectively love another.

One of our greatest struggles to attain self-identity as Black women is to increase our self awareness and self-esteem and to reject the stereotypes that have plagued us for so many years. We have been taught to love others before we love ourselves. And now, I think, for us to reach our full potential

and liberation, we must stop looking at things through the eyes of men -- both black and white -- and start looking through Black feminist eyes or to the liberating Christ.

4.1.2 Jesus, the Bible and Liberation

Jesus was quite clear about his involvement in liberation as evidenced by his declaration of mission in Luke 4:16-20. He stood in solidarity with the oppressed. His approach was holistic and touched every aspect of the lives with whom he came in contact. Throughout his ministry, Jesus identified with women and when he blessed them, he sought to bring them wholeness.

Jesus' ministry was not in isolation from the Old Testament. The gospel of Jesus was a gospel of liberation. As Cone (in Boesak 1977:17) correctly points out, the liberation that Jesus sought to bring was not simply a part of the gospel, rather it was the "content and framework of the whole biblical message". The idea of liberation and quality of life are paramount in the Bible in both the Old and New Testaments. The Exodus, which revealed God's liberating act, was as central to the Old Testament as was the resurrection to the New Testament, both representing the same reality (Boesak 1977:18).

The Exodus probably is seen as the greatest event of liberation in the Old Testament. The message of liberation is central to the Old Testament and to the people of Israel. "Yahweh's great act of liberation forms the content of the life and faith, the history and confession of Israel" (Boesak 1977:17). Throughout the Old Testament there are instances of Yahweh's love for the people manifested in God's liberating acts. These acts are not reserved for men only. The Old Testament tells the story of women of faith who are typically cited for their faith and strength, like Sarah, Ruth, Naomi, Ester and others who find *shalom* wholeness of life. Delores Williams (1993) takes the story of Hagar and poignantly reminds us of God's liberating power as we walk "in the wilderness" of despair. Hagar is an example of how Black women have survived and found liberation. As a womanist, I believe that the liberating power of God continues in our lives today and that the message of both the Old and New Testaments are still relevant to us today. There is a clear connection between the two testaments. Jesus is seen as announcing and then actually accomplishing what Yahweh of the Old Testament was doing from the very beginning.

4.2   MISSION AS RE-EVANGELISATION

Re-evangelisation is an interesting term to use in relation to Black women's identity and survival/liberation. Although the term has been used to describe Black Theology in South Africa, I think it can help us understand a lot about identity and survival as far as Black women in general are concerned. As indicated by Kritzinger (1989:148), it implies that one has already been evangelised by the mere fact that one claims to be Christian. The process of Christianisation as far as Black women are concerned leaves a lot to be desired and consequently the Christian faith suffers from a credibility crisis both in terms of identity and as a church. From observation, I think, re-evangelism in relation to Black women's lives must be addressed in two key areas: that which is perpetuated in many circles, and particularly, in the Black church and that which is often a reflection of society.

4.2.1   Identity Crisis

I mentioned earlier that liberation from ourselves and what enslaves us is an important missiological concern of womanists/Black feminists. Black people in general, but Black women in particular, have been socialised to believe that "white" is ultimately good and that "black" is ultimately evil. This has been reinforced through language, culture, physical features of individuals and so on. Long, straight, silky hair is thought to be better than Black women's natural kinky hair. The many skin bleaching creams on the market are also a sign of the self-hatred perpetuated leading to identity crisis. The glamourisation of tall, thin women over the robust, stout women is indicative of our identity crisis. This has led to the creation of a slave mentality that has separated Black people from one another as well as from God. This mentality which distorts our identity and hampers our survival mechanisms must be stopped. It is the responsibility of those women who have left behind "the chores of Martha" to undertake "the learning of Mary" to help restore Black sisters and brothers to their rightful minds and reconcile them once more with God.

There is so much happening in the Black community both in America and Zimbabwe. As is often the case, women are the first to bear the brunt of bad situations. How can Christianity maintain its credibility when Black communities are notoriously characterised by the stench of daily death rather than life — death from economic deprivation, rampant diseases, violence and abuse? How can the community be reevangelised if there is not a personal transformation in the lives of Black people? This is especially true for Black women. The community may be viewed as a 'whole' but it is made

up of 'individuals' who are responsible for changing the growing negative characteristics of the Black community. As Black women, over the years, we have helped to perpetuate the slave mentality by accepting the inferior positions dished out to us and by exemplifying an unwillingness to participate as individuals in changing our social conditions or the roles with which we have been identified. Desmond Tutu, (in Kritzinger 1989:15) speaking on characteristics of Black Theology, says that it has "a burning and evangelistic zeal necessary to convert the Black man *(sic)* out of the stupor of subservience and obsequiousness to acceptance of the thrilling but demanding responsibility of full human personhood".

The mission of Black Theology, but most especially womanist theology, is to teach self-love, acceptance and self-affirmation. We have often allowed others to identify us and, consequently, this has resulted in a negative self-image of ourselves and self-identity. This negative self-image is pervasive and obvious in our Black communities, in America and Zimbabwe, where women learn to hate themselves and distrust other women. As Black women, some of us were socialised to believe that we could not stand alone without depending on Black men and whites. Yet, when we learn to identify ourselves and tell our own stories of how we are also created by God in God's image, then we are on the road to survival/liberation. Distrust is one of the barriers that has prevented intercultural communication between African-American and Zimbabwean women. Both sides appear to be distrustful of each other and suppose that there is a hidden agenda. Only by openly sharing can there be a conversion towards oneself and one another. It is not a one-time event. It is a process where we as Black women must work together for survival/liberation over a period of time to know and understand each other. It is hoped that the ultimate result will be that we appreciate our uniqueness and how our 'being' is wrapped up together.

4.2.2   Re-evangelising the Church

Re-evangelising the Black church is another priority of Black Theology (Kritzinger 1989) that has missiological implications for womanist theology. Often the church has simply been a reflection of society. The church has perpetuated colonialism, racism, capitalism, sexism and all the other negative "isms". The Black church has a profound mission to bring survival/liberation. As in the words of Goba (in Kritzinger 1989:159), "the Church expresses its essence as long as it participates in Christ's mission of liberation in all aspects of human life".

As we consider re-evangelisation, African-American and African women must also take a look at the white community and its influence on Black women's struggle for identity and survival. Kritzinger (1989:173) thinks that the kind of re-evangelisation necessary for the white community is one where whites have gained insight from Black Theology and "have understood its message and who see their ministry as an integral part of the struggle for holistic liberation". This is especially true, I think, as far as white feminists are concerned who can learn something from womanists theologians. There are some shared elements in their struggle for liberation, for example, patriarchy and classism. Whether or not it is important to look at re-evangelisation within the white community, there are still certain issues that need to be addressed if Black women are to understand factors that have influenced their identity and need for survival. One is exposing the evil perpetrated by whites. Many womanists would agree with Wilmore (in Kritzinger 1989:174) in his assessment that a pivotal mission of the whole church is "its function of unmasking the sin of Western Christianity". For too long, Blacks have been led to believe that the oppressive social and political structures set up are the will of God. The impression has often been that women are to be suppressed, especially Black women. The strength of Black women has often been described in terms of their being at the very bottom holding up all the others on top of them. So, our white sisters must understand that regardless of how much they feel in solidarity with Black women's struggle for liberation that white women benefited directly from the oppression meted out on Blacks. We can learn from the experiences of our white sisters under western Christianity, but we must write our own stories of oppression, identity and survival on our own terms.

4.3   MISSION AS TRANSFORMATION OF SOCIETY

A third missiological concept taken from Black Theology (Kritzinger 1989) that is applicable to womanists/Black feminists struggle for identity and survival/liberation is transforming society. Essential to transforming society is to understand mission as holistic, as a struggle for survival/liberation and as a need for reconciliation.

4.3.1   Holistic

Society can only be transformed when the holistic aspect of liberation is taken into account. Kritzinger (1989:183) observes that in the thinking and praxis of Black theologians personal, ecclesial and political liberation are inseparable or part and parcel of the same struggle. Although

often criticised for emphasis on what western scholars call secular themes, Black theologians feel they have a responsibility to become involved in all that oppresses the community. To understand the scope of Black Theology, which has a profound effect on womanist theology, one must understand that true liberation encompasses the entire human situation and its transformation. The church has a mission of liberation and is called to confront and help eradicate oppression at all levels. The liberation of the poor and oppressed means tackling the economic and political systems of society that keep them down. The church has an obligation to not only expose unjust systems but also to fight actively in eradicating them.. What this means for Black women is that in a holistic mission when we are hungry, ill and without clothes that we will find it difficult to stand on Sunday morning shouting "Praise the Lord!". If social and political structures are separating us from our Lord, then they must be transformed into something more acceptable to Jesus the Christ who died that we may have a whole life characterised by quality. Holistic mission will allow me to reach my full potential and at the same time maintain my identity as a person.

4.3.2   *Mission as a Struggle for Survival/Liberation*

If society is to be transformed as well as to be relevant to the needs of Black women, both African and African-American, the Black church must not be negligent in its mission for justice. Those who are powerful will never willingly accept to give to those who are powerless out of politeness. Delores Williams (1993) points this out with the biblical story of Hagar where Sarah was not prepared to give power to Hagar. The only way Hagar could change her situation was to find her own identity and her own strength during her wilderness experience. I do believe that as Black women we are able to change our oppressive condition through communal strength. This is why intercultural communication between Zimbabwean and African-American women is so vital. Solidarity with each other means that the growing sense of individualism, whether as individual cultures or as individuals within one culture, must be tackled. It is this call for solidarity that the powerful will always seek to undermine. I have observed that one of the classic methods used by the oppressor is to put one against another, for example, to give advantages to a few and use them as a showcase. The chosen ones then meet the glass-ceiling that prevents them from going any further. This is very unfortunate because rather than try to lift ourselves from the forces that oppress us, we tend to become more capitalistic. When this happens, it becomes very difficult for us to struggle against social and structural sin. This capitalistic tendency prevents us from what is

described by Boesak (in Kritzinger 1989:185) as the call to "unmask the lies, the half truths and the myths that are employed to destroy humanity". Furthermore, this placating blinds us to the struggle set before us making us unable to recognise the demons that must be cast out. Said (in Kritzinger 1989:187) "mentions racism, war, poverty, powerlessness and self depreciation as demonic forces which constitute the negation of God's humanity". The mission of the church has to be seen as empowering Black women to fight against these ills in order to find healing.

4.3.3 Mission as Reconciliation

Reconciliation is another goal of Black Theology in its mission to transform society that impacts on Black women's struggle for identity and survival. Given the visible conflicts and various forms of alienation in Africa today, one can readily understand that the concept of reconciliation has different meanings for Africans and Europeans. Mosala (1989:324) quite aptly points out that Black people find liberation and reconciliation as inseparable whereas whites have failed to see how deeply racism is rooted in society in all its structures. He further contends that there can be no real reconciliation as long as Blacks are treated unequally and inhumanly. Desmond Tutu (in Mosala 1989:324-325) declares that Black Theology must help Black Christians "to assert their personhood and humanity because only persons can ultimately be reconciled". In the case for women, there are still many miles to go and many steep mountains to climb before such reconciliation with the rest of humanity can be achieved.

Reconciliation, points out Mosala (1989:325) can not come about unless there is an appreciation for the history of Black alienation for "it is in this history that the roots of Black people's perspective on reconciliation lie". Mosala (1989:324) continues to explain that as far as Black Theology is concerned "white people's notion of reconciliation exclude [b]lack history, [b]lack culture and the [b]lack struggle." In other words, Africans and African-Americans are expected to come to the table of reconciliation forgetting the oppression and dehumanization inflicted on the Black community. In agreement with Mosala (1989:324), I think it is reasonable to think that for a European in power to speak of reconciliation to Blacks in positions of powerlessness is to show complete misunderstanding of the term.

The discussion on reconciliation has valid implications for African and African-American womanist theologians. The alienation previously expressed for Blacks in general has cut deeper as far as

women are concerned. Perhaps this can explain why as womanists theologians we have felt the need to develop our own theology as a necessary means of first becoming reconciled to ourselves. Our identity was at stake. We have had to learn to accept ourselves as equal to both whites and Black men as well as viewing ourselves as God's loved children.

4.4   CONCLUSION

It, thus, becomes clear that there can be no reconciliation without justice. If the church does not address the evils that exist within church and society, it fails in its mission and loses credibility. There is no guarantee that the church will succeed in transforming society if it takes up the challenge. Quite frankly, if one were a pessimist, one would say that two thousand years have passed since Jesus' declaration of liberation for the oppressed. In that period of time, not much has changed. Perhaps that is the case, but the church should not be deterred from being a church on a mission of liberation. The church should not be deterred from lifting up women and giving them support in a struggle for identity and survival.

There is still much to be done and the church must lead the way in helping to change general attitudes toward women. Women are entitled to full expression of life. The African church can not be what Oduyoye (1995:184) terms as "rear-action" which is "rarely visible on the front lines, and often delayed in arriving on the scene afterward to pick up the pieces". The church made mistakes in the past and even underestimated the strength of women. What needs to take place now is renewed solidarity between Black woman and Black man working together--both African-Americans and Zimbabweans. An incredibly beautiful image of this challenge is given by Oduyoye (1995:185), "Liberation must be viewed as men and women walking together on the journey home with the church as the umbrella of faith, hope and love."

