



## INTIMATE VIOLENCE AGAINST BLACK WOMEN AND INTERNALIZED SHAME: A WOMANIST PASTORAL COUNSELING PERSPECTIVE

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### Introduction

This writer's concern for some time has been the phenomenon of violence against Black girls and women and the ramifications this has on their psychological functioning and overall being. Womanist Theology gives us a viable methodology for reflection upon the multiple systems of oppression that impact the lives of Black women, especially victim-survivors of sexual abuse.

Toinette Eugene's essay, ". . .A Womanist Ethical Response to Sexual Violence and Abuse," in wrestling with her questions about healing, transformation, ethical facts, and the sexually-violated woman's view of God, provides a three-fold premise:

The first two points call for proper attention and response.

1. Sexual abuse is prevalent in the lives of many African-American women, having negative implications both for these women and for the African-American Community.

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2. Sexual violence in the lives of African-American women has not been adequately addressed from the perspectives of theology, ethics, psychology, or sexual-abuse theorists.

Her third premise presents us, in a succinct way, with our methodology.

3. A Womanist approach is necessary because it
  - articulates an analysis which examines the dynamics between race, gender, and sexual abuse;
  - examines the historical and contemporary factors [affecting] the lives of African-American women; and
  - asserts a perspective that retains the link between healing, liberation, and transformation of the African-American Community.<sup>1</sup>

This writer adds a fourth dimension:

4. A Womanist theological approach is necessary because it recognizes, respects, and affirms the necessity of the personal spiritual experience, in terms of helping Black women in their exploration and enhancement of a proper relationship with intimate and ultimate reality.

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<sup>1</sup>Toinette M. Eugene, “. . . If You Get There Before I Do. . .!”: A Womanist Ethical Response to Sexual Violence and Abuse,” in *Perspectives on Womanist Theology*, ed. Jacquelyn Grant (Atlanta: ITC Press, 1995), 95.

### Lament

Violence against Black girls is shameful and a sin. Many of us are crying, responding, lamenting, helping, and protecting—but not enough. All of us are affected, and we all have a responsibility when the community is in crisis.

Emilie Townes, in her work, *Breaking the Fine Rain of Death*, writes about the communal lament: “In the Hebrew Bible, the communal lament is used by and/or on behalf of a community to express complaint, sorrow, and grief over impending doom that could be physical or cultural. It could also be used for a tragedy or a series of calamities that had already happened. Yet the appeal is always to God for deliverance.”<sup>2</sup> The form of the lament encompasses four dimensions: acknowledgement, movement, structure, and healthy covenantal relationship:<sup>3</sup>

1. The Hebrew people first had to acknowledge the crisis in their midst.
2. Upon articulating their suffering, the community could move to a pain or pains that could be named and then addressed. Lament is, in a word, formful.
3. This means that the lament gives structure in terms of a way to process the pain.

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<sup>2</sup>Paul Wayne Ferris Jr., *The Genre of the Communal Lament in the Bible and the Ancient Near East* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), 10; quoted in Emilie M. Townes, *Breaking the Fine Rain of Death: African-American Health Issues and a Womanist Ethics of Care* (New York: Continuum Publishing Company, 1998), 23, n. 24.

<sup>3</sup>See Donald Capps, *Biblical Approaches to Pastoral Counseling* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1981), especially, “The Use of Psalms and Grief Counseling,” for a similar understanding of communal lament.

4. When done as communal lament, it helps the community to see the crisis as bearable and manageable—in the community, developing a genuine covenant interaction with God.<sup>4</sup>

Calling the people to lament, the leader remains in the community to enable it to process the experience of pain and destruction.

Laments are genuine pastoral activities. Walter Brueggemann, in an essay that reflects our contemporary moves away from genuine lament, suggests that this loss of lament is also a loss of genuine covenant interaction with God.<sup>5</sup> Townes notes that in this article “the result is that the petitioner either becomes voiceless or has a voice *permitted to speak only praise*. When lament is absent, covenant is created only as celebration of joy and wellbeing. Without lament, covenant is a practice of denial and pretense that sanctions social control.”<sup>6</sup>

*Lift Every Voice and Lament!*

Violence against girls is evident in the Bible around 2000 BC as seen in the rape of Tamar (II Samuel 13:10-14):

Then Amnon said to Tamar,  
“Bring the food into chamber, so that I may  
eat from your hand.”

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<sup>4</sup>Townes, *Breaking the Fine Rain of Death*, 23.

<sup>5</sup>See Walter Brueggemann, “The Costly Loss of Lament,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 36 (1986): 59-60.

<sup>6</sup>Townes, *Breaking the Fine Rains of Death*, 24. (Italics added for emphasis by this writer.)

So Tamar took the cakes she had made,  
and brought them into the chamber to Amnon her brother.

But when she brought them near him to eat,  
he took hold of her, and said to her,

“Come, lie with me, my sister.”

She answered him,

“No, my brother, do not force me;  
for such a thing is not done in Israel;  
do not do anything so vile!

As for me, where could I carry my shame?  
And as for you, you would be as one of the  
scoundrels in Israel.

Now therefore, I beg you, speak to the king;  
for he will not withhold me from you.”

But he would not listen to her;  
and being stronger than she,  
he forced her and lay with her.

Violence against Black girls is a sin and shameful. God, we not only feel hurt, sad, betrayed and outraged, we are devastated and almost undone. Just what do you have to say for yourself? What can we say for ourselves? What are we doing to ourselves? Why don't you just kill them all—and then, we'll just kill ourselves...maybe.