CHAPTER 5: NARRATIVE STORIES -- YOUR STORY IS MY STORY

"MOTHER" TO "DAUGHTER"

You know, Sandra, I'll tell you
Life has not been easy for me
There were many difficult moments
There were times when I wanted to give up
But I didn't.
I continued to put my trust in God
And I moved on.
I could not stop even when reaching barriers on the road.
There was no time for sitting down.
There were times when I saw others in more pain than myself.
And I prayed for them as well.
And together we prayed.
There were times when my dream seemed shattered.
But I put my faith in God
And stood firm.
I have come a long way and sometimes feel tired.
But by the grace of God
I'll continue to move forward
As long as God is at my side.

(P. Mahlangu as told to S. Gourdet)

5.1   INTRODUCTION:

Zimbabwe is one of the nations in southern Africa endowed with beautiful landscape and beautiful people. Statistics obtained from city officials estimate the population at twelve million inhabitants with women being approximately 52% of the number. The largest ethnic group in Zimbabwe is Shona (about 80%) with the remaining 20% consisting of Ndebebele (15%), whites (3%) and Asians and others (2%). These next pages will give a glimpse into the lives of three Zimbabwean women. This is an attempt to weave together the threads of their lives with that of my own in our mutual struggle for identity and survival/liberation.

The stories are intact as they were told to me through interviews. In some cases, I have edited to allow for an easier flow of the narrative and to highlight the depth of their passion. Each has a compelling story. These women are survivors, and yet, I am aware that for each of these women who survived the racial, economic, class, sexual barriers there are thousands of untold stories of

those who did not survive. At the end of the chapter I do a comparison where I show how my own story interacts with theirs and how my identity of liminality allows me to cross the border to their lives. Many women in the community today can identify with the stories of these women because they deal with current contextual issues to which women can still relate. They are stories of identity and survival/liberation that bring hope to other women in Zimbabwe. I can relate to their stories because of my own experiences of struggle. Theologians can relate to their stories because of the power of their faith that allows God to walk with them in the "wilderness" that Delores Williams (1993) speaks of in relation to the Biblical character Hagar.

Much of my interaction with the women and the mutual sharing of experiences took place not only during the interviews, which at times were quite emotional, but also living with them while learning to depend on each other. Yet, it was during the interviews that I realised that I had "crossed over" and had truly become a part of their lives. The in-depth sharing allowed us to understand our human similarities, differences and even our human frailties. We discovered that we were part of one symbiotic relationship that should be nurtured.

Their stories and my interaction with them are examples of the continuous search for identity and survival/liberation based on themes like war, poverty, economic development, cultural and religious constraints and other barriers that hinder the progress of women. These are stories of pain and struggle salted with faith and perseverance. These are voices that refuse to be silent.

5.2   JEAN MUNDETA

5.2.1   Background

Jean Mundeta is a Shona woman currently living at the United Church of Christ in Zimbabwe Mission Station at Chikore located in a rural area approximately 40 kilometres from Chipinge in the southeastern part of the country. The adjacent mission, Mt Selinda, where Mrs Mundeta attended secondary school is approximately 29 kilometres east of Chikore and less than ten kilometres from Mozambique. It was while learning at Mt Selinda as a young girl that the liberation soldiers came and forcibly marched her entire class off to Mozambique. She is married and she and her husband have two children. She currently teaches at Chikore High School.

I remember vividly that Sunday afternoon in 1993 when I met her. My husband and I arrived at the mission station the previous evening. Little did we know that it was the beginning of a wonderful three-years relationship with God and God's people. Jean was one of those special people who would enter our lives and leave an indelible mark. We were introduced to her husband, Allen, after the church service as someone who could help us get our furniture made for the house. After completing our business, the three of us walked the short distance back to the mission houses. As we approached his house, Allen invited us in for tea.

Jean was seated in the sitting room doing needlework. This soft-spoken woman quietly said, "Get in and sit down" as if she had known us for years. The smile was contagious and the friendship was instant. The four of us talked for hours and shared openly with each other much about our individual lives. We knew instinctively that this was the first of many long conversations that we would have together.

I learned a lot about Jean and from her over the months to come. Each conversation revealed something new about her. She trained as a secondary school teacher and had been working at the mission school for several years before we arrived. In her early thirties, Jean was already a highly respected 'senior teacher'. Many school responsibilities had been placed on her because she was efficient and committed. She was admired by the staff because she was honest, assiduous and responsible. She was known by the student body as being impartial and not swayed by popular opinions. Community and churchwomen saw her as an advisor. Her own two children adored her and knew how far to push her. She and her husband were the mission's *Romeo and Juliet* – an example of true love. I learned to admire her for her strength and resilience tempered with patience and a strong Christian faith. She did not "talk religion" but, when in her presence, one could feel something emanating from her that was deeply rooted in her spiritual being and faith.

Here is her poignant story.

5.2.2 Jean's Story

I grew up in Mutare, the third largest city in Zimbabwe. My parents sent me a boarding school at the church mission at Mt Selinda near Mozambique, which I enjoyed very much. It was unfortunate

for me that this was during the time of the Ian Smith regime and the Liberation War was taking place. We had heard so many stories about both the white soldiers and the Black soldiers and we feared both. On 17 July 1977, a large group of Black soldiers, known as guerrillas or rebels, came to our school. I was doing Form 3 and I was only sixteen. We were in the dining hall and were made to assemble outside in the school court. We were told that we must follow the soldiers. We were allowed to pack a few clothes, shoes, a jacket, etc. All the children in forms 3 and 4 as well as those doing teacher training were taken. This was so painful. At that young age, we were not expected to think or protest. You know that this is a culture where children are socialised according to very strict etiquette. This is especially true for girls who even have to kneel when giving or receiving something from adults. So, to avoid problems with the soldiers, we did what we were told to do.

We walked during the night from Mt Selinda to Espungabera, the first town inside the Mozambique border. It was difficult for me to walk as I was raised in town and was used to boarding buses wherever I went. As we walked across a certain stream, 1 lost one of my tennis shoes and I soon developed blisters under my feet. Even worse, we never ate anything on the way.

By this time, word had got out that children had been abducted and we saw helicopters flying overhead and heard voices shouting "come out". The guerrillas told us to hide. We managed to escape the Rhodesian soldiers but now we feared going forward or even back home. We were more than a hundred children and on the way three girls managed to escape, but the whole group had to pay dearly for it. We were not given a choice to go back because they were afraid that information might leak out. Intimidation was always the order of the day and those suspected of being spies were dealt with severely. Even if anyone had beautiful clothes, wrist watches, or anything nice, it was taken by the senior guerrillas and no one was supposed to refuse or argue. If at all this was the case, that particular person was actually harassed and they would say that the person was a spy.

From Espungebera, we got into lorries during the night and the following day we reached Chibavava – a camp far into Mozambique with about 10 000 refugees, mainly children who were escaping the war in Zimbabwe. It was really a transit camp and the UN provided food, clothes and supplies. We were even supplied with shoes, but never the proper sizes. It was up to us to move around and find someone to exchange with to get the proper size. The same thing was true for clothes, which were mostly trousers. We had to look for the correct size from others. We were also

given blankets, which were often stolen along with the clothes by boys who exchanged them for food or beer whenever there was a shortage.

In most cases, we had food as the United Nations would send rice, tinned fish, tinned beef, dried fish, powdered milk and sometimes yellow mealie-meal, but there were times we did not have any and we would simply drink water. Food shortages on the farms were caused by lack of rain or too much rain. There were times when food was plentiful in Beira but the trucks would get stuck on the way and almost everybody in the camp would be asked to go to the truck to collect the food. The distance of the truck or the weight of the bags did not concern the senior officers. Those were our problems!

The conditions at the camp were horrible. We built our own sleeping quarters that had two doors in order to escape if necessary. We made our own beds of grass and poles. There were lots of lice, fleas and ticks, but it was mostly the guys who had them. They would get under the skin and make deep wounds.

We were arranged in battalions. Some were assigned to military training, others responsible for first aid, security, logistics, administration, etc. Most of us from Mt Selinda were assigned to be teachers, we had our own group and we had our own barrack. I taught grades one and two, but the ages of the children ranged from five to ten years old, or even fifteen years old who had never gone to school before when they were in Zimbabwe. We were also taught basic training just as any soldier would receive – discipline, crawling, marching, saluting and what to do if the camp is attacked. Disobedience was not accepted. Punishment could be very severe. One would be whipped in public and then forced to recite slogans. Even if there was a complaint or an injustice, it was reported after the beating.

For more than three years, I completely lost the identity I had known all my life. I was no longer called "Jean". I was now "Patricia Chitepo". We were told that this was to protect our identity and that of our family. Being part of the liberation struggle meant I lived in a different world, in a different country, in a different context. I was removed from my familiar surroundings and the family love that nurtured me as a child. We were all given tasks and it was my responsibility to teach some of the younger children. I was no longer a student at a mission secondary school. I was now

expected to change from being student to become teacher and role model for children younger than I was. It was a new identity. It was difficult at first, but you know, I never forgot God and God's love.

Right from the beginning, I knew that I would have to use all my wit and intelligence to survive and cope with this new situation which was so different from anything that I had ever known. I prayed a lot during this period asking God for strength. My greatest fear was that I would not be able to see my family again, but deep inside of me I felt I would see them. I had to convince myself that they were well and that I would see them soon. Since there was no way of contacting them to receive comfort, I would often think of things that my mom would say to me at home. Sometimes I would pretend to have a conversation with her. Meanwhile, I tried to do my job properly so that there would be neither punishment nor repercussion.

The years in Mozambique seemed to go by at a snail's pace. There were many difficult moments, but a firm belief that God was present helped me and some of the others survive. I was very fortunate that there were no bloody battles near the camp nor were there any horror stories of rape and assault. There was one disastrous case when we were being transferred to another camp. The guys were taken the first day and most of them perished as bombs were launched. The girls missed the bombing and it was decided we go to another camp. We were taken to Mabvudzi where we taught small boys and girls until the end of the war. One moment of great joy and comfort came near the end of my stay in the camp. My brother came through the camp on his way to another location. We had a chance to talk with each other. This was the first time that I had had contact with any member of my family. When I got home, I was able to tell my parents that my brother was safe and alive. It meant so much to my mother to hear this news.

By September 1980, the war was over and lorries started coming to gradually take us home. The route was not direct. We would stay two days in one camp and move to another camp for a few days until we reached home. At one of these transit camps, I saw my brother who had been to Libya. He gave me clothes and other items, which were all stolen. We finally reached Zimbabwe and were dumped at a caravan campsite at Mutare.

As soon as my mom heard that lorries had started arriving, she went everyday to look for me. My father never seemed to worry himself about my absence. What I have always known is that my mother was very much worried and she would always pray day and night that I would come back alive. The very day I arrived in Zimbabwe, my mum had already made contacts with most of the officers where most of the people coming from Mozambique were assembled. She left her phone number and visited so many bases where people were staying. She had so many questions in her mind and was wondering why I had not come back. As we were transported in stages, I eventually came and one of the officers told me about my mum. Many of my relatives, and later even my in-laws, thought I was very wild. I am sure some even thought I had become a whore. So many stories were being told about girls being loose and the first question asked was "Doesn't she have a child?"

When I returned from the bush, all I wanted to do was to return to school. As I walked around the town watching others about my age progressing in life as if a war had never taken place, I knew that I had to get an education no matter how long it would take. I knew that God had not protected me during the war years without having a purpose in life for me. I wanted an education and I would settle for nothing less. Everywhere I applied, I was refused by headmasters who saw me as a risk. They were afraid that I would cause trouble for the other students who were now much younger than I was. I was so disappointed and discouraged. I had been forced to leave school so that I could make a difference for my country. And now, my reward for being part of the struggle was to be refused a place at school. My mother stood by my side and never allowed me to lose hope.

As my mom and I went from school to school looking for a place, I stared those headmasters in the eyes knowing that one day they would meet the "real" me – a young war victim wanting to be somebody. They thought I was too old to mix with the other children. They thought I was a bad influence and they identified me as a "trouble maker". Eventually I got a place and I worked hard to prove myself. I was determined to prove them wrong.

I managed to complete secondary school and Teacher's Training College to become a professional teacher. As a result of the experience in Mozambique, I had developed a passion for teaching.

When I met my husband, Allen, we discovered that we both had a passion for teaching. It was very difficult for him at first. My in-laws did not want me and even discouraged him from marrying me.

He often told me things they had said. When Allen told them he had fallen for me, there was nothing else they could do except to accept me as part of the family. Rev and Mrs Mundeta had a negative attitude towards me but when I stayed with them and showed them love, they changed. They saw how I took the responsibility for their welfare and as I was nearby I was able to do more for them than the other daughters-in-law.

It has not been an easy road, but I am grateful that things have worked out for me. Other women were not so lucky. Some are living in abject poverty, in very bad marriages or relationships or have become old before their time. I was determined that I would not allow the war to destroy me. I had a mum who was on her knees in prayer for me everyday and I know God heard her prayers as well as mine.

5.3.   EUNAH NDLOVU

5.3.1   Background

Eunah is a Ndebele woman who proudly speaks of her "strong rural background" and how she beat the cultural odds against a backdrop of economic deprivation. That rural background and poverty were her impetus for completing not only secondary school but to obtain her Bachelor's degree in Business Administration. She is currently working on her Master's degree. She is married to the Head of the Zimbabwe Synod of United Congregational Church of Southern Africa (UCCSA) and is the mother of four adult children. I met her when my husband and I came to Bulawayo in 1997 to work with the church. She and Mrs Mahlangu *(next story)* had the task of welcoming my husband and me. After six weeks when we were eventually provided with permanent accommodation, we became neighbours. We occupied an adjacent flat at the church manse located in one of the high density suburbs. It was the day to day contact and sharing that brought us closer together. We soon discovered our similarities and differences. We learned about intercultural communication first hand by living it. Over the years we both learned what it means to walk in another's shoes, as we became free to share our joys and troubles. As she and I were both doing advanced studies, we unconsciously formed a support group to encourage each other. With our lives intertwined in ways that are even difficult to describe, we both learned the resilience of Black women and that survival/liberation is not a struggle that can be fought and won alone by one people. The principle of *ubuntu* (see 3.1.2), where community effort is essential, clearly became the answer to the struggle of survival/liberation for African and African-American women working together.