This represents a portion of a contemporary lament, reflecting upon the preceding verses from the Hebrew Bible and in light of the following excerpts from case histories of women who were violently abused as children.

**Candace and Alma: Excerpts From  
Their Case Histories  
1996**

Candace, a twenty-five-year-old African-American woman of medium height, with pretty chocolate skin, usually fashionable dressed, yet overweight, came to me for counseling, by way of a referral from a female friend and church member. This person told her that "this Black woman pastoral counselor had been helpful to her during the loss of a significant relationship."

In session, Candace told me that she needed to tell someone about the horrible things in her life and the pain that she had been feeling and carrying alone for years. She wanted to talk with someone who didn't think she was "crazy" or possessed with demons or something. She said that she felt alone, depressed, sad, angry, and ashamed. Once she fought and pulled a knife on a male acquaintance who was "man-handling" her. As our sessions progressed, she talked mostly about "just checking out"—killing herself and some times she wished she could just kill her father and most of his family too.

Candace had suffered violence from the age of nine to about eighteen. Her father had raped her—many times. Her paternal uncles had raped her. While at her paternal grandmother's farm, her father forced her to have sex with an animal. She reluctantly told her paternal grandmother, who defended her sons and threatened to beat Candace if she talked to anyone about any of the experiences. Candace says that she was devastated all her adolescent life. And, then, to add misery to her life, Candace says that when she was about fifteen, her father forced her to prostitute (for

several years), telling her, "You're just a wh—; that's all you're good at."

Candace's parents had separated; most of the violence occurred during the summers that she spent with her father and his people. She finally told her mother that she would never go back to visit her father or his relatives, but she never told her mother why. "I felt too ashamed to talk about it with her. I knew it would hurt her," she said. "Besides, my mother always said, 'It's just so hard being a Black woman.'"

Candace rarely shed tears. Only once did a tear roll all the way down her cheek. This was when she talked about the amount of blood on her body after that horrible time. She allowed me to touch her hand as I handed her a tissue. She said frequently, in her wee small voice, "I just want to die and end it all. I really can't take it anymore." I always asked her how she thought that she might "check out" or commit suicide. "I have my means," she would say. We put into her contract that she would have to tell me and formally terminate counseling with me (before) she could commit suicide. (Of course, we both knew that this measure was to give her extra support against taking her life.) She formally terminated counseling with me only when she moved up north to help her mother care for an ill aunt and hopefully go back to college. She still calls often.

Alma said that she and her father were rather close in the early years of her life. He was strict then. She remembers always having to wear dresses, to play outside even in the cold. She wasn't allowed to climb trees or play any kind of rough ball, such as basketball, like her older and younger brothers. She could play dodge ball. Her mother basically let her father do all the talking and disciplining. She mainly worked in the church and took care of the home and the family.

As she grew up, her father, who was pastoring in the city, used to talk a lot about not drinking, gambling, cursing, and listening to worldly music or dancing. She discovered that she liked this “worldly music” and she loved to dance. As a teenager, she would sneak out of the house to a friend’s house or even to a party and dance. When her father found out, he whipped her. When Alma continued to go out and dance, her father took her down in the basement, told her to undress, tied her to a pole and beat her. She said her father would shout as he struck her with his belt, “I’m going to beat the devil out of you!” Alma cried, and I cried too, as she told me about these things. We were often silent and just looked at each other, as I would lightly touch her hand.

When I asked, “Did your mother know what he was doing to you?”, she said as her head fell first to one side and then to her chest, “Mother knew, especially after he would leave me down there in the dark for hours—once it was overnight—she just didn’t say anything to him or to me.” Mother would just say, “You know how he is.”

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Candace and Alma are victim-survivors of intimate violence against children, also known as child sexual abuse, rape, incest, and sexual assault. They are not alone. Nancy Ramsey, in her essay, “Sexual Abuse and Shame,” speaking of the U.S. in general, states that

One in three girls and at least one in seven boys are sexually molested before the age of eighteen. Between 75 and 90 percent of the time, the abuser is an adult the girl and those who would protect her know and trust, thus lowering



the likelihood that she would reveal the identity of the perpetrator or that she would be believed if she did. Estimates are that half of the incidents of sexual abuse occur in the immediate or extended family as incest. Sexual abuse in the family is likely to begin when the child is as young as three to six years of age and, if unreported, continues into adolescence. In this country, a girl is molested every ten minutes, and a daughter is molested by her father every thirty minutes.<sup>7</sup>

Traci West, in *Wounds of the Spirit*, informs us that "out of one hundred Black females 4.5 are victims of intimate assault each year. This includes rape, sexual assault, robberies, and aggravated and simple assaults. . .[and] one out of every 2.5 African-American women has experienced some form of sexual abuse involving bodily contact before the age of eighteen."<sup>8</sup>

"Cry. . .Cry Baby"

Sometimes crying isn't a catharsis.  
Sometimes crying just makes you want to cry.

Sometimes crying isn't a catharsis.  
It just makes you mad and tight inside.<sup>9</sup>

Listening and talking in general to persons about violence against women and children is painful. Unfortunately,

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<sup>7</sup>Nancy J. Ramsey, "Sexual Abuse and Shame: The Travail of Recovery," in *Women in Travail and Transition: A New Pastoral Care*, ed. Maxine Glaz and Jeanne Stevenson Moessner (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 110.

<sup>8</sup>Traci C. West, *Wounds of the Spirit: Black Women, Violence and Resistance Ethics* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 209.

<sup>9</sup>Mary Anne Bellinger, *Expressions*, vol. 1 (Atlanta: Printing and Graphic Designs, 1991), 7.

it is so prevalent in our society that specific language and vocabulary is being used to articulate the various dimensions. Two such terms are "intimate violence" and "victim-survivor."

### Intimate Violence

We have learned that intimate violence occurs in diverse "domestic situations": against the elderly in the home, among siblings, between spouses, among gay and lesbian partners and against children.<sup>10</sup> However, this writer takes her cue from Traci West and uses the term intimate violence to refer to male-perpetrated rape, wife/partner battering, and childhood sexual abuse.<sup>11</sup> The terms seem painfully paradoxical: intimacy and violence. And they are: intimate—marked by close acquaintance, association, familiarity, essential, innermost, comfortably private, personal, a close friend or confidant; and violence—"rough or injurious physical force, action, or treatment."<sup>12</sup> Further, "most basically, it is the coercive attempt to restrict, to limit, to thwart the exercise and realization of a human person's essential and effective freedom. Violence aims to obliterate the fundamental liberty or active, dynamic, determination of the self by the human subject. . . [and] seeks to destroy not only

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<sup>10</sup>See Delores S. Williams, "African-American Women in Three Contexts of Domestic Violence," in *Violence Against Women, Concilium*, no. 1, ed. Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza and M. Shawn Copeland (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994), [34], for the three domestic contexts: North America, white female and male employers in the U.S., and their own homes.

<sup>11</sup>West, *Wounds of the Spirit*, 83, 117, 124.

<sup>12</sup>M. Shawn Copeland, "Editorial Reflections," in *Violence Against Women*, [119].

the body, but the spirit as well."<sup>13</sup> For this writer, the term speaks not only of the injurious physical aggression of the plundering and violating of a person, but also of experiences as a result of the abusive relationship.

Don't tell me not to grieve  
or that *this, too, will pass*.  
Save your platitudes  
and meaningless sermons.

Grief is meat to me.  
I must mourn  
the passing of the dawn of us  
into the busy, dusty days  
filled with other people  
and sorrow.<sup>14</sup>

### Victim-Survivor

Concerning the term victim-survivor, Traci West says,

When referring to women who have experienced intimate violence, I have chosen to use the terms 'victim-survivor.' I do so to rhetorically remind us of the dual status of women who have been victimized by violent assault and have survived it. Black women are sometimes denied an opportunity to have their victimization recognized. The strength of their coping and survival abilities

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>Valerie Bridgeman Davis, *In Search of Warriors Dark and Strong and Other Poems* (Austin, TX: Publication Designers, 1995), 21.

is commonly emphasized at the expense of an appreciation of their injury and anguish. Multiple aspects of both victimization and survival are represented in women's experiences of, and reactions to, male violence.<sup>15</sup>

Don't tell me to *dry my eyes,*  
*grow up or be strong.*  
My strength is in my yowling  
for what might have been.<sup>16</sup>

Hearing the anguish and the (overall) psychological torment suffered by girls, now women, at the hands of violent male perpetrators tends to make one wonder, "Just how do they survive? How do they 'hold it together'?" "How can I best help?" "How can pastoral-care persons and counselors hear and value the suffering of Black women and appreciate the "strength of their coping and survival abilities"?" More importantly, how can pastoral care/counselors help Black women victim-survivors to continue to cope in healthy ways and do more than just survive? What is it that Candace and Alma are teaching us about their suffering/pain and about survival?

### Shame

One common theme that permeates most of this writer's (pastoral counselor) experiences dealing with childhood sexual abuse is shame. Candace stated:

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<sup>15</sup>West, *Wounds of the Spirit*, 5.

<sup>16</sup>Davis, *In Search of Warriors*, 21.

I think that I'm losing it. I'm really tired of feeling this pain. I'm tired of hurting, tired of the nightmares and the feeling of being so exposed . . . . Tell me, could you see it on me when you first met me? Could you just tell what I had been through? Could you see it on me? Sometimes I feel so worthless, like what's the use? I just feel so bad. Sometimes I wonder what did I do wrong? Then I just know I'm wrong. I'm all-wrong. It's just me. . . .It's just me. . . .I really think I could just end it all. . .

Candace is articulating as best she can the torment of her daily life. One can hear and feel the expressions of guilt, depression, exposure, shame, and suicidal ideations in this and her previous statements. Upon close reflection, one realizes that shame is a core factor, impacting her behavior as well as a crucial part of her identity. "What did I do wrong?" implies feelings of guilt that are quite different from shame. Guilt is usually reflective of an action—I did something wrong—that can be remedied or "assuaged by penalty or reparation." Ironically, the victim-survivor is not at all to blame for the crime committed against her; it is difficult to work through the feelings wherein she somehow perceives it as having been her fault. Nevertheless, the feeling of guilt is partial, outwardly directed, and usually concerning an action or behavior.

However, shame is an overall self-attribution of failure and "wrongness." It is a global self-interpretation that I am wrong. **I** failed. **I** am bad. Even **I** am worthless. Note two perspectives: Michael Lewis, author of *Shame: The Exposed Self*,<sup>17</sup> defines shame as a total self-failure vis-à-vis

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<sup>17</sup>Michael Lewis, *Shame: The Exposed Self* (New York: Free Press, 1992), 99.

standards, rules, or goals. Shame is the product of a complex set of cognitive activities—the evaluation of an individual's action in regard to standards, rules, goals, and global self. Lewis, at this point, proposes his theoretical basis: "I propose that our success or failure in regard to abiding by standards, rules and goals produces a signal to the self. This . . . affects the organism and allows individuals to reflect upon themselves. This . . . reflection is made on the basis of self-attribution—[the determination] of the nature of the resulting emotion."<sup>18</sup> Gershen Kaufman, author of *The Psychology of Shame*, says

Shame is a loss of face. . . .Shame feels like a wound made from the inside. Shame is dishonor, fallen pride, a broken spirit. The beaten humiliated individual, whether defeated as a child by a brutalizing parent or defeated as an adult by a dead-end career or marriage, has been defeated by shame, has endured it until it has broken the self. If unchecked, shame can engulf the self, immersing the individual deeper into despair. To live with shame is to feel alienated and defeated, never quite good enough to belong. And secretly the self feels to blame; the deficiency lies within. Shame is without parallel a sickness of the soul.<sup>19</sup>

But why are these feelings of shame so deep, so intense? And how do they become so entrenched (so reoccurring and so overwhelming) in light of the fact that the victim-survivor

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 63.