6.3.2   Eunah's Story

I grew up in a small village called White Water. My mother had six children and I was the last born. My father died when I was four years old. As last born, I was very close to my mother and I held on tenaciously to her words and gestures. She believed in good manners and honesty. We grew up in the church and I can remember others envying how well behaved we were. She was a widow but she had strong character. All six of my mother's children worked very hard to help her. She even resisted the family demands to become wife of one of my father's brothers.

My father had fields and a herd of cattle. We used to plow and since the field was in a swampy area, we would have something growing throughout the year. We even had enough to supply the market

with peas, beans, maize, sweet potatoes and grains. We worked hard!! As the youngest, when my older siblings started moving away, a lot of the work -- traditional and non-traditional fell on me. It did not matter that I was a girl.

I learned to herd the cattle when I accompanied my brother who was born about two years before me. At that time, I could not do the milking. When he went off to school, there were no other small boys around, so I had to look after the cattle and do the milking. Imagine a girl doing the herding and the milking! I defied tradition at an early age![1] Some people today do not believe it and find it impossible for a girl to be a cattle herder. It was difficult, but when I look back, I am sure it had a profound impact on me. I think that is what influenced me to develop myself. I know that if I do not develop myself that I can get back to that same situation which was not easy then and certainly would be harder even now.

My struggle for an education was a difficult one. It was not so much that I was a girl, as is often the case in Africa. Our situation at home made it difficult as we were very poor. I started school at a very early age. In fact, I remember that I was doing sub A when my father died. The District Administrator in our area encouraged my mother to leave the village where we were staying. He thought it would help her through the bereavement process.

In this new place, I did sub B or Standard 1,2,3. There was no Standard 4,5,6 in this village, but my mom had a relative in a nearby village and I went to live with his family. There were many good

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[1] The Zimbabwean journalist, Pathisa Ndlovu, in the 23 January 2001 edition of Bulawayo newspaer The Chronicle, writing on cultural heritage states that with the introduction of cattle to the African economy, taboos were imposed to keep the rearing of cattle as a male domain consequently creating an economic gulf between men and women. He further states that among the Ndebele sex differentiation starts early in life where boys and girls are socialised to fit into their expected adult roles. At that stage, girls come to believe cattle were not their business and boys were inculturated to regard cattle as their socially given preserve. This was extended to all their activities where girls were taught to weave baskets or mould items like water pots, bowls, etc that would be useful for their household. They did not, generally speaking, mould or carve cattle figurines which was the preserve of the boys. All this allowed for future economic disempowerment. At the stage of puberty, natural processes of the body, such as menstruation, miscarriage and birth were used in the form of taboos to consolidate male dominance in the field of cattle ownership. Cultural taboos were male created to safeguard male economic interests and enforced by a fear of the departed ancestors or God (religion) or reference to natural body processes over which women had not control. For example, women were not allowed to eat *inhloko*, the head of the beast as it symbolised strength and power nor were various beef cuts to be eaten by women -- *impundu* (the liver) or *amadliketana* (small intestine). Menstruating girls or women were not allowed in the cattle byre for fear the cows would miscarry. The sum total being that women were distanced from cattle and their ownership.

people there. Some of them are still in our church today. They became my family and helped me become independent. I learned to live on my own and become responsible.

After Standard 6, I returned home. My mom, as a single parent, had financial constraints. She escaped the cultural practice of having to marry one of my father's brothers. Yet, it was very difficult for her to take care of us. And, nobody made an effort for me to go to school to get my grade 7 junior certificate, so I was seated at home with my mom for two years. I often thought of going back to school, but one of my two brothers who had come home from school was very, very sick in bed. This had a psychological influence on my mother as she cared for my brother night and day. At the same time, my brother just before me was doing secondary school in town. I suppose that it never occurred to anyone that I should get that opportunity to be in school in town. I was not able to continue my schooling, but I never lost hope.

I met my husband-to-be, Imon, in 1968 some two years after I had completed Standard 6. He had come to my home village to work as a temporary teacher. We were seeing each other for about two years before I was introduced to his parents. After that introduction, his family made the move to talk with my family.

It was not easy for Imon being a temporary teacher. He was unemployed for two years and he left the village in 1972 to look for a job in Bulawayo. He finally managed to get a job with the Ministry of Education and we got married in 1974. As my own father had died, my father's brother was responsible for me. The *lobola* or 'bride's price' was very reasonable. My family requested seven heads of cattle. At that time, the entire cost would have been approximately ZIM $140. So many people outside of Africa have misunderstood *lobola*. It was not meant "to buy" somebody. It was an expression of appreciation for the good upbringing of one's future bride. No monetary value can be placed on a person. Even the process of adopting the surnames of a husband meant it was an honour to be accepted in another family and an honour to take the name of that family. It is only today with so many economic constraints and influences from other cultures that the idea behind *lobola* has been distorted. And, it should be noted that the girl's family also makes a substantial

contribution to the union. The man's family pays *lobola*, but the girl brings all the necessary household items.[2]

My wedding ceremony was typical of what one can expect from Christian families. Our marriage was solemnised at the church on a Saturday. On the same day, we went to my home place and on Sunday to Imon's home village for additional wedding ceremonies so that both families could participate in our joy. On Monday, Imon returned to his job in Bulawayo. I remained behind with his family where a new life and identity would begin. It was to be the most difficult challenge of my life!

This new beginning was especially difficult. Not only had I become a wife, but I was also a daughter-in-law. Culture dictated my roles and I was treated as the "daughter-in-law"! I received minimum acceptance. In fact, I was treated as if I was a stranger. As a general rule, I find that Africans ill-treat their daughters-in-law and I was certainly no exception.

As a daughter-in-law, I had to be seen as hardworking. I had to work in their fields which were about seven kilometres away. It was my duty to fetch the water every day three to four kilometres from the homestead. It was a drilled well without a manual pump so I had to use buckets that were lowered into the well, which was not an easy task. My work included looking after the cattle and taking them to the dip tank once a week. And, the milking had to be done. I even had to do the plowing, cultivating and reaping. Worse still, I was either carrying a baby on my back or in my stomach. At one point, there was a child on the back and one in the stomach. I would then come from the field and do the chores at home. I did all this work because I thought this is what was expected of me as a wife. I was young and inexperienced and I actually thought this is what came with a marriage. No one told me that it should be done differently, i.e. that I needed not be a slave for my in-laws nor lose my dignity as person. I remained silent and submissive because I did not know and because I had come to believe it was easier to remain silent that go through useless

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[2] The issue of "lobola" continues to divide feminists in Africa. Oduyoye (1994:168) insists that the gifts given for dowry or bride price were intended "to emphasise the worth of women, to provide community participation and social witness to the coming together of the two persons for the religious duty of procreation" and should not be seen as an economic transaction. Conversely to this opinion, there are feminists who see the bride price as the woman being sold into marriage where even her reproductive potential has been purchased by the husband. In both cases, it is clear that the woman has little or no say in the matter.

discussion of the matter. I know that I lost much of my self-esteem during this period. I am just grateful that I was able to bear children. I was expected to do all this as his wife, but had I not been able to bear children, life would have been even more difficult. There would have been insults and more hard work. My husband had a cousin who could not have children and hanged herself.

No one was there to really help the in-laws. There were only two small boys. The wife of my husband's brother lived with the in-laws before I did. She did not have the same problems because she was already working as a teacher. She did not stay a long time with the in-laws as she and her husband moved out very quickly after the marriage. The sisters were already married and had jobs. The brothers had also moved away. So I had to do the work for them as I had no degree nor any money to contribute to the well-being of the family. You understand that it is normal for the daughter-in-law to stay with the in-laws for a certain period of time so that they get to know the daughter joining their family. However, my stay was extended because Imon and I did not have the financial basis on which to start our married life. I was not working professionally like my sister-in-law and Imon was working simply as a temporary teacher as he did not have the required training. He was married to someone who also was not trained. So, I had to stay behind and do the work for my in-laws. One time when he came home for the week-end, he found me covered in mud and cow dung. My mother-in-law asked him what he expected since I was not trained to do anything better. It pained him very much to see how I was being treated. I was virtually used as a slave. It was painful for both of us. We wanted to come out of this situation, but without training or a good job, it was difficult. During this period of time, my responsibilities to my husband's family were not my only concern. The Liberation War was raging in the country. As you know, the battles were being fought in the "bush" or rural areas. There was still a resemblance of normalcy in the cities and big towns. But in the villages, we experienced some uneasy moments. We had to cook for those who were fighting against the Ian Smith government. Fortunately, as a village community, we could work together. When the soldiers were in our area, each family in the village did the cooking and gave blankets. It was a bitter war, so you can imagine that many abuses took place.

The war had a profound effect on everyone. I think I learned to value my husband and children. I also learned how precious life can be. I learned to enjoy all the forms of identity that had become elements of "who I am". When I was born, it was popular to give English names to children rather than Ndebele names. I think people were influenced by early missionaries. Perhaps they were

having problems pronouncing our names. All my sisters and brothers have English names. I am happy with the various names that identify who I am. According to culture, you do not lose your maiden name when you marry. So I am very pleased when people identify me as MaSikhosana. It was because of western influence that I am now Mrs Ndlovu. I am just as comfortable with the name "NakaVi" meaning "the mother of Vi", who is my first son. My daughter is my first born child, but I am not identified by her because in our culture, families tend to value boys more than they do girls. As a mother I have always tried to show equal love for all my children.

My turning point came when I felt very unhappy about the life I was leading with my in-laws. I knew we had to be independent and take care of our own children. I talked with my husband and shared my thoughts on furthering my education. He too wanted to further his education because he was not able to get a better job with the Ministry of Education without a diploma. We discussed our options. He felt a call to the ministry and decided to apply for theological training. That was to become our ticket out of our situation with his parents. We moved to Harare for his training at United Theological College. As for me? Imagine! After seventeen years of being away from school, I started my junior certificate or grade seven studies!! It did not matter how old I was. I was determined to succeed. It did not take much to stimulate me to read. I would think of my situation — how my own mother was a widow and depended on others to help her survive because she had no formal training; how I could continue to be a slave for my husband's parents; how my own children could fall into the same trap as I did. I had been given an opportunity and nothing could turn me back!!

It was difficult at first because I had small children. We lived at the theological college. I did my initial studies externally while Imon attended his classes on campus. I eventually passed and started my "O" level. Imagine! I wrote Bible Knowledge at "O" level and did very well. I got a "B" without any assistance. I must admit that it was the encouragement and help from others that I was able to manage. There was a woman at the college married to an aspiring Methodist minister. He eventually became the superintendent of the Methodist church. She was also doing 'O' level just as I was. We supported each other. Some of the women did not take education as seriously as we did. Then there was Mrs Maphosa from the United Church of Christ in Zimbabwe who went out of her way to help me. When she came from school everyday, she would help with my small child so that I could do my studies. She was also an inspiration in that she was gainfully employed as a teacher and

was able to help her husband. Her children were not suffering and she gained recognition as an individual. She was respected by the other women and even by the lecturers.

We were in Harare for four years and then returned to Bulawayo. Imon worked as the Bulawayo minister for the church and I assisted in the role as minister's wife. For one year, I looked for a job in the formal sector, but I was unsuccessful. So I went to Bulawayo Polytechnic College for two years and obtained the National Foundation Certificate in Business Studies and a National Certificate in Secretarial Studies.

By this time, Imon's mother had left her rural home and come to live with us. He was very pleased that I was furthering my studies. My mother-in-law was very bitter. She could not understand why I was wasting *Imon's money*. She thought my place should be in the kitchen or at home with the children. As Imon was very supportive, he made it clear that my going to school was "our intentions" and not "hers". I eventually got a job at our mission secondary school -- Tennyson Hlabangana -- some twenty kilometres from Bulawayo. It was very difficult going there because of transport. I woke up very early to take the only morning bus going there. I worked there for one year.

Zimbabwe Council of Churches organised lots of women's workshops. When we came from Harare, I joined the Ministers' Wives Fraternal. As I was the youngest member, I attended a lot of these workshops to represent the other ministers' wives. During that time, I met Mrs Mabusela who was a Coordinator at Zimbabwe Council of Churches. She was very close to one of the ministers' wives who helped me get a list of vacancies at the Council. Eventually I was hired to work as Mrs Mabusela's secretary. She was also a great influence on my life and encouraged me to continue my studies. I have not stopped!!

When I look back over the years, I realise that God put many people in my life and gave me many experiences to show me the way. I think that there were at least three factors contributing to my success as a person. When I speak of success I mean being able to discover my potential, work at achieving it and overcoming the barriers. The first would have to be my family. I have received strong support from my husband and children. My success is also their pride. We see it as a way of uplifting our standard of living and it even means financial security for them.

The second influence should be my religious experience and faith. The time at United Theological College strengthened me. I can imagine that if I had come directly from Imon's rural home at Filabusi to be a minister's wife in Bulawayo, I would not have been successful. Imagine the difficulties I would have had! I left Harare with confidence that I never had before. I was able to work with my husband and do it effectively.

The third influence has been the support of other women. I have mentioned Mrs Maphosa who was a role model. We all wanted to be respected in the same way as she was. I have mentioned Mrs Mabusela who really became my mentor. She helped me during those early years and even after her retirement, she continued to be supportive as I moved up the ladder within Zimbabwe Council of Churches. There have been many others – too numerous to mention. The important thing is that some women do help other women. It is true that we as women tend to pull each other down, but there are others who are prepared to lift up others.

My story is not exactly a "from rags to riches" story. I still have a long way to go to become financially secure. I do feel that I have had "rich" experiences that have had a profound effect on my family and me. And, I have traveled very far from those days of having to herd cattle and having to remain at home because there was no money for my education. I will never go back to that. I have discovered what I can be. I have discovered that knowing who I am and knowing my potentials have released me from bondage that allowed others to use me. That is how I understand survival and liberation for me.

5.4   POLYANNA MAHLANGU

J.4.1   Background

Polyanna Mahlangu, who is also known as Gogo (Grandmother), is a seventy-five years old Ndebele devout Christian. Her energy, wisdom and faith defy her age and make her seem many years younger than what she actually is. She dared to dream of opening a convalescent centre for the elderly who were being sent home from hospital much too soon after surgery or treatment. She placed her faith in God, stood firm and that dream became a reality. She continues to give leadership to Ekuphumeleni Geriatric Nursing Home that makes its mark on the citizens of Bulawayo. She is also an active member of the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa (UCCSA). In fact, when I met her, she was serving as the first woman president in the long history

of the Zimbabwe Synod as a church. She, along with Eunah Ndlovu, was one of the first persons I met when I came to Bulawayo.

She is the mother of four children who are all success stories in themselves. She thoroughly enjoys being a grandmother and, in spite of her active life, she is never too busy for them. Gogo is one of the persons with whom I have felt completely comfortable to share my frustrations and problems. She is a listener and does not feel the need to do all the talking. She is a stately person and her title of Matron (term for senior nurse) is befitting. Her mannerisms and stature command the respect deserving of a good leader. It is easy to get caught in her dreams because one sees that she has a vision when she forges ahead.

One of her greatest assets is her keen sense of observation and ability to assess a situation. I am reminded of my frustration and that of my husband when we arrived in Bulawayo. The church arranged for us to be housed at a guesthouse at our own expense that extended beyond the original two weeks promised. As we contemplated packing and returning home, she intervened and arranged for us to stay with her daughter who had a guest cottage. Her every action was to make us feel truly welcome. If we survived the first critical six weeks in the city, it was due to her friendship.

Her faith adventure story is an example of truly walking side by side with God. There is no other explanation for being able to move monumental obstacles out of one's way. One can see the positive role the church played in her life. Yet, it is also clear that she has been bound by her culture and only reached the top position in the church a few years ago. Her incredible testimony of faith is heartwarming and inspiring. Only she can know the pains she suffered and only she can tell the story.

5.4.2   Polyanna's Story

I grew up in the home of very devout Christians. My father was a minister. His first wife died and left one child. My father then married my mother and I was the fourth of her eight children. We were just a typical Ndebele family where boys had their duties of herding the cattle and the girls did the cooking and cleaning. My father was a rare person in that he believed in education for his girls.

In fact, he was often criticised for "wasting money" to send girls to school. He was adamant and told people that if anyone really needed to go to school that it should be girls. He was not your typical man who was bound by culture. Christianity, I am sure, was a major determinant. He did not even care for *lobola*. My mother died when she was delivering my youngest brother and was not around. My father did not accept for *lobola* to be paid for any of us girls. He said that his sons-in-law could pay *lobola* by taking good care of his daughters. This was quite a stance in a society where culture plays such a pivotal role in church and in all aspects of society.

My interest in caring for elderly people was really not surprising. By nature as a child I liked old people. I remember my mother being fond of them as well. Often the elderly people around our home would come and I would sit with them. I was brought up in a family that believed in God and helping others. I would always marvel at my parents' goodness and was even annoyed to see them giving all the food away. So, helping others has always been a part of me. I enjoy action in the right direction.

I have said all this to help you understand how I got into this business of helping elderly people. I think God sent me in this direction rather than in a traditional pulpit ministry. After Independence, I was a senior sister at Mpilo General Hospital. I saw so many people needing additional care but who were being discharged because of the overload at the hospital. In other words, there was not enough space so the elderly were discharged to make room for others. Some were on stretchers, wheelchairs, crutches and often relatives would disappear because they could not take care of them. It worried me to see them discharged when not fit – not because doctors chased them away but a lack of available space.

I talked with some co-workers about this situation. Some would see me coming and would say, "We see that twinkle in your eyes. What have you got in your mind this time?" I asked them if we could build a small building and do voluntary service on rotational basis to take care of the elderly. The immediate reaction was a definite "No". They said I would have to go it alone as they were tired of my getting them involved in charities.

I prayed, "Lord, how can I do it? I feel you are sending me!" Soon after that, a Methodist minister, Rev Musa, came for a visit. When he was ready to leave, I stood up and asked him to sit down again. I explained that I had a problem that I wanted to share with him. I was not sure how he would react but I concluded by asking, "Don't you think we can do this"? He hesitated for only a moment and said, "You know, I think you are right. Some die when caregivers go to work. Some caregivers leave water and food on plates and expect the elderly to fend for themselves while they (the caregivers) go off to work. But I also think that whatever is done is just a drop in the ocean — not even a bucket — for there are just too many."

I asked him to think about it. His encouraging words were, "We have started because I have already given thought to the matter. Before I leave let us think of six other persons we can contact to interest in the idea". The team included the town clerk, two nurses who had softened and were ready to join, the mayor, a teacher and a city council worker. We had our first meeting on 15 December 1979. Rev Musa's introduction to them was that Mrs Mahlangu has something bothering her and we should allow her time to explain.

When I finished talking, the Town Clerk immediately spoke up and said "we do not take word of mouth. Where are your documents?" I was stunned and unprepared for his reply, but I answered that if documents were needed then I should be told which documents to obtain. I was given five weeks to make a survey saying how many people had been discharged in this period of time. The meeting was disbanded as it was agreed we could not carry on without adequate information.

I had absolutely no idea how to make a survey or where to start. A Jewish doctor at Mpilo was so kind when I related to him the problem and what the committee had said to me. He, too, felt that a convalescent home was needed and that it was in great demand. He insisted that I leave everything to him and that he would do the survey himself. He felt he could get enough information from his three wards without involving other senior doctors from the other wards. His finding was that forty-nine elderly people were discharged during the period from his three wards alone. If that was the case, what about the entire hospital!! He wrote a covering letter to support the survey.

At the next meeting, I proudly presented the facts, figures and the cover letter. The town clerk simply said, "I am going to draft the constitution". We knew we had started and would not stop. We held weekly meetings in each other's homes until we found a permanent place for meeting.

We met our next hurdle when the Housing Administrator for City Council, a certain Mr Van der Meuller refused our application to operate stating that another nursing home was already operating. We tried to explain that the objectives of Entembeni (Nursing Home) was to care for the destitute while our objective was to nurse discharged patients who were not able to get proper medical care at home. He was not impressed. The Town Clerk came to our rescue. He talked with the Housing Administrator and asked him who was he to stop the people when they wanted to render service for their own people. Soon after, we got a letter giving us the go ahead.

Our troubles were not yet over. We came out on television to tell people about this project. The police heard that we were collecting public funds and were at our doorsteps. Rev Musa explained to them that these were well- wishers who were supporting our work. The police told us in no uncertain terms that we must get registered immediately. We applied for registration and were eventually granted a registration number. It enabled us to work without police interference and we could fundraise and receive public and private donations.

At the end of the year, as we were still working as an ad hoc committee, we called a general meeting. The town clerk explained the constitution to the people and what we were trying to do. People agreed overwhelmingly that this is what was wanted and needed in the community. Rev Musa was chosen Chairman, one of the educators became secretary, and I was chosen treasurer. An executive of fifteen members was formed that day. At the next annual general meeting, we asked for a replacement of the executives, but people refused arguing that the project should really get off the ground first before choosing new executives.

By this time, a new Housing Administrator was placed in office. One day in 1980, he asked us when were we going to get started. We explained that we had only raised $3000 and that we were not yet in a position to start. He asked whether we wanted to start up in the sky or down at the bottom. In other words, he insisted we had enough to get started. Rev Musa, who should have been the one to

advise us to venture out on faith, was very hesitant but practical. His comment was that this Housing Administrator "wants us to open today and close tomorrow". I dared to ask him where was his faith and reminded him that he had taught me that there was no turning back. In December 1983, we started the home. We started renting at $175 a month and had two patients. The funds were exhausted within the same month. And of course, Rev Musa said, "You see what I told you?". I simply told him "God will provide". When I went to collect the mail, I found cheques for $250, $100 and $25. I could not believe it. I rang Rev Musa to share the good news with him. He said that "Faith is like that. When it is dark and you do not know where to turn, God will send a word to you."

There were still skeptics who thought the project would fail. In fact the mayor thought that by giving us land in an area that had not yet been really developed that we would not manage and the city could re-take the land. We set out to prove him wrong. We contacted a donor and explained that we wanted to put a building that would cost us one hundred thousand dollars. They agreed to finance seventy-five per cent of the cost if we could raise twenty-five per cent. This was once again a sign for us that there was no turning back.

I went to a friend in charge of development projects who agreed to help. We wrote out our details and she gave the information to someone to write up in the form of a project proposal. The friend agreed to get the project to the donor once it had been typed. I still believe that I was sent to that friend as a sign from God. I knew to leave things for God to work out. Not long after that, I got a call from Harare that the donors had given us the go ahead.

We were all excited. The executives advised that rather than a small building that we should do something to cater for at least forty-two patients. We were also told that we could apply for a loan to cover costs not included in the proposal. We needed an architect and through some friends, I met a young man who had just completed his studies. The executives said "no" to the idea because he did not have experience. I managed to convince them that this was a chance to give him the experience he needed to get started in his career. It was a risk taken but as you can see, he did a wonderful job. I wanted a nice structure and at the same time one where the sisters could see patients from anywhere in the building. He managed to capture both.

We have lived from out of nothing, but God has always been present to help. God will always send somebody to help. We receive some funding from other donors. We also receive token gestures from the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare. We understand that our objective for being here is not to get rich or assist the rich. We are here for the poor. Most of our patients are low income and would suffer if we were not here. Jesus made it clear that he was on the side of the poor. This is our mission as well. We feel that we are on our way of reaching our goal of getting the government to help the elderly population in a tangible way. The City Council allows us to do street collections once a year. Last year we raised twenty one thousand dollars. Different groups, civic organisations, churches, and individuals assist in both cash and kind. Others are there for moral support. We have become recognised nationally and internationally. Help-Age, an agency in London, has an "Adopt a Granny" programme that assists us.

It has been a lot of hard work. People often ask me why I continue. Some are even more blunt and ask "why are you killing yourself?". It is difficult to express, but I see this as a way of saying "Thank you God for what you have done for me". It gives me satisfaction to know that I have helped somebody.

My family has been very supportive but I have also suffered a lot. My children and sons-in-law have always been steadfast in their support. When the children were younger, they pitched in to do the household chores and cooking while I was away. My husband was even very helpful in the beginning. He showed me how to keep records and the first records even had his handwriting. As my work load became more and more demanding I had less time at home. It created a rift between us. He gave me an ultimatum that I defied. I felt I had put so much of "me" as a person into the project. I was not being defiant or a feminist standing against my husband. I was taking a stand against losing this new person that had emerged within me. The end result was that I became a better person. I became more respectful of him and started making sure that my role as a wife was intact. He gave me a diary and told me to put down my daily activities. At the same time, I became more determined in my work. I became a more organised person and it helped me to sort out some things in my mind. For example, I have always said 'yes' to equal rights if you have the same education. I believe that a wife has her role and that a husband has his. We should not begrudge

each other if we are doing our job. We cannot force one to do the job of the other. I still believe that a man remains the head of the house, but he must learn to allow the woman to walk beside him so that they are walking together toward a common goal.

Over the years, I have learned a lot. Some of the great lessons of life have included learning to respect other people. I have learned to share with others and to be patient. I have learned that whilst angry that I should not shout, whether it is with my spouse, my children or work mates. One must settle down and discuss when calm and then learn to forgive.

Along the way, it has been my faith that has helped me. Before I embark on any action, I always ask God if this is right or wrong. If I feel that the answer is a go ahead, then I think that God has sent me. My survival and the survival of this home, I think, lie in the teachings of my father. He taught us that as Christians, we must learn to care for all people and that we are all together in the struggle of survival in life. We were taught at an early age to trust in God, even when times were difficult. I think that sums up the answer to your question on how I have survived.

5.5   MY STORY

5.5.1   Background

In Chapter One, I alluded to my family, the faith instilled at an early age, and the circumstances surrounding the day to day living in southern USA in the late fifties and sixties when racism reached its fullest measure. I have had many rich experiences and they have made me who I am today. They have also allowed me to understand that one never attains full identity. Identity is always in the making and I have come to understand that survival/liberation has to be based on one's self-concept of whom we are and where we have been and where we are going. The stories of these three powerful women who have entered my life as sisters remind me of events that have also taken place in my life. When I hear their stories, I also hear the voice of my mother saying, "Do not give up! Life has not been a crystal stair but since I have been able to survive difficult moments, I count on you to do the same". However different we are from each other, we walk along the same path in search of identity, survival/liberation.

5.5.2   My Story

I was born and grew up in Birmingham, Alabama – the largest city in that state – at a time when segregation reigned and racism was the order of the day for African-Americans. In the late 40s and early 50s, many African values were still intact in southern USA – respect for elders, close family ties, courtesy and respect to the point of appearing obsequious, deep religious involvement, and others. My siblings - two brothers and three sisters - and myself, along with the extended family, were very close knit.