<sup>19</sup>Gershen Kaufman, *The Psychology of Shame: Theory and Treatment of Shame-based Syndromes*, 2d ed. (New York: Springer Publishing Company, 1996), 24.

did not cause the violence nor perpetrated/precipitated the initial shame scenes? Then, how does this shame “break the self and engulf the self”?

As a response to intimate violence, shame has an especially poisonous effect.

Further analysis of intimate and societal violence enables us to understand how shame has such a profoundly invasive capacity to subsume portions of a woman's identity. While guilt is directed toward an action and can be assuaged through penalty or reparation, shame is invariably directed inward. Shame is precipitated and initiated by acts, but it can seep into our consciousness and become rooted in who we are. Thus it functions as more than simply a response to acts that we have endured, in the way guilt does. Because shame has a psychic identity, it can readily merge with the social stigmas based on race and gender that are usually at work on Black women's psyches.<sup>20</sup>

This leads us in several meaningful directions:

- Shame is different from guilt.
- Shame can be psychic poison.
- Shame can plague a Black woman's identity, all too often in layers, and is what this writer calls “shame: the mother matrix of internalized violence.”

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<sup>20</sup>West, *Wounds of the Spirit*, 67.

### Internalized Shame

The object relations theory of W. R. D. Fairbairn can be helpful for our discussion about internalized shame and *Black* women in three ways:

- Fairbairn's espousal of dependency as a positive quality for relationships;
- The internalization of the bad object and the consequent splitting of the central ego; and
- The internalization of social structures and ideologies.<sup>21</sup>

Building on his fundamental rejection of the Freudian drive/structure model of personality development and formulating his own unique relational model of personality, Fairbairn's first dimension of his object relations theory views all relationships as related in some basic way upon a state of dependency. He does not reduce dependency to a negative state to be shunned or from which one must grow after a brief period in early childhood. He contends that all of us remain dependent upon relationships all our lives; although it is the nature of the dependency that must change. Dependency is no longer a bad word for mature relationships. In fact, mature dependency is the goal of development in Fairbairn's theory of personality development.

In this writer's essay "Interdependence as a Normative Value in Pastoral Counseling with African Americans" in

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<sup>21</sup>William Ronald Dobbs Fairbairn, *Psychoanalytic Studies of the Personality* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1952), 233-246; also Carolyn [Akua] McCrary, "Interdependence as a Norm for an Interdisciplinary Model of Pastoral Counseling" (Th.D. diss., Interdenominational Theological Center, 1989), 142.



*The Recovery in Black Presence*, she notes that such a positive posture about dependency has relevance for African Americans and other counselees. This posture is equally explicative in articulating an essential quality of relationships for and among African-American women.

Such a posture has relevance for African American [women] in that the denotation and connotation of the 'dependent person' have been broadened and enhanced toward the ideology that being intimately and consciously related in a needful way to someone all one's life is a natural thing to be grasped and not denied—the crucial factors being the changes in the nature, and/or the degree, of the dependency, and the timing of those changes. This attitude and the concomitant values of reciprocity and sharing fit better, in a foundational way, into the African-American worldview and its value system which reflects interdependence as a positive way of living. The attainment of a state of existence called independence is put in its perspective as an arrival at a transitional stage of development that reflects quasi-independence at most.<sup>22</sup>

Interdependence as a value in the Black community, especially among women, is important as we recognize the responsibility of the whole—family, community, church, society—in protecting, preventing, caring for, calling out, and bringing justice in cases of intimate violence against girls and women.

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<sup>22</sup>Carolyn [Akua] McCrary, "Interdependence as a Norm for a Normative Value in Pastoral Counseling with African Americans," in *The Recovery of Black Presence: An Interdisciplinary Exploration*, ed. Randall C. Bailey and Jacquelyn Grant (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 166.

A second dimension of Fairbairn's object relations theory is his discussion of internalization. For Fairbairn, internalization is a pathological process involving the incorporation of external realities/experiences into the psyche, thereby creating division and splitting of the initially whole central ego. *This process is basically unconscious.* The word "object" refers to the person, usually the mother; the process of internalizing the "unsatisfying" or "preambivalent object" entails the incorporation or the psychological "taking in" of the object representation and the accompanying affect. The object, which was causing discomfort to the infant/child in the external world, is then split into theoretically manageable parts by the central ego.

The preambivalent, or mostly 'unsatisfying object' is internalized by the infant/young child as a way to control or coerce it. The 'unsatisfying object' is then split by the central ego into the 'good object' and the 'bad object.' The 'bad object' is further split into the 'rejecting object' and 'exciting object.' While the 'good object' remains cathected to the central ego and partially conscious as the 'ideal object,' the 'rejecting object,' and the 'exciting object' are repressed by the corresponding dimensions of the now split ego. The libidinal ego represses the 'exciting object' and the anti-libidinal ego [initially called the internal saboteur] represses the 'rejecting' and 'exciting objects.' Consequently, the picture of the endopsychic structure is of a split object and a divided ego.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 167.