There was never a question as to whether any of my mom's four daughters and two sons would have equal opportunity to attend school. It was a given. She had known the pain of her lost dream to attend university. Because of the family's economic situation, she had to get a job after high school to send her younger twin sisters to business college. My mother did not tolerate the special privileges my father insisted on bestowing on 'his' sons to the disadvantage of 'her' daughters. As children, we were socialised to do tasks and play games appropriate for our sex. When we strayed, as girls we were identified in the community by such hurtful terms as 'tomboys' indicating masculine tendencies exemplified by girls while boys were characterised as 'sissy' to mean they were effeminate.

At the same time, as girls, we were encouraged to go to school and set our goals as high as the boys. My mom insisted that girls could achieve academically as well as or better than boys. Being the strong woman that she was, she taught us not to feel threatened by society's negative perception of strong women who pursued the traditional male domain.

It would be very difficult for me to identify who I am based on names associated with roles or cultural implications. So much of who I am today is based on my past history rather than cultural constraints. As a young African-American growing up in America, I lived through many of the years when we struggled with our identity. Evidence of how our identity was in crisis can be seen in the various names by which we have been known in less than a half century. We have gone from being the very derogatory 'nigger' to being 'Negro', 'coloured', 'Black' (from small 'b' to capital 'B'), Afro-American', 'African-American', 'people of colour', 'people of the two-thirds world'. I personally like the blend that is implied when described as African-American. My life has been spent equally in each context and I feel as if I am a product of both cultures. Yet, I cannot escape the fact that even this term is inaccurate and often discriminatory. I recognise that not everyone of African origin living in the USA is identified as African-American or even wish to be identified as such. Many people from the Caribbean Islands, e.g. Jamaica, Haiti, Trinidad, are not regarded as African-Americans by mainstream America. My guess is that in their own quest for identity, many would not wish to lose that part of their cultural heritage and would prefer being known as Haitian-American, Jamaican-American, etc.

Perhaps the period in my life when 'identity' became a reality for me was during the tense years of overt racism in the 50s, 60s, and 70s in the United States. I remember traveling as a small child in the 50s with my mother on a public bus and clearly seeing the sign that said 'Coloured', which indicated the point on the bus where we dared sit down. Painted vividly in my mind is the white bus driver who moved the sign further to the back when more whites got on the bus and my mom and I had to move. We had to stand the remaining distance as there were no longer any vacant seats. I learned that being identified as 'coloured' meant being inferior.

The era of the sixties came with its own 'Liberation War' for 'the coloured people' in racist America, particularly in the South. The many nights when my parents left my older brother and me in charge of our younger siblings as they attended 'church meetings' on nights other than the usual Wednesday

night reserved for prayer service, will long be remembered. We found their hushed tones and almost secretive re-entrance into the house unusual but not alarming. We were to learn later that these were precautionary measures to protect the family in case they had been followed or if we, as children, divulged secrets unknowingly. We had all heard the news of a renown activist being killed as he returned from a meeting and got out of his car at home. My older brother and I were intrigued by their discussions late at night when they thought we were asleep. The talk of difficult days ahead and a certain Martin Luther King, Jr. captured our attention. This became even more captivating when we heard some of the same things repeated on Sunday mornings at church. No one was surprised when many young people and children throughout the city of Birmingham, Alabama marched downtown in the 60s for several days to confront police, their dogs and fire hoses to protest the prevailing injustices in what became known as the Civil Rights Movement. My brother and I, aged 14 and 13, participated in that aspect of organised protests only one day because our parents thought it was "just too dangerous".

The Movement took on a new context in the late 60s and early 70s.African-Americans were cheered on by slogans, such as: "Black Power", "Black and Beautiful", "Black and Proud", "I may be 'Black' but I am somebody". A sense of pride emerged and, as a people, our identity received a positive boost. We were able to counterattack the negativism associated with "Black", e.g. black sheep, black market, blackball and many others. Racism was still very much alive but there was a sense of church, community and family united together to help us overcome. The Movement days were a time when our sense of family, community and collective purpose were enhanced. During this period, the seeds of protest, that were unconsciously planted by my parents through their own efforts of self-awareness and participation in the Movement meetings, were growing within my brother and me. African-Americans discovered that protest could bring about economic and political change although the battle for self-identity and self worth had not been fully achieved.

The next major experience towards self-identity and liberation in my life occurred as a result of tension within my father's workplace. He worked for the largest steel company in the city and for many years trained white supervisors without ever becoming a supervisor himself. With mounting pressure on government and private companies to change many of their racist laws, my father was eventually upgraded to the deserved post of supervisor. It was a given that many other African-Americans were equally qualified for similar posts but the company felt that 'one good Black' was

enough. For me, this was tangible proof that my identity was wrapped in that of others as well. It meant nothing to be 'Black and beautiful' or to 'be somebody' if it was not for the good of the community. Consequently, I joined the protest movement that went door-to-door to inform the public that other Blacks were equally qualified. My brother and I were part and parcel of the demonstrations at the steel company everyday until changes were made.

Many secondary school children were encouraged to break the colour barrier in previously all-white schools. Often, as was my case, children lived within a short distance of a school but could not cross into the nearby white neighbourhood to attend. Consequently, we would walk kilometres to the nearest Black school. In 1965, I volunteered to attend the all-white school in our community. The previous year, an African-American girl had gone there in her final year of high school to become the first non-white student at the school. I was to do my final two years of high school. In that first year, I was joined by three other girls in lower classes. By the end of that first school year, I was questioning whether our being "somebody" and our desire for a quality education was worth the pain, humiliation, hatred and insults that were thrust upon us. This was especially true for me since I was in the higher class where the hatred was clearly overt. During those painful years, there was no comfort in knowing that we were making it easier for others to follow. In fact, I left there thinking that *integration* was not the solution after all. I often wondered by what power had the young girl from the previous year managed to survive alone!

My university years were equally turbulent but I was coming closer to finding my sense of purpose as a woman of colour on the margins of the American society. After a traumatic final two years of high school, I chose to attend an African-American university to reinforce the identity of 'Blackness' that I was discovering. This, in fact, proved to be a healing experience for me.

During these years, there was a shift from being 'Black' to being 'Afro-American' as we became conscious of a world beyond the confines of America. As university students, we became aware of places like Vietnam, Jamaica, South Africa, Ghana and the Congo. We followed events on the African continent and realised that our destinies were entwined. We became aware of American imperialism and neo-colonialism and we followed world events like the rise and fall of Patrice Lumumba in the Congo, the apartheid system in South Africa, the destruction of 'people of colour' in Vietnam. We listened avidly to Bob Marley's lyrics and came to realise the struggle for

survival/liberation was universal. We became acutely aware that history books portrayed Africa as the 'dark, heathen country' where nothing good was reflected. History books were written in the past, but even the present portrayed people of brown, black and yellow colour as 'nobodies' in the eyes of the white dominant culture. It was painful, and it was time to protest again. My brother and I became actively involved in the student campus movement to protest the war in Vietnam and we fought to include African-American History in the university's curriculum. The protest moved from the university campus to the State capitol that led to my arrest by police on two occasions and spending time in jail on both occasions.

Both parents had instilled in us values and admonished us to be true to them. The words of my parents rang clear in my heart — "do not settle for being a 'second class' citizen", "stand up for what you believe in and be prepared to face the consequences", "be somebody" and many other words of wisdom. The jail experience reinforced the fact that I was "my mother's daughter" whenever my father was not pleased with my actions. My father's rejection was painful, yet, I discovered in practical ways what it meant to stand for a cause and this helped me to in discovering my identity.

During my final years at university, my involvement in the African-American liberation struggle was challenging me to discover more about my identity and cultural uprootedness. At the same time that strong urge to serve the church that characterised my early teen years was intensifying. I wanted to be part of a global ministry but not as a minister, as I was still questioning the role of the institutional church. Shortly before the end of my degree program, I applied for overseas work with the church. I also applied to the United States government to participate in a volunteer programme that had been set up for youth to gain short-term overseas experience. Providentially both replied on the same day offering me a position in Africa. I chose to go with the church for several reasons, among which was the chance to go the country of my childhood dreams — the Congo (before changing to Zaire). I remembered some of the stories shared by missionaries who had come to holiday church youth camps. I also noticed that the face of mission was changing and more Blacks were serving the church at national level. It was now my chance to test the sincerity of the church in sending Black missionaries overseas.

After completing a Teachers' Education Program at the University of Michigan, I travelled to France for language study. In April 1973, I left France to start my faith journey in the Congo. Although it

was post independence in the early 1970s, this African nation was still searching for its place and its identity. As a young, energetic, idealistic and often naïve teacher at a girls' school, I had a lot to learn but I was prepared. Having overcome many barriers in the USA and understanding the value of 'knowing oneself, I did not want my teaching methods to reinforce models of Belgium domestic virtues of being good housewives and ignore the students' other potentials. I wanted to impart values that would inspire them to aim higher without losing sight of their traditions and cultures. This was a contradiction, and probably cultural arrogance on my part. This became clear to me when I discovered that the school was seen as some kind of finishing school where some of the girls attended just long enough to say that they had attended "The Lycee". Others saw it as a chance to prepare for marriage with men who were becoming part of the emerging elite such as professional men, teachers, doctors or government workers.

I also found myself in the unique position of being a "Black missionary" in an African church community that had only seen white missionaries. I felt marginalised from both the missionary and African communities as I was separated either culturally or racially. Intuitively, I knew that no matter how sympathetic I may have been that I would never identify wholly with either group. Interestingly, at the nearby mission school about 7 kilometres away where I worked part time, there was a very international community that included young American Peace Corps workers, young Zairians (Congolese), Haitians, and east and west Europeans. It was there that I met my husband to be and soul mate. It was at that point that I embarked on a true journey of intense intercultural communication. My experiences in France and the earlier months in Zaire (Congo) simply paved the way.

My husband, Daniel, was born and raised on the Caribbean island of Haiti and had travelled to Congo (Zaire) shortly after that country's independence from Belgium to teach under the UNESCO recruitment programme. Haiti, being a French-speaking country like the Congo with similar climate and its inhabitants being part of the Diaspora, was an ideal place for recruiting people for the various sectors needing personnel in the Congo. Daniel and I met, fell in love and into marriage before we really realised what had happened. We considered ourselves to be rational adults committed to remaining single and yet, within seven months of meeting each other we made the life commitment of growing in love and getting to know each other better in marriage. We knew intuitively that we would cast our lot with the people of the Congo. We remained in the Congo

following our wedding and we have been blessed with two children – a son and a daughter – who were born and grew up in the Congo. At a tender age, they understood the struggle of 'identity'. They were part of the local community while being the 'other' as well. They were identified as "MK" (missionary kid) and "TCK" (third culture kid). In reality, they were probably "FCK" (fourth culture kid) [3]. By the time we moved to Zimbabwe, our son was university age and returned to the USA for tertiary education while our daughter was in school in South Africa and came for visits during holidays. The separation has always been for me the greatest sacrifice to make in communicating the gospel interculturally. I have seen them grow to become intercultural communicators themselves. I think the greatest gifts I could have given to them have been (a) to gird them in strong family values and a profound spiritual faith; and (b) to give them wings to fly in search of their own identity and their own place in life. In a sense, my story of identity, survival/liberation pauses here and their stories begin. They have strong African roots – from both parents as well as having lived their own childhood in the African context. They will choose where to cast their lot. They will survive as the struggle continues – *alluta continua!!*

5.6 INTERACTION AND EXPLORATION

In these stories, one will notice at least three recurring themes that helped to shape the identity of the women and which formulated the basis for their survival/liberation. These themes are poverty, Christian faith and family values. The scope of the paper will not allow me to look at each theme in depth. I do wish to highlight some key areas reflected in the stories. No matter how differently the four of us may appear to be as we share our stories, there are elements of commonality in our lives, notwithstanding our differences. Elements that neither of us can escape in our struggle of identity and survival are the impact of poverty or potential poverty, our strong Christian upbringing and the deeply rooted family values.

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[3] I understand FCK to be a child whose parents are from two different cultures but living in a third culture. The blend of these three cultures brings about the fourth culture that determines the child's own unique identity. This is in contrast to the popular term "third culture kid" where both parents are from one culture living in another and the blend creating the third culture for the child.

5.6.1   Poverty: Identity and Survival/Liberation

EUNAH

Eunah's story of overcoming poverty is poignant. Poverty formed the essence of her life as a child as it was an everyday reality. Her strong nature allowed her to escape. She was often in a position of potential exploitation, especially with her in-laws. This is perhaps one of the reasons she is often criticised now as being harsh and unreasonably critical of others.

Whether in Zimbabwe, which was second to South Africa in terms of economic wealth in southern Africa, or the United States, which is considered to be the richest country in the world, poverty is pervasive and continues to cripple Black women. Eunah's struggle with poverty is characteristic of what most women in Africa encounter and how women are identified. In a study done by Karen Hurt, Debbie Budlender and Neva Siedman Makgetla (in Haddad 2000b:40-41), women continue to be the brunt of poverty in that they are underpaid and essentially overworked. Even more striking is the assessment that most South African women (which appears to be equally true for Zimbabwean women) are unemployed, from rural areas, head of households with no fixed income, do not own land, vulnerable to disease like AIDS, and struggle to survive against the odds set before them (Haddad 2000b:41). We saw this in Eunah's mother trying to provide for a family as a single parent. One can only imagine what the case would have been for the mother had it not been for determination to succeed and the strength to ward off the temptation of being used for economic or cultural gains by the male community and family. Often in the traditional African family, the woman "is seen solely as a other in the family" (Masenya 1994:68). Because of important survival skills taught by her mother, Eunah was able to break the vicious cycle of poverty that could have continued from one generation to the next. Eunah, however, reached into the depths of her soul to find her identity and strength. As she struggled to get an education, she kept her dream in focus. She did not want to be one of those African women who had to succumb to "practicing subsistence farming in the rural areas" nor settle for "poor work conditions [arising] from the poor educational opportunities provided for them" (Masenya 1994:69). She wanted to be identified as somebody and not as a 'useless daughter-in-law'. She triumphed and recognised her own strength during this period of transformation. She was even able to reconcile with her in-laws and recognise that their cruelty toward her was out of their own feelings of defeat, ignorance and poverty. She could not allow herself to perpetuate the cycle. In interviews with women who testified during the Truth and

Reconciliation Commission in South Africa, Van Schalkwyk (1999:33) noted that this ability to heal broken relationships had a religious dimension based on faith.

The idea of poverty is linked to the cross for both African and African-American Christian women. Both tend to find Jesus Christ as a symbol of life, strength and hope who embodies saving, liberating salvation by a life of resistance and by the survival strategies used to help others survive the death of identity (in Baker-Fletcher 1997:133). Often Christian women are made to believe that poverty and suffering are Christ-like elements that must be glorified whereas I agree with Delores Williams (1993:164-166) who contends that to expect women to glorify the suffering and poverty is to ask them to accept exploitation as sacred. Women have known what it means to be cross-bearers and should not be expected to remain in bondage and glorify it. In African-American churches one may hear about the power of the cross, but "it is the daily healing, delivering, saving power of Jesus that one hears about from congregational testimonies" (Baker-Fletcher 1997:134). It is true that the cross holds a lot of meaning, but at the same time it should not be a form of exploitation, for Jesus came for life and not for death. As stated by Oduyoye (1994:178), "We cannot assign the cross to half of humanity and the resurrection to the other half". They must remain together if we want our teaching to be consistent with the *shalom* message of healing, deliverance, survival/liberation and wholeness. Eunah in her personal struggle against poverty found identity. Equally important, she was freed from the chains of poverty. She survived to pursue her dream of finding wholeness for herself and family.

5.6.2   Christian Faith: Identity and Survival/Liberation

JEAN

How easy it would have been for the young Jean Mundeta to fall into the clutches of despair and hopelessness upon returning to her home following a war that promised land and economic prosperity. Unemployed with little chance of completing secondary education could have been detrimental for her and could have caused her to become disillusioned and impoverished, as was the case for many of her comrades in the war. Very few women moved up the economic and political ladder as evidenced by the small number of women in high government and private positions of authority or senior posts. Many women ended up living in abject poverty and/or returned to a patriarchal system where their short-lived freedom ended. Cheryl Potgieter (1996:89) reminds us that

in many countries during wars and in times of political transformation, as well as in struggles for national liberation, women have taken an active and leading role. But after these goals have been met, women have again been marginalised from the mainstream or what some women call the "malestream" of society. The Liberation War in Zimbabwe was a bitter one where everyone was affected both young and old. Black Zimbabwean women participated in many ways – side by side with male combatants, in the preparation of food in the villages, as nurses, etc. The war impoverished the people, but women felt the brunt of the whole colonial system that led to war. Women saw much suffering and bore many of the burdens inflicted. Young girls were exposed to the brutality of war. Some survived and found healing in their lives. The many experiences of a young girl in the midst of a war were enough to push Jean to search her inner being to find an identity that was not dictated by colonialism. She became aware of the strength within her that led her to a stronger relationship with God in whose image she believed she had been created. She discovered a God who was protecting her and her family during their separation, even if this God brought suffering and exploitation to her family while whites were advantaged.

After the war, she knew she had to return to a world of contradictions. She would return to a culture and society that questioned her social identity as a woman, and particularly her ability to be a good acceptable wife and mother in the eyes of her in-laws. The many myths and truths about female soldiers would create tension that would make it difficult for her own father and the family of her spouse to accept her, especially since the father-in-law was a minister of religion. She had been brought up in a Christian family and was convinced that those values she received at an early age were still intact and would serve as a source to overcome objections to past military life. Yet, it is not surprising that she alluded to her mother as being a source of strength. This is similar to research carried out by Elizabeth Peterson (1997:167) among African-American women where the father was considered the 'head of the household' but the mother the most influential in the upbringing of the daughter.

She who had been free to be herself during the war, now longed to discover the fullness of womanhood. She longed for healing within herself just as many other women did who had fought but who were not at peace with themselves. She desired to be identified as a good wife and mother and not as an ex-combatant, prostitute or even caretaker (Comas-Diaz and Greene 1994:14). It was by turning inward to see the good and bad could she reconcile herself to God and find the divine in

herself. She discovered the kind of liberation that Christ proclaimed that is described by Goba (1989:164) as being freed "from the captivity of inferiority which destroys [their] God given potential to be fully human".

She witnessed the many contradictions of war that included the atrocities and abuse of women, men and children committed by both sides in the conflict in the name of liberation. In one sense, Jean understood survival/liberation in political terms where a war was expected to bring blanket liberation to everyone following the terror of colonialism. People were promised economic prosperity with land and riches that would eradicate the poverty known before the war. The survival skills of war were clearly laid out – you learned to cope and survive or you died. On a different level, survival and liberation were much more profound. A fourteen year old girl had to dig into the depths of her character to survive the situation in which she was placed and that was in itself liberating. She realised how much participating in the war had cost her and how much it had helped her find her identity and strengthen her spiritual faith. As Jean continued to search for identity within the community after the war, she felt a deep need to depend not only on her mom for support but her spiritual faith as well. Essentially, she understood that she had to take the first step towards healing and "finding the voice of empowerment" (Collins 1990:112). The readjustment at the end of four years was not an easy one. The country had completely changed and she felt lost. In her search, she had to rely on the God who had been with her throughout those years in Mozambique. There was a sense of confidence that if God sustained her during four years of war that God would be present with her during this struggle as well.

She had survived the daunting unknown because of her resilience and faith. She received no medals nor did she relate her story for self-glorification. For her, it was a simple fact-of-life. However, she was now aware that she did not have to fear being a woman in a man's world. She took pride in her femininity and African culture and fought the odds against her. She knew she had *survived* where many had failed. This prepared her to meet more difficult challenges of life. Above all, she realised that this experience was her preparation to serve God by helping young high school students to survive the challenges facing them. Service to these young people "was a way of being religious" in a practical way where she could find "new strength and meaning as Christ Himself was the great Servant of humankind" (Van Schalkywk 1999:33).

She found healing and discovered her worth and identity as a Christian Black woman and pledged to impart those same survival skills to her children. She would often say that the reason she could never abandon her Christian faith was its sustaining power during the war. She has never consciously labeled herself a feminist or a womanist, and yet, her story speaks volumes on the principles and ideas articulated by African womanists.

5.6.3 Family: Identity and Survival/Liberation

POLYANNA

Although Polyanna felt the pains of poverty as a small girl, her greatest sense of identity and survival/liberation came through her family and family values. She, like Eunah, understood the impact of poverty on an individual and family. Ministers in those days survived on the goodwill of the people and were expected to be poor financially and to enjoy their poverty, as it was thought to be part of the sacrifice made when serving God. Salaries and support were often paid in the form of eggs, chickens, vegetables or other commodities. A rich faith and family values kept the family together as one unified unit. The economic poverty that they endured was to be replaced by the 'rich spirituality' emanating from being Christ-like, giving to others and binding together as family.

Throughout her narrative, one can sense not only her strong spiritual faith, but also the family values that served as tools for identity and survival/liberation. Having grown up in a Christian home at a time when the community was very supportive of ministers, Polyanna had no illusions about what it meant to be a 'preacher's kid'. Everyone in the family was expected to be self-giving and sacrificing. Under her father's guidance, she and her siblings understood that "a familiarity with God would help them to cope with hardship no matter how difficult" (Black 1999:364). Her identity as a staunch service oriented Christian was formed during those tender years when the father and step-mother set values for the family. She was socialised from a young age to work hard, serve others and God. Raised for many years by a father who defied culture by advocating for quality education of the girl child, Polyanna was steps ahead of others in terms of education and self-identity. Her father – and later on, her step mother – prepared the way for a positive self-esteem and faith in self which gave her a comfortable sense of identity. She was an achiever and understood the value of education for girls. Life was not a bed of roses for her as she had to do chores as any girl would be required to do. She understood her social role and accepted that identity. At the same time, she was

trained to see the oppressive forces that can imprison women. Her sense of family and wholeness has been characterised as something positive and affirming. In her context, Polyanna has proved to be the kind of person prepared to serve church and society so that change and transformation can take place in the areas in which she has been involved. Service, to her, has meant applying her powers to affirm and liberate people. Service to her has not meant abasing herself before those in authority. She understands it to "mean sharing in redemption with others" (Van Schalkwyk 2000:181). That sense of service emanating from family makes her a special role model for those with whom she works.

As the years went by, she was very comfortable in the presence of other people and made them feel like family members. There was nothing shy about her. It is not surprising that she was married to the first university trained Black Zimbabwean in the region. She enjoyed being identified as wife and mother, but she was not dependent on those roles to be her own person. Her identity was intact by this time and she made a name for herself as a qualified nurse. She knew what it meant to have a "spirit of independence" and to be self-reliant (Collins 1990:109).

Strong family ties that formed roots when Polyanna was very young were enhanced over the years and she passed them to her own children. When she struggled to get her business started, her entire family supported her. She has had her share of 'ups and downs'. In her moments of greatest trial, she relied on her faith and her family to survive. Although she identified with family values and maintained her support of traditional values and roles for women, she was prepared to stand for her beliefs even to the point of challenging her husband's patriarchal authority. This was a turning point for her but it helped her understand her ability to be herself. It helped her to see how the meeting of culture and modernity can create conflicts within families. Polyanna maintained her belief that God would see her through and keep her family ties strong. The conflict was resolved between her husband and herself and they both grew. Her need to find self and keep family values in the forefront were two of the greatest challenges of her life. She survived and found liberation and wholeness. Peterson (1997:166) articulates this growth, shaping of character and life experiences as being a testimony to one's strength and courage.

Conclusively, these three themes – poverty, Christian faith and family – served as pillars of strength for these women who showed a strong will to survive. The themes have highlighted the unique

personalities and experiences of these women and at the same time served as common threads weaving their stories and those of most Zimbabwean women. No one would want to live a life of poverty intentionally and most would see it as destructive rather than constructive. Yet, we have seen how it can be an impetus to change our lives and bring about transformation in others and us. Christian faith played a significant role in the lives of the three women as it does for so many other Black women. The faith of these women gave them a sense of peace and strength that they could draw on during difficult times in order to survive. This Christian faith has been an enabling factor that has allowed women to come together to share and to heal their wounds. Close relationships and extended families have been and continue to be the root of a strong Black community. This has been a basic tool in the 'survival equipment' of Zimbabwean and African-American women. These strong women are like magnets in that they draw other women to them increasing each other's strength and ability to self-identify, survive and find liberation.

5.6.4   Identification

My Story

The move to Zimbabwe found me a more mature intercultural communicator. The period of culture shock did not last long. I came to Zimbabwe knowing that I would need a sense of "awareness, knowledge and skills" (in Karecki 2000:96-97). I was very much aware of the cultural baggage with which I had travelled. However, there was also a desire to "cross over" and identify with the women given that many of the things they had encountered in their lives were similar to experiences in my life.

I had visited Zimbabwe some years earlier and had read much about the country. I was somewhat knowledgeable of the country and some of the people's values. I had skills to offer among which included listening and learning. Max Warren (in Karecki 1999:38) defined identification as "the sympathetic entering into the life of another based on the desire to communicate with the people with whom one lives and work". I felt that I could offer that much to my new family. I was prepared to receive from them knowing my own limitations and shortcomings. My most outstanding shortcoming was not being able to speak the local language. I was aware that I would need to work with extra energy to overcome this barrier or give of myself in other ways to compensate if I truly wanted to identify. Over the years, I have known how limited communication

can be without language as a tool. I struggled with greetings and simple sentences in both Shona and isiNdebele to show the people that I do care. To my advantage was that the three women interviewed were all fluent English speakers and they were prepared to trust me and share with me the complexities of life.

If language was my handicap, one of my assets was my humility. Despite my perceived gifts and limitations, I humbly allowed myself to see the beauty and the love of God glowing in others. I wanted to share in that joy of living and did not feel that I was too important or too special to learn from my new family. The trust, mutual respect and acceptance that I received from Jean, other Shona women, as well as from Eunah, Polyanna and other Ndebele women came shortly after my arrival in each place. In the case of Jean, I mentioned that our friendship was instant and grew over the years. I easily identified with her involvement in the Liberation War against colonialism. Sharing the experiences of racism and colonialism brought home the reality of how all women have been affected. It also helped us to understand how both African and African-American women understood the gospel as a liberating force in our lives. As she recounted her story, I relived some of my own experiences of 'liberation' growing up in racist America as African-Americans were seeking economic, social and political independence. I knew exactly what she meant when she talked of the irony of family support as a sustaining force and family rejection when actions did not conform to cultural values. I knew the dismay she felt at having fought only to discover that everyone continued to live life as usual.

As I became a familiar 'fixture' in that rural community where I met Jean, women accepted me as I was. I became acutely aware of my acceptance when I was no longer 'invited' to women's meetings at church and at school. Rather I was expected to be present and questioned about my absence as I had broken a link. Being in a rural area meant that one became a part of the community family and one pulled the required weight or considered a liability. The centre of life was the church and its greatest outlet was the school. I identified with both and attended church services, funerals, community gatherings and other functions.