Generally speaking, herein lies the problem and a task for the pastoral counselor. There must be a reconciliation of these dimensions of the psyche for health and wholeness to occur. The problem for the victim-survivor of intimate violence, such as Candace or Alma, is reconciliation. According to this theory, she has internalized the "bad object," the violent offender, her father, in an effort to gain some control over the situation. Psychologically, she cannot fathom the external world as being so awful; and she would much rather take in the bad, the awfulness, *in an effort to control the violence and the horror* so as to let the object/father remain good. But now, after the internalization process, bad is inside; wrong is inside; she feels that she is bad and that she is wrong. Adding injury to injury, her central ego is now fragmented. A part of herself rejects "trusting" anyone in relationships and is often enraged. Another part of herself—the part of her ego that is connected to the "exciting object"—is enticed by, *is excited by*, the prospects of, and longs for, intimacy and meaningful relationship. She is constantly at war with herself.

Additionally, those parts of her central ego that are now split and catheted to the split bad objects, hold many shame scenes, and feelings of shame, blame, extreme exposure, humiliation, and worthlessness. It is from these inner infected and affected parts of her intrapsychic (and probably intraspiritual) being that feelings and thoughts such as, "I am just all wrong....I must have done something wrong...*I am bad...I am so ashamed...I am so worthless*—emanate. Tragically, these are the feelings that often get projected—out onto others who look like her, other females. And the pain becomes "You ain't nothing!" Who does she think she is?

Note that the child or the girl has done nothing wrong.

She is clearly the victim, but she is the one who feels and lives with the shame of it. This theory helps us to understand how that happens. The terrible intimate violence that repeatedly happened to her was just too much with which to deal in the external world. This grown man—this significant parental figure—this person with whom she longed to continue in relationship or thought that she had to be in relationship—or at least, live with—was actually committing these violent acts upon her. Experiencing these horrible violent acts, over and over, against her body, her spirit, her innocence, her will, and against her fragile developing self, was mentally, physically, spiritually too much to bear, i.e., “My daddy could not be torturing me like this.” So she internalized the horror and the pain as one way of trying to control and possibly change this trauma-filled external world. One could say she sacrifices her inner self. However, since this is usually an unconscious process, it is more accurate to say:

- Her inner self is sacrificed by her internal psychological mechanisms in an effort to protect and enable her to cope in the outside weary world.
- Her inner self is sacrificed for the sake of an idealized and/or “good” external world that sometimes means a “good” or idealized father.

A third helpful dimension of Fairbairn is the internalization of social structures and ideologies.<sup>24</sup> Suffice it to say that for Fairbairn social structure and ideologies can also act as an ideal object or a bad object. This means that a clan, a tribe,

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 142.

a family, a nation, an army, Communism (in Fairbairn's day), or other such ideologies can become either an ideal object or a bad object. When a person invests libidinal energy in any of these social structures, they become an ideal object that is pursued, admired, respected, and obeyed. However, when the person invests aggressive energy in such social structures, they become the bad object, and it is repressed into the unconscious.<sup>25</sup> It is to be noted that intra-familial (especially during early childhood) and extra-familial objects (in the form of structures and ideologies) attempt to control and direct the aggression of the individuals and the group.<sup>26</sup>

Two such ideologies and social structures that have been internalized by Black females and males, negatively impacting the lives of Black girls and women, are patriarchy and racism—more specifically male supremacy and white supremacy. Black girls and women (who are victim-survivors of intimate violence), in general, have had to surmount, and still face great obstacles in developing and maintaining healthy identities and mature intrapsychic wholeness in the midst of a society that overwhelmingly values male over female and white over Black.

In too many situations the Black female is not valued at all. White supremacist ideology declares that Blackness, in general, is wrong, bad, and shameful—white supremacist structures support this idea. Her Black color is dirty and unattractive; her Black lips and nose are too round and too large; her hair is immoral—“bad”; her body is large and wrong; her Black rhythms and movements are evil; her

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

<sup>26</sup>Fairbairn, *Psychoanalytic Studies of the Personality*, 233-238, especially 238.

Black history is primitive and full of savagery; her Black families are matriarchal, therefore pathological; and her Black religion is simplistic, animistic, or mimetic.

Unfortunately, in too many families, churches, and societies male supremacy dictates that the Black female is not worth appreciating, protecting, or properly nurturing while the male, who may be equally or less qualified or needful, receives preferential and privileged treatment. She is automatically deemed as "less than" because she is born with a vagina and not a penis. What a shame!

*IT'S A MAN'S WORLD!*

This is but a short litany of the toxic ideologies internalized by too many Black women. And, though many of us consciously refute these poisonous and cancerous white supremacist and male supremacist convictions, they yet metastasize into our unconscious intrapsychic mechanisms and lodge as fertile scenes and structures of shame.

Consider the words from a contemporary rap song by Lil' Kim:

Queen B——

Hit hard like sledge-hammers, b—— with that platinum grammer

I am a diamond cluster hustler

Queen B——, supreme B——

Kill a nigga for my nigga by any means b——

I used to wear Mossino, but every b—— got it

Now I rock colorful minks because my pockets stay knotted

And I'll stick your moms for her stock and bonds

Cruise the diamond district with my biscuit

Flossin my rolex rich  
Shi-, I'ma stay that b——<sup>27</sup>

Unconsciously, as a result of the process of internalized violence, many Black girls and women daily live with shame while the white and male supremacist systems continue to advocate, perpetuate, and sanction mental, physical, verbal, emotional, and spiritual violence against Black girls and Black women.