Bulawayo was much different in that with urbanisaztion, some of the communal values that were prevalent in rural areas had been lost. The period of adjustment and finding ways to identify in a large urban community took longer than in the rural area. Although our house was located in a

high-density suburb, it was located within the church compound without easy access to the neighbours. My identification came about by associating with church people living in scattered parts of the city. I started by walking long distances with them to visit their homes. I attended funerals with the women and followed the customs of sitting on the cold floor or ground with the women (even after I had become an ordained minister) for funeral prayer services. The women in the community soon discovered that I was sincere in my efforts and forgave me of my limited language skills. Many in the community could not believe that I was unable to speak the language. Even with my thick American accent, they thought I was feigning ignorance of the normal speech or that I was one of the 'nose brigade' – a term referring to those Zimbabweans who speak English 'through their nose' to show that they have been trained outside the country, either in England or America.

The self-searching of how I would identify with women knowing that I had come from America with all the advantages that that country offered remained to be answered. It did not matter to these women that I had spent more time in Africa than in the USA. I was still American and could return home at the 'end of a contract'. I knew like Findlay (1984:58) that it was possible to persist in my own "patterns and selfsameness of being" and "put those of others at a distance" because their ways were not my own. I wanted to be part of the community without losing my own identity. Over the years, I had learned that identification was not simply eating the same food, dressing in the same manner or living in the same huts with the people. They certainly help, but I remember an old lady in the Congo telling me that if I were to change my lifestyle simply to live like them meant that their children had nothing to which to look forward or for which to hope. It also meant that I had no respect for my own culture and was rejecting my own values. Given such a scenario, she wondered how I expected others to believe that I had no suspicious motives for wanting to be like them. Colleta Chitsike (1995:22) described identification as respect for other people's dignity while remaining confident about one's own beliefs and ways of behaving. In spite of my economic advantage. I wanted to build loving and caring relationships that would last long after any financial support would have dissipated. I saw identification as expressed by Karecki (1999:46) as being modeled in the life of Jesus born out of love and as a sense of mission to bring about loving solidarity.

As I became part of the Bulawayo community, I was immediately struck by the cautious nature of people towards strangers and I intuitively knew that there was no place for the naturally curious and

probing American worldview. I respected people's need to be closed and cautious and was not offended by their need for privacy. As I related more with Eunah and Polyanna, I discovered a positive relationship developing built on mutual trust, empathy and sensitivity which was an invitation to join the community. It was a God-send for me that they both spoke impeccable English. They were willing to use it to make me feel comfortable when in company with others, even to the extent of chiding others for excluding me when they spoke isiNdebele in my presence. Finding a language of communication, we soon became aware of our similarities. We came from families deeply rooted in family values and strong Christian faith.

As a young girl growing up in racist America, I knew exactly what Eunah was talking about when describing her early schooling. I had a very clear picture in mind when she spoke of the stress of doing post graduate work. Education for women has not come easily. It was easy for me to identify with Eunah because of my own experiences with potential poverty. My father was without work for several months when my siblings and I were too young to understand terms like 'downsizing' or 'laid off'. Yet, we can all pinpoint the time when our disdain for soup emerged. During this period, the only item on our dinner table was soup. We did not know that it was a lack of money that limited us to the same meal everyday. In our own minds, we felt it was either our mom's lack of creativity or her lack of time as we noticed she was always 'looking for a job'. And yet, we never felt or even knew that we were poor simply because the more important things in our life continued as usual – laughter, chatting around a warm fire on winter days, being part of a strong faith tradition.

Being around Gogo Polyannna was always a joy and was refreshing as we shared special moments together. She was absolutely encouraging and easy to talk with. I felt that I could share my thoughts with her and knew that they did not become part of the community gossip. Being attached to a church office and later to a congregation in Bulawayo, my deeds of faith and sincerity as an intercultural communicator of the gospel were tested more often than when in the rural area. I often depended on Polyanna's wisdom as I knew that identification was not dependent only on a few women but on a community of more than 15,000 believers. I sometimes felt that I had "to prove myself worthy" of acceptance that white missionaries often took for granted (Collins 1990:94). The odds were stacked against me: woman, Black, inadequate language skills, and ordination after arrival in community. As part of my upbringing in the United States, I was taught to make direct eye contact when talking with people. To do otherwise meant that one was being

shy or lying. In Zimbabwe, I was to learn that it was a sign of rudeness or lack of respect to make direct eye contact. This cultural clash was an eye-opener for me in my relationship with Zimbabwean women. This helped me to understand the weight of patriarchy, colonialism, and racism on women. Along the way, I am sure that I offended many people, especially men to whom I may have appeared to be arrogant and too independent.

In conclusion, acceptance in the community was possible because of acceptance by women in the church community first. Everyone did not accept me, but I did become part and parcel of the community. Identification for me meant recognising my involvement and my commitment to being in the family. I, like Bernard Joinet (1972:244-245), felt

> deeply rooted in my native land, sharing intensely in both political, religious and social life of my host country. I feel I am a bridge, no matter how narrow it may be, between two cultures. Through me, a certain exchange takes place between two sister churches. To the best of my capabilities, I feel I am a witness to the universality of the people of God. I am a stranger in my Father's house, it is true. But this very 'otherness' allows me to make two cultures communicate with each other. It is at the basis of my insertion in the local community. It is a gift from God.

I cannot say how much I influenced growth or even transformation in the lives of women with whom I interacted over the years. As for myself, I grew and became more observant and aware of women's battle for self-identity and survival/liberation. I would like to believe that the more noticeable confidence displayed by several women was a result of our interaction. We, as sisters joined hands together and were determined to communicate the gospel of Jesus in our respective contexts.

CHAPTER 6   CONCLUSION

"MOTHERS" TO "CHILDREN"
Children of African women,
The road has not been easy for us.
But we continued to forge ahead
So that life could be easier for you.
Poverty, war, insults, illness, cultural practices,
And other evils we faced.
We united as sisters. We trusted God.
We survived

Daughters of strong African women:
Tafadzwa, Quba, Sibongile, Gugu, Danielle.
You, too, must follow your dreams,
Search into the depths of your heart
To find the beautiful being that God meant you to be.
Then hold your head high
Walk as sisters together on the path of liberation
Then African women will survive.

Sons of African women
Kumbirai, Thando, Zulu, Nico
You, too, suckled from our breasts
You received strength and grace from African women
Use your knife of manhood to carve the path
For the survival and liberation of your African women
Love them, protect them, and treasure these gifts to you.
Then you will survive.

Children of African women
Love yourselves so that you may love others.
Do not pass on the unholy, unsacred trait of
Low self-esteem.
Find God in yourself
And, love Her, love Her fiercely
We will survive!

---- Sandra Gourdet

6.1   INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION – THEMES

This research has been an attempt to show that meaningful intercultural communication can take place between African-American and Zimbabwean women. Yet, it is clear that the approach can not be based simply on the fact that one has the same skin colour. The sharing must be much deeper

and based on other shared experiences. Genuine intercultural communication takes place within a community of people. The role of the community is to make sure that each person is valued and each person is encouraged to know and appreciate his or her gifts that define who she/he is. Our lives as Black women are entwined. This connection will either strengthen us or continue to tear us apart by the stereotypes and misunderstandings of each other. Many obstacles used by the dominant cultures, for example, racism, colonialism, culture and religion have managed to keep Black women at the bottom of society and even stifle meaningful intercultural communication. These barriers, amongst many others, have greatly contributed to Black women not achieving a confident sense of identity and survival/liberation. The patriarchal, or rather kyriarchal society, has served as the context for perpetuating the oppression of women and rendered them inferior, robbed them of identity and caused them to struggle to survive. Yet, in spite of the forces against both Zimbabwean and African-American women, they have managed to survive and find identity and a sense of liberation, howbeit small. This has happened because of their Christian faith, family values and experiences of other women as described in the narratives of the four women in this project. We have seen through the narratives how these three factors have helped to sustain them even in the midst of acute poverty and despair. There are many other factors, but because of the limited scope of this research, I have dealt with only three. Four women have reflected on individual struggles in search of identity, identity-formation and survival/liberation. The sharing of these individual stories allows for the strengthening of one another interculturally while reflecting on themes that run throughout the project.

6.1.1   Christian Faith

In the first instance, the research contends that the identity-formation and survival/liberation of Zimbabwean and African-American women have been greatly influenced by the Christian faith negatively and positively. Christianity, although patriarchal, provided both the means and motivation for identity, survival/liberation. The narratives show how the church provided an avenue for Zimbabwean and African-American women to find themselves in spite of the difficulties and to feel God working in their lives by helping them to chart a way forward when no conceivable plan was in sight. This common feeling of God working in the lives of Black women enriches the intercultural communication of the Gospel. This idea of Christian faith is part of a second tenet of the research that shall be reviewed in 6.2.

6.1.2   *Family*

Another theme brought out in the research has been the importance of family to achieving identity-formation and survival/liberation. Both for Zimbabwean and African-American women, families have played a pivotal role in determining the identity, role and survival of women. A challenge for Christian womanists and theologians that emerges from the research is the need to strengthen the family. The restoration of strong African and African-American families must continue to serve as a springboard from which women can find identity and survival/liberation. The extended African family has been a carry-over from Africa to the African-American culture. It has been the strength of family that has sustained Black women over the years and served as a pillar of support in their struggles. This shared sense of family support has been very important in the experiences discussed in this project and seen as a vehicle in enhancing intercultural communication.

6.1.3   *Other Women*

This project has tried to show that although some women tend to bring down their sisters, that women can also be a source of support and strength for other women. The onus is on us as Zimbabwean and African-American women theologians to lift up other women in the struggle for identity and survival/liberation. The loving example of Jesus reminds the "Marys" of society to uplift the "Marthas" by giving encouragement and support to one another. We are challenged to share together without one claiming superiority over the other as both have something to offer, regardless of cultural background. One of the concerns expressed in the research that offers a challenge to women theologians is that even Shona and Ndebele women should lift up each other and explore intercultural communication.

6.2   CHRISTIAN FAITH - SOURCE OF SURVIVAL AND IDENTITY

A second major tenet of this research has been to show how Christian faith is a shared source of strength, resilience, healing, renewal or *shalom* source for survival and identity-formation. Furthermore, it has been an attempt to address how Zimbabwean and African-American women can participate in the intercultural communication of the gospel. Jesus advocated for healing and wholeness for the people around him. We have the same opportunity as sisters to move from our comfort zones and reach out as Jesus would have done, to our sisters unable to sustain the crippling

impact of poverty, oppression and other ills of society. Polyanna worked for the well-being of others by helping the sick and elderly. Jean gained strength by teaching refugee children in spite of her own need to be a child. Often as Christians we have failed to recognise the gifts and strengths of some of the marginalised of the community, for example Black women. The voices of African and African-American women can play a vital role in raising questions that help to shape our identity as women and contribute to the liberation/survival of women. There are questions of racism, economic injustice, self-worth and others. Black women voices have been ignored although they are generally voices that speak from the depth of survival and liberation that significantly affect womanist theology.

I have tried to show that Black women view identity and liberation as key concerns of the Christian faith. Jesus identified with the poor, oppressed and marginalised to help them restore their self-esteem and live up to their potentials within the community to which they returned. African-American women have often attributed their source of strength to "sweet Jesus" who has understood many of their troubles dating back to the period of slavery and racism. A stereotypical image of African-American women has prevailed over the years and continues to cripple the identity and survival/liberation of women. As Collins (1990:71) pointed out, African-American women have gone from being identified as "mammies" whose role was to work the fields and breed children to being identified later as "matriarchs" who crippled Black men by being too forward. Today they have been identified as "welfare mothers" and have been accused of crippling the Black family by not going outside the home to seek manual labour or by not giving their children a work ethic.

I have attempted to show that an Afrocentric approach can best capture this interconnection of oppression in the lives of Black women and the effect on womanist thought. I contend that an Afrocentric worldview reflects elements of an African value system in place long before colonialism in Africa and slavery in America. Furthermore, I agree with Collins (1990:206) that despite the various histories of Black societies, as a result of colonialism, imperialism, slavery, apartheid and other systems of domination, Black people have shared a common experience of oppression. I think one important result of this approach to the research project has been to show that there are shared Afrocentric values that permeate the family structures, religious institutions, culture and community life of Black people regardless of the context. An Afrocentric epistemology is rooted in

the everyday experiences of Black women, thus the importance of the narratives in this research.

Given the context in which Zimbabwean and African-American women find themselves and the shared experiences of oppression, I think it is very important for womanist theologians to look at ways of theologising that serve the development of a broader womanist liberation theology. As for this project, I have placed Black women and their experiences at the centre of analysis. Race, gender, class and culture are not the only systems of oppression faced by Zimbabwean and African-American women, but they are the ones that have most affected women. They open the way for liberation theologians to look at other forms of oppression – religious, economic, political, age, ethnicity, etc. The investigation of Black women's experiences reveals much more about the universal process of domination.

Jesus' mission was encompassing and addressed healing, economic exploitation, dehumanisation, oppression, suffering, poverty, self-alienation and all the other ills of society that Black women face today. Christ showed solidarity with women and expressed a will to empower them to struggle for their own identity and liberation. Zimbabwean and African-American women, especially those who have shared their narratives, have all expressed how their faith allowed them to sustain the oppression and find the kind of shalom healing that Jesus intended for those who followed him.

In our quest as Zimbabwean and African-American women to achieve identity and survival/liberation, we are encouraged to use Jesus' example that leads to healing and transformation. Liberation, as Jesus advocated, must reach both the heart and world of the person and touch on everything that relates to that person's reality – community, family, God, self, society – leading to transformation. Liberation, as Jesus advocated, moves one from a 'survival' mode to a 'living' mode of life. It means forgiveness and perseverance despite the hardship. Eunah reconciled with her in-laws and even allowed the mother-in-law to live with the family at a difficult time in the mother's life. Being at the theological college helped Eunah to work through her own identity crisis. She discovered that there could be no liberation unless she released the anger in her heart. She also learned that by not forgiving, she would continue to perpetuate negative cultural and gender norms that inflict pain on others. I found healing after a traumatic jail experience that had the potential of breaking me, but rather strengthened me and gave me a sense of self-worth and independence. The

experience deepened my faith and commitment and later inspired me to follow Jesus' mission plan as advocated in Luke 4:18. All four of us discovered that the kind of liberation that Jesus offered meant that we had to first seek to free ourselves. This had to be done by becoming aware of the causes of our own oppression and to struggle consciously against those causes.

Women, in general and Black women in particular, have not always experienced the kind of liberation that Jesus came to bring. Often liberation has been misunderstood to be the kind of promised liberation that led Jean Mundeta and many other women to war for a political or economic cause. It is clear that liberation must be holistic including political, economic and all aspects of life that prevent women from reaching their fullest potential towards self-assertion and identity. Women must be aware of those elements that contribute negatively to their identity-formation and survival/liberation and be prepared to struggle against them. It is only then that they can receive blessings from the holistic ministry advocated by Jesus. Women must be aware of cultural practices, colonialism, racism, imperialism, biblical interpretations and other forms of power abuse. The narratives give concrete examples of how four women struggled against the causes of their oppression. At a late age in life, Eunah returned to school to improve her life and that of her family. Polyanna worked for the well-being of the aged and at the same time gained financial independence. After training as a teacher, Jean gave of herself by accepting to go to a rural and remote village where other teachers would prefer not to go. I became a lifetime missionary spending thirty years in Africa.

Other women have worked hard to consciously address the causes of oppression. Some women have made efforts to gain education for themselves and their children. Others have stood against cultural constraints that render them helpless and voiceless. Many have sought to understand the Bible and help others to re-read it based on their context and circumstances. Many have worked for the well-being of others through programmes that address AIDS sufferers, orphans, children in especially difficult circumstances, widows/widowers, the physically and mentally challenged and countless others. They have understood that liberation and identity, especially that which Jesus offered, must involve the community.

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6.3   CONTRIBUTION TO BROADER WOMANIST LIBERATION THEOLOGY

This research project has also been an attempt to contribute to the broader feminist/womanist liberation theology discourse. Zimbabwean and African-American women must still seek to strengthen their sense of self-identity and survival/liberation. I hope this research project can contribute to those efforts or spark an interest. I have found that the sharing of stories and the experiences of women provide a platform for reflection and insight into each other's culture, thus eliminating many of the stereotypes and obstacles to intercultural communication. These experiences present challenges for women theologians, womanists and feminists. One can recognise many challenges emerging from these four shared narratives.

6.3.1   Poverty

One such challenge is that of poverty, which no Black woman can escape. Given the deteriorating economic and political climate in Zimbabwe, we as women theologians have a chance to make a difference by giving support and being a voice for women who are rapidly sinking in despair. Poverty, in my opinion, is one of the greatest threats to survival/liberation and identity. Eunah's story of poverty is not unique as many women continue to travel the same path. The difference, however, is that Eunah's extended family was intact and could serve as a support mechanism for her whereas given the situation today many extended families are over stretched and finding it difficult to assist.

6.3.2   Transformation and Empowerment

Zimbabwean and African-American women must be united in this global community even if separated by thousands of kilometres. Transformation can occur in the plight of Zimbabwean and African-American women when one realises that empowerment and strategies of survival and liberation occur through action. Eunah found empowerment by pushing herself to obtain an education despite the difficulties. When Polyanna broke the silence and articulated her dream of a place to care for the elderly, a transformation occurred in her life. This change even allowed her to stand up to her husband, a very stern man, and maintain her dignity as an African woman. Persistently knocking at school doors with her mother until she found a place to continue her studies was the mechanism used by Jean to empower her life. Transformation occurred in my life when I stood firm on my convictions although it meant going to jail. Each one of us discovered a

sense of self-worth, empowerment and healing from human brokenness. This transformation was liberational for it started the process of "freeing the soul, body and mind from the oppressive structures of bondage characterized by guilt and profound alienation" (Goba 1989:165).

Change is not always overt. It can occur in the privacy of an individual's consciousness. Even when women are limited in what they do, they can find empowerment through self-knowledge. Jean knew from the time the soldiers marched the children away from school that her life was to be controlled by the young liberation fighters. Yet, in the depths of her soul she prayed and refused to lose her selfhood. She also learned how to cope with the situations she confronted which thus enhanced her means of survival. Eunah never lost sight of her dream and kept it alive by encouraging her own children to get an education. When the time came for her to return to school, she was prepared because she had already nurtured her self-worth and was simply seizing the opportunity to achieve it.

We can only be a part of the liberation advocated by Jesus when we unite in the struggle to restore a positive image to our identity as women of colour. We must use communal strength in overcoming the ills of racism and colonialism that have adversely affected us as children of God. Racism and colonialism affect all women – Black and White. When we see each other as necessary for survival, a basis is established for interdependence to overcome cultural and social barriers. The sharing of these experiences enhance the liberating effect of the gospel. Consequently, we must continue to bring these experiences to the forefront.

6.3.3 Responsibility to Progeny

We are challenged to share our experiences with our children. The sharing of experiences of Zimbabwean and African-American women will strengthen our children in their own resolve to know who they are and know how deep their roots of survival and liberation extend. We owe it to our children to share with them our narratives of struggle and survival in order to strengthen their self-esteem, their sense of identity and survival/liberation. Survival for most Zimbabwean and African-American women has been so time consuming that very few have had the time or opportunity to live life to the fullest. As theologians, we must commit ourselves to helping our children break the chains of defeat and mere survival and replace these chainswith quality living and hope.

Liberation that empowers and transforms, as advocated by Jesus, demands that we carefully look at self and society. We must become conscious of gender-related issues whether in the USA or Zimbabwe. We must seek to understand the interplay of gender, culture, class, race and how they have been used to oppress women and separate them from each other's struggle. Then we are challenged to teach our children how the chain of economy, polity and ideology function as an effective way of social control designed to keep Black women in subordinate positions, and subsequently our children.

6.3.4 Leadership Positions

From this interaction of forces – culture, gender, class, race, religion – one discerns that another challenge that must be addressed by womanist theologians is that of women in leadership in church and society. In some churches in Zimbabwe, particularly in the Congregational Church, women are encouraged to take up leadership positions as ordained ministers, officers and convenors of committees. However, women are not to be too assertive and they are expected to abide by 'cultural traditions' if they want to succeed in leadership positions. As more women train for the ministry, there are questions that the church must ask and answer concerning women's leadership roles.

Women like Jean Mundeta challenge theologians to speak out concerning the injustice triggered by society in refusing to acknowledge the participation of women in liberation struggles and other national crisis. Verbal acknowledgement is not enough, but women must be recognised in terms of leadership positions with tangible influence on societal and church policies. Jean and a few other women soldiers found important positions after the war because of their inner strength. This has not been the case for hundreds of other women who are now destitute and broken in spirit after valiant service for the country.

Gender, class, and race have made a mockery of so many African-American women still struggling to find their identity and place in the American society. Where women have achieved successful leadership positions in the work place, they have often been enslaved by the constant hard work and lack of true quality of life. There is little free time to enjoy life. Furthermore, the capitalistic system has made it such that people are deeply rooted in debt. There is little time for self-enhancement or

continuing education. In fact, most African-American working women are generally only one or two paychecks away from poverty.

6.3.5 Property Ownership

Land or property ownership is another issue facing both African and African-American women as they struggle for survival/liberation. These women must continue to prove themselves worthy of being property owners in a male's world. Loan facilities are not readily available for women and if they were, the economic situation of the vast majority would not permit them to repay without untold suffering. Polyanna is an example of someone who managed to gain financial independence in a business venture. She attributes this in part to strong family and community support, hard work, faith in God and a belief in self that it can be done despite the difficulties. She is also a rare example of finding self-esteem for herself and trying to pass it on to others in her employ.

6.3.6 Cultural and Religious Constraints

Culturally, many Zimbabweans, both rural and urban, must submit to the dictates of family and particularly to the in-laws. Eunah's story of abuse by her in-laws is not uncommon. Such things continue to happen and because of 'culture', young girls must accept the abuse. Many are not strong enough to rise above culture and class.

A broader womanist liberation theology must help create an awareness of domination experienced and resisted even in the name of religion. While Church and the Christian faith often promise empowerment through salvation and quality of life, religion often has been used to render women docile and passive. African culture as defined by colonialists and missionaries was "heathen" and inferior. This kind of definition rendered people inferior or less than human. Blacks, whether Zimbabweans or African-American have been identified by others and have needed others to validate their existence. The Church played a role and must share part of the blame for perpetuating this identity crisis.

Cultural hermeneutics have played a key role in educating Black women to re-read the Bible and making them aware of how the Bible is used against them. Womanists theologians have the challenge of assisting women to re-read biblical texts from a Black woman's perspective with

intentions of freeing them from anything "antagonistic to their sense of identity and their basic instincts of survival" (Masenya 1995a:153) This critical reading of the Bible strengthens women in their search for a more liberational understanding of culture and religion.

When Zimbabwean and African-American women look at communal strength and analyze the context, they can then take steps toward liberation, empowerment, transformation and healing based on Jesus' example of intercultural communication of the gospel. We cannot talk about healing or *shalom* unless we talk about the needs of women. Furthermore, after the sharing of experiences in this research project, healing cannot be viewed as a personal quest nor as a quest of any one country. Jesus advocated healing that transcends continents and this require us to heal wounds in ways that may be different for all of us. Shared connectedness of the gospel is a source of the healing and resilience characterised by Black women. It cannot be done alone. This is not to impose one culture on the other, but rather a clarion call that we are fighting the same battle and joining hands together to make the struggle easier and the healing faster.

6.4   FUTURE PROJECTS

This research project has sparked a lot of interest and conversation among the four women in the narratives. As we shared together after each had read the narratives, we were encouraged and felt that, as Christian women, intercultural communication should be strengthened so that others may benefit. Several suggestions came to the forefront.

6.4.1   Cultural Exchange

After hearing about a Hunger Project in Malawi carried out by women and designed to eliminate hunger and poverty, I presented the idea to a group of women. Women were excited about the programme's principles. Preparations are underway to implement the project in their own communities with the assistance of sisters in Malawi.

Eunah has put forth plans to invite ministers' wives to accompany her when she visits women of other denominations as part of her work duties. She understands this as being a way of assisting

her own sisters in the church in their self-development. In other words, this is an example of "Mary" uplifting "Martha" by making sure Martha sits at Jesus' feet as well.

Women in the church have voiced a desire to exchange letters with African-American women to understand more about life in America for African-Americans. This is encouraging and plans are underway to make this happen. We have all been inspired by the mature relationship between one of our women's groups and a church in the United States and how the lives on both sides have been enriched.

6.4.2   Exchange of Ideas

In order to keep the ideas alive that have been explored in this project, the three Zimbabwean women have agreed at an individual level to maintain contact with me after I leave Zimbabwe. It is hoped that the circle of friendship may be expanded. I have committed myself to putting the women in contact with other women who are equally ready to share ideas. It is not clear where this type of exchange will lead, but seeds have definitely been planted.

6.4.3   Future Documentation of Women's Stories

As a researcher, I have been inspired by the close contact with the three women in the narratives. I have felt the joys and the pains emanating from our shared experiences. As a future project, I wish to look at the shared experiences of other women of the Diaspora in their identity-formation and struggle for survival/liberation. I am particularly interested in African descendents living in the North American, the Caribbean and South American nations. As mentioned in the project, the term African-American is not a blanket term that includes people of African descent in the Americas but is reserved for most Blacks in the USA. I think this kind of research will greatly strengthen studies on African women and their relationship to women of the Diaspora. I foresee this contributing to present studies on the interconnection of race, gender, class, and culture in the subordination of women regardless of the context. This interplay affects Black women everywhere. The entire concept of globalisation makes it imperative for all of us to work together to help eradicate poverty, economic injustice, AIDS, war, corruption, political and economic decline. My desire is that this future project should assist women to re-read the Bible in a more liberational manner. I know that one of the obstacles will be to help women understand how they have internalised patriarchal tendencies. It will also be a challenge to help them remove the guilt feeling

of unfaithfulness to the Bible when they attempt to see themselves as God sees them – loving human beings.

6.5   PERSONAL ENRICHMENT

Finally, this research has been an attempt for me to augment my sense of identity and survival/liberation by becoming a part of the lives of women in Africa. Further, it shows how we must struggle to fight a common cause. When one is in pain, the whole body suffers and needs healing. bell hooks (in Haddad 2000:182) asserts that Black women cannot afford to see themselves as "victims" as their survival depends on harnessing their inner resources and basing their solidarity on shared strengths rather than on victimization. Consequently, one of the tasks as Black women researchers is to assess whether research has contributed to strengthening and furthering Black women's survival/liberation. I have tried to contribute to the strengthening of identity-formation that can lead to survival/liberation.

I cannot say that this research project will transform the lives of women in the USA or Zimbabwe. I know that the lives of four women have been touched and in some small way, we will never be the same after experiencing transforming events in our lives and sharing them. I, as a womanist theologian, remain committed to the value of African and African American women's lives as well as to actions that will enhance self-identity and survival/liberation. I remain committed to the children of African women and descendents of Africa in helping them to grasp the strength and resilience of Black mothers in their quest for identity-formation, survival and liberation.

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ADDENDUM TO BIBLIOGRAPHY

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- Sandra Gourdet conducted interviews with Eunah Ndlovu on 10 and 17 February 2001 in Bulawayo.

- Sandra Gourdet conducted interviews with Polyanna Mahlangu on 12 February 2001 in Bulawayo