Therefore, the Black woman victim-survivor of intimate violence is plagued with more shame. Her destructive self-interpretation of I am bad, *I am* worthless, I am wrong is then multi-layered with “shame structures” on top of “shame structures.” Internalized shame is a result of direct intimate violence—what the writer calls “intimate shame”—layered on top “shame structures” around gender, ethnic, and (often class) identity. This internalized shame with which Black folk wrestle—this writer calls *Maafa* shame. Of course, *Maafa* is taken from Marimba Ani's phenomenal work *Yurugu*.<sup>28</sup> *Maafa* shame, then, refers to the intense internalized feelings of worthlessness and loss of dignity based on negative self-interpretations relative to ethnicity and/or color, resulting from European enslavement of African people.

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<sup>27</sup>Lil' Kim, “Queen Bitch,” High School High Sound Track (New York: Atlantic Records, 1996, accessed 31 August 2001); available from <http://lyrics.astraweb.com>; Internet.

<sup>28</sup>Marimba Ani, *Yurugu: An African-Centered Critique of European Cultural Thought and Behavior* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1994), xix.

Snoop Doggy Dogg, a contemporary rap artist, shows how young people have internalized negative and irresponsible images about themselves that also perpetuate violence against Black women.

1975 I was just a young pup  
tryin' to learn to be a dogg . . .  
Sometimes I sit and think how I used to be  
Before I got converted to a D-O-double G  
I'd like to thank that girl  
From way back in the days  
Cause if it weren't for you I wouldn't pimp this way.<sup>29</sup>

### Resistance Toward Healing

In light of these realities, what can we do to help in the healing process of victim-survivors of sexual abuse?

Yes, we are helping by breaking the silence, by involving the religious and the academic communities, the students, and other community leaders in interdisciplinary reflection toward continued action. What and how can pastoral care and counseling contribute further to the healing process for Black girls and women?

Traci West identifies healing and resistance as key ingredients in the process of responding to and countering male violence against Black girls and women. She differentiates healing from resistance, notes the particular and some times extreme difficulties involved in healing, and

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<sup>29</sup>Snoop Doggy Dogg, "Puppy Love," G-Funk Classics, vols. 1 and 2 (New Hope, MN: Breakaway/Navarre [Navarre Corporation 7400], 1998, accessed 4 September 2001); available from <http://lyrics.astraweb.com/>; Internet.



advocates resistance. She states:

Yet, since the intimate and social violence against Black women is comprised not only of particular incidents of assault but also of ongoing systemic violations, the rectifying work of healing is perpetually unfinished. Healing is a frustrating, unreachable goal under the present conditions of our white supremacist, male-oriented society. Only acts of resistance can challenge the virulent strains of violence that are visited upon African-American women. And when communally carried out with a persistent and comprehensive approach that matches the violence, resistance bears the potential for igniting a broad-based transformation of cultural values and practices.<sup>30</sup>

This writer agrees that healing, especially as defined by West, is an extremely frustrating process, is perpetually unfinished, and for too many women victim-survivors, is an unreachable goal. However, from this writer's clinical experiences, degrees of spiritual, emotional, and psychological healing can and do occur when caring processes are involved. One such caring process is, as West says, the way of resistance: "Resistance involves any sign of dissent with the consuming effects of intimate and social violence. When a woman survives, she accomplishes resistance. It occurs when a community leader publicly contests through words and action the male-centered notions of power, authority, and status that can appear to authorize violence

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<sup>30</sup>West, *Wounds of the Spirit*, 152.

against women."<sup>31</sup>

Nikki Giovanni's poem, "Ego Tripping," accentuates for us a resistance against male ideas of power and promotes Womanist power, authority, and status.

I was born in the congo  
 I walked to the fertile crescent and built the sphinx  
 I designed a pyramid so tough that a star  
 that only glows every one hundred years  
 falls into the center giving divine perfect light  
 I am bad

I sat on the throne  
 drinking nectar with allah  
 I got hot and sent an ice age to europe  
 My oldest daughter is nefertiti  
 the tears from my birth pains created the Nile  
 I am a beautiful woman

For a birthday present when he was three  
 I gave my son hannibal an elephant  
 He gave me rome for mother's day  
 My strength flows ever on<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 51. This writer is aware that in psychoanalytic theory and technique the phenomenon of resistance, an ego defense mechanism, is generally treated as a challenge to be worked through. This process, a conscious endeavor for the therapist and often an unconscious one for the client, confronts, explores, and reflects upon the resistance so as to engender healthier psychological development and functioning for the client. West, however, is using resistance in a more politico-socio-ethical sense, which is positive and necessary for Black women in their struggle against intimate violence. See also Nancy Boyd-Franklin, *Black Families in Therapy: A Multisystem Approach* (New York: Guilford Press, 1989), 18-20.

<sup>32</sup>Nikki Giovanni, *The Women and the Men* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1975), [22].

Some resistances noted by West that are particularly relevant in terms of helping to deal with internalized violence in the form of shame are: silence breaking; seeming and subtle acquiescence (until such time as you can flee); physical retaliation—biting, kicking (strategically, of course), hitting, scratching; the claiming of anger, especially in the Christian community and in light of Christian teachings not to be angry or show anger; as well as curtailing the emphasis on premature forgiveness; and salvific prayers from friends and ancestors in America and Africa.<sup>33</sup>

Another element of resistance pertinent to a Womanist perspective of pastoral care and counseling is what West calls “Finding Space for ‘I’m sad, and I need to cry.’” Crying in our culture has been relegated to weakness and Black women are apparently buying into the myth of “Big girls don’t cry.” Concerning Black women, West says “. . .serious resistance work has to make it possible to elude the con-signed cultural roles that forbid displays of weakness in response to violence.”<sup>34</sup>

An example of a reinterpretation of the plight of Black women is seen in the latter verses of “Ego Tripping” :

My son Noah built new / ark and  
I stood proudly at the helm  
as we sailed on a soft summer day  
I turned myself into myself and was jesus  
men intone my loving name  
All praises  
All praises  
I am the one who would save

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<sup>33</sup>West, *Wounds of the Spirit*, 162-174.

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*, 175-178.

I sowed diamonds in my back year  
 My bowels deliver uranium  
 the filings from my fingernails are semi-precious stones  
 On a trip north  
 I caught a cold and blew  
 My nose giving oil to the arab world  
 I am so hip even my errors are correct  
 I sailed west to reach east and had to round  
 off the earth as I went  
 The hair from my head thinned and gold was laid across  
 three continents

I am so perfect so divine so ethereal so surreal  
 I cannot be comprehended  
 Except by my permission  
 I mean. . . I. . . can fly  
 like a bird in the sky. . .<sup>35</sup>

### Resistance as Finding Womanist Space

Whereas bell hooks says the socio-political context of the African American pushes her to an "addiction to being tough,"<sup>36</sup> Teresa Snorton, in her essay, "The Legacy of the African-American Matriarch," says that the Womanist "neither denies nor minimizes her troubles. She reinterprets them."<sup>37</sup> These sisters are highlighting for us how difficult it can be for "the strong" Black woman to find space and a place to be vulnerable.

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<sup>35</sup>Giovanni, *Women and Men*, [23].

<sup>36</sup>bell hooks, *Sisters of the Yam: Black Women and Self-Recovery* (Boston: South End Press, 1993), 62.

<sup>37</sup>Teresa E. Snorton, "The Legacy of the African-American Matriarch: New Perspectives for Pastoral Care," in *Through the Eyes of Women: Insights for Pastoral Care*, ed. Jeanne Stevenson Moessner (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 60.

Here, we are speaking for many women of the difficulty involved in terms of finding internal and external space. In addition to the need for external space, West adds: "Pressure from the unrelenting demands of family, work, and community commitments such as church work must also be mediated in this quest."<sup>38</sup> This reminds one of a line from a Negro spiritual with a slight twist,

*Lord, I keep so busy working for the kingdom  
Ain't got time to [cry] . . .*

More poignant here, however, is the difficulty for a Black woman to allow herself, and/or feel that she is allowed by her community, to seem vulnerable or to be vulnerable. West says, "It seems there is no cultural space for a sad, weak, crying Black woman."<sup>39</sup> Alma says, "My sister and brothers still looked up to me; I just felt I couldn't cry and seem like a weak pitiful little girl."

Another barrier to Black women finding and using space to be vulnerable is their *Maafa* shame. Nancy Boyd-Franklin speaks of the difficulties that a group of all Black women in therapy still have in terms of being vulnerable. Her clients in group therapy still feel vulnerable about being labeled "dysfunctional" or "pathological" and are distrustful about discussing their "family business."<sup>40</sup> West interprets that "[t]his sense of vulnerability is fed by the potent cultural messages that demean and stereotype blacks. . . .The

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<sup>38</sup>West, *Wounds of the Spirit*, 176.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid.

<sup>40</sup>See Nancy Boyd-Franklin, "Recurrent Themes in the Treatment of African-American Women in Group Psychotherapy," *Women and Therapy* 11, no. 2 (1991): 25-40.

tenacious grasp of social ideologies that devalue Black women is never totally absent from the room."<sup>41</sup> This writer contends that they are never totally absent from the room because they "enter the room"—the psychotherapeutic space—with Black women in the form of internalized shame, *Maafa* shame. The *Maafa* shame of white supremacy and male supremacy says that Black women are just that—Black women—meaning dirty and wrong, unattractive and bad, soiled and second class.

You may write me down in History,  
With your bitter, twisted lies,  
You may trod me in the very dirt  
But still, like dust, I'll rise.<sup>42</sup>

Here, too, the silence must be broken! These internalized ideologies intricate to *Maafa* shame must be brought out into the open, discussed, talked about, cried about, and denounced for the evil that they are. The *Maafa* shame structures that undergird the direct violence of the intimate shame structures must be addressed, analyzed, and acted upon by the victim-survivors and by those would-be-helpers in the process.

Nancy Ramsay reminds us that:

The travail of recovery can include forging an authentic faith when women are able to face their experience of evil and find support in the struggle to discern meaning

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<sup>41</sup>West, *Wounds of the Spirit*, 176.

<sup>42</sup>Maya Angelou, *Maya Angelou: Poems* (New York: Bantam Books, 1986), 154.

in their suffering. For women molested as children, evil is not abstract or distant. They carry its cost in the shame and estrangement they embody. Recovery involves naming evil for what it is and raging against it. For many women the church is not exempt from evil, for the church failed to invite their stories, actively denied the truth, or responded to their situation in blame and guilt.<sup>43</sup>

The process in therapy, according to Fairbairn, is the externalization of the bad internalized objects, which he likens to exorcising demons. He says that they must be expelled and then mourned by the victim-survivor in order for differentiation and intrapsychic integration to occur. The victim-survivor is able to exorcise these demons—these bad objects—and endure the agonizing, oscillating process of differentiation, only within a context of a nurturing and facilitating environment.<sup>44</sup>

One such nurturing and facilitating environment is in Womanist pastoral care and counseling. For the Black woman victim-survivor of intimate violence, counseling in this context can provide not only a safe space but also a sacred space. This counseling is sensitive to the internal and the external systems that oppress and/or uplift Black women and that inhibit or augment the healthy development of their psychic identities.

Consider the uplifting message of Queen Latifah in her contemporary rap song, "Ladies First":

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<sup>43</sup>Ramsey, "Sexual Abuse and Shame," 116-117.

<sup>44</sup>McCrary, "Interdependence as a Norm," 127-128, 172.

Grab the mic, look into the crowd and see smiles  
Cause they see a woman standing up on her own two  
Sloppy slouching is something I won't do  
Some think that we can't flow (can't flow)  
Stereotypes they got to go (got to go)  
Ladies first, there's no time to rehearse  
I'm divine and my mind expands throughout the universe  
A female rapper with the message to send the  
Queen Latifah is a perfect specimen.<sup>45</sup>

Finally, however, the Womanist pastoral care person or counselor is also aware of the theological need for a sense of self that is grounded in a relationship with ultimate reality.

### Concluding Theological Reflections

Howard Thurman, in articulating his theology of Community, gives three crucial dimensions for a "proper sense of self" that speak to the victim-survivor: the self-fact, the self-image and self-love—all grounded in the prerequisite personal religious experience. The self-fact identifies that one's inherent worth is of ultimate value to be reflected in one's self-image.<sup>46</sup> Thurman holds the family, the community, the religious communions, and the nation accountable for the nurturing and instilling of this self-fact into the healthy self-image of each child.

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<sup>45</sup>Queen Latifah, "Ladies First," *All Hail the Queen* (Los Angeles: Motown Records, 1989, accessed 5 September 2001); available from <http://lyrics.astraweb.com>; Internet.

<sup>46</sup>Luther Smith, *Howard Thurman: The Mystic as Prophet* (New York: University Press of America, 1981), 49-50.



However, in the cases of Alma and Candace, the primary social unit, the family—males in particular—violated them and betrayed their sacred trust, inculcating in the victim-survivors' feelings of worthlessness, isolation, and shame. Ramsey discusses this violence against girls as also involving the theological issues of community and trust. She then adds the important dimension of the "sin of domination and betrayal" whose consequences are "all the more powerful when perpetrated by a family member or trusted adult."<sup>47</sup> "Moreover, the child's notions of community and trust were further distorted by the fact that often her requests for help to mothers or other trusted adults were denied or the abuse was met with indifference. That victims of sexual abuse often voice the sense that God betrayed them is not surprising."<sup>48</sup> It is necessary that we hear our sisters moan their sense of maybe their reality of betrayal by God.

Yet, in spite of these violent attacks, in spite of the fragmenting and the betrayals, Thurman believes that inherent in life itself there is hope for growth and wholeness. He postulates that there is a "built in resistance in all humans against the threat of isolation" and by logic a built in resistance against fragmentation and worthlessness, "which is a major safeguard against the disintegration of the self."<sup>49</sup>

This built in resistance is not under human control. It is a divine inheritance that like self-love does not really originate with or belong to the individual. Like the wild flower that through the crevice in the concrete grows and blooms purple even in the shaded corner of a busy street—even so

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<sup>47</sup>Ramsey, "Sexual Abuse and Shame," 117.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid.

<sup>49</sup>Howard Thurman, *The Search for Common Ground: An Inquiry into the Basis of Man's Experience of Community* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), 81-82.

God can heal when all supposedly protective systems of the developing person fail. A proper relationship with God can heal toward wholeness. God can mediate love and mitigate against (and maybe even annihilate) shame.

Thurman offers one essential ingredient for the annihilation of shame: "Self-love is the kind of activity having as its purpose the maintenance and furtherance of one's own life at its highest level. All love grows basically out of a qualitative self-regard and is in essence the exercise of that which is spiritual. If we accept the basic proposition that all life is one, arising out of common center—God, all expressions of love are acts of God."<sup>50</sup>

Shange, in her choreopoem, "For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow is Enuf," expresses the discovery within of the healing capacity of God's transcendent love. As the sisters dance in their prayer circle, they chant:

i found god in myself  
 & i loved her/i loved her fiercely . . .  
 & this is for colored girls who have considered suicide/  
 but are movin to the ends of their own rainbows.<sup>51</sup>

Resistance and healing relative to Womanist pastoral caregivers and counseling include:

Preaching a sermon  
 Conducting a workshop

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<sup>50</sup>Howard Thurman, *Deep Is the Hunger* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1951), 109.

<sup>51</sup>Ntozake Shange, *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow Is Enuf: A Choreopoem* (New York: Bantam Books, 1977), 67.

Writing a poem  
Exegeting a text  
Singing a song  
Leading a lament  
Reviewing the fine print of your covenant with God  
about violence against girls and women  
Listening  
Listening  
Listening  
to those same awful shame-provoking stories over and over again  
A touch on the hand  
Wiping a tear  
Sitting in silence  
Letting her see your tears  
Maybe even a calculated hug

All of these are expressions of kinship and acts of God's  
love incarnate, attempting to say:  
Yes, that evil violence did happen to you.  
Yes, I believe you.  
Yes, it was not your fault.  
Yes, you are still a sister of infinite worth,  
value, and beauty,  
and I'm proud of you.  
Shame is not your name!

**Phenomenal Woman!**

**That's you and me!**

**Womanist Pastoral Care and Counseling is sacred space!**

Faint, illegible text, possibly bleed-through from the reverse side of the page